Welding Borderlands: An Assemblage of Memory, Movement, and Embodied Translation

by

Natalia Cervantes

Dance Program
Duke University

Defense Date: March 26, 2025

Approved:

Jingqiu Guan, Co-Chair

Andrea E. Woods Valdés, Co-Chair

Pedro Lasch

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in the Dance Program in The Graduate School of
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This thesis offers a dance-based practice called *welding* as a generative tool of embodied translation. *welding*, created by Natalia Cervantes, is a layered practice that physicalizes seemingly intangible borderlands, or third/in-between spaces, through the body in motion to make them more accessible to process. This practice involves artifacts, movement, sound, and video elements. The borderlands of focus are between and across bodies, materials, generations, memories, and more. With an autoethnographic approach grounded in a multimedia creative process, three research trips to México, and familial oral history conversations, this thesis positions the body as an archive of generational memory and the site where borderlands materialize. This research was shared through a community journey, "*welding* **borderlands** | *soldando* **las tierras fronterizas**," comprised of four layers: a migration, an immersive installation, a sharing of *welding*, and a celebration. Along and beyond this journey, guests were invited to reconnect with generational memory, reflect on personal archival practices, and celebrate in community. At its core, this work aims to make space for Latinx identities, communities, and stories.

Dedication

Dedicated to my family, whose ever-presence and passionate support has fueled my art and grounded me in indescribable ways.

In honor of my abuelos, whose resilience, love, and guidance have paved the way for me to embark on this journey.

In memory of Abuela, my bright, guiding light, who empowers me as a storyteller.

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A special thank you to my thesis committee members, Jingqiu Guan, for your unwavering support and invaluable mentorship, Andrea E. Woods Valdés, for your empowering guidance and belief in me, and Pedro Lasch, for your impactful insight and inspirational presence. Thank you to Dierdre Shipman for your intentional care and reliable support throughout my time at Duke, to Sarah Wilbur for your insightful feedback and enthusiastic involvement in my work from its very beginning stages, and to Ethan Eldred for your influential production mentorship that helped bring my thesis experience to life.

I would also like to thank El Centro Hispano for their generosity in co-sponsoring my thesis experience, "*welding* **borderlands** | *soldando* **las tierras fronterizas**." The community space held my work so warmly and I could not have imagined it anywhere else. Special thanks to Mauricio Solano for your help, time, and energy in facilitating this connection.

I am eternally grateful to my village of support. My dear friends, mentors, and those who anchor me from near and far—each of you made a lasting impact on my artistic journey and on my life. As ever, immense gratitude to my family for truly everything. Words cannot describe how much it means to feel your presence and support. This is for us.

1. Introduction: *welding* Borderlands

There is a buzzing sensation near my collarbone. I jerk my head to the right and crunch my shoulder to my ear trying to settle it. The buzzing amplifies, making my knees buckle as I am accompanied by a thud sound from my hands and knees greeting the ground. It feels as if there are roots growing from my palms through the floor. I apply pressure downward. Shaking ignites from my bent elbows and ripples through my torso. I am compelled to stay here. My breathing accelerates and warmth creeps into my cheeks. I follow a sudden urge to lift myself to a standing position. The resonating pulse from the shaking tingles throughout my skin. I am met with a sense of groundedness and calm. This exploration feels resolved.

With a beat of breath, I open my eyes, shift to the computer screen, and pull up the video of this intuitive movement processing I just experienced. Witnessing myself dancing through pixels makes the past version of myself seem like a complete other entity, yet there is still a lingering sense of familiarity and comfort in knowing that it is me. I acknowledge the imprint she has left on me by re-embodying movements she offers. I fall and high five the ground like she did. It does not feel quite right. I try it again. Again. Again, starting with a breath and my chest to the ceiling, igniting a body wave that gradually meets the floor. That feels right in my present body. Throughout this navigation, I stay watching my past self on the screen, waiting for another one of her movements to resonate with me. My gaze has become increasingly tender and generous the more I have done this. I push pressure into the floor with bent elbows like my past self did, but only three times. That feels right in my present body. I attach this to the roll down movement to the floor and keep building… I am actively *welding* within in-between spaces, or borderlands, that connect my past and present self, the digital and physical realms, and my body and the poem I read that inspired my collarbone to buzz at the start.

Over the past few years, I have created and refined a dance-based practice called *welding*. My *welding* practice is a layered investigation of embodied translation involving artifacts,

movement, sound, and video elements. With the supportive framework of Gloria Anzaldúa's borderlands theory,[1] which reimagines the border from a restrictive boundary to a living third space rich in energy and opportunity, *welding* physicalizes the borderlands that seem intangible. It is an effective tool that ignites these third/in-between spaces by guiding them from an abstract consideration into a tangible, concentrated, grounded state in the body. By activating the body through dance, these borderlands become more accessible to identify, feel, and process.

The questions that led me to the creation of *welding* and continue to fuel my exploration of the practice include: How can seemingly intangible borderlands be identified, accessed, and sensorially engaged? What is the value of a nonlinear, multimodal, layered artistic approach in the context of investigating borderlands? How can the material and ephemeral resonance of memory be mindfully embodied? What is the impact of recursively interacting with and accumulating material traces of my creative process?

I argue that *welding* physicalizes seemingly intangible borderlands, or third/in-between spaces, through the body in motion to make them more accessible to process. In this practice, I position the body as an archive of generational memory and as the active site where entities fuse to materialize borderlands. I offer my *welding* practice as an effective tool in activating and materializing the borderlands between and across entities such as bodies, materials, generations, memories, and more.

The fluid, nonlinear nature of borderlands and memory mirrors the fluidity and nonlinearity within my creative process. As a multimedia artist, I utilize a variety of artistic avenues, including dance, collage, blackout poetry, painting, and more, to engage with these questions and contemplate my findings in-process. The material traces I create along the way are continuously added to my archive alongside the gradual accumulation of artifacts gathered from significant places, people, and sources. I interact with these artifacts during *welding*, which sparks

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[1] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987).

ephemeral, emotional, sensorial, and material imprints that resonate in my body. These imprints and my intuitive movement responses to them in *welding* are never the same, regardless of if I repeatedly engage with the same artifact or revisit artifacts after a period of time. My archive will continue to grow with time and the web of connection across the artifacts, memories, feelings, movements, and layers within each experience of *welding* will become more intricate. Embracing nonlinearity through these webs of interactions and multimodal layers has encouraged a sincere appreciation for the process of creation and a generative, eager mindset that my work has longevity in its never-ending, cumulative layers. *welding* is a dynamic practice and even in its many years of deep exploration, has even deeper layers yet to be discovered.

welding's creation was informed and supported mainly by my creative process as a multimedia artist, the three autoethnographic research trips I took to México, and the oral history conversations I had with my family over many years. I draw interdisciplinary support from existing literature in the Latinx/Chicanx Studies, Archival Studies, Performance Studies, and Psychology fields, and am in conversation with other Latinx artists whose work centers Latinx and/or immigrant experiences in fields such as dance, photography, and installation art. My hope with this work is to make space for Latinx identities, communities, and stories, inspire others, and highlight the power of dance as a research method and storytelling tool.

1.1 The Roots of the Work

My *welding* practice positions the body as an archive of generational memory. In my research, I center memory related to Latinx immigration experiences into the United States. Through an autoethnographic approach and the intentional choice to start from the personal, I find empowerment in vulnerability, as it can inspire others to look inward, backward, and onward. During the past few years, I have been committed to refining a methodological blueprint that can be used as a reference for what to expect when I invite others into my process in the

future. This does not mean that I work alone, as I consider my collaborators to be my family members, scholars, mentors, and artists within my lineage.

My family is central to this work. In my *welding* practice, I excavate memories from my familial experiences, accumulate archival artifacts tied to different generations in my family, and engage with family oral history in my movement explorations. Documenting oral history has especially helped me track throughlines between generations. All of my abuelos immigrated from México and Cuba into the United States, which is how I am able to specifically investigate memories of Latinx immigration into the United States. With my autoethnographic approach, the goal is not to generalize my personal experience to the greater population, but rather to start from the personal in hopes to inspire others to consider their own embodiment of and engagement with memories and experiences passed down generationally. I also aim to emphasize the importance of personal archival practices.

Throughout *welding*'s development, I gradually came to realize how much my grieving process of the recent passing of my maternal abuela tenderly hugs this process. Her vibrant presence is deeply-rooted in every aspect of my research and my life. Her passing amplified my drive to develop an archival practice in response to my research curiosities. I felt an intense urgency to archive as much of my family's history as I could. This urge inspired an autoethnographic research trip to México for the first time to visit where my paternal abuelos grew up, with them to show me around, and secondly, to visit where my late abuela grew up. As I navigated the borderlands between my grieving process and wanting to celebrate my abuela's life, I was inspired to take a third autoethnographic research trip to Ciudad de México (CDMX) for Día de los Muertos. These experiences revealed new, colorful layers to my research. I realized that the physical presence or absence of my abuelos—whose immigration experiences form the backbone of my research—had an equally significant impact on me as a person and an artist. Physically being in spaces I could only previously imagine from generationally passed down

stories was immensely transformative. In the future, I plan to embark on a research trip to Cuba to connect with my familial roots there, which was not logistically possible this time.

These research trips also offered opportunities to exercise my multimedia creative process while traveling through significant spaces. This resulted in an enhancement of my archive. As I traveled, I engaged in dancing, journaling, video and audio recording, photography, drawing, and collecting artifacts. My archival process created abundant discoveries for both types of experiences—that is with or without the physical presence of my abuelos. This gave me solace in my grieving process and confidence that it is never too late to personally archive family history.

Overarchingly, this thesis aims to uplift Latinx identities, communities, and stories. Navigating the in-betweenness of spaces, communities, languages, and identities is a reality I have consistently inhabited and has significantly shaped my life. I am a Latina woman who grew up in a predominantly white community in California. I was often one of few or the only Latina in community spaces. Although I studied Spanish in school, I did not grow up fluent in the language, which made me feel disoriented at times while navigating the borderlands between the Spanish and English languages and my identities as a Latina and an American. As I entered college and graduate school, I became increasingly aware of the often subtle and occasional blatant ways academia's emphasis on the black and white racial binary dismisses my Latinx identity and community. As often one of few or the only Latina in my academic spaces, I found myself needing to over explain myself and my research to others and exerting excessive amounts of effort out of necessity in trying to find and build community with people I could relate to culturally. These personal experiences lit a fire under me to loudly take up space and make space for the Latinx community and to embrace both the disorienting and the empowering aspects of navigating borderlands.

In regard to my research about generational memory in the body, I also found existing literature to extensively urge research about the trauma of immigration. This type of research is

incredibly important and valid, and it is also not generalizable to the entirety of the immigration experience for everyone. Especially in our current political climate, I have been passionately inspired by celebration, pride, and joy as radical acts, which is what I urge in this thesis. It is these experiences of disorientation and tension coexisting with the often neglected pride and celebration in navigating borderlands that has driven my commitment to centering my art and research around uplifting Latinx experiences.

1.2 Community Journey Thesis Experience

The pillars of my research include memory, my family, immigration, Latinidad, grief, and archival artifacts. These pillars guided the development of my thesis experience, "*welding* **borderlands** | *soldando* **las tierras fronterizas**," which was a community journey that took place on February 22, 2025. This experience had two venues: a bus[2] and a main event space at El Centro Hispano. El Centro Hispano, North Carolina's largest Latinx community organization, co-sponsored my thesis experience. Their venue at The Freedman Center, a community event and office space, was the perfect fit for this work, as it was somewhere local Latinx people already gathered. This added comfort, joy, and purpose to the four-hour event. Throughout my time in graduate school at Duke University, I cultivated a relationship with this inspiring organization. I was involved in a collaboration between El Centro Hispano and ComMotion,[3] equipping community health workers with inclusive movement training. I also aided El Centro Hispano in a workshop series empowering older generations to explore accessible movement pathways for daily use. These experiences inspired me further to dedicate my thesis experience and research to making space for our Latinx community. My target audience for "*welding* **borderlands** | *soldando* **las tierras fronterizas**" was the Latinx community, who I personally invited mainly from El Centro Hispano and Duke student organizations.

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[2] This bus was rented from a green transportation company called Greenway Transit.
[3] ComMotion, community in motion, is a non-profit organization based in North Carolina that centralizes inclusivity, community, and dance.

This community journey was comprised of four layers: a migration, an immersive installation, a sharing of *welding*, and a celebration. The journey began with The Migration by bus to the main venue, where guests were given the Map, introduced to *welding* and some of the artifacts in my archive, and grew familiar with each other. At the venue, El Centro Hispano/The Freedman Center, guests were welcomed by The Installation, which was an interactive, immersive display of the artifacts from my archive that I collected and created throughout this work's development. The *welding* Sharing then emerged, where I moved through a few layers of my *welding* practice, shared a video of one of my autoethnographic research trips to México, and invited my family members into a few more *welding* layers. This experience settled into The Celebration, which was a dedicated space to reflect on the experience, connect with the space, share a meal, and embrace collective joy. Along and beyond this journey, guests were invited to reconnect with generational memory, reflect on personal archival practices, and celebrate in community.

1.3 Navigating This Thesis

I invite an engagement with this thesis through a *welding* mindset. My *welding* practice is reliant on layering. I process borderlands in and through my body by building upon layers of memories, videos, movements, among other entities, and letting them bleed into each other to create meaning. The more layers I embrace, the more intensely the essence of fusing these layers resonates within and through me. The act of layering strips back the noise to the core of the work. Consider this thesis like layers of *welding*. Each of these chapters, elements, and ponderings bleed into one another. They intertwine nonlinearly. They build on each other. The fusion between and across these entities generates insight and depth of meaning. It reveals how *welding* can materialize borderlands and serve as a useful tool of embodied translation, highlights the importance of making space for Latinx communities, identities, and stories, and urges dance as a unique and invaluable research method.

2. Review of Related Works

My *welding* practice draws interdisciplinary support from Latinx/Chicanx Studies, Psychology, Archival Studies, Performance Studies, and other artists who are invested in Latinx and/or immigrant experiences. The theoretical frameworks of borderlands theory,[4] Material Engagement Theory,[5] and assemblage theory[6] form the groundwork of this thesis. Through reinforcement from interdisciplinary findings, I consider my body as an archive of generational memory, my installation of artifacts as a living archive, and my approach in creating the community journey for my thesis experience as dynamic and effective.

2.1 Borderlands Theory

The essence of my *welding* practice was founded upon borderlands theory,[7] which was created by the trailblazing scholar of Chicana feminism, Gloria Anzaldúa. Borderlands theory rejects the negative connotations of rigidity and restriction associated with borders and reimagines the border as a living, breathing, bleeding third space. Anzaldúa centralizes the body as she describes borderlands in this corporeal manner and through her discussions about the toll that living within borderlands takes on one's body. These borderlands can be literal, like the physical borders between countries, or abstract, such as borders between identities, languages, or temporalities. To me, borderlands are powerful, vibrating spaces I can most closely describe as the space between two opposing magnets—simultaneously pushing away and pulling into each other. The push and pull of entities on either side of a borderland make it a disorienting and tense area to navigate. However, embracing this in-between state and its fluid nature can also be an empowering experience of resistance and resilience.

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[4] Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*.
[5] Emanuele Prezioso and Nicolás Alessandroni, "Enacting Memories through and with Things: Remembering as Material Engagement," *Memory Studies* 16, no. 4 (August 1, 2023): 962–83.).
[6] Manuel DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory*, Edinburgh University Press (2016).
[7] Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*.

I use borderlands theory as the framework to ground my claim that the body is the site where seemingly intangible borderlands materialize and become more accessible to process. I offer my *welding* practice as an effective tool in activating and materializing the borderlands between and across bodies, materials, generations, memories, and more, through the body in motion. I have also found personal empowerment through Anzaldúa's work—drawing strength from her perseverance in my own quest to make space for Latinx people to feel heard and empowered. She credits Chicanxs for building our own generative and multilayered world within these borderlands and motivates our community to claim our complexities. This empowerment has manifested in my current research through my autoethnographic approach, where I am taking up space as a Latina woman and making my ancestral lineage's stories heard and known. Simply put, Anzaldúa's borderlands theory has been invaluable to this thesis.

2.2 Material Engagement Theory

Material Engagement Theory (MET)[8] anchors the relationship between artifacts and memory in my *welding* practice. MET is a theoretical framework developed by Lambros Malafouris that has roots in cognitive archaeology. This theory critiques the understanding of memory as solely an internal process in the mind or brain and argues that it is rather a "situated and collective practice with, through, and about material culture."[9] Objects in the material world do not function as stagnant, passive representations of memory, but are active participants that influence memory through the act of material engagement. In other words, considering things as empty containers that memory is deposited into dismisses the emergent, nonlinear nature of memory, which is activated through tangible interactions with objects over time. MET considers things as memories because there is a simultaneous emergence and re-enactment of the previous material interactions with the objects, combined with influence from present-day contexts and

[8] Prezioso and Alessandroni, "Enacting Memories," 962–83.
[9] Prezioso and Alessandroni, "Enacting Memories," 965.

embodied engagement in the moment—both of which can shape future interactions and understandings. Memories adapt and meaning evolves with every new tangible interaction.

I adopt this framework in my *welding* practice as it guides my understanding of what is actively happening as I interact with artifacts from my archive and respond to that interaction through intuitive movement. I begin *welding* by being with and absorbing each chosen artifact, then intuitively responding to that interaction through dance, and finally adding continuous layers of intuitive movement responses to my memory of the initial interaction rather than physically reconnecting with the artifact each time. My previous engagements with the chosen artifacts and their origins, such as patterns of holding or using the artifacts or what my initial introduction to them was like, emerge within the present interaction. My current state of being and the larger contexts of the present-day impact how I engage with these artifacts in the moment. For example, the time of day, where I am, how I feel, or my experiences prior to *welding* may influence what parts of the artifact interaction resonate with me and inspire certain movement. This aligns with MET because *welding* is a dynamic practice that amplifies the interaction between me and the chosen artifacts, focuses on the material and ephemeral imprints made through this interaction, and demonstrates how each material interaction will never look, be, or feel the same. Memory and artifacts are intensely intertwined, and my *welding* practice embraces this.

2.3 Assemblage Theory

The organization and realization of my thesis experience "*welding* **borderlands** | *soldando* **las tierras fronterizas**," was guided by assemblage theory. Assemblage theory, first formulated by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and expanded upon by Manuel DeLanda, is a framework that highlights how varied, seemingly unrelated components connect with one another to create a dynamic, whole structure. [10] These components are both material (objects, landscapes,

[10] DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory*.

humans, etc.) and immaterial (processes, emotions, behaviors, etc.). They co-exist as active contributors to a non-hierarchical, malleable structure. Each component of an assemblage maintains its agency, as its connection to other components does not fundamentally change the essence of what it is nor how it functions independently. This complex web of relationships morphs over time as new connections are formed and components within the structure change.

Understanding my thesis experience as an assemblage offered clarity when absorbing the breadth of elements it contained. The community journey I created was structured in four layers: a migration, an immersive installation, a sharing of *welding*, and a celebration. Each of these layers simultaneously existed as independent entities as well as connected components that formed the entire experience. There was a non-hierarchical connection across these overarching layers and the journey included material and immaterial factors.

Especially in considering the four independent layers as separate assemblages, their fluid, interconnected nature became abundantly clear. For example, the presence of the guests the day of the thesis experience inspired shifts in the structure of the immersive installation layer. The Installation contained my archive of artifacts I accumulated throughout the process of developing this community journey. Leading up to this, the connections between these artifacts, my intentions and ideas, the spaces I was in, the soundscape, and more, were constantly transforming as I conceptually and technically refined them, more were added, others were removed, the way they were displayed changed, and so on. With the component of new guests, for instance, introduced to the assemblage among other things the day of the thesis experience, these pre-existing connections continuously scrambled, reconnected, and resettled. The artifacts, movement patterns of the guests, architecture of each display station, lighting, how guests interacted with each other and my artifacts, and more were all components within The Installation assemblage. The Installation itself was a component of the community journey assemblage. Assemblages were in assemblages, all combining to form a collage-like entity that morphed in real time as guests

engaged and contributed to the structure of the community journey. This also reflects the structure of *welding* as it builds layers upon layers of artifacts, movement, sound, and video.

2.4 My Body is an Archive

I situate the body as an archive of generational memory, which is reinforced through my *welding* practice. An archive is generally understood as both the architectural site and the collection of artifacts that are gathered and stored within an organized system. The rigidity of this definition has been loosened in Archival Studies mainly by acknowledging the role of the body in the archival process. For example, Lara Lookabaugh defines archives as "lived, messy spaces where history unfolds not linearly, but in proximity to bodies."[11] The bodies involved in the process of archiving material are recognized here as active contributors to the maintenance of the archive. Although the presence of the body is uplifted, distance is still maintained between the body and the archive in definitions like this. Bodies are often acknowledged within the system of archives but infrequently credited as literal archival sources. I urge that the body is even more essential in the archival process as the body itself is an archive.

Psychological perspectives surrounding imagination and memory support my claim of the body as an archive of generational memory and my engagement with oral history in my creative process. There is much literature in the Psychology field that mainly explores how trauma is held in the body. The term body memory is used to describe how the body is able to archive sensations from past experiences.[12] My centering of the body holding generational memory stems from this discovery. In a psychological study by Antje Gentsch and Esther Kuen that investigates body memory, it was found that the re-enactment of a traumatic experience, which often happens involuntarily as a coping mechanism to prevent re-exposure to a similar event, can have the same

[11] Lara Lookabaugh, "Body of Evidence: Time and Desire in Embodied Archives," *Qualitative Inquiry* (2022).
[12] Antje Gentsch and Esther Kuehn, "Clinical Manifestations of Body Memories: The Impact of Past Bodily Experiences on Mental Health," *Brain Sciences* 12, no. 5 (2022): 594.

sensorial intensity as the original event.[13] For example, if someone gets injured in a car accident and they hear any loud crashing sound after that, it could trigger their body to respond as if it were the original accident—such as immediately bracing themselves, holding tension in body parts that were affected in the crash, or experiencing emotions of fear or discomfort. The fact that the body is able to replicate a past traumatic experience on such an extreme somatic level justifies my identification of the body as an archive. In my *welding* practice, I contribute a curiosity of body memory's potential in capturing more joyous experiences. The triggers I have used to investigate this are my artifacts, which have continuously generated a positive visceral experience of body memory in me.

The generational memory aspect of the body as an archive is supported in the Psychology field through findings that memories that are passed down from others, or vicarious memories, are often imagined in the first-person perspective as if it were one's own memory. Pillemer, et al. found that vicarious memories are related to personal memories in that they have similar qualities of vividness, physical reaction, and emotional intensity.[14] This finding supports my centering of the imprints left by the generational translation of memory and the undeniable impact this has on those who did not experience something first-hand. I urge that vicarious memories have a degree of personal impact that has the potential to be sensorially felt and processed across generations.

In *welding*, my movement is inspired by this action of re-exposure to memories. The memories I am re-experiencing are not always my own—as I also work with vicarious memories passed down from family members through oral history. These memories are not always traumatic, as I am very consciously driven to uplift celebratory memories around the topic of immigration in order to disrupt the existing literature's overwhelming focus on trauma. When I

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[13] Gentsch and Kuehn.
[14] David B. Pillemer, Kristina L. Steiner, Kie J. Kuwabara, Dorthe Kirkegaard Thomsen, and Connie Svob, "Vicarious Memories," *Consciousness and Cognition* 36 (November 2015): 233–45.

imagine these types of joyous memories, I am hyper-aware of the sensations that arrive in my body, such as buzzing, heaviness, tingling, tension, stickiness, and so on. These sensations trigger impulses that I intuitively follow to dance in a way that explores the boundaries and roots of these sensations. I am not re-enacting what happened in these memories in a mime-like fashion, but rather, allowing my body to respond to the sensations that arise in the act of remembering during an interaction with an artifact.

Having established that memory lives within the archive of the body, I position my *welding* practice as a tool to excavate, access, and process these memories. Diana Taylor outlines how embodied memory is transmitted through embodied practices in her definitions of the archive and the repertoire: "the archive of supposedly enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bones) and the so-called ephemeral repertoire of embodied practice/knowledge (i.e., spoken language, dance, sports, ritual)."[15] The physical body is subtly referenced here in the archive category through the inclusion of bones, and dance is categorized within the repertoire. Using this framework, I position my body as an archive and my *welding* practice within the repertoire.

2.5 Installation Inspiration

For my thesis experience, "*welding* **borderlands** | *soldando* **las tierras fronterizas**," I created an immersive installation with the archive from my creative process. This archive consists of artifacts I have encountered and created during my development of *welding* over the past few years. It is an open container that will continue to grow. The decision to share my artifacts with guests through an immersive installation was influenced by the Puerto Rican visual artist, Pepón Osorio. Osorio creates immersive installations based on personal memories and influence from

[15] Diana Taylor, "Acts of Transfer," in *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, 1–52 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

Latinidad. He takes several years to accumulate objects for building one installation.[16] Within this long-term period, the care, intention, and intricacies within each of his works can settle, deepen, and be palpably felt. Inspired by Osorio's commitment to take his time, I decided to adopt a process of slow gathering in collecting artifacts in my archive. Gradual, gentle gathering allowed for a web of connection between each of these artifacts to marinate and adjust each time something was added, removed, or altered. My intention for crafting a space of care, warmth, familiarity, and belonging seeped into every crevasse of my installation because I gave myself time with the details. I also adopted Osorio's consideration of an installation as a landscape of memory.[17] Bringing these artifacts together into an immersive installation made the interaction with memory a tangible experience. Personal meaning was created through the material exchange between the guests and my artifacts.[18] The immersive element of my installation invited guests to consider themselves as part of the landscape, not static witnesses to it, which further encouraged a sense of community and comfort in the space.

My installation was an immersive landscape of memory embedded within the living archive of my thesis experience. As defined by Amalia Sabiescu, living archives are "practices and environments that connect the organisation, curation and transmission of memory with present-bound creative, performative, and participatory processes."[19] They are experiences that nourish community-building through the social transmission of memory. I curated this community journey with a specific intention to engage guests as active participants in the creation and fostering of personal and collective meaning. This was especially potent in The Installation, which is a living archive in itself. In this approach, I embraced memory as a fluid entity preserved not only by the individual, but within the collective.

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[16] Pepón Osorio**,** interview by Maria Hinojosa, *Latino USA*, January 23, 2024, https://www.latinousa.org/2024/01/23/peponosorio/.
[17] Pepón Osorio**,** interview by Maria Hinojosa.
[18] Prezioso and Alessandroni, "Enacting Memories," 962–83.
[19] Amalia G. Sabiescu, "Living Archives and The Social Transmission of Memory," *Curator: The Museum Journal* 63, no. 4 (2020): 497–510.

The practice of collecting these artifacts that are material traces of my process truly changed my perception of and relationship with inanimate objects. There is vibrant energy within them that becomes diminished and restricted within the limits of the English language and its reinforcement of the animate/inanimate binary. Robin Kimmerer's urge to embrace the animacy in all things[20] grounded me in appreciating the lively essence of my artifacts. The ritual in *welding* of being with/absorbing these artifacts gave me space to acknowledge how much I learn each time I interact with them with full presence. Every time is different. *welding* is a reciprocal exchange of knowledge between the artifacts and me. In crafting The Installation, I was reminded of how personal my relationship with these artifacts became over time. Transferring these precious entities from their places in my home to inhabit The Installation added another layer of vulnerability to my thesis experience that I was not originally anticipating.

The animacy of my artifacts supported my intent for The Installation to feel welcoming and dynamic, rather than rigid, distant, and museum-like. Nonlinearity was an important factor in ensuring it was experienced the way I intended. A nonlinear archival model that influenced The Installation design was the clay sculpture, *Tree of Life*, by Verónica Castillo.[21] Its web-like, spinning structure, filled with clay figures of moments in Latinx history, functions as both nonlinear and non-hierarchical. This is how I designed The Installation space. Each of the eight stations in my installation could be approached from any angle and the artifacts within them were not placed chronologically. This allowed for web-like connections and meaning to be made between temporally unrelated artifacts not only throughout The Installation at-large, but also within the smaller installation I created when choosing which artifacts to do *welding* with during The *welding* Sharing.

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[20] Robin Wall Kimmerer, "Learning the Grammar of Animacy," *Anthropology of Consciousness* 28, no. 2 (2017): 128–34.
[21] Francesca Galván, "Rooted in Tradition, Reaching for Social Change: Verónica Castillo's 'Tree of Life' Sculptures." *Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage* (2023), https://folklife.si.edu/magazine/veronica-castillo-tree-of-life-sculptures.

2.6 Artistic Approach and Influences

My general artistic approach while refining my creative practice and developing *welding* has been informed by artists like Josefina Baez, who utilize a multimodal structure of artmaking, and by my prioritization of my body's needs, as emphasized in Somatics. Josefina Baez, a Dominican-York scholar, created Performance Autology,[22] which is an autobiographical, creative practice that has deep roots in cultivating joy and introspection. The actions involved in this practice include engaging in different art forms, spending time with oneself, play, mindfulness, and more. My artistic approach relates to Baez's multimodal creative practice as I rely on multiple artistic avenues, including dance, blackout poetry, collaging, and more, to digest my questions and findings. I am committed to a process-oriented style of creation that disperses the weight of the work among many factors and encourages ongoing discoveries.

As for my approach in my *welding* practice, I was inspired by a practice in Somatics called Authentic Movement.[23] This practice, created by Mary Starks Whitehouse, involves a score with a mover and a witness. The witness holds a generous, non-judgmental gaze as the mover follows the impulses that arrive in their body without forcing themselves to do something specific. The mover begins with eyes closed and is guided to movement by their own internal focus. This internal focus and reliance on the body's sensations rather than predetermined thought activating movement is how I approach my *welding* practice. *welding* encourages movement that I am intuitively inclined to do based on my body's current state of being. Embracing a multimodal, process-oriented approach and listening deeply to my body's needs are integral to my personal values and the foundations of my creative practice.

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[22] Josefina Baez, "About Performance Autology," https://www.josefinabaez.com/autology.
[23] Janet Adler, "A Brief Description - Discipline of Authentic Movement," 2015, https://disciplineofauthenticmovement.com/public-pages/welcome-discipline-of-authentic-movement/a-brief-description/.

In my approach for crafting my community journey thesis experience, I found Performance Studies to offer useful frameworks to work from. Firstly, Diana Taylor's expansive definition of performance reaches beyond its traditional, artistic context and into a community preservation technique. Taylor offers that performance plays a key role in understanding past experiences in present day contexts. In "Performance and/as History,"[24] she discusses how the act of performance opens an opportunity for communities to reimagine historical events. She insists that this is a generative action where novel realizations about the past are revealed within the present climate and with present-day bodies. This directly supports my practice of using dance as a method of excavating memories of intergenerational experiences captured in the body and my decision to craft a community journey that had the capacity to create and process collective memory. Guests were active participants in the collective meaning-making of this experience. Performance in community is an effective method to unearth historical and cultural memory, which is what I prioritize in my research.

In addition, Rebecca Schneider claims that performance is not something that disappears but rather something that remains, reappears, and is reimagined in the flesh. By reconsidering performance as a dynamic force that leaves eternal, experiential and sensorial imprints, it becomes apparent that what remains from a performance does "not have to be isolated to the document, to the object, [or] to bone versus flesh."[25] There is great value in immaterial remains, which make up the spaces and silences within every archive, including that of the body. What is not articulated may be felt or experienced in a way that cannot be captured through language or attached to a material thing. Through *welding*, I embrace a dynamic approach to exploring the residue of memory as it gets translated through layers of embodied processing and I do not restrict this processing to one mode of translation.

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[24] Diana Taylor, "Performance and/as History," *TDR (1988-)* 50, no. 1 (2006): 67–86.
[25] Rebecca Schneider, "Performance Remains," *Performance Research* 6, no. 2 (January 1, 2001): 100–108.

Creators in other artistic fields engage with similar themes in my research like borderlands and memory. Angelica Monteiro is a movement artist and educator from the Brazilian Amazon whose personal experiences crossing borders inform her art. One of her works, *Narratives of the Migrant Body*,[26] explores how to find a sense of home as an immigrant or descendant of immigrants, using personal histories as inspiration for the performers' embodiment. My research connects to Monteiro's exploration of the general experience of crossing borders and pivots from it in my specificity of where my embodied processing occurs — not only in the experience of crossing a border but within the site of the borderland.

Additionally, Susan Harbage Page, a photographer, has an ongoing project called *Humanizing the Border* that centers experiences in and on borders.[27] This work emphasizes the body being impacted by the creation and maintenance of geographical borders. This work specifically focuses on the México-United States border, as Page lays down on this borderline and exposes the vulnerability of her body by staying there for a prolonged period of time. This work is linked to my interest in borderlands between geographical locations as well as my emphasis on the body being physically impacted by experiences of immigration. Page's work focuses on the external, visible effects of borders whereas my research hones in on the internal, invisible effects of geographic, generational, spatial, bodily and material borders.

Another example of artists who focus on borders is the collective, Border Arts Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronterizo. This collective of many different artists makes work centering the México-United States border. One work that resonates with me is *Border Sutures*,[28] which was an extensive trip from the east-most end of the México-U.S. border to the west-most

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[26] Angelica Monteiro, *Narratives of the Migrant Body*, in "The In-between Project: Part I," performance video, December 2023, https://angelicamonteiro.com/whats-new.
[27] Susan Harbage Page, *Humanizing the Border*, in the "U.S.–Mexico Border Project" (2017), https://susanharbagepage.com/u-s-mexico-border-project/.
[28] Border Artistic Workshop, Berta Jottar, Carmela Castrejón, Victor Ochoa, Richard Lou, Robert Sánchez, Michael Schnorr, Patricio Chávez, and Lourdes Grobet, "Border Sutures," performance, 1990, https://lourdesgrobet.com/en/border-sutures/.

end. Along the way, performances and rituals were held and an oversized staple was punctured into the ground along the borderline. Their literal, physical trace left along the México-U.S. borderline is how I envision my *welding* practice traveling along multiple borderlands between and across bodies, materials, generations, memories, and more. A lasting imprint is created while navigating these borderlands through the body in motion. I also involve an intentional leaving of trace in my process by collecting and creating artifacts for my archive.

One of the many founding members of Border Arts Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronterizo is prominent artist and activist, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, who creates performance art about border culture, identity politics, and power dynamics.[29] He is also known for his role as the director of La Pocha Nostra, a transdisciplinary, performance art organization. Gómez-Peña's work is transgressive, provocative, and frequently shaped by his signature strategy of reverse anthropology, where expected power dynamics are inverted. With this approach, audiences are forced into confronting their own perspectives and assumptions and are positioned as outsiders. My work lives on the other side of this spectrum of intention, as I crafted my thesis experience to feel like an inclusive, communal journey with a variety of access points for guests. As Gómez-Peña employs shock and confrontation as a strategy of disruption, critique, and awareness, I employ vulnerability and tenderness as a strategy of reflection, connection, and motivation. The aura of my work is warm and personal, which creates a powerful and emotionally intense impact on guests that resonates beyond the event itself and inspires self-reflection.

[29] Guillermo Gómez-Peña, "Essential Works: A Gómez-Peña Project Chronology," https://www.guillermogomezpena.com/works/#essentialworks

3. What is *welding*?

My *welding* practice is a layered investigation of embodied translation. It is a tool that physicalizes seemingly intangible borderlands, or third/in-between spaces, through the body in motion to make them more accessible to process. The borderlands I investigate through *welding* are between and across bodies, materials, generations, memories, and more. *welding* frames the body as an archive of generational memory and uplifts dance as an empowering medium and skillful tool to identify, reconnect with, and reflect upon those memories.

The seedlings of *welding* were planted during my undergraduate Capstone work, *Familia Cervantes*.[30] While developing phrase work in a rehearsal, as I improvised, I had my thought partners embody movements of mine that resonated with them and put them into a sequence in real time. I then re-embodied movements from their developed sequence that resonated with me in the moment. The residue of this rehearsal subtly made its way back into my curiosity in my first semester of graduate school at Duke University in the MFA in Dance: Embodied Interdisciplinary Praxis program. For the final of my Theories of Corporeality course, I, unknowingly at the time, revisited this exploration of embodied translation. I randomly chose to engage with the poem, “The Welder” by Cherríe Moraga.[31] I read this poem in full for the first time during my final presentation, where I instructed my classmates to read it on their own and then join me in the center of the classroom. I intuitively responded to the poem through movement and recorded it on video. Once my classmates joined me, they witnessed me in continued motion and began to gather movements of mine that resonated with them into a sequence. After my digestion of the poem felt complete, I asked them to share their sequences with me simultaneously. I then gathered movements from the group that resonated with me into a

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[30] Natalia Cervantes, *Familia Cervantes,* performed by Natalia Cervantes (Washington, D.C.: American University Museum at the Katzen Arts Center, December 4, 2022). Thought partners involved in its creation were Leena Khurana and Allison Grant.
[31] Cherríe Moraga, "The Welder," in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, Fourth Edition (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 219-220.

sequence. Once they were done, I shared my sequence with them. This was where the concept of *welding* gained momentum.

"The Welder" by Cherríe Moraga[32] holds significant weight in my *welding* practice—not just in its name but in its message and origin. *welding* centralizes the relationships between bodies, materials, generations, memories, and more. The fusion of these entities creates living third spaces, or borderlands. Borderlands breathe, bleed, blend, and change shape. My *welding* practice lives within and through these borderlands, which become materialized through dance. The imagery that automatically comes to mind with the name *welding* is the welding of metal, which is a powerful metaphorical comparison. Metal welding requires intense heat that liquifies pieces of materials at their seam to merge permanently. These seams are like the borderlands between entities in my version of *welding.* The borderlands I explore are alive and morph like liquified metal as the heat of my body in motion explores them.

Overtime, I refined the practice of *welding* into an accumulative layering structure involving intuitive movement, video recordings, significant artifacts from my archive, and sound. *welding* uplifts the knowledge of the body, as its focus is on my immediate, instinctive, movement-based investigation after engaging with personally or culturally significant artifacts. This first layer's intuitive movement response to the interaction with chosen artifacts is recorded on video, and once it feels temporarily settled, is then projected onto a larger screen. The second movement response layer involves an intuitive movement response to the memory of the original interaction with the chosen artifacts and a gathering of resonating movements from the previous layer's video into a sequence. This second layer is also recorded on video and projected onto the previous screen. This can continue for an unlimited number of iterations and can re-engage any artifacts accumulated over time. The videos captured during this process become artifacts in my archive that can be used in future *welding* investigations.

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[32] Moraga, "The Welder," 219-220.

3.1 Structure of welding

Figure 1: Poster describing the structure of *welding*.

welding in its most basic, step-by-step form has two layers:

***welding*, Layer 1:**

1. Choose artifact/s from archive
2. Start video recording
3. Be with/absorb chosen artifacts
4. Intuitive Movement Response
5. Stop video recording
6. Project video onto a bigger screen

This first layer begins with choosing artifacts from my archive. These artifacts have been collected from Latinx artists/activists/scholars, family members, myself, and/or my autoethnographic research trips. The number of artifacts chosen at this stage is flexible. An iPhone camera positioned on a tripod is the usual recording device for this practice. The third step, to be with/absorb the chosen artifact/s, consists of reading, listening to, and/or feeling the selected artifact/s, respectively corresponding to the type of material they are. Here, I tune into the memories and sensations that emerge from engaging with the artifact/s. The Intuitive Movement Response is where the physicalizing of borderlands through the body in motion occurs. I process what resonates from my interaction with the chosen artifact/s by materializing my intuitive reactions, which are released through dance. There is no set time or rush for the Intuitive Movement Response, as I continue until it feels temporarily settled. These responses have tended to be less than ten minutes. To close this first *welding* layer, I stop the recording and transfer it to be projected onto a larger screen.

***welding* Layer 2:**

1. Start video recording
2. Intuitive Movement Response with memory of previous artifact interaction
3. Actively witness and re-embody resonating movements
4. Accumulate resonating movements into a sequence
5. Stop video recording
6. Project video onto previous screen
7. Repeat for future layers

This second layer can be repeated for however many iterations are desired. The Layer 1 video playing on the projected screen must be visible in the frame of the Layer 2 video recording. The Intuitive Movement Response is slightly different here. The immediate movement is drawn from intuitive impulses in response to the memory of my original interaction with the chosen

artifact/s. This continues until it feels temporarily settled, with no set time frame. From there, I actively witness myself in the previous layer's video and translate the movements that resonate from my digital, past self into my present body. These movements are adapted as necessary to meet my present body's needs. The resonating movements can alter in time, texture, direction, quantity, or transfer to a different part of my body, for example. As the previous layer's video continues playing, I gradually accumulate these resonating movements into a sequence. There is fluidity in the building of this sequence, as I do not pressure myself to remember their order or their every detail. If a resonating movement is misplaced or mentally forgotten, I release it with ease. I continually repeat the sequence as I build onto it, so these adaptations are welcomed at any time in the process. As the previous layer's video comes to a close, I move once more through the newly developed sequence, either in a duet with my digital past self still on screen or after she has exited the frame. I close this layer by stopping the recording and projecting it onto the previous screen, to then repeat the cycle.

The more layers a *welding* practice has, the more clearly the essence of the first interaction with the artifact/s is revealed. There is a dialing in energy that is visually captured by the never-ending tunnel of videos inside of videos. As more layers accumulate and are shown on the larger projected screen, the active witnessing step involves any movement that resonates from any of the previous layers. Throughlines across the borderlands of focus emerge more clearly the more they are able to marinate inside of layers upon layers. Each *welding* layer is encouraged to be framed in a different position to mark time in a more dynamic way. The projector element also offers an opportunity to consider the imprint made by my present self as I cast a shadow within my past digital self's environment. *welding* is an opportunity to intimately connect with and process the borderlands of focus, witness myself with a tender gaze in my vulnerable processing state, and to reflect inward as I dance with past, present, and future versions of myself.

3.2 Elements of welding

The above structure of these basic layers of *welding* are fixed, but I have found that there is a lot of room to play within this container. The four elements of *welding* where variations can happen include: Artifacts, Movement, Sound, and Video. The abundant variations in *welding* are not required, they are simply diverse opportunities for playful explorations that have helped me more thoroughly process the memories and indescribable visceral experiences that emerge through this practice.

3.1.1 Artifacts

The artifacts used in *welding* are from my archive that has been growing since I began developing this practice and will continue growing beyond this point. These are artifacts I have both encountered and created over many years. I have collected them from various spaces, experiences, and people. My archive includes but is not limited to blackout poetry, paintings, books, poems, mementos, souvenirs, family treasures, collages, edited videos, *welding* videos, photographs, audio recordings, and music.

These objects have three major sources of origin. The first is the three autoethnographic trips I took to México, specifically to Tendeparacua, Mexicali, and Ciudad de México (CDMX). Secondly, they are artifacts from Latinx artists/activists/scholars I am inspired by, passed down or gifted by my family members, and collected by or for myself. Finally, I created artifacts varying in medium throughout this process, as I have embraced multiple artistic avenues while digesting my research questions and findings. The main artifacts from this source have been blackout poetry, collages, and *welding* videos.

The variations within this element of *welding* can involve how many artifacts are chosen during Layer 1 and whether or not the same or new artifacts are inserted at different layers. Some examples of these types of variations include one or multiple artifacts at once, one or multiple different artifact/s after each layer, one or multiple artifact/s at Layer 1 then the memory of the

interaction with those artifact/s, only the memory of the artifact/s, a new artifact halfway through, and so on.

3.1.2 Movement

Variations in the movement element include the duration and placement of the *welding* steps of Intuitive Movement Response, actively witnessing, and accumulating resonating movements into a sequence. The Intuitive Movement Response has the most flexibility in duration, as the timing of this is dependent on whenever it feels temporarily settled. Actively witnessing can occur immediately with the start of the previous layer's video or happen after the Intuitive Movement Response. The sequence of resonating movements can be built in a consecutive order or form nonlinearly as new movements get inserted wherever they interrupt the existing sequence, which is repeated as it gets built. These resonating movements can also be taken from solely the previous layer or any of the previous layers at once. Movement can also continue or stop once the previous layer video ends and be more pedestrian or stylized.

3.1.3 Sound

Sound is not only an object in *welding,* but it is also an element that fills the room in a way that tenderly wraps itself around my movement explorations. The sounds that have been involved in this process from the beginning stages include audio recordings of oral history conversations with my family, culturally and personally significant music, silence, and breath. Each of these types of sound can vary in their layer placement and the amount of time they are engaged with. Live music was explored for my thesis experience and was an enriching exploration of layering that deeply complimented *welding*. I will expand on this in the next chapter, which details the thesis experience.

3.1.4 Video

The video element of *welding* is where the importance of layering in this practice is most clearly, visually displayed. Video is necessary for every layer in *welding*, so the variations with it

mainly include fluctuations in its framing. For example, it could be the same or different framing in every layer, the same or different framing only showing the originally chosen artifacts, the same or different framing showing artifacts not chosen in the original interaction or having myself and movement in the frame always or sometimes.

3.2 Context of welding

The term *welding* refers to the literal structure of the dance-based practice, as previously outlined in the basic *welding* layers framework; however, there is context that made its development possible and more vibrant. *welding* is not reliant on but rather inspired by three major sources of context: Multiple artistic avenues, Autoethnographic research trips, and Oral history conversations with my family.

3.2.1 Multiple Artistic Avenues

In my creative practice, it is crucial for me to engage with multiple artistic avenues. By having access to multiple modes of creative expression, I am able to digest and reflect upon my research questions, explorations, and discoveries in a nonlinear fashion. This way, I do not get stuck in approaching my research through one perspective. If I were to restrict myself to one medium, it would eliminate opportunities for the unanticipated discoveries that embracing other angles offers. The artistic avenues I engage with include dancing, blackout poetry, collaging, painting, drawing, poetry, writing, scrapbooking, editing and shooting videos, writing, and photography. The purpose of this list is not to use all of these mediums all of the time, but rather to give myself options to choose from that best suit my needs at any time. Each of these artistic avenues carry significant value in my creative practice. They help me craft material traces of my journey. As I create material, they also become artifacts in my archive that can be used during my *welding* practice. A few artistic avenues I would like to highlight are blackout poetry, collaging, and painting.

My interest in blackout poetry began in Fall 2023 as a method to process what I was learning in my academic courses. This expanded into something that helped me digest new experiences and track how my insights about them changed over time. The templates for my blackout poetry have been pages from my journal, papers and readings from classes, existing poems that inspire me, excerpts from books that I work closely with, personally and culturally significant song lyrics, and more. As I deliberately black out words on the page with a marker, a new poem is revealed from the words left over. After a poem emerges from the text, I add a design to the page that compliments the message.[33] The staggered nature of reading a blackout poetry poem makes space in the jumpy pauses for the imprint of the previous work that it grew from to shine through the black ink. This is how I experience *welding* holding space for its previous layers, and how I see each of the generational experiences in my family building the path that supported me to get here. I deeply appreciate this art form because it allows me to revisit past experiences distilled in words and find new meaning embedded within it, all influenced by my present state of being.

Collaging has been an art form I have enjoyed for several years. This artistic avenue naturally picked up pace as I approached my thesis experience, "*welding* **borderlands** | *soldando* **las tierras fronterizas**."[34] Collaging is an empowering art form where scraps can turn vibrant in meaning and raw connections between seemingly unrelated or unassuming pieces are formed. It is the tangible epitome of how fundamental assemblage is in my research. Pieces in a collage are individual but also morph together to create a dynamic sea of texture, color, and imagery when viewed as a whole. The process of collaging can also be translated to the relationship between borderlands and my *welding* practice. My *welding* practice is the glue that fuses the collage

[33] See Appendix A for examples of my blackout poetry.
[34] See Appendix B for an example of my collages.

supplies of bodies, materials, generations, memories, and more together. The connection across these entities is ever changing as its meaning shifts with every new eye that absorbs it.

Another artistic form I frequently involve in my creative practice is painting. One of my paintings was a cumulative work I made in my Choreographic Praxis II course in the Spring 2024 semester.[35] This painting is symbolic of how important the concept of layering is in my *welding* practice. I created an archive on a canvas for a dance-a-day practice. For six days each week for the whole semester, I would engage in a one-minute dance at the end of the day where I would check in with my body and let myself move how I felt inclined to process the events of the day. This could mean shaking, stretching, being still, fluid movement guided by breath, or tensing and releasing certain parts of my body, to name a few. These movements were not predetermined, and I mixed a variety of movement qualities and textures based on the needs of my body each day. After this one-minute movement exploration, I immediately shifted to the canvas and painted how the dance was resonating in my body. I impulsively grabbed the color/s and painting utensil/s that I immediately felt drawn to and painted a visualization of how the dance felt. I was not concerned with remembering the exact movements I did, but rather focused on creating a visual representation of what reverberated through my body after dancing. As time passed, each of these painted moments overlapped and interacted with one another. This translates to how my *welding* practice embraces layering, archiving, and following intuition.

I embrace these artistic mediums as integral methods in my creative process rather than background, supplemental materials. The layering of multiple artistic outlets influences my movement when dancing by helping me release the expectation to describe what my body feels only through words. It is incredibly empowering to be able to communicate the weight of the

[35] See Appendix C for my dance-a-day archive painting.

insights, sensations, and realizations I come to in dance through multiple art forms. What does not seem to be captured through one outlet can be explored through another.

3.2.2 Autoethnographic Trips

Another major source of context for *welding* is the three autoethnographic trips I took to México in 2024. The first research trip was to Tendeparacua, where my paternal abuelos grew up, the second was to Mexicali, where my late maternal abuela grew up, and the third was to Ciudad de México (CDMX) for Día de los Muertos. The first two research trips occurred during the summer of 2024 and the third research trip was in November 2024. I went into these experiences with the intent of exploring the places my abuelos grew up, tracking my sensorial experiences of connecting with physical spaces I have only imagined from stories, gathering information about my roots in México, and immersing myself into spaces where I feel proud, grounded, and seen.

The first research trip was a ten-day experience in Morelia, Tendeparacua, and Ciudad de México (CDMX). Tendeparacua was the main priority, as that is the town where my paternal abuelos grew up. The other two cities helped me situate Tendeparacua within the context of the greater country and culture of México. My family, including my two sisters, parents, and both of my paternal abuelos joined me on this trip. It was the first time my sisters and I went to México, which made the experience even more impactful. There are no words to describe how it felt to connect to the soil of my roots. Having my abuelos there to show us around and tell us about their life in Tendeparacua was extremely special. Their glow of joy in sharing memories with two more generations was incredibly energizing. Walking the literal paths they used to walk and seeing the changes in things they used to see created fertile ground that to this day nourishes my imaginings of their life and the memories they passed down to me.

I approached this trip with a purpose to pay close attention to the sensorial activations I felt while connecting with the new environment and any memories that were remembered and shared within these spaces. I did not premeditate on what I wanted to discover while there, but

rather trusted that curiosities and inspirations would reveal themselves to me while inside of the experience—and they did.

The second research trip to México was to Mexicali, a city on the México-United States border, where my late maternal abuela grew up. A few family members joined me on this trip. This experience mainly held significance in that it was an opportunity to connect with Abuela and the first time I ever drove across the México-U.S. border. The physical experience of moving from one side of the border wall to the other, instead of flying over it, was enlightening; It gave me clearer imagery and context to situate my research framework of borderlands. After returning from this trip, I found that the weight of my grieving process with Abuela's passing illuminates much of my drive for my research. The urgency I originally felt in wanting to archive my familial history was eased as I realized that her legacy is imprinted upon countless things, spaces, and people, regardless of if it is officially recorded through archival artifacts or not. It also gave me peace of mind that my research is accessible to a myriad of familial situations, especially pertaining to whether one's family member/s who immigrated into the United States are alive or not. This was relieving for my future aspirations to involve more people into my research process and *welding* practice.

The final research trip was to Ciudad de México (CDMX) in November 2024 for Día de los Muertos. Día de los Muertos is a Latin American holiday predominantly celebrated in México that honors the lives of those who have passed on. One of the significant practices embedded in this holiday is creating an ofrenda, which is an altar specific to a deceased loved one that contains items like their favorite foods, drinks, and personal items lined with photos and paths of cempasúchiles, or marigolds, to help them find their way. The vibrancy of CDMX during this time was indescribable and its imprints reverberate through my work. I drew inspiration from ofrendas in my creation of the immersive installation in my thesis experience, which consisted of the accumulated artifacts from my archival process. This was a way for me to investigate how memory and grief are externalized and re-imagined through material things.

I had multiple modes of archiving these research trips, including dancing, journaling, video and audio recording, photography, drawing, and collecting artifacts. It was a priority of mine to encourage the involvement of several of my artistic interests in order to see how my experiences manifested through varied mediums and into unique artifacts. Every day, I would finish the day with the movement exercise I used in the Spring 2024 semester, which was an embodied processing of the day's events. I followed the internal impulses to move how my body wanted to move and recorded it on video. I would also journal at the end of each day. Video recording and photography occurred throughout the day. I would capture a moment or a detail in spaces we moved through, choosing whichever medium felt right in the moment. I also collected audio-recordings of both the ambient environment and stories that came up for my family as we were traveling. Additionally, I had a notebook designated for drawing that I always kept accessible for when something resonated with me, and I felt called to capture it. Finally, I naturally gravitated toward collecting physical items along the way, whether that be objects from street vendors, pieces of paper from historical buildings, postcards or mementos from stores, and so on. As I collected and created these artifacts along the way, I envisioned them as a constellation of my experience on these trips. They became entry points to sensorially bring me back to these places when I was not there physically. All of these artifacts are a piece of my archive and can also be used in my *welding* practice.

My experiences on these research trips gave me immense confidence in my autoethnographic approach and provided more material for my archive that I used in my thesis experience's installation and general *welding* practice. My story, my family’s story, and my cultural history are important to hear, feel, see, and know. I am even more empowered in my research because of its potential to inspire others to archive their own history and share their story how they want to share it.

3.2.3 Oral History Conversations with Family

The third source of context for *welding* is oral history documentation via the conversations I have had with my family over the course of several years. The questions I asked during these conversations surrounded themes about memory, home, family, Latinidad, and immigration. During my autoethnographic research trips, I connected with extended family members I had never met before and spaces I had only ever heard about in oral history stories. I documented oral history in these spaces through a mixture of formally and informally documented conversations. Some notable conversations include the one I had in Tendeparacua with my paternal abuelos to archive their experiences returning to their hometown after many years and sharing that experience with multiple generations. Shortly after our return home from that trip, I had another formally documented conversation with my paternal abuelos and asked them more about that trip and their immigration experiences into the United States. I have also documented conversations with many other family members alongside my own reflections. These types of conversations amplified my confidence in emphasizing storytelling through dance.

Another notable source of oral history conversations was the photo archive project I began after returning from my first two autoethnographic trips. I started sorting through and digitizing photo prints that my parents had stored in boxes. These photos go back to before I was born, so it was very special to interact with images I had never seen before. I would ask my mom, who was often in the room with me, about who or what was in a certain photo, and she would share stories about them. These oral history engagements were ones I absorbed through listening and did not write down because it felt disruptive to the moment. The re-engagement with memories through these photos for my mom and my initial introduction to them was a prime example of an intergenerational interaction where meaning is built. These are moments I want to inspire through my research.

4. The Actualization of "*welding* **borderlands** | *soldando* **las tierras fronterizas**"

My thesis experience, "*welding* **borderlands** | *soldando* **las tierras fronterizas**," was a community journey comprised of four layers: a migration, an immersive installation, a sharing of *welding*, and a celebration.[36] Each of these layers bled into one another to create the whole experience and formed an assemblage enriched by connection in community. To begin, The Migration occurred on a bus where guests traveled together from the Lakewood Shopping Center parking lot to the main venue, El Centro Hispano/The Freedman Center. There, they were introduced to *welding*, each other, some of the artifacts in my archive, and an atmosphere of tender warmth and reminiscence. Guests were then welcomed into the main venue by The Installation, which displayed my archive's artifacts within cozy, nostalgic, living room-like architecture. This is where they were encouraged to interact with the tangible traces of my process in developing this work. The *welding* Sharing layer gradually emerged, where I dynamically moved through a few layers of my *welding* practice, shared a video of my Tendeparacua research trip, and invited my family members into the *welding* practice. The culminating layer was The Celebration, which was vibrantly filled with food, music, talking, connecting, and reflecting. This moment was dedicated to digesting the experience in community and holding space for joy, pride, and connectivity. Guests continued their settling out of the experience on the bus ride back to the original pick-up spot. Along and beyond this journey, guests were invited to reconnect with generational memory, reflect on personal archival practices, and celebrate in community.

[36] See Appendix D for the community journey's event schedule.

4.1 The Migration

I step into the blue bus and am immediately enveloped by an ambience of warmth, nostalgia, comfort, and a buzzing sensation of excitement. Smiling faces greet me as tenderly as the memories and senses prompted by the interior decor flood my imagination. My blackout poetry works speckling the windows, the photos from my research trips lining the poles near the ceiling like clothes on a clothesline, and the paper butterflies gently dangling from the ceiling, are all reminders of the journey it took to get to this moment. I take a seat next to my family and soak it all in. I open the Map as the bus starts moving. Alongside a calming soundscape, chatter fills the air, ebbing and flowing in volume as we all become familiar with each other. The community journey has begun.

The bus served as a transitioning space into the *welding* world. Guests were introduced to artifacts and feelings that re-emerged in different moments and ways during the rest of the experience. My blackout poetry poems were intentionally placed along the windows so each guest had an intimate connection to at least one of them and so people in close proximity could access them directly to the side, in front of, or behind them, resulting in natural interaction among guests. The purpose of the bus was to plant and nourish seeds of connection between guests and with some artifacts in my archive. It also created fertile ground of comforting and grounding sensations that securely held the raw vulnerability embedded within the rest of the experience.

I was on the first bus, not as a performer, but as a member of the community. This created a more personal relationship between the guests and me. I wanted to make clear from the start that this experience was not a unidirectional transfer of knowledge from me to them; it was about moving through this journey as a community and co-creating an experience of collective memory. Yes, I did create the foundation for this artistic world so my imprint on the experience was deeply rooted, but it was a communal effort to embrace this experience with tender care in order for it to be realized and energetically activated as vibrantly as it was.

The bus awaited the guests at the Lakewood Shopping Center parking lot. Bus stop signs in Spanish and English guided guests to the bus entrance, where they were greeted by an usher.[37] Upon entry, each person could choose a Spanish or English version of the Map, which contained more information about the process, credits, and "The Welder" poem.[38] The bus ride was about fifteen minutes to the main venue, El Centro Hispano/The Freedman Center. The bus gave people space and time to ponder about what it meant and felt like to migrate as a communal unit, literally transitioning into a new space together to experience something collectively. It was a moving installation—an extension of the immersive installation that awaited guests at the main venue.

4.1.1 The Map

The Map is not a program, it is an offering. It is the handheld version of the heart of this experience, a hint into what is to come, an honoring of who and what contributed to this process, and a memento for the audience to keep in remembrance of this experience. Printed on a sandstone-colored paper, the Map texturally and visually distilled the aesthetic of the whole work. I made both Spanish and English versions of it.[39]

The Map was intentionally folded in three columns and two rows, so it could be opened similarly to a regular map. This prompted the reader to consider this overall experience as a journey with (bus) stops along the way. The reader was initially greeted by the event's promotional image, then unfolded the Map to reveal the title, date, and time. They opened it to the internal, full page where a collage of moments in the process lived, titled "the *welding* journey." Each of the images in this collage represented a significant milestone in my creative process that led to this event. These images could be visually absorbed at once as a whole collage in a nonlinear form or be traced one-by-one as guided by the faded footprints swirling around the

[37] The usher for the bus was Julia Piper and the usher for the venue was Michela Arietti.
[38] Cherríe Moraga, "The Welder," 219-220.
[39] See Appendix E for The Map, displayed as it would be unfolded.

page. These footprints trailed on and off the page, signifying that this collage is just a glimpse into the journey; it began before the first image and will continue past the present event.

The only significant moment of "the *welding* journey" that was physically detached from the page was "The Welder" poem by Cherríe Moraga.[40] As this poem inspired the name of my *welding* practice, came from an influential book, and gave insight into the themes and questions I have been pondering, it deserved a distinct space in the Map. This poem was folded in a way where the reader needed to actively engage with it by unfolding it in order to read the full piece. At the bottom corner of the Map, where the footprints trailed off, was the Schedule of the evening's event. As the reader closed the Map upward, they encountered the Acknowledgments, Credits, and Dedication statements for this work.

4.1.2 Sound

The soundscape of The Migration involved conversational chatter, music by my collaborator, Josué Collado Fregoso, and natural ambience while driving to the main venue. The bus was a space primarily for connection among guests, so chattering was encouraged through low volume music and guests' proximity to conversation starters like my blackout poetry poems, the photographs of my research trips, and the Map. The music on the bus was rich in color and texture, coming to life in an ambient, pulsating, nonlinear loop—the way a memory would. There were two pieces of music: the first was an iteration of the sound installation piece used during The *welding* Sharing element of the thesis experience, titled "Never the same river" [41] by Josué Collado Fregoso. The second was a piece titled, "Anécdota"[42] by Josué Collado Fregoso, which pulsated with short segments from the song "Tango Azul" by Los Tres Diamantes,[43] embellished

[40] Moraga, "The Welder," 219-220.
[41] Josué Collado Fregoso, "Never the Same River*,"* sound installation, performed by Josué Collado Fregoso, composed in 2023.
[42] Josué Collado Fregoso, "Anécdota," performed by Josué Collado Fregoso, composed in 2023.
[43] Los Tres Diamantes, "Tango Azul*,"* track 11 on *Boleros In Trío* (YOYOUSA, Inc., 2006).

by reverb, repetition, layering, and static, as if changing the channel on a radio. This soundscape embodied what memory feels like.

4.2 The Installation

As we exited the bus, I became conscious of the borderland we were navigating together while transitioning from the bus to the venue. Borderlands are ubiquitous. I open the venue door and feel the undeniable gravitational pull of my welding world, so eager to embrace us. We walk into a space glowing with warmth and bright energy. A sea of reds, beiges, oranges, and browns are illuminated by golden orbs of light and deeply saturated by traces of memories. Witnessing guests enter the immersive installation for the first time gave me an opportunity to see it with new eyes and feel it with a fresh appreciation. Every inch of the space emerged from the core of my being—every detail intentionally cared for and every station delicately crafted. The space is throbbing with my memories from this creative process and from my life. These entries into myself give those around me encouragement to access entries into themselves and their own memories. I did not only make space for me; it is space for us and all of the parts of ourselves that feel invisible in other places.

Figure 2: Image of The Installation.

There was variety in the ebb and flow of nonlinear movement, both individually and collectively, as we shifted from the bus door to the venue entrance. This parallels the instability of borderlands, which requires entities to adapt and morph as they fuse. As guests transitioned from the bus to the building, they were unknowingly embodying the borderland between these spaces. Once inside, the guests were invited deeper into the space by the immersive installation of my archive.[44] There were eight pieces of furniture that held my artifacts, which I called stations. There was intentionally no instruction on how to move throughout The Installation. People meandered every which way, which reflects the nonlinearity of my process and how I embrace intuitive impulses as guides of movement.

The main venue was El Centro Hispano/The Freedman Center. It was important for this journey to land at a community center where Latinx people already gather, as my art is inspired by and made for my Latinx community. This space holds lively, familiar energy, and a deep history of Latinx community gatherings, which contributed to the comforting feeling of The Installation. I translated every instructional sign in both Spanish and English in order to keep an inclusive atmosphere.

4.2.1 Stations

There were eight stations total in the space, where the guests could interact with the artifacts from my archive and engage in multiple artistic avenues. This included an entry station, four stations primarily for displaying artifacts, two community creation stations, and a central altar for The *welding* Sharing. The space resembled a living room with a couch, dark wooden furniture, rugs, and domestic lighting. All of the stations were decorated with the artifacts I have collected and created along the way in this process. Each one had a specific place and was cradled by different baskets, nooks, and fabrics. Every station was sprinkled with tea lights, making them

[44] The Installation was designed by Natalia Cervantes and Julia Piper, with lighting design and stage management by Indigo Cook.

look like altars. This gently signaled an extra nudge of encouragement to guests to handle the artifacts with care. My blackout poetry and photos from the bus re-emerged throughout this space alongside new poems, photos, paintings, and collages. The projector screen displayed an image of the same room we were in, subtly foreshadowing the layering that would be revealed in The *welding* Sharing.

The entry table provided information about the interactive nature of The Installation and context of what *welding* is. A central note described The Installation and invited guests to interact with the artifacts in a mindful manner. It also invited them to leave thoughts, questions, and memories with the provided note cards throughout The Installation at any point: on a clothespin frame, dropbox, or corkboard. Since I gave so much of myself within this work, this was a way for me to receive something back and refuel. It was an act of self-care for an artist who deeply embraces vulnerability.

There were three community creation stations: two were solely dedicated as hands-on artistic opportunities for guests—collaging and blackout poetry—and the third, integrated magnet poetry into a station mainly focused on my artifacts. The point of these was to have guests actively engage in the other artistic avenues that are important to my creative practice. It was a fun, non-intimidating way to invite people deeper into the *welding* world, to make art, to interact with new people, to leave their own imprint on The Installation, and to let them know that they are included, appreciated, and seen in this space.

The collage station was a space where guests' artistic imprints gradually accumulated over time. The collage was a living artifact constantly changing and developing new meaning with each new encounter. Guests created a lasting web of connection with each other by overlapping on the page and gathering closely together to create a larger piece of art. The anonymity behind each imprint speaks volumes to the collective effort in generating this artwork. The blackout poetry station was more of a space for guests to make an individual imprint on The Installation. They were invited to leave their poem at the station or take it home as a memento of

their time there. The magnet poetry station was a space of impermanence. Guests could make a poem by rearranging the magnets already on the board or by adding completely new words. Each of these community creation stations produced artifacts that are now part of my archive. I can do *welding* with them in the future and fondly remember that they were crafted in community.

4.2.2 Sound

The Installation soundscape included a blend of music and audio recordings from conversations with my family. The music I edited together involved songs that I have previously done *welding* with and songs that are personally and culturally significant to me. The songs were linked together by short snippets of the audio recordings from oral history conversations I have had with my family. These audio recordings ranged from ones I recorded years ago to those I recorded during my recent autoethnographic research trips. My family's voices were grounding anchors as guests explored The Installation. The content of what they said gave glimpses into the themes I was searching through in my research, such as memory, immigration, and Latinidad. Chatter among the guests interacting with each other and my artifacts decorated this soundscape with playful energy.

4.3 The welding Sharing

Deep breath. I open the door, and its squeak introduces me to the room. Swirling in, step by step, pushed forward by the faded footprints on the Map and pulled in by the smudged footprints on the cloth below the projector, where I will share welding. I greet the guests with my eyes, soaking in the warmth from new and familiar faces who have witnessed the journey to this moment from near and far. I orbit the center altar, eventually grounding myself in its nucleus. A beat of connection with the uninhabited altar. Each station calls me, one by one, and I gather an artifact from each. Their energy hums in my hand as I absorb their essence with full presence.

The *welding* Sharing consisted of three phases: four layers of *welding*, a video of my Tendeparacua research trip, and *welding* between generations, which involved my family

members. After I spent some time in The Installation with the first group, I trailed off to prepare for The *welding* Sharing. During this time, the second group who had a later bus pickup time joined the space. Seats were pulled into a semicircle around a giant cloth on the floor below the projector screen, which signaled a shift into this next layer of my thesis experience.

To recap, *welding* is my developed practice that physicalizes seemingly intangible borderlands, or third/in-between spaces, through the body in motion to make them more accessible to process. In short, it is a layered investigation of embodied translation. The borderlands I investigate through *welding* are between and across bodies, materials, generations, memories, and more. Each *welding* layer during this sharing ended up being under five minutes.

4.3.1 Sound

The soundscape that supported the emotional intensity of this experience was created by Josué Collado Fregoso. He performed his sound installation, "Never the same river,"[45] adapting it live to my intuitive movement. Josué used a software that randomly chose electronic tones and types of sounds, such as footsteps, static, water, humming drones, among many more. He used a mixer to adjust these sounds in real time through reverb, volume, balance, and more. As I built each *welding* layer, the sound mirrored its layering by becoming increasingly full and complex. Josué's generative music embodies the essence of my *welding* practice. Each time Josué performs this work, it sounds completely different because the choices made by the software and himself change. Similarly, every time I do *welding* it never looks or feels the same, especially because my Intuitive Movement Responses tune into the impulses of my body's reactions in the ever-present moment. The music filled the room with such rich color and visceral energy, hugging my *welding* practice and those in the space with such care.

[45] Josué Collado Fregoso, "Never the Same River."

4.3.2 Four Layers of *welding*

As I begin welding, I close my eyes to focus into the internal impulses that guide my movement. The resonating imprint of my interaction with these artifacts sculpts the first layer. My breath bounces through my torso in a wave, the shaking in my core reverberates to the tips of my fingers, my arms gently wrap around my back, my feet drag the cloth beneath me into a spiral...These impulses gradually settle to a lull, which is when I pause, open my eyes, and choose to step away. My recentering breath supports me through the live archiving process. As I move my recording device, I feel like a painter stepping back from her painting to soak in the work as a whole and re-enter with a new perspective. Each time my feet rejoin the smudged cloth, wrinkling across the floor with my imprint, I reunite with the memory of the initial interaction with my artifacts. I am activating, releasing, energizing, and processing the borderlands with and through the heat of my body in motion.

These four layers of *welding* reveal the borderlands between my body and these artifacts, digital and physical spaces, my initial interaction with the artifacts and the memory of it, and the realms of time. This practice grounds these metaphorical and seemingly intangible entities into my body, where they become palpable, intimate, discernable, and more accessible to explore. As the *welding* layers build, the shadow I cast on the projector screen becomes a material example of how I navigate these borderlands. My present self in the physical realm and my past self in the digital realm fuse at the site of this shadow. My shadow lives in the borderland between these entities. Its presence naturally alters each realm by automatically shifting the focus from conceiving them as individual spaces to also understanding them as a dynamic, blending unit. I am simultaneously moving within the past, present, and future by navigating embodied memory, following intuitive movement impulses, and creating the foundation for the next *welding* layer.

Additionally, each layer's video alternated between being flipped upside down and right side up, which marked time in a distinct, perplexing manner. This complicated any initial

assumptions about the layers being stagnant and restricted within the realm of their respective video. Each layer was an active entity and morphed with every addition of another layer, as signaled by their directional flips. This also cemented how I was interacting with every layer at once in my *welding* practice, not just the most recent one.

The tools of my *welding* practice, including my iPhone camera and tripod, did not change for the public sharing. It was important to maintain the integrity of the practice in this way because I wanted my archiving process to be transparent. Guests actively witnessed the steps of me preparing the frame, pressing record, airdropping the video to my computer, and then projecting it onto the screen. The labor involved was intentionally not erased. This also gave us all a moment to breathe, look around, and reflect.

In the fourth and final layer, I played the last *welding* video while I slowly returned the artifacts that were gathered at the central altar back to their original place in The Installation. I continuously watched myself in these previous *welding* layers and took a seat next to the once again uninhabited center altar after returning the last artifact. This gesture was a reminder of my place as a member of the community in the room. Once this video ended, I shared the video of my Tendeparacua research trip.

4.3.3 Research Trip Video Sharing

The turning point of the *welding* sharing was a documentary-style video I made about the research trip I took with my family to Tendeparacua, México. The story followed the experiences of my abuelos on that trip and what it meant to them to return to their hometown and share it with two other generations. A mixture of video and still images was glued together by my abuelos' voices. Some of the photographs previously seen in The Migration and The Installation reappeared in this video. The joy of my abuelos in remembering and in returning home exuded from the screen. Sharing this video opened space to appreciate just how much these research trips and my family impacted me and my process of developing *welding*.

At its core, this video embodied major themes I have been inspired by, including family, immigration, Latinidad, memory, and intergenerational experiences. It also welcomed another reminder of the multiple artistic avenues I engage with in my creative practice. This video was created in an Editing for Film and Video course I took the semester prior to realizing this thesis experience. The dialogue in the video was mostly in Spanish, with English subtitles, which signaled the borderlands that exist across languages.

I hold great value and commitment in bringing my family along with me in all I do. In this thesis experience, their imprint became increasingly obvious. Starting with their subtly visible influence on my artwork displayed in the bus, artifacts from them or from experiences with them and their voices in The Installation space, their memories and bodies in the video living inside of the projector screen where *welding* just took place, and then their physical presence and entire being invited into my *welding* practice, as described below.

4.3.4 *welding* Between Generations

This part of my thesis experience feels sacred and is especially challenging to describe in words. I will not be revealing certain details here out of respect for the integrity of the work. The essence of this part of the experience was to honor my family. I did three layers of *welding* here, each prompted by artifacts chosen by my family members. I was not aware of which artifacts they would pick and some of them were coincidentally artifacts I spontaneously chose during the previous four layers of *welding*. Each layer was dedicated to a different generation, starting with my abuelos, then my parents, then my sisters and me. The chosen artifacts from each generation accumulated in one assemblage, which allowed me to do *welding* with the same artifacts from the previous layer in addition to the new artifacts of each current layer. The borderlands across and between generations were especially vivid here.

I transitioned us out of the Tendeparacua video by approaching my abuelos, who were sitting in the semicircle of guests. We eagerly and tenderly embraced and stepped into the center

of the *welding* space. They each went to a station in The Installation, retrieved an artifact of their choosing, and gave it to me at the center altar before returning to their seats. I did *welding* Layer 1 with these artifacts. Then, for Layer 2, my parents chose their own artifacts and added it to our family installation at the center altar. I absorbed these new and old artifacts before responding through dance. For Layer 3, my sisters and I added our own artifacts to the family installation. Once my movement within this last generation layer settled, I projected the Layer 3 video onto the screen. As it played, I slowly swirled my way out of the *welding* nucleus back to the door I first emerged from, leaving the family installation artifacts at the center altar, witnessing my Layer 3 self, and reconnecting with guests on the journey out. It was a totally different space than the one I first entered in every way.

4.4 The Celebration

The culminating layer of "*welding* **borderlands** | *soldando* **las tierras fronterizas**," was The Celebration. The shift into this uplifting, lively energy was gradual and supported by sound and lighting transitions. I created a playlist of songs that I have done *welding* with as well as songs that are significant in the Latinx community. I attempted to recreate the spirit of the big and busy family parties I experienced growing up. This part of the community journey was structured time to help ease people back to daily life and offer a reflective space to ponder about what they just experienced. It was a celebration because I wanted to make a dedicated space to nourish the joyful and prideful qualities of immigration stories, memories, and Latinidad. I joined the celebration with the same intention—to reflect and embrace joy.

During this time, guests enjoyed a meal together, re-engaged with the artifacts in my archive, gathered at the community creation stations, reflected with each other, and gifted their thoughts, questions, and memories on notecards to me. These opportunities to offer a piece of their experience back to me and my process were vital in refueling this work and myself. There is a strong foundation of vulnerability and taxing offerings of myself and my family's stories that

drove this thesis experience. I am proud of these pillars and also recognize that a reciprocal system of giving is necessary in order for this work to be sustainable. The Celebration continued on the two bus rides back to the Lakewood Shopping Center where everyone was originally picked up. They left the space charged with new life.

5. Conclusion

Over the past few years, I developed a layered practice called *welding*, which I shared through my community journey thesis experience titled "*welding* **borderlands** | *soldando* **las tierras fronterizas**." My *welding* practice is a layered investigation of embodied translation that physicalizes seemingly intangible borderlands between and across bodies, materials, generations, memories, and more, through the body in motion. With its foundational elements of artifacts, movement, sound, and video, and influential contexts of multiple artistic avenues in my creative process, three autoethnographic research trips to México, and oral history conversations with my family, the dynamic and complex structure of *welding* can be utilized as an effective tool to identify and process borderlands.

welding has interdisciplinary support from Latinx/Chicanx Studies, Psychology, Archival Studies, Performance Studies, and other artists who explore Latinx and/or immigrant experiences. Inspired by the findings within these fields, significantly influenced by borderlands theory,[46] and in conversation with Material Engagement Theory (MET)[47] and assemblage theory,[48] I position the body as an archive of generational memory and the site where borderlands materialize. I offer my *welding* practice as a prime example of how powerful and empowering dance is as a method of research.

The culmination of the past few years as I developed *welding* was my community journey thesis experience, "*welding* **borderlands** | *soldando* **las tierras fronterizas**." This experience consisted of four layers: a migration, an immersive installation, a sharing of *welding*, and a celebration. The Migration started the journey on a bus to the main venue where guests were introduced to the *welding* world and to each other. Guests were then welcomed into the main venue, El Centro Hispano/The Freedman Center, by The Installation, which was an interactive,

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[46] Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*.
[47] Prezioso and Alessandroni, "Enacting Memories," 962–83.
[48] DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory*.

immersive display of the artifacts from my archive that I collected and created throughout this work's development. Within The Installation, emerged The *welding* Sharing, where I moved through four layers of *welding*, shared a video of my research trip to Tendeparacua, and invited my family members into the practice for three more *welding* layers. The journey culminated in The Celebration, which was a dedicated space to reflect on the experience, connect with the space, share a meal, and embrace collective joy. Each of the components of the community journey was enhanced by the intention to move through it as a community and co-create an experience of collective memory. Along and beyond this journey, guests were invited to reconnect with generational memory, reflect on personal archival practices, and celebrate in community.

My dedication to creating space for Latinx experiences, identities, and stories shined throughout the development of "*welding* **borderlands** | *soldando* **las tierras fronterizas**." The "why" behind this commitment was powerfully revealed in my efforts to make my thesis experience accessible, especially through language. The labor involved in English and Spanish translation was overwhelming but necessary. I refused to let the systemic hurdles get in the way of my effort to have Spanish, English, Spanglish, bilingual, non-fluent speakers, and the like feel welcomed in my thesis experience. By making Spanish and English versions of every piece of event material, providing captions on the Tendeparacua research trip video, needing to create a separate event website because the word count restrictions on the university's page did not allow space for translation, and so on, I was actively making space—not just hoping for it. It made me feel incredibly frustrated at times when I got push back from institutional rules and regulations, but I let those moments fuel my fire in my commitment to making space for Latinx experiences, identities, and stories. I will continue to call attention to and push through the labor of translation in my future artistic endeavors and beyond. It is a labor of love. I encourage other artists to mindfully consider acts of translation that even extend beyond languages as necessary forms of bridge-building.

The layers of *welding* are ongoing, with more discoveries yet to be unearthed. My future aspirations for *welding* involve an inclusion of more people in the practice. Although *welding* started from this multi-person space, I decided to focus these last few years on refining its core blueprint so I can provide future collaborators with more clarity as to what they would be joining. Especially because different people have varying relationships to central concepts in my work such as memory, identity, and family, I want to be mindful and adaptive to their needs and experiences. This new dynamic within *welding* reveals a whole other dimension that I am eager to explore.

The all-encompassing comedown of my thesis experience bittersweetly weighs on my spirit. As I gently place my artifacts from my installation, one by one, back into my home, I am zapped with jolts of awe. These artifacts feel profoundly different. The ceramic butterfly glows even brighter, the decorative measuring spoons ring even louder, the fabric doll's colors are even richer, the little painted rock feels even heavier…and they all exude a pulsating aura of calm, nostalgia, and wonder. It is as if they had been energetically charged by the experience…just as I had. These artifacts were not only witnesses to the welding world, but active participants in gifting the space a sense of home. Now, back in my home, they settle in and gift me moments to reminisce.

Appendix A

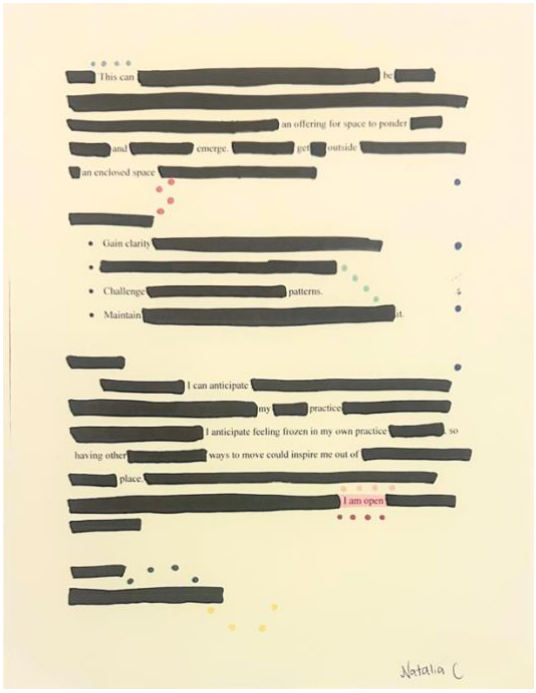

Figure A.1: Example of my blackout poetry with typed text.

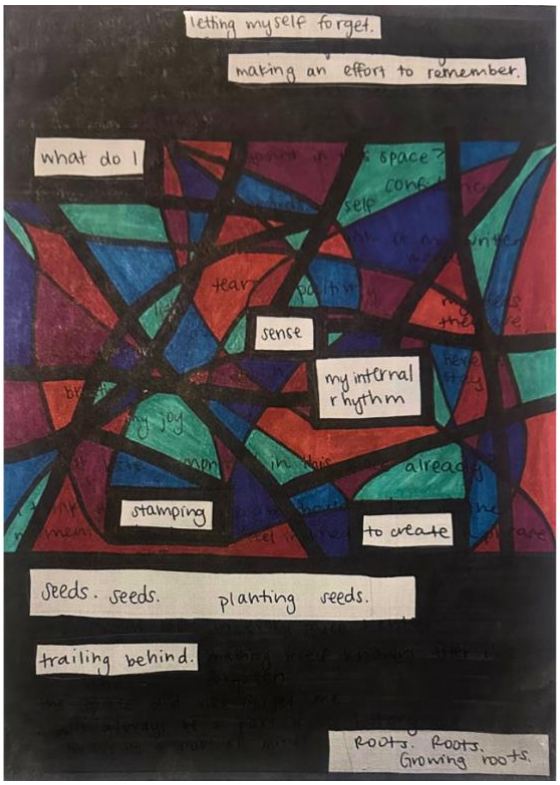

Figure A.2: Example of my blackout poetry with handwritten text.

Appendix B

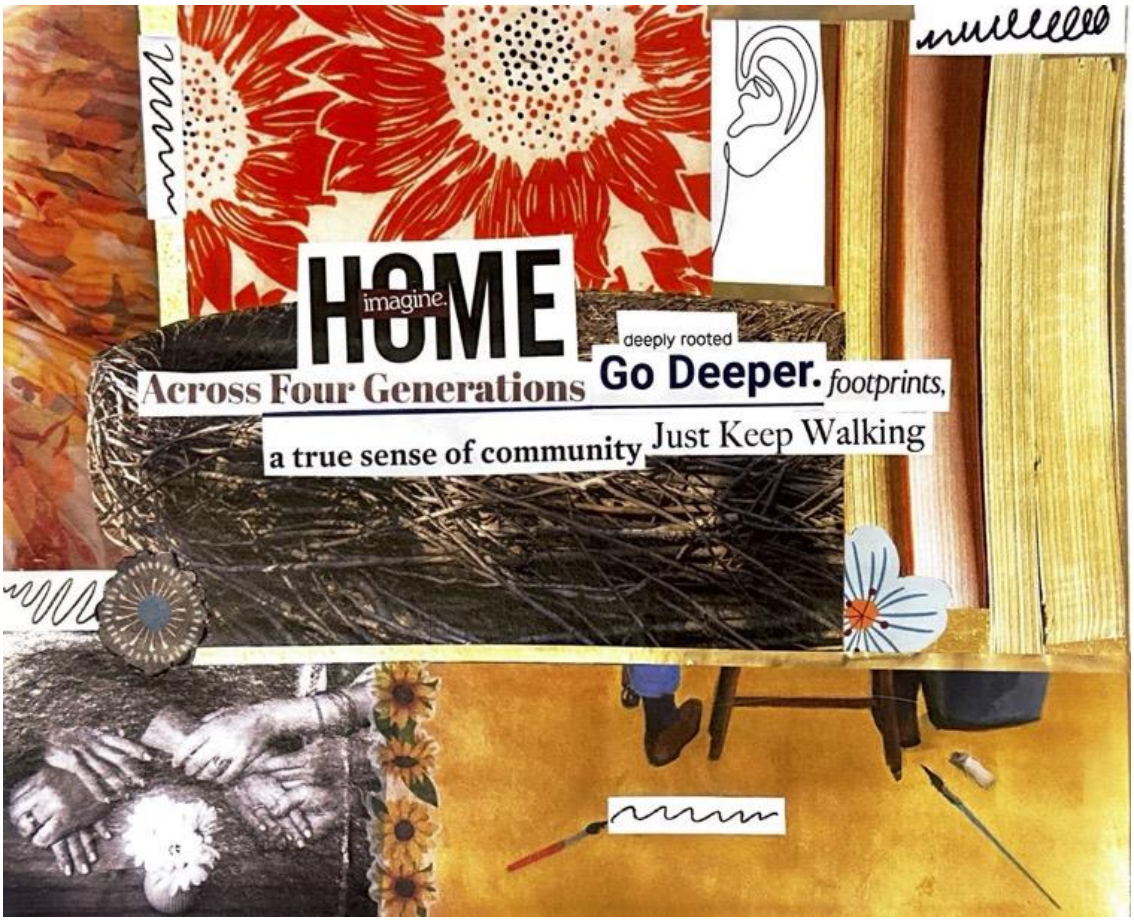

Figure B.1: Example of the collages I create.

Appendix C

Figure C.1: My dance-a-day archive from Spring 2024.

Appendix D

Table D.1: Event schedule for "*welding* **borderlands** | *soldando* **las tierras fronterizas**."

TIME	EVENT
4:00pm	Bus Pickup #1 at Lakewood Shopping Center parking lot
4:10pm	Leave to El Centro Hispano
4:30pm	Drop off at El Centro Hispano, The Installation exploration
4:35pm	Bus returns to Lakewood Shopping Center parking lot
4:45pm	Bus Pickup #2 at Lakewood Shopping Center parking lot
4:55pm	Leave to El Centro Hispano
5:15pm	Drop off at El Centro Hispano, The Installation exploration
5:35pm	The *welding* Sharing
6:35pm	The Celebration Begins
7:00pm	Load bus for departure #1
7:10pm	Leave to Lakewood Shopping Center parking lot
7:20pm	Drop off at Lakewood Shopping Center parking lot
7:25pm	Bus returns to El Centro Hispano
7:35pm	Load bus for departure #2
7:45pm	Leave to Lakewood Shopping Center parking lot
8:00pm	Drop off at Lakewood Shopping Center parking lot

Appendix E

Figure E.1: The Map given to guests during The Migration, displayed as it would be unfolded.

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