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Border Brujo: A Performance Poem (From the Series "Documented/Undocumented")

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# Border Brujo

A Performance Poem  
(from the series  
“Documented/Undocumented”)\*

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*I dedicate this piece to my son, Guillermo Emiliano, hoping that when he grows up, most of these words will be outdated and unnecessary.*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

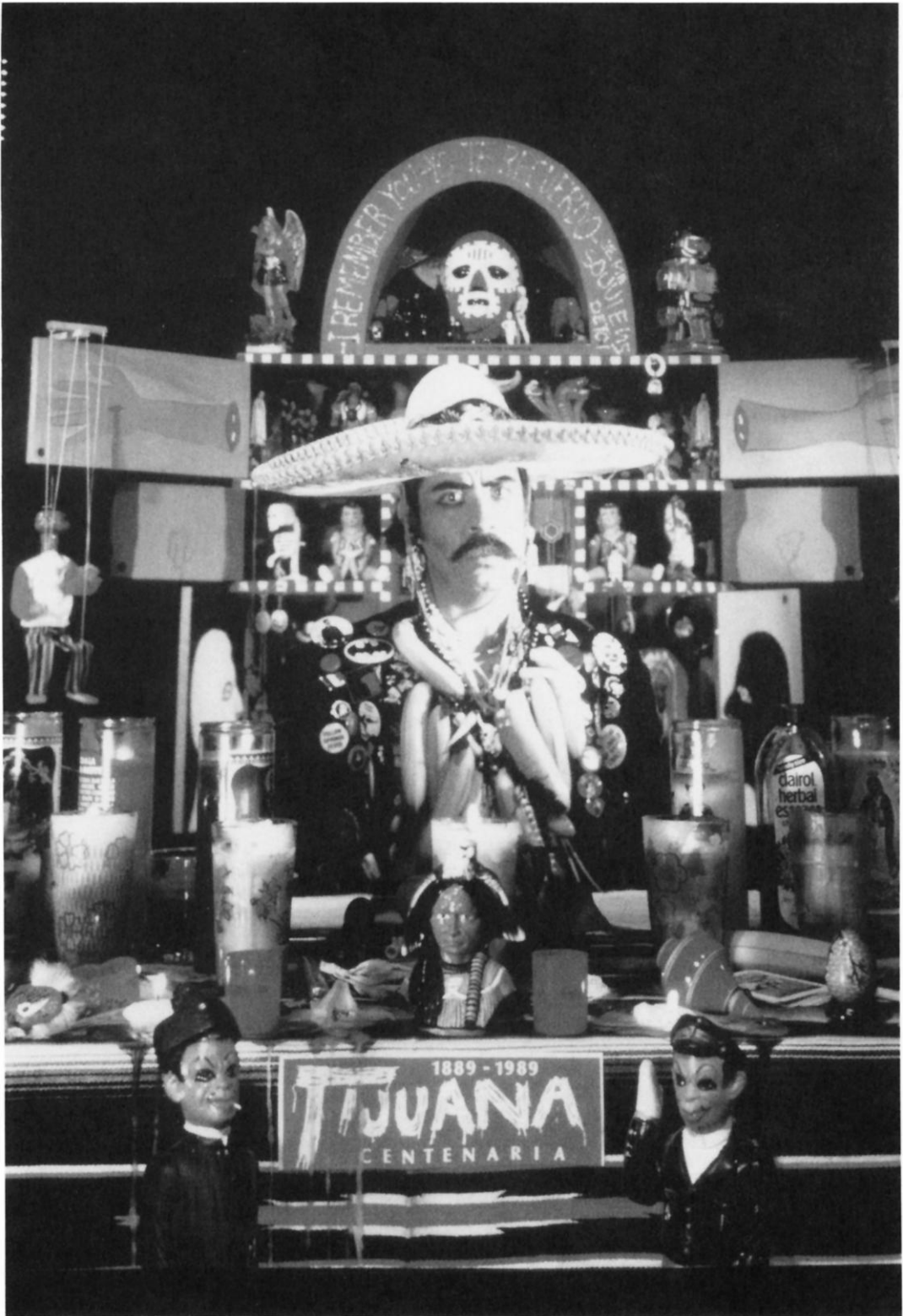
*Border Brujo* articulates fear, desire, trauma, sublimation, anger, and misplacement.

*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 Arstein 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  
toward 1992.

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

**PROPS:** portable altar, megaphone, cassette recorder, tequila bottle, toy violin, knife, syringe, shampoo bottle, etc. The props lie on a table. A digital billboard announces, "SPONSORED BY TURISMO FRONTERIZO." On the back wall a *pinta* reads, "Border Brujo (2000 BC–1989)."

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  
dear foreign audience  
it's January 1st, 1847  
& the U.S. hasn't invaded Mexico yet  
this is Mexico carnales!  
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-crosser  
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 Manhattan  
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: danzon  
“Impossible” 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

Rrrrrroommantic México

“Amigou Country”

para el gringo desvelado

Tijuana Caliente, la “O”

Mexicali Rose

para el gabacho deshauciado

El Pasou y Juarrézz

ciudades para encontrar el amor

amor que nunca existió

ay México

rrrrroommantic México

paraíso en fragmentación

mariachis desempleados

concheros desnutridos

banditous alegris

beautiful señoritas

mafioso politicians

federalis que bailan el mambou

el rónchero, la cumbía, la zambía

en-tropical skyline sprayed on the wall

“dare to cross the Tequila border”

dare to cross “the line” without your Cop-  
pertone

transcorporate breeze sponsored by Turismo

maquiladora power for the business macho

crunchy nachous to appease the hunger

**[He turns into a transvestite.]**

Tostadas Supreme para aliviar las penas

enchiladas y MacFa-ji-tas

mmmmn . . . peso little-eat so grand!

where else but in México

## III

**[He manipulates objects from the altar ta-  
ble, 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

víctima del melting plot

**[He turns into a México City ñero (deroga-  
tive for urban mestizo).]**

pinto mi raya

salto la tuya

me dicen el Borges de Caléxico

el Octavio Pus de San Isidro

hablo en español, dígolo intento

& 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

mentírame 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

craises

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 funkahuátl desertor de 2 países

rayo tardío de la corriente democratik

vengo del sur

el único de 10 que se pintó

**[He turns into a merolico (Mexico City street  
performer).]**

nací entre épocas y culturas y viceversa

nací de una herida infectada

herida en llamas

herida que auuuuuuulla

**[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 transterrados y descoyuntados*  
*los que partimos y nunca llegamos*  
*y aquí estamos aún*  
*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 *craneal*  
 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 entre-*  
*piernan*  
 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 Guermo 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!!  
*crosssss/cruzzzzzz/crasssss*

## 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*  
*Padraastro de la Incertidumbre Mundial*  
*Legislador de la Tercera y Ultima Realidad*  
*Gran Mano que todo lo acorralla*  
 you ordered us to come  
 via TV via rock & roll

*Imevisión* here we are  
SPANISH INTERNATIONAL NETWORK  
& we are here . . .

to stay

**[He continues with *norteño* (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 lost 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?

my my ma-ma, *ma-ma-cita* . . . *mamita!*

**[He cries.]**

## 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 *Pochtlani*

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

it hurts but it makes sense  
it's up to you to dialog  
it's up to you to dialog

## XI

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

smack! smack!

hey, baby . . . baby, *güerita*

*duraznito en almíbar, nalguita 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 *carнали*

*no te duermas Samurái*

get a computer *piratai*

but *buzo*

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  
for the contemporary warrior  
who doesn't  
want to give up  
his language, his identity, or his . . . mmhhjj  
**[He then proceeds to announce a shampoo  
bottle in an Indian dialect.]**

## XIV

**[Soundtrack: "La Negra" fading in & out.  
He speaks like a transvestite and clearly ex-  
periences a lot of pain.]**

ay!

ayyy!!

aayyyy!!!

*las leyes que emasculan*

*la orden mortal en forma de cupón*

*de imagen televisiva*

. . . *trémula voz eléctrica*

*al otro lado del teléfono*

0095-619

*al otro lado del other side*

**[He grabs the megaphone, speaks with  
overdone Mexican accent.]**

hellou, hellou

alo Jack

can you hearr me?

can you rreally hear me?

I am finally speakin' English

. . . no, no, you are not blame for the invasion  
of Grenada . . .

the air-raid to Libya wasn't your fault . . .

the Iran-Contra aid wasn't really your initiative  
nor were the last economic sanctions to México

**[Pause.]**

Jack, you have delusions of grandeur

you were merely receiving instructions

. . . & please forgive my bad English

I came too old to this country

& I haven't been domesticated yet

**[He puts down the megaphone & addresses  
the audience with real voice.]**

the marine stood up

kicked the table

spit at my face

"you goddamn terrorist wetback!!"

& began to cry like a *chihuahua*

**[Pause.]**

. . . but the *mariaichis* never stopped playing

they are still playing right now

what beautiful paradox

California sinks

& the *mariaichis* keep playing

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 Tasadays

& 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 . . .

**[Pause.]**

why are you responsible?

**[He answers in an Indian dialect, then con-  
tinues 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



2. "The birth of Border Brujo." Balboa Park, San Diego, 1988. A collaboration by Guillermo Gómez-Peña (kneeling) and Hugo Sanchez. (Photo by Isaac Arstein)

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

## XVII

**[Very fast Cantinflas-like voice.]**

they say I talk to gringos  
 they say I wasn't born in East L.A.  
 they say I left the Committee by choice  
 they say I promote the "negative stereotypes"  
 of my people

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  
**[He speaks in tongues.]**

## XVIII

**[He speaks in a normal voice.]**

. . . *porque sufro la gran ruptura  
fractura parietal en 5° grado  
estar does unidos es pura ilusión  
. . . porque sufro el gran destierro  
la vida es un lento destierro  
good-bye compadre transhumante  
Ulises ranchero  
te apañó la migra por 9a ocasión  
te quedaste sin cruzar  
sin cruisin' no hay redemption  
somos nadie en el éter desunidos  
en USA desunidos  
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.]**

aaaaaagggggghhhhhhhh

**[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 . . . mixer  
& 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 sustote 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, chaocito, adieu*  
*auf Wiedersehen, caput, puut' . íssimus . . . . .*

**[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*  
*Nacho*,

*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

**[Soundtrack: 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, *ajjuua!*

*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

**[Soundtrack: 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 tifoidea*

*Chili Ortega pa'la güera*

*muchiou machou el muchiachou*

*ay, que rrico gaspachou*

*oh, pardon*

*don Giovanni tampocou Mexicani?*

from where?

São Paolo, 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*

with *sombrero grandi* & Coppertone

& man, they sure don't complain about *machismo*

they love it!!

*porqui* let's face it,

*el machou Méxicanou no ser tan machou como el*

*texanou*

### 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 *bravadou & passionadou*

I want *mucho* more

I want to see García 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-ffir-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 triste en país ajeno*

*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 güera 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



3. Guillermo Gómez-Peña as Border Brujo at Sushi Gallery, San Diego, 1988. (Photo courtesy of Sushi Gallery)

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?

can you please identify yourself?

**[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 sub-  
 stances” 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 organiza-  
 tion 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 *náhuatl*  
**[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 ac-  
 tivist.]**  
 “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 2nda 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 *verbotten 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 Nahuál 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 Arntenstein)

*abráxame retuérxeme*  
*soy tu loco encaramado al muslo izquierdo*  
*y no me suelto por nada*  
*soy el pendejo permanente*  
*que llevas tatuado en una chichi*  
*la izquierda, la grandota*  
*y no me borro*  
*ay, Batichica de Mexicali*  
let me know if you are coming back soon  
for I'm tired of fighting *la migra* by myself  
*ay*, my little brown self  
is almost nonexistent tonight  
*ay*, *la pinche velita se me apaga*

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).