Border Brujo

A Performance Poem
(from the series
"Documented/Undocumented")

Guillermo Gómez-Peña

San Diego/Tijuana 1989
I dedicate this piece to my son, Guillermo Emiliano, hoping that when he grows up, most of these words will be outdated and unnecessary.

Preface

Border Brujo is a ritual, linguistic, and performative journey across the U.S.-México border.

Border Brujo first crossed the border in costume in June of 1988.

Border Brujo unfolds into 15 different personas, each speaking a different border language. And the relationship between these personas is symbolic of the one between North and South; Anglo and Latin America; myth and social reality; legality and illegality; performance art and life.

The structure is disnarrative and modular, like the border experience.

It fuses postmodern techniques with popular voices and dialectical forms borrowed from a dozen sources, such as media, tourism, pop culture, Pachuco and pinto slang, and political jargon. These voices are intertwined with meta-commentary and epic poetry. The epic tone reflects the epic experience of contemporary Mexican Americans.

Border Brujo speaks in Spanish to Mexicans, in Spanglish to Chicanos, in English to Anglo-Americans, and in tongues to other brujos and border crossers. Only the perfectly bicultural can be in complicity with him.

Border Brujo exorcises with the word the demons of the dominant cultures of both countries.

Border Brujo articulates fear, desire, trauma, sublimation, anger, and misplacement.

Border Brujo suffers in his own flesh the pain of his ruptured community.

Border Brujo puts a mirror between the two countries then breaks it in front of the audience.

*Work in progress
The Drama Review 35, no. 3 (T131), Fall 1991

Guillermo Gómez-Peña wants everyone to be able to use his work so he places no limitations on its use. As far as Gómez-Peña is concerned, his work is in the public domain.
1. Still from the film, Border Brujo, by Isaac Artenstein and Guillermo Gómez-Peña, 1990. (Photo by Max Aguilera Hellweg)
Border Brujo loves and hates his audience; loves and hates himself.

Border Brujo creates a sacred space to reflect on the painful relationship between self and other. He dances between self and other. He becomes self and other, with himself.

Border Brujo negotiates several artistic traditions, including performance art, Chicano theatre, ritual theatre, and Latin American literature.

Border Brujo is a character, but he is also an alternative chronicler of life in a community.

Border Brujo is a performance artist, but he is also a cultural prisoner, a refugee, a migrant poet, a homeless shaman, and the village fool.

His performance language has no artifice whatsoever. His sole instruments consist of an altar jacket, a hat, a wig, a table, a ghetto blaster, and a megaphone. There’s no backstage magic.

Border Brujo practices the aesthetics of poverty and the culture of recycling so characteristic of Latin America.

Border Brujo performs distinctly inside and outside the art world. He has appeared in galleries and theatre festivals, and also at youth centers, migrant worker centers, high schools, community events, political rallies, and performance pilgrimages.

Border Brujo is another strategy to let you know we are here to stay, and we’d better begin developing a pact of mutual cultural understanding.

Gómez-Peña
desde la herida infectada

COSTUMES: altar jacket, Pachuco hat, wig, dark glasses, banana necklace.


Music plays as audience enters space. A collage of tambora, German punk, bilingual songs from Los Tigres del Norte, and rap opera.

Introduction

[Soundtrack: Tarahumara violins. Border Brujo organizes his altar table, while speaking in an Indian dialect. When he is done fixing the altar he grabs megaphone and switches to English.]

dear audience
feel at home
this continent is your home
grab a cigarette
this is a smoking world
kick back
grab the crotch of your neighbor
& allow me the privilege
of reorganizing your thoughts
& the U.S. hasn’t invaded Mexico yet
there is no border
we are merely divided
by the imprecision of your memory

[He enters into a trance & begins speaking in tongues. Then he switches to the voice of a drunk.]

hey, would you just leave me alone?
just leave me alone . . .
you’re just a border-crocker
a “wetback” with amnesia
who the hell invited your ancestors
to this country by the way?

I

[With eyes closed & in an epiphanic voice.]
I came following your dream
your dream became my nightmare
once here,
I dreamt you didn’t exist
I dreamt a map without borders
where the Latin American archipelago
reached all the way
to the nuyorrican barrios of Boston and Man-
hattan
all the way to the pockets
of Central American refugees
in Alberta & British Columbia

[He opens his eyes.]
& when I dream like this
you suffer
my dream becomes your nightmare
& pot, your only consolation
II

[Sounds of rooster, the soundtrack: danzón “Imposible” by Los Xochimilcas. Voice of a Mexican soap opera actor; parts in Spanish are mispronounced.]
today, the sun came out in English
the world spins around en inglés
& life is just a melancholic tune
in a foreign tongue . . .
like this one

[He shows his tongue to the audience.]
ay México
Rrrrroommantic México
“Amigou Country”
para el gringo desvelado
Tijuana Caliente, la “O”
Mexicali Rose
para el gabacho deshauiciado
El Pasou y Juarrézz
ciudades para encontrar el amor
amor que nunca existió
ay México
rrrooommantic México
paráiso en fragmentación
mariachis desempleados
concheros desnitrados
bandidous alegris
beautiful señoritas
mafioso politicians
federalis que bailan el mambou
el róncher, la cumbia, la zambía
en-tropical skyline sprayed on the wall
“dare to cross the Tequila border”
dare to cross “the line” without your Cop-

[He turns into a transvestite.]
Tostadas Suprema para aliviar las penas
enchiladas y MacPa-ji-tas
mmmmn . . . peso little-eat so grandi!
where else but in México

III

[He manipulates objects from the altar table, speaks in a normal voice.]
vivir y crear en California
es un tormento privilegiado
vivir en los ‘80s
esperar a la muerte total

ser bilingüe, bihemisférico
macizo, sereno, proto-histórico
ininteligible luego expedi-mental
e incompatible con usted
sr. Monochromatic
victima del melting plot

[He turns into a México City ñero (derogative for urban mestizo).]
pinto mi raya
salto la tuya
me dicen el Borges de Caléxico
el Octavio Pas de San Isidro
hablo en español, digolo intento
Er los gabachos me escuchan con recelo
(unos me interrogan con las uñas
otros me filman en Super-8)
soy posmoderno . . . ¿pos qué?
conceptual . . . ¿con qué?
experimental . . . pos qué experi-mentira
mentirame sobre tu pin-che-es-pa-ci-o-cu-pa-do

[He does sound poem based on Mexican street voices.]

IV

[He begins walking in circles and howling like a wolf, keeping a rhythm with his feet.]
crisis
craives
the biting crises
the barking crises

[He barks.]
la crisis es un perro
que nos ladra desde el norte
la crisis es un Chrysler le Baron con 4 puertas

[He barks more.]
soy hijo de la crisis fronteriza
soy hijo de la bruja hermafrodita
producto de una cultural cesarean
punkraca heavy-mierda all the way
el chuco funkahuatl deresertor de 2 países
rayo tardío de la corriente democratik
vengo del sur
el único de 10 que se pintó

[He turns into a merlíco (Mexico City street performer).]
naci entre épocas y culturas y viceversa
naci de una herida infectada
herida en llamas
herida que aausuaulla

[He howls.]
I’m a child of border crisis
a product of a cultural cesarean
I was born between epochs & cultures
born from an infected wound
a howling wound
a flaming wound
for I am part of a new mankind
the 4th World, the migrant kind
los transyruados y descoyuntados
los que partimos y nunca llegamos
y aqui estamos aun
desempleados e incontenibles
en proceso, en ascenso, en transición
per omnia saecula saeculorum
“INVIERTA EN MEXICO”
bienes y raíces
vienes y te vas
púdrete a gusto en los United
estate still si no te chingan
[He continues with a sound poem.]

V

[With thick Mexican accent, pointing at specific audience members.]
I speak Spanish therefore you hate me
I speak in English therefore they hate me
I speak Spanglish therefore she speaks ingleñol
I speak in tongues therefore you desire me
I speak to you therefore you kill me
I speak therefore you change
I speak in English therefore you listen
I speak in English therefore I hate you
pero cuando hablo en español te adoro
but when I speak Spanish I adore you
ahora, why carajos do I speak Spanish?
political praxis cranal
I mean . . .
I mean . . .

VI

[Soundtrack: Supercombo. He delivers text in the fast style of a Tijuana barker.]
welcome to the Casa de Cambio
foreign currency exchange
the Temple of Instant Transformation
the place where Tijuana y San Diego se entrepienan
where the Third becomes the First
and the fist becomes the sphincter
here, we produce every imaginable change
money exchange kasse
cambio genético verbal
cambio de dólar y de nombre
cambio de esposa y oficio
de poeta a profeta
de actor a pelotari
de narco a funcionario
de mal en peor
sin cover charge
here, everything can take place
for a very reasonable fee
anything can change into something else
Mexicanos can become Chicanos
overnite
Chicanos become Hispanics
Anglosaxons become Sandinistas
& surfers turn into soldiers of fortune
here, fanatic Catholics become swingers
& evangelists go zen
at the clap of my fingers
for a very modest amount
I can turn your pesos into dollars
your “coke” into flour
your dreams into nightmares
your penis into a clitoris
you name it Califa
if your name is Guillermo Gómez-Peña
I can turn it into Gueromo Comes Penis
or Bill “the multi-media beaner”
or even better, Indocumentado #00281431
because here Spanish becomes English ipso facto
& life becomes art with the same speed
that mambo becomes jazz
tostadas become pizza
machos become transvestites
& brujos become performance artists
it’s fun, it’s fast
it’s easy, it’s worthwhile
you just gotta cross the border
[He stands up & performs a biblical gesture.]
Lázaro gabacho wake up and cross!!
crossss/cruzzzzz/crssss

VII

[He begins the following text with a psalm in Latin. He delivers text like a Catholic chant.]
Cyber-Bwana
Tezcatlipoca Electronic
Fabricante de la Imagen Internacional
Padrastro de la Incertidumbre Mundial
Legislador de la Tercera y Ultima Realidad
Gran Mano que todo lo acorrala
you ordered us to come
via TV via rock & roll
Imevision here we are
SPANISH INTERNATIONAL NETWORK
& we are here...
to stay
[He continues with norteno (Northern Mexican) accent.]
Cyber-Bwana
we are your product in a way
we are what you can only dream about
we hold the tiny artery
which links you to the past
the umbilical cord that goes back to the origins
from Homo Punk to Homo Pre-Hispanic
from high-tech to Aztec without missing a beat
without us you would go mad
without us you would forget who you really are
without us you are just another tourist in
Puerto Vallarta
[He grabs megaphone.]
we perform, we scold you, we remind you
'cause we are so little
so fuckin' minute
what else can we do?

VIII
[Soundtrack: Tambora Sinaloense. He speaks like a drunk.]
... & you think we have nothing in common?
well, well
you are a victim of your government
& so am I... of yours
I am here 'cause your government
went down there
to my country
without a formal invitation
& took all our resources
so I came to look for them
just to look for them
nothing else
[He drinks from a bottle of shampoo.]
if you see a refugee tonight
treat him well
he's just seeking his stolen resources
if you happen to meet a migrant worker
treat him well
he's merely picking the food
that was stolen from his garden
[He begins to scream.]
has anyone seen my stolen resources?
has anyone seen my coffee,
my copper, my banana, my gas,
my cocaine, my wrestling mask?

IX
[He speaks through the megaphone.]
dear Californian
we harvest your food
we cook it
& serve it to you
we sing for you
we fix your car
we paint your house
we trim your garden
we babysit your children
& now
we even tell you what to do:
go South Califa
abandon your dream
& join the continental project
dear Californian
your hours are counted
by the fingers of your unwillingness
to become part of the world
you must be scared shitless of the future
[He speaks in tongues.]
I've got the future in my throat
[He speaks in tongues.]
take me or kill me Pochtlan
look South or go mad
I mean it vato
[He speaks in tongues.]
... & you dare to ask me
where have I been
all these years?

X
[He continues to speak through the megaphone.]
estimado compañero
del otro lado del espejo
there's really no danger tonight
estoy completamente desarmado
the only real danger lies
in your inability to understand me
in your unwillingness to trust
the only real danger is in your fingers
your thumb lies on the button
your index finger on the trigger
you have the weapons maestro
I merely have the word
my tongue is licking your wounds
XI

[Soundtrack: Ry Cooder. He speaks like a smooth-talker, kisses audience with a smooth-talker style.]

smack! smack!
hey, baby... baby, guerita
duraznito en almíbar, nalquito descolorida...
It’s me, the Mexican beast
we are here to talk, to change, to ex-change
to ex-change images and fluids
to look at each other’s eyes
to look at each other’s mmmhhj
so let’s pull down the zipper of our fears
& begin the... Binational Summit mi vida
but remember,
I’m not your tourist guide across the undetermined otherness
this ain’t no tropical safari to Palenke or Martinique
much less a private seminar on interracial relations

[He changes to normal voice.]
this is a basic survival proposal
from a fellow Mex-american
in the debris of continental culture
& all this blood is real
the hoopla is false but the blood is real
come taste it mi amor

[He grabs the megaphone.]

subtext:
dear border lover
Eurídice Anglosajona
the state of interracial communication
has been seriously damaged by the AIDS crisis
we are no longer fucking our brains out
no longer masturbating across the fence
no longer exchanging binational fluids
we are merely stalking & waiting
waiting for better times
& more efficient medication
we are horny & scared
very horny & very scared
tonight we must look for other strategies
& place additional importance on the word
I love you querida amante extranjera
but this time you have to be content with my words
la palabra alivia las heridas de la historia

XII

[He speaks in broken English.]
no, I did not qualify
my ex-landlord didn’t recognize me when I called
my employers said they’d never seen me before
those art lords didn’t want to sign the form
“there’s no recognizable form in your art”—they said
“there’s no recognizable form for your fear”—I told them
“your aggressivity is an expression of cultural weakness”—they replied
“but which is the form of my dignity?”—I asked rhetorically

[Pause.]
they were shocked by how articulate I was
[Voice becomes softer.]
form, form
form without content
love without saliva
art without ideas
tacos without salsa
life without redemption
form, form, form

[Voice changes to stylized Pachuco.]
form a coalition carnalí
no te duermas Samurai
get a computer piratai
but buzó
if your umbilical cord breaks
there’s nothing we can do
you’re gone
lost in the all-encompassing fog
of the United States of America
& then,
you es-tass jou-didou
com-pre-hen-di?

[He continues in a normal voice.]
the day I was born
September 23 of 1955
eternity died
& the border wound became infected
the day my father died
February 17 of 1989
my last tentacle with México broke
& I finally became a Chicano

XIII

[He holds bottle & delivers commercial as Latino transvestite.]
Tequila Guero... with menthol
the new breath of old México
can you hear them?
can you really hear them?

XV

[He speaks through the megaphone.]
hello, this is authentic Latino performance art
zero bullshit/lots of style
[He puts on shaman wig, delivers text with a breathy drunken voice.]
I am 33, the age of Christ
& this is the year of Armageddon
the “Year of the Yellow Spider”
according to the Tasaday
& the Chinese “Year of the Snake”
di go la neta es que
your president & bunch have brought
sadness, radioactivity, & death
to the whole damn world
[He burps & coughs.]
they’ve killed thousands of people
down south & overseas
& you are also responsible
como dice Chomsky
“we are all responsible
for the crimes of our governments . . .”
but . . .
you are particularly responsible
for the crimes of the CIA, the FBI,
the Border Patrol, the Contras . . .
you are responsible for all civilian mercenaries
engaged in foreign causes
both military & artistic
you are also responsible for . . .

[XV]

why are you responsible?
[He answers in an Indian dialect, then continues as hipster.]
hey, I grow the pot . . . & you smoke it
I need dollars, you need magic
a perfect transaction I’d say
we both need to overcome
our particular devaluations, que no?

XVI

[Soundtrack: Gregorian chants. He delivers text as a TV evangelist.]
you can leave this space if you wish
there’s really nowhere else to go
your house has been culturally occupied
your mind is already invaded
trust me
let’s begin to talk

let's stop performing
this is an art of emergency
there's nowhere else to go
the South is in flames
the border is canceled
& the North is occupied
by Reagan's conceptual battalion
I'm sorry for being so direct
but we are running out of time, pesos, & faith
but we are running out of time, pesos, & faith

they say I sound like Pablo Neruda gone punk
they say my art is a declaration against the Holy Virgin of
Mexican aesthetics
they say my politics are endangering the party
they say I'm sleeping with a poststructuralist
feminist troublemaker
they say I have to stop riding my experimental
donkey
& put my feet on the ground
once & for all
but let me tell you something
I feel no ground under my feet
I'm floating, floating
on the ether
of the present tense
of California
& the past tense
of Mexico

[XVII]

[Very fast Cantinflas-like voice.]
you say I talk to gringos
they say I wasn't born in East L.A.
you say I left the Committee by choice
they say I promote the "negative stereotypes"
of my people

[He speaks in tongues.]
XVIII

[He speaks in a normal voice.]
... porque sufro la gran ruptura
fractura parietal en 5º grado
estar dos unidos es pura ilusión
... porque sufro el gran destierro
la vida es un lento destierro
good-bye compadre transhumante
Ulises ranchero
te apiñó la migra por qa ocasión
te quedaste sin cruzar
sin cruzin' no hay redemption
somos nadie en el éter desnudos
en USA desnudos
mita y mito
partidos por la mitad

[He grabs knife, gestures as though wanting to commit hara-kiri. Speaks like a macuarro (Racist depiction of a Mexico City urban mestizo).]
soy carne de cañón
papel de hoguera
ardo en las llamas del arte contemporáneo
arde el inglés en mi garganta
arde el D.F. en mi memoria
arde la llama del movimiento
apenas
apenas
apenitas

[He stabs himself.]

[He continues with normal voice.]
& as I was crossing the border check point
this somewhat intelligent migra
confiscated a copy of this text
he read a few pages
& asked if I was a member
of the Partido Chicano-Cardenista
"no, señor," I replied
"I am a member of the Tribe of the Inflamed Eyelids"
he tore my passport in half
& I proceeded to kick him in the balls
for the sake of experimentation

XIX

[Soundtrack: cumbia. He speaks like a Tijuana street hustler.]
hey mister...mixter
& you thought Mexico was South America?
you thought Castillian Spanish was better than Mexican
you thought salsa was Mexican music
you thought all Mexicans were dark-skinned & short & talkative like me
you thought Mexican art was a bunch of candy skulls & velvet paintings
you thought Mexico represented your past
& now you're realizing Mexico is your future
you thought there was a border between the 1st & 3rd world
& now you're realizing you're part of the 3rd world
& your children are hanging out with us
& your children & us are plotting against you
hey mister, eeh mister...mister
& suddenly you woke up
& it was too late to call the priest, the cops, or the psychiatrist
a qué pinche susto te pegaste
y en español

XX

[He grabs the megaphone.]
hello, this is the uncensored voice of the "Latino boom":
I mean to ask you some questions
dear editor
dear curator
dear collector
dear candidate
dear anthropologist
where can we draw the line between curiosity & exploitation?
between dialog & entertainment?
between democratic participation & tokenism?
where is the borderline
between my Spanish & your English?
ce n'est pas ici
between my sperm & your mouth
there is a cultural void
between my wings & your knife
there's uncontrollable panic
between my words & your ears
there are 33 years of rain
& between my art & yours
there's 10,000 miles of misunderstanding

[He subvocalizes, then speaks in an Indian dialect, then continues text with a nonchalant attitude.]
what I think is avant-garde, you think is passé
what I think is cool, you think is corny
what I think is funny, you think is cruel
what I think is fascism, you think is just life
what I think is life, you think is romantic
what I think is true, you think is literature
what I think is art, you just have no time for it
what I think is West, you think is South
what I think is America, you think is your
country
[He stands up & screams.]
we are so far away from one another
we are so far away from one another!!
[He mouths as if screaming, then continues
text in cool style.]
I speak therefore you misinterpret me
I am in Tijuana, you are in . . . . . .
I exist therefore you misunderstand me
I walk back into Spanish
for there are many concepts to protect
good-bye compita
extranjero en tu propio país
chao, chaochita, adieu
auf Wiedersehen, caput, puut' . .issimus . . . .
[He performs “offensive” sign language
from México. Lights fade out.]

—TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION—

Part Two

XXI

[He chants text in the style of a merolico.
Soundtrack: bullfight music.]
so, ¿a qué vienes extranjero?
¿a experimentar “peligro cultural?”
¿a tocarle los pies al brujo?
¿a pedirle perdón?
¿a ver si te reorienta hacia el poniente?
pero sus palabras te confunden aún más
te hieren, te desconsuelan
you can’t even understand the guy
'cause he speaks in a foreign tongue
seems real angry & ungrateful
& you begin to wonder
[He begins to mumble like a “redneck,”
mispronounces Spanish.]
whatever happened to the sleepy Mexican
the smiley guy you met last summer
on the “Amigou Country” cruise, remember?
whatever happened to the great host
the helpful kimozabe
the sexy mariachi with pencil mostachio
the chubby cartoon character
you enjoyed so much in last Sunday’s paper?
whatever happened to Speedy González
Fritou Banditou, Johnny McTaco, Pancho de
Nach, los treis caballerous, Ricardou Mont’lban
the Baja Marimba Band y sus cantina girls?
when did they disappear?
were they deported back to Mexicorama?
how? through Mexicannabis Airlines
& who let these troublemakers in?
are they for real? ’cause
I want to witness a real representation . . .
[His voice goes back to normal.]
hmmm, how ironic
I represent you
yet, you don’t represent me
& you think you still have the power to define?
please . .
please . .
please . .

XXII

[He speaks in a very elegant & soft-spoken
manner.]
please don’t touch me
I’ve got typhoid & malaria
don’t dare touch me
I haven’t been documented yet
I’m still an illegal alien
my back is wet
my nipples are hard
I’m ready to fight
I’m ready to rape
don’t like me too much
’cause I’m a drug smuggling
welfare recipient-to-be
sexist communist car thief
fanatically devoted to the overthrow
of the U.S. government & the art world
[Pause.]
no, just kiddin’
don’t listen to me
I’m just a deterritorialized “chilango”
who claims to be a Chicano
& I’m not even eligible for amnesty
’cause I never documented my work
the only photos of my performances
are in the archives of the FBI
& I’m a bit too shy to ask them for copies
can anyone document me please?
[Pause.]
can anyone take a photo of this memorable
occasion?
[Pause.]
come on, for the archives of border culture
for the history of performance art
can anyone be so kind as to authenticate my existence?

[He freezes for 20 seconds.]

XXIII

[Sounds track: old instrumental blues. He speaks like a “macuarro.”]

cameras 1 & 2 rolling

música maestro!

[Music doesn’t start.]

¡música!! pss, que pasó? . . . pos nos la echamos sin música

[Music finally begins.]

I was born in the middle of a movie set they were shooting La Migra Contra El Príncipe Chichimeca

I was literally born in the middle of a battle

I’m almost an aborigine you know a Hollywood Indian, ajuua!

me dicen el Papantla Flyer
de la Broadway, bien tumbado

’cause I love to show my balls to strangers & to talk dirty to gringas feministas

& if it wasn’t for the fact that I’ve read too much Foucault & Baudrillard & Fuentes & Subirats & Roger Bartra & other writers you haven’t even heard of I could fulfill your expectations much better if it wasn’t for the fact that I wrote this text on a Macintosh & I couldn’t even memorize it all & I shot my rehearsals with a Sony-8 & I would really fulfill your expectations le bon sauvage du Mexique l’enfant terrible de la frontière

XXIV

[Sounds track: Ry Cooder’s “Canción Mixteca.” He speaks with an unbearably snobbish accent.]

oui, oui, oui
Mexique ooh la la
Chingada da-da
les enfants de la chingada
México rromantic México
paraíso para tizos
para todos tifóidea
Chili Ortega pa’la güera
muchiou machou el muchiachou
ay, que rico gaspachou
oh, pardon
don Giovanni tampoco un Mexicano?

from where?

São Paulo, Manila, or Cuernavaca?

[He changes voice to that of a drunk tourist.]

well, I don’t care it’s all the same the world is filled with colorful creatures like me, like them I simply adore Mexico its fleshy señoritas with humongous black eyes walking down Revolución like hundreds of thousands of Carmen Mirandas & man, they sure don’t complain about machismo they love it!!

porqii let’s face it, el machou Mexicanou no ser tan machou como el texano

XXV

[Super-flamboyant Latino accent & exaggerated gestures.]

please, check my pronunciation

I’m a child of the fallen Latin American oligarchy I dream of a beautiful beautiful condo in Coronado or Key West away from my homeland in turmoil I dream of a disinfected environment one that only my memory can inhabit & only the memories I want she dreams of a beautiful suburb somewhere in the periphery of her fears she’s tired of suffering she lost her man in Santiago her son in Guatemala her daughter raped by a U.S. marine she walked all the way from Tegucigalpa she came to ask for an explanation can anyone explain to her why?

[A pre-recorded text in an Indian language will continue throughout the next text.]

XXVI

[He switches to a “redneck” accent, speaks through megaphone.]

“no, no, too didactic” . . .
too romantic, too, too . . .

[He barks.]
not experimental enough
not inter-dizzy enough

[He barks again.]
looks like...

[He barks.]
old-fashioned Anglo stuff
I mean not enough... picante
not enough bravado & passionado
I want mucho more
I want to see Garcia Márquez in 3-D
a post posty rendition of Castañeda
holographic shamans flying onstage
political massacres on multiple screens

[He gets progressively crazier.]
what's wrong with you pre-technological creatures?!
a-fhir-ma-ti-ve-ac-tion-pimps!
you can't even put together a good fuckin' video!!

[He breathes heavily & rests his head on the table.]

XXVII

[He delivers the text in broken English with an artificial smile.]
please check my pronunciation
this is the year of the Hispanic
Hispanics on MTV
Hispanics on Broadway
Hispanics in Hollywood
Hispanics in the Museum of Modern Art
Hispanics in . . . . . . . . .
Hispanics in the Calendar Section
Hispanics in Ripley's Believe It or Not
Hispanics in Congress
Hispanics in General Dynamics
Hispanics in the Border Patrol
Hispanics in the Federal Jail
Hispanics in Skid Row
Hispanics in AIDS clinics
Hispanics in the cemetery
Hispanics in different sizes
buy one/get one for free
it's in, it's hot, it's cheap, it's durable
& like the bumper sticker says,
"A TRUE HISPANIC IS NOT JUST YOUR PANIC
BUT EVERYONE'S PANIC"

[Pause.]
as I was saying
thanks to marketing
& not to civil rights
we are the new generation

[Pause.]
of laboratory rats & experimental patients.
[He begins to cut coke/speak like a druggie.]
. . . at night
alone in my condo
when I pray to my 3-D virgin
it's strange you know
I'm happy yet I feel like killing myself
so I take more pills to fall asleep
the pills you sent me last month are terrific
they make me forget all the pain
& alienation I thought I used to feel
they make me feel part of it all
with them I feel one with California
one with the art world
& a thousand within myself
justo a tu imagen y semejanza
so I turn on the radio . . .

XXVIII

[He grabs megaphone/speaks like a barker.]
alien-ation
alien action
alienated
alguien ate it
alien hatred
aliens out there
hay alguien out there
"Aliens" the movie
"Aliens" the album
"Cowboys vs. Aliens"
"Bikers vs. Aliens"
"The Wet Back from Mars"
"The Mexican Transformer & his Radio-active Torta"
"The Conquest of Tenochtitlan" by Spielberg
"The Reconquest of Aztlán" by Monty Python
"The Brown Wave vs. the Micro Wave"
"Invaders from the South vs. the San Diego Padres"
reinforced by the San Diego Police
reinforced by your ignorance dear San Diegan . . ."

good morning
this is Radio Latino FM
spoiling your breakfast as always
[The remainder of this text is prerecorded.]

He sub-vocalizes.

efectivamente, anoche asesinaron
a un niño mexicano de escasos 8 años
la patrulla fronteriza asegura
que se trata de “peligroso asaltante”
a continuación, más noticias en inglés:

the Mexican fly is heading North
the Mexican fly is coming to destroy your crops
the Mexican fly is now in Chihuahua
there’s no insecticide for the Mexican fly
no antidote for your fear of otherness
the Simpson-Rodino bill is an emergency plan
to regulate your fears
some call it an act of political fumigation
the Amnesty Program has been designed to le-
galize otherness
for otherness keeps leaking into the country into
your psyche
dear listener/dear audience
your country is no longer yours
your relationship with otherness has reached a
point of crisis
you love me/you hate me
you are in good company
but you don’t know it yet
the Mexican fly will be coming soon to a garden
near you
good evening
this is Radio Latino FM
interrupting your coitus as always

[He sings an Indian song & covers his face
with the hair of the wig.]

XXIX

[Soundtrack: New Age percussion. He en-
ters into a trance.]
I see Tenochtitlan Island
resting peacefully on the surface of a daiquiri
I see the Aztec warrior in a straitjacket
facing a 100-year sentence in Chino
I see the Spanish landowner & the American
tourist
getting wasted at Margarita’s Village
I see the border guards masturbating & vomiting
under the border fog
under the very fog that covers us right now
I see the first sparks of the 2nd Mexican
Independence
& the final kicks of a drowning saurus
I see other more personal things
like friendly women & friendly men
really trying to understand
but despite all of these visions

estoy muy triste en país ajeno
estamos tristes en país ajeno
país de todos/país de nadie
& there’s nothing you can do to ease my pain
nothing sadder than a Mexican artist in Southern
California
under the present Administration
nothing is really administered but death

[He speaks in tongues.]
I mean, death as a “lifestyle”
death as a media celebrity
death as a mandatory practice
la gran calaca gieera que todo lo gobierna
[He speaks in tongues.]
in order to operate without physical
repercussions
I chose the temporary safety of the art world
[He continues to speak in tongues.]

XXX

[He screams over the heads of the audience,
as if wanting to reach someone far away.]
hermano de allá
de hasta allá abajo
si tan sólo supieras lo que es
pasarse una noche solitario
en un motel de Alabama
en una cantina de Oxnard o Detroit
caminar por las calles desiertas y peligrosas
de Marin County o Pasadena
amar en Nueva York
con el temor de un contagio mortal
y por si fuera poco
sentir la luz del helicóptero en Imperial Beach
la voz forastera por la espalda . .
[He freezes for 20 seconds.]

XXXI

[He speaks in very broken English.]
no, I have no green card
I was illegally hired by this gallery
the director might receive employer’s sanctions
the INS might raid my audience
one of these nights
one of them might even shoot me
from the audience
perhaps tonight
one never knows nowadays
anything can happen in America
we are so fuckin’ vulnerable in America
I’m scared therefore you exist
so look out for me

I'm going through the Big Smoke
I'm going through the Big Smoke
& so are you
[He walks around the audience speaking in tongues. He suddenly stops, and seems very irritated.]
there is a Border Patrol agent in the audience
can he please identify himself?
[Long pause.]
!cobarde!!

XXXII
[He uses the megaphone & points a hand flashlight at the faces of the audience.]
Dear friends
let me ask you a few questions
has anyone ever crossed a border illegally?
has anyone ever smuggled any “illegal substances” or radical literature?
have you ever harbored or hired an “illegal alien”?
have you ever worked illegally yourself?
have you ever visited a “communist country” or a transvestite cantina?
have you ever joined an anti-American organization named (the name of the place he is performing)?
have you ever engaged in sexually illicit practices?
come on, be honest
this is just a performance
no big deal
I’ve been asked myself each of these questions at least a couple hundred times
& I’ve been violently frisked at least 20 times
for not having answered them

[He puts down the megaphone, raises his hands & freezes.]
& you ask me
“are you implying that the U.S. is a police state?”
but I can only answer in nahuatl

[He answers in an Indian dialect.]
but you insist
isn’t California the ultimate utopia for Latinos?”
& this time I answer with a violent question
“isn’t Disneyland the capital of California?”
& you interrupt me with a knife
“. . . but Guillermo, you’re cheating
you’re exercising your political freedom”
& I think for a second, “hmmm”
& reply “sure . . .
but how many people are here tonight
to listen to my political freedom?”
& we begin to count them
& as we count them in Spanish
we begin to wonder about freedom in America
& the show goes on
& the critic over there is falling asleep
wondering why Latinos are so bloody dramatic

XXXIII

[He lights a joint and speaks as though he were “high.”]
our moment arrived
we did have a chance to speak out
but we hesitated
& someone up there
unplugged the lights . . . & the camera before we even realized it

[He smokes more pot. His voice becomes muddy.]
the “quebequization” of the Southwest was effectively co-opted by the NSA & our communities were fragmented by the asymmetrical distribution of funding & space
we all know it . . . & suffer it

[He snorts fictional drugs. Speaks like a junkie, moving his head like a pendulum.]
today, once again
we are alone
like in the early days
alone like children in the forest
like Chicano performance artists in Anglo alternative spaces
we are alone & waiting
like the popular corrido says
“some are waiting for Amnesty & others for the guillotine blade”

[He repeats this phrase several times as if totally drugged out. Then he puts on a wrestler’s mask & stands up.]

XXXIV

[He speaks like a hard-core political activist.]
“whatever happened to the leaders?” you ask me
some died of a heart attack
with a little help from the CIA
some are mortally wounded by the media & others paralyzed by chemical nostalgia
a few created an impenetrable bureaucracy emulating their enemies
or found refuge & comfort in the university spa
today (date)
standing on the edge of the 20th century cliff
I finally dare to ask you
where are all my Chicano compadres?
I can’t accept that they all went crazy like me or yuppie like some of you
can’t accept the Indian leaders are still in jail
can’t believe the Puerto Rican independentistas are still in jail
after all these years
still in jail in America
& you worry about Nelson Mandela?

[Long pause.]
& you worry about Lech Walesa?

[Long pause.]
& you worry about cigarette smoking?
[He cries for a few seconds & covers his face.]

XXXV

[He continues like a hard-core political activist.]
last night at the “Main Intersection”
someone told me
that all we want is
access to the suburbs
access to the museums
to the City Council
to the media
to your girlfriend
that all-we-want-is-access
access! access! access!!
well, I’m sorry to disappoint you “someone”
all we want is to go back
but for the moment
there’s nowhere to go back to

[Pause. He changes to normal voice.]
our past was destroyed by your government
therefore dear “someone”
this is our land for the moment
& you gotta share the pie
to regain your peace of mind

[He speaks in tongues, then switches to normal voice.]
& you insist on asking me
what am I doing here?
como podré explicártelo
sin ofenderte...
if Spalding Gray can go to Cambodia
why can’t I come to (the city where he is
performing)?

XXXVI

[Soundtrack: Rossini or Beethoven. He speaks through megaphone.]
tonight, I am the one who determines
the exact nature of our relation
even if only for one night
I SAY:
you are no longer my spectator
you are my object of adoration
your country is losing weight & size
your skin is losing its privilege
your crisis is graver than mine
I SAY:
ciudadano del mentado primer mundo
you have a friend in me
a solid but critical friend
a friend who will never betray you
but never again will accept
your asymmetrical conditions
I SAY:
generic citizenship
Norteamérica has grown
back to its original size
from Yucatán to Greenland
from Michigan to Michoacán
I toast to Nuestra América
from the Papago to the punk
I toast to the beginning of an era
a true multicultural society
from ritual art to “neo-geo”
I toast in equal terms with you
my dear Anglosaxican partner
waspano de 2da o 3a generación
in my performance country
República de Arteamérica
you’re just a minority
but you have some rights
like the right to listen respectfully
& as long as you continue
to fear moi or desire me
without proportion to my dignity
then, my dear involuntary neighbor
entropy will keep creeping
like magma into your tract home
into your troubled spirit
& I won’t be there to rescue you
from the flood of your guilt

[He puts down the megaphone.]
& you, my dear negro, latino, indígena, asiático
or hybrid in between
you’re next
like it or not
you have till January 1st of ’92
to incorporate this country into the world
to turn the continent upside down
& infect English with Spanish & Japanese
and many other verboten imbricalingüis
remember
you have 3 years to get your shit together

XXXVII

[Soundtrack: “Ojos Españoles” by Los Xochimilcas. He speaks like a smooth-talker,
while applying orange or red makeup.]
so, my dear audience
we are finally in the same room
even if only for an evening
we are truly conversing right now
in your language, but conversing after all . . .
so I mean to ask you
where is the threshold of your desire?
Baghdad, São Paulo, Berlin, Tangier,
Calcutta, Tijuana, Ibiza, La Chingada
where are your memories running loose?
in which bed
in whose arms
on which stage
in which language are you dreaming?
in Spanish, Jamaican English, or Persian?
where will your permanent home be erected?
in Jakarta, Managua, or Oro Preto
perhaps somewhere on the shores of Cataluña
beyond the borders of panic & boredom?
I envy your capability to desire
I really do

[His voice changes to that of a drunk.]
I’m here in prison
right in the center of the wound
right in the crack of the 2 countries
I am a prisoner of thought
a prisoner of art
a prisoner of a media war
I’m each & every bad guy in the film
a one-man film so to speak

they call me El Corny, El Slickoid
El Nahuatl Conceptual, El Suddenly Violento
El Channy Fumigamitos
I’m getting tired corazón
where demonios are you?
I want to read you something from my heart
are you coming to visit me tonight?
are they going to let you in?

XXXVIII

[Music continues. He speaks like a stylized Pachuco.]

hey!
my Spider Babe
my Surfin’ Loca
my Mambo Jane
my Bless Me Ultima
la Jazzercise
házmela buena
la Nena Radioactiva
la Biker Lacandona
la Corporate Chingona
la “búscame a horcajadas en noches de neón”
la gimme those besitos across the border fence
ay, ay, Pantera Feminista
la gran Bruja Marxista

4. Guillermo Gómez-Peña as Border Brujo at Centro Cultural de la Raza, San Diego, 1989. (Photo by Isaac Artenstein)
Guillermo Gómez-Peña

XXXIX

[He drinks from the shampoo bottle. Speaks like a drunk, covering his face with his hands.]
I hate to say it but we failed
[Pause.]
we are still alive but . . . we failed
still awake, sort of
but kind’a clumsy & fuzzy
the food tastes like shit
the music is awful
it’s all been done before
one artist replaces the other
one minority replaces the other
& the other, other, other, others

next year Latinos are “out”
& albino Romanians are “in”
therefore my dear audience
I’m going back to Hell
en camión de tres estrellas
como vine
back to the origins maestro

XL

[He begins to walk into the audience, while delivering final text as a merolico. He holds two baskets; one is empty & the other is filled with food & ritual objects.]

but before I go back
ladies & gentlemen
I’m going to ask you to give me
whatever you no longer need
please feel free to get rid of everything
you wish you didn’t have:
money, IDs, ideas, your keys, your sins
your telephone number, your credit card
your leather jacket, your contact lenses, etc.
please make sure that whatever you give me
you’re prepared never to see again.
Some objects I will bury right on the
U.S.-México border ditch.
& others will become part of my traveling altar
damas y caballeros . . . aflogen!!

Guillermo Gómez-Peña is a writer, interdisciplinary artist, and journalist. He is coeditor of The Broken Line and a founding member of Border Arts Workshop.

FIN

TDReading

For an earlier view of intercultural performance see the special issue on it: 1982 vol. 26, no. 2 (T94).