# *La Pared Que Habla: A Photo Essay about Art and Graffiti at the Border Fence in Nogales, Sonora*

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Despite being visible across a wide expanse of desert, for many newcomers to border country the steel fence that separates the United States from Mexico is an apparition—an unsightly phenomenon sprung up from the earth without warning. But truth be told, despite the otherworldly rhetoric frequently imputed to the borderlands, there is no ghostly presence here. What can be found here instead, quite literally and materially, are the Machiavellian games of state powers splicing the land and the people into experimental oddities that, were they to be left alone, would cook up their own mundane versions of the strange (as people here have done for generations). The power that wills the fence into being is the same power that hails us to submit to a higher order of things, so to speak—a vision of the world as *a place where things stay in their place*.

Yet, there is no denying it: the border stages a drama with highly melodramatic appeal. Many of the local folks are quick to note the absurdity of the geo-political setup: for people who *became* bi-national by decree of war and live their daily existences "contaminated" by bi-national interactions, the orderly and sanitary aspirations of the fence make no sense. Neither does it make sense to label as disorderly "the way things are done around here." The favored North American discourse of site bifurcation—the idea that "on the other side" bodies, cars, objects, and houses reproduce infinitely while resisting the "discipline" of advanced capitalism's efficiency, law and order, strategic planning, and muted colors—has become increasingly irrelevant. Neoliberal contamination has upstaged the pictorial dividend of day-trips to the curio shops across the line. Border tourism is dead; globalization killed it.

On a short fragment of this fence—running from the port-of-entry station towards the northwestern edge of the twin towns of Ambos Nogales—three artists from Sonora and Arizona have installed public works of art on the Mexican side of the fence. The works of Alfred Quiroz, Guadalupe Serrano, and Alberto Morackis transform a simple piece of metal into an outlandish and outlawed visual archive that disputes the fence's alleged rationality. Functioning partly as art canvass and partly as scandalous tabloid, through the works of these artists the border fence acquires a newfound power of enunciation.

But don't expect the works on display to thunder over all other social and political discourses important to this region. As works of art, these interventions speak with a strange combination of assertiveness and subtlety, almost as if their creators were simultaneously idealistic and cautious about their faith in the power of art to influence social outcomes.

Although the artworks inch forward invitations for civic engagement, their delivery is remarkably unpretentious. To be effective, artistic representations hinge necessarily on the ability to circulate symbolic capital. In the borderlands, this can be a tall order. As it is, the zone is already layered to a certain degree with symbolic excess. Many writers have pondered the border mythology. In the end, it boils down to this: nothing is quite what it seems. There's always something *more* underneath the surface of everything. Therefore, social messaging in these parts can turn out to be more complicated than is often assumed.

Luis Alberto Urrea writes about "the dastardliness of Mexico that grows into popular myth in our imaginations." When I first read Urrea's 1993 text *Across the Wire: Life and Hard Times on the Mexican Border,* I had to look up the word *dastard*. The dictionary wasn't much help: the word is synonymous with *both* coward and daredevil, gutless and hero. But taken within a larger context, I came to understand Urrea's deployment of the word as a tactic of border-writing itself, a displacement of meaning that resists easy characterization. Urrea seeks another drift: he wants to evoke that quality of border life that many others have noted—the recalcitrant *otherly* story behind the assembly-line industries, the statistics, the duty-free shopping, and the postmodern metaphors. It is a little bit of this and a little bit of that—a "typical" border reality that is atypical everywhere else (or used to be; now that the economy and taste are global, things may be more border-like everywhere, but this should not be a foregone conclusion).

One such story, *otherly* told by border residents, is the one-sided tone of much of what North Americans know, dispute, or fabricate about the fence and the border experiences it encodes. Carlos Vélez-Ibáñez, a professor at Arizona State University who was born only a few feet north of the once Cyclone fence that separated Nogales in the Colossus of the North from Nogales in the Third World, has written about the oppositions he saw growing up in this region. For him, to the extent that it is the most transparent sign, the physical fence is the least onerous of border injustices—it is meant to separate persons—nothing else, a no-brainer. But other fences are far more insidiously consequential. Take, for instance, argues Vélez-Ibáñez, the fence that recognizes a population only by its legal-political status and not by the cultural systems people use to survive problems of daily subsistence. Or how about the fence that stands for the "mistaken idea that human populations somehow are culturally pristine."[1]

In border territory, people have been contaminated with each other's imaginaries for a long time. While it is true that some fight it tooth and nail (this is the reverse law of proximity of human understanding at work: the closer you are to something, the farther away you want to be); others embrace it and thrive on it. An entirely fresh, inventive, adaptive culture has sprung up from the friction between north and south, east and west, in these borderlands. *Corridos,* for instance, circulated in Mexico since the Spanish arrived singing their "romances," but only in the northern border did they grow to be the "voice of the people." Religious devotion has long been associated with the Catholic strand of Mexican nationalism, but only in the borderlands did faith practices acquire the intense folk improvisations and anti-canonical markings that cults to Pancho Villa, Jesús Malverde, Don Pedrito Jaramillo, El Niño Fidencio, Teresita Urrea–La Santa de Cabora, Juan Soldado, and most recently La Santa Muerte have promoted. Anyone anywhere can grill meat over fire, but only in the northern border can *carne asada* become a holistic, transformational ritual of communitarian and male-bonding significance. I suppose it is a matter of degrees; life around here is ordinary in its own unique, vernacular extraordinariness.

It has become increasingly common—at New York City art galleries or during Santa Monica performance evenings for example—to hear people speak about the border as an allegory of the twenty-first-century human condition. Perhaps there is some truth to the affirmation that in a sense "we are all border crossers" now. Crossing "la frontera de nuestras difer-

encias con los demás" (the border of our differences with each other), as the Old Gringo in Carlos Fuentes' text by the same title remarked, is as worthwhile a goal as any.[2] But if we are always crossing some kind of border, what types of fences do each of our psychological struggles put up to prevent us from doing so? If border is the metaphor of our epoch, what is the equivalent sociological and spiritual metonym for fence?

Drawing from his experience as a border crosser (transgressing his social class, nationality, and language), Vélez-Ibáñez challenges us on this point. Some of the most appealing ingredients of a cosmopolitan border consciousness, he argues, are in fact cemented on the fictional success of a sort of "commodity identity" assigned—pejorative characteristics and all—to certain specific kinds of bodies under certain specific kinds of conditions. In other words, we may all feel like borderlanders today, and may even aspire to be more so than not, but are we also all ready to be *Mexicans* right now?

*Mexican* is no longer (it hasn't been for a long time) *just* a national descriptor; in a very real sense the word is also an idiom of prejudicial thinking—a "term to be erased and not envied," says Vélez-Ibáñez (71). If *Mexican* is the stand-in for "untouchable" in our current political juncture, what kinds of fences would U.S. society be willing to erect to avoid contamination? Well, we sort of know the answer to this question: the electronic, military, harsh-desert, virtual kinds of fences that compel a secretary of state to suspend enforcement of twenty-four different environmental "laws" to stop the lawbreakers. Who is the "illegal" now? But how far would we go when even those do not contain the flow of our imbricated destinies?

Those are the kinds of interrogations that have drawn artists and desperate scribes to deface the fence, to make it answer for its complicity in the hour of sorrow, to demand that it confess what else the apparatus of fear has up its sleeve; to soften like wet paper . . . collapse on the desert floor, fold over and stop doing what it persists in doing against the land, the people, the animals, against the *idea* of who we can be if we stop fighting it.

In border towns, a sui generis admixture of Mexican and non-Mexican humanfolk seems to move about in multiple enactments of surplus value: first, there are the laboring bodies that crowd around assembly plants and improvised housing compounds on the outskirts of town. Add to the mix the commodities overloaded on lopsided trucks that line up along the international highways to move goods from south to north. Consider,

too, the insufferable traffic lines at ports of entry, the visual density and serial reproduction of all things reproducible, the surviving tactics of the everyday that iterate multiple forms of conventional wisdom alongside persistent faith rituals intertwined with pleasures of *cantinas* and nightclubs. Everywhere one senses knowledge too banal to be taken seriously—except by the lonely-heart patrons of the underground economy. For them, the law of the lawless border zone is improvisation.

In this border zone, as has been established ad infinitum, aesthetics of immodest display rule the day. "We want to see and be seen," seem to proclaim the works of art applied to the fence. But see what? Perhaps border artists want the rest of us to notice their desire to surpass the wall, to render its materiality useless, to defy its admonitions and create art out of scrap metal (hope out of violence). *Me vale madre este muro estéril y feo. (*I don't give a damn about this ugly wall*)*.

Ambos Nogales (Both Nogales) are not exactly sister-cities nor even *pueblos compadres*—they are more like cousins. Some cousins are estranged, but others are "kissing cousins." Yet other cousins play with each other secretly—touching their nationalistic parts in bouts of shame and arrogance behind the fence. The local museum exhibition confected in the U.S. Nogales that partnered with the Smithsonian show captured glimpses of the intimate, familiar relationship. It was entitled In Spite of Fences, highlighting the historical and ongoing intimacy of some Nogalenses on both sides of the line.

But, at core, it remains genealogical accident, fate, and the serendipitous crossroads of capital and state edicts that connect these two settlements. When American investors became eager to establish a railroad route that would link the eastern United States with the west coast of Mexico, the chosen path was the old trading road between Tucson, Arizona, and Guaymas, Sonora. In 1882 the railroad was completed, and the twin towns of Nogales were founded.

Until the 1960s, the border was only a juridical distinction. The separation between the American and the Mexican side did not impose much of an inconvenience for local residents on either side. The name of Nogales refers to "Canyon of the Walnut Trees," and even today, a pastoral feeling of ease and friendship is never too far from daily experience around these parts. Elements of the intimacy rear their head when least expected: the best horse handlers are Mexicanos on the U.S. side; wealthy ranchers from Chihuahua send messages by word of mouth that these individuals' services are required "back home," and they offer enough

compensation to cover "coyote" expenses for the return to Tucson. In Nogales, USA, any marijuana loot of less than five hundred pounds is negligible; no wasting time in prosecuting those "small" business deals. Until recently, whenever gringos talked about the Mexican Nogales they favored the word "nice." Compared to Juárez, Tijuana, Laredo, or Matamoros, Nogales was just big enough to be a city but at the same time of a scale that did not threaten disorder.

Nogales' romantic folk image started to change in the early 1980s. In less than fifteen years the population on the Mexican side tripled, reaching upwards of 400,000 today. As many as one hundred *maquilas* (assembly plants) employ workers from all corners of Mexico. One account estimates that 80 percent of those employed in the *maquila* industry at any given point are "new arrivals." The other Nogales, on the U.S. side, has maintained a steady population of around 20,000, but the impact of the human concentration and environmental degradation brought about by the industrial boom across the line has exacted a high price in this once-sleepy community. Nogales, Arizona, counts a cancer rate five times the national average; some believe that the appearance of several clusters of disease here (lupus is especially overrepresented) are the result of severe levels of toxins in the water that floods downhill from Sonora to Arizona.[4]

The locals call the fence "el muro." Some call it "la pared" (wall). A *muro* is any solid, vertical construction serving as a barrier; but the term is also used allegorically to refer to anything that in some way suggests a wall, as in the English expression "a wall of secrecy." I heard someone in Nogales once describe the fence as "un muro de miedo" (a wall of fear); another person simply referred to it as "a wall of arrogance." The graffiti artists and impromptu muralists that have taken upon themselves to decorate this wall seem intent on sizing down the wall's preponderance on the landscape. As a political object, the fence is subject to the arithmetic of humility; its bulk must be humbled, its perspective across the desert must be distorted. Its power must be disobeyed.

It is not surprising that Nogalenses and their contiguous neighbors have taken up the various strands of monumental art—murals, sculptures, and graffiti—to express themselves. It is well known that Mexico has a solid and reputable tradition of muralism dating to the ancient Mesoamerican civilizations and, in the early part of the twentieth century, to the Revolution-inspired art movement led by "los Tres Grandes" (Rivera, Orozco, Siqueiros). But these grand men's grandiose version of mural arts is only

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Art and
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A PHOTO ESSAY.

# Descriptions of the photos

1 *In lieu of a welcoming sign for northbound travelers, the border fence sprawls a wry poetic manifesto in Spanish, a paraphrasing of sorts of the words uttered by the Gringo Viejo in Carlos Fuentes' canonic border-treatment text: "borders are scars on the landscape." The land as a kind of "body" that can be mutilated, written into, wounded, or adorned is a recurring metaphor among immigrant-rights activists in the area. As a device to engender empathy, these loose semantic associations with injury, disfiguration, or branding seem to resonate with feelings experienced by many area residents. On the other hand, one can question the extent to which the anthropomorphic readings of the fence distort the historical record, imputing a discourse of the "natural" over the socially constituted.*

2 *Crosses placed on the fence by religious leaders and humanitarian groups signal an overwhelming aspect of the politics of immigration: U.S. border-enforcement policies pushing immigrants to cross in remote desert areas have resulted in a twenty-fold increase in immigrant deaths since 1990. Many border experts refer to the strategy that tightens ports-of-entry enforcement while hoping for the vast desert to serve as a natural deterrent to would-be crossers as a "funnel" effect. The deliberate effect of the current government policy is not only fatal to many who attempt to cross, but it is also an affront to international humanitarian standards for life and safety.*

3 *Thin strips of papers containing the names of migrants whose recovered remains have been identifiable appear on a portion of the wall. The names were posted during a human-rights demonstration in 2005. For a moment, the greenish patina of the metal plank on which these names were attached postmortem resembles a maguey or plantain tree leaf, eerily reminiscent of the locations in the interior and coastal regions of Mexico from which many workers and would-be border crossers hail.*

4 *Alberto Morackis and Guadalupe Serrano (working under the artistic name* Taller Yonke*) began populating with public art the everyday spaces of transit in Nogales, Sonora, in 1995.* Paseo de Humanidad *(Parade of Humanity) is their second major art installation on the wall (2004). The colorful metal cutouts narrate the story of border life by means of a carefully assembled collection of signs, images, references, and symbolic codes. One need not be an insider to understand the meanings behind most of the images represented, but a fine-tuned sense of contextual observation goes a long way towards a more complete interpretation. While elements of melancholy, political sarcasm, and human despair are salient in the works, a sense of hope and lightheartedness is also conveyed through splashes of vibrant color, the strategic placement of folk objects of affection, and comical cues hidden from plain view throughout the intricate iconography.*

5 *A headless body on the move bears the inscribed monochromatic image of Juan Soldado, a folk saint of the borderlands. A private in the Mexican army from the state of Jalisco, Juan, according to legend, was wrongly accused of a terrible crime in Tijuana and was later pursued and killed by the authorities circa 1938. Many migrants pray to Juan Soldado, as a symbol of all those whom justice has failed, before attempting to cross the border. In this representation, however, the figure of Juan Soldado is also associated with a geography of shame* (vergüenza), *revulsion* (asco), *and tongue-twisting lies* (trabalenguas), *depicted as sites on a map inscribed in the figure's right arm. Perhaps these undesirable destination points are stark reminders of the moral pain migrants unwillingly take on when they confront their new identities as "illegal" human beings in a new country.*

6 *Serapes, corn, and wheat: under the specter of biotechnology, one could argue these products are all "made" in Mexico, in a matter of speaking. The yellow figure to the right dons the costume of Mexico's manufacturing logo. For many, the "Hecho en México" logo represents prosperity and is a testament to the success of the assembly plants that hedge border towns. For others, it is a sign of what Mexico loses in greater and greater doses every year: control over its own production and an increasingly central role in the neoliberal pact that sustains globalization.*

7 *Faith and violence travel together in border country. The figure in blue on the left bears the image of Jesús Malverde, otherwise known as the "narco-saint," a popular folk hero in Sinaloa and across the borderlands. An outlaw frequently associated with "special favors" involving drug trafficking, he is also recognized as a kind of Robin Hood defender of the poor. In this representation, he is taken down a notch, as a hat-wearing* valiente *(strongman) who harasses the naked, brown body of a tattooed runner. At the center of the brown figure's body, a tattooed image of Latino parents holding a baby reminds us what matters most in the "bottom line" of migration. The runner's backpack* (morral) *does not contain the expected profitable cargo; instead, an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe protrudes from it—the only "true" possession a Mexicano/a ever carries wherever he/she goes.*

# Descriptions of the photos (cont.)

8 *Artist Alfred Quiroz found inspiration in the miniature* milagros *people frequently wear as tokens of faith in the borderlands and throughout Mexico and Latin America, designing his own large-scale, contemporary versions. Sometimes pinned to inner garments or worn as a charm in a necklace,* milagros *are both representations of a pending petition to a divine being and amulets to ward off diseases and evil related to the icon represented. Quiroz's amulets hang from the border's "necklace"—a string of metal planks that, rather than adorning the border, choke it.*

9 *A hand opens up to receive compensation for labor performed. While dollar signs are the returns migrants and border* maquila *workers dream of, their actual payment is pennies on the dollar* (centavos). *Conversely, another interpretation would see the worker's hand as the one that hands out pennies, in this case pennies that have grown wings. Since 1990, the flow of money sent home by Mexican migrants in the United States has grown exponentially. More than $20 billion flowed from the United States to Mexico in 2007. That figure amounts to about 150 percent of Mexico's annual foreign direct investment in recent years.*

10 *To the extent that* milagros *are supposed to halt the effects of something feared, the amulets of a "coyote" (the middleman who arranges a border crossing in exchange for a substantial amount of money) and a sneaker-wearing foot and leg posted on the border fence contribute to a safer passage. The prayers of the faithful would echo wishes along the lines of "legs, do not fail me now" and "may my heart never be deceived." The risk of deception is represented by the wavy strands coming out of the coyote's mouth, a modern adaptation by Quiroz of the Mesoamerican glyph for the spoken word.*

11 *"Poder Para la Gente" (Power to the People) reads the message on this aerosol-can-painted mural elbowing for space amidst myriad other graffiti tags on this section of the fence. The face of an anonymous spectator looms large next to the revolutionary slogan. The figure wears a red kerchief or bandana over his nose and mouth, most likely an evocation of the trademark of members of the EZLN, or Zapatista Army of National Liberation, in southern Mexico. Many activists see correlations between the struggles of migrant workers and the accompanying militarization of the U.S.–Mexico border and the struggles for justice and social change in other parts of Mexico and Latin America.*

12 *An amateur artist has captured in an impromptu spray-painted mural an encounter between a Border Patrol agent and a desert trekker (maybe a migrant or perhaps someone providing humanitarian aid to migrants). The "long arm of the law" reaches out stiffly and unilaterally to point a gun at the trespasser who, kneeling before the authority figure, seems fearfully frozen in place. We are offered no clues anywhere in the painting as to whether the depiction refers to a specific historical event or is a composite commentary on several shooting incidents between Border Patrol agents and suspects in recent memory reported in the news. Above the image is a quotation often attributed to the Mexican journalist and patriot Praxedis G. Guerrero, who died in 1910 in the early armed struggled against the dictator Porfirio Díaz: "Vivir para ser libres o morir para dejar de ser esclavos" (live to be free or die to stop being enslaved).*

part of the story of public art expression in Mexico. Bruce Campbell has written an eye-opening book documenting the range of mural practices in contemporary Mexico—from site-specific installations to banners to graffiti.[5] The artists engaged in these forms of expression frequently embark on their art-making endeavors from the point of view of documenting social and political problematics of daily life. Aesthetic concerns are important to them, but they are not bound by aestheticism. Instead, a sort of performative impulse drives them—deploying tactics of provocation onto the social fields they wish to speak to and about. The works on the fence in Nogales, Sonora, stand comfortably in line with this contestatory mode of art making. The artistic practices of this newer generation of Mexican muralists are simultaneously studious *and* improvisational—on the one hand executing with great proficiency the vocabulary of visual expression of the Mexican School and on the other hand experimenting with the medium and, in effect, desacralizing it from its authoritarian origins.

While the professional works of art attached to the fence enjoy the coherence inherent to interventions well planned and executed, one also finds layered onto the fence messages and images ostensibly more diffused, impromptu, and eclectic. The intrusive artifact is in turn intruded upon. The fence does not only "speak," it does so in multiple languages and with divergent intentions. It is a fence that exposes the family's dirty laundry. Embroiled in negotiations (not always successful) over the fine line between sarcasm and poignancy, irony and consciousness-raising, who is to say who has the last word on the resolution of the political quagmire made tangible (in this place and at this moment) by metal slashes protruding from a dusty track of marginal land?

Judging by the military buildup around the fence, it is at least clear who has the power to speak loudest. But then again, *la pared no cesa de hablar* (the wall does not stop talking). One tag scribbled in red spray paint above a bush of white wildflowers reads "Bush Criminal." Not far away, another block-lettered sign in black spray paint reads "Yankee Terror." Yet a third scribe has opted to focus his message around words charged with a heightened level of currency: "Visual Terrorism" someone has written hurriedly on one of the planks.

But a visitor to the fence might be compelled to ask, In what manner exactly can the intent of these messages be termed "terroristic"? In what direction does meaning flow? At whose expense? It is not always clear how to read the signs left behind by the impromptu social critics and organic intellectuals who pass by this crossing point. But then again,

ambiguous meanings breed more comfortably in transitional sites (hence the irony of the terrorist threat implied when art is compared to weapons of mass destruction).

Walls, of course, are natural receptacles for social commentary. Whether sanctioned or not by the powers that be, people always and everywhere have been drawn to walls to make a point. By the time it tumbled down, the Berlin Wall had become a dense manuscript of social aspirations. When all was said and done, the pieces of the wall that young people chiseled away during that fateful November in 1989 resembled a Scrabble game gone mad or a coloring book torn apart in a moment of youthful euphoria. Today, the Israeli Separation Barrier stands opposite that other wall of prayer in the Holy Land, both whispering different kinds of hopes and fears. During World War II, many Europeans risked their lives devising safe passages across occupied and nonoccupied territories. A geography of terror scarred the beautiful cities and ancient countryside and left millions enclosed in new oppressive spaces (ghettos and concentration camps). Some would argue that the Mason-Dixon line is one of the United States' unacknowledged internal borders, with New Orleans its southernmost outpost. More than one writer and an occasional anthropologist have deemed the Appalachian Mountains the frontier of "an Other America" invisible to the rest of the country. In the conquest of the American West, the Lakota Black Hills also functioned as an embattled border of human worth posited against "practical" reasons for governance and administration; once crossed, neither victors nor dispossessed were ever the same. Changes in political order do not necessarily do away with propaganda: they simply modify the form and function of public discourse. In Cuba, for example, political slogans such as "Patria o Muerte Venceremos" replaced "Buy Coca-Cola" signs forty-eight years ago. Yet ask the average Cuban and you will soon learn that he or she has learned to live with overloads of ideological messaging much like any Cancún resident has come to accept hotel and *cerveza* billboards as part of the everyday milieu.

If actions speak louder than words, then the border fence is the ultimate artifact of defiance: *la migración no cesa* (migration does not relent). The wall disrupts the landscape in a profoundly unnatural way; people who live *cara a cara* (face-to-face) with this fence cannot help but to remark on its ugliness. But the wall's presence might as well be a taunt, a provocation of sorts, to do exactly what this imposing body of steel seeks to prevent. The wall embodies the authority to regulate movement, but border crossers

beg to differ day after day. In fact, militarized or not, high or low tech, people "keep on crossin'," as one subversive collective of artists in San Diego once labeled an art installation in that near-border city.

The words transmitted by pundits and commentators who watch the border and its fence from afar seek to capture some of the urgency of the human crisis that *la frontera* has become in our time. But an unrelenting presentism colors border talk in the media. Few ever stop to evaluate the long view of history and its (im)possible lessons. Evaluations generally conform to a clumsy left/right (blue/red) ideological scheme, but locked as they are in an either-or rhetoric, few exchanges ever successfully cause a change in what really matters: the public policies that structure border reality as we know it.

In the May 2007 edition of *National Geographic* magazine, borderlander and author Charles Bowden writes "fences can mutate into walls . . . a wall turns a legal distinction into a visual slap in the face . . . they say something unpleasant about the neighbors—and us." Three issues later, in September 2007, a reader from Vermont writes "while a wall is certainly not the cure, it seems the only solution." Another reader from the state of Washington brings down the argument to that ineffable zone of gut-level certainty where debate is rendered forever useless; the "logical" and "rational" terrains of our ideological boundaries that halt conversations. He writes: "every nation has laws that govern immigration. The U.S. is no different."

OK. So there!

The twelve photographs in the portfolio accompanying this essay document some of the messages inscribed, superimposed, attached, painted, scratched, or staged along a half-mile stretch of fence in Nogales, Sonora. The images have been there at least since 2005; the author took the photographs during the spring of 2007.

The images are offered here as evidence of a persistent desire to speak the border's story in a hypervisible way. These visual tactics of social discourse, however, are mostly visible only on the Mexican side of the fence. On the U.S. side, the Department of Homeland Security prohibits artistic embellishments of the fence and removes graffiti regularly. So much, then, for bi-national communication. But of course, this doesn't mean there is no talkback from residents or passersby on the U.S. side, only that the tagging each one of us manages to imprint on this unwelcoming structure will have to rely more on hope, imagination, and regime change than on aerosol cans, brushes, or digital projections. ✣

## Notes

1. Carlos Vélez-Ibáñez, *Border Visions: Mexican Cultures of the Southwest United States* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996).

2. Carlos Fuentes, *The Old Gringo,* edited by Margaret Sayers Paden (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007).

3. See Miguel Salas Tinker, *In the Shadow of the Eagles: Sonora and the Transformation of the Border during the Porfiriato*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

4. See Davison,

5. Bruce Campbell, *Mexican Murals in Times of Crisis* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003).