



But when one draws a boundary it may be for various kinds of reasons. If I surround an area with a fence or a line or otherwise, the purpose may be to prevent someone from getting in or out; but may also be part of a game and the players be supposed, say, to jump over the boundary; or it may show where the property of one man ends and that of another begins; and so on. So if I draw a boundary line that is not yet to say what I am drawing it for.—Wittgenstein¹

By some measures, the U.S. Secure Fence Act of 2006 funded the single largest and most expensive building project in the United States of the 21st Century. It finances approximately 800 miles of fortification dividing the U.S. from Mexico that can cost up to \$16 million dollars per mile. Known as the Mexico - United States Barrier, the Great Wall of Mexico, Border Fence, and Border Wall, the construction of this wall has transformed the large cities, small towns, and the multitude of cultural and ecological biomes along its path. It is a scenario engineered for a conceptual *tabula rasa* defined by the United States Department of Homeland Security Secretary, Michael Chertoff, who was given unprecedented powers by President George Bush to waive any and all laws in order to expedite the wall's construction.² Ignoring the rich and diverse contexts found along the border not only raises critical questions of urbanism, ecology, politics, economics, archaeology, and eminent domain (to name a few), it also radically redefines and transforms the territories of the frontera.

The area along U.S. / Mexico border is one of the fastest growing regions in the Americas. 90% of the entire border population resides in 14 principal sister cities abutting this boundary; and these populations are expected to more than double in the next ten years.³ Currently the "longest contiguous international divide between a superpower and a developing nation," this region contains three of the ten poorest counties in the United States, with twenty-one of the border counties being designated as "economically distressed."⁴ Rapid urbanization and industrialization on both sides of the border have led to ecological degradation and limited access to basic health and sanitation services. The erection of the U.S. / Mexico border fence has exacerbated these conditions, dividing families and communities and rupturing urban continuities.

Borderwall as Architecture suggests that the wall, at such prices, should and could be thought of not only as security, but also as productive infrastructure— as a means to knit communities together, control and organize future urban growth, aggregate civic space, collect and organize local amenities, and function as the very backbone of a borderland economy. This proposal theorizes the wall as a mechanism with the potential to act as a progressive agent of planned growth and economic stimulation. Coupling the wall with viable infrastructure—this proposal thus far focuses on social infrastructure, water, and renewable energy—presents a pathway to security and safety in border communities and the nations beyond them. *Borderwall as Architecture* is a proposition for a wide array of retrofits and new schemes for the U.S./ Mexico border wall that builds on existing conditions and seeks to ameliorate current problems created by the physical divider. Taking advantage of the material realities of the border wall and using its presence as a catalyst, this project lays the groundwork for thoughtful, engaged and responsible development in the bi-national border region, both during and after the presence of the border fence. As border populations balloon, this project asks how the wall itself can become an agent for city-making, a means of mediating the inevitable collision of sister cities along the border, and a framework for activating spaces of connectivity rather than of mere security.

Borderwall as Architecture is an ongoing project lead and conceived by California based Rael San Fratello Architects. The project exists currently as a targeted and varied series of studies and physical designs for specific conditions along the U.S. / Mexico border wall. The proposal has been presented to leaders in the design community and to head policy makers in Washington D.C. While these initial conversations proved incredibly fruitful, the



SISTER CITIES ALONG U.S.-MEXICO BORDER

DESIGNERS:

Rael San Fratello Architects, established in 2002 by partners Ronald Rael and Virginia San Fratello, is an internationally recognized award-winning firm whose focus on emerging technologies and ecological design lies at the intersection of architecture, art, culture, and the environment. As practitioners and academics, we seek to bridge the gap between the theory and practice of ecological thinking through design and are committed to innovation through research, analysis and artistry. Rael San Fratello Architects is proud to be considered among the few young architecture offices in the country that merge the social/ecological project with digital practice.

Borderwall as Architecture has evolved over the course of the past three years under Rael San Fratello Architects. The project team includes: Ronald Rael (principal), Virginia San Fratello (principal), Emily Licht, Brian Grieb, Nicholas Karklins, Plamena Milusheva, Colleen Paz, Molly Reichert.

For video presentations of *Borderwall as Architecture* visit:

-- http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_

[embedded&v=dM_fOKv8QI0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=dM_fOKv8QI0)

-- <http://www.vimeo.com/8549290>

SCHEDULE:**APRIL - JUNE 2011**

-- Research and preparation for travel to sister cities

JULY 2011

-- Site Visit: El Paso, Texas and Ciudad Juarez, Mexico

-- Site Visit: Nogales, AZ and Nogales, MX

AUGUST 2011

-- Synthesize materials collected from site visits, refine designs, conduct additional research

SEPTEMBER - NOVEMBER 2011

-- production of deliverables, renderings, maps, models, animations

DECEMBER 2011

--Site Visit: Calexico, California and Mexicali, Mexico

JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2012

--completion of catalogue of design charettes along the border

--completion of animations and models

-- Packaging and finalization of Biennial presentation

MARCH 2012

--Materials arrive in Rotterdam

CONTACT:

Ronald Rael

Rael San Fratello Architects

2200 Adeline Street, Suite 360

Oakland, CA 94607

e: studio@rael-sanfratello.com

t: (510) 207-2960