

**Writing the Visual:
An Interview with Lawrence Taylor and Maeve Hickey¹**

The noon skies turned midnight black and cracked open, roaring with lightening. The summer monsoons had come at last to this southwestern desert. We just made it onto the bus, three of the younger kids and I, but the windows would not close, and the weather followed us in. First came the sheets of rain – soaking stoic adults and ecstatic children – then the hail, like silver bullets from some army of drunken outlaws, bouncing off the green vinyl seats and into our laps. David and Gordito rushed from window to window, pointing with delight. Outside, water was everywhere, cascading down the steep hillsides from rooftop to rooftop, roaring through the avenidas, turning parking lots into ponds. We made it back to Mi Nueva Casa by the border, where it had already stopped raining. The streets down there were far less flooded, but the water was still on its way down the hills, as I discovered twenty minutes later when I tried to work the few hundred yards to the border gate. The roads were gone, replaced by raging rapids three feet deep, black with muck and heaving sticks and plastic jugs into my legs as I staggered from one pole or building site to the next. I waded through a final swirling eddy, where a young woman clasping an infant to her breast balanced uncertainly on a battered shopping cart. Past the turnstile into the United States, I climbed the higher streets of Nogales, Arizona, where I had left my car. Safely on my way north toward Tubac, I remembered the tunnel and tried to imagine what the rains brought to it. I heard the story the next day from Chito, who, along with many others, had been too far inside the silent gloom to hear the thunder.

‘We were deep inside, in the tunnel they call “Los Vampiros” – the one that goes through Buenos Aires. All of a sudden we heard noise, and some people came running; they had been crossing to the other side. There were about fifteen. And then we heard a wave behind them. They shouted, “Here comes the water!”’ Chito undulated his arms to imitate the flood waves.

‘And the next thing I knew, firemen, police and la migra (Border Patrol) started coming, and they grabbed us and pulled us up. There were many in the water, and many people were on the other side. The migra took only a few friends and put them in a room, so I ran for the border.’

Flushed into the United States.

(Taylor and Hickey 1997: ix–x)

AO: We would like to begin with a question about the nature of your collaboration. How, for example, is the notion of authorship negotiated? We’re thinking here of the relationship between writerly and visual modes of representation. Given Maeve’s conceptual training and experience as a photographer/artist and Larry’s anthropological

¹ Interview of Lawrence Taylor (LT) and Maeve Hickey (MH), conducted by Áine O’Brien (AO) and Alan Grossman (AG) for inclusion in *Tunnel Kids: Installation* catalogue publication, ‘Migration and Location: Visual Media Research’ Conference, Dublin, 5 November 2001.

background, how do these diverse strands intersect both in terms of the research process and its mode of representation?

LT: Our collaboration has evolved over time, beginning with the book *The Road to Mexico* (Taylor and Hickey 1997). Maeve had lived in the border area and had shot a number of photographs, one of which was in fact called the 'Road to Mexico' that always appealed to me. One fateful day I suggested to Maeve that she should consider putting together an entire exhibit or a book of photography, comprising images collected on the road that begins in Tucson, Arizona and crosses the border to Mexico. Maeve asked if I would write something to accompany the photographs, which I thought interesting yet a daunting prospect. I had visited the area on a number of occasions but I hadn't actually lived or indeed worked there for any period of time. She convinced me and off we went.

When we began working together on what we thought would be a book, we agreed right away not to 'illustrate' one another. I wouldn't be writing things that described the photos and Maeve wouldn't be illustrating what I wrote. And it became a kind of established procedure right from the beginning that we would go along this road . . . sometimes together, sometimes not, and so the project which we initiated in 1994 was defined in terms of the place and our visions and experiences. We were out there for about nine months in an old pick-up truck rattling up and down the road to the border and across it, and then came back the next year for another three months. And during this time we evolved a way of working together; for example, when visiting a certain place Maeve would wander off and take photos of the things she was interested in and I would inevitably engage somebody in conversation . . . this is reflected in the book. So each chapter in *The Road to Mexico* is both a series of encounters with one or more people and photographs of different places. . . . The University of Arizona Press present the book as a collaboration in the form of two different narratives of the road, one in pictures and photographs and the other through written encounters:

Equipped with camera, pen and a lively curiosity, photographer Maeve Hickey and writer Lawrence J. Taylor set out to capture whatever might come their way on the Road to Mexico. They roamed and rambled, they stayed well off the beaten track, and they talked to nearly everyone they met, from wisecracking

waitresses to landed gentry to street urchins dressed in rags. Their book brings to life the calf ropers and casinos, the saints and sinners, the mariachis and miracles in a no-man's-land that sometimes seems to belong neither to the United States nor to Mexico.²

This way of working subsequently developed in our next project, *Tunnel Kids*. Do you want to take it from there?

MH: Well, the first thing to say about our collaboration is that it simply shapes itself. I always think of us as two artists working together. Larry has a particular anthropological training that influences him as a writer, so we are two artists working together using different media or modes of expression that don't compete with one another. It's beneficial to me collaborating with somebody who thinks very artistically and creatively and who doesn't crowd my own particular way of working. He certainly trusts my instincts, perhaps more than his own on occasions, which I think is quite lucky in the case of two people collaborating.

LT: I agree. I certainly would describe this book [*Tunnel Kids*] as a story narrated by an anthropologist rather than an ethnography in the traditional academic mode. There are of course other anthropologists who have been trying experimental narrative forms, so I'm certainly not alone in this regard. But the collaboration with Maeve, in this case working with an artist, represented a kind of licence, an opportunity, rather than a limitation – it was enabling and liberating. In the writing, I am trying not only to talk about the world, sometimes in an analytic way, if subtly, but also to capture, as an artist or novelist would, the texture and quality of everyday life. I want to give readers a sense of what's going on and why people are doing what they are doing, but what it's like in a meaningful and imaginative way to find ourselves in certain situations, in such a place, doing this seemingly strange work of living alongside a group of migrant kids who have been shaped by forces and conditions so different to what we know.

² <<http://www.uapress.arizona.edu/books/bid1039.htm>> [Accessed 10 November 2001].

It seems to me that our knowledge of the other is always mediated. Somebody is always out there on the edge of something, actually meeting people, talking with them and trying to make sense of their lives, attempting to convey why they're doing what they're doing. This I would say is ultimately how knowledge of a particular kind emerges whatever package it arrives in and so my writing tries to convey this with all the attendant frailties of the process. In reading various anthropological accounts I am often struck by the absence of imaginative writing, failed opportunities if you like, to capture the poetic dimensions of people's worlds. So working with both an artist and the kids helped establish an inventive environment that lent itself to a more creative engagement with its written representation. Interestingly, I had an increasing sense of the kids themselves performing as artists, whether for each other or in front of and through use of the video camera:

A few days later it was raining again, and this time I took my car through the low streets of Nogales, Sonora. Afraid of more floods, I tore out of the house and tip-toed across the swirling, stinking pond that had in twenty minutes filled Avenida Fenochio, climbed into my car, and plowed a wake through Calle Capillo, driving north a few hundred yards to the border. But it was just an average summer afternoon rain, enough to send a few inches of brown water flowing through the border streets. Safely across on the drier Arizona roads, I thought of Chito and the others, and pulled up to the US end of the tunnel, where it opens up into the concrete embankments of the the Nogales Wash, just past Church's Chicken on Grand Avenue.

Leaning over the guardrail, I looked down into the opening – the scene of Chito's rescue a few days earlier. Chocolate water about a foot and a half deep was rushing through the large rectangular opening, just big enough for a car to drive through. I saw a sneaker flash in the gloom, then the pale smiling face of Chito 'of the flood'. The others were there, too: El Boston, La Fanta, Jesús, El Negro, La Negra, Humberto, Gilberto, and two little boys of about eleven and eight whom I did not yet know. They came grinning into the daylight, flashing Barrio Libre gang signs, and pushing a soccer ball through the churning rapids. They formed a circle in the open tunnel and began to knee, head and throw the ball around – laughing and falling into the water. They were like any group of exuberant teenagers enjoying a summer rain. 'Lorenzo', they shouted up to me, '¿Not tiene el video?' – 'Don't you have the video?' I obliged, taking a film of their water sports that they would often ask to see in the coming months.

(Taylor and Hickey 2001: x–xi)

AG: In terms of collaboration, when choosing a particular location, for example, the US–Mexico border site of Nogales, presumably there was discussion between you in

advance as to what you planned to do, issues you wished to explore or indeed how the work might evolve at a very basic level.

LT: Actually, far less than you could possibly imagine. You should have been here earlier today, when we discussed the next plan, which was shaped within three minutes and with thousands of miles of geography in front of us.

AG: I suppose what I'm getting at is the manner in which you come together to talk about research, given that you're both pursuing different activities. Larry, for example, out and about driving the kids with Maeve often elsewhere on a shoot. So would you then discuss what Maeve has photographed and how this could potentially be interesting for Larry to explore and vice versa?

LT: Sure, on a daily basis. Naturally we discussed at length what we were doing, and also what we were experiencing emotionally. It was often tough and demanding work, very much a roller coaster ride with the kids, which I think is reflected in the book both in the photographs and the writing. We were involved in their lives on a daily basis and so were subject to if not exposed to a whole gamut of emotions, often needing to deal with individual problems. From my point of view, I had to be as adaptable as possible, since we often planned a trip which didn't materialize due to one problem or another. Most of the time it was about going with the flow, not really knowing how the day would unfold. This way of working and the sheer unpredictability of events was very different from earlier fieldwork of mine in Donegal, where at least I could count on the houses and the people being where I left them the night before.

AO: Maeve, did you want to add anything to that?

MH: When we're working together on a project such as the *Tunnel Kids*, the everyday work is totally engaging. It becomes a way of life, a complete reality and world, where everything seems to be absorbed and channelled into the work.

LT: Certainly. I would often urge Maeve to go out and photograph something I had seen on the day although often this never worked.

MH: What did happen frequently is that if I experienced something or met somebody I would say, ‘Larry, I saw this most interesting thing that you have to see’. So Larry would set out, meet the person, and almost always come away with useful material. The reverse, however, was not as simple. Larry would say to me, ‘I saw something I would like you to photograph that could well be helpful to me or maybe even you’. But looking back, I don't think I ever came up with anything I could use following Larry's suggestion, not without trying I should add. Maybe this is something to do with my own independent way of working.

AO: Maeve, perhaps if you are trained as an artist as opposed to an anthropologist, there is an intuitive, instinctive way of entering into your subject matter. That's not to dismiss research modes in academic inquiry which have their own organizing structures and discourses that sustain the work over time. Yet this thing called instinct or trust in relation to the subject in question is no less rigorous as it's something that is equally developed over time, disciplining your selection of what photographic object to focus on. Arguably, the richness of your collaboration is inherent in the combination of two different working methodologies.

MH: Yet there is a danger in this too.

AO: Sure.

MH: This is the trickiest part for me. I have to be thinking and alert all the time. Am I listening to what my collaborator has to say or am I switched off, not listening at all? Am I perhaps listening too much? Often my tendency is to say, ‘Nah, I'll do it this way, my way’. I find that I have to stop myself from rejecting something out of hand and force myself to listen. But then the question pops into my head whether I'm being influenced too much? So it's back and forth much of the time as I don't want to dismiss what's good

and potentially interesting just because I can't let my instinct get blown off course. A delicate balance is required all the time.

LT: I think that's true. Beyond any differences in our respective training, we are two different artists with different characters. Then of course there's the fundamental distinction between writing and the visual arts, particularly the editorial dimension inherent in the writing process. For the written word is changed and re-changed all the time and this is markedly different to decisions made in relation to how and when you take photographs, where your essential choice is either to capture an image or not, however you might work with it later. Writing, in contrast, is all about rewriting. It's a fluid, ongoing and flexible process that allows me to feel less fragile about what is written. So, if I'm going to write something I don't worry too much about listening or being influenced one way or the other.

MH: But this question of listening doesn't come up on a moment to moment basis because I mostly work intuitively and instinctively. It arises more so on a grander scale, for example, in terms of the future direction of a given project.

AG: Could I then return to the early stages of working with the kids and your underlying conception of the projected output? Did you, for example, plan to produce a book which would contain portraits of the tunnel kids from the outset of the work?

MH: No.

LT: We began volunteering at the shelter, trying to help the kids out in various ways. It was only after we'd begun spending time with the kids that the idea for the book took hold. I recall showing Boston and some of the other kids a copy of *The Road to Mexico*, which happened to arrive during one summer and saying to them that we wanted to write a book about their lives that would incorporate images of them. Boston responded favourably to the idea. By then, Maeve was already taking photographs of the kids. It was Maeve, I think, who had a clearer idea about a book, especially on the subject of the

border and the two cities of Nogales's [Sonora and Arizona]. As a writer, the idea of a book had much appeal, since it presented the possibility of engaging with the border through the kids, whose everyday existence was shaped significantly by living on and under the border. We also thought it worthwhile to present a human portrait of these kids, while certainly not angels, were often misunderstood and misrepresented. I would say that by the end of our second summer I had this idea and wanted to do a book and Maeve did as well.

MH: It was in fact during this period that the University of Arizona Press, who published *The Road to Mexico*, unexpectedly approached me about supporting any book project that I had in mind. I was quite taken aback by this gesture, particularly since I had told them that I had no clear ideas about present/future work. I did, however, mention our involvement with the tunnel kids and they expressed keen interest in publishing whatever work we might produce, which took us both by surprise.

LT: That's right. The commissioning editor from the press actually laid out an open invitation on the table which understandably was difficult to reject. At the time, Maeve was busy photographing the kids in various places as well as taking their portraits which were actually hung in the shelter, transforming it into a gallery of sorts. As to the book, the editor, Maeve and I began to discuss how best to represent the relationship between the written and photographic aspects of the publication:

In an instinctive and affectionate way, Flor also grew closer to Maeve, who was busy with her camera at Mi Nueva Casa. She was trying to find a way to teach the kids something of value and decided to hold a regular 'class' every Wednesday afternoon. The class rarely went smoothly and never lasted very long, but once there, the kids that came showed great enthusiasm for the enterprise. Maeve succeeded in teaching Flor and a few of the other kids how to operate everything from a Polaroid to a fully manual vintage Pentax, once again belying what we had been told about their abilities and attention span. Maeve was also trying to help make Mi Nueva Casa more like a home by covering its walls with a series of portraits of the kids. Flor and Chito decided they would help her. They took their own photos and acted as her assistants, handling equipment, directing subjects, discussing the virtues of black and white over color. 'Next victim', Chito would shout into the house and then bring another kid out into the sun-drenched courtyard. 'You must stand here', he told each one. 'That's where we all stand.' And so they would. Each one would strike his or her

own pose, some looking like they always did, but others becoming suddenly 'other' – posing, pretending, revealing – proud, hopeful, frightened, distant.

(Ibid: 64)

I learned an awful amount that I didn't expect through working with a photographer. I knew I'd get better quality photographs than anthropologists typically get – I knew that much at least. But what was really interesting was the photographic process itself and observing that unfold. Namely, the way the kids responded to the photographer and the extent to which they reflected on issues of photographic representation – a subject that I briefly touched upon in the book. So, it was fascinating to observe the interactions surrounding the use of photography, for example, how the gallery was constructed in the shelter, how the kids used this space to accommodate their own needs and the importance of the portraits regarding their self-worth. From the very beginning of the work the photographs assumed an importance for the kids in a way that writing didn't or couldn't, since the written component of the work was a future abstract notion for them, unlike the huge portraits hanging in the shelter, which were real and useful objects that received much attention and care.

AO: I would like to ask you about the editorial decisions made by Arizona Press, particularly the decision to use portraiture in the book. Given the fact that Maeve was shooting in different locations, I was wondering if you felt any pressure surrounding the limitations of a book format and whether you had to edit out much of the visual material that you would otherwise include – or maybe not – in an exhibit?

MH: There was no pressure from the press. As I said, they were supportive of whatever I wanted to do. While I had accumulated many photographs of the kids in different locations, my decision to use ultimately formal portraits as a contribution to the book was quite straightforward. I wasn't entirely happy with the quality of images I was getting from wandering around and it was actually difficult work under these circumstances. On the other hand, work on the portraits progressed nicely and acquired a certain quality that provided a counterpoint to Larry's lively narrative about the kids and their hyperactivity. Remember the kids were homeless teenagers and that one drama often followed the next,

in addition to plenty of movement and restlessness. So, Larry's writing covered these issues creatively and the decision to include portraits provided the opportunity to portray them differently, quietly and in a more open-ended manner.

LT: I think the kids were also showing off something of themselves in the portraits.

MH: They certainly were.

LT: They were very interested in appearing the way they wanted to appear.

AO: Do you mean they had more control over self-portrayal in these portraits?

LT: Sure. They were comfortable around photographs as so many Mexicans tend to be – they got involved in the process quickly and easily. Aspects of themselves were being presented as an ongoing conversation with Maeve through the lens:

The kids, especially Chito and Flor, became increasingly conscious of the usefulness of the camera to record and validate the moments of their lives, which was hardly a foreign notion in Mexico, where every public occasion finds street photographers memorializing the event for those who can afford it. But now they had cameras readily available, and they themselves were able to use them whenever and wherever the occasion demanded, as when we were all together on the day of Guanato's departure for Guadalajara. We waited with him that morning in the cavernous, sweltering bunker of a station, along with families still stretched out on blankets from the night before. Guanatos held his ticket tightly in one hand and a plastic shopping bag Ramona had packed with clothes and snacks in the other. We were at a loss as to what to do with the remaining moments when Flor, like a compulsive aunt at a wedding, began to arrange us for the photos. She had to have every possible shot of Guanatos, passing Davidcito around like a prop and making one after the other of us join or leave the photo.

(Ibid: 63–4)

MH: Returning to the question of portraits in the book, I wanted them to have both an elegance and simplicity – a resting place if you like for the reader or viewer, since as I

said earlier Larry's text is snappy in contrast to the portraits, which are deliberately reflective and composed.

LT: I think the contrast in *Tunnel Kids* between the two media depictions is interesting. Had there been greater similarity between the style of writing and the photographic content, the two may have been in danger of converging, indeed blending into each other, and readers would be less struck perhaps by the individuality of each of the portraits. I would hope that the juxtaposition in the book makes one think about what constitutes a photograph, because the image is looking at you, working on you very differently to the impact of the text. Ideally, this kind of positioning should guard against simply incorporating the images and text into a single story, a kind of collective image forming in your mind comprising words and pictures. Instead you're presented with a format that hopefully makes you think about the very difference between photography and writing. At issue here is the question of authorship where we began this discussion and it seems to me our decision to present the material in this way clarifies our collaboration around authorship. It's not simply a combination of photography with text, but clearly two different eyes and moods conveyed throughout the book.

AO: I think this emerges quite clearly in the set of portraits since your role as a subject Maeve, in the portraits, is explicitly marked because it's so patterned, consistent and very deliberate. What is interesting, as you were saying, is how the subjects themselves, that is the children, did not simply take control of the photographs, but that their sense of self appears far more reflective and self-conscious than when you photographed them in different contexts. As a reader, what works well, is watching the photographs evolve while simultaneously listening to the narrative unfold. I do think the question of authorship is important here because I sense your viewing position outside the frame yet you're also inscribed in the frame.

LT: I think so.

AO: It's a different notion of voice operating.

LT: Yes. This is interesting and leads us conveniently into one of your questions about the nature of the ethnographic encounter, with Boston, one of the characters in the book, and indeed with the rest of the kids.

AG: Right. We were interested in your pointed choice of the word ‘conversation’ to describe your many encounters with the kids. In Boston’s case, you allow and indeed encourage him to set the research agenda. Why did you choose to do this? Was it merely an instinctive decision at the time, or was this pre-planned, perhaps adhering to reflective ethnographic methodology?

LT: There was little pre-planned, rather opportunities presented themselves as we went along. The term ‘conversation’ seemed to capture this open-ended quality. Of course, certain kinds of situations were generated and made possible as a result of our presence in this particular community. For example, the fact that they posed as subjects in a series of portraits or that Boston came up with this role as ‘reporter’. In that opening scene of the book, I frankly didn’t know what I had in mind other than to use the video camera, which I knew the kids wanted to play with, since we had spoken about filming different things together around Nogales. I just wanted to see if it were possible to use the camera to gain access to their points of view on various issues. Yet when Boston remarked that he wanted to be a reporter and ask questions, I thought that’s interesting, let’s see what he comes up with. I then took the further step of asking him to write the questions down, which I think is a good example of both taking control of a situation and simultaneously allowing something to happen – a ‘conversation’ if you like. I’m confident in saying that if I didn’t have him write the questions, they wouldn’t have developed as interestingly as they did in a number of respects. Thinking about the questions and writing them gave Boston an air of seriousness that was astounding to watch. It became a hugely significant project for him once he began, making him feel important for there was something very real and tangible about the task. Rather than calling that process ‘imposing an analytical frame’, or ‘creating a research divide’, I see it

more in terms of an opening of a space in which the kids willingly entered, facilitating the emergence of all sorts of conversations:

Boston was blasé. It was a nearly normal morning.

'You have the video again', he noted over his breakfast, looking at the camera on the table. 'You filmed us in the tunnel yesterday. Are we going to make a film?'

'We could make a video about all of you here in Mi Nueva Casa', I suggested. 'We could go around Nogales and film whatever you think is important. We could start with the interviews.'

Boston turned serious. 'I could do that; Soy el reportero!'

'Maybe you could write down some suggestions to ask all of your friends here', I suggested.

He agreed immediately, and I handed him a piece of paper and a pen. Boston bent to his task. Nose inches from the paper, he scribbled without looking up for half an hour or more. He handed me the completed sheet, a list of numbered, neatly scribbled questions, but then took them back before I could read them.

'They are not in the right order. I will recopy them.' Finally, Boston handed me his reworked list of forty-four questions . . .

Reading through the questions, I was stunned by their number and surprised by their direction. They began as you might expect: 'What's your name? Where are you from?' But the subsequent questions sought nothing more on the distant past of family and tierra (homeland), turning rather to where and how the kids lived and who they were now – in and under the streets of Nogales. Boston wanted to explore the life of Barrio Libre. The markers of that life, of that identity, were clear in the questions: fights, drugs, and clothes. Most of all, he wanted to know how long and how deep was their sense of belonging in that fellowship.

But then, somewhere in the middle of the list, Boston's focus switched. Subtly, his questions began to suggest a certain ambivalence: he wanted to press his friends to defend their life and even to think about the future.

Have you ever been bored by your barrio?

Why?

Have you thought about changing your way of being?

If you were king of this world, would you like there to be cholos?

Why?

Are you happy as you are?

Why?

The intent seemed almost subversive – and from Boston, the most cholo of cholos. Further down the list, he returned to the life of the barrio, but in a more reflective and even critical way that might encourage his friends to think about how they had been changed, and not always for the better,

since joining the gang. That same mood seemed to continue with questions that linked the present with the future: questions about girlfriends and boyfriends and about the possibility of marriage.

'Very interesting', I said. 'Do you want to ask them something more about the future at the end? Like where they hope to be, say, ten years from now?' Boston liked the idea, but tempered the 'hope'. He wrote, 'Dentro de diez años mas adelante, que cres que pase contigo?' — 'In another ten years, what do you believe will be happening with you?'

Those were Boston's questions.

I was evidently impressed, and he was proud, but all business.

'Let's go in the schoolroom', he told me. 'I will interview everyone, and you can film it with the video camera.'

'Juán', he announced to one of his friends, 'come with us; you're first.'

(Ibid: 6–9)

AO: Were the conversations that shape the narrative structure of the work transcribed from audio or are they post recollections of conversations, written from memory and fashioned to create a dramatic, if not theatrical world of characters and shifting locations? There seems to be at play different layers of translation at work. For example, from a street dialect of spoken Spanish to your own English-language translation and then the crafted narrative that emerges in the book for public consumption. Who then is the audience for the book?

LT: Much of the material in the book was transcribed from audio-cassette and through use of the video camera. I would listen to the tapes repeatedly because I often missed words – some of the kids were far harder to understand than others. On a few occasions, for example, the playful scene in the swimming pool where obviously I didn't have a tape recorder, I jotted down key words afterwards. Yet by then I was already quite familiar with the kids, so when reconstructing a series of exchanges, if in doubt, I tended to fall back on the idiom and turn of phrase associated with the individual kid. So, no, it was not a verbatim reconstruction but one which tried to capture and reflect the style of the particular kid's talk or use of language. I suppose you could view this as an artistic translation on my behalf – an attempt to convey both the richness and sound of their talk to English-language readers.

AG: Maeve, did you have a particular audience or constituency in mind so far as your work on *Tunnel Kids* was concerned?

MH: I don't tend to think along these lines so this question never really occurred to me. Should people take an interest in my work then of course that's very gratifying and I consider myself fortunate.

AG: What about you, Larry?

LT: I certainly would be very different in this regard because there were many decisions I had to make as a writer, which directly relate to this question, not at every stage of the writing but more surrounding the kinds of issues we've been talking about. I wanted the book to be read by the general intelligent person out there and to a lesser extent by a restricted academic audience. Although, in saying that, during the course of the writing, I was also thinking of anthropology students as potential readers.

AG: Sure. Can I shift the discussion to your use of visual technologies as an ethnographic research tool. In reading the book, one gets the impression that the use of a technological device such as the camera or indeed video, functioned to establish a sense of ethnographic authority in the 'field', both for yourselves and in the eyes of the children. Would the narrative account of the research been very different had you not chosen to include in the book visual representations of the kids?

LT: I'll give a swift reply regarding video and then Maeve can respond on the subject of the camera. In short, I would say it established no authority at all. You really need to understand how video was introduced in the first place. If, for example, I had shown up not knowing these kids and their initial encounter with me was of this stranger turning a video camera on them, then, yes, that would certainly have established a particular kind of power dynamic and hierarchy to which I think you're alluding. The work didn't materialize that way at all. To begin with, we already knew these kids for a long while before the video camera came into play and I introduced it more or less as a toy that we

could share in our various excursions. Flor, Boston and Jesús actually took possession of the camera most of the time. On occasions, Flor would pretend she was a reporter, poking the video camera into kids' faces, urging them to respond to her questions. I would say that the technology, as you put it, didn't operate in the way you've suggested as I don't think I was the person identified with the camera. After all, I wasn't a professional filmmaker shooting on location, which I'm sure is reflected in the video material.

MH: The 'camera as an ethnographic tool'. The thought would never occur to me. I'm an artist. The camera is just another paintbrush to work with as a means to an end.

AG: Sure.

AO: As to the last question, Larry, it seems to me that as one reads through the narrative in the book, your prose touches regularly on aspects of the visual whether it's Maeve's physical presence somewhere in the vicinity, describing where she is, what she's doing and so on, or even your explicit and implicit accounts of happenings around you. What I'm trying to say is that the visual in its various dimensions seems to shape your narrative.

LT: I think that's true and significantly to do with the fact that I was collaborating with Maeve. If you're working with a photographer on a daily basis then you're bound to be made more visually aware of how you view and represent something. This undoubtedly has had a forceful impact on my writing in its various stages. I've always been interested in the visual and became much more self-consciously so in constantly talking with Maeve and observing her at work. I'm actually very familiar with Maeve's photos as she is with my writing, which she's always quoting back at me. Her images are engraved in my mind. So I have a very strong sense of her eye at least as it manifests itself in our work together:

Soon we were on the road again, heading farther south. As we approached the edge of the city, the vista widened, and newly plowed, wide dirt roads led into industrial parks with dozens of huge, hangerlike structures.

'Maquiladoras', Boston said. 'There are many of them.' In fact, there were nearly one hundred by then, assembly plants that formed the core of the new industry dominating every big Mexican border town and a fair few some distance into the interior.

'There, turn left', Boston told me, and we jolted over the railroad tracks that, like the main road there, traveled from south to north, from the rest of Mexico to the border. We sailed through a knot of cars nudging one another in a triple dirt-road intersection and began to climb slowly out of the narrow valley floor of the city and up increasingly provisional and crumbling roads into the colonias that housed the great majority of Nogalenses.

'Here is Solidaridad. I know those people there', Jesús said, nodding toward a knot of young men, women, and dust-smeared, lively children chatting by a large white plastic pipe jutting out of a dirt hillside. Behind them were a ditch road and a line of houses, each assembled out of available materials – particle board, plywood, cardboard, even sheets of plastic – fastened together and topped by roofs of yet more uncertain construction, considering the sudden winds and rains of the summer storms. The sheets of tar paper or tin were weighted down by concrete blocks or large stones – or, in one fascinating case, by all the metal belongings of the family, including several bicycles and a wheelbarrow.

(Ibid: 27)

AO: Maeve, in a previous conversation a few weeks back you spoke of the US–Mexico border and mentioned how often the notion of the 'fragment' provides a careful working device or method for visual artists, since it works to isolate content yet becomes unique in and of itself.

MH: Definitely. When we were involved with *The Road to Mexico* (1997) everything about the work seemed overwhelming as I wasn't able to take it all in. And so I conceptualized and divided my photographic work up into fragments, not worrying too much how the various pieces added up which carried me through the project.

AO: And then at some point in our discussion Larry commented on the importance of, or indeed the need for, a unifying structure to tie the fragments together. Somehow you both obviously were able to resolve this tension?

LT: For me *The Road to Mexico* presented more of a problem in that respect than did *Tunnel Kids*. With respect to the former, I was more willing to accept, out of necessity

perhaps, and this also derived out of our collaboration, the need for textually disconnected fragments which went against the grain of my academic training. Interestingly, much of everyday life is experienced in this way where things don't cohere perfectly or necessarily make sense. So, as a writer collaborating with Maeve, I felt increasingly comfortable working in a fragmentary manner, much more so than had I been working alone. But as a writer, if you have the notion to begin with that you're writing a manuscript, then from the outset you're simultaneously thinking about different sections, what goes where, what's missing and so on.

MH: But to think as I do in terms of fragments does not fundamentally imply that I work in a fragmented way. While my artistic thinking is not necessarily geared towards the end product, I'm still striving for a certain consistency in my working methods.

LT: For me, there are further issues here related to my anthropological training as well as being a writer in a more general sense. Certainly in my writing, I'm trying, successfully or not – since I may end up pleasing nobody and this is the danger – to capture a sense of the social and cultural world out there and its inherent processes – but in ways which are not stifling. What is therefore important to me is not to conceal those aesthetic dimensions inherent in a particular cultural world that too often are absent in conventional anthropological representation.

AG: From reading the book and listening to you talk, I was wondering more generally about the nature of knowledge conveyed through the visual arts in contrast to knowledge transmitted through the written word, the distinction between pictorial and writerly forms of knowledge. Are they indeed separate and irreconcilable domains, but yet, when brought together as is in the case of *Tunnel Kids*, they are altered or effected or metamorphosed in a way which cannot be readily defined and explained. There are those, I imagine, who would prefer to keep these forms separate and others who would be more comfortable inhabiting the intersection between the two. Do either of you have any thoughts about this?

LT: I think it's very difficult to disentangle the specificity of the medium used from the particular attributes of the artist. That said, I would tend to agree with you that there are inherent properties if you will to both media forms.

MH: I could be mistaken about this but are there not certain things which lend themselves more to the writerly convention and other aspects more conducive to some form of visual representation? I'll try to give an example here. In *The Road to Mexico* we included a chapter on a particular town famous for its fiesta which Larry wrote about in a most interesting way, giving it the creative title of 'Magdalena Off Season'. Significantly, he wrote about the town out of season and therefore not during fiesta time, describing the kinds of things that many people wouldn't have been interested in or think about, as they tend to drive past the town during the off season. Now one of my photos in that chapter was a photograph of this extraordinary looking taxi stand, which resembled a sculpture. It was this little box, to which a taxi driver had attached a telephone line, and had it nailed up and hinged. He would close this miniature box at night and open it when he was working. The telephone actually worked and was illegally hooked up to a post. Inside the box he had placed a bottle of water, candles, a statue of the Virgin Mary and some other stuff that I can't recall. This beautiful structure was in essence the driver's miniaturized office, and having photographed it, I'm now planning to make a sculpture of it. So representing this structure in a three dimensional way is perhaps far more interesting than describing it in words. Here's another example. We were by a river one day . . .

LT: This is my favourite photograph in the book.

MH: And all of the sudden through the corner of my eye I saw a child in a hammock slung between two trees over a river. What a sight! It was just a little baby. So I dropped my taco, hastily picked up the camera and sprinted to the river where I photographed the scene as quickly as possible. It was a good thing I did, because almost immediately the heavens opened and the family, who were swimming nearby in the river, in one motion took down the hammock and dispersed. Now if you were to write about a baby in a

hammock, I wonder how effective that would be – something different would be conveyed.

LT: I think what you're saying has something to do with time, the idea that the photograph captures two dimensions of time. One element is this notion of the photographic moment, that perishable second, characteristic of the captured image that makes you think about time in a certain way. The other is the simultaneity of time, emotions and events inherent in the visual image, which is so difficult to achieve in creative and descriptive writing. There is something immediate and emphatic about literally seeing everything at once in a photograph. In the portraits of the kids, for example, both within and between the images, I find layers of doubt and aggressiveness at play yet the kids remain very absolutely present. You therefore not only sense their forceful presence, but their vulnerabilities and ambiguities on the surface of the image.

MH: From my perspective as an artist, I've always thought that writers are more fortunate because they can always rework their material at a later stage, a point we touched on earlier in the discussion. Of course the material has to be there for the writer in the first place but maybe it's because I don't work in this way that I think it's different for them. If you're taking photographs, regardless of context, you have to get what you want at that moment in time, so I'm always instructing myself to concentrate. If you miss the initial opportunity then it's too late. Occasionally, I berate myself for sloppy work on the site which then forces me to compensate by working harder in the darkroom to correct problems.

AG: Yet surely you can always manipulate the image digitally.

MH: Yes, you can. Yet I know from experience that if you're careless with the original shot, you can grope around in the darkroom as much as you like, marginally improving the print, but if you haven't got it right first time round, you're sunk. I know this to be the case, since often I deceive myself at the last minute into thinking that the light wasn't

right, the lens was out of focus and I'll rectify this in the darkroom and so on, but I know better.

AO: Yes, we know that with digital photography any image can be manipulated. But I think what we're discussing here is the wider implications of photographic knowledge as opposed to written forms of knowledge. If we accept that the photograph has a particular indexical power as in the example of the photographic image of the child in the hammock, a mere moment before the rainstorm, this then alludes to a very particular notion of the temporal. Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* makes this important distinction between the 'photographic studium' and the 'photographic punctum'. The 'studium', according to Barthes, is cultural information relayed in the photograph, for example, the child in the hammock. On the other hand, the 'punctum' is the unexpected detail inherent in the photograph, drawing the viewer into a different imaginative space, triggering a moment beyond the frame. I suppose what I'm getting at here and what essentially interested me in some of the portraits was precisely this notion of the 'punctum' – the idiosyncratic details pulling me into a different narrative space. I would look at them individually and was struck how one particular kid, La Halloween, had a slightly swollen stomach. I then looked at the image a second and third time, wondering whether she was pregnant or not, which sent me back to Larry's evocative descriptions of the kids in the text – creative descriptions in their own right yet operating very differently to the photographic.

LT: I was going to say something to this effect and your examples are interesting. It seems to me that regardless of the photographer's artistic intention there will always be traces and aspects present in the photograph that the artist didn't necessarily have in mind. That is less the case with writing. The writer more controls what, when and how to introduce material. In contrast, however, the photographer can't have total control over what people will zoom in on and what will be evoked. So there are all kinds of knowledge conveyed in the photographic image beyond the artist's initial intentions.

I think today there is excessive attention and concentration on the intentionality of the artist – the pendulum, it seems to me, has swung too far in this direction. Often I witness people reading photographs as if there weren't real and actual subjects in the frame, as if what is celebrated and therefore important is the skilled manipulation and heavily contrived poses by the artist, which I think is both naïve and misplaced. I'm always struck by the range of responses to the presentation of the portraits, to how people read the poses differently. Some will comment quite forcefully on the extent to which the kids come across as terribly sad and suffering and that Maeve chose such moments deliberately. At another showing, others will reflect on the fact that collectively the kids appeared too happy given their miserable circumstances. They're always asking her about this.

MH: Yes, they do, but I never say.

AG: Earlier you touched on the editorial relationship between the portraits and the text in the book. What I'm curious about is the absence in the book of actual photographic material shot by the kids themselves, whether portraits of one another or indeed of their environment. Was this again an editorial decision and did this possible inclusion merit any consideration on your behalf?

MH: Yes, it did. I actually had the idea that I would like to do a book profiling the kids' photographic work but that turned out to be far too ambitious not so much in terms of working with the kids – that was already tricky and complicated enough – but so far as achieving ultimately good work, which would have required much more time and effort on my part as well as getting the kids to cooperate on such a project. The other factor worth mentioning was that the kids didn't just do many self-portraits. They actually shot fewer self-portraits compared to photographs of other things. I think incorporating these photographs into the book would, therefore, have added a very complicated spin because as I said earlier, I wanted the images in the book to have a certain elegance and the book to be spare in terms of its photographic content. . . . I had a fantastic time working with the kids nevertheless in the sense that much was achieved and the kids took a great

interest in photography. It's important to note that the actual working conditions in the shelter were so irregular, if not chaotic for much of the time, which meant that I had to install some discipline in terms of how and when we worked in order to accomplish anything. I gradually learnt how the kids required an organizing structure of sorts, so instead of turning up on the day with my cameras and trying to gather the kids for a photography lesson in the afternoon, I would post a notice on the shelter door announcing a lesson in advance.

AG: Can I come in at this point and ask Larry to don his anthropological hat for a moment and consider questions of co-authorship and textual representation surrounding the issue of self-representation on behalf of the kids in the book. You've conveyed quite clearly the audience you had in mind for *Tunnel Kids* and the relationship between text and image. Yet, listening to Maeve talk about working with the kids, teaching them to use cameras and then hearing about the underlying considerations informing the use of portraiture in the book, I was wondering whether you viewed the writing as a form of textual collaboration between yourself and the kids – an attempt, if you like, at experimental ethnographic representation where, in this case, the kids are seen and see themselves as co-authors of the text. Put simply, who was representing whom and did you sense any tension in this regard?

LT: On the subject of co-authoring an ethnographic text, I've yet to read a convincing example of thorough textual collaboration between the anthropologist and members of his/her ethnographic community. I'm nevertheless open to such textual experimentation. Even if I had set out with this altogether different project in mind, it would still have been extremely difficult because of the inherent limitations of the setting. I tried to leave as much space as possible for the kids to express themselves in their own words. I will admit, however, to retaining ethnographic licence or authority if you will, since I did write the text after all, although a colleague of mine responding to *Tunnel Kids*, commented that it was a 'very good book Boston wrote!'

AO: It's interesting though that there's a slight shift in tone in the final chapter of the book to a more recognizably academic voice describing the economic and political geography shaping the Maquiladora migrant community:

For them [the kids] the Casa was one element in a delicate adjustment to a world formed and manipulated by forces well beyond their control, if not beyond their ken. The brutal edge of those forces was typically manifest in the guise of men with guns: representatives of the US and Mexican states or the criminal forces of drug and immigrant runners. All were there to protect the interests of free trade – a movement of electronic parts, grapes, drugs, or labor from Mexico into the United States. That movement was answered by a flow of money going the opposite direction in the forms of 'legitimate' profits from Maquiladoras, 'illegitimate' profits from contraband, and emigrant remittances. This 'exchange' was based in disparities and inequalities that were not about to disappear. Moreover, this world of powerful actors was, to make matters worse, unpredictable. Drug cartels and their local associates were subject to reorganization and realignment, and agents of the Mexican state might seem as volatile. US enforcement of anti-drug or immigrant control laws was also somewhat quixotic, subject to sudden bursts of legislation, movement of manpower, increases in technology. Among the representatives of this shifting if powerful world, the tunnel kids found enemies and untrustworthy friends, and they attempted to put together lives, families, and 'clans' in the face of all that. The result was a powerfully imagined but loosely structured band, without the formal rituals or hierarchy typical of many street gangs.

(Ibid: 133–4)

Here, you were not commenting simply on migrancy but on questions of intense exploitation, about the movement of capital and bodies. At this point of closure in the book itself, we were struck by the use of this different rhetoric – a fleeting and intermittent analytical voice that moves rapidly back into the dominant personalized voice that shapes the book throughout.

LT: Sure. I wanted to do a couple of things here, which were not in any way imposed by the editor. I wanted to narrate life stories that in essence were open-ended. We all know that readers best respond to an account through immersion in a story via identification with one or more characters. This tends not to work when you as a writer simply lecture to the reader, so I guess I was trying to find ways to mix two different modes of writing in the final chapter.

AG: To enact a drama of sorts?

MH: More a soap opera I would say.

LT: Writing in this way was a rather obvious lesson that took me years to learn because academic conventions and expectations had driven me further and further away from this – from the fact that people only remember stories if they get involved with characters imaginatively presented to them.

MH: That's why soap operas are so popular.

LT: Right, and why ethnographies aren't. In my experience, the few ethnographies people actually read and find meaningful and remember have characters and something at least of a narrative structure. So such thoughts were uppermost in my mind when it came to developing the prose, yet at the same time I didn't want to construct a world that didn't exist. I vividly remember the day I asked the kids to draw a map of the tunnels:

We all sat on the wall over the tunnel entrance, and looking down into it, I thought of one last thing I could ask them. 'Could you make a map of the tunnels?' I asked.

'Of course', Guanatos said, so I took a few blank pages from a notebook and taped them together to make a long sheet. Guanatos took it from me and spread it on the sidewalk, grasping the pen I gave him and squinting back and forth between the world around us and the blank paper. He began to draw. As he did, Chito and Jesús leaned over his shoulders, adding names and correcting lines. All the others watched with fascination as the map took shape before our eyes. There was the border, here ran the dry tunnel, here the wet one. All the while, below us men went in and out of the actual tunnel to use it as a lavatory. Flor filmed the whole event, and the little kids scrambled around us, watching the boys do the map and craning for a look at the camera. Passers-by on the street looked at us with some amazement: 'Who can that gringo be in the midst of that crowd of street kids and the toothless crone of thirty-five, and what was the dark chola filming?'

(Ibid: 147–8)

I remember getting back to Maeve that night, describing animatedly the scene surrounding the drawing of the map, but most importantly, how I thought the kids had just written the last chapter of the book. It just struck me that the writing should end at this point regardless of what unfolded next.

AG: You're soon to return to the Mexican border to conduct further research. Does the relationship between the visual and the writerly continue to influence and shape the methodology underpinning your work?

MH: We actually have another project that is coming up in a couple of months called *Ambos Nogales*, which really began while we were finishing *Tunnel Kids*. It will be mainly photographs, some one hundred and forty black and white images of both Nogales, Sonora and Nogales, Arizona. How many pages of text?

LT: Approximately eighty pages.

MH: So that's the proposed balance in answer to your question. As an artist I tend not to spend time alone working in my studio. I travel to far away places, learn languages and this is certainly not something that most people think artists do, but I do and working in various border towns is extremely demanding. You have to learn about all kinds of things, where you can go, where you shouldn't venture, when you need an assistant and when not, so working on the *Tunnel Kids* project taught me a great deal about these kinds of issues. We're leaving for the border in less than three weeks, but what exactly we're are going to do out there, I don't know. Maybe Larry knows what he's up to but I'm far from certain.

LT: I think we both respond imaginatively to the discoveries we make and create. If ethnographic inquiry has any advantages over the more exact social sciences it's to do with the possibility that you may learn something you didn't set out to, or indeed expect to know from the very beginning. It's about paying attention. People will always let you know what's really important to them if you hang around long enough and are prepared

to listen. When I set out to do research on a book, I think I have a sense of what the focus will be. In the first few weeks I invariably discover that my initial ideas were really misplaced or not the least bit interesting. I get depressed and am sure that I've chosen the wrong site and should be somewhere else altogether. Perhaps I have to first reject my preconceptions to notice what is really going on around me. I went to Donegal to do a project on fishing but soon thought that I had made a big mistake. Maeve told me not to worry and to be patient. She was right. As a result, what was initially a book on fishing became a book about Catholicism, *Occasions of Faith* (1995). So, there's always something going on. I definitely believe there are no dull people out there, only dull academics writing about them.

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