

## **The Digital Marimba Project: a high-tech cultural bridge across the US/Mexico border**

Rumors of the “death of distance” have been greatly exaggerated. In fact, one place where distance is alive and well is the San Diego / Tijuana metropolis. The region may look like one big city from above but on the ground, traveling the 20 miles that separate Tijuana from downtown San Diego can take five frustrating hours. This very real distance represents a huge obstacle to social, cultural and artistic interaction between people living on different sides of the border.

**Digital Marimba** seeks to lower this barrier by creating a virtual bridge across the border, a modern day echo to “*la marimba*”, the wooden bridge that once spanned the Tijuana River. We want to establish a permanent high-definition video conferencing connection, linking one physical space in San Diego / Los Angeles to another in Tijuana. This bridge will use the high-speed network link CENIC and CUDI have created between California and Mexico and rely on the high-definition videoconferencing and large tiled display technologies developed at Calit2. **Digital Marimba** will serve to organize cultural events and activities that bridge the gap between creators and audiences from both sides of the border. These live activities will be documented and complemented through a companion web site which will become a tangible archive of cross-border interactions. For social scientists and cultural anthropologists at the host institutions, this would represent a rich terrain for the study of the possibilities open by sustained interaction over advanced video links.

To illustrate the possibilities, here are five examples of the kinds of activities **Digital Marimba** could enable:

- **Improvisation Across Borders:** We assemble a band of jazz improvisers from Tijuana and San Diego/Los Angeles. Half of them are playing live in a space in Tijuana. The other half are playing live in a space in San Diego or Los Angeles. They then perform a set of live improvisation via video-conferencing. At each location there are live audiences.
- **Dialogue Across Borders:** Modeled after the Fuel4Talk series at the Haudenschild Garage in San Diego, we host a series of live cross-border conversations between thinkers/artists/writers. We might start with Mike Davis and Marcos Ramirez Erre in dialogue about urbanism and immigration politics.
- **Long-Distance Banda:** We invite Tijuana’s Nortec Collective-- veterans of using digital audio technology to sample and collage “traditional” Mexican sounds and styles-- to hold a live performance with the USC marching band. Nortec have done live events with Mexican brass bands (bandas) but this event would have them remixing beats and sequences in collaboration with the USC marching band.
- **Bulbo Here and There:** Tijuana’s multi-media Bulbo collective have been experimenting with cross-border media and TV broadcasts for the past few years-- mostly covering the dynamic world of border popular culture. We work with Bulbo to devise a series of live broadcasts from Tijuana and Los Angeles (where members of the collective are now living).
- **Migrant Media Space:** we set up a space in Los Angeles and a space in TJ that are meant as live message boards between migrants and their families.

We have formed an exploratory committee to investigate the feasibility of this project. Members include **François Bar** (USC, Director of the Annenberg Research Network on International Communication), **Josh Kun** (USC, Director of the Popular Music Project at the Lear Center), **Harrison Grey** (Director, ICT Program, Institute of the Americas), **Shannon Spanhake** (Calit2, UCSD) and **Sergio de la Torre** (documentary filmmaker and photographer, co-founder of Lui Velazquez, an art space in Tijuana). Together, we have the right set of home institutions in Tijuana, San Diego and Los Angeles, and a rich set of connections with the technology and cultural communities on both sides of the border.