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Queer Provisionality: Mapping the Generative Failures of the
Transborder Immigrant Tool

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ABSTRACT   Alison Reed investigates the border- and boundary-crossing performance of Electronic Disturbance Theater 2.0's TransBorder Immigrant Tool (TBT), an incomplete cell phone program that offers GPS, guidance, and poetry to those attempting to cross into the United States across the Mexico/US border. Reed suggests a provocation-based performance of "queer provisionality," revealing the aesthetics of oppressive power structures by juxtaposing them to social utopias. Interrogating the national neoliberal project of both US liberalism and US conservatism, Reed's essay is also a transcription of the performances launched around TBT, the social and political machinery set into motion by Electronic Disturbance Theater's failed utopian project.
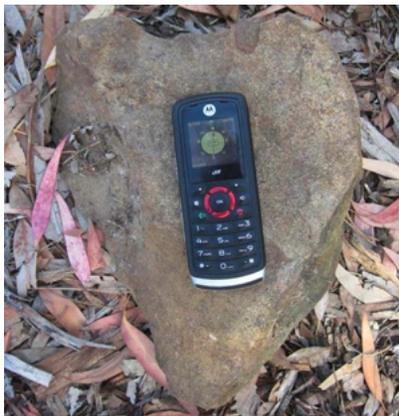
TRANSITION

(song of my cells)

Gloria Anzaldúa writes, "We have a tradition of migration, a tradition of long walks. Today we are witnessing la migración de los pueblos mexicanos, *the return odyssey to the historical/mythological Aztlán" (1999 [1987]: 33). The historical? The mythological? Aztlán? It's difficult to follow the soundings of that song. Today's borders and circuits speak at "lower frequencies," are "shot through with chips of Messianic time." Might (*O chondria!*): imagine the chips' transliteralization and you have "arrived" at the engines of a global positioning system—the transitivity of the Transborder Immigrant Tool. Too: when you outgrow that definition, look for the "trans-" of transcendental -isms, imperfect as overwound pocketwatches, "off"-beat as subliminalities (alternate forms of energy which exceed Reason's predetermined star maps). Pointedly past Walden-pondering,* el otro lado *de flâneur-floundering—draw a circle, now "irse por la tangente"—neither gray nor grey (nor black-and-white). Arco-iris: flight, a*

> *fight. Of fancy.* This Bridge Called my Back, *my heart, my head, my cock, my*
> *cunt, my tunnel. Vision: You. Are. Crossing. Into. Me.*
>
> —Amy Sara Carroll, *Sustenance*

Prologue: Utopian Poetics, Dystopian Realities

Imagine hearing this poem on your mobile phone as you pause somewhere between Baja California, Mexico, and San Diego County on the US side of the border. Leaning into the vertiginous landscape of the Anza-Borrego Desert, punctuated by tangled branches, barrel cacti, and sage brush roused only by ephemeral windstorms, and endlessly unfolding against a horizon of striated mountains and unbearable heat, you see through sunspots the GPS-enabled compass rose on your Nokia e71's dusty screen (Figure 1). You listen for a sign from the looped poetry that alternately offers desert survival advice and sustaining words, "alternate forms of energy which exceed Reason's predetermined star maps." At the interstices of this messy interface your body reads a signal: 33. Steps. Forward. Your feet, leaden weights in too-tight shoes, manage the micro-migration. Northeast of you lies a transient promise of hope, stenciled in white words on a blue container, which you mouth silently with chapped lips: *AGUA/WATER*.

On September 1, 2010, neoconservative pundit Glenn Beck decried this poem as a threat to national security. Not surprisingly, Beck aired the [video poem](#)'s most provocative lines: "*This Bridge Called my Back*, my heart, my head, my cock, my cunt, my tunnel. Vision: You. Are. Crossing. Into. Me."[1] Part of Beck's performative condemnation necessarily turned on censoring the words "cock" and "cunt" with loud bleeps that interrupted the video poem's audio track. Beck's outrage over this sexually explicit moment moved him to prophesize: "The poetry on this system will destroy the border and the nation" (Gharavi 2011). Beck framed the performance collective's verse as evidence for the supposed need to fire its creators from their university teaching posts. Performing his anti-intellectual brand of Fox News Channel's ongoing xenophobic melodrama, Beck conspired in making visible the high political stakes of poetry.

Figure 1. The *Transborder Immigrant Tool*'s compass rose provides directions to a Water Station Inc. water cache in the Anza-Borrego Desert. The screenshot is captured from the same Nokia e71 mobile phone featured here. (Photo: Brett Stalbaum. Courtesy of the artist.)

The poetic object of Beck's scorn was Electronic Disturbance Theater 2.0's *Transborder Immigrant Tool*, which currently exists in prototype form as a GPS-enabled cell phone application meant to direct migrants to water caches and other safety sites along the Mexico/US border. Electronic Disturbance Theater 2.0 developed this cell phone application at the bits.atoms.neurons.genes (b.a.n.g.) lab, a research collective at the California Institute for Telecommunications and Information Technology. Based out of the

University of California, San Diego, and the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Electronic Disturbance Theater 2.0 (EDT) collaborators include b.a.n.g. lab director and artivist Ricardo Dominguez, performance artists Micha Cárdenas and Elle Mehrmand, programmer Brett Stalbaum, and poet Amy Sara Carroll. EDT features Carroll's poems on the mobile devices as part of its museum- and gallery-based reception history, but also views computer programmer Brett Stalbaum's code-as-poetry/poetry-as-code. Stalbaum's GPS tools can be downloaded online as an open source alternative to navigation software.[2] Simultaneously a concept and an actual provision, the *Transborder Immigrant Tool* circulates its code freely in order to amplify the accessibility of the prototype with potentially far-reaching effects. Centering audio recordings of Amy Sara Carroll's poetry as part of its intervention, the app pays homage to notions of poetic sustenance in the works of feminists of color such as Cherríe Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Audre Lorde (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1984; Lorde 1984) by offering heteroglossic poetry-in-motion translated into Indigenous languages of Mexico such as Mexica, Maya, Yoeme, Diné, and Náhuatl, as well as Spanish, Portuguese, German, Russian, Greek, and Taiwanese. In so doing, the tool's poetry evokes a utopian image of global fellowship. Like Ramón H. Rivera-Servera (2012), my evocation of utopia delineates a set of social practices and concrete performance spaces that imagine and enact other ways of being in the world, and *not* a naïve ideal world with its own set of principles, bound to reinscribe the very problems it seeks to move beyond.

In their project's deliberately provocative utopian vision, EDT recruits unwitting political actors and outraged publics as the primary performers in the *Transborder Immigrant Tool*'s drama. That is to say, since its conceptualization the tool's design has remained provisional and technically non-functional, but its poetry activates a political response *as performance*. The poem that Beck cites, Carroll's "Transition (song of my cells)," has been a flash point for the project since Beck's belligerent mockery of its final lines. He decried:

> That is so beautiful […] I mean who needs water, you know, when their souls will be drenched in life-refreshing dew of poetry like that. Oh we are in good hands aren't we? America this is madness and you know it. Common sense says we must turn the money off on this project and others like it.[3]

Underlining the popular conflation of the prototype's poetry and GPS technology, Beck's vitriolic address to his version of "America" encapsulates the key terms of the debate over the *Transborder Immigrant Tool* (TBT). Social actors across the political spectrum have disputed its functionality, its poetry, its alleged federal violation of immigration law, and the contested use of tax dollars to fund projects that put pressure on both conservative and liberal discourses of migrant rights.

In spotlighting the online media frenzy surrounding the tool as well as Electronic Disturbance Theater's creation of video poems for the project, this article—structured like a play—holds in tension the competing visions of reality offered by poets and politicians. Act I addresses Electronic Disturbance Theater's performance history against the backdrop of material realities at the border. This act also engages the *Transborder Immigrant Tool*'s intervention in the victim narrative of much human rights discourse—putting pressure on the limits of legal reform. While a device that could potentially save lives will always remain an urgent project, the *Transborder Immigrant Tool* does another kind of work: by including poetry as part of its technology, EDT interrogates the imaginative constraints on desire for change. The need for technical functionality sometimes dismisses the work of poetry, but in the struggle for justice, the absence of one perfect tool necessitates the strategic coalition of many. Act II closely reads the tool's poetic interruption of discourses of "illegality" in order to understand creative form as central to the tool's political intervention—particularly the possibilities and pitfalls of

utopian visions as they clash with dystopian realities, reflected in Electronic Disturbance Theater's activation and archive of digital hate. Through affectively charged reactions to the tool's technical non-functionality and functional poetry, Electronic Disturbance Theater stages its performance of TBT online. EDT conceives of Internet flames as a kind of art practice, because, as Carroll describes in *Vandal* (2011), "nobody talks about Fox News's Aesthetics" (67). Act III offers a theoretical framework I term "queer provisionality," as a performance mode that provokes dominant publics with its expansive social vision. Utopian provocations expose the artistry of power, or the aestheticized rehearsal of contradictory political logics in the spheres of the law, the academy, and cyberspace. Rather than romanticizing utopian potentials in artistic practice as a way out of a noxious present, queer provisionality takes seriously the work of exposing systemic practices as producing their own artistry.

Act I: Call of *El Otro Lado*

Since Anzaldúa's (1987) evocation of border culture as *una herida abierta*, Queer of Color feminists have understood borders as simultaneously discursive and material places for identity negotiation and meaning-making. The Mexico/US border, of course, not only polices racialized bodies but also locates a key space for the production and regulation of sexuality. Despite Carroll's homage to Anzaldúa's queering of the border in the poem that Beck denounces above, articles published on TBT systematically elide its queerness (Amoore and Hall, 2010; Goldstein, 2010; Warren, 2011). In contrast, EDT (2010) discusses the tool as serving a specifically queer function: "TBT's aesthetic, a poetics of dislocation, unfolds to queer the Nation's concretude" (7). TBT's utopian gesture—to queer the Nation's concretude—moves beyond the limitations of legal reform to an abolitionist ethics of challenging oppressive institutions themselves while also strategizing ways to move within them. As Dean Spade (2013) writes, fighting the law's injustices can be one "tactic of transformation focused on interventions that materially reduce violence or maldistribution without inadvertently expanding harmful systems in the name of reform" (1047).

On June 4, 2011, artist Marlène Ramírez-Cancio walked the *Transborder Immigrant Tool* prototype into Tijuana via a tunnel from the US side of the border. This art event was staged as part of *Political Equator 3*, a two-day cross-border mobile conference. Of course, uneven and exploitative flows of capital secure the border's permeability for US citizens seeking thrills in Tijuana, for instance, but not for migrants moving to *El Norte*. Rather than ignoring the radical power differential, we can understand Ramírez-Cancio's act of walking TBT across national boundaries as an anticipatory act of solidarity with the UndocuBus movement, which takes as one of its mottoes "Migration is a Human Right."[4]

Beyond the desert, Electronic Disturbance Theater has demonstrated the *Transborder Immigrant Tool* mobile device prototype in art galleries and institutional spaces— circuitously staging the question of the tool's functionality as academic performance. EDT members have represented TBT at more than forty international performance venues. In February 2012, for example, *LA Re.Play: An Exhibition of Mobile Media Art Los Angeles* at UCLA's Broad Art Center in conjunction with the College Art Association Conference, exhibited twenty-five of Carroll's poems uploaded onto four cell phones alongside other international "geolocated media" artworks.[5] As its extensive exhibition record attests, TBT has generated much positive attention: Electronic Disturbance Theater won two Transborder Awards from UC San Diego's Center for the Humanities, which funds year-long research proposals that innovatively address the issue of (trans)borders, as well as the Transnational Communities Award funded by Contacto Cultural, Fideicomiso para la Cultura México-Estados Unidos, which was awarded by the US Embassy in Mexico. Rather than serving an end in and of themselves, these artistic and

academic accolades set into motion the tool's performative afterlife: the opacity of the tool's poetic intervention reads as transparently dangerous to cultural actors and commentators.

Designed to provide aid in the tradition of [Border Angels](#), [No Más Muertes](#), [Humane Borders](#), and other humanitarian organizations that provide life-saving water during long stretches of desert, the app, once fully operable and distributable, would ostensibly direct users to already existent water stations. However, during interviews about the tool (Bird 2011; Warren 2011), Electronic Disturbance Theater members cite multiple reasons—both unforeseen and anticipated—for the fact of its technical limitations. EDT's practical concerns range from operationalizing a cell phone model cheap enough for mass distribution and sustaining battery life to mapping a particular area when NGOs want to keep stations hidden as a protective measure, as well as preventing the devices from being co-opted as a means of tracking by *La Migra*. If a cheap mobile device could in fact sustain battery life over long distances to direct migrants to makeshift water stations, the labor of mapping and remapping safety routes would require constant communication with NGOs and circumvention of hostile Border Patrol agents. In addition to jingoistic realities short-circuiting hemispheric imaginaries, the material fact of GPS technology's history of bolstering the military industrial complex also threatens the tool's sustainability.[6] In effect, EDT's material and political challenges cannot be separated from the dangerous potential for repurposing the tool as a technology of state surveillance and violence.

While Electronic Disturbance Theater members maintain that they originally hoped to distribute a fully-functional version of the app by April 2011, approximately four years after its first iteration, I am more interested in the concrete effects of a utopian idea; given these setbacks, I read EDT's insistence on the tool's practicality as part of their performance. Nonetheless, a series of highly publicized legal, institutional, and federal investigations indefinitely stalled the tool's development. These scandals, unsurprising in a political context marked by institutional repression and state violence, also halted migrants from operationalizing the tool along the border. TBT's performative life thus exists in the space of its provisionality, or the fact of its technical non-functionality; it is a powerful idea that because of its utopian ethical reach cannot fully materialize within the confines of US immigration law. Electronic Disturbance Theater's performance process explicitly embraces Fredric Jameson's politics of "anti-anti-Utopianism" (vxi), which understands that only the most privileged members of society can afford not to hope, or to think that hope alone can sustain a political project. Through the tool's embedded poetry, EDT imagines a world not circumscribed by arbitrary national borders. This utopian poetics does real work in the world, even as its technology for crossing the material border remains provisional. By staging political backlash as performance, the tool's non-functional technology and functional poetry together reveal the danger and urgency of imagining other ways to be in the world. Legal reform alone, however necessary organizing efforts remain there, cannot transform cultural realities.

Electronic Disturbance Theater's understanding of migration as a human right rather than a federal crime gestures toward abolition of the immigration control apparatus altogether as the basis for collective action. Legal frameworks, after all, often require the performance of particular kinds of citizenship that reify hetero- and homonormative productions of the US as a safe space of freedom, including sexual freedoms, at the cost of casting "Third World" countries in imperialist terms as arrested or regressive. In other words, part of the process of assimilation into citizenship demands the collective reiteration and reinforcement of a dangerous racialized and non-conforming "other"—the terrorist, for example—against whom the nation guards and defines itself, a point that

Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai (2002) make in "Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terror and the Production of Docile Patriots." Toby Beauchamp (2009) extends this argument about national security and patriotism in light of the gender-nonconforming subject to critique occasions when transgender advocacy organizations have depended on defining a properly assimilated citizen against a fantasized "other" who threatens national coherence—covertly linking patriotism to race hatred through the anxious repetition of the racially ambiguous terrorist figure, a force to be expelled from the nation.

Given its performance trajectory from poetic prototype to legal liability, the *Transborder Immigrant Tool* can be described as a work of conceptual/performance art that troubles public disputes about immigration and human rights law in print and social media, the legal sphere, and the academy—shifting the terms of debate from the security of the border to the material realities of immigration reform. EDT members articulate a poetic vision of border dissolution and stage a debate about migration in which social actors collude in performing their political aesthetics, which rationalize global flows of capital across borders while criminalizing the very people whose exploited labor makes possible the conditions of neoliberal production. Neoliberalism's duplicitous positioning of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) as a democratic opening of borders deliberately elides the pattern of uneven globalization and systematic disenfranchisement that secures economic dominance over and through an expendable labor force.[7] As Ricardo Dominguez states during an interview with Louis Warren (2011):

> A Coca-Cola can has more rights of protection in the flow across borders than the people who make the can, who fill the can, and pack the cans […] NAFTA seems to indicate that these commodities have [rights] and a right of flow. So, to me, transborders, trans-California, would be about an equation wherein the equality of the commodities would have a direct impact on the equality of the individuals who are the very flows of production there. (28)

Dominquez calls for awareness of not only the various violences underlying neoliberal policy, but of US capitalism as being rooted in longer histories of imperialism, genocide, and slavery.[8] While many accounts of the US border myopically treat NAFTA's 1994 concretization as the defining moment in Mexico/US relations, a more nuanced understanding attentive to global racial regimes would reach back to the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (which forced Mexico to cede half its former territory) or even first colonization contact.[9] The contradictions of a selectively permeable border depend on global inequities, outsourcing, and the exploitation of labor, which maximize the flow of capital and racially restrict the movement of people through the discourse of "illegality."

Reinforced by national moral panics around spectacularized threats such as contagion and disease, criminality, and terrorism, the racialized discourse of "illegality" has been in wide circulation since the US government criminalized undocumented entry in 1929 (Nevins 2002, 54). The mass detention and deportation of undocumented and document permanent residents on mere suspicion of being in the country "illegally" bolsters the conflation of "national security threats" with bodies not easily marked as white and conforming. Echoing Richard Nixon's 1971 "war on drugs," for instance, the affectively charged "war on terror" in the wake of September 11, 2001 heightened a longstanding anti-Latinx immigration regime.[10] While the criminalization and hyperpolicing of People of Color is nothing historically new, the post-9/11 extension of immigration, detention, and border control authority from the Immigration and Naturalization Service and US Customs Service to US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) under the Department of Homeland Security in 2003 exacerbated ongoing injustices around, and a rise in, mass detention and incarceration of racialized Latinx immigrants in ICE detention centers, county and state jails, and privately-owned prisons. DHS's coordination with

local police to racially profile and detain targeted groups compounds the alignment of criminal law with immigration law, reinforcing the domestic and border hyperpolicing of Latinx communities. The gross human rights violations of ICE facilities and privatized prisons have also been well-documented by the [American Civil Liberties Union](#) and grassroots organizations, and include an absence of basic legal protections, such as the right to an attorney and medical care, and subjection to sexual, physical, and psychological abuse by Border Patrol, local police, and detention center guards. Ultimately, the alliance of border enforcement and criminal law enforcement bolsters the power of the state to mass incarcerate, detain, and deport People of Color in moments of moral panic and economic crisis.[11] In building their performance around the bankruptcy of the idea of borders and cages, EDT refuses to advocate for a reformism that merely humanizes state power's walls.

Framed as both art and activism while collapsing the space between them, EDT's poetic gestures simultaneously serve as artistic invocation of and political intervention in a humanitarian crisis set into motion by shifting relations of capital and racialized moral panics—the escalating numbers of border deaths each year despite an overall decrease in attempted crossings. One report (Moreno, 2013) states that from 2007–2011, the Border Patrol reported 1,934 deaths, averaging 386 people per year. EDT (2010, 3) describes that in 2009, the same year the US Customs and Border Protection Agency released its data on Boeing's virtual fence construction—a hugely expensive failed attempt to further securitize existing barriers—it documented 416 deaths from attempted border crossings during the months of January through October alone. Of course, as EDT (2010) notes, state figures are often deflated: "In contrast, humanitarian aid organizations like the Border Angels of San Diego/Tijuana estimate that 10,000 people to date have perished attempting to cross the México-US border" (3). Rising death rates can be attributed to the increased militarization of the US immigration control apparatus, a multi-billion dollar industry. *Los Angeles Times* (Marosi, Carcamo, and Hennessy-Fiske 2013) reports that

> Obama administration officials claim the frontier is more secure than ever, benefiting from the billions of taxpayer dollars spent on border defenses. There are 18,500 US Border Patrol agents on the US-Mexico border now, compared with 3,222 in 1986. Barriers have been built along nearly 700 miles.

As if border fences and surveillance technologies do not make crossing perilous enough, migrants must also fear the growing numbers of Border Patrol agents, and not only the possibility of getting caught but the violence to which they may be subjected if taken in by *La Migra*.[12] TBT counters the government's massive investment in border control with the act of imagining migration as a human right.

While the *Transborder Immigrant Tool* exists as a prototype that has not been replicated or distributed, the debate surrounding the tool ignores its virtuality, the fact of its not-yet-ness. Beginning in January 2010 an investigation of EDT's supposed misuse of funding sources instigated by Members of Congress Brian P. Bilbray, Darrell Issa, and Duncan Hunter, and ensuing interrogation of each EDT team member by Audit and Management Advisory Services at UCSD, stalled TBT's development. Bilbray, Issa, and Hunter charged b.a.n.g. lab with using taxpayer dollars to violate the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which criminalizes border-crossing aiders at the federal level. Subsequently a series of investigations in 2010 by institutional and federal actors, namely, UC San Diego, the UC Office of the President, and the FBI Office of Cybercrimes, not only halted the tool's mass production and deployment, but also subjected EDT members to invasive legal protocols and online harassment from opponents to the tool, fueled by local and national media coverage. Bad press catalyzed these major setbacks for TBT's deployment. For instance, the letter Bilbray, Issa, and Hunter wrote to UC San Diego Chancellor Marye Anne Fox on

March 17, 2010 shifts between present and future tenses, describing the tool paradoxically as a "program that helps individuals illegally cross the US/Mexico border" but one that EDT members "plan on disseminating … to illegal immigrants to aid in their crossing of our southern land border" (EDT 2010, 4). Here, they collapse the temporal distance between "helps" *in the present* and "plan on disseminating" *in the future*. Ignoring its provisionality, they view the prototype as an active threat to the nation— typifying the warped temporality undergirding debate.

The University of California, San Diego, also threatened removal of Professor Dominguez's tenure. He was hired as an assistant professor in 2004 for his groundbreaking work developing Electronic Civil Disobedience with Critical Art Ensemble. Then, Dominguez's virtual sit-in performance on March 4, 2010—to protest widespread UC salary cuts, layoffs, and fee hikes—was deemed a distributed denial-of-service attack, warranting an investigation by the FBI Office of Cybercrimes. Drawing from his training in classical and agit-prop theater, as well as the practice of Electronic Civil Disobedience that he collaboratively developed in the late 1980s with Critical Art Ensemble, Ricardo Dominguez developed virtual sit-in technologies with EDT cofounder Brett Stalbaum in political solidarity with the Zapatistas, an anti-free trade movement of Indigenous peoples in Chiapas, Mexico who led an armed rebellion on the day NAFTA took effect. In fighting for Indigenous rights against linked histories of global neoliberalism and colonialism, Zapatismo emphasizes the power of words, not war. Led by Subcomandante Marcos, the Zapatista National Liberation Army famously staged the symbolic gesture of sending hundreds of paper airplanes containing fragments of poetry into a Mexican army base. This tactical move takes seriously the power of collective creativity in the ongoing struggle against systematic destruction and state violence. Linking Electronic Disturbance Theater's performance genealogy to Electronic Civil Disobedience and Zapatismo underlines the significance of both digital activism and tactical poetry to TBT's performance mode.[13]

In the end, all charges against EDT members were dropped, but the University of California Office of the President asked Dominguez to refrain from producing more artivist work and to remain silent about the investigations. In an era that often portrays the university as a radical oasis, this institutional reaction exposes the persistence of the 1980s culture wars in which conservatives sought to restrict content of federally funded intellectual and artistic projects. A public advocate of the anti-migrant Secure Communities program, Janet Napolitano's ascension from Secretary of Homeland Security to President of the University of California system provides further evidence of the university's xenophobic agenda in censuring Dominguez. UC San Diego's actions seem inconsistent: after hiring Dominguez for his hacktivism and virtual sit-in technologies, his tenure was threatened for those very reasons. The university's response to competing pressures reveals the internal contradictions, gaps, and ruptures in institutional power as generative sites for social change. EDT's work carves out a space for imagining how academics might risk and repurpose institutional resources to mobilize within larger networks of activists and organizers.

Despite the right's obsession with the tool's "immediate" danger, the media has simultaneously doubted its potential for efficacy—particularly how to reconcile TBT's poetry with its activist impetus. During a trial run of the tool with Dominguez and Stalbaum at UC San Diego in 2010, journalist Evan Goldstein (2010) observes: "Our movements are punctuated by occasional bleats of unintelligible, crackly poetry. There is no discernible logic to the dance of its compass arrow." Goldstein's skepticism crystallizes as he observes Dominguez's supposed digital incorrectness, a term which refers to crossing the line from hacktivism to cybercrime, but which Goldstein (2010) defines as

deliberately inefficient: "His creations are 'digitally incorrect,' he told me in April, by which he meant deliberately inefficient... They are, in short, conversation pieces." In relegating TBT's performance to the space of a conversation piece, Goldstein betrays a healthy amount of doubt about whether conversations alone can do political work in the world. That is to say, Goldstein's concern over the functionality of the tool underlines an important point. For migrants, a final product could indeed translate to saving lives; but EDT (2010, 7) points out that GPS devices available for purchase in Mexico thanks to transnational corporations such as Walmart "have been utilized for a long time in border crossings. In other words, capitalism long ago accomplished what the atavistic right and neoliberal administrations fear most!" Activists may support TBT's evocation of political urgency, only to be disappointed by the tool's provisionality. For some, the tool is *too much* in existence—it poses a tangible threat. For others such as Goldstein, the tool has not done enough, or anything, as activist art. Yet, Electronic Disturbance Theater's digital activism locates the multi-directional affective flows of political outrage and solidarity born out of heated dialogue and debate as the space of performance.

In undermining the framework of il/legality,[14] TBT challenges both the conservative and liberal political imagination. In the former, TBT heightens the visibility of publics whose inability to accept migrants as people with basic human rights forecloses recognizing their right to not die in the desert. In the latter, the tool critiques the limits of human rights agendas, which turn on a fantasized victim figure in need of saving instead of a dynamic agent whose desires may not center on being folded into the nation-state. As Wendy Hesford (2011) argues, the human rights spectacle often attempts to elicit pity from its publics by erasing difference through universalization, mirroring an image of suffering that one can only identify as such insofar as it throws into relief the goodness and fallibility of the First World subject. The tool's use of poetry troubles this latter perspective in particular. While human rights discourses attempt to fix a stable, universalized image of a victim (often a wide-eyed woman or child) onto local contexts, TBT refuses to map this substitutable figure onto the border. Instead, TBT's inclusion of poetry as functional technology asks us to consider how the obsessive repetition of the victim figure covers over the paradoxes of human rights discourse, which purports to embrace equity and dignity but in fact leaves little room for self-determination, overemphasizing the so-called benevolence of US institutions to determine the futures of its imagined victims.

EDT's functional poetry and non-functional technology set into motion a digital performance of liberal discourses of human rights. In online responses to the *Transborder Immigrant Tool*, liberals often assert the discourse of human rights in order to delimit what aid should look like and in whose image. This assertion manifests as concern about the extent to which a potentially life-saving tool could or should simultaneously contain within its function the recitation of multilingual poetry. For example, one comment posted to Evan Goldstein's article (2010) reads: "It seems to me that the only parts of the 'landscape' that people traveling through a desert need to 'encounter' are those that help them not to die. To lecture them about sublimity and American landscape painting during their quest for water—not to mention force-feeding them poetry—borders on the obscene." To deem migrants unfit for cultural production or consumption is not only presumptuous but based on privileged claims to intellectual authority and authorizing presence. In making assumptions about what kinds of provisions sustain the perilous process of desert-crossing, such writers presuppose the centrality of their own subject positions. Locating the performance art squarely on the racialized bodies of migrants romanticizes and objectifies an entire population by coercing them into a staged event. This becomes particularly insidious, as commenters express concern about the extent to which a potentially life-saving tool should contain within its function the recitation of

poetry. Electronic Disturbance Theater stages its utopian poetics as provocation, turning to the mediated spheres where power gets consolidated and (re)produced, mapping the category of political performance onto a constellation of cultural actors whose privilege often remains uninterrogated and invisible.

Act II: The Artistry of Power, the Power of Artistry

Aesthetically and theoretically aligned with Amy Sara Carroll's poetry collection *Secession* (2012), "Transition (song of my cells)" literalizes metaphors of transnational identity on the space of the Mexico/US border via an affective mapping of global politics through sustaining poetry, and a philosophy rooted to the land rather than transcendent of it—extending beyond the limitations of legal rhetoric and reform to what Henry David Thoreau in *On Civil Disobedience* calls a "higher law doctrine" (EDT 2010, 4). Understanding the imbrication of Mexico/US relations and slavery as the historical stage on which transcendentalist politics were thought, Electronic Disturbance Theater reimagines Thoreau's higher law as "transborder justice."[15] In the tradition of civil disobedience, change becomes possible by deliberately breaking the law, not abiding it. Layering spatial and symbolic crossings, "Transition (song of my cells)" ultimately calls for an empathic act of imagination: "You. Are. Crossing. Into. Me." Poetically suturing border crossing and relational intimacy, Carroll's poem refuses the colonialist terms of nations dividing land, power, and resources—instead honoring an expansive vision of movement linked to bodies and social contact.

In "Transition (song of my cells)," Carroll's politics of citation moves from transcendentalism to US Third World Feminism—examining social relationships to the land on which TBT's intervention is metaphorically staked. Henry David Thoreau's privileged escape to Walden Pond, land owned by Ralph Waldo Emerson, meets Gloria Anzaldúa's "tradition of migration." The poem also asks us to interrogate the entitlement attending a US transcendentalist desire for returning to a natural world untainted by the corrupting effects of modernity: "Pointedly past Walden-pondering, *el otro lado* de flâneur-floundering." By evoking the expansive I/eye of Whitman (song of my cells/of myself) to the strategic essentialisms of Anzaldúa's Aztlán ("The historical? The mythological? Aztlán? It's difficult to follow the soundings of that song"), Carroll's poem maps biological, technological, and utopian spaces onto exclusionary geographies policed by discursive and state regimes. Rooting language of transcendental -isms in the body grounds any notion of ethical engagement in a respect for rather than rejection, minimization, or tokenization of difference, countering empathy's dangerous desire to consume the other's experience in order to better reflect back one's own.[16] EDT presses against the limits of empathy in performance art and poetry by exposing it to the militarized site of the border, where the failure of a provision to perform could mean being out of water, out of time, and out of life.

Alternating between desert survival advice and pointed rejoinders to discourses of "illegality" permeating US policy, Carroll's poems are captured both aurally and visually (Figure 2). One conceptual poem, for example, quotes Luis Alberto Urrea, who invokes and undermines political frameworks with the provocation: "In the desert, we are all illegal aliens" (Urrea 2005, 120). Rather than leveling out the material differences between an undocumented migrant and a US citizen experiencing a vertiginous landscape, however, Carroll's scrambling of the words formally replicates physical barriers to empathic understanding. Perhaps suggesting a border fatality, the ominous singling out of one red letter "g" renders a linguistic absence that dissolves the word on which such death is predicated—"illegal." Replacing nationalist rhetorics of securitizing the border with global social logics that welcome rather than ward off migrants, this poem gestures toward the dislocating effects of entering a US debate centered on the

devaluation of an entire group of people as outside the law and thus undeserving of survival in the desert.
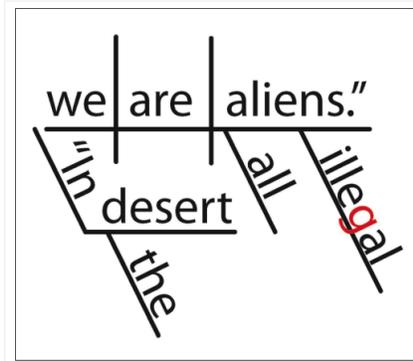

Figure 2. Conceptual poem, following Luis Alberto Urrea's *The Devil's Highway*, by Amy Sara Carroll. Image courtesy of the artist.

A [Fox News report](#) in April 2011 on the *Transborder Immigrant Tool* comically pits Enrique Morones, Founder and Executive Director of the non-profit organization Border Angels, against Retired Army Colonel Al Rodriguez, who founded the hate group You Don't Speak for Me in 2006. You Don't Speak for Me is a coalition of "concerned Americans of Hispanic/Latino heritage, some first or second generation, others recent legal immigrants, who believe illegal immigration harms America."[17] Morones explains that much like the humanitarian mission of Border Angels, TBT is meant to save lives, not aid and abet migration. Rodriguez, however, argues that the tool actively encourages illegality, insisting that anyone who has condoned illegal immigration should be "thrown in jail." Bolstering Rodriguez's position, the Fox News reporter's obsessive repetition of the discourse of illegality permeates the entire interview—twice in the first fifteen seconds, for example—operating as a covert placeholder for racialization. Rodriguez bespeaks a vested interest in the ongoing production of Americanness as white, and racial difference as "foreign." (The injunction for President Barack Obama to present his birth certificate points to this disturbing social reality. Moneymaking conspiracy theories that routinely question Obama's citizenship, so popular among Republican politicians, celebrity advocates such as Donald Trump, Harvard-educated *New York Times* bestselling author Jerome Corsi, journalists, and voting publics, allow people who do not want to be identified as bigots to hide behind the legal parameters of US citizenship.[18]) The discursive divide between legal and illegal, then, tenuously links racialized bodies to overdetermined origins rather than actual social location and citizenship status. In short, the performance of illegality masks over material realities of migration. The artistry of power, or the aesthetic strategies of hegemonic political logics in legal, institutional, and social spaces, attempts to stabilize the constantly shifting terms of legality and citizenship through ongoing *performances of the law* as justifying white supremacist political and social practices.

Anxiously evoking the specter of illegality in a country of millions of undocumented migrants also bespeaks a disavowal of how global shifts in capitalist production create the conditions in which mass movement must be contextualized. Rodriguez wishes to distance himself from Morones through the language of citizenship: "I think this guy that you're talking to—I don't know where he comes from nor where he was born." Rodriguez self-identifies as American, whereas for him Morones—as a Mexican American—is not truly American, because "you don't follow the laws of the United States of America." As this Fox News report exemplifies, US voting publics equate a migration "threat" with

racialized bodies, precisely by making whiteness the precondition for US citizenship. Yet, since whiteness also functions symbolically as a form of social capital, the perpetuation of white supremacy can hide behind the brownness of figures such as Rodriguez. In a so-called post-racial era that wields "colorblind" language to perpetuate institutional and interpersonal racism, the nationalistic language of Americanness polices the boundaries of race without explicitly invoking racialized difference.[19] In other words, xenophobic publics manage a racialized fear of brown skin by excluding it from the very concept of US belonging. What Claire Kim calls the "colorblind talk" of white liberalism obscures the fact of systemic group dominance (2000, 18), and as Hiram Perez writes, "colludes with institutionalized racism in vanishing, hence retrenching, white entitlement. It serves as the magician's assistant to whiteness's disappearing act" (2005, 187). Academics, anonymous online commenters, and policymakers collude in this "colorblind" racism by conflating illegality with racialized bodies.

Electronic Disturbance Theater calls attention to these performing publics, exposing their carefully produced aesthetic of Americanness. A digital archive of right-wing extremist reactions to the *Transborder Immigrant Tool*, documented in online forums and blogs,[20] makes visible the overt xenophobia that the liberal-individualist frame seeks to elide, since it so often advocates a mass colorblindness in order to foreclose conversations about racism's ongoing violences. Covert and overt white supremacy persists, as with the far-right "race realists," whose *American Renaissance* journal has not surprisingly expressed outrage at the *Transborder Immigrant Tool* project.[21] By applying pressure to the pulse of a xenophobic rhetoric that continually attempts to hide its racist cultural logics behind legal frameworks, EDT activates a performance not of the tool itself but of the discourse communities who receive it.

Overtly bigoted threats, which thinly veil white supremacist viewpoints in the official language of anti-immigration law, such as "I favor mining the border area" (qtd. in Goldstein 2010), are hard to miss. However, liberal responses to hate speech typically code racist responses as exceptions to the multicultural world order, rather than symptoms of its structural force. Many commenters react directly to the xenophobic views of other commenters as not only out of line but not with the times. By performatively shaming *individual* racists, the *institutional* perpetuation of white supremacy goes unchecked. One direct reaction to another commenter's fear of the tool using tax dollars to enable "illegal" immigration uses vitriol to fight xenophobia:

> Anything that irritates Glen [sic.] Beck and his army of brain-dead followers is worth funding to the max! But aside from all that, "enabling" people to not die is hardly wasteful. If you're going to doom people to die in the desert, how is that any different from waiting for them with a sniper's rifle? But maybe that's more to your liking? (qtd. in Goldstein, 2010)

Particularly in an academic climate that touts post-identity politics, these comments signal the material force of racism in contemporary cultural production as anything but beyond, or "post-." And yet, a liberal discourse of shock alleviates commenters from unpacking their complicity in systemic logics that seek to exclude people from entering a country that was once their own, scapegoating Beck's cult-like following for a systemic problem in which liberals are also complicit. This exceptionalist desire for distance from US colonialism finds an easy outlet when social actors conflate online expressions of desire for justice with active and ongoing steps toward its enactment.

Anything but a post-race space, the Internet bespeaks the violent meeting point of neoliberalism and neoconservatism in a kind of willed blindness or desired sameness that both tout fictions of the post- in order to foreclose conversations about race. Online

networks generate viral processes of communal meaning-making, establishing the comment forum not as a unidirectional project of personal response to a given article but a collaborative space. While websites can be a particularly nasty breeding ground for discursive violence, due to the anonymity of actors, activist-oriented bloggers check the damage of Internet "trolls" for whom online harassment constitutes a destructive form of play. As Lisa Nakamura (2012) writes, "[u]ser-generated blogs that confront racism, sexism, and homophobia work against the impulse to forget or ignore racist 'trash talk' by preserving and archiving it using old and new media" (3). When colorblind rhetoric bars conversations about the violent material manifestations of racism, disclosure itself is a generative kind of work.

Taking seriously what Nakamura (2012) describes as media archives of "trash talk," Electronic Disturbance Theater makes online inundations of recreational race hatred part of the performance, turning enemies into actors in the tool's drama. The tool's perceived threat provokes publics into staging their animosity, as EDT members have been targets of hate mail and death threats. In order to provide accountability for hate speech, EDT maintains the practice of publicly posting hate mail they receive online under a tab titled "Flames" on TBT's homepage.[22] The published "Flames" on TBT's website include names as well as email addresses, following the politics of making visible perpetrators of hate speech—although online personas can be difficult to link to real-world bodies. On March 10, 2010, for example, "gil baco" wrote: "Giving people who cross illegally into OUR country a free electronic PATHWAY to non-detection? YOU SON OF A BITCH. I strongly suggest that you and your piss-ant, gay colleagues in this outrage, pack up you [sic] belongings and families and do your work from the other side of the world." What is particularly striking about this threat is the sexual metaphors that underline its conception of the outlaw who can only be safely fringe when on the ideologically-demarcated "other side of the world," which "gil" presumably figures as Mexico. Xenophobia and homophobia work hand-in-hand, as both threaten to deform the safely white, patriotic "American people," as if Mexico were not part of the Americas but a vast wasteland to which anyone's "gay colleagues" should be banished.

From EDT's archive of online bullying emerge patterns that echo the paradoxical coexistence and interdependence of colorblind rhetoric and a xenophobic imaginary that conflates national borders with the limits of racialized and sexualized identities. Xenophobic reactions to immigration debates immediately hold suspect the citizenship of all Latinxs, mirrored in the hate speech directed at EDT members, who were told to leave their teaching posts and go back to Mexico—imagined as the collective repository for badly behaving citizens. Moreover, the inassimilable production of difference read onto the group seems to exacerbate the nativist fear of the tool as threatening US social cohesion. The fear of having TBT operate on the ground, dramatized by the "Flames" archive, reveals something that already exists in the world—thoroughly gendered, racialized, and sexualized panics over permeable national borders.

This jingoistic anxiety often plays out in colorblind language that replaces explicit mentions of race with discourses of cultural and sexual pathology. In other words, the colorblind substitution of overtly racist biological discourses of race with the covertly racist language of cultural pathology relies heavily upon the scapegoating of "non-normative" sexuality and gender expression. For example, Siobhan Somerville (2005) traces the persistence of colorblind language from the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) into present immigration debates, exposing that: "Although the explicit language of race was losing legitimacy in the eye of the law as a means of excluding potential citizens, the language of sexual pathology and pollution became increasingly available for circumscribing the characteristics of the ideal citizen" (87). As Somerville makes clear,

immigration law deploys a thoroughly racialized form of queerness even, *and especially*, when it sees itself as deracinated.

The public performance of xenophobic hate has aesthetic value insofar as its logics gain recognition through repetition of a stylized set of formal motifs, namely the concealment of race hatred through the abjection of racialized queerness. Gender hatred—especially that directed at queer gender expression—becomes the scapegoat for nonetheless thoroughly racialized and sexualized ideas of nationhood itself. As Jessica Chapin (1998) explains, the Rio Grande/Río Bravo establishes the violent oppositions of "capital/labor, mind/body, cleanliness/dirt, white/brown, reason/instinct, First World/Third World, progress/backwardness, order/chaos, closed/open, and male/female" (409). The online flames anxiously rehearse these false binaries at every turn, notably shifting overt racism to misogyny and transphobia. In another message, "Bryan Prince" digitally shouts: "You fucking anti-American CUNT!!!!I hope you die the worse [sic] death possible you horrible, disgraceful BITCH! GET THE FUCK OUT OF THIS COUNTRY YOU WHORE!!!!" Here, the death threats seem entirely unrelated to EDT's work on the tool as such; instead, Prince's hatred, conceived in strictly gendered and sexualized terms, turns on his imagination of a non-conforming, impure, hypersexualized female body.

Figuring Mexico/US relations with violent metaphors of penetration at once marks Mexico with the feminine term and the threat of masculine aggression or border transgression metaphorized as sexual violation. These homophobic, transphobic, and xenophobic anxieties expressed in sexual terms recast the US as "victim" of unwanted incursions despite its histories of violently seizing Mexican land. US neoliberal policy colludes in global racial capitalism's ongoing legacies of imperialism, annexation, slavery, and genocide. In these responses, race hatred takes one form as sexual violence, which the digital space of "Flames" captures as part of what Cárdenas (2010b) calls its "long history of radical transparency." Extremist reactions to TBT, which view it as a concretized event in need of legal policing and control, expose the persistence of overt racism during a supposedly post-racial era in which the election of the nation's first Black president and the pervasiveness of social media both provide fodder for the myth of a deracinated, borderless world.

Act III: Staging Provisional Utopias

By exposing the artistry of power, Electronic Disturbance Theater's *Transborder Immigrant Tool* offers a performance mode I call "queer provisionality," which repositions dominant identity in relationship to performance. Following Cathy Cohen (1997), I understand queerness not in strictly identitarian terms along the lines of gender expression and sexual orientation but as a shared relationship to power that creates alternative possibilities for inhabiting space, recognizing deviance as a socially-regulated category with liberatory potential. By imagining otherwise, queer provisionality generates a performance politics that throws into relief the hegemonic aesthetics of material and discursive boundary-building. Poetic visions of utopia meet dystopian material realities of white supremacy, mass detention and incarceration, border surveillance, and domestic hyperpolicing. Queer provisionality characterizes Electronic Disturbance Theater's offering of a performance mode that balances, precisely by clashing, utopian visions of justice with the material weight of real and symbolic borders.

Electronic Disturbance Theater builds its performance around the instability of political and institutional actors, fostering public debate. As a communication device, after all, the mobile phone amplifies the voices of transmitter and receiver. Based on the 1960s model of the "happening" pioneered by Allan Kaprow, who famously declared that "[e]ven when things have gone 'wrong,' something far more 'right,' more revelatory, has many times

emerged" (2003, 86), the productivity of provisionality emerges from Kaprow's revolutionizing of the notion of art as a temporal experience open to failure.[23] Extending this trajectory, J. Jack Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011) suggests that failure's resistance to performing within existing models of success actually carves out a space for imagining, and creatively inhabiting, other ways to be in the world. As Halberstam contends, unmastery—as a manifestation of the queer art of failure—refuses legibility within hegemonic frameworks of desire. Understanding the tool as a specifically performance-based mode of queer failure helps unlock the implications of its provisional technology, shifting the conversation from capitalist functionality and productivity to the political work of utopian poetry.

The tool's illegibility *as a provision* must be read in tandem with its illegibility *as queer*. While it may not seem obvious to link queerness and TBT, doing so extends definitions of political activism to digital and fantasy spaces by reconceptualizing assumptions about the body while never simply romanticizing technology—a central intervention of EDT member Micha Cárdenas's critical writings and performance art. Cárdenas's theory of the "transreal" describes an expansive space between fiction and non-fiction, the virtual and the real. Rather than conceiving of digital and fantasy spaces as escapist, the transreal reflects how fantasies shape everyday life, locating possibilities for self-transformation in shifting sites of identity production—a multi-dimensional becoming linked to the figure of the prototype, which Cárdenas in "Becoming Dragon" (2010) defines as being "between a model and an actual implementation." A prototype, as a tentative sample, actualizes some of its properties in the process of realizing itself, but remains provisional and subject to change. Building on Cárdenas's important theorization of the transreal, queer provisionality turns the notion of identity-as-process toward hegemonic social actors whose politics often masquerade as fixed, inflexible, and timeless. By provoking the aesthetic strategies of dominant ways of understanding racialization, gender, and sexuality, queer provisionality exposes power as contradictory, unstable, and reactionary to shifting economic conditions and social demands.

The utopian vision of the project's poetry puts pressure on teleological models of change. Yet, short- and long-term strategies remain vital in the struggle for justice: utopian visions of social transformation need not be seen as oppositional to present-based mobilization around reform and resource redistribution. The critical resurgence of utopianism in queer theory counters popular logics of anti-relational hopelessness not tenable for communities mobilizing on the ground to end heteropatriarchal white supremacy's machinations, such as mass deportation, detention, and incarceration.[24] I thus follow Kristie Soares (2014) in arguing for the necessity of utopian visions and daily acts of resilience in dialectical relation as a framework for any movement toward transformative politics. As she writes, "thinkers who look at only one half of the equation—either only at resistance or only at creation—are putting queer activism in a precarious place: a nonplace" (122). Soares reads José Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia* (2009) alongside his earlier work, *Disidentifications* (1999), which theorizes how social actors recycle oppressive representational frames as modes of empowerment in daily struggle and cultural production. Queer provisionality plays on the double meaning of provisional—as an unfinished draft or something in process pending confirmation, but also as something tangible to aid movement through (un)inhabitable geographies *just in case*. Its existence as a prototype holds in tension the notion of the provision, as a form of material or spiritual sustenance to bring with you on a journey, and provisionality, a way of acting in the world toward visions of justice without fixing boundaries on what that can or should look like in the future.

Queer provisionality is both a political tool and performance method situated between the provision and the provisional, the real and the virtual, hypervisibility and illegibility. The distinctively future-oriented reach of provisionality as a utopian gesture meets the materiality of the provision. In negotiating these spaces Electronic Disturbance Theater imagines what it would look like to live in a world where dignity and humanity get counted within the parameters of immigration and human rights discourse; alternative forms of social life have always existed in the face of power's attempt to selectively define humanity. Queer provisionality pushes the boundary of what an ethics of dissent can delineate, gesturing toward a utopian vision of political reality rooted in self-determination. At the same time, by strategically wielding the language of rights (e.g. "Migration is a Human Right") queer provisionality understands that agency can circulate within oppressive regimes without being ideologically circumscribed by structural limits. While critiquing the capitalist and globalist logics underlying rights-based discourses, the provision- of provisionality holds in tension the need to navigate within power structures as a matter of survival, not false consciousness.

Aware of the "unique structure of state violence and social emancipation" (Reddy 2011, 37), queer provisionality tactically summons the law, as in provisions made to law. However, in presently enacting visions of justice not legible within existing legal and cultural parameters, queer provisionality sees the utopian as a key tool for social change— while remaining attentive to the structurally produced traumas of border violence and policing. The force of Electronic Disturbance Theater's performance lies in its deliberate provocation of the artistry of power, or the aestheticized rehearsal of contradictory political logics as performance. This poetic provocation shifts the terms for understanding performance in relationship to social identities and institutional power; the tool's generative failures expose power's shifting and unstable technologies of coercion and control.

Bridging the significance of both abolitionist artistry and legal reform as part of grassroots movements for social justice, queer provisionality finds spaces to work within the law while challenging its limits. Even though artistic practice sometimes seems extraneous to the daily demands of organizing work, its space to imagine can create material change in the long and ongoing struggle. Both the poetry and the tool itself remain prototypes, models for a more just world around which organizers have been mobilizing for centuries —yet their provisionality manifests real effects. While replacing border violence with border abolition remains an active hope, Robin D. G. Kelley's *Freedom Dreams* (2002) reminds us that: "Struggle is par for the course when our dreams go into action. But unless we have the space to imagine and a vision of what it means fully to realize our humanity, all the protests and demonstrations in the world won't bring about our liberation" (198). Poetry alone cannot change the violent fact of the border, but its *space to imagine* exists alongside on-the-ground activism. Volunteers at No More Deaths, for example, often draw pictures on their water bottles because people crossing the border understand that the Border Patrol might poison the water, but would not make art. Refusing to either romanticize or minimize the work poetry does in the world, EDT's generative failures remind us that the site of cultural change can never be limited to the legal sphere, for transformational work must dismantle existing legal frameworks rather than recapitulate them. Social action cannot happen only at the level of the law; it must take hold of the powerful social ideas that shape perception. Queer networks of creative solidarity concretize alternative visions of reality that sustain social justice struggles.

Epilogue: Sustaining Queer Provisions

An abolitionist ethos, as I have argued, need not be pitted against strategic mobilization within the sphere of politics, despite the fact that legal frameworks often authorize the

violent production of disciplined subjects who mirror the hegemonic status quo. Yet, queer theory's anti-disciplinary anarchist refusal of institutional frameworks of legibility and recognition can and does coexist within the very institutions from which most do not have the privilege to claim freedom. Electronic Disturbance Theater's performance mode, what I have termed queer provisionality, reveals the inextricability of practice and theory, and provocatively circles theory back on itself, testing its own limitations against the weight of embodied existence. The *Transborder Immigrant Tool*, in sum, lays bare the possibilities of consciousness-raising art, but also the stakes of theory that stops short of praxis—complicating the opposition between radical paradigm shifts and legal reform.

The *Transborder Immigrant Tool* (proto)typifies queer provisionality's deliberate contradiction as an in/operable tool. Gaining its force from a refusal of binaristic formulations of instrumental/ornamental, rights/utopia, or effective/expressive, the tool's generative failures open up zones of ambiguity at the crossroads of form and technology. While conversations about technology are often mired in functionality and productivity, EDT's technological short-circuits foreground poetry *as the productive technology*. Instead of staging its intervention in hypothetical desert-crossing, the performance makes visible the artistry of power. As a result, the tool challenges immigration and human rights discourses without posing a solution that ventriloquizes the voices of migrant communities.

Capturing the production of bellicose nationalism in an archive of legal charges, FBI investigations, online comment forums, and viral media frenzy, Electronic Disturbance Theater activates as a political space of possibility something new: queer provisionality makes room for abolitionist demands and passionate dialogue in its generative, while dangerous, illegibility within teleological models of art and activism. Instead, it sees digital and imaginative spaces as vital material realities. The poetic texture of the provision cleaved to the staging of public debate locates the *Transborder Immigrant Tool* in multiple spaces of border- and reality-crossing. Utopian visions of global fellowship encounter archives of digitized hate, but EDT holds out hope as/for transformation: the dissolution of il/legality that frames discourses on migration. Ultimately, the media uproar surrounding the *Transborder Immigrant Tool* points to the inextricability of poetry from policy, art from activism.

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Notes

Notes

1. Beck played an excerpt of the video poem of "Transition (song of my cells)," co-designed by poet Amy Sara Carroll with Ricardo Dominguez, Elle Mehrmand, and Micha Cárdenas, the latter of whose voice is featured reciting Carroll's poetry. This video has been featured in various performance venues and is available for viewing on Vimeo: http://vimeo.com/6109723 (accessed 30 October 2014). ↩
2. Developers can download and install Walkingtools software at: http://www.walkingtools.net/ (accessed 30 October 2014). ↩
3. EDT archived the Beck footage here: http://www.walkingtools.net/?p=537 (accessed 23 October 2014). ↩
4. See, for example, the artwork designed by Alfredo Burgos, Pablo Alvarado, and other artists in solidarity with the "No Papers, No Fear" Ride for Justice through the South,

beginning in Phoenix, Arizona, and culminating in an appearance at the Democratic National Convention in Charlotte, North Carolina in September 2012. For more information on the UndocuBus movement, see:http://nopapersnofear.org (accessed 11 October 2014). ↩

5. For online exhibition information visit: http://www.lareplay.net/artists/ (accessed 2 July 2014). ↩

6. As Kaplan (2006) argues, digital technology's data tracking capabilities claim to streamline the convenience and quality of one's consumer choices but instead produce a "militarized subject" of the Geographic Information Systems and Global Positioning Systems central to the military industrial complex. ↩

7. For a thorough account of the way NAFTA in particular and US economic strategies of neoliberalism and globalism more generally continually exploit Latinx populations on both sides of the border, see Rosa Linda Fregoso (2003) and Lázaro Lima (2007). ↩

8. During interviews and presentations on the tool, Electronic Disturbance Theater addresses the global reach of racial capital by explicitly engaging the long history of Mexico/US relations before neoliberalism's infamous 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement, from first colonization contact to the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, compromise legislation passed under Reagan, which by design did little to slow crossings into the US but made it illegal to "knowingly" hire undocumented workers. In 1986 Congress also passed the Immigration Marriage Fraud Amendments, which regulated and defined what constituted a "genuine" marriage in order to make seamless the already inextricable link between cheap migrant labor and the nuclear family model (Luibhéid 2008a, 176). Both measures can be seen as part of the US government's record of exploiting migratory labor, as with the 1942 Bracero Treaty, at the same time as it promotes anti-migration rhetoric. ↩

9. For a detailed history of the Mexico/US border, see Gloria Anzaldúa (1987). ↩

10. For a brief genealogy of the long history of Latinx detention under the US detention regime, see David Manuel Hernández (2008). ↩

11. For more on enhancements in the coercive arm of the state post-9/11 and political spectacles of mass deportation in moments of economic crisis, see Tanya Golash-Boza (2012). ↩

12. The border remains a site not only of policing and surveillance technologies but, as Eithne Luibhéid (2002) explains, "of serious human rights abuses, including beatings, rapings, and deaths" (xviii).One aid organization, No More Deaths, recently exposed the overt hostility of Border Patrol agents, three of whom were caught on tape destroying water caches set out for crossers as a humanitarian response to the escalating number of deaths catalyzed by stricter border control (Frey 2011). The Border Patrol's own vigilante acts of destruction to potentially life-saving water stations along common migration routes takes border security to its logical conclusion, which extends beyond a legal issue to a human rights one: death. From the denial of medical service and the theft of money and medications, to overt displays of race hatred, sexual assault, torture, and murder, this belligerence reflects larger patterns of abuse, which overtly counter official protocols yet with little consequence for Border Patrol agents. ↩

13. My evocation of "tactical poetry" is less a spatial distinction Michel de Certeau makes between tactics and strategies in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) and more a temporal one, as Rita Raley theorizes in *Tactical Media* (2009). As she writes, "tactical media's imagination of an outside, a space exterior to neoliberal capitalism, is not spatial but temporal" (12). Raley defines tactical media as

"performance for which a consumable product is not the primary endgame; it foregrounds the experiential over the physical" (13). ⤶

14. Foundational queer migration scholarship focuses attention on the active production of a divide between "illegal" unauthorized migrants and "legal" assimilated citizens or victims in need of saving. Luibhéid (2008b) examines the invention of this gap particularly with respect to the movement for same-sex migrant couple rights, looking to the way the category of "illegal" circulates to regulate racialized, sexualized, and gendered bodies. ⤶
15. For more on transborder justice, see Bird (2011). ⤶
16. Empathy's limits are exposed at the site of the US immigration control apparatus, which differentially polices bodies along the lines of race, gender, sexuality, and citizenship status. ⤶
17. YouDontSpeakForMe.org is no longer active but its archive can be found here: http://immigration.procon.org/view.source.php?sourceID=003107 (accessed 31 October 2014). ⤶
18. See, for example, the New York Times bestselling author and Harvard Ph.D. in political science, Jerome Corsi's *Where's the Birth Certificate?: The Case that Barack Obama is not Eligible to be President* (2011). ⤶
19. This myth of post-raciality, or the denial of race and racism as significant factors shaping lived realities, is propelled by formal policies and cultural rhetorics of "colorblindness." As Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich (2011, 190) explain, "It has become accepted dogma among whites in the United States that race is no longer a central factor determining the life chances of Americans." Racism is alive and well, but colorblindness propagates the myth that the Civil Rights movement marked an end to institutional racism, with President Barack Obama's re/election as the ultimate excuse for closing the book on addressing racial injustices. ⤶
20. One such commenter, "jc100," (qtd. in Goldstein 2010) writes: "Helping people to break immigration laws is INDEED a waste of student dollars on many levels, regardless of the ludicrous assertion of 'performance art.' 'Enabling people not to die'? (!) Get real. We are discussing people who are not citizens of the United States and who enter the country illegally, and entitlement to an array of benefits paid for by legal US citizens." ⤶
21. See, for instance, "O Tempora, O Mores!" in the overtly white supremacist journal *American Renaissance*, founded and edited by Jared Taylor (2010). ⤶
22. While the original Transborder Immigrant Tool Homepage (http://bang.calit2.net/) is no longer operative and has since migrated to http://bang.transreal.org/, you may consult a web archive here: http://web.archive.org/web/20120627081843/http://bang.calit2.net/xborder/ (accessed 28 February 2014). All three selected "flames" included in this article are also reproduced in *Sustenance* (EDT 2010). ⤶
23. Others have since theorized failure as event. On the "political efficacy of the non-event" (201), see Marcela Fuentes (2008). ⤶
24. Queer theory's antirelational turn, which understands queerness in individualistic terms as rejecting the promise of futurity offered by the child, the family, and by extension community networks of support and belonging, is exemplified by Lee Edelman's *No Future* (2004). For a recent revival of the utopian strand, see José Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia* (2009). ⤶

Bio

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Alison Reed recently joined the Department of English at Old Dominion University as Assistant Professor of African American Literature and Studies of Race & Ethnicity. Her work on queer networks of creative solidarity as well as social identities and technologies of power has appeared in several journals including *Text and Performance Quarterly*, *Digital Creativity*, *Media-N*, and *Women & Performance*. This article is excerpted from her first book project, "Traumatic Utopias: Staging Power and Justice in Black and Latinx Queer Performance," which owes much to the support of her doctoral committee: Stephanie Batiste, Carl Gutiérrez-Jones, J. Jack Halberstam, and George Lipsitz. The author is also grateful for the fellowship of the Antiracism Inc. Working Group convened by Felice Blake and sponsored by the UCSB English Department's American Cultures & Global Contexts Center and the University of California Humanities Research Institute. Finally, the author would like to acknowledge the generative feedback of her colleagues and comrades Shannon Brennan, Jessica Lopez Lyman, Marzia Milazzo, and Kristie Soares, as well as the Performance Working Group of the Cultural Studies Association, particularly Stefanie A. Jones and Eero Laine. Likewise, many thanks to Corinne Bancroft, Steven Osuna, and Amanda Phillips for reading earlier drafts.