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Retoryka ciała i umysłu w XXI wieku
Rhetoric of body and mind in the 21st century

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The persuasive power of an image: hostipitality and conviviality in Ana Teresa Fernández's *At the Edge of Distance* (2022)
Perswazyjna siła obrazu: wrogościnność i solidarność społeczna w *At the Edge of Distance* (2022) autorstwa Any Teresy Fernández

Abstract

As the mainstream representations of the contested space of the U.S.-Mexico border often neglect to reflect the diversity of border stories and miss rhetorical dimension, the aim of this paper is to analyze Ana Teresa Fernández's most recent act of border *artivism* – her performance, *At the Edge of Distance* (2022) and its documentation, from the visual rhetoric's perspective. This analysis is to examine the argumentative power of images created by the artist as well as their function. The article explores versatile border stories Fernández's paintings convey and analyzes how they function as a call for action – to challenge hostipitality Latinx experience in the U.S. and replace it with acts of transborder conviviality.

Jako że reprezentacje nurtu głównego, które przestawiają sporną przestrzeń granicy meksykańsko-amerykańskiej często nie uwzględniają różnorodności historii granicznych oraz pomijają wymiar retoryczny, celem niniejszego artykułu jest analiza z perspektywy retoryki wizualnej efektów najnowszego przykładu artystycznego aktywizmu Any Teresy Fernández – jej performansu *At the Edge of Distance* (2022) i jego dokumentacji. Analiza ta ma na celu zbadanie siły argumentacyjnej obrazów stworzonych przez artystkę, a także ich funkcji. Artykuł bada uniwersalne historie graniczne zawarte w obrazach Fernández i analizuje, w jaki sposób funkcjonują one jako wezwanie do działania – do zakwestionowania wrogościnności, która dotyka Latynosów mieszkających w Stanach Zjednoczonych i zastąpienia jej aktami ponadgranicznej solidarności społecznej.

Key words

visual rhetoric, hostipitality, the Latino Threat Narrative, *artivism*, the U.S.-Mexico border, Latinx artists
retoryka wizualna, wrogościnność, narracja o zagrożeniu latynoskim, *artystyczny aktywizm*, granica meksykańsko-amerykańska, artyści pochodzenia latynoskiego

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The representations of the U.S.-Mexico border have been present in various media for decades now. The images and accounts that appear in the media usually focus on the militarization of this space and its main cause – undocumented migration to the U.S. These themes reappear in the media alongside with new legislation on immigration or subsequent waves of migrants, proliferating a specific image of the border. As a result, in popular opinion the southern U.S. border is regarded as contingent and problematic space (as opposed to the northern border with Canada, for example), which justifies intervention measures undertaken by the authorities on, around, and about the U.S.-Mexico border. Moreover, as I analyze in my article about the border *doxa*, the current mainstream perception of the U.S.-Mexico border is reinforced by "a neglect of the rhetorical dimension of borders" (DeChaine 2012, 6), which ignores "how "symbolic ascriptions of the border function doxastically in public culture" (DeChaine 2012, 14), contributing to the creation of master narratives about the border" (Antoszek 2022, 121). These master narratives, or mainstream narratives have been consistently questioned by activists and artists who provide alternative representations of the border to challenge disfigured images of the border. Through acts of *artivism*[1] artists and activists demonstrate a multifaceted character of this space and show how it influences those who have lived in its shadow as well as those who attempt to cross the border. The acts of *artivism* – from graffiti slogans, through murals, installations and performances – both address the issues related to the current status quo of the U.S.-Mexico border and at the same time highlight the potential of this space to become a contact zone through a transborder dialogue. The aim of

1. As Aladro-Vico (2018, 9) explains, "Artivism is a hybrid form of art and activism which has a semantic mechanism to use art as a means towards change and social transformation." As such, as Leslie Quintanilla maintains, it "disrupts the normalization of colonial, imperial, and patriarchal structures of oppression at the US///Mexico border" (Quintanilla 2020, 61). It originated in the actions of artists in East Los Angeles, USA and Chiapas, Mexico, respectively, in the 1990s.

this paper is to analyze Ana Teresa Fernández's most recent act of border *artivism* – her performance, *At the Edge of Distance* (2022) and its documentation, from the visual rhetoric's perspective, which elicits how "meaning is attributed to the artifact" (Foss 2004, 303). In the case of *At the Edge of Distance* (2022) I examine how the performance and the images documenting the event function as acts of conviviality whose purpose is to overcome hostipitality that Latinx experience in the U.S. on a daily basis, with particular emphasis on transactional processes that create the persuasive power of an image.

Visual turn and the power of an image – a rhetorical perspective

Since the 1970s we have been observing a departure from the emphasis on a word with the shifting focus on the importance of an image with its persuasive function. In the introduction to *Defining Visual Rhetorics*, Marguerite Helmers and Charles A. Hill (2008, 19), referring to William John Thomas Mitchell, announce the "pictorial turn" in the field of rhetoric and define it as "a growing recognition of the ubiquity of images and of their importance in the dissemination and reception of information, ideas, and opinions – processes that lie at the heart of all rhetorical practices, social movements, and cultural institutions." This visual turn is "one in which an increasing amount of the discipline's attention was becoming focused on visual objects and on the visual nature of the rhetorical process" (Helmers and Hill 2008, ix). Rhetoric, thus, as Agnieszka Kampka argues, quoting Howells (2008) together with Evans and Hall (2009), is one of the tools that can be deployed to decode visual messages (Kampka 2011, 11).

As Paweł Sarna (2014, 407) comments on Kampka's edited volume on visual rhetoric, in the twenty-first century there is no question about the importance of an image and its potential to serve persuasive functions. What is even more pertinent is the fact that nowadays the image has changed its status from a complement to a word to an independent entity that, as Kampka (2011, 10) argues, can be now complemented by words and perform different functions. Kampka (2011, 10) also suggests a necessity for acknowledgement "to what an extent, through its influence on our thinking, the process of evoking emotions and constructing memories, an image shapes our reality".[2] This propensity in turn has attracted rhetoricians to shift their attention to an image and its persuasive powers. As Kampka (2011, 12) notes,

> Dominance of visuality in contemporary culture, taking over by an image the persuasive functions performed so far by print and a word, independence of an image – the fact that it becomes a complete message and does not require any connection with a text – all that means that researchers of rhetoric have naturally become interested in an image.

2. All the translations of Agnieszka Kampka's works are mine, unless specified otherwise.

As a result of this transformation, researchers have identified specific conditions and circumstances that allow to analyze an image from a rhetorical perspective. For example, Sonja K. Foss in the chapter addressing the issue of definitions of *visual rhetoric* writes that "Conceptualized as a communicative artifact, visual rhetoric is the actual image or object rhetors generate when they use visual symbols for the purpose of communicating" (Foss 2008, 304). Consequently, as she continues, "Three characteristics appear to define artifacts or products conceptualized as visual rhetoric: They must be symbolic, involve human intervention, and be presented to an audience for the purpose of communicating" (Foss 2008, 304-305). Moreover, as Foss (2008, 306) refers to Finnegan's definition, "A rhetorical perspective on visual artifacts constitutes a particular way of viewing images—a set of conceptual lenses through which visual symbols become knowable as communicative or rhetorical phenomena." Kampka (2014, 10) reiterates Foss's conclusions and notes that "Visual rhetoric focuses on the analysis how images communicate, how they function in social and cultural environment, forming both individual and group identities, reinforcing convictions, defining and valuing subsequent fragments of reality (Wright 2011: 317)."

It is apparent that the definitions mentioned above share a common denominator: the focus on a communicative purpose of an image. In other words, they address the following questions: What message does an image convey? How does it do that? What is the influence that it has on the audiences? What is the role of the responder in interpreting this message so that it elicits "rhetorical response to an artifact rather than an aesthetic one" (Foss 2008, 306)? And, finally, what is "the function or functions the visual rhetoric serves for an audience" which in the case of "a visual artifact is the action it communicates" (Foss 2008, 308)? Owing to that, as Kampka (2014, 8) argues, "An image becomes a framework through which we perceive a specific issue," or an element that "structures our meetings with other human beings (Mitchell 2013: 377)", oftentimes contributing to the "creation of group identity, mobilization of individuals, forming postulates and publicizing activity of certain groups" (Kampka 2014, 13).

Since "[r]hetoric appears where multiple interpretations are possible" (Kampka 2014, 9), it reinforces validity of rhetorical perspective applied to analyze an image, as images lend themselves to multiple and versatile interpretations. The process is to a large extent determined by two factors, namely time and a viewer's skills to analyze an image as well as a capacity to identify what Victor Burgin calls "pre-texts," or elements that exist in popular cognizance and "can be called to mind by the majority of individuals in a given society at a particular moment in history" (in Calvo 2004, 216). As a result pre-texts can reveal "manifest and latent contents of the image" (Burgin 1986, 61). As Marguartie Helmers (2008, 65)

claims, situating the discussion in the specific context of analyzing fine arts, "A *visual rhetoric* is a frame of analysis for looking and interpreting" and "different spectators approach viewing at different times, in different spaces, and with varying degrees of prior experience and access to information." Therefore, Helmers (2008, 65) observes, referring to Ernst Gombrich and James Heffernan, "'looking at a picture can often take a good deal of time' because it involves 'scanning, remembering, anticipating, correcting, and confirming impressions' (97)." However, it has to be noted that a reduced prior experience of a viewer does not preclude a person from interpreting an image. When a viewer has such a prior experience, they, as Kampka (2014, 10) maintains, will be part of a discursive community, owing to which their interpretations may overlap and can be conveyed more easily and efficiently. Quoting Kostelnick and Hasset, Kampka (2014, 10) observes that "Visual conventions shape our understanding of the world, create patters that allow quick interpretations to the viewers. It is possible owing to the existence of a discursive community. Being part of this community, we understand different representations, we can read the codes and use them." Nevertheless, even without knowledge of those conventions, or with some limited prior orientation, a layperson can also become an eligible viewer, capable of interpreting the images they see. These analyses may vary in their scope, insight, or comprehensiveness, yet they are valid interpretations. It is due to the fact that, as Helmers (2008, 64) argues, "rhetoric does not focus on correspondences between the arts, but on the image itself as a carrier of meaning." This is particularly important when analyzing examples of *artivism* that are available to and accessed by diverse audiences, ranging from participants of those actions to experts and researchers, as all the groups are competent to conduct such analyses and interpretations. This aspect of an image as a carrier of meaning, combined with Kampka's argument that "we use the term visual rhetoric to apply it to images that have been created or used to persuade someone to something …" (Kampka 2011, 13), demonstrates that representations of border *artivism* constitute a suitable example of visual rhetoric and can be analyzed as such.

Hostipitality and Latinx in the U.S.

The concept of hostipitality was coined by Jacques Derrida, who described it in his essay with the same title, "Hostipitality" (2000).[3] The ideas he proposes in "Hostipitality" are the resultant of Derrida's prior interest in the ethics of hospitality, which he discusses in *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites*

3. I analyze Derrida's concept of hostipitality in the context of Latinx immigration to the U.S. in "Hostipitality and Solidarity in *Casa en tierra ajena* (2016)" (2022) which is the chapter in *Cosmopolitan Strangers in US Latinx Literature and Culture: Building Bridges, Not Walls* (2022).

Jacques Derrida to Respond. The "conversation" with Anne Dufourmantelle begins his preoccupation with the situation of *l'étranger* – the foreigner, or the stranger. This double – and dubious – translation of the French original leads him to the discussion of the subtleties around the host-guest relationship and the definition of hospitality. Consequently, in "Hostipitality" Derrida first addresses Immanuel Kant's concept of hospitality and then enters into a polemics about the possibility of unconditional hospitality with Emmanuel Levinas and Martin Heidegger, or as Aleksandra Bida (2018, 123) argues, "mediates the approaches of these two philosophers in a way that relates the self and the other through the impossibility of absolute hospitality (completely unconditional welcome) . . ." Taking up on Immanuel Kant's conviction that "hospitality . . . means the right of a stranger . . . not to be treated with hostility . . . when he arrives on someone else's territory" (in Derrida 2000, 4), Derrida argues that the evocation of hostility already in the definition of hospitality indicates its dubious character. Furthermore, Derrida analyzes other conditions that are included in descriptions of the term, namely that "hospitality is certainly, necessarily, a right, a duty, an obligation, the *greeting* of the foreign other [*l'autre étranger*] as a friend but on the condition that the host, the *Wirt*, the one who receives, lodges or *gives asylum* remains the *patron*, the master of the household, on the condition that he maintains his own authority *in his own home* . . ." (Derrida 2000, 4). Admitting that "[h]ospitality is owed to the other as stranger," Derrida (2000, 8) concludes: "[b]ut if one determines the other as stranger, one is already introducing the circles of conditionality that are family, nation, state, and citizenship." He concludes his discussion on the impossibility of an ideal of unconditional hospitality with the well-known reference to limitations on hospitality: "To take up the figure of the door, for there to be hospitality, there must be a door. But if there is a door, there is no longer hospitality. There is no hospitable house. . . . There must be a threshold. But if there is a threshold, there is no longer hospitality" (Derrida 2000, 4). As a result of his reflections, Derrida identifies the potential for the hostile in hospitality and the host-guest relation. As hospitality if often tenuous and temporary, restricted by various conditions, it often transforms quickly into hostility. The dynamics of the hostile overtaking the hospitable makes hospitable encounters aporetic or impossible and it often results in the process of othering. Hence the concept of hostipitality reflects more aptly such encounters and relationships. In the twenty-first century the Other – the stranger – is usually a migrant or a refugee and hostipitality reflects an ambivalent attitude of societies towards guests and strangers.

This type of experience often befalls Latinx living in the U.S., which is reflected in the concept described by Leo R. Chavez as the Latino Threat Narrative (2013). According to this narrative, Latinx constitute a group that has a particular potential

to threaten the tenuous stability of the American nation-state. This "diagnosis" pertains to the whole group, regardless of its heterogeneity and versatile statuses of its members. Chavez describes in detail both the origins of anti-Latinx sentiments and their legal grounding, emphasizing how those factors have been contributing to the proliferation of stereotypes of Latinx as illegal immigrants, social welfare beneficiaries, and criminals, or conversely, as vigilantes who want to reclaim the Southwest, to name just a few disfigured images Chavez mentions. He also indicates how the media perpetuate these stereotypes, which results in an image of a Latinx person presented as an illegal alien. Consequently, Latinx in the U.S. are almost always presented as the Other: historically, even as the legitimate inhabitants of the borderlands they were discriminated against and held inferior status, which aggravated particularly after 1848. In addition to that, they "have historically been used as scapegoats when the American economy stumbles" (Vargas 2017, 375). Nowadays, with the larger numbers of immigrants from Central America, Latinx situation in the U.S. is even more tenuous and they fall prey to anti-immigrant legislation, increased border enforcement, various repressive policies, and hate crimes. Treated as the Other, they are always on the line – both literally and metaphorically, thus experiencing hostipitality on a daily basis.

Border images: hostipitality and *artivism*'s power to persuade

When analyzing representations of the U.S.-Mexico border *artivism* it has to be determined where the persuasive properties of an image derive from and what the functions of an image are. Agnieszka Kampka (2011, 19) notes that in most cases "visual elements gain their meaning exclusively as part of the discourse." She also refers to Gui Bonsiepe's argument that semiotics can help analyze visual messages (Kampka 2011, 19). However, returning to the central question of persuasion, she argues that "visual rhetoric should focus on argumentation rather than elocution" (Kampka 2011, 19). Marguerite Helmers (2008, 64) in turn refers to Blair's analysis of argumentative power of an image and concludes that "visual images are construed not as capable of arguments, but as invested with the ability to offer audiences propositions." Kampka (2011, 16) also analyzes Blair's postulates and proposes an analogical argument, namely that "an image can be persuasive without being an argument." She also explains this further by saying that

> At the same time it [an image] serves argumentation – adding to it dramatism and power through the possibility to refer to cultural icons and commonly shared symbols. Directness and immediacy of action, probability resulting from its similarity to reality, and finally, concreteness – these are the features of an image, owing to which it gains acceptance of recipients and at the same time these are the features that a verbal message lacks (Blair 1996, 2004). (Kampka 2011, 16)

In this context I aim to analyze the most recent border performance and its documentation by one of the well-known border artists – Ana Teresa Fernández – to examine the persuasive power of the images and determine their purpose and function – since the two concepts, as Sonja Foss (2008, 207) maintains, are not the same and should not be used interchangeably.

Ana Teresa Fernández is a Mexico-born artist who grew up in California. She now lives in San Francisco, but she has created residencies basically all over the world. She calls herself "an artist of fluencies. . . . An artist of border erasure, she elevates the intersectionality of place, person, and politics to create a common human vernacular" (anateresafernandez.com). In her works she often refers to her transborder allegiances with the borders playing a significant role in all of her performances, happenings, photographs and paintings. Fernández emphasizes equivocal and diverse character of borders through her heterogeneous representations of this space. In her works she illustrates two paradigms that Monika Kaup (2001, 10) proposes to talk about borderlands, namely the nation-based paradigm, which defines this space as "home territory, as homeland, as viewed by the original occupants of the borderlands" and the immigrant paradigm that depicts borderlands as a space of migratory movements. In this way Fernández addresses the issues that are critical to the lives of both borderlanders and migrants, illustrating what the processes of bordering create, including the destructive effects they have on people and the environment. In her works Fernández often comments on the situation of women and combines examples of social injustice or inequalities afflicting women with the images of the destruction of the environment along the U.S.-Mexico border. As of 2023, her works devoted to border issues include *Pressing Matters* (2010) series, *Ablution* (2010) series, *Foreign Bodies* (2014) series, with the famous "Erasing the Border/Borrando La Frontera" painting, *Of Bodies and Borders* (2018-19) series, and *At the Edge of Distance* (2022) series.[4] As she reveals in her artist's statements on her website,

> Through enacted narratives, she reveals all that too often gets lost in translation, becoming the literal embodiment of the stories that divide but also bind us as human beings sharing a planet of great fragility and beauty. Asked to characterize her work, Fernandez gives it the novel label *Magical Non-fiction*, explaining: "Where unimaginable conditions are the reality, I seek to portray dreamscapes of what's possible. The courage to transform is up to us." (anateresafernandez.com)

4. These are the dates assigned to the series on the artist's website. (Accessed in October 2023).I have discussed Fernández's pervious works about the border in: "Challenging the Border *Doxa*: Selected Examples of Border Artivism" (2022), "U.S.–Mexico Border Re-Visions: Border Artivism in Time and Space" (2022), "Revisiting *La Frontera*: Consuelo Jiménez Underwood and Ana Teresa Fernández" (2021), and "The U.S.-Mexico Border as a Palimpsest in Ana Teresa Fernández's Art" (2018). Apart from the series mentioned above, Fernández also has produced other series of works devoted to various social issues.

This article focuses on Fernández's project from 2022, *At the Edge of Distance* that became a part of her solo exhibition at Catharine Clark Gallery at the Armory Show (July 30 – September 11, 2022) and is also part of *Listen Louder* exhibition, presented in di Rosa Center for Contemporary Art between October 7, 2023 and January 21, 2024, described as Fernández's "largest career survey to date" (anateresafernandez.com). As with her other projects, Ana Teresa Fernández starts with a performance and documents it later on – with videos and photos, followed up by paintings. This combination is quite powerful, as owing to that, the artist can take advantage of the power of each medium. Border performances, I argue in the analysis of the border *doxa*, function as limit acts activism or as Norma Iglesias-Prieto calls them, "transborderism" (in Antoszek 2022, 13), transforming the conflicted space of the border into the space of exchange and dialogue. There are no videos from the performances available yet (the artist usually uploads them on her website), but the "painted documentation" of this performance is already available and thus it is possible to analyze the argumentative power of these images from the U.S.-Mexico border as well as the function they perform.

At the Edge of Distance consists of a series of images of a person (or in one case two people) wrapped in space blankets. The setting is the U.S.-Mexico border which in some images becomes more prominent than in others when we can see the border fence separating the two states in the distance. The sequence of images moves from "At the Edge of Distance One" (which in the exhibition catalogue has the title *The Space Between Us* (2022)) through "At the Edge of Distance Two" (*On the Line* (2022)) to "At the Edge of Distance Three" (*From Within, Without You* (2023)), which suggests the order in which the images should be watched and analyzed. Interestingly "At the Edge of Distance One" or *The Space Between Us* (2022) presents two people whose heads are wrapped in space blankets in an attempt to kiss. This image inevitably evokes intertextual references of Burgin's pre-texts – the artist herself reveals her inspiration with René Magritte's *The Lovers* (1928), where two enshrouded people attempt at kissing each other. The MoMA description of *The Lovers* emphasizes the frustration visible in this unfulfilled or failed attempt, citing it as one of recurring themes of Magritte's works: "Here, a barrier of fabric prevents the intimate embrace between two lovers, transforming an act of passion into one of isolation and frustration. Some have interpreted this work as a depiction of the inability to fully unveil the true nature of even our most intimate companions" (https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79933). The motif of enshrouded faces in turn is attributed to Magritte's trauma after his mother's suicidal death by drowning. He allegedly watched his mother being taken out of the water wrapped in her nightgown around her face. (https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79933). Ana Teresa Fernández also includes a similar motif

– of a shrouded body swimming (or drowning) in the water, in her series *Of Bodies and Borders*. Hence, in *The Space Between Us* frustration and unfulfilled desires are transferred to the setting of the U.S.-Mexico border, which allows the artist to play with border-related images and concepts to challenge border-related popular imagery as well as reinforce some of her messages in order to undermine the destructive effects of the border markers demarcating the division of that space, namely the fence and (in some places) the wall.

What comes to the forefront in this image are the two enshrouded heads. The figures are faceless and we can only see fragments of upper parts of their bodies. Therefore, we cannot easily and unequivocally determine their role or status. The setting suggests they may be migrants, but due to such an anonymized representation it cannot be stated unquestionably. They do not seem to create a potential threat to anybody (which is the popular rhetoric about the migrants or the Other). Their heads are wrapped like Magritte's lovers' heads, but in the context of migration across the Mediterranean it can be also inferred that that the heads are wrapped in a hijab-like manner, which may suggest the two persons are Muslims. Finally, their indistinguishable figures allow for a more universal reception and interpretation of the situation they are in. Such a representation of the two figures is very important and it reinforces the persuasive power of this image. Through the anonymization of her lovers Fernández shifts the focus of the viewer's analysis: since we (as viewers) cannot identify clearly who these persons are, we are more likely to avoid falling into the trap of overgeneralizations and perpetuation of stereotypes regarding migrants. What is more, the universal aspect of the migrant experience gets emphasized and the viewer becomes puzzled by the story this image recounts.

Fernández accomplishes this effect by a play on Magritte's representation of the lovers, since unlike Magritte's lovers, her partners are portrayed outside and they seem to be undressed. Thus the space blankets covering their faces become even more prominent, drawing attention to this attribute and making it an important element of the picture. As the generic definition describes, the main purpose of a space blanket is to "to reduce heat loss from a person's body, but as they are constructed of PET film, they can be used for other applications for which this material is useful" (wikipedia.org). Most often they have been deployed during accidents and in emergencies (hence another name for it, "an emergency blanket"), but in recent years they have been used by migrants and border crossers and, as Fernández claims, "Even though NASA invented them for outer space, they have now become the symbol of immigration; used at border detention camps between US / Mexico, as well across the Mediterranean by "illegal aliens"" (anateresafernandez.com). Therefore, an object that functioned as a means of protection in emergencies has

gained additional meaning – that related to immigration. People wrapped in these blankets are not necessarily victims of accidents that by definition are unexpected but relatively rare, but instead they are casualties of long-lasting emergencies (however oxymoronic it may sound) that force people to leave their homes and houses all over the world. The artist herself declares the following: "*The Space Between Us* is part of the intervention created at the Mexico/US border using these space blankets addressing that families are still separated. Using Magritte's *The Lovers*, in real contemporary space & time" (anateresafernandez.com). Thus the image of the heads wrapped in Mylar blankets contrasted with nakedness of the torsos can also refer to the photos documenting the scenes of capturing the undocumented migrants that are often present in the media, where the people who have gone through the ordeal of border crossing are often left with scarcely any clothes, become dehydrated and sick and as such, when caught by the Border Patrol, require immediate assistance that is often provided in the form of the emergency blanket. Consequently, such a blanket gains a dubious character – on the one hand, it protects from the outside weather conditions, providing at least temporary safety. On the other hand, this safety is tenuous, as it coincides with the failure to cross to the other side of the border (without being caught). In this way the blanket both protects and separates.

Moreover, the blankets not only keep the heat inside but they also prevent "your breath to transmit across it" (anateresafernandez.com) leading to the suffocation--like state. Therefore, the couple who are trying to kiss each other in *The Space Between Us* cannot achieve it and their efforts are futile. Even though their faces and their lips are in very close proximity, they are denied a direct contact, due to the blankets wrapped around their heads. The artist, who was wrapped in the Mylar blanket during her performance describes this experience in the following way:

> During the performance I began to sweat inside the blanket, unable to feel my lover's breath, even though he was right in front of me. I would inhale & the blanket would press up against my face, suffocating & completely isolating me. My space was contained, no breath, no warmth shared between us. (anateresafernandez.com)

Thus the blanket that suffocates and isolates stifles any interaction between the two people, separating them just as the border separates the communities that oftentimes used to be one, preventing interaction between them and leading to the destruction of bonds. With *The Space Between Us* the artist indicates once again the problems the border creates both for human relations between communities and also for the perception of those who attempt to cross these borders. As she notes,

> During the Obama administration society became aware of the violence & hostility in the language being used & actively changes how we refer to migrants as Undocumented. Now, the president [Trump], in bullying & hateful fashion has brought back rhetoric that belittles & condemns individuals attempting to seek asylum. Calling everyone illegal aliens. This is a country of natives & Undocumented Migrants that have poured in over 200 years ago, often forgetting who were here before us & forgetting to trace where they came from. (anateresafernandez.com)

In that light, the titular space between – that of the U.S.-Mexico border – should be a space with a capacity to connect and yet it functions otherwise, making encounters aporetic or impossible at all. And it has to be noted here that this pervasive feeling of futility and failure of contact can be inferred from the image, regardless of the viewer's knowledge of Magritte's painting. Even without awareness of this pre-text at the denotational level the image conveys the meaning of frustration through this unfulfilled interaction.

As mentioned above, Fernández "moves" her lovers away from the enclosed space of the room that is a background in Magritte's painting and places them on the beach of the U.S.-Mexico border. However, absent in *The Space Between Us* is the border marker – the fence, which is present in other images of this series. In the light of the discussion on the tenuous status of Latinx in the U.S. and hostipitality they experience on a daily basis it may also mean that Latinx encounter these borders and frustrations not only on the physical border between the U.S. and Mexico, but all over the U.S., wherever they live. What Mike Davis (2008, 71) calls a "third border" haunts them in their daily lives, determining the battles they fight every day. As in Derrida's discussion on hospitality and hostipitality, sometimes the incomers are regarded as guests, sometimes they are hosts and sometimes they are treated as both. It has to be noted that this categorization and their resulting treatment have nothing to do with Latinx actual status in the U.S. (i.e. whether they are recent immigrants, representatives of the second, third, or fourth generation or the descendants of people native to the borderlands), but depends more on the context of the encounter. Hence, the third border may well follow those who have lived in the U.S. for generations. And, what is even more important, even if they are welcome, their acceptance is still conditional. Conditionality in turn results in hostipitality with its intrinsic hesitation between hospitality and hostility that reaffirms the treatment of some groups and individuals as the Other. Finally, the composition of this image also influences its argumentative power, since these two figures occupy the whole painting. Therefore, it may be concluded that it is actually people who are important in this image: the human aspect comes literally and metaphorically to the forefront of this painting, which again persuades the viewer that no matter who these lovers-migrants are, they are all human, they share emotions and they deserve respect and dignity. In fact, all the elements of this image analyzed above contribute to the universal message it conveys about

people and borders: that borders prevent interaction and communication, destroy bonds and relationships as a result of which they often deprive people of humanity.

The next two images from the project, *On the Line* (2022) and *From Within, Without You* (2023), are the result of *Formed in Fiction* (2022)/*Formado en Ficción* (2022) performance during which Fernández "suspended 50 space blankets across laundry lines on the sand at the beach in front of the border wall" (anateresafernandez.com) to challenge various histories formed in fiction, including the one of the U.S.-Mexico border. Consequently, in *On the Line* (2022) we see a female figure once again enshrouded or hidden in the Mylar blanket, hanging it on the laundry rope right in front of the border fence. Similar to *The Space Between Us* a viewer may have doubts about the function of the blanket: looking at the painting the question arises whether the woman is wrapped in it for protection, or whether she is fighting with its suffocating power, (the image definitely suggests movement). Another interpretation is that perhaps she is wrapped in it like many dead bodies of migrants that become covered once found by Border Patrol or other services, particularly due to the fact that her head is also hidden behind the blanket – the idea that is even more prominently suggested in *From Within, Without You* (2023).

Moreover, similar to her *Pressing Matters* series, with that image the artist suggests references to female domestic work that is oftentimes futile and almost always unpaid. But even without prior knowledge of her previous series an image of a woman hanging the laundry and fighting with the wind that is pulling the blanket from her hands and thus covers her whole body in it, as if overwhelming her, unequivocally suggests difficulty and futility of this task. To reinforce this impression, the woman is dressed in black stiletto shoes (Fernández's trademark) that are already sinking in the wet sand, making her work even more strenuous. Thus *On the Line* addresses the aforementioned female household chores that are often invisible (and therefore unappreciated), yet always exhausting and time--consuming. Placed in the context of the U.S.-Mexico border (there is a border fence behind the woman and a Border Patrol car in the distance) the image gains additional meaning: the woman is performing her chores on the line – on the U.S. Mexico border, and thus her efforts are similar to the work of those who want to challenge the official history of the border, not infrequently "formed in fiction" and propagating that fiction. With her action she not only hangs the "laundry on the line" but at the same time puts herself on the line, questioning the aforementioned fiction. At the same time introducing the private element – the laundry line – to the public space, the artist domesticates that space in a sense. In this way she challenges the popular images of the U.S.-Mexico border as highly militarized space, countering them with the image of laundry hanging along the fence. Even though the element

of surveillance is still present in the painting in the form of the Border Patrol car, the car is placed further away in the background. The space of surveillance turns into a more common and familiar space and the woman standing against the wind that wraps the blanket around her can also symbolize "human perseverance against physical separation, political divide, and borders" (cclarkgallery.com/exhibitions/fernandez-at-the-edge-of-distance-ccg-solo-2022).

The last painting from this series, which is entitled *From Within, Without You* (2023), reinforces the idea of human perseverance against all adverse circumstances. In this work of art the artist once again presents a woman wearing black stiletto shoes and standing against the wind on a beach right in front of the ocean with waves approaching her feet. To add to that, this female figure is covered from top to toe in a Mylar blanket which adheres very closely to her body, since the wind wraps it around her. Withstanding the wind, attacked by the water, covered in this protective material, the woman evokes the idea of endurance and persistence against all odds. At the same time, the image unequivocally suggests other interpretations, analogical to the previous paintings from this series. It may as well illustrate the suffocating power of the impermeable fabric, clinging closely to the woman's body and hampering her movements. Finally, this representation may also imply a dead female body wrapped in an emergency blanket. Here, as in the case of other analyses of images in general, the argumentative role(s) of an image will vary, depending on the way in which the viewer watches this image. As Helmers and Hill argue,

> One of the important concepts for any discussion of the role of the viewer in images is the relationship between viewing and time. Images work on us synchronically and diachronically. Synchronically, we view the image that represents the present. Diachronic viewings are slightly more complicated, for we view an image that represents the past and was created in the past, but we also view contemporaneous images with a knowledge of their precursors and their previous meanings. (Helmers and Hill 2008, 12-13)

Therefore, these multiple interpretations are plausible when the painting is analyzed "in isolation," regardless of its precursors. However, looking at this image as part of Fernández's triptych it seems that *From Within, Without You* (2023), similar to the previous two paintings in the series, addresses the issue of the divisive power of borders and determination to challenge it. Those who are inside, that is, "within," have been separated from their close ones who are outside of the borderline. As a result, they continue their fight to counter the separating forces that create spaces between and thus aim at rewriting border stories.

Images complemented by words

Before examining how Fernández's paintings from *At the Edge of Distance* (2022) function in a relation with words, it has to be noted that the messages they convey and their persuasive power exist even without the prior knowledge, experience, or information of a viewer, as mentioned above. So they do without words, yet the words can complement the message of an image or direct the viewer in the process of interpretation. As Helmers and Hill (2008, 21) observe, "James Elkins argues perhaps most explicitly and forcefully against any sharp demarcation between words and images, insisting that "the word-image opposition is . . . demonstrably untrue" and persists largely because it "correspond(s) to institutional habits and needs" (84)." Therefore, according to them, "visual and verbal modes of communication work together in complex ways" (Helmers and Hill 2008, 21) and "the visual and the verbal bleed over into each other's territory . . . in an effort to prompt the desired response from the audience" (Helmers and Hill 2008, 20). The analysis of Fernández's series conducted above already alludes to this interrelationship of the two modes of communication. The titles that the artist chooses for her paintings are suggestive and, as such, they can guide the viewer during the process of interpreting of the work of art. Moreover, the titles of the triptych on the artist's website differ from those assigned to the paining in the exhibitions' catalogues. Consequently, when read in a sequence in which the images appear in the series: *The Space Between Us*, *On the Line*, *From Within*, *Without You*, the titles reiterate the stories presented in the paintings. Similar to the images, they refer to the separating power of borders, difficulties, frustration and danger involved in the attempts to challenge divisions that borders create, as well as continuous and strenuous efforts and perseverance to defy them in spite of adverse circumstances. As analyzed above, apart from the U.S.-Mexico border stories these titles also imply female stories. In addition to that, Ana Teresa Fernández uses her website to comment on the issues she represents through performances and paintings. Finally, the catalogues from her exhibitions, also available on-line, constitute a complementary source of information about the purpose of her works. The verbal thus becomes combined with the visual and altogether contributes to the alternative stories of the borderlands.

Zelizer's "as if:" challenging hostipitality, facilitating conviviality

Discussing the prerequisites of visual rhetoric, Marguerite Helmers and Charles A. Hill quote Barbie Zelizer, who argues that "Visual *representation* gives way to visual *rhetoric* through subjectivity, voice, and contingency" (Helmers and Hill 2008, 17). Referring to Zelizer's categorization, they describe this process in the following way:

> This insertion of the spectator's desires for the future is like the tense in verbal discourse, as tense can locate a moment into the past (that which has already happened and cannot be changed; visual *representation*), the present (what Zelizer terms the "as is"), or the future (the moment of possibility that Zelizer calls the "as if"). Rhetorically, "as if " has the greatest power because it directly involves the spectator and depends on the spectator's ability to forecast and manipulate contingencies in order to create a meaning. (Helmers and Hill 2008, 17-18)

Anthony Blair in turn analyzes the "structure of the arguing process" (2008, 48) and explains that "The arguer appeals to attitude-, intention- or behavior--commitments of the audience, and tries to show that they commit the audience to the new attitude, intention or behavior at issue" (2008, 48). Therefore, both Zelizer's "as if" and Blair's description of the arguing process assume that visual rhetoric replaces visual representation through an active involvement of a viewer, which leads to particular actions. Through creating meanings, the viewers undergo transformations and the images function like a call for action.

Looking through this perspective at Fernández's project, it may be stated that the artist's works in *At the Edge of Distance* (2022) series not only document divisive role of borders, present the process of Othering of certain groups of people in the U.S. (including Latinx, migrants, and women) and reveal how in contemporary world the issue human dignity is often relegated from the discussions. These works also (or, maybe, first and foremost?) make us think what the life on the border would be, as if those divisions did not exist, as if the symbolic blankets did not prevent transborder communication and relations, as if the border did not exist in the form as we know it. Those images have the persuasive power to challenge mainstream reception of the border and to provide alternatives to hostipitality that has origins in that space and expands further away from the border, determining the dynamics of Latinx status in the U.S. Consequently, it can be argued that Fernández's works function as the call for conviviality, similar to other examples of *artivism* – getting involved communities on both sides of the border to undertake a dialogue, cooperate, work together, and in this way rewrite the story of this contentious space from an alternative perspective.

Sonja Foss (2008, 304) analyzing "visual rhetoric as a communicative artefact" argues that "[v]isual elements are arranged and modified by a rhetor not simply for the purpose of emotional discharge but for communication with an audience . . ." Agnieszka Kampka (2014) in turn notes that "[p]ersuasive images allow us to define a social reality in which we function and transform it according to the goals we set." All the examples analyzed above show how images hold the persuasive potential to challenge the divisive power of borders through proposing alternative histories. At the same time the function of these works is to engage the viewer to undermine the contentious character of this space and replace acts of hostipitality with acts of conviviality performed not only on the border but in other

spaces as well. Ana Teresa Fernández's works both humanize the experiences of migrants and draw attention to the complex realities of border life. The artist's works encourage to embrace the Other as the self and thus to engage audiences in acts of conviviality that include joint transborder community projects. With these works she propagates a more ethical behavior and both the exhibit of her works and her website that makes these works available to broader audiences make her voice heard all over the world. Created with this purpose in mind, *At the Edge of Distance* (2022) constitutes an apt example of a call for dignity of humanity, which is crucial in contemporary times when conflicts and wars shift the already existing borders or re-establish them, depriving more and more people of their homes, houses, and oftentimes lives.

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