Disruptive culture: Violence and cultural self-management in Tijuana, 2001–2017

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses the relationship between culture, violence and urban transformation in Tijuana from 2001 until 2017, a period characterized by extreme disruptions to everyday life and the emergence of citizens self-managed cultural initiatives after the border crisis prompted by 9/11 terrorist attacks. While violence was not an extraordinary affair in the city, this period saw a shift in its characteristics and function as a regulating force of the urban network. At the same time, a citizens' drive of the city's cultural life recognizable since the 1990s transformed their objectives, modes of operation and function, in what we will argue became a stabilizing reaction to these disruptions. We will introduce the notion of 'cultural urban assemblage' to discuss the role that culture has played in assembling Tijuana during this acute rise of violence.

1. Introduction

On September 11th, 2001, the terrorist attacks on the United States noticeably changed Tijuana's symbolic and material relationship to its border with that country. The temporary disruption of the border in the wake of the attacks and the nationalistic shift in the US securitization policy would trigger a socioeconomic crisis. Organized crime grew exponentially complex and by 2006 a 'war' was declared against it by the administration of conservative president Felipe Calderón Hinojosa. Additionally, the US subprime mortgage crisis of 2008 and the H1N1 sanitary emergency of 2009 plunged the border city into further economic stagnation.

Tijuana's commercial and touristic infrastructure was completely shattered and large urban sectors were abandoned (Personal Interview [local artist and entrepreneur 10], [local artist and activist 11], [local artist, public administrator and entrepreneur 14), such as the city center and the Avenida Revolución. As the crisis unfolded, a set of actors noticeably increased their presence in the city. These actors can be identified, at first glance, with what Richard Florida (2012) has termed *creative class*. Diverse projects, from festivals, gallery-coffee shops and movie screenings to local beer breweries and housing developments emerged, especially in those areas that had been deserted. What can the experience of Tijuana tell us about the relationship between violence, culture, and the city?

This relationship has been explored before, specifically in Latin American cities such as Medellin (Dolan, 2020) and São Paulo (Caldeira, 2012). Nonetheless, these approaches tend to see culture as a conventional set of practices with a predefined set of goals, such as the reconstruction of the social fabric or the sanitation of public spaces. At the same time, the relationship is often thought of as linearly causal –e.g. changes in culture lead to changes in the city or vice versa– and both culture and violence are treated as ontologically stable and fixed –i.e. not as assemblages in constant production and adjustment. Ultimately, culture tends to be limited to instrumental policies and tactics, and violence as determined actions, but neither of them seems to be understood as mutating agents of urban reconfiguration.

What we propose here is to explore culture and violence as multidimensional, heterogeneous and antagonistic processes that both destabilize and produce the city. We will do so through the notion of *cultural urban assemblage* (CUA). This concept builds on assemblage thinking as it has developed in urban studies in considering the relational constitution of the city and accounting for its continuities and discontinuities (McFarlane, 2011a, p. 661), both human and non-human. Urban assemblage thinking however has not considered

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culture as a focal quality that can account for producing certain forms of socialization, so we introduce the idea of cultural urban assemblage to understand and stress the contingency of culture as an urban phenomenon (Gibson and Stevenson, 2004).

In what follows we will argue that Tijuana's CUA from 2001 until 2017 was produced and stabilized by two antagonistic processes: the mobilization of violence and the mobilization of culture. The objective is to show which actors, networks and discourses articulate the dominant organizing principle of the city and how it gets spatialized. For this purpose, between 2016 and 2018 we conducted 49 in-depth interviews with local actors (public officials, artists, producers, entrepreneurs, journalists, academics, activists), participant and systematic observation of places (i.e. galleries, real estate developments) and situations (i.e. traffic and activities at cultural corridors), group workshops with local actors, documentation of cultural and urbanization projects, and review of primary and secondary sources such as public speeches, academic bibliography, official documents, media, advertising materials –referred to by interviewees or identified by the authors through research. Interviews were analyzed through coding and network-diagraming using specialized software.

2. Cultural urban assemblage

At a general level, the multiple ways in which culture has been shaping cities has been a widely studied topic. Zukin (1995) has brought to light the different cultures of cities, which coexist in contradictory ways. While cultural consumption and creative industries stimulate the symbolic economy, the socio-demographic diversity of big cities forces cultural institutions to respond with proposals for more complex audiences. Then again, as the city attracts visitors by stimulating mass tourism, real estate developers trigger processes of gentrification. Likewise, as the city fills with 'outsiders', fear increases and urbanization responds with segregation, gated communities, and a culture of surveillance. This recognition of tensions has also been made by those who have staked their bets on the creative economy as the engine of contemporary cities. Thus, while Florida (2012) initially highlighted the rise of the creative class as a force composed of scientists, musicians, designers, engineers, and entrepreneurs that constituted the new engine of creative capitalism, he himself corrected his optimism (Florida, 2017) to focus on gentrification, housing bubbles, growing inequality, and the urban crisis that innovation also contributed to produce.

In the same vein, the touristification of cities, often noted as highly problematic for prioritizing the interests of the tourist industry over the needs of the inhabitants (Vasconcelos, 2005), also highlights processes of mobility that do not include tourists, such as the inhabitants' need for spaces of consumption, the exploration of the city 'as if' they were tourists, the migratory flows triggered by tourism, and the cosmopolitan air that cities acquire (Novy, 2016). In this way, culture makes a city 'cool' while increasing internal resistances by the loss of identity (Colomb and Novy 2016; Zukin, 2010). Moreover, 'cool' does not emerge out of nowhere. As Zukin has rightly pointed out,

> […] it is the concentration of wealth and capital in certain places that allows the proliferation of new businesses. This is primarily financial capital, of course, but it is also the social capital that connects different actors and organizations in the 'startup ecosystem' and the cultural capital that is transmitted from investors to entrepreneurs and tech workers through mentorship and networking in various 'pipelines' of the innovation complex, notably universities, accelerators, and coding schools (Zukin, 2020: X).

Thus, as Mouffe has argued, today 'artistic and cultural production plays a central role in the process of valorisation of capital and, through neo-management, artistic criticism has become an important element of capitalist productivity' (Mouffe, 2007: 59). In short, the relationship between culture and the city obeys, in some sense, the logic of capital: its geographical concentration translates into greater opportunities for its

possessors and into processes of displacement (intentional or not, symbolic and material) for those who are excluded. These visions, although of the utmost importance in our understanding of the relationship between culture and city, tend to essentialise both and, therefore, fail to perceive the effects of mutual co-production. Moreover, they also essentialise conflicts (between economic capital and cultural diversity), whereas our empirical observations show a multiplicity of unstable tensions that are permanently reconfigured. This has led us to explore non-foundational notions of the urban.

For Deleuze and Parnet, assemblage means 'a multiplicity constituted by heterogeneous terms that established links, relations between them' (2007, p.52), while for Rainbow it is 'a matrix of heterogeneous elements, techniques and concepts' (2003, p.56) and for Edensor it is 'complex, mutable and intertwined processes through which place is continuously transformed and stabilized and explores the conceptual and ethical consequences of such a process' (2011, p. 238). Seeking to sharpen the contrast with other concepts, such as networks, DeLanda (2006) has introduced the notions of property and capacities of assemblages to deal with the conflicting relations of stability and change. Thus, De Landa differentiates between an entity's properties (qualities carried over to another context) and capacities (its potential to affect and be affected by other entities). Drawing on similar sources, Michaels argues that an assemblage is a 'collection of various heterogeneous fragments that may involve territorialization, which he characterizes as stabilized (or rather, reiterative) patterns of relation that generate particular differentiations' (2006: 78).

Although it was not intended to be applied exclusively to cities, urban studies have increasingly adopted this conceptualization of the city because of its aptness to deal symmetrically with heterogeneous elements in a relational manner. '[B]eing unfinished, cultural/physical, constitutive, socio-material, subjective/objective, and tricky, the urban areas and cities are ideal models for adopting assemblage thinking' (Kamalipour & Peimani, 2015, p. 403). Cities are understood not as a homogeneous object with defining features but rather as an ensemble of networks of capital, persons, objects, signs and information (Edensor, 2011: 244). In this way, as it is lived and perceived, a city is ontologically heterogeneous, temporal and relational.

How such an ontology stabilizes is no small matter. For Kyle et al. (2014), it is the repetition of activities over time that allows for the emergence of an urban identity and ties between individuals and space. In that sense, what emerges in recurrent interactions is a collective that includes humans and non-humans symmetrically (Latour, 2005) or culture (DeLanda, 2016) which allows for the generation of expectations of continuity. These spatially anchored continuities have been the focus of actor-network theory, while assemblage thinking allows the affective dimension to be added to the construction of ties (Müller & Schurr, 2016). In this sense, we follow Lara-Hernández et al. in considering culture as 'as an assemblage and part of a dynamic continuum where culture is the result of activities repeated over time, though we must bear in mind that the same actions can also be a reflection of different cultures'(Lara-Hernandez et al., 2020: 38). At the same time, once that culture is stabilized, it can structure behavior in space –i.e., the way of occupying it or not (Lara-Hernández et al., 2019: 6).

Given the ontology of articulated networks, we argue that culture develops both as practices of production of symbolic goods and as a quality of the assemblage that characterizes forms of socialization and their spatialization. Our position assumes that space is always culturalized (Low, 2016; Newman, 2007). This position is also informed by G. Yúdice's take on cultural policy in Latin America, in that a 'new epistemic framework where ideology and much of what Foucault called disciplinary society […] are appropriated within an economic or ecological rationale in a way that culture has priority for investment management' (2002: 13, AAT). As well, A. Davila has specifically articulated the instrumental role culture has adopted in neoliberal urban contexts: 'In most contemporary cities, there is not a project or policy without a 'cultural' component, as discussion intensifies over the role

culture plays in urban development projects' (2012: 1).

Consequently, we have introduced the concept of cultural urban assemblage (Ismael-Simental, 2019) in an attempt to highlight the role that culture has as a conflictive and contingent process in producing the city. This approach is distant from the most common assumption in fields such as cultural policy or urban studies in which culture is understood as a top-down conceptualization of identity and practices and their institutionalization. The cultural emerges in the encounter of diverse forms of socialization that often produce conflict, dispute and discontent (Entwistle & Slater, 2014).

Cultural urban assemblages (CUA) have three dimensions and two processes that make them discernible. The three dimensions are heterogeneity, temporality and depth. Heterogeneity assumes symmetry between the human and non-human elements. Heterogeneity also acknowledges that identity and function is relational, and it changes over time. CUAs show discernible features and qualities over periods of time but they are always in flux, shifting and rearranging the structures of their networks. When some elements disappear or change their position, as well as when new elements emerge, the structure of the assemblage changes and enacts new qualities. Finally, depth allows for observation that certain elements can persist and transcend different moments or configurations of the assemblage. This accounts for durable relations that shape, facilitate or constrain the functions of new elements.

As for the two processes that constitute the CUA, these are stabilization and antagonism. The first one refers to the maintenance of elements and their relationship. Although stability can be fragile and is always evolving, when certain configurations are sustained over a perceived period of time and actors are able to reproduce relations, then we can say the assemblage has been stabilized and its distinct qualities are noticeable. In establishing boundaries, however, stabilization exhibits a co-constitutive process. Actors that are marginalized or become vulnerable through the stabilization process will react by trying to weaken those boundaries, a counter process of sorts. This is what we call a process of antagonism and can generate unexpected alignments that make evident the precariousness of the assemblage and thus its disputability.

Stabilization and antagonism bring the question of power to the fore. Theoretically, power in this theoretical perspective refers to the capacity of a network of assembled elements to produce effects. These effects can materialize in actions or stop (or render invisible) other effects or other networks (Latour, 2005). When certain relationships are stabilized, specific actors become central, while others are often displaced to the margins. Immediately, those who are marginalized often articulate to (re)present antagonistic positions –i.e., interests in different ways of reorganizing (Rodriguez Medina, 2022). Thus, while power is manifest in the centrality of certain actors and their strategies of reproduction, it can also be observed in the marginalization of others and their strategies of opposition.

A major theoretical consequence of the notion of assemblage thinking is the possibility of rethinking political, social and economic theories of urban development along two axes, one focused on its capacity to produce new socio-political orders and the other on its capacity to question the very ontology of the social, the political, and the economic. The first, as McFarlane points out, is that 'as a relational process of composition, assemblage signals the emergence, labour and socio-materiality of the city, and the ways in which this process becomes structured and hierarchical through inequalities of power, resource and knowledge' (McFarlane, 2011b: 222). The urban is the result of practices that, while they may be closed, are never inevitable, but can always be produced differently. Moreover, assemblage allows for the identification of privileged or exploited nodes and these can be the basis for collective action of recognition as well as for forging solidarities and resistances (McFarlane, 2011b: 222). From here, the theory also allows us to think about political action at the level of public policy. As a methodology, assemblages provide a way of seeing, writing and enacting the world of political decision-making in a way that reveals the (de/re)stabilization

of orders, institutions, networks and spaces (Baker & McGuirk, 2017, p. 438). Without "attending to the fine-grain of practice that this theoretical perspective prioritises, policy scholars risk over-estimating the salience of influential actors and political projects, and under-estimating the contingencies, failures, course corrections, and re-directions that animate the making and implementation of policy" (Baker & McGuirk, 2017, p. 439).

Assemblage thinking also challenges social, cultural, economic and political understandings of the urban at a deeper level. Russell et al. (2011) have argued that what is political about assemblage, what gives it its potential, is that it allows us to question the stability of what exists and to propose alternative worlds. Thus, they recognise that "assemblages are not political in and of themselves; it is what puts them in movement, what composes them or decomposes them that is the object of the political. What allows us to de/reassemble according to our collective self-interest? What obstructs, arrests or confuses this movement? This is not a discussion of political purity, of some perfect form we all must strive towards, but one of strategy towards the radical restructuring of what currently exists (2011: 580). Even deeper, what seems to be at stake in these strategies includes a re-ontologisation of the social, as Farías (2011) points out. While assemblages will never provide a path to revolutionary social change, largely because of their commitment to indeterminism (Anderson et al., 2012), their polity lies in the "redefinition of democracy towards participatory practices that might eventually recognise and represent humans and nonhumans as political actors (Farías, 2011: 371).

3. Cultural urban assemblage and violence

In Tijuana, violence features consistently in data collection, secondary literature and informants' perception throughout our research, especially after 9/11. But what is it that violence names when we try to observe it at a city scale? This is not homogeneous; it is not one event, type of action or intention and it is not performed just by one identifiable set of individuals. Thus, violence cannot be placed as a naturalized element in a network, and it cannot essentialise actors or actions. Much in the same way Mier Garza has stated that there is no original violence, '–there is no original, primordial action; all action responds to other immediate, mediate, express or tacit actions, carried out or purely imaginary, corporal or of a purely symbolic nature–' (2013: 31, AAT). In this sense, violence is also relational.

Precisely, Staudigl has discussed that, until recently, violence studies across disciplines have not been able to conceive of violence as relational. The three main shortcomings for this are the normative privilege of physical violence, its moral coding and the dialectical assumptions about violence and counter-violence as forms of legitimation (2014: 7–9). In short, 'it seems that we have to the greatest possible extent fallen into the tendency to understand violence as an exception to our essential sociality' (9). Particularly, when it comes to analyzing the urban and cultural impact of violence in Latin American cities, it is important to note that violence is too often predefined and typified as criminal actions over physical property as a legitimation for the neoliberal state's solely punitive role (Aguiar, 2006). This induces a homogenous political response in the way of enhanced social control that overlooks the cultural dimension of violence and has a direct manifestation in the segmentation of urban space (Trujillo, Forthcoming; Rosenstein, 2011, p. 12).

The CUA approach allows us not to treat violence as an ontologically predetermined, essentialized and autonomous element but as a relational process of disruption with spatial characteristics. Based on fieldwork, we first approach violence as '[…] bodily, affective, instinctual and symbolic disturbances' therefore encompassing the different 'dynamic facets of culture' (Mier-Garza, 2013, p. 28, AAT). Then, as the following sections will present, in the interviews we conducted violence is frequently perceived in relation to its territorial effects: the indirect yet generalized expulsion of people from public spaces, an exodus of

certain groups from the city, deterioration of infrastructures or lack of economic investment in certain areas. Hence, we will attempt to reconstruct the cultural urban assembling of Tijuana after 9/11, stressing how violence emerged as a dominant process of disruption of the previous urban networks and, as paradoxically as it may seem, it temporarily stabilized the city. Put differently, through the CUA we will show that certain elements recognized by actors as violent, disruptive or disturbing, shaped relations that were reproduced for a period of time, establishing forms of sociality and recognizable cultural alignments in the city.

4. Tijuana's cultural urban assemblage before 9/11

Tijuana's association with violence is not a recent phenomenon. As a border crossing point, the city developed in the first half of the twentieth century with little socio-territorial planning under the pressure of external forces: the influx of US tourists during the Prohibition, the mass deportations from the US triggered by the Great Depression, the continuous transit of migrants that started in 1942 under the temporary 'Bracero' work-program (Durand, 2007). Tijuana had an irregular urban development responding to varied populations that converged under different temporalities and conditions, some short-term but others becoming permanent (Sánchez, 1993).

This generated an erratic socio-urban development. It was not until 1961 that a first attempt at controlling its growth was made by legally establishing an urban district for the city, limiting the area where urbanization was permitted (Padilla n/d). The fluidity produced by its border status became a prominent signifier for Tijuana's identity but also a condition for precariousness and insecurity. Violence emerged through social vulnerability and the state's episodic attempts at socio-urban control. One of such cases was the forced eviction of an irregular settlement popularly known as Cartolandia on the channel of Río Tijuana. After several attempts at relocating the settlement to urbanize the river channel, alleging the risk of overflow, the government ordered the opening of the Rodríguez Dam floodgates without any warning (Peralta, 2012, p. 139).

The border has also been a prominent node in the city's urban assemblage regarding the trajectories of the cultural and artistic sector. Tijuana's cultural scholars like García Canclini have established that the permeability of its territory and the complexity of its population, flows and development generated not the lack of a cultural identity, as it was once argued by the national state, but a burgeoning and multicultural life with a diversity of demands and expectations (Montezemolo, 2012, pp. 95–96). In this sense, it could be stated, following Bonfil Batalla (2004), that Tijuana illustrates, better than almost any other city in Mexico, that one cannot legitimize a privileged portion of existing heritages, otherwise centralist and vertical, but to accept the diversity of cultural heritages, each one equally legitimate for the group that has produced and inherited it. In this context, the last decades of the twentieth century saw an extensive escalation of cultural initiatives and institutions. Projects like Border Art Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronterizo and InSite positioned Tijuana in the international art scene, along with a growing number of artistic collectives like Nortec, Bulbo, Martes, YONKEart, among others.

At the same time, starting in 1980's, a wide range of cultural institutions became part of the city's networks, most prominently the Centro Cultural Tijuana – henceforth CECUT–, built on the riverbank in 1982 and one of the most iconic cultural institutions in the country. There were also the Centro de Estudios Fronterizos del Norte de México –later El Colegio de la Frontera Norte– (1980), the northwest campus of Universidad Iberoamericana (1982), the Programa Cultural de las Fronteras (1983), the Instituto de Cultura de Baja California-ICBC (1989), and the Instituto Municipal de Arte y Cultura-IMACT (1999). We have argued elsewhere (AA, Forthcoming) that this institutionalization of culture had two functions: on the one hand, institutions used the border as a sign of cultural distinction –not vulnerability. On the

other, they formalized and articulated the effervescent artistic activity that was sign of Tijuana's unruly character: "[i]t is a city that have both, precariousness and the challenge of reinventing yourself every day, it stimulates the creative faculty to survive (Personal Interview [local academic 2 (24):5]).

Thus before 9/11, violence had a presence in the cultural configuration of Tijuana as a quality of the relationship between external and transitory actors. The urban and spatial effect was observed in the many formal spaces and institutions that emerged to capture that chaotic nature and turn it into a strength. The result was the reproduction of spaces and relationships that sustained the external demands for a wild and disobedient city.

5. Cultural urban assemblage after 9/11: Disrupting culture

The US-Mexico border is not merely a frontier between countries. It is a node of physical and symbolic elements. Deracination had stabilized the city through processes of institutionalization of culture and the symbolic construct of the border as fluid and chaotic. That abruptly changed on September 11th, 2001. The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon provoked a long-lasting process of re-alignments by introducing elements such as new legislation, trafficking and the military. These heterogeneous elements not only disrupted the previous networks of the Tijuana but eventually also stabilized it, that is, created new observable and sustainable relationships and boundaries. In the following pages we show, first, the stabilization that post-9/11 violence produced. We then point to two forms of antagonism involving key cultural actors in the city. Finally, we hypothesise that a new form of stabilization is taking place, this time around a strategic alliance between culture and business.

5.1. Stabilisation through withdrawal

Due to extreme screening, there was a de facto temporal shutdown of the border after 9/11 (Heyman, 2009, p. 50). The role of the border effectively mutated. It slowed down the fluxes that were part of day-to-day life, it made lawful economic and social exchange more difficult for transnational populations (Heyman, 2009, p. 50; Personal Interview [local artist 10:1], [local artist, activist and entrepreneur 7:7], [local businessman 4:9], [local academic 2:1], [local artist, activist and entrepreneur 8:3], [local artist and activist 11:1])), as explained by a local artist and activist:

> After September 11th –so you can get the idea of how much Tijuana is [explicit] by what happens in the United States– the border was closed for a few hours … border crossing gets tough, but ours is a 'living' border, we cross daily to study, to work. So now you had to be in line for like 9, 5 or 8 hours, a horrible chaos. Then the *gringos* started to run it in the news, the violence, and making warning campaigns, almost prohibiting US citizens to come because their lives would be in danger. (Personal interview 11:1)

In the years following this event, legislation from the US such as the Patriot Act (2001) and the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act (2004), accelerated the physical and symbolical fortification of the border (García-Marín, 2017, p. 156; Shirk, 2012, p. 64). Most notably was the creation of the Department of Homeland Security (2002) (Heyman, 2009, p. 52). There was a considerable increase in cameras, barbed wire, fencing, and armed patrolling at the border, among other measures (Shirk, 2012, pp. 50–1). In terms of migratory regulations, the US government hardened its stance against human mobility with the US Mexican Smart Border Action Plan (2002) and the Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act (2002).

The securitization of the border triggered a shift in the relationship and networks of organized crime. As already noted, criminal and violent activities where not absent from the previous stages of Tijuana's cultural assemblage but their role, characteristics and significance started to

change:

> [O]n September 11th the city completely changed its dynamic and, overnight, the Avenida Revolución, the main street was almost empty because Americans stopped coming […], and it started adding up to all the violence situation, that had been there, in one way or another, we are a border city and it was there, the crossing of merchandises, anything, even humans. [Local artist, activist and entrepreneur, Personal interview 8:3]

The new border did not deter the flux of illicit activities like drugs and human trafficking. Quite the opposite, it pushed organized crime into strengthening their operations by making trafficking methods more sophisticated and diversifying bankrolling strategies (García-Marín, 2017, p. 155; Shirk, 2012, p. 64). Kidnapping, for instance, had a 300% increase between 2005 and 2006, while armed assault had an 80% increase by 2007 (Alvarado, 2010). Extortion along with dismembered bodies laid out on the street or hanging from pedestrian bridges, shootings and an average of 800 people executed on public spaces per year between 2008 and 2010 (Personal Interview [local businessman 4:8], [local academic, 5:48]) became disruptive elements. The Mexican government responded with military control and a frontal war against organized crime (Dudley & Rodríguez, 2013: 21).

Furthermore, the US subprime mortgage crisis in 2008 and the H1N1 sanitary emergency in 2009 exacerbated economic distress. The abating of foreign inversion and tourism due to the Great Recession, combined with the US government's health advisory that stigmatized México (Pérez-Floriano & París-Pombo, 2009), proved catastrophic. Unemployment increased locally across sectors from 3.46% to 6.97% just between 2008 and 2009, from tourism to manufacturing (Acosta et al., 2015: 16; Personal interviews [local academic, 2:21] [local businessman, 4:5]; [local artist, 6:1]). Reportedly, up to 13,000 local business closed between 2007 and 2010 (Alvarado, 2010) and iconic areas of the city such as the city center and the Avenida Revolución became desolated (Personal Interview [local academic 2:21], [local artist and entrepreneur 3:8], [local businessman 4:5], [local academic 5:45]).

The economic crisis disrupted the cultural urban networks and forced Tijuana's citizens to reorganize their social, economic and cultural boundaries. This had spatial consequences, 'things happened elsewhere', in the words of a local academic:

> People retreated to their houses; they started to gather, to party there because of fear, because of the angst of the violence we were living, because death is terrifying. In 2008 there were around 600, there were 860 executed, in 2009 near 630 or 640, in 2010 near 830 executed in Tijuana, the *levantones* (lifts) on the street, the hanging bodies, the dismembered, the *dislingüiados* (ones which tongues have been removed), the mutilated, police and military checkpoints, home searches, all that made … people sheltered in their private places and [public] spaces emptied out, things happened elsewhere (Personal Interview [5:47])

Foreign tourism dropped, having a major effect in the local service industry, as was quoted above. The alignment of all these elements into a new cultural urban network generated a clear territorialization:

> Downtown died in many different ways because of several factors: 9/11 caused border crossing to become increasingly difficult and hit tourism really hard, then you add insecurity, the H1N1 issue and the global recession that hit the south of California specially hard, so that all hit [Tijuana's] downtown area very hard (Personal interview [Local businessman, 4:9])

The disruption of the previous configurations articulated a new moment of the assemblage: people withdrew from public spaces. Dismembered, hanging corpses and fear of death became elements in the reorganization of mobility and spatialization.

5.2. Antagonism (I): cultural institutions vs self-managed cultural entrepreneurs

As soon as an assemblage is stabilized, antagonisms emerge that challenge this stabilization. Different actors started to look for ways to counteract the new arrangements set by violence:

> [t]he stigma of violence, right? Because it was very prominent at a national level, […] I got together with some friends and decided to start a movement, in 2005, it was the first time we did *Entijuanarte* with the goal to show the kind face of the city, from another perspective, from the creative side, looking for artists and using the esplanade of the [CECUT]. (Personal interview [Local artist, activist and entrepreneur, 8:1])

Fieldwork shows that during this period of socioeconomic crisis and urban exodus, a significant number of self-managed cultural actors (*autogestivos*) emerged. One of them was Fundación Entijuanarte, a civil cultural initiative with different facets, including an arts festival and a wide platform of professional development for local artists. Starting in 2005, among its main objectives was to promote social reintegration into public spaces and to strengthen local identity in response to the violent struggles of the city (Fundación Entijuanarte, Fundación; Personal Interview [Local artist, activist and entrepreneur, 8:1]).

Entijuanarte –among other civil organizations like Festiart or Interzona– formed alliances with cultural actors, such as CECUT (Personal interview [local artist, activist and entrepreneur, 8:1], [Public administrator, 9:1]), and later with the municipal office of the national system for social assistance, Desarrollo Integral de la Familia (DIF) (Fundación Entijuanarte, Espacio; Personal Interview [local artist, activist and entrepreneur, 8:2]). The first alliance made CECUT the main venue for their recurrent festival on its 3000 square meter esplanade. This speaks not only of the emergence of new cultural actors but of the changed experienced by pre-existing ones. Until then, CECUT's institutional role had been inwards, with its own programming within its own walls. The second coalition secured, by loan, a stable space for continuous programming in a central commercial and housing district of the city, Delegation La Mesa, offering workshops, a gallery space, co-working facilities, a photo studio, among other services. In the same fashion, DIF expanded its local reach through cultural programming.

As theorized in assemblage thinking, the city is produced not only through different actors but also through their unanticipated relations and ontological fluidity:

> [in 2007], when Lila Downs was programmed to perform on the esplanade [of CECUT], it was a truly massive [event] I started receiving comments like "no, please, don't do that, look at how the streets are being patrolled, you are taking a risk, it might not end well, why do it … also, nobody is going to come, people are scared, no one will show up at the esplanade, etcetera". I asked Lila Downs, this is the state of things, do you want to go [on stage]? We are game. She said, "if you are game then I will go [on stage]". She did and in the eight years that I was there, that was the year with the worst violence […] and without fear of being wrong, I can tell you that that is the year that more people came, that more people were seated there. This gives you an idea of what Tijuana wanted to do to revert that, right? […] When I came out to give the opening speech and I said thank you for being here, the crowd screamed back, "the night is ours!" it was of us citizens who wanted to be out and occupy the city, that was really moving, really, really moving with all the people and Lila performing (Personal interview [Public administrator, 13:4])

After 9/11, these institutional actors reframed their functions and relations with the new civil society initiatives. The most relevant of these traditional institutions was CECUT. Formerly a central node to Tijuana's cultural life, it pivoted by engaging in alliances with civil initiatives and reexamining its own infrastructure. Besides lending the use of their esplanade for mass events, in 2008 it inaugurated *El Cubo*, a state-of-the-

art museographic space. This was to serve both international and local artists but, most importantly, the city with its first professional space for exhibitions (Personal interview [Public administrator, 13:1]).

During this process of transformation of roles there were also ruptures in the relationships with some entities. The first of such struggles was in 2004 with Tijuana, Tercera Nación, an ambitious international cultural program that included concerts, exhibitions and conferences, organized by a public-private alliance with corporations like media Spanish company Prisa, Coca Cola and Telefónica Móvil. Many local artists refused to legitimize the event and protested because they perceived it was, yet another cultural policy imposed from the central federal government that ignored local cultural voices (Ceballos, 2004).

More antagonisms arose with the appointments of political actors with no cultural background to the directorships of the two main offices for culture, CECUT (federal) and the ICBC (state). This generated strong discontent in the local cultural scene. In the case of the ICBC the reason was the appointment as director of César Hank Inzunza, son of a controversial former mayor of Tijuana with no significant experience in the cultural sector (Morales, 2013). In the case of CECUT, in 2009, it was Virgilio Muñoz, a political appointee that not only lacked any cultural experience but also had a documented history of corruption (Guedea, 2011; Heras, 2009).

This last case was particularly critical because Muñoz publicly declared he did not care in engaging with the local artistic sector, which was, in his own opinion, 'a small world' (González, 2013).

> [t]here was a crisis with CECUT. CECUT had been the place for [local] artists. CECUT's café was the meeting place for all generations of artists; there you ate, you had some area for producing work, you had exhibition space, until the administration of this notable corrupt guy, what was his name? I even try to forget his name … Virgilio Muñoz […] The most productive, most critical community of artists, at least the older generations, not the recent graduates, but the ones that already had a path, he kicks them out because he says: "Here, I am going to bring only real culture". He gets criticized for this and his response is "I don't have to worry about such a small world". That is why there was then this movement called "We are all a small world". Thanks to the expulsion of artists from the institution that had sheltered them, there is the rise of independent projects …. (Personal interview [local academic, 2:24])

Local artists also distanced themselves from the municipal cultural institution, IMAC Tijuana, when the institution turned to pre-produced mainstream cultural programming such as *Tutankamón: la tumba, el oro y la maldición* in 2014 (Personal interview [local artist, 6:4], [local artist, public administrator and entrepreneur, 14:1]). All these antagonisms with institutions cemented the changes of the function of institutional actors in the CUA and contributed to the strengthening of an independent, self-managed and creative economic environment.

5.3. Antagonism (II): self-managed cultural entrepreneurs vs a violent public space

As the relationships with the formal institutions strained, other actors emerged that would become significant figures in the resistance to violence. These were the revitalized pedestrian passageways Rodríguez and Gómez, the collective project Reactivando Espacios, the Cine Tonalá, the Escuela Libre de Arquitectura, Relaciones Inesperadas, along with restaurants, craft beer breweries, and real estate developments. The first of these initiatives organized a group of local artists that had started renting locales on the historic walking passageways Rodríguez and Gómez, which cut through blocks along the Avenida Revolución. Artists and cultural entrepreneurs turned these locales into cultural venues such as galleries, studios, art-cafés, etc. These passageways had previously been souvenir shops for tourists and multi-family apartment housing but, with a renovated attitude, artists where reoccupying the buildings with the idea of creating cultural spaces for Tijuana's own citizens and

not just for foreign tourism (Personal Interviews [local artist and entrepreneur, 10:2] [local artist and activist, 11:3] [local academic, 2:41]). The collective sense of cultural organization that had seen the boom of artistic collectives in the previous moments of Tijuana's cultural history continued yet it shifted into a professionalized and productive effort in resonance with a creative industries model. Significantly, actors like CECUT were displaced by the *autogestivos* from their central role in the organization of cultural life in the city.

It is noticeable that the antagonism to the stabilization of violence emerged from a self-identified cultural sector. It was artists and creative actors who claimed their presence, practices and activities to reactivate public urban life, beyond the established institutions of culture, especially in downtown Tijuana:

> These [factors], all together, caused the Avenida Revolución to die […] it was empty. Imagine it! A whole economy depended on it! Artists said "Hey, why don't we use the passageways where they used to sell curiosities for the *gringos* and we turn them into studios and we make them galleries, and we sell our art", and that is how passageway Rodriguez was born. The owners of the passageways saw this as an opportunity, they were not big entrepreneurs thinking, "Oh, let's rehabilitate downtown", no, they just saw it as an opportunity. (Personal interview [local artist and activist, 11:4])

These cultural revitalization projects were considered self-managed or *autogestionados,* meaning that they were not dependent on larger institutional support, either public or private. Central to their identity was the generation of their own resources as civil initiatives:

> [It was] a private initiative completely, no funding, no nothing, simply artists dedicated to their own production. There's so much talk about this cultural renaissance after the infamous city hit rock bottom and people stopped living depending on foreign (capital) […] and they started focusing on the production of creative goods and services for local people. (Personal interview [local artist, activist and entrepreneur, 3:10])

The model adopted by these cultural workers is at a local level openly associated with the creative industries as defined by organizations such as the Inter-American Development Bank and UNESCO (Tijuana informativo, 2016). That is, "[t]hose sectors of organized activity that have as their main objective the production or reproduction, the promotion, distribution or commercialization of goods, services and activities of content derived from cultural, artistic or heritage origins" (Section for the Diversity). Several of these projects have relied on hybrid schemes, for example, creative hubs, gallery-cafés, bars with stages for the performing arts or film screenings, art-residency studios, subletting spaces for multiple artistic uses, and private academies. Their vision being that of self-management and sustainability through the offering of goods and services either of a cultural nature or articulated with culture.

> […] people started trying to redefine their lives, recuperate the life of the city by betting on cultural projects, recovering our spaces on Avenida Revolución, […] Tijuana was once again having a night life but, at the same time, along with other types of expressions, like the boom of the movement of artisanal craft beer [….] (Personal Interview [Local academic, 5:49])

Collective projects like Cine Tonalá and Relaciones Inesperadas focused on reenergizing the local community by providing cultural public spaces. Reactivando Espacios aimed at recovering abandoned spaces through what they call cultural reprogramming in response to local needs (Personal interview [local artist, activist and entrepreneur, 7:9]). There were thus two common impulses identified in these civil initiatives –the professionalization of art as a productive sector, and the re-focalization of cultural activity for the local community. Similarly, the architecture institute, Escuela Libre de Arquitectura, founded in 2014, was thought to serve the city of Tijuana by attending to its particular needs and not external demands (Personal Interview [local

architect, entrepreneur and activist, 12:3]). In doing so, the school operates through agreements with other actors, such as public institutions and the private sector to generate cultural, educational as well as commercial projects for the city (Personal interview [local architect, entrepreneur and activist, 12:4]).

5.4. Towards a new stabilization? Culture meets business

Along with the *autogestivos* initiatives, real estate developers emerge as significant actors in the CUA. Corporations like Bustamante Realty Group and Cosmopolitan Group have mobilized investment by aligning with the cultural renaissance (Personal Interview [local businessman, 4:2 & 10]. These developers and marketers started upper middle- and upper-class housing projects close to cultural spaces, especially in the city center (Personal interview [local businessman, 4:11]). Other projects include co-working spaces, creative hubs, or gourmet eateries that cluster up with the aforementioned cultural initiatives. It is worth noting that many of the actors interviewed for this project refer to one another as informal allies or commend each other's interests and projects, regardless of their professional backgrounds (Personal Interviews [local academic, 2:17][local artist, activist and entrepreneur, 3:3][local businessman, 4:14][local architect, entrepreneur and activist, 12:5]).

The mobilization of capital through culture is seen as positive by local actors because of the territorialization effects it has: the revitalization and reoccupation of public spaces by upper middle- and upper-class citizens. Downgrading the effect of gentrification, the changes at the urban level are welcome:

[t]he rents are going to be around 500 [dollars] because they are going to be totally renovated, equipped, beautiful, looking for another type of market […] [t]he focus has been mainly millennial, the local professional, the loaded local, that means, the one that works at the family business and has a good socio-economic level. The sector that is arriving there … is not about cheap rents. (Personal interview [local businessman 4:7, 16, 17]).

This reterritorialization implies the emergence of more new actors such as security guards and modification to land use. Tijuana is already showing signs of what Angotti has observed in other Latin American cities ravaged by violence:

Every private condominium complex must have protected parking, electrified fences, and 24-hour security guards and cameras. Neoliberal urban policies have ushered in new formulas for ensuring private dominion over public space, and the difference between public and private is shrinking. Excluding the 'other' is essential to the growing centers of financial capital in Latin America's major cities. (Angotti, 2013: 9)

The re-territorialization of the city by the mobilization of a cultural economy driven by the self-managed independent cultural sector or *autogestivos* is seen as a sign of social accomplishment in projects like new apartment complexes or co-working hubs (Personal interview [local businessman, 4:15], [local artist, activist and entrepreneur, 7:4]). These larger projects are seen as part of the successful efforts of citizens in their struggle to reclaim their city after the critical violence following 9/11 and the so-called 'war on drugs'.

6. Closing discussion

The attacks on the United States on September 11th, 2001, marked an abrupt shift in the role the border had in Tijuana's cultural configuration. A series of realignments and introduction of new or reconfigured elements –legislation, surveillance technology, a health epidemic and government travel advisories, among others– visibly disrupted the city's networks that had stabilized it for at least two decades: a culture that celebrated its deracination and the establishment of large institutions to exhibit it to outsiders. In this new order, however, actions

against human life, free circulation and use of public places became pervasive: kidnapping, body mutilation and dismemberment, executions and extortion became the relationships and boundaries of the socio-technical networks. Those acts of violence stabilized a new CUA that had observable spatial qualities: people sheltered in their homes and spaces for the general public abandoned.

Like in any cultural urban assemblage, there were antagonisms to the stabilizing forces of violence. In this case, the emergence of self-managed initiatives, *autogestivos*, in the cultural sector were among the most prominent elements trying to interfere with the relationships of violence. These initiatives were an impulse to recover public life and reoccupy the city. They displayed characteristics associated with the cultural economy: they offered cultural goods and services, used hybrid models of production like craft-beer bars with film screening programs or co-working hubs, and they formed different degrees of formal and informal alliances with the public and private sectors, such as real estate corporations (Personal interview [local businessman, 4:10]). Against common understanding of the link between culture and violence, artistic and cultural projects are not only developed after violent actions end and the social fabric must be rewoven. As shown here, these projects have defied the stabilization produced by the actors involved in the increasing (un)securitization of Tijuana.

It is important to point out, however, that antagonisms are difficult to distinguish in the case of Tijuana's CUA. Apart from obvious discontent with larger institutions in specific moments, human actors' perceptions are generally positive of one another and their context. This could be caused by different factors. One, the high mobility of actors. Actors frequently move from one role into another, for instance, from a position as a public servant at a cultural institution and then developing their own art project or being a business entrepreneur and an activist at the same time. Second, because the city carries a historical symbolic capital as 'the happiest place on earth' (Kun & Montezemolo, 2012, p. 3), glorified in popular expressions like Nortec Collective's song *Tijuana makes me happy* (2007). Finally, because Tijuana's multicultural identity supports the opinion that, despite its problems, it is a region of tolerance and opportunity (Medina, 2014, pp. 112, 118).

This perception of Tijuana as a land of opportunities contributes to the reinforcement of networks among actors and the positive view on their re-territorialization. Gentrification is not yet seen as a widespread problem, even though the recaptured urban sectors of Tijuana are being designed for upper socioeconomic segments:

The matter of security affected us greatly. My family is from here, from Tijuana, I am from Tijuana and at least once or twice a month you knew of someone that had been kidnapped. Now, in the last 3 or 4 years, I can tell you of only one or two people that I know that have been kidnapped. We are talking about 50 people a year, which were being kidnapped, from wealthy families, and now that is changing to one every two to three years. That's changing a lot the expectations about how safe the city is, of being able to go out to a restaurant, able to go out without bodyguards (Personal interview [local businessman, 4:8])

The role of self-described cultural actors emerged as a significant antagonism against the stabilization of violence. Their trajectory towards stabilization will certainly generate new antagonisms that are still to be followed and mapped, especially after the effects of the SARS-Cov-2 pandemic. In spite of the general positive shift away from dangers to life and confinement, in this developing territorialization there is still a tendency to safeguard the interests of its newer dwellers. Real estate development and some hybrid cultural ventures have contributed to claim these spaces for some citizens of Tijuana. Not all citizens, though, and especially not those that had historically been present in the downtown area as an economic hub for the lower socioeconomic segments. The disruptive effects of culture in Tijuana are still ongoing.

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