

Jerónimo Reyes-Retana
terranullius.global
September 24 – November 1, 2025
Lodos, Mexico City

During the expansion of the colonial apparatus, the Latin term *terra nullius* was instrumentalized as a justification for exerting mechanisms of control, domination, and extraction over territories that, through the lens of the Western worldview, were considered nobody's land. In the twenty-first century, this jurisdictional principle continues to drive projects of industrialization and infrastructure development in the pursuit of so-called "progress." Such is the case in the Mexico–U.S. borderlands, where the marginalized community of El Campo Pesquero de Playa Bagdad, in Tamaulipas, Mexico, now coexists with SpaceX's spaceport in Boca Chica, Texas, only four kilometers north of the Rio Bravo/Rio Grande delta.

Since the first environmental assessment was published by the Federal Aviation Administration in 2014, which regulates SpaceX's operations in the area, the settlement of Playa Bagdad, has remained conspicuously absent. Ironically, this omission places Playa Bagdad in the front row to witness a techno-political spectacle without precedent, while simultaneously subjecting the community to the colonial practices of erasure that often accompany the materialization of infrastructure and industrialization projects—projects that are inherently dualistic: while they connect, move, and liberate, they also disconnect, constrain, and subjugate.

As an aesthetic practitioner, researcher, and community organizer with a profound interest in the politics of noise and the poetics/politics of infrastructure, Reyes-Retana's work in Playa Bagdad emerges from the examination of the cultural, environmental, and economic impact of the detrimental sonic shock waves produced by SpaceX rockets during liftoff. In this scenario, the sound generated by Starship/Super Heavy—the largest spacecraft ever built, comparable in size to a 70-story building—has the potency to cross the Mexico–U.S. border, distressing the bodies of Playa Bagdad's residents, their rudimentary and vernacular architecture, and the wildlife of a community whose economy depends on fishing in the waters of both the Rio Bravo/Rio Grande and the Gulf of Mexico.

Within a geopolitical context where not only the waters of the Rio Bravo/Rio Grande meet the Gulf of Mexico but also processes of economic, cultural, and environmental amalgamation unfold, the presence of SpaceX reaffirms the Mexico–U.S. borderlands as a nerve center from which to rearticulate the political anatomy of contemporary domination. Provoked by the urgency of examining an inherently multidimensional case of social and environmental justice, and through a situated practice grounded in relational and reflexive methodologies, Reyes-Retana has been working with the community of Playa Bagdad for the past five years. By articulating a multi-focal perspective that does not seek to speak on behalf of others but instead to listen to and amplify the unheard voices of Playa Bagdad residents, his work addresses a unique case of transboundary sonic violence.

In *terranullius.global*, Reyes-Retana presents a site-responsive, multi-channel installation that counter-registers—through the eyes of Playa Bagdad's residents—the activity of SpaceX's massive launcher, Starship/Super Heavy, a rocket designed to play a crucial role in a new chapter of outer space industrialization. Conceived as a living counter-archive, the installation unfolds as a tentacular device that functions as a repository of video footage collected by residents. These files are programmed for randomized and simultaneous reproduction, weaving an audiovisual experience further complemented by processes of sonic frequency diffraction that invite reflection on a corporate-made case of social and environmental violence—one in which sound should be understood not only as a signal but also as a category of analysis.

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Checklist

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Multi-channel, site-responsive installation with reclaimed wood, glass panels, sixteen-channel sound interface with transducers, eight 7-inch monitors, eight network-connected BrightSign players, media rack, cabling.

Dimensions variable

Unique