

Insofar as movement enables thought, and insofar as *Crossings* incites viewers to move as they look and listen, storytell/ing can be said to propel one of the key features of the autonomy of migration—the migrating being's desire and decision to move—in the exhibition space. In so doing, the multichannel structure of the installation affirms the political potential of movement. The image of the Moria Refugee Camp reproduced in figure 8.3 is highly suggestive in that regard; it shows graffiti painted on the wall of a shed behind the camp's wired fence, reading "Freedom of Movement."

BORDER TUNER/SINTONIZADOR FRONTERIZO

Border Tuner/Sintonizador fronterizo, *Relational Architecture 23* by the Mexican Canadian, Montreal-based artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer (b. 1967, Mexico City) consisted in a large-scale installation that connected communities in El Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico, between November 13 and November 24, 2019. Interactive stations—each composed of a dial, a microphone, and a speaker—were installed on both sides of the US-Mexico border: three at Bowie High School, El Paso; three in Chamizal Federal Park, Ciudad Juárez. The two locations were by then separated by layers of transport and security infrastructure, including the Cesar Chavez Border Highway/Avenue Rafael Pérez Serna, a few mesh fences, and the very recent border wall constructed under President Donald Trump's administration. At night, participants on each side could turn a dial to activate and orient the light created by a robotic searchlight. The intersection of light beams in the sky would automatically open a live computer-generated bidirectional sound channel for communication between the participants across the border or within one of the two cities (figure 8.4). As they spoke to one another as tellers and listeners, the brightness of the light beams would modulate in sync.

An estimated 12,000 people visited the *Border Tuner* sites, exchanging on a variety of subjects—personal, cultural, social, and political.²⁰ Each evening would begin with a curated 30-minute "activation," featuring *fronterizo* artists, activists, poets, musicians, historians, and Indigenous leaders on both sides of the border, invited to establish cross-border performances around issues of migration, LGBTQ+, and Indigeneity (figure 8.5).²¹ These activations included one by Puro Borde, a group of urban muralists from El Paso and Ciudad Juárez, as well as one directed by Las Platicadoras, an activist and academic feminist and decolonial collective working



FIGURE 8.4

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, *Border Tuner/Sintonizador fronterizo, Relational Architecture 23*, 2019. Xenon 7kW robotic searchlights, dials with digital encoders, webcams, GPS, speakers, microphones, custom software. Interactive area 300 × 300 yd. (275 × 275 m). Bowie High School/Parque Chamizal, El Paso/Ciudad Juárez, Texas/Chihuahua, United States/México. Photo: Monica Lozano. Courtesy of the artist, Lozano-Hemmer Studio, and Antimodular Research. © Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, "Border Tuner/Sintonizador fronterizo, Relational Architecture 23," 2019.



FIGURE 8.5

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, *Border Tuner/ Sintonizador fronterizo, Relational Architecture 23*, 2019. Xenon 7kW robotic searchlights, dials with digital encoders, webcams, GPS, speakers, microphones, custom software. Interactive area 300 × 300 yd. (275 × 275 m). Bowie High School/ Parque Chamizal, El Paso/Ciudad Juárez, Texas/Chihuahua, United States/México. Photo: Mariana Yañez. Courtesy of the artist, Lozano-Hemmer Studio, and Antimodular Research. © Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, "Border Tuner/Sintonizador fronterizo, Relational Architecture 23," 2019.

on migrant narratives and testimonies surfacing at the US-Mexico border. The latter took the form of a 30-minute-dialogue in Spanish and English between two migration advocates in Juárez and three in the United States. The conversation focused on explaining how migrating citizens are required to wait for their court hearings in tent settlements and shelters in Mexico after filing their asylum application in the US. Especially relevant to the question of coexistence, the dialogue was also about solidarity—that is, about declaring “that migrants need radical love and radical friendship, and that the migrants at the Parque Chamizal in Ciudad Juárez are not alone.”²² After the performances, participants could activate the dial and eventually communicate with someone else—strangers connecting with each other for the first time or, in many cases, individuals who already knew each other, whose relationality or relationship was made perceptible by the modulation of the light bridge’s brightness.

This was Lozano-Hemmer’s main finding: expecting a more divided El Paso-Ciudad Juárez community, he was exposed to coexisting communities with deep historical ties that they have maintained over time. Consolidating his project as a “civilian platform,” he progressively confirmed the installation as a device completely operated by residents and visitors, allowing for what became a continuum of “bipolar” (in the figurative sense of the word, ranging from joy to sadness) conversations and statements.²³ Observers, people traveling near or toward the border, could contemplate the intersecting beams of light, which were visible ten miles away. *Border Tuner* highlighted El Paso’s and Ciudad Juárez’s coexistence as sister cities, together constituting the second-largest binational metropolitan area on the US-Mexico border. More importantly, resonating with Khalili’s *The Mapping Journey Project* countergeography, *Border Tuner* worked as a counterbalance to the borderzone’s violence and the Trump administration’s adversarial rhetoric depicting the border as a porous boundary in need of securitization. As observed by the political philosopher Wendy Brown in her study on the twenty-first-century spread, bolstering, and theatricalization of border walls, the effectiveness of US-Mexico fences in deterring the flow of “irregular (im)migration” has been rather limited. They have in fact been more successful in rerouting the flow by forcing Mexicans and Central Americans to take more dangerous borderzones to reach the United States. The reinforcement of border walls has also intensified the blooming of criminal industries (including the drug-smuggling industry) that are never simply confined to borderzones but generate drug gang wars “deep inside both nations”; it has increased the violence of border areas as well as xenophobic nationalism.²⁴ President

Trump's 131-mile-long, 30-foot-high border wall in the El Paso sector of Texas and New Mexico was upgraded and built between 2018 and 2021. In his State of the Union speech in February 2019 (made nine months before *Border Tuner* was installed), the president stated that the border fence built in El Paso in 2008 had turned it from being one of the most unsafe into one of the safest cities in the United States; the statement was uttered to support his claim for further reinforcement, despite the fact that El Paso, as maintained by border patrol officials and government officials, "already had one of the lowest violent crime rates in the US" before the fence was erected in 2008, and experienced a rise of its violent crime rate "over the next four years, after the fencing went up."²⁵ The new wall's main effect has been one of deterrence—inciting people to cross the hostile Chihuahuan Desert, "where deaths from exposure have risen."²⁶

Border Tuner's visualization and auralization of the binational coexistence of El Paso and Ciudad Juárez were key to the work's counterbalancing of the Trumpian rhetoric. *Border Tuner* worked only if there were at least two participants turning the dial to activate the light beams and generate the possibility of storytelling. Storytelling unfolded then less as a utopia of togetherness than as a meeting device for strangers or an amplification device for preexisting relationships—relationships typically concealed by the discursive and physical antimigrant reinforcement of the border wall. Light was used not to make material borders visible but to enable the reciprocal coexistences they deny or disable.

Lozano-Hemmer has more specifically stated that the installation could be explored by local people to "reclaim their narrative of the border" instead of having that story defined for them by others. I understand this to be the quintessence of Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of border culture as a possibility to mix cultures.²⁷ "[T]his platform," he added, "is one of communication and reconciliation."²⁸ But the poetics of most of Lozano-Hemmer's light works, including *Border Tuner*, lies in their unpredictability: they never fully predict the relational encounters in advance, nor can they fully control them. As in the work of Richard Mosse and Forensic Oceanography, the installation repurposed surveillance technology—here, large robotic searchlights used "to track any attempt on the fence"²⁹—to generate the possibility of unscripted countervisualities and counternarratives. *Border Tuner*'s inventiveness came from the light beams' capacity to de- and reborder the two sides of the wall, much like Chico MacMurtrie's giant border-crossing robot (a work that Lozano-Hemmer particularly admires) that was designed to bend over border walls. Its inventiveness came from its materialization of storytelling (about migration,

among other issues) in unique modulations of brightness and, ultimately, from the dramatic reversal of the light beams' orientation: instead of coming from above—let us recall Alejandro González Iñárritu's *CARNE y ARENA* (2017) and its simulation of a searchlight controlled by a border patrol helicopter—the beams were now initiated and controlled from the ground by civilians.³⁰ Teresa Margolles's *La promesa* (2012) discussed in chapter 5 (Lozano-Hemmer knows Margolles's work³¹) invites us to complicate even further the simplistic understanding of *Border Tuner/Sintonizador fronterizo* as a relational, participatory, and interactive work. As the installation activated the continual relaying of storytellers, some residents and visitors were in fact taking care of each other—both giving and receiving stories, as fragmented as they may well have been.³² In short, the “/” in “storytell/ing” accounted for collectivity, interdependence, and movement (echoing Khalili's and Melitopoulos's installations), while adding the dimension of care, the challenge of care.

CRIMES OF SOLIDARITY/CRIMES DE SOLIDARITÉ

The Vietnamese American artist Tuan Andrew Nguyen (b. 1976, Saigon, Vietnam) made *Crimes of Solidarity/Crimes de solidarité*—a 71-minute-long two-channel video installation and performance—in the context of Manifesta 13, which took place in Marseille in the fall of 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the work was produced remotely from Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon) in southern Vietnam, where the artist works and lives. He worked in collaboration with refugees who lived in Marseille's Squat Saint-Just, a building that sheltered roughly 300 residents at any given time between 2018 and 2020. The occupants had received an eviction notice to leave the premises in February 2020. The initial plan had been to extend the life of the squat during the biennial by using it as a filming locale and exhibition place, but the squat burned down in June, forcing the evacuation of the residents. The resulting work took the form of an “incomplete” video. In an interview with *Artforum*, Nguyen described the production as a growing script made in conversation and in collaboration with the former squat tenants (most of them Nigerians), whom he invited to share what they were willing to share with him and eventually with a larger audience. The Skype discussions were recorded and turned into scripted scenes.³³ More than 70 percent of the script was made using the former tenants' words.³⁴ The work evolved into live performances held in a new venue, the Music Conservatory of Marseille. The video was played with muted dialogue on a large