1992

*a performance chronicle of the rediscovery of America*

by

*The Warrior for Gringostroica' aka Guillermo Gómez-Peña*

Guillermo Gómez-Peña

Photo by Jeffrey Scales
La Partida Original

I

Nasal voice with megaphone:

in August of 1492
Columbus departed from the Port of Palos
in three state of the art carabelas.
La Pinta for the prisoners
La Niña for the child molesters
y la Santa Maria for the religious fanatics
Columbus arrived in America without papers
don’t we all secretly wish he had been deported right away?

Normal voice:

in August of 1942
my uncle Pepe departed from Mexico City
with $100 pesos in his pocket
he arrived in Los Angeles without papers
& became a clothing designer for prominent Pachucos
don’t we all wish he dies in peace?
pazza, pastiche ...
partir
de una lengua a otra
de una ciudad a otro país
a otro continente o sueño
partimos
y en proceso de estallar
estamos sin really estar
partidos por la mitad

Binational Cabaret

II

Gringo cabaret animateur:

ladies & gentlemen
this is the incredible journey
of a five-year-old Mexican kid
through four countries, three decades
two languages & one uninterrupted memory
his name is still not clear to me
Guilermo, Guermo, Yermo, Yiguermo
I believe it means Bill
Bill . . . bill . . . bill . . .

**Pachuco:**

who are you vato loco?
Tantric Charro de las mil y una parrandas
why are you walking down the street
as if you owned this part of the world
this frontera land
so foreign to everyone?

who do you think you are?
Cabeza de Vaca reencarnado?
el primer hipiteca americano, o que?

you wear this new dilemma
like a tattoo in your forehead
but you still don’t know what it means
it means, puros chili beans

**translation:**

**Nahual:**
yoquinomictilique notatzin ihuan ye yiman on
nomatzin hueh omochquiliaya. Tapan ocalaque
in gringos ihuan zan oquimocemixohtilique

**Memories**

**III**

**Normal:**
I clearly remember my birth
a major contradiction per-se
a mestizo baby born in the Spanish hospital
of a mostly Jewish quarter of Mexico City

right between Virgo & Libra
right in the middle of the decade of the mid-century
as the church bells of a wondering San Agustín
were announcing the death of the day
I was being born
from the contradictory lips of Martha
my beautiful mother
who worked in a Kodak shop at the time
primer cuadro:

**With megaphone:**

Mexico-Tenochtitlan, 1992
2000 years of dreaming
500 years of nightmare
action!

*I cover my face with a fabric.*

**Nasal:**
the medicine man is brought to trial for execution
miento
the Mexican activist is brought to trial for deportation

**Tongues**

*Dramatic Pause:*

dear Spanish Inquisition
dear Border Patrol
dear US Art World
for 500 years, we've been invisible to you
tu, vous, se, sabe, ve, nada
for 500 years we've been . . . remembering
recordar, desandar, performear
reinventar crímenes contra el Estado
contra uno mismo . . .

*I freeze for ten seconds.*

I remember the distorted reflection of my face
in the mental torso of a Spanish soldier named Rodrigo
I remember the corpse of a viceroy
in a window display in the financial district of Madrid
I remember each & every war & movement of independence
from the Mayan jungles to the farmlands of Wisconsin
I remember Hatuey, Canek & Reies Tijerina
I remember the day Zapata & Villa entered 'la capital'
blessed with an almost mystical naiveté
Zapata, performed by Brando
& Villa, by Telly Savalas
the same day my father brought home the first TV
I remember Batman, Mr Ed & Jungle Jim
the first Americans I ever met

Sounds of Donald Duck.

**Pachuco:**

'Americans que wierrrdd!', I thought

**Normal:**

I remember drinking out of political sadness
lost between Mexico, Spain & Gringolandia

*I drink from shampoo bottle.*

**Drunk:**

I remember cowboy films dubbed in Spain
that memorable scene where John Wayne enters the cantina
to find his sweetheart on the lap of a Mexican bandito myself
'coño, habéis bevido demasiado' he exclaimed
as I remembered other things
in English & Spanish
English for prose, Spanish for poetry
English for the present, Spanish for the past
English for you, Spanish for us
blackout coño!!

*Blackout*

---

**Aca the Transient Generation**

**IV**

**With megaphone:**

un, dos, tres, probando, probando
improvisando en Inglés, spanglish, gringoñol
is it clear what I'm talking about?

or do I need to give you more clues?
apunten!

**Nasal:**

early September, 1988
at the legendary Centro Cultural de la Raza
Supermojado welcomes Superbarrio to the grand border wrestling arena
Chicanosaurio and Transvestite Pachuco dance a sweaty lambada stage
left

Migrasferatu stalks
& the Mexican consul watches the performance ananadado

**Chant:**

crisis, crises, the biting crises, the barking crises

*I bark.*

la crisi es un perro
que nos ladrá desde el norte
la crisi es un Chrysler le Baron con four puertas

*I bark more.*

soy hijo de la crisi fronteriza
soy hijo de la bruja hermafrodita
producto de una cultural cesarean
punkraca, heavy mierda all the way
el chuco funkahuatl desertor de 2 paises
vengol del sur
el único de 10 que se pintó
nací entre épocas y culturas y viceversa
nací de una herida infectada
herida en llamas
herida que auuulla . . .

*I howl.*

**Rapping:**

soy
porque somos
we are
un fuckin' chingo
the transient generation acá

*Pause.*
Me persigno while talking.

Normal:

norte, sur, este, oeste
Europa, Africa, Asia o América

Merolico:

pos where are we?
West of what?
North of what?
are we migrating in reverse?
or are we simply collecting data for future projects?

Verbigratia:

Nasal:

September 23, 1989, Pueblo Colorado
just finished performing at the adobe fort
I drink mezcal with a group of local activists
they want to know everything about my life

Normal:

I remember early trips to Tepoztlán, Havana & San Francisco
early dreams about Nirvana & La Chingada
early caresses lost in German skin
hotel rooms, forbidden books & second-hand buses
conversations with Chamula Indians & burnt out Europeans
poetas, mercenarios y escapistas
conversations about the true dimensions of the world
from metros to miles
every day a bigger world
I used to whisper into the mirror
but one day
the US invaded Grenada

& I realized how small the world was
& how insignificant my vision

Blackout

Shampoo Commercial in Tongues

Blackout

Transcultural Love

V

Normal:

Gran Vato says:
'take an airplane & cry for a vision'
but remember guerita,
don't forget to bring your Pepto-Bismol
ajuuaaa!

Nasal:

Somewhere in colorful Tacolandia, summer of '75
a tall American woman looks at me intensely
as if trying to locate me in her past
I grab her by the waist

Drunk:

remember me?
I used to be . . . I used to be . . . I used to be . . .
was I the chilango hipster you desired so badly
while drinking Kahlúa con milk
in the Tacuba Café?
or was it the lobby of the Acapulco Hilton?
I believe you asked
'hey muchachio, sabes dondi la pot?'
you also said something like
'yo ya tengu machiu parra tonight
pero you ser easy to persuade de lo contrarrío'

Latin lover:

you made a fool of yourself in a foreign country
but I didn't mind
pre-semantic communication
was fun & fruitful
remember?
the crux of trans-cultural love
but everything falls apart
when you finally learn to translate
or when a full house is watching you attentively.

Merolico:

por fortuna, aun tenemos
la triple ventaja del lenguaje
para ocultar, conspirar y atacar
verbigratia:

With megaphone:
ciudadano del mentado primer mundo:
today the roles seem to have reversed
you are a foreigner in your own land
& I am a citizen of this time & place

Fake sensitive voice:

but who do I think I am?
Cuauhtemoc posmoderno
resisting the Hispanic invaders?
a mariachi prophet in Gringolandia
no, a post-Mexican suffused in ranchero nostalgia
no, an angry Chicano lost in the US Are World
protagonizing America's capital crisis
its endemic inability to deal with otherness
your endemic inability to deal with me

Memories

VI

I domesticate a rattlesnake in the altar.

Nasal:

early January, 1990
San Ysidro border check-point
I wait in secondary inspection

the guard is furious
'cause I answered him in Spanish
'no señor, no traigo nada
que usted sea capaz de reconocer'
he revises the computer black list
looking for mistakes in my life
I get sad & begin remembering

Thick Mexican accent:

I remember the golden days of Cocoteros
the weekly family dinners
three generations scanning the past
from Andalucia to Yucatan
from Chihuahua to la capital
ahh, what a permanent world it was
what exquisite food
& all encompassing love
my gentle father leading the toast
to celebrate every inch of the present

Pause.

& then came the disaster
Cortez arrived in Tenochtitlan
under a cloud of germs
& we began migrating North
amidst earthquakes & fires
from Michoacan to Michigan
from Mexico City to San Pancho
across the mirror como quien dice
across the river como quien llora

Gringoñol:

Tijuana, Juarez, Los Angeles, San Antonio...

Merolico:

la migra, el miedo, la muerte, la chingada
looooooteria!!

Normal:

September 1, 1978. Mexico City airport
Colonial Death Space
my best friends & relatives are gathered to say good-bye
con mariachis y toda la cosa
I'm going to California, el otro Mexico
& I don't know when I'll be back
as I cross the magnetic check-point
I turn & say to them:
'pretendan que estoy a punto de morirme'
'I beg you to pretend I'm about to die
this way you'll get used to my absence'
I mouth.

ausencia, nostalgia, imagen pura . . .
I turn on my inner VCR . . .

Blackout

Hypnosis

VII

I perform a suicide in front of a TV monitor.

Nasal:

a Chicano performance hypnotist
sneaks through my fractured self
colonizing my fragile Mexican psyche

Singing like a sleazy Hare Krishna:

Hare Krishna, Krishnahuatl
Hare Nalga, Hairy Nalga
everybody!!

I freeze for ten seconds.

Hypnotist:

ommm . . . rrrrelaxxx
Mocos. (Offensive sign language.)
fall asleep on the map
now walk toward LA
el lay que nunca vino
shift direction toward Vegas
walk cross-country cross-language to Miami
visit Nuevo Orleans, Chicago
Detroit, Toronto, Montreal
not one English word

now, face the North West
& proceed to walk toward Alaska
& through the Aleutian Chain
into the USSR
in search of the older origins . . .

Neanderthal sounds:

Exhausted:

I woke up exhausted on stage
not knowing exactly where I was
what a beautiful paradox - I thought
the first Americans came from Russia
40,000 years ago
what brave 'illegal aliens'
who dared to cross the border of ice
ye walked all the way down
to the Valley of Anahuac
all the way down
to the bottom of my psyche

Normal:

I remember crossing the Guatemalan border in '69
being told by a soldier: 'pague o muera'
I remember crossing the US border for the first time
I remember being asked to promise to never work
I also remember thinking, wait
there's something similar between Guatemala & California
there's no people on the streets after five
at least Guatemalans know they aren't free
at least my audience knows I am not lying

Juliana told me this morning:
'Guillermo, you tend to idealize the South,
you also tend to equate the past with the South'
but tell me dear Juliana, my Brooklyn Yemaya,
don't most dreams come from the South?

With megaphone:

'false' - she answered
'the dream of America came from the West
Columbus made an unforgivable mistake
& you are following in his footsteps'

Pause.
'porque?'
'he didn't know he had arrived in the New World
& neither do you'

Blackout

Ritos Necesarios

VIII

I point a finger at an audience member.

Normal:

You are here in spite of my will
I am here in spite of yours
we are all here re-enacting a historical damnation
la conquista y liberación del Nuevo Mundo

first scene, take two, rolling

Nasal:

Arlington, Texas, 1987
I roam around the stage dressed as
the Arawak slave brought to the Spanish Court
by Christopher Columbus
the first American ever to set foot in Europe
my make-up is running down
my audience is 90% red-neck

Drunk:

damas y caballeros
let's stop the performance for a moment
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
nothing else

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

has anyone seen my stolen resources?
has anyone seen my coffee,
my gold, my banana, my gas,
my cocaine, my dignity, my wrestling mask?
my ma-ma, ma-ma-cita . . . mamita! donde andas?

I chant with open arms.

Devotional tone:

holy mother of crises
santos sean tus senos
holy mother of random nostalgia
santas sean tus trenzas
holy mother of the first bus ride
santas sean tus piernas
holy mother of sexual awakening
santas sean tus nalgas
y santa, tu vagina espinada
holy mother of political activism
santa sea tu espalda
holy mother of the departure
santa sea tu memoria
y santos tus tennis shoes

Normal:

I drink from a candle
& dive into my next words
Este Oeste
política y sexualidad

Nasal:

When Cortez met La Malinche
he was shocked by the anger of her beauty
and the clarity of her gestures
he was unable to reconcile
his fear & his passion for her
what a pinche coward el capitán
Tender:

October 12, 1990
somewhere in this continent
I write on the breasts of my lover:
quenídisima C:
I come back to your arms
to remember in your arms
is an act of political defiance
you are guiding me back to the center once more
Cocoteros 110, Coloni Nueva Santa María
a 6 kilómetros del Centro Histórico

Pause.

but wait,
is it possible to ever go back?
I wonder who's trapped in the spiderweb of the other?
& where exactly are we?
Havana, Manhattan, Tijuana, Berlin
all axes are breaking my dear,
al all borders are fading away
a new decade
demands another cartography
& your kisses are giving me the strength to continue
this epic performance-pilgrimage of reconquista

to the end of the North
to the end of the century
to the end of the Art World

I faint in her arms
& wake up three hours later in Manhattan
scary, peludo, incommensurable . . .

Blackout

Post-Columbian Vertigo

IX

Nasal:

I'm entering Manhattan on the L train
surrounded by people from every possible nationality
Russians, Filipinos, Africans, Texans, Mixtecos
illegal hybrids of sorts
I feel at home in a world so crowded & eccentric
I call it the end-of-the-century society
I experience a post-Columbian vertigo

Tongues:

(spiced with words such as IBM, Macintosh, Macdonalds, etc.).

Pinto:

I woke up in jail one night
the guard said he'd found me wounded on the beach
I saw this mirror dripping blood
& through it
I saw myself dripping blood
from the wounds of my childhood
I had been shaved by the cops
I looked so pitiful
that I decided to hide in my memory
& once again
I was here
there
in the USA
looking for something I knew didn't exist
the Mexican Weltschmerz
a Hollywood gig
a Sony Walkman
you name it
I was still a tourist
not quite an immigrant yet
not quite a performance artist

I became an immigrant
the day I was forbidden to remember
Tongues

los españoles no nos permitieron recordar
the French didn’t allow us to remember (in French)
the Americans still don’t want us to remember

Megaphone (thick Mexican accent):

Cortéz, Maximilian, Emperor Bush
why are you so scared of the past?

Pause.

hellow, hellow
are you still there?
can we continue the rehearsal?
testing, testing . . .
dear involuntary cast
imagine this scenario for a film:

Fast talk:

Queen Isabella is an empresario of the European common market
a friend of Violeta Chamorro & Salinas de Gortari
Columbus is an illegal alien lost in Ohio
Cortés y La Malinche are two transvestites from Veracruz
who migrated to Tijuana
they work in a bar called La Conquista
Moctezuma is a ranchero singer dying of Aids
& Cuauhtemoc, a performance artist from East Los Angeles
New Spain now encompasses the old territories of
Guatemala, Mexico & the United States of Aztlan
the Tortilla Curtain no longer exists
Spanglish has become the official language
Puerto Rico, Hawaii and Panama have finally seceded
from the federation of US Republics
and a Free Art Agreement has replaced the Brady Plan
it’s marvellous,
wherever we go
we witness the effects of Gringostroica

Pause.

any reaction?

do you think this film will ever be shot?
camaras rolling . . .
first scene, take one, without subtitles

Noche de Sorpresas y Aficionados

X

Cabaret animateur:

Los Angeles, 1992
noche de sorpresas y aficionados
en el bar ‘La Gloria Tecno-Azteca’
damas y caballos, quiet please	onight we are proud to present
an authentic Third World performance saga
low-tech but filled with love, magic & violence
written, directed & performed
by ‘El Charromántico’
acompañado por sus twelve naked mariachis
un aplauso por favor . . .

El Piporro:

thank you, thank you
this song is dedicated to all of you out there
beautiful razzza
undiscovered aborigines
para ustedes, ‘El Rey del Cauce’ . . .
‘una yerba en el camino
me enseño que mi destino
era cruzar y cruzar

por ahí me dijo un troquero
que no hay que cruzar primero
pero hay que saber cruzar

con tarjeta o sin tarjeta
digo yo la pura neta
y mi palabra es la ley . . .

no tengo troca ni jaina
ni raza que me respalda
pero sigo siendo de LA

I stop singing and continue drunk.
Drunk:
you only know how lonely you are
when you stand in front of so many lonely people

Pause.

shit! this part belongs to another script
but, where the hell is that other script?
stop that pinche cámara!!

Pause.

now, press the rewind button ... stop!

Nasal:
as I was saying
La Esperanza bar closed at midnight
I hit the streets of Tijuana
along with a gang of marines
they were speaking an incomprehensible dialect
something like ... .

I snap my fingers as if looking for an idea.

English Bicameral

Interwoven with ‘fucks’ and ‘dollars’.

I believe they were talking about
how much they hated women, Mexicans and communists

Blackout

Memories

XI

I put on Indian head-dress.

Normal:
I remember living at the intersection of twenty mythologies

Piporro:
I remember the cowboys at the Saugus Cafe
who insisted on buying me drinks

'cause they thought I was an Indian
but made me pay the bill
when they discovered I was Mexican
I remember Mimi, the albino trumpet player from Alaska
who thought we could become famous as a comical duo
‘Aztec boy y la trompeta de hielo’
I remember the punk parties at Jaimie X
I remember thinking that by slam-dancing
I could exorcise my Pre-Columbian pathos
I remember six ribs broken by cultural clash

Scream:
ay! ay! ay! ay! ay!

Nahual:
amo otlacualoc oncan techtlanahualiz quename
ye huitz atlatlacamananilihti.
amo otimatiya hueyi quahuitl ihuan de tlacatecolotl

One of Many Departures

XII

Normal:
parto, luego existo
one can only exorcise this pathos by departing

Nasal:
it's January 1st, 1988
my sixty-fourth trip to the USA
escaping the Spanish Inquisition
little did I know
they had offices in Gringolandia
I travel on a train full of high-spirited migrant workers
I turn on my inner radio:

I sing:
yo no soy un mojado sin visa
ni tampoco un vil exiliado
yo lo único que quiero
is to come to the North
y que me dejen vacilar sin ton sin son

Melancholic Rapper:
a long & lonely road to the most dangerous place on earth
Califas, home of La Reina de Los Angeles
a long & dangerous journey to her arms
a melancholic journey to the center of the art world
it's all behind me
35 years of life at the end of
five centuries of death
global crises, border dreams
time to find a new language
and a brand-new performance jacket

Pause.
time to change the location so to speak

Drunk:
where chingados are we?
I'm sinking, sinking
in the turquoise waters of the Caribbean
1/2 a mile from Isla Mujeres
I'm clearly young & fucked up
& my friends are busy
seducing a group of French anthropologists ashore

French accent:
are you authentic Mayan or Mixteco?
are you a poet or an actor?

Nero:
guatever yu want señorita

Blackout

Street Performance

XIII

I light a toke, put on bandana, take off jacket and open my arms.

Normal:
Los Angeles again, spring of '91

I sit on the sidewalk naked
my political arms are exhausted
dozens of slogans are written all over my body
I quote:

I snap my fingers with each quote.
'to perform is to return'
'to arrive is just an illusion'
'the map is catching on fire'
'California fornicare sin memoria'
'chinga tu Mare Nostrum'
'Spanglish the language of the future'
'censorship the opposite of glasnost'
& many others frankly illegible to you

people begin to gather around me
I look at them with demonic tenderness
I finally exclaim:

Pinto:
'the other is thinking of you
I am the other
but you might no longer be yourself'

Gringo:
'speak from the heart, not from the script'

Normal:
someone yells, a plant perhaps
'the script is my very heart,' I answer
each line, a vein that links two arteries
a line that divides two countries
a nail that scratches your retina
coma
estado de coma global
identidad desguartizada

Megaphone:
the East-West border collapses
the North-South border is militarized
you are forcing me to rethink the entire performance
forcing me to cross the border once more

I mouth.

Blackout
**Border Blaster**

XIV

**DJ Merolico:**

Laredo, Piedras Negras, Pilsen, Eco Park,
pos where are we?
West of what?
North of what?
Arteamérica
tierra de convictos y alucinados
acá
su servidor el Charrollero
la lengua más veloz de la frontera
broadcasting from border blaster WXYZ Tijuana

**Grave Merolico:**

good evening ladies & germs
I would like to dedicate this chorizo
to all the pluribus raza
who have risked their fundillos
for the creation of a New World Border
digo, el maestro Gorbochev, el cojonudo de Mandela
Vaclav Havel, Daniel 'el chili' Ortega, el padre Aristide
Arafat, Superbarrio, Fray Tormenta, 'el Icuicui'
...pa todos ellos con afecto y admiracion
este danzon de fin de siglo

*I freeze for ten seconds.*

**Radio announcer:**

Radio Fin de Siglo
1990 megahertz en todas direcciones

**Radio Evangelist:**

dear Tribe of the Inflamed Eyelids:
wherever you may be
in Baghdad, Berlin or Panama
are you listening to my holy words?
I wonder who will outlive this crisis?
who will walk safely across the bridge of the century?

& who will be left to listen
to the birth screams of the next millenium?
*I howl.*

*Blackout*

**Terra Ignota**

XV

**Normal:**

terra ignota . . . sin mota
two miles before the end of the North
I get very sentimental
I write a bunch of postcards:

**Melancholic:**

dear father
I promise I'll hold the family together
dear mother
I promise I'll wear my father's clothes
dear Alfredo
I promise I will take you to the US on my back
dear Gui, my only son
I promise I will teach you survival skills in Spanish
dear granma
I promise I'll stay strong
for at least another decade
for at least another performance
dear audience
I promise I will try to piece myself together
dear Juliana
I promise I will finish this performance
one of these days
& you & I will descend to the temascalii
with my son and best friends
we will sweat our angst away
& co-imagine better options for the future

**Grave:**

ei gran performance pilgrimage
across the USA border
toward the North of the future
cross my Mexican memory
la memoria de la lengua
or what's left of it

Normal:
I remember burning the three carabels of Columbus
on the shores of Imperial Beach
I remember Tijuacóatl spitting fire across the border fence
Twenty artistas busted for disrupting the bi-national order
I remember harassing the Canadian border patrol
with this very megaphone
from the other short of the Niagara river

Megaphone:
nationality?
sexual preference?
got any papers? . . . to roll, I mean
I remember Border Brujo myself
performing with torches
at the Adobe Fort of Pueblo Colorado
& then at the Teatro del Estado de Mexicali
at the Convention Center of Vladivostok
at the Brooklyn Academy of Music
at a migrant worker center of Southern Florida
& so on & so forth
until the brujo died of exhaustion
& I was born from the ashes of his last word
his last word was . . .
I freeze.

Pachuco rapper moving hands suavecito:
did I ever melt?
did I ever arrive?
did I lose enough of myself in the bloody crossing?
am I the same stubborn 15-year-old chilango
snake boots & rockabilly toupee
ever looking for trouble & truth
in the most dangerous corners of the city?
a city which no longer exists
Tenochtitlan
ten years after the conquest

Mexico DE
six years after the quake
San Francisco de Asís
nine years after the plague
stop!
stop I say!!
I scream at light technicians.
can't you guys do something more creative with the lights?
I mean, this is a real crucial moment in the piece!
Columbus is just about to land & shit!!
The lights go crazy.

Normal:
fine, fine, don't overdo it 'cause
I'm looking for a dangerous place
I'm looking for a dangerous phrase
something like . . .
I hesitate and snap fingers.
'when you forget what's next
you step in the wound by accident'
so here I go, my accidental friends . . .

Nasal:
October 12, 1992
Ellis Island, New York
the tribe & I are about to land
on a low-rider carabela
a huge banner reads
'500 años de genocidio'
y aquí andamos todavía vida mía
I speak through a high-powered megaphone:
I stand up and adopt heroic Columbus-like position.

Merolico voice with megaphone:
hellow America!
soy Cristobal Cogelón
unofficial performance chronicler de la Nueva Santa María
alias 'El Warrior de la Gringostroika'
& . . . I just . . . just (In loop.)
discovered you . . . discovered you (In loop.)
I point at an audience member.
The Admiral of the Ocean Sea

XVI

With megaphone:
five centuries
four races
three languages
two faces
one heart
action:
the night before the awaited arrival
the Admiral of the Ocean Sea
confronts his restless crew:

Pachuco:

no se asusten carnals
It's only me, the transatlantic vato
& I've got some questions for you
are you a citizen of this time & place?
or are you still clinging to a dying order?
are you willing to dialogue?
or are you going to shoot me after the show?
are you ready to co-write with me the next chapter?

Ars Frontérlica

XVII

Normal:
Matachin,
remember only what you want

the rest is poisonous algae
toxic waste in your mental tundra
linguo lae ars frontérlica

Tongues
I remember speaking in tongues since I was twelve
always wondering if I was mad or enlightened
either or
I remember things in English or in Spanish
English for politics, Spanish for love
English for praxis, Spanish for theory
English for survival, Spanish for laughter
English for time, Spanish for space
English for art, Spanish for literature
linguo lae ars fronterica

Voice of Donald Duck.

Three different accents: Norteno, Merolico and Gringo

have I finally lost my accent?

Gringoñol:
you no entender un carayo perro sounds mucho interesting

Barks.

Nasal:

Tenochtitlan, 1512
Spanish becomes the 'official language' of Nova Hispania
miento:
San Diego, 1988
English becomes the 'official language' of the Southwest
Mezkin performance artist Charrollo
addresses a group of quote unquote
'Latinou gang members & ex-pintos'

Didactic:
repeat with me:
'censura no es cultura'
'a la chingada el Ingles Oficial'
'fuck Official English' 'cause . . .

Pachuco:
I speak Spanglish 'cause reality is broken
I speak weird shit 'cause times are weird que no?
I stutter 'cause I'm about to die, about to die
in front of your very eyes, your very eyes
I'm dying
as a Mexican is dying
& a Chicano is being born

I open legs and push as if giving birth.

I'm giving birth
to the new passenger in my body
Part Two of this performance saga
parto luego existo

Singing:
'adios pampa mia, me voy a tierras lejanas . . .''

Argentine accent:
adios Guillermo III, capitán de barco hundido
adios Comanche Pinto, guerrero de experimentos marginales
adios Super-mojado, samurai de cruces cumbancheros
adios muchachos compañeros de la huida
adios país de promesas desmembradas
adios me muero regreso y me volteo
hacia mi nueva cortez a ontológica

Mexico City ñer o:
onológica?
on toy, lógica? on tamos?
y con la mismisima capa del tinebias
el más chido luchador
catapulto mis poemas hacia el norte
norteno soy, nortead voy y bien mojado
Cristobal Colón el indio-cumentado
el mero mero y voy que vuelo
sin brújula ni caravela
al otro lado del infierno

Voice of authority with megaphone:
Pausing between questions.

alo?
did you ever arrive?
where you able to jump over the fence?
could you step into the mirror
without cutting yourself?

without slashing your epidermic dignity?
did you make it to the new decade?
in time to participate in the change
or did you witness it from a distance?
hello? hello?!
can you still hear me?
or have you already departed
to another land, another language, another text . . .

Blackout

Spanish Lesson

XVIII

Normal:
'there is a distance between us
that reminds me of who I am
nēhuatl nimopo
nēhuatl oic onimitzcoalli'
says Cuauhtémoc to Cortez
while being tortured

Pause.

mas lo cortés no quita lo culero
Spanish lesson #1

Nero:
culero es aquel
que conociendo dos o más lenguajes
solo te muestra uno

Gringoñol:
translation:
culeirou is someone who speaks
two or more languages
but always answers in the one you don't know
Bush también ezz un culeirou
blackout!!

Blackout
Memory

XIX

Nasal:

Times Square, New York City
an electronic billboard reads:
'today you have 2 choices in America:
contribute to Gringostroica
or let nostalgia drive you bananas'
verbigratia:

I stand up and Howl

I remember yodelling in the Alps with a group of Swiss campesinos
howling in the Rockies with my immigrant friends
drunk out of our minds & our countries
I remember dancing salsas in the mountains of North Carolina
with a bunch of Southern artists
dancing yuyu in a London bar
with a bunch of Rasta blonds
I remember not knowing where I was anymore
inside or outside myself
fiction or social reality

Evangelist:

the borders were drifting away
the map was catching on fire
weather changes in every place of your psyche
rowdy winds demolishing your fragile identity
auxilio, you said in perfect Spanish
but no one was there to rescue you
cue, cue, cue . . .
cue the fuckin' tape maestro!

Megaphone:

everybody quiet!
Pause,

the show begins for the second time
la 3a es la vencida

action:
Gómez-Peña as a performer of cultural mistakes

I put on one of my hats or masks.

Normal:

I remember my first appointments
with the guardians of cultural misunderstanding:
I remember being thrown out of a deli
'cause I said I wanted a kidnap instead of a napkin
I remember being sent to secondary inspection
'cause I told a humorless border guard
I had an appointment with freedom
I remember each of the seven times
the California police busted me for 'looking suspicious'
for 'looking Iranian'
for 'looking exactly like the dealer they were after'
for 'stealing my radio'
for wearing a wrestler mask on the 4th of July
for walking at night in a country
which has forbidden darkness
I'm glad I'm able to remember these moments
& share them with you as art
with all my love & all my anger

Breathy voice:

ay, my Southern affection
my border nostalgia
my Northern wrath
la vida loca
la vida en llamas
placazo de la memoria

I freeze.

From normal to Merolico:

I choose to continue remembering
the singular journey
that led me to this stage
five centuries of foreign domination
total
492 performances
in which
I've cut my hair
sliced my wrists
farted & eaten on stage
danced on fire & ice
recreated my birth
invoked my ancestors
conspired against the government
asked for a job
sold my identity
deported myself back to Mexico
repositioned my soul within my body
reshaped my body to accommodate your whims
or to confirm your fears
aqui, tu miedo encarnado
en mi cuerpo

I stand up.

Military chant:

my body elastic
mi cuerpo celuloid
my body pasional
mi cuerpo folcloric
my body cartographic
mi cuerpo cyber-punk
my body rupestre
mi cuerpo ceremonial
my body militant
mi cuerpo metaphor
my bloody body
cuerpo adentro
me interno
en un concierto
de adioses
me amortajo
hacia el futuro incierto
adios, adios
década del pánico
siglo del progreso
milenio de la guerra
arte occidental
arte marginal ... 

I click boots and give a Fascist salute.

Authoritarian voice:

America!
I say America-ca-ca-ca

Megaphone:

welcome to the great international community
here, no one understands you
here, no one wants to be like you
here, you are just another country
with big weapons and small aspirations
it's 1991 & the dream is almost over
for CNN, charrollero servidor
disapproved by military censors

Tongues

Blackout

Death Prayer

XX

Nasal:

Christmas night
at the temple of the Basilica de Guadalupe
in Mexico City
my family & I are wearing all black
my nephew Ricardiacio listens to Jello Biafra on his walkman
the priest speaks of the bleeding memories of Mexico
I begin to remember so many memorable deaths
throughout my years
documented deaths/undocumented years:

Vieja beata (elderly devotee):

Guevara; Cuauhtémoc, Canek
Neruda, Rosario Castellanos, Althusser
Fassbinder, Cortázar, Roque Dalton
Allende, José Alfredo Jiménez, Indira Ghandi
Abbie Hoffman, Joseph Beuys, Ana Mendicta
my father, Sid Vicious, Pedro Vargas . . .
'more men than women die
women are always stronger'

Normal:
said Grampa Carlos while dying in Spanish
I certainly expect to die
before my compañera
especulando, especulando
how could I witness without her
the grand eclipse of the century?
how could I face the great rupture
without my other half?

Blackout

Fragmentos

XXI

Nasal:
Standford University
I stand in front of an academic audience
linguists, sociologists, anthropologists
surveying my 'authenticity' los muy cabrones

Two voices: Merolico and Pachuco:
me dicen el half & half
half Indian/half Spaniard
half Mexican/half Chicano
half son/half father
half artist/half writer
half wolf/half eagle
half always/half never
I look for someone in the audience.

Romantic:
& you my dear C
will you dare to love
such an incomplete creature?
the Spaniards, the gringos & the art world

left me all fractured & angry
lenguas muertas para oídos muertos

Nero Jitanjaforas
In crescendo.
I cover myself with an Indian cloth.

Gringo:
does he speak in Aztecou, Esperanto or Cholo-punk?
is he a terrorist, a brujo or a performance artist?
is he being harassed by Cortez or the Border Patrol?

Angry voice:
confiesa hijo de la . . . !
ay!!
confiesa hijo de la . . . !
ay!!

Tired voice:
Pausing.
mouth is dry
liver is weak
veins are swollen
haven't slept in twelve years
haven't stopped walking since I left
haven't quite arrived to the North of my dream
I'm not even sure there is a North really
not even sure I really exist
do I? do I?
I put on a blond wig.

Gringo:
'kill the stereotype!', you said . . .

Normal:
stereotype?
stereotipo # 39
a third class citizen in a First World country
the Mexican as flamboyant victim of cultural misunderstanding
I begin pulling hair down slowly.
Transvestite:

one night I was beaten up by a biker gang from Hollywood
one of my first leading roles in an American thriller
they mistook me for a Columbian dealer
a Philippino boxer, a Lybian Pachuco, a Hawaiian surfer
who knows what they thought they knew
I've been mistaken so many times in America

Pause.

but then, who hasn't?
people here tend to mistake each other's identities
it's like a national sport

Gringo:

are you Peruvian or Venezuelan?
where you speaking Mexican or Spanish?
did I see you on the TV of my fears?

Nasal:

when Columbus arrived in Las Americas
he was convinced he had found a short cut to the Indies
the very discovery of this continent was a flat misunderstanding
& let's not forget that misunderstanding is the seed of all violence

change:

when President Bush arrived in the Persian Gulf
he was convinced he had found a short cut to the New World Order
but his interpretation of Islam was a flat misunderstanding
& let's not forget that misunderstanding is the seed of all violence

Blackout

Binational Performance

XXII

Normal:

angry mob in the background
an insurrection in my mind

& a bunch of German tourists
recording my voice with a nagra
testing, testing . . .
1, 2, 3, testing . . .
testing the IQ of my audience
the Warrior for Gringostroika takes over my tongue

Pachuco with megaphone:

helloww rrazzta . . .
can you hear me?
I'm standing right on the US-Mexico borderline
with a foot on each country, sii . . .
the line is actually bisecting my manhood
got a Mexican huevo
& an American ball
& on top of that
I've got a poem for you
check it out:
I unzip my pants and pull out a poem from my crotch.
I mouth for twenty seconds.

Blackout

Pirate Radio

XXIII

Normal:

flashback:
Radio Berlin, September of 1983

Interviewer with German accent:

but Mr Gómez
where exactly do you live?
& who are you really?

Soft rap:
While snapping fingers.

soy el otro fuera de mí
el otro dentro de tí
the other tras de ti
la sombra espanticana
your sticky Mexican shadow
y al borde de la border
me inclino
y te reclamo

Interviewer:
meaning what?

Merolico:
I live in the other Mexico
injetado en las entrañas del etcétera
the metropolitan area that extends
from Méjico Depe to San Pancho California
with branches in every major city of the West
including Piedras Negras & Brooklyn
y desde acá XEKK
transmito y me reinvento
voila

German accent:
I don't know what you mean
you Mexicans are flowery & redundant

Pachuco:
Snapping fingers.
I mean
soy 'am'
the double other
el seven masks
el charro-punk
el cholomatic
el Krishnavatl
& I'm about
to escape once more
from the prison of your perceptions
voilaaaaa . . .
cambio de canal

Interviewer with French accent:
how exactly has your identity been affected
by your experience of Amerique?

Thick Latino accent:
to 'be' in America, I mean in this America
is a complicated matter
you 'are' in relation to the multiplicity of looks
you are able to display
I am brown therefore I'm underdeveloped
I wear a moustache therefore I am Mexican
I gesticulate therefore I'm Latino
I am horny therefore I am a sexist
I speak about politics therefore I'm unAmerican
my art is undescrivable therefore I'm a performance artist
I talk therefore I am, period.

Interviewer:
c'est fascinant

Thick Latino accent:
in order to multiply the perceptual readings of my identity
I always try to create interference during the broadcast
verbi gratia

Normal:
San Antonio, Radio Armageddon

Radio Preacher:
good evening children of evil
there is a war in the streets of America
in the schools & parks of your neighborhoods
in your very home & workplace
between races & generations
men & women
hippies & punks
cops & 'colored's'
government censors & radical artists
a nasty war is taking place right now
in this very moment
someone out there wishes my words were lies

Macabre laughter.
tonight we have a very distinguished guest
a border warrior, a post-modern Geronimo
a conceptual ‘wet-back’ whose life epitomizes this . . .

I continue mouthing. I open arms as if being executed.

Dramatic:
nine, ocho, seven, seis, five, cuatro, three, dos

Verbal shots.
I begin to die in slow motion and suddenly freeze.

Soft spoken:
I dreamt in English that the US had become a totalitarian state
controlled by satellites & computers
I dreamt that in this strange society
poets and artists had no public voice whatsoever
thank god it was just a dream
‘English only’, just a dream
not a memory
Jessie Helms, just a dream
not a memory
my oldest memory being

Tongues: nasal voice with megaphone:
we interrupt this radio-novella
to give you an important message:
migrant God Quetzalcóatl is now crossing
the US-Mexico border by foot
he’s coming once more to give you
the basic secrets of agriculture, education & art
be willing to listen, be willing to . . .

Interference sounds or mouthing.
Blackout

vivir en estado de sitio
is a translatable statement
to live in state of siege
es susceptible de traducción
an Aztec in Nova Hispania
a Mexican in San Diego
a Portorrican in New York
a Moroccan in Paris
a Pakistani in London
definitely a translatable condition

Pachuco:
vivir en estado de alerta
is also translatable my dear

Rapping:
to live in state of alert
with your wings ready to flap
& your eyes ready to question
why, why, why, why . . . (Snapping fingers.)
Ayy!! I, I
a child of the Mexican crisis
a new foreigner in the art world
allowed to exhibit his wounds
in immaculate neon coffins . . .
why, why, why . . .

Newsman:
the war goes on in El Salvador
as the performance continues in . . . (Name of the city I am performing in.)
sorry
the war goes on in the Persian Gulf
as the performance continues in . . . (Name of the city I am performing in.)
same war, different performance
aquí, allá
al Sur . . . de la . . . Chingada
Blackout

Spanglish Lesson

XXIV

Didactic Pachuco:
okey vatos
repeat with me:
Memory

XXV

Normal:
I remember the cool waters of Veracruz
where Cortés decided to burn his ships
his point being
there was no way back to the Old World
I remember the cold waters of California
where I decided to burn my tennis shoes
my point being
there was no way back to Mexico
today, twelve years later
I still haven’t repented myself
still haven’t finished this text
but God, thy Father Tezcatlipoca
Lord of Bloody Misconceptions
haven’t I spilled blood all over the map?

Ad Lib TV

XXVI

Nasal:
San Diego, Channel 12
Supermojado loses his cool
in the middle of a TV interview
the pro-producers are shitting in their pants

Drunk:
the Spaniards arrived on a Monday
I left my country on a Tuesday
the San Juanico fire occurred on a Wednesday
& the Mexico City earthquake on a Thursday
my father died on a Friday
my son was born on a Saturday
& my best performance ever took place on a Sunday

I think...
on each of those days,
a bunch of us Mexican wolves
get together to lick each other’s tears
’cause you know carnals
this kind of pain is only bearable as ritual

I howl or grab candle and drink.
& my psyche is the only document left
a performance document
for the end-of-century society

I light a joint.

Tongues: Normal:
recordamos, recordamos, recordamos . . .
we remember, we remember, we remember . . .
we remember dreaming about the arrival of Cortés
not knowing exactly what a hairy man on a horse was
we thought the Spaniards were gods
& our fate was to welcome them
we still carry the weight of that mistake
we also remember the arrival of the first turista
not knowing exactly what a blond man on a donkey was
we thought the gringos were gods
& our fate was to welcome them

Cabaret animateur:
ladies & gentlemen
it is my fate to welcome you
to my performance continent
musica maestro:

Music.

Drunk:
Europe, welcome to the Third World
Cortés welcome to Tenochtitlan
Baker, welcome to the source of the Nile
Herzog, welcome to Peru
Gauguin, welcome to Tahiti
Artaud, welcome to Chihuahua
Lowry, welcome to the barranca
Lennon, welcome to Calcutta
you welcome to me
free rum for all of you

I show my tongue.

Sexy:

hey, babe!
give me a chance & I'll give you my passion
give me a contract & I'll give you my talents
give me a loan & I'll give you my oil
give me a visa & I'll give you my memory . . .
give me a job & I'll give you my language
painful but necessary transactions
we are hungry not horny I mean

Horny noises.

I wonder . . .
I wonder when will the cycle break?
a broken record, a broken record

I scream:

ay, my broken heart!!

Blackout

cruise Radio

XXVII

Pachuco DJ:

hellow America!
this is the voice of Gran Vato Charrollero
broadcasting from the hot deserts of Nogales, Arizona
zona de libre cogercio
2000 megahertz en todas direcciones . . .

today, September 7 of 1989
you are celebrating Labor Day in Seattle
while the Klan demonstrates
against Mexicans in Georgia
ironia, 100% ironia

today, November 20, 1989
your Fuhrer has invaded Panama
in search of a bad performance artist
Noriega hides in the Vatican embassy
imagine, que loquera
500 years ago
Europe didn't even imagine
this continent existed
500 years ago
this continent was . . .

I mouth.

Drunk:

wait, my memory is failing again
are you the cousin of the uncle
of the mother of someone
I can't remember?
or am I making it up
'cause after all
this is just a bad performance
in a country that has forbidden memory?
a country whose name I can't even remember
USA I think
United States of Am... nesia
yes, your government really did a number on me
left me all amnesiac & shit
let's celebrate the death of memory
with a bottle of words

I grab bottle and drink.

wait, my memory is coming back

Nasal:

Los Angeles, 1982
Bishop Misterio addresses his gringo congregation:

Epiphanic voice:

I ask you to join in this communion

He grabs a bottle and drinks from it.

this is 'Elixir de Pasión'
I drink it every night
to renew my hormones & spice my saliva
would anyone care for a sip?

*Someone stands up and grabs the bottle. Then Bishop Misterio grabs another bottle.*

this is *saliva de gato para-el-miedo*
I drink it every morning
it protects me against racism
formalism & reborn christianity
who will dare to drink from it?

*Someone grabs the bottle. The congregation cracks up.*

& this is *Elixir de Misterios Ancestrales*
it helps me to remember
drink, drink my children
but just a little sip
or you might grow hair in your $#@&*
pass these bottles around & commune with my madness
when I speak we make art together
when I speak we slowly create a New World, a new word
He freezes.

Blackout

**Memories**

XXVIII

**Normal:**

cámara, acción!

I remember the day I arrived in California
as if it were yesterday
the lonely Greyhound station of Los Angeles
smelling like hypodermic piss
the three undercover cops who welcomed me
with a sudden "no loitering, out!"
the lack of social & verbal skills of Californians
the gargantuan size of the sandwiches & the marines
the width of the sky; the depth of the faults
the artificial happiness in the faces of the blondes

the endemic anger in the faces of the 'others'
that anger seemed to be one of the few real things in movieland

**Pachuco:**

scary but real
real pain comanche . . .
deep loneliness maestro . . .

**Soft voice:**

I remember falling into a trance on stage
I remember the day I came back from the Flower Wars
Ixtacihuatl had turned into ice for me
& I had decided to let myself die
to fulfill the damn prophecy
but instead I parted
left my skin without color
& crossed the border of Anahuac
to regain the desired citizenship
they had so cruelly denied me
but who are they?

**Letter**

XXIX

**Nasal:**

at the new Taco Bell of San Juan Capistrano
undocumented Christopher Columbus
tired, ill & misunderstood
scribbles a strange letter to Queen Isabella

**Solemn Spanish accent:**

Salve Reina de todos los Imperios,
my phony green card states
Resident Alien #00141932
my last medical exams reveal
high cholesterol & low blood pressure
my bank account is empty
my desire is one day to go back
from Califas to Nova Hispania
and further back
from Salvador island to Palos
my Ergo Motto reads:

**Tender:**
‘to sail the waves of Horror Vacui’
‘cruzar el estrecho del Mictlán’
ni Reina de todas las Aguas
will you wait for me
in the other side of the ocean?
will you wait for me
in the other side of my tongue?
will my voice break into your future dreams?
or will you be dead when I go back?

**Blackout**

**Megaphone:**

*During blackout.*

dear actors, dancers, musicians, poets
are we ready to start the show?
or should I go back to Mexico?

*There is no answer.*

*OK, I’m going back!*

---

**Private Ritual**

**XXX**

*I appear sitting on a chair with my pants down. As I deliver the following text, I slowly apply war make-up.*

**Troubled voice:**

*I’m shitting in my Mexico City 100-year-old toilet
filled with gases, memories & joy
I re-mem-ber performing Smogman
in my catholic high-school
my first play ever to be seen
by people who didn’t really want to
I remember my first performances in the US

wrapped with an Indian cloth in foetal position
left alone for two days in a public elevator
I remember bringing my audience to the edge of Freeway 5
screaming at the cars to stop & save me from shipwreck
I remember burning the best photo of my mother
while screaming to the heavens:
‘maddre, házme regresar a la placenta!’
from high-tech to Aztec . . . via . . . performance art

*I continue to apply make-up and speak in tongues.*

**From normal to Merolico:**

*I speak therefore I continue to be.
language, my passport to your country
language, my journey to your arms
language, my most effective weapon
language, my two-way ticket to the past
language
my abracadabra
a memory per line
a thread of life per sentence
ten dollars a poem
postcard included
life in America,
a cheese TV talk show
a color-xerox photo-novella
ten video lessons on misinformation
stop!!

*Blackout*

---

**Finale**

**XXXI**

**Soft and slow voice:**

Europe owns no other continent
Eurown discovery not continent
disco-very strange co-
descubrimiento descubro, miento . . .
I lie to you . . .
we don't lie together
in the end
we never lie together
vecinos abismales
still undiscovered
to one another
not quite carnals yet

Normal:
Border Field Park
two years after the fall of the Berlin Wall

Confessional: reportage style:
I lie on the beach
waiting for Christopher Columbus
to discover me
for the 500th time
It's October 12, midday
& the cameras are waiting like me
Televisa & CBS are ready to record history
or better said, to reinvent it
the fanfares of Turismo are growing intense
my heart speeds up as my tongue writhes
my tongue goes physically crazy

Tongues and Jitanjaforas:
but this time Columbus didn't arrive
Spain & Italy were so busy
fighting over credits
that the entire production
was postponed til' 99
I go back to the city
to think of a better text
to put into practice
thank you, my other selves, my other voices
for travelling with me tonight

I blow off the candles.

The End

The B File

An Erotic Interrogation
Deborah Levy

Photo by Phil Woodward