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Diagrama de dependencia: An Essay on Art and Occupation through Situated Practice

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements

for the degree Master of Fine Arts

in

Visual Arts

by

Dominic Paul Miller

Committee in charge:

Professor Anya Gallaccio, Chair
Professor Grant Kester
Professor Rubén Otriz-Torres
Professor Elana Zilberg

2016

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2016

EPIGRAPH

*Happy are those ages when the starry sky is the map of all possible paths;
ages whose paths are illuminated by the light of the stars.*

-Georg Lukács, Theory of the Novel

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In 2015, I produced a sculptural drawing situationally in a specific community of Tijuana. The work occurred over a two-month period within a set physical location of the Reforma neighborhood. To create the work, a group of ten gathered daily, Monday through Friday, 8 – 5 pm, to work for the duration of 2 weeks. During that time the participants were financially compensated for their participation. Following that period we met more sporadically to continue developing additional works. At the end of the two-month period an opening was held in the space and a combination of the many objects produced was exhibited. This text will attempt to chronicle the events both which led to the workshop and the directions it took in its duration.

The work officially began during my second year of graduate school after I was awarded a García Robles Student Fulbright to Mexico in Installation Art. Preceding the workshop, itself, I spent countless hours with the labor rights collective, Ollin Calli. Gratitude is necessary to artist, Fred Lonidier, who is an active member of the San Diego branch of Ollin Calli, “San Diego Maquila Network.” Through him I met and collaborated with the core members of Ollin Calli: Magarita Avalos, Enrique Davalos, Nerida Gaspar, Cathie and Lynn DeWeese Parkinson, Lalo, and Marlene Solis. “Mago” and “Nery” were instrumental in lending assistance to the workshop’s design. From the workshop, itself, I would also like thank those who participated: Marisela Espinoza Carrasco, Eva Arvizu Castillo, Adelina Valle Delgadillo, Francisco Javier Guízar, Maria Natividad Guízar, Raquel Carrillo Lopez, Linda Marin Liberato, Perla Azucena Perez,

Jorge Alejandro Vazquez. Many of those individuals are organized under the group, Promotoras unidas por el bien-estar de la comunidad (United Promotoras for the Well-Being of the Community.)

Also instrumental in the work's development are the members of my committee. My chair, Anya Gallaccio, has been involved since the project's inception, and is owed a great deal of thanks for her insight and patience. Mariana Botey was extremely helpful in clarifying many of the work's lineages and potentials in the context of alterity and Marx. Thanks is owed to Grant Kester for his exchange of ideas on dialog and the public sphere; Rubén Ortiz Torres, for his insight on display and materials; and Elana Zilberg, for her attention on "complicity" and ethnography. Additionally, I would like to thank Morana Alač for her feedback on ethnomethodology. Finally, the construction of this text was largely reliant on the oversight and attention of Alena Williams.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Diagrama de dependencia: An Essay on Art and Occupation Through Situated Practice

by

Dominic Paul Miller

Master of Fine Art in Visual Arts

University of California, San Diego, 2016

Professor Anya Gallaccio, Chair

In *Diagrama de dependencia* I have continued my exploration of cooperative and engaged production of art objects. As a thesis work it represents the culmination of my studies at UC San Diego, much of which has been focused on the U.S. border region with Mexico. This text not only serves to chronicle the many steps that led to a final installation of drawings and photographs, but also provides an important documentative

structure displaced within the physical installation itself. The project as a whole contends with the ongoing rhetoric of public or civic space as a critical ground for artistic production. More particularly, I am focused on artworks that become entangled by issues of authorship and agency within cooperative or negotiated settings. This broad thematic is often contextualized by local places that act as important sites for the enfolding of powerful global forces such as economy, gender, and race. In this current investigation the site is a community of Tijuana largely identified by *maquila* production. Over the course of two months I worked with a group of nine participants to cooperatively produce art objects that negotiated this complex identity.

Introduction



Figure 1.1: Alejandro and Perla working, Day 1.

In 1998, I visited Ciudad Juarez on a high school border immersion trip as part of our social action group. I had never been to Texas before, but after flying into El Paso it felt similar to Phoenix where I grew up. A professor at our Jesuit high school was doing relief work in the outlying *colonias* to Juarez, and had organized a series of encounters for us as a group: we visited a political asylum in El Paso, a women’s domestic violence shelter in Juarez, and participated in a factory tour at a Siemen’s electrical components plant, more commonly known as a “maquila.” Prior to visiting the plant we also met with a family living in the informal settlements outside of Juarez that had sprouted up with the many people relocating from the south. During the visit we had lunch with a husband and

wife, both of who were employed by regional factories. The couple “pirated” electricity by stranding cable directly over nearby power lines, just as their surrounding neighbors did, and had constructed their home from recycled, non-construction regulated materials. In retrospect it’s difficult to imagine the conditions that allowed for such a trip to occur. The series of feminicides that took place during that time in Juarez had continued since 1994, the year in which NAFTA was passed bringing drastic changes to the border regions. [1][2] Either coverage of the murders was yet to reach critical mass, or the crisis hadn’t attracted broader reception in a significant manner. While there, we passed without fear, however; I recall a coffee shop with other students out in the late evening, a night club mostly empty on an off night. During the day we moved as cultural tourists in a group struggling with mediocre Spanish to communicate with widely differing peoples.

In our tour of the *maquila* we entered under the guise of students of an economics class. The cover afforded us the necessary neutrality to see firsthand the conditions of the shop floor, and later listen as our guide explained how the overall process worked at the plant where they were currently producing electrical sockets. The company liaison was candid about the necessity of low-wages as he characterized the socio-economic background of the bottom level employees. In the guide’s logic, their backgrounds necessitated the minimal amount they earned weekly, around fifty U.S. dollars at the time. Socially, they weren’t able to earn more: “they’d get drunk” was the basic rational. More complexly, the transformation of Mexico’s socio-geographic landscape was being

¹ Hennessy and Ojeda, “NAFTA from Below: Maquiladora Workers, Farmers, and Indigenous Communities Speak Out on the Impact of Free Trade in Mexico.” Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras, 2006.

² Rodriguez, Sergio Gonzalez, “Bones in the Desert.” Author’s translation, 2005 edition.

illustrated for us. He did not include in his explanation, the flooding of the Mexican agricultural market with cheap, U.S.-subsidized corn. The term “flood” is not used entirely figuratively here. It is estimated that over 2 million people have left the agriculture industry of Mexico since NAFTA’s introduction.³ The massive collision is illustrated by the convergence of subsidized, large-scale industrialized farming with that of Mexico’s tradition of *ejidos* and “smaller-scale” development of rural lands. The complexity of this force, however, is still little understood. As people are displaced into migrant labor or the border region between Mexico and the U.S., the economic pressures continue to force certain individuals into marginalized positions. While the liquidity of capital more and more readily permeates our national boundaries, people, namely women, are caught in systemic cycles of violence and exploitation along these margins. The image of the undeveloped rural worker often evoked to represent this figure, simultaneously activates the erasure of the single mother working endlessly to support her family on below-sustenance wages. This invisible factory laborer spans the globe and is an important focal point of understanding social formation. The gendering of factory labor poses a complex socio-economic structuring of global proportions as wealth is increasingly consolidated by the few. Understood as a dominant component of “an international division of labor,” gender has become a necessary means of addressing power and exploitation⁴.

My interest in engaging with this context stems from a performance of the socio-geographic encounter particular to my own identity and region. Just as we are obligated

³ Wise, Timothy A. “Reforming NAFTA’s Agricultural Provisions.” Pardee Study

⁴ Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. “Can the Subaltern Speak?” *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. 1988

to its collateral restructuring of social encounters outside the shop floor, I wanted to seek out the present conditions of labor in these settings with a desire to understand my own relationship to the objects and people around me. The nearby proximity and simultaneous invisibility of factory labor as it relocates people to social peripheries, enacts an on-going escalation of capitalism's development under large-scale manufacturing. Arguably, the position of privilege I experienced as someone coming from the north of one of the world's most heavily militarized borders, never ceased to guide my experiences. Conditions of mobility and constraint will be further explored throughout my paper.

The complicated sense of proximity I experienced during that initial trip left a lasting impression on me. The feeling of being both complicit in, and at the same time, distanced from those systems of production, both social and economic, can be understood more generally as outcomes of the increasing dissolution of our social fabrics. In key ways, my investigation as an artist sought to deal with a more specified context, a particular neighborhood of Tijuana as a site of factory assembly production. As an object of study similar to the field of ethnography, my investigation, placed me "inside" of a specific social formation with discernibly "outsider" orientations and obligations. Initially, I wanted to use my practice as a means of developing a coherent means of representation for that context. Evidently, this desire brings important structural issues to light. While the maneuverability I experienced as both a citizen of the U.S., a male, and an artist, were apparent to me in the project's latency, I struggled throughout the engagement to perform that social construction critically. Most complexly in the total

scenario are the genre-specific outcomes which constrain my production as an artist. It is the pushing up against the limits of representation and the eventual *turning away* that characterize an impossibility of giving form to the experience at hand. The contingency of meaning, both as a limit and subsequent delineation, will serve as an important methodological framework in this investigation. As the limits of representation meet with an inverted desire for visibility and ethical standard, we may discover the complex locus of the conditions of subjectivity.

The impossibility of locating “the Other,” in this instance, the subaltern, female factory worker—nor wishing to produce an essentialized figure of exploitation—is a condition which characterized my encounter. Ultimately, the process of negotiating that encounter and the necessary means of its construction through a dialogical process do provide an ethical basis for the formation of a mediated social subjectivity. In particular, I will examine Rosi Braidotti’s concept of “transposition” as a means of ethical encounter as the narrative of the project unfolds. In the following chapter, I will also introduce the historical context of factory labor along the U.S.-Mexico border, as well as contemporary figures in labor advocacy, and their role in my investigation. This will lead to a discussion of how this mediation occurred through the guidance of the labor rights collective, Ollin Calli, which I shadowed during the course of my project. Through them I was able to form the endogenous criteria for the work, both mapping my practice onto their activities, and simultaneously taking their practices as the material baseline for my own. In Braidotti this intermingling through transposition leads to a very specific question, “How can we link the issue of desire, as a structural force that entails both

ethical and erotic elements, with the question of socio-political forces and power relations?”⁵ I hope to demonstrate how the project brought me into contact with its participants, tracing out as we explored this newly negotiated terrain through the process of the work, itself. The resulting artworks must be read through this intermingled configuration of materials and identities.

⁵ Braidotti, “Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics.” 2006

Ch. 1 Mapping Labor across a Scattered Geopolitical Boundary

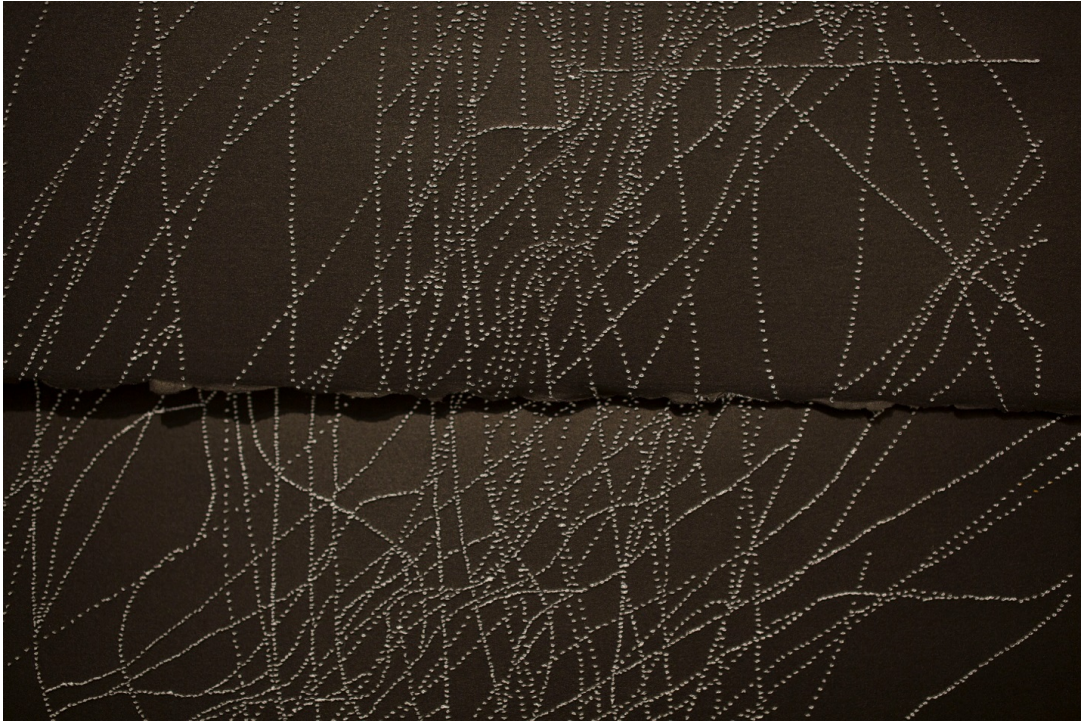


Figure 1.2: Detail of perforated drawing.

1. 1. *Introduction to Mexico and the U.S.*

How does one map the disparate front of labor against that of capital's on-going global saturation? While we see a greater proliferation of information's accessibility and liquidity, is there not a simultaneous rise of social and economic disparity, or have the aesthetic representations of those subjugated by class struggle merely shifted under advanced capitalism? The structure of representation, itself, implies a series of dependent constructions necessarily linked within dominant material frameworks. Information technology is often heralded as the most determinant frame among these contemporary

socio-economic relations. As those relations are increasingly identified by “immaterial labor,” we must strategically consider that which remains *material* in capital’s on-going process of exclusion.⁶ What is left behind after the perceived separation of information-based industries from those of conventional manufacturing? These questions underscore the complexity of analyzing an increasingly scattered and decentralized global social fabric. The mechanisms by which capital occupies and exploits its social margins would suggest, however, a comparable network of labor linked in its material chain of supply. Despite the increase of ubiquitous information technologies, communicating across heavily divided social milieus proves no easier a task, if, in fact, labor is to exact a unified front of solidarity.

At the tri-national labor conference in Los Angeles of 2014, this very front was being elicited by its many participants. Although it has been twenty years since the passage of NAFTA across Canada, the U.S., and Mexico, international union lines are only recently coming together to join hands. This conference in particular was designed to confront the necessity of edifying *informal* workers’ solidarity within traditional union networks. Along with other important topics, union leaders were highlighting the extent to which labor has been forced to readdress strategies for combating capital’s interests in a transnational setting. Following the opening of the free trade market NAFTA’s legislation continues to have resounding impacts on labor. The ease by which private interests can permeate national boundaries is an important factor in capital’s ability to reposition labor competitively. As liberal economics continue to favor private interests,

⁶ Lazzarato, Maurizio “Immaterial Labor.” *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*. 1996

the civic role of local, and even national, governments becomes symmetrically diminished.

In the case of Mexico, economic restructuring has occurred extensively through the continued displacement of small-scale farming populations of Mexico's south. The *maquila* system, characterized by "value-added," or, "partial assembly" factories, has sought to absorb those displaced by economic restructuring, but in the process has indicated a complicity in that very tendency.⁷ These factories will be referred to generally throughout this paper as "maquilas" to indicate at once the different various types, including outsourcing solutions, "twin" facilities, and, more conventionally-termed, "overseas" plants. This overall system of displaced, or *de*-placed, labor, often established within EPZ's, or export processing zones, has led to some of the most corrupt and exploitative forms of employment practice including forced birth control, sexual harassment, and highly toxic or unsafe working conditions. While the tendency of capital towards the market's margins has existed well before late capitalism, the post-Cold War global supply chain as it was bolstered by liberal trade law has substantially accelerated private interests. As we approach new trade legislation in the TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership) and TTIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership) the global economy faces yet another important shift towards the privatization of once considered public spheres.

The scales of such economies often illicit the dislocated images of shipping containers and cargo vessels orchestrated semi-autonomously by algorithmic

⁷ Kopinak, Kathryn. "How Maquiladora Industries Contribute to Mexico-U.S. Labor Migration." Papers, 96/3, 2011, 633-55.

computation. This carbon-fueled imaginary of circulation and flux eclipses the localized impacts of manufacturing, which remain bound to basic resources such as water, energy, and labor power. And while the infrastructure necessary for a global supply chain has swollen under the carbon-based economy of the 20th century, the purportedly “networked” economy of the 21st as of yet still relies heavily on cheap labor and expanding markets for exploitation. Although the rhetoric of the networked economy suggests liberalization will amount to greater freedom of entrepreneurialism, what we are seeing economically is a greater consolidation of wealth among an increasingly smaller group of private interests. Just as this crisis of separation follows Marxist political economy towards capitalism’s logical and material point of collapse, we may lose sight of the very resource that drives it. Labor alienated from its value still fuels the production of profit. The infrastructure necessary to liberate resources in the form of labor power or otherwise has merely established a geo-political frame capable of displacing labor globally. This redistribution of a global margin effects the most salient form of exploitation that labor faces, as every fissure of subjectivity is exposed to private interest.

The conditions of “outsourced” labor were taken as an important socio-economic frame in the artwork that accompanies this text. Working through a Fulbright award in the genre of installation art, I produced a cooperative installation situated in a specific community of Tijuana flanked by two industrial parks. A workshop was designed and organized to bring together a group of participants whose socio-economic backgrounds was largely determined by maquila production. In the workshop we generated a series of drawings through a technical process unique to my individual studio practice. Details of

this technique will be expanded upon later in the text. The structure of the workshop, meanwhile, attempted to gather local knowledge of the maquilas, while also diverging in important critical measures. “Labor” was therefore treated both materially and affectively as a diffuse nexus of customs and economies; transborderisms and local histories; objective outcomes and durational conditions of the investigation as a whole. The clash of these frequencies has not been removed from the physical artwork produced, and much of the situational knowledge it registered lies embedded within the objects themselves. Following two months of operation a public reception for the artworks was hosted in the physical location where the work was produced, after which the space was disbanded.

1. 2. Situating Displacement along the Border

An explicit condition of my intervention is the complex relationship between San Diego and Tijuana. The San Diego-Tijuana area embodies an extremely important site in this discourse as a prominent geo-political union of technological development and the necessary material conditions of its production.⁸ Although these two polities are intrinsically bound into a single economy, their compositions and characteristics could not be more apparently divergent. San Diego is well known globally for its military presence formed both by large air force and naval operations occurring throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Less visible are the many facets of medical innovation, much of which lies embedded within San Diego’s massive research

⁸ Latour, Bruno. “Drawing Things Together.” The perceived division between “dichotomous distinctions” as policed by “strong asymmetrical divide,” could be instantiated here, between “research” in San Diego and “production” in Tijuana. 1980.

infrastructure and economy. Tijuana, on the other hand, has always been considered a crossroads for those entering the United States, or seen as a popular destination for prostitution, gambling, and other illicit activities. Tijuana's streamlining of factory production, meanwhile, is underscored by academic institutions such as CETYS (Center for Advanced Technical Studies,) which generates an organizational class of factory managers.⁹ The institute is located directly opposite MedFlex, a prominent maquila for the production of medical supplies. UABC (Autonomous University of Baja California) is also located in direct proximity to factory production in the Chilpancingo community near Otay Mesa, a district which identifies one of the denser factory belts of greater Tijuana. On the San Diego side corporate headquarters for international groups such as Samsung, Sharp, and Kyocera operate regional business activities. While many such border towns exist in such a polarity, Tijuana constitutes the largest conglomeration of supply services within Mexico even after the widespread relocation of both electronics line production to China, and garment facilities further south in Latin America, is taken into account.¹⁰ Tijuana was not long ago the television screen production capital of the world, but now caters largely to the "near sourcing" of manufacturing solutions to border zones like Tijuana for American businesses often based regionally in San Diego, for

⁹ Kopinak, Kathryn. "Maquiladora Industrialization of the Baja California Peninsula: The Coexistence of Thick and Thin Globalization with Economic Regionalism International Journal of Urban and Regional Research. Volume 27.2, June 2003, 319-36.

¹⁰ Instituto Nacional De Estadística y Geografía (INEGI).

<http://www.inegi.org.mx/sistemas/bie/?idserPadre=104001100080002000200550>. Accessed 1/31/2016.

According to the national count there was an average of over a 1,000 export manufacturing operations in the state of Baja California in 2008. The current average is nearly 900, with 600 individual manufacturers in Tijuana alone. This is, of course, only the formally registered number. For comparison the entire state of Nuevo Leon has an average nearer to 600. Juarez by comparison in the month of October in 2015 claimed 320 manufacturers in operation.

example^{[11][12]}.] The advantages of cheaper and, meanwhile, *skilled* labor is a definite reality for Tijuana as factory jobs there have become increasingly competitive. This shift towards *quality*-emphasized manufacturing is based particularly on the increased production of medical supplies, the largest growing sector of production in Tijuana. This condition of production links directly to public health issues which bind the two locations in a complex network of labor, industry, and development.¹³

While many strong unions continue to exist within Mexico, the mechanisms for corruption and coercion of labor have become so intertwined throughout Mexico's national history that the largest unions have become indistinguishable from the elite party dominating both foreign and domestic policy. Dating back to Mexico's democratic revolution, the formation of a strong, centralized federal government dominated by an elite party has allowed the functioning of unions to flourish, yet remain strictly under the purview of elite officials.^{[14][15]} NAFTA's imposition of resolution boards, or *juntas*, to arbitrate worker's grievances gave no international traction for enforcing human rights standards. Even in the case of important and hard won victories in labor courts, such as the now infamous Han Young Strike, companies dissolve and relocate nearby merely to

¹¹ Kopinak, Kathryn. "Maquiladora Industrialization of the Baja California Peninsula: The Coexistence of Thick and Thin Globalization with Economic Regionalism International Journal of Urban and Regional Research. Volume 27.2, June 2003, 319-36.

¹² <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/27/opinion/sunday/the-tijuana-connection-a-template-for-growth.html>.

¹³ Environmental Health Coalition, "Challenging the Chip." Connie Garcia and Amelia Simpson.

¹⁴ Middlebrook, Kevin J. "The Paradox of Revolt: "

¹⁵ de Alba, Ana Alicia Solís. "The Labor Movement Painted Magenta: Productivity, Sexism, and Neocorporatism." UNAM. De Alba covers the historical "crises" in Mexico's major unions, pg.203-217

avoid enforcement. The strike was the first legally achieved by an independent union in Mexico, but was not upheld after negotiations led to federal courts.¹⁶

1. 3. *Meanwhile: Art and Class Consciousness*

Returning to the questions this study poses—How can power be addressed within these structures of such immaterial and, simultaneously, concrete forces which operate on both a global and localized scale? Additionally, the desire to address these global forces ultimately yields a problematic outcome in its attempt to objectify the structures which in with they operate. By questioning these frameworks, feminist and postcolonialist discourses have largely expanded this inquiry. As an artist seeking to operate within this elusive total discourse, the degrees to which advocacy, occupation, and intervention become embedded within the work of art remain of great concern. The rise in contemporary trends—which address an often ambiguous “public”—suggests an artist-practitioner who has become more emphatically enmeshed within “local” social fabrics. Whether or not this work seeks a further dematerialization of the art object-*cum*-commodity remains a problematic tension given the ongoing structures of viewership and encounter with art. More specific to my own production is a questioning of the specific pretext for my social and political engagement in Tijuana in and through labor practices, and the extent by which the engagement lies isolated within the site, itself.

Throughout modernity, class consciousness has been a focus of art making. Artworks of differing media have attempted to distinguish themselves from mass entertainment or popular culture, in the hopes of introducing a critical apparatus directed

¹⁶ Bacon, David. “The Children of NAFTA: Labor Wars on the U.S./Mexico Border.” UC Press, 2006.

at class identity. Of course, the boundaries are never discrete and often fundamentally contradict one another. These contradictions of experience should not be erased from the work of art, however, as heterogeneity provides new models for radical representation. In my work, I have sought to make these contradictions evident through scripted social situations and their durational engagement. The outcomes of these encounters, meanwhile, have been guided by the eventual consolidation of specific objects. This constraint of the object—its singularity and otherness—along with its silence, appeals to all bodies and in its appeal seeks all audiences. In this instance, I perceived working across the alienated positions of the factory and arts production, as of a fundamental necessity to the conditions my identity as an artist. The subsequent difficulty in enacting empirical approaches across cultural divides without being consumed within them leads constructively to an escalation of the form in crisis. Empiricism in the activity of social representation offers a specific socio-historical lens through realism. Realism in an object, however, also marks a presupposed analogical *other* in the lived world from which the artist/producer is distanced, and subsequently, an implied public sphere guided by civic interests. As we experience a greater fragmentation of the objects and materials that surround us meanwhile, it is increasingly problematic to locate even the material means by which we are either gathered *or* alienated. The retracing of objects and positions must necessarily find points of reference as the empirical gathers tentatively into a locus of identity. The contingency of meaning there, as it meets with an inversely gathered desire for visibility and ethical standard, {are thus defined as the complex locus for representation}. In examples such as the San Diego-Tijuana, trans-border conurbation we can experience an important distributive fracture inhabiting this

production of identity. Its figure must be sought situationally in all its divisions and complexity.

Ch. 2 The Workshop as a Site for Community-Level Development



Figure 2.1: Beginning exploration of the materials, Day 1.

2. 1. Diagramming Dependence

Beginning in 2014, I sought to develop a situated artwork within the context of factory labor along the Mexico-U.S. border. The conceived work at once looked to gather the problematic representations of race, gender, and class in the context of the border as a socio-economic construction. The means for registering this extensive encounter were largely cooperative, and ultimately relied on the participation of two key organizations. First was my engagement with Ollin Calli, a labor rights collective operating in Tijuana. After months of shadowing their various activities, a secondary group was identified and enlisted for participation in a two-month workshop, physically planted within their

community. Before the workshop was in place, however, Ollin Calli was instrumental in lending assistance towards my design of the workshop's structure. What resulted from that environment will be discussed from various perspectives relevant to community-level, participatory development as well contemporary discourses in artistic practice.

Within the workshop, participants were initially solicited to assist in the production of a singular, yet partially undetermined artwork. The workshop's participants were compensated hourly for their time in the studio, which included daily periods of written reflection and use of a small library. My intentions were to use the structure of the setting to address the contemporary *reality* of factory production. What ultimately transpired in the two-month engagement diverged greatly from that singular focus, while also attempting to maintain a similar thematic emphasis. The physical materials introduced by the workshop were manually elaborated by the participants through a relatively simple technical process. The technique is one I developed previously in my individual studio practice, and involves the perforation of heavy-weight paper by use of a single needle embedded in a wooden dowel. The paper is pigmented on one side beforehand, and the resulting perforations expose the white of the paper's original state. The raised marks add a tactile quality to the drawing as the small holes reveal themselves to be dimensional in closer proximity. This "reveal" is part of the haptic basis for the work which is highly repetitive and physical. Those who were invited to participate were not required to have any experience explicitly tied to a similar method of craft, and differing "proficiencies" were anticipated as a *material* element of the workshop's development.

Simultaneously, the technical process was presented during the workshop's orientation as metaphorically bound to the larger phenomenon of factory assembly-line production. The repetitive nature of the work is both a result of the limited range of marks produced, and the limited range of motion involved in the material's manipulation. Additionally, I explained my personal history within the border region, to which I will return later on, and why I felt the project was important. To convey this I posited the workshop as a means of confronting the necessary modes of production that often remain invisible to the eventual consumers of such commodities. The implication of the project's title, "Diagrama de dependencia," —"dependency diagram" in English— was thus situated within the economic relationship between Mexico and the U.S. To further specify this relationship I suggested that the physical hand is always necessary in the production of technology; and, despite that, technology often functions to promote itself rhetorically as a liberation from this very necessity. To their community, I suggested, there were negative local impacts, socially and environmentally, related to technology's production. Thus, in many ways the project was initially presented in fairly limited, or particularized, terms. Along with those terms were the numerous embedded social values which I hoped would be confronted in the exchange necessitated by the conditions of the workshop. This process of constraint and negotiation are important components of community engagement that can reveal substantive commonalities often unknown when designing the work beforehand. Artmaking in this context can be identified by the potential to occupy and activate these unknown territories in a sensual process of investigation. As such the diagram served to offer a preliminary structure to our encounter, which became increasingly mutable as the work continued.

Before the workshop began I determined a particular image that would guide their hand work. The “diagram” was, therefore, a discrete image I selected as the starting point for the “final artwork.” This image was taken from a “dependency diagram” or “graph” developed to visually *map* the coding of other software programs. To create the drawing I transferred the image by hand to sheets of paper that the group would later perforate. As the workshop proceeded we experimented with different configurations of preparatory drawing, perforation, and resultant image-outcome. The work was ultimately divided between experimental stages and final production, but both modes proceeded alongside one another throughout the duration of the workshop. To add variety and reflective awareness to the process these two channels to the investigation extended throughout the workshop, even as we collectively speculated on certain outcomes. I continuously sought to suspend a defined outcome as we worked, emphasizing that they consider what the different marks conveyed. I struggled to maintain by instruction that a spontaneous quality to the work must emerge from their present elaboration. The most important focus of our discussions in that process came from our collective decision *not* to reproduce the diagram in its entirety. By electing to leave portions of the diagram unperforated, the “final” process emerged dialogically from the workshop. Spontaneous analysis of the perforated line work as it unfolded, served to transform the matrix of image, materials, and labor. The transition from the participants’ rote reproduction of the traced diagram, to that of an improvised and conscious manipulation of the drawing’s structure, was an important step towards removing some of the limitations I had initially imposed.

Considered against the thematic backdrop of labor rights and economic disparity, however, the outcome may appear trivial. To understand the shift in our orientation from labor towards conscious manipulation of the materials and the aesthetic potential that carried it, we must consider the participants' developed familiarity within employment settings. Designed from the practices of *repetition* and factory line work, the shift necessitated a redistribution of their preconceptions of those types of labor. Once subjected to their diversity as individuals with varied labor histories, our engagement of both this thematic location *and* the conditions of the workshop became increasingly complex. This complexity inevitably led to a necessary widening of the overall project's scope, just as it established more particularized relationships to each individual. This *transpositioning* of the individual to a collective production is embedded within the emergent artworks. The objects produced from the workshop do *not* exist, therefore, as a one-to-one record of the collaboration which transpired, but rather as a shift in our conceptualization of the media and its aesthetic organization. This temporary reorganization is a cognitive moment of production in which each participant forms an individuated semantic hierarchy, both contingent and integrated to the social setting. Pleasure in the work and its social context are then necessarily bound to cognition through the act of tracing which searches out momentary limits only to dissolve again back into the flux of the space:

This day was exciting for me, we advanced in our sculpture project which is very interesting because upon uniting the dotted lines I realized they're passages that we go along in life and we find ourselves in the world with people of different classes and cultures, it became interesting to me how we intertwine our customs and culture or religions with different people. It's interesting how we share in a group and know the

way of thinking and how we live in our daily life. I like it because in the project we are advancing with more consciousness of what we are doing, but at the same time we see things emerging as it changes with each process we do, it's in the different figures that we imagine when we finish a part of the work and at the same time it's fun because each person discovers something different.¹⁷

2. 2. *Constructing the Workshop*

My introduction to the group at hand through my relationship to Ollin Calli placed me within a familiar point of reference: labor advocacy and, more particularly, the context in which labor confronts issues systemic to gender inequality. But, what were the other means by which the expectations of those engaged were situated? This question brings to the foreground my subjectivity as it links with the embedded social values of “art” and “community.” If the work was truly oriented towards a specific community, their varied backgrounds and experiences would be difficult to approach objectively *en masse*, if such an objectivity could ever be thought to exist. The participants’ initial appraisal of the project is impossible to represent from my perspective as the artist, nor does the work exist anywhere in a totalized form of discourse. This fact importantly encounters the *degrees* of “conscious” participation the project reflexively sought out. Ultimately, a rejection of the project’s semantic, or conceptual, organization during its evolution, equally represents a successful outcome from many perspectives. The scaled engagement from individual to group levels of encounter called forward important problematics in the production of “public” artworks. Subsequently, it is my intention to retrace those encounters, and to indicate what decisions were made along the way. As a

¹⁷ Linda Marin Liberato, from the daily journaling exercise, author’s translation.

situated artwork I believed that only from its *social* production would meaning emerge more fully. In many ways I was still not able to perceive what logical and irrational frameworks had already organized my articulation of “labor” or “factory” in the context I was proposing. The specific meanings I had offered would necessarily be subjected to each participants’ interpretation and alteration. I hoped to maintain an artistic practice closely bound to the emerging negotiations and encounters of that process. The proximity of this encounter and exchange was sought and elaborated by the conditions of the workshop as the material basis for the artwork’s configuration, even as it existed to produce a physical object that would inevitably become dislocated from that very site.

On March 30th, 2015 a meeting was held in a newly rented store front along the Circuito Reforma Avenue, just as it reaches the top of a large bluff that overlooks the Tijuana River valley. Visible through the plots of land too unstable to build upon are numerous factories, small in fraction, however, to the many which operate across the surrounding region. Traffic is loud and frequent as it passes by on the small, two-lane road that climbs up and over the hill. This particular day was nearing the holiday of Semana Santa, a week long break from school for kids and time off from work for parents. That day brought together 10 participants along with two of Ollin Calli’s members. Mago and her partner, Lalo, drove up from Rosarito, the nearest town just south of Tijuana. Lalo had worked at the Sharp electronics plant there for over ten years. Mago had also worked in other factories after emigrating when she was much younger from the southern state of Puebla. In the more recent years, however, she has worked full-time as Ollin Calli’s grant writer and spokesperson, and before that she held a similar

position with a different agency, CITTAC. My relationship to Mago and Lalo had been formed over the prior 8 months as I shadowed their collective's many activities. Before that time they had been involved in a strike at Sharp that led to important outcomes such as the firing of staff members indicted for sexual harassment.

The remaining people present were a combination of community members and individuals directly known by Ollin Calli. A majority of them are currently organized in a local coalition entitled United "Promotoras" for the Well-being of the Community, which is based in the Reforma, or "Latinos," neighborhood, where the workshop was being held. "Latinos" refers to a specific public housing development, or INFONAVIT,¹⁸ built on the northern edge of Reforma in the 1980's. Located directly below the housing development is La Mesa industrial parks where major maquilas such as Bazz Houstons and Flextronics are located. Like many areas of the region a direct relationship exists between factory production and urban development. While this is often perceived as "informal" development, numerous strategies exist to relocate people to certain areas in need of laborers. As long-term residents of Latinos, the promotoras are engaged in bettering their community in various ways both governmental and non-. Those present who were not part of the promotoras core group had been hand-selected either by the promotoras, themselves, or Ollin Calli, with the majority having ties to the Latinos community. Determining who would be invited to participate in the workshop was one of the many complicated steps within the artwork's development, and through my engagement with Ollin Calli I had already met many of people present, either to complete interviews related to their labor history, or in observation of Ollin Calli's on-

¹⁸ INFONAVIT: National Worker Housing Institute.

going legal aid. Before being able to define concretely who the project would engage, I had little more than an ambiguous desire to extend Ollin Calli's reach to a particular area of Tijuana. Early in our collaboration I had imagined the workshop I was designing to act as a field office for Ollin Calli, extending their operations into the communities they served. This abstraction of the conditions of community organizing and engagement served to further my interest in meeting and working with this undefined group. Through the potential site I sought to be immersed in a reality which I assumed was the object of my own labor.

The tasks of differentiating which community, allocating resources to one area over another, and spreading out beyond their central operation, were not simple measures to accomplish with respect to the many activities occupying Ollin Calli's advocacy. Certain members of the collective felt this was an important step in their operation, while others cautioned against the expectations that would inevitably follow. While I felt my project could serve some of Ollin Calli's interests, it was clear that what I could offer was limited in many ways. The problem, meanwhile, of *locating* the work in relationship to the eventual participants was crucial to its development. The very specific technical and material aspects of the work I hoped to produce further complicated this process. From the beginning my motivation was held in tension between the "real" conditions of labor as seen by Ollin Calli, the particular interests of a more narrow, although yet- to be defined community, and lastly, my individual desire to produce an artwork through a particular technique. Evidently, the arrangement of haptic and cultural frequencies I would introduce could not avoid mapping new meanings and relationships to the site in

question, ones that could not mirror fully the orientation of Ollin Calli to its advocacy.

What I did not realize at the beginning was that new meaning would have to emerge, if I was to avoid objectifying the engagement and its participants along with it.

Simultaneously, without confronting the work *in situ* through its social production, it would be impossible to construct this meaning. My own orientation to the work, even if projected towards the supposed identity of the eventual participants, could not span a group necessarily heterogeneous in composition. I could not anticipate the divisions within our configuration with hopes of equalizing them preemptively. The divisions, more importantly, would add a critical depth to the experience if addressed carefully.

2. 3. *La técnica*

From the project's beginning I knew that as part of their broader mission Ollin Calli operates a craft store that includes hand-made goods such as artesian jewelry. Their promotion of the store stems from the importance they give to developing alternative economies rooted to traditional practices. This value also overlaps with representations of indigeneity explicit in their overall practice. The name "Ollin Calli" comes from the Nahuatl language, meaning "collective" or "house" "in movement." Along with tours of important sites endemic of factory production in Tijuana, Ollin Calli partners with tribal members from the Kumeyaay Nation near Tecate. Tours of tribal areas also make up an important aspect of Ollin Calli's regional engagement. The promotoras of Reforma, on the other hand, were engaged with organizing piñata production workshops towards the development of "proyectos productivos," or productive projects, also meant to provide supplemental means of income. The logic of hand work necessary for the workshop I

was proposing, was therefore embedded within an existing cultural and economic framework. The prevailing value to “proyectos productivos,” however, is not one attached to the genre of fine art within which I am operating. For me, this provided another difficult tension in the work’s production. Was it possible to produce art across the social registers established by the endogenous conditions of the site in question, achieving a form of *transposition*, or would the production in itself only maintain those divisions of class and labor as it linked them structurally? How was the final artwork to be maintained given this type of exchange? These questions exist not only in relationship to the ownership of the physical objects made in the workshop, but extend to the implicit “public” value of the work. In fact, much of the workshop, for me, was spent learning that my feelings of ownership would never match those of the individuals engaged, *and* that it was not my goal to organize an outcome of equal ownership as I formerly understood it. Even after the project concluded I struggled to understand what types of labor had been performed, and how they were contingent upon the complex and interlaced levels of public and private encounter we were all experiencing. Viewed in hindsight, the ways in the which public and private experience were linked by the smaller scale of the workshop, the individuated types of labor performed, and the roles that emerged from those labors, account for the artwork’s total intervention.

“La técnica,” or “the technique,” for making the work, as it was referred to by the end, is a process I have developed over many years in my individual studio practice. Small perforations are done by use of a single needle struck through paper that has been pigmented beforehand on the opposing side. The materials are relatively inexpensive and

incorporate a simple matrix of time, space, and energy. For me, making the work had always been grounded on an interior, meditative rhythm. Entering the project I felt there was interesting relationship, however, to the repetitive conditions of factory assembly line work. I believed that this intersection of craft, economy, and time would allow for complicated agency to emerge from the process, namely as it was done cooperatively. Inasmuch as the process was also introduced around the abstracted conditions of technology, the personal encounter to the mark making that I hoped to share had many layers. The meanings I associated with the work *en masse* could not transfer to the group, however, and I could not imagine how they would construct new meanings with the materials. The means by which this reception and recording of their individual reactions as the workshop proceeded had to emerge spontaneously from the process itself. The tension between soliciting a fixed outcome in the artwork which provided an important constraint to our interaction, was kept in balance with a large degree of ambiguity over the final configuration. As an artist I had to respond to their interests once the workshop began in an effort to maintain both dimensions. Many of the reactions I had anticipated were not important once the work was underway. Relating the work back to themes of economic dependence or interconnectedness, the environmental impacts of production, and so on, were not always compelling strategies as we moved forward. The gratification of the process, however, was more widely registered and evolved in a complex system of interaction among us.

Within the context of the workshop the materials were received with some familiarity, but obvious divisions, such as those inherent in the *type* of paper I selected,

accounted for one of the many inevitable distinctions of our economic positions. While designing the workshop I hadn't considered socially the *quality* inherent to the type of paper I selected: its weight, text, and body were not impartial, nor were they insignificant to the immediate feeling of the space we were activating. The paper, which I took care to establish with them, was expensive, and its presence in the workshop was valued.

Introducing a paper type that in most social contexts is considered a luxury, offered an important *pleasure* to the work. Of course the scale for this value is not easily defined, nor does it operate within the language of representation we have come to expect in community-engaged work. The transferability of value and pleasure in work became more apparent to me as the process continued. Eventually, I realized that it would be important for them to produce their own artworks as an outgrowth of this individual scale of the process, something that in hindsight feels readily transparent. The constraint of the collaborative work led us through important steps in understanding the physical process and its potential outcomes. This learning was then transferred to individual studies that expanded in numerous thematic directions.

While I had imagined my technique would avoid overt clashes of economic disparity because of its simplicity, the reality of those divisions would never disappear from our exchange. This scenario extended to every aspect of the workshop as it was populated by the many objects we found necessary or desirable to accompany us. Some objects were guided by the conditions of the work, while others were contingent on the individuals' cultural background. To guide the hand labor I constructed two large work tables for the space which allowed for various types of groups to configure. Because I

had constructed them by hand, they were noticeably appreciated by different members of the workshop. In fact, my desire to make things, once confronted within the space of the workshop as it was occupied by many individuals working simultaneously, became an interesting topic of the work, itself, in one of our many exchanges. With some participants I was able to reflect on the differences in shared and individual labor, and what my motivations for working with them were, even as that sometimes conflicted with my other tendencies. The concepts of “participation” and “making” thus entered the setting on a discrete level, although perhaps still objectified in some ways by the rhetoric of “community” and “labor equality.” Difficult to convey are the moments in which the participants, themselves, contributed to the space, once they sensed that the conditions of ownership were more complicated than anyone of us could easily articulate.

2. 4. Organizing the Workshop

Once in place it wasn't difficult to see that the socialization that accompanied the work was in many ways equally important to the physical work itself. Entering the workshop though, I had imagined the work very differently. And despite my presentation of the workshop's structure as open to dramatic reorganizing, there were obvious limitations to my relationship to the process. Its metaphorical ground in hand labor was only a simple introduction to be complicated and specified by the various reactions of each participant. Once again the protocols that orchestrated production were far more important in determining the conscious engagement I was seeking, than the conceptual or metaphorical arrangement. The ways in which we made use of a library housed there, established a make-shift kitchen, and maintained the space, all rooted themselves in the

degrees of engagement achieved across different participants. As the workshop evolved people brought new books that were looked at collectively, and the kitchen grew to support more complex activity. While I had provided texts relevant to labor rights, often more appreciated were those documenting folk arts as well as the contemporary catalogs in fine art. My logical mapping of the library as a means to address labor consciousness was well intended, but couldn't account for the subtle ways the library would occupy the space *temporally*. I hadn't anticipated the leisure associated with "paging through" an art book as an important transition from the work we were doing, or as an important interior moment of experience available to us all. Throughout the day they were asked to spend one hour reading and writing as part of the workshop time for which they were supported. Initially, I designed the procedure attempting to disrupt the repetition of the hand work. I couldn't foresee specifically how to best make use of the time as it linked with the collective imaginary we were enacting. The library later became an important collection of source materials for producing their own works through tracing and appropriation. The interruption of the elaboration of the materials is articulated by another journal entry drafted by Perla:

The basic concept of work-break-experience is new to me, you always hear adults saying "work is not done for pleasure." It creates a heavy and negative way of thinking, and in no other context is this more representative than "in the maquilas." I grew up with a mom who worked from Monday to Saturday who instilled community work in me....I have never worked in a "maquiladora" but many of my neighbors do....I watch the news and believe that I'm conscious of the problems within my city, country, and planet; never the less I see a slow awakening of people towards their reality and the injustices they are subjected to, and now they are starting to seek solutions for the labor situation as well as their families.

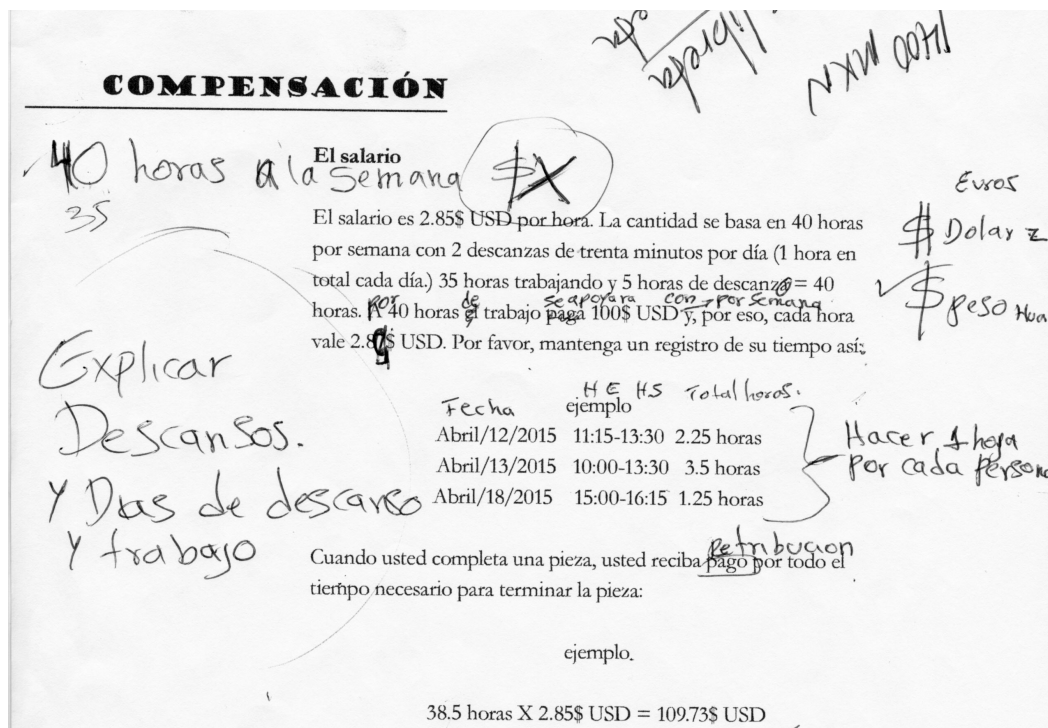


Figure 2.2: Detail of edited work manual.

“Manual de elaboración”

To initiate the workshop I first drafted a “manual de elaboración,” or work manual. Through this document I hoped to effectively introduce the main concepts behind the project, as well as the aesthetic and political concerns intrinsic to it. It served additionally as a contract that defined key details such as the hourly “support” to be allocated to the participants, as well as what the “final artwork” would hope to achieve. Before reaching the participants, the first draft of the manual was edited by Mago and Nery of Ollin Calli. Much like Mago, Nery had moved to Tijuana from Puebla with her mother, Vicky, when she was younger. In Tijuana she worked in various factories before earning a legal credential and becoming Ollin Calli’s in-house lawyer. Before Ollin Calli she worked in other advocacy settings. Nery’s mother, Vicky, helps to organize and cook

for the tours that Ollin Calli conducts of important sites in Tijuana related to the maquiladoras. Both Mago and Nery's first-hand experience in the factories gives them an important understanding of the demographic they operate within and a strong voice when contributing to public engagements. In the drafting of the manual both were quick to urge me in directions they felt would protect both me *and* those solicited to participate.

Through their advice the manual was designed to avoid certain references or language that would open up a legal responsibility of employment to endure beyond the period of the project. Naty, lead organizer of the promotoras, had recently experienced trouble with a participant to a workshop she hosted. It was clear that maintaining specific language surrounding the project would be necessary to defining terms that protected me from conditions of employment that were not always evident. Particularly, if I was engaging the work in a public context where money was involved, I was vulnerable to people attempting to exploit the situation. The necessity of soliciting "conscious participants" to the workshop, not those merely seeking to receive financial compensation, was in the end the most important criteria. While I had dedicated much effort to considering what the ethical wage would be for the workshop, Ollin Calli was crucial in defining the specific *type of labor* I was soliciting. Assuming that solely the type of artwork I wanted to make contextualized the wage, led to scenarios that either reproduced the conditions of outsourced labor or, conversely, transposed an artificial universality of economy.

NOMBRE: MARIA NATIVIDAD GUIZAR

FECHA	H.E.	H.S.	TOTAL HORAS		
31/03/15	8:30 AM	1:18 PM	6:40	6.67	
1/04/15	8:15 AM	4:05 PM	8:00	7.83	
2/04/15	8:10 AM	5:00 PM	9:00	8.50	
				23 x 2.85	
Resibi	\$65.55	6/04/15	11/6/15	\$65.55	
6/04/15	8:10 AM	5:31	6/04/15	9:15	9:00
7/04/15	8:30 AM	7/04/15	4:00	7.50	
8/04/15	8:15 AM	4:00		.75	
9/04/15	8:10 AM	4:00 P.M.		17.25	
Week 2				7.83	
				25.08	
				\$71.48	
Week 3	1pm	4pm		3 = \$8.55	

Figure 2.3: Detail of workshop time sheets.

Value in the Workshop

Negotiating a rate of compensation that implied the community-specific context for its production was inherently bound to the process of locating the work. Often what produced this dichotomy was the knowledge that what we constructed cooperatively would later on be reduced in many ways to the perceived object of *my* labor. In the first draft of the manual I sought to counter-act this outcome by establishing a partial ownership clause for the final artwork by which each participant would retain a 5% share. I anticipated that by sharing the revenue generated by the artwork's hypothetical sale, the project could develop a private means of supporting those involved. Once engaged concretely it was obviously much more complicated. Which costs were associated with the artwork's commercial value were not clear, nor did a commercial

entity really exist behind the speculative artwork. Positing a commercial nature to the work at the outset seemed to protect those engaged, but equally oriented the work in such a direction that emphasized such a value to be the basis of our interaction. In this convoluted way, however, it became apparent that I was asking them to produce a community-based work oriented around a physical outcome that would only benefit them in particular ways. The compensation provided did not equal that of a generalized labor of art production projected into a global market; nor was it a purely inscriptive model of encounter. The value established by that context is only material once the artwork has been translated to the location of the gallery or museum. So often in community-based work this establishes an *a priori* de-valuing of art, much of which attempts the confused encounter of a Kantian-style *disinterestedness*, one seeking, however, an inverted mirroring of “fine” art’s formal autonomy. In this rationale the “community” is a positive set of material conditions, and the assumption becomes that the artwork must map those qualities logically, or else risk imposing an artificial excess. In late Modernity we have also seen an oppositional trend occurring towards the antagonistic. This furthers the supposed *taste* behind revealing social constructions, most often situated within the gallery or museum’s context of display and consumerism. Once again we have found ourselves caught between capitalism and an embattled public sphere, although this time, we have merely shortened the trip through an express route to global ethics. Meanwhile, the products of objective representation in these instances are no less predicated by the same principles of “immutable mobility” that govern scientific inscriptions as described by Latour. They follow in the same processes of extraction, displacement, and

accumulation that allow data to become objective and meaningful.¹⁹ When considered in the context of community development we must be explicit about what becomes mobilized *and* immutable.

In the workshop value was not determined apart from the experience that precipitated the object's construction. This includes the wages leading up to it, the conversations, the writing and reading, and the labor, itself. Constructing the space, however, was equally the production of an object. This agglomeration of actions, motives, senses of unknowing, miscommunications, and so on, was complicated by the other objects, in the form of the artwork that guided our time throughout the workshop. In hindsight the separation of the space and the objects we produced was inevitable. How should art account for this inevitable separation when work becomes consolidated and invisible, or the *result* of some other things, such as the *a priori* factory conditions or the economic divide between Tijuana and San Diego? Meaning is always ready to rush in to the cracks momentarily opened, and bind together the social fabric once more, just as we first found it. The unknowing and cognition that pursued the objects became embedded in them, and just as they were exhausted, the work had been accomplished. Even the means by which to *see* the work shifted. For the participants, the memories and encounters along the way are the more accessible antecedents, and just as any artist develops specific values from the iterative aspects of their practice, seeing the figures that emerged in the drawing and connecting them within the site *was* the artwork. It cannot exist within this total scenario after that the fact. In the conclusion I will discuss

¹⁹ Latour, Bruno. "Drawing Things Together." 1980, Representations in Scientific Practices.

how the object of our investigation remains following the exhibition of the completed works.

Ch. 3 Conclusion



Figure 3.1: Meeting in Perla's house, Colonia Reforma.

From the outset, my investigation sought collaboration with Ollin Calli. In early 2013, I attended a public event organized by one of its principal members, Enrique Davalos at City College where he is a professor of Chicano Studies. Enrique, originally from Mexico City, invited fellow activist in the *maquila* sector, Martha Ojeda, to speak at a public event. Martha is well-known in the labor activism community for the important book, *NAFTA from Below*, which she co-edited with Rosemary Hennessey. She is also director for the informal union, CJM or the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras. Ollin Calli was originally recommended to me by labor advocate and artist Fred Lonidier. Fred is also an active member of the San Diego branch of Ollin Calli, SD Maquila

Network. In July of 2014, just before moving to Tijuana, I participated in my first immersion with Ollin Calli, acting as both a researcher and participant in their group outing. We traveled south through Tijuana, passing along the Via Rapida to the Avenida Reforma exit, and headed up into the mesa towards the west. Along the way we took a small detour to pass by the first place of employment for Mago, another principle member of the collective. The facility sits within a middle class neighborhood, and now produces components for industrial fans. Residences completely surround the mid-size plant, some perhaps older than the maquila, itself.

Like many other people, Mago had made the transition with her mother from southern Mexico to the north in search of opportunities not available to them in their home state of Puebla. In the south she had worked in the fields or in houses as a “domestica.” Within the plant in Tijuana she performed simple tasks of assembly, joining components with an adhesive. Now, she had left both behind and was a spokesperson and grant writer for Ollin Calli. It was not clear to me at the time, but each member of the collective plays key roles, or positions, which regularly evolve to correspond to their engagements. Although they may have explained this early on, it remained difficult to understand, even after months of collaboration. Their varied expertise in the field has been cultivated from extremely disparate backgrounds in terms of culture, ethnicity, and economy. The subtle and intertwined formation of their collective brings together knowledge of differing legal systems, organizing, and lived-experience of the very labor setting within which they are advocating. The complexity of that advocacy continues to unfold and change shapes as our collaboration continues.

That day we headed further up the hill, or “cerro,” that identifies Colonia Reforma, or “Latinos” as we called it. The area is occupied by an older public housing development built in the 1980s. The community is flanked by two large industrial parks with numerous independent *maquiladoras* cloistered inside. We were headed to visit a group of *promotoras* that Ollin Calli had engaged with in the past; some of the members had worked under another advocacy coalition, Grupo Factor X. That day the *promotoras* were hosting a breast cancer clinic imparted by Roxana Salcedo from the organization, Papalote Mujeres en Movimiento. The number of incidents of breast cancer in Baja California ranks high in Mexico, likely due to population density and the widespread presence of factory production.



Figure 3.2: Breast cancer meeting in Acamapichtli classroom.

We entered a small, grade school classroom occupied by fourteen women as the clinic was already underway. Techniques for self-examination were imparted as was a

general explanation of how the cancer functioned. After entering we introduced ourselves; it was the first occasion for me to explain myself and what my role was, or hoped to be. The classroom was part of Acamapichtli, an elementary school, which occupies a portion of a larger square block in the center of INFONAVIT Latinos. I learned later on that the *promotoras* had negotiated use of the space with the school's director. The room was filled ecstatically with multiplication tables and illustrations of classroom etiquettes. Afterwards, we chatted with some of the members as they talked about the latest news among them. We were all excited to witness such a well-organized event, and I was bolstered by the feeling that I would soon make sense of my project. It would be nine months, however, before I returned to the location with a plan in hand. Some of the women present at the meeting would become central participants in the artworks' production. The time in between ranged greatly in its impact, but slowly gathered itself into a subtle and discrete vocabulary of intentions and familiarities. What transpired following the workshop's initiation then occurred relatively quickly in relationship to the project's whole. The series of utterances and encounters that formed the necessary language to arrive there cannot be fully recounted, but must be seen in the light of the friendships and exchanges that ensued between me and Ollin Calli, and subsequently the nine participants to the workshop.

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Following the workshop's conclusion we held a meeting in Naty's house, where I posed a question to the group: "How did the relationship change between "labor" and the pleasure of the space?" My intention was still fixated on resolving the direct relationship

between the project and the lived experiences they were facing in relationship to work. We discussed issues of age discrimination and the inexperience of younger workers that perpetuates some of the abuses of labor rights in the workplace. Most importantly, what was implied was not a negative portrait of factory labor but the problems of seeking new forms of employment after those positions ceased to be viable. Community work was discussed in that regard, but implied less financial stability. Combining the differing schedules of late night factory work while engaging their community was also extremely difficult. Access to jobs was always limited by gender, often with the undesired positions left to women capable of enduring extreme conditions of production. They shared stories of early jobs held in textile factories or piece-rate home work. In many ways it was the first time we had collectively addressed the concepts I had begun with. During the course of the interview, Linda posed the question to me: "Will the economy be better in the United States?" I struggled to answer the question thinking through a foreign language. I compared the wage discrepancy among agricultural workers in San Quintin, Baja California versus those in Oxnard, California, who make significantly more, and we compared, in general, the cost of living being higher in Tijuana comparatively to southern cities within Mexico. Naty offered a story of a short-term job replacing the labels on consumer items from Chinese export to U.S. origin. What emerged was an expression of being in the middle with pressures downward from the economic force exerted by the United States. For them the flow back and forth was evident, but Linda commented that she had already had eight years seeking a tourist visa unsuccessfully. After twenty years of living in Tijuana, her family is here and she doesn't wish to move

north, but still, the feeling of not being able to visit sets up a negative psychological situation.

While I expressed hope that in some way a tangible means of interpreting the border through their combined expertise could emerge, I could not offer a particular solution apart from the technique and experience we shared. Adelina questioned in response, that if they were to continue in a commercial pursuit with the drawing process, similar to that of piñatas, to whom would the objects be valuable? Once again I could not offer a solution. Perhaps it was evident from this that the object was only valuable in the abstraction of community labor, but Francisco commented that what was equally important was a unifying thematic that drove the work itself under a collective identity. This would also entail mobilizing other groups such as Ollin Calli in the process of building a network. Taking advantage of seasonal events under a group identity could allow them the critical mass necessary to find a market. As this aspect of the conversation evolved, Naty offered that for her the motivation was not the commercial return, but an opportunity to experience the craft. Connecting the process with on-going community work would be no less difficult, but nevertheless, a discrete object of community production had been introduced. Naty joked that when we first talked, Nery from Ollin Calli had made her feel like “she was being contracted for a job in factory.” I had talked, meanwhile, about “art” and “knowledge,” of “apprenticeship.” Because at that point she had been asked primarily to assist in selecting the participants from her community, there was ownership being shared over the event as it occurred among us. The opportunity to take time away from her house was in of itself valuable. Additionally,

“the work of a promotora, was always to learn something, and then reproduce it in her community.” If the project assisted to help identify other shared values among them, which could be facilitated by other forms of cooperative labor, then the work could continue on within the networks they have established.

After following the workshop my thesis exhibition was completed in the main gallery available to visual art candidates on campus. I constructed a series of tables, one for each of the ten segments of the cooperative drawing we produced. The tables as a mode of display were originally considered well before the drawings had been physically made. Once installed for the final exhibition the logic of the presentation not only matched the complicated relationship between individual and collective labor, but also that of the physical work to create the drawings. Opposite from the gridded layout of the tables was a sprawling wall drawing that listed the many people involved in the project. It extended to mention those individuals who I had met during the research and development of the workshop. The more informal feeling of the wall drawing was held in tension with the huddled metal tables. A series of photogram-style prints was displayed above them along the remaining two planes of the gallery space. These objects were created in a darkroom through a traditional analog process. Light was recorded by silver gelatin paper as it passed through the perforated drawings, transforming them into negatives. The “positive” prints were made from multiple exposures, isolating sections of the drawings that in turn registered our shared interpretations.

The figures that emerged in these photograms are for me, a series of hieroglyphs generated from the common language of the work. They evoke characters, spaces, and

images from the moments we shared interpreting the outcomes of the technique. Once separated from the space, meanwhile, they become wholly abstract and open to further interpretation. Additionally, they follow the basic ways by which labor is transformed into objects such as technological commodities. They consolidate the cooperative work into frames. In some ways I fear this repeats the displacement I sought to overcome in the project's beginning. More importantly, however, I continued to recognize that in this way the artwork could not locate and then translate to the space of the gallery the community along with its empirical conditions. While the register of the drawing lives on, it cannot be asked to call forth positively the conditions of labor, computation, and displacement. Simultaneously, I did not achieve an entirely antagonistic or negative display of alienation through the drawing and its eventual displacement. Much of this current document is a result of limiting the material encounter actualized by the installation itself. For some the central position between positivist and antagonistic modelings of the encounter may feel like the imposition of an ideological, if not utopic, neutrality. I would argue that it is left for the spectator themselves to weigh, and in doing so, trace out once again the modes of production that lead to such a separation in society.

Appendix

“Diagrama de dependencia,” Dominic Paul Miller, Main Graduate Gallery, UCSD,
March 31-April 3rd, 2016. Thesis exhibition.



Figure 4.1: installation detail.



Figure 4.2: installation detail.



Figure 4.3: installation detail.



Figure 4.4: installation detail.

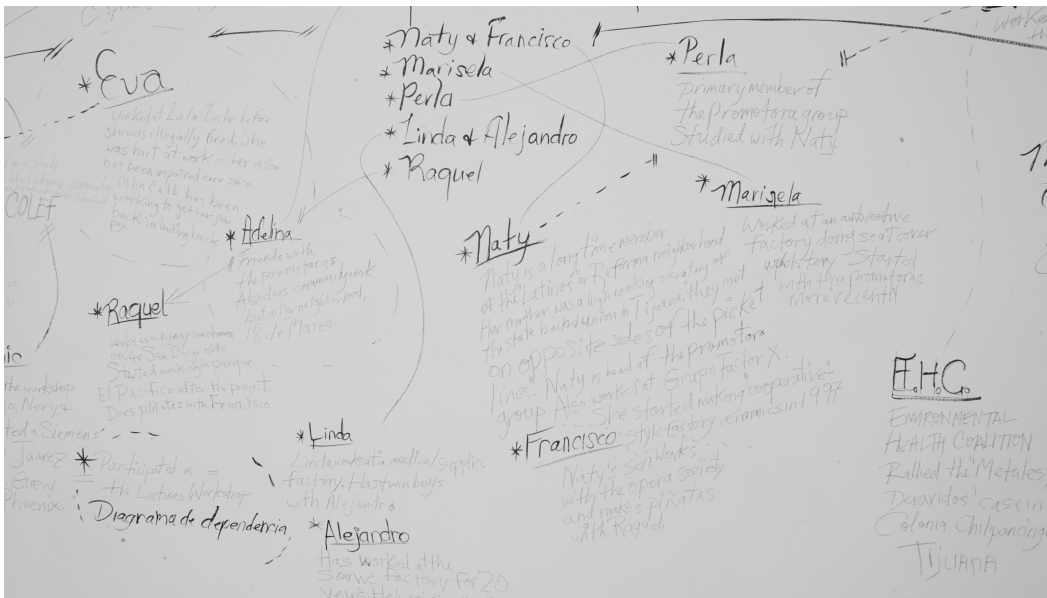


Figure 4.5: installation detail (wall drawing detail)



Figure 4.6: installation detail, “boat/barca” framed silver gelatin print, 11 in. x 14 in. 2016.



Figure 4.7: installation detail, “tower/torre” framed silver gelatin print, 11 in. x 14 in. 2016.



Figure 4.8: installation detail, sumi ink on hand-perforated paper, wood, metal frame, each table:

29 in. x 50 in. 2016.