The Anta Project

Anta ~ Sanskrit word meaning border or end of known territory
The Idea

- The Anta Project began with a simple premise:
  - Choose a politically symbolic object or place
  - Play it
  - Record the performance
  - Make it available to the world at no charge
  - See what happens next
An Obvious Choice

- The US/Mexico border in southern Arizona was an obvious choice.
- For over 300 years the borderlands have been traditionally porous with a blended cultural heritage and national identity.
An Obvious Choice

Post 9/11 fears and America’s drug policy have transformed the border into a symbol of vulnerability and invasion.

Military has lead to increased migrant deaths.

In 2007 over 100 people are “known” to have died crossing the Arizona desert.

That number has skyrocketed during the summer months.
The Anta Project’s Early Intentions

- Transform the border from a symbol of fear and loathing into an instrument capable of promoting unity.
- Create a recording which would offer an organic line of inquiry to the listener:
  - What am I hearing?
  - Why do these walls and fences exist?
  - Who is being kept out?
  - Who is being kept in?
  - What are the impacts of this border on the people and cultures who live there?
Recording Parameters

Sounds would be recorded at a “micro” level utilizing a contact microphone, a sustain/volume/compression pedal, and various implements of mass percussion.
Studio Work

- The final recording would be a multi-tracked ambient work, designed to immerse the listener in a single sonic interpretation of a migrant’s journey, from Mexico into the United States, through the Arizona desert.
High Walls Make For Bad Neighbors

- Instrument: The US/Mexican Border
  - A three-mile steel wall
High Walls Make For Bad Neighbors

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  - A three-mile steel wall
  - Barbed wire fences
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  - Field recordings of Homeland Security Helicopters
High Walls Make For Bad Neighbors

- **Instrument:** The US/Mexican Border
  - A three-mile steel wall
  - Barbed wire fences
  - Field recordings of Homeland Security Helicopters
  - Migrant water bottles
High Walls Make For Bad Neighbors

- **Instrument: The US/Mexican Border**
  - A three-mile steel wall
  - Barbed wire fences
  - Field recordings of Homeland Security Helicopters
  - Migrant water bottles
  - A roadside shrine
Viral Transformation

- The performance was closely monitored by local residents (US/Mexico), The Nogales Police Department, The U.S. Department of Homeland Security, The U.S. Border Patrol.
- Before the recording was heard, an instant change in perceptions from border to instrument began with the performance.
Distribution

- To reach the greatest number of people, The Anta Project was made available as a series of downloads at no charge to the listener.

- [www.sonicanta.com](http://www.sonicanta.com) was built to facilitate distribution. The site contains extensive notes about the project with images designed to link the sounds heard with the instrument itself.
What Happened Next

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- June 2006: National Public Radio’s All Things Considered airs a selection from The Anta Project with an interview.
July-August 2006: The Anta Project is featured on Bowed Radio and in blogs, both international and domestic.
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- October through present: The Anta Project gains momentum with presentations at Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University, University of Kansas, UCMerced and a clip on the German national radio program SWR2.
So Far: Over 40 Gigs And 300 Discs To Listeners In Nearly 80 Countries

- Angola, Argentina, Azerbaijan, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Canada, Czech Republic, China, Chile, Cocos (Keeling) Islands, Colombia, Cote D'Ivoire, Croatia (Hrvatska), Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Estonia, Fiji, Finland, France, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Hong Kong, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iran, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Korea (South), Kuwait, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Malaysia, Mexico, Moldova, Montserrat, Morocco, Netherlands, New Zealand (Aotearoa), Norway, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Saudi Arabia, Seychelles, Singapore, Slovak Republic, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Sweden, Syria, Taiwan, Togo, Tonga, Turkey, Turks and Caicos Islands, Tuvalu, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States, Uruguay, Vanuatu, Viet Nam Also... US Government, US Military
On Average

- Daily traffic has grown from four listeners per day to over two hundred.
- Statistics show non-media related knowledge of The Anta Project is spreading primarily via blogs and word of mouth.
- Does not take into account variables such as:
  - Sharing of music once downloaded.
  - Inexplicable spikes from countries without a discernable driver. Countries with traffic spikes often have walls on their borders or are wrestling with immigration issues.
Feedback

- Listeners express feeling visceral emotions about the US/Mexico border when hearing The Anta Project such as anger, sadness and longing.
- The Anta Project has been used to increase awareness about border issues by activists and academics.
- The border as “instrument” fosters interest in learning more about border issues.
The Unexpected

- Some listeners report The Anta Project is useful in meditation.
- Tracks have been remixed and used:
  - During shamanic journeys
  - By dance club DJs
  - As an ambient sound installation
So What Do Politicians Think?

- The Anta Project along with supporting text and a cover letter were sent to:
  - Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano
  - Arizona Senator John McCain
  - US President George Bush
  - US Vice President Richard (Dick) Chaney
  - US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld
  - Mexican President Vicente Fox
  - Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper
President George Bush

“Thank you for your kind gesture. I appreciate your good wishes.” --- President George W. Bush
“(President Vicente Fox) appreciates the way in which you intend to transform the meaning of the wall from it’s divisive nature, into one of unity.” --- Jaun Carlos Hernandez Wocker Diplomatic Advisor
What’s Next

- As a direct result of The Anta Project, the sister cities of Nogales, Sonora and Nogales, Arizona had begun discussions on hosting a joint event on either side of the border.
- The event would be a celebration of border arts and culture.
What’s Next

- An oversized metal kalimba designed by Glenn Weyant is being constructed by artists Alberto Morackis and Guadalupe Serraro of Murals de Frontera.

- The kalimba will be attached to the Mexican side of the wall, utilizing the metal barrier as a sprawling resonator.
Anta Installation

- The Anta Project recording is being reimagined as a sound installation.
- In July, The Anta Project began a two month installation at The Art Gallery of Knoxville accompanying photographs taken by the children of migrant farm workers and Appalachian families.
Conclusion

- The instrument a musician chooses can be as powerful as the sounds he or she chooses to create.
- All the world’s an instrument.

Play It: NOW.