

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?
pazzz, pastiche . . .
partir
de una lengua a otra
de una ciudad a otro pais
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
 Guillermo, 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:

Nahuatl:

yoquimomictilique notatzin ihuan ye yiman on
 nomatzin huel omochoquiliaya. Tapan ocalaque
 in gringos ihuan zan oquinmocemixohtilique

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 Agustin
 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 wieerrddd!', 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, habeis bebido 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 lambda stage
 left
 Migrasferatu stalks
 & the Mexican consul watches the performance anonadado

Chant:

crisis, crises, the biting crises, the barking crises

I bark.

la crisis es un perro
 que nos ladra desde el norte
 la crisis es un Chrysler le Baron con four puertas

I bark more.

soy hijo de la crisis fronteriza
 soy hijo de la bruja hermafrodita
 producto de una cultural cesarean
 punkraca heavy mierda all the way
 el chuco funkahuatl desertor de 2 paises
 vengol del sur
 el único de 10 que se pintó
 nació 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.

los high-tech Aztéc Raspa Locos Anónimos
 for all we have left is dates
 places, borders, wounds
 all we have left is the hope
 to die before the earth
 & the will to continue cruisin'
 under the Big, Big Smoke
 under the Big, Big Smoke
 under the Big, Big Smoke

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 Tepoztlan, 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
 ajuuuuu!

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 Kahlua con milk
 in the Tacuba Cafe?
 or was it the lobby of the Acapulco Hilton?
 I believe you asked
 'hey muchiachio, sabis dondi la pot?'
 you also said something like
 'yo ya tengou machiou parra tonight
 pero you ser easy to persuade de lo contrarrio'

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 rancho 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
 looooooooteria!!

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 hipnotist
 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:

ommmm . . . rrelaxxx
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
 they 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
 politica y sexualidad

Nasal:

When Cortéz 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

barbas blancas entre piernas indígenas
beep, beep, beep, caput
communication breakdown . . .

Tender:

October 12, 1990
somewhere in this continent
I write on the breasts of my lover:
queridisima 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
Cocoterós 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,
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, Philipinos, 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
 Cortéz 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'

dámas y caballos, quiet please
 tonight 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 Cruce' . . .

'una yerba en el camino
 me enseñó 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

Intertwined 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!

Nahuatl:

amo otlacualoc oncan techtlanahualiz quename
ye huitz atlatlacamamaniliztli.
amo otimatiaya 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
indentidad descuartizada

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 Gorboshev, el cojonudo de Mandela
 Vaclav Havel, Daniel 'el chili' Ortega, el padre Aristide
 Arafat, Superbarrio, Fray Tormenta, 'el Icuiricui' . . .
 pa todos ellos con afecto y admiration
 este danzón 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 temascalli
 with my son and best friends
 we will sweat our angst away
 & co-imagine better options for the future

Grave:

el gran performance pilgrimage

across the USA border
toward the North of the future
across 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 suavequito:

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 Asismo
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.

therefore you exist
per omnia saecula speculorum
con saffoosss . . .

Mocos (offensive sign language) then blackout.

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 carnales
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 Frontérica

XVII

Normal:

Matachin,
remember only what you want

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

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 carrayo 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 Charrollero
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, capitan de barco hundido
 adios Comanche Pinto, guerrero de experimentos marginales
 adios Super-mojado, samurai de cruces cumbancheros
 adios muchachos compañeros de la huída
 adios país de promesas desmembradas
 adios me muero regreso y me volteo
 hacia mi nueva corteza ontológica

Mexico City ñero:

ontológica?
 on toy, lógica? on tamos?
 y con la mismísima capa del tinieblas
 el más chido luchador
 catapulto mis poemas hacia el norte
 norteño soy, norteadado 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
 néhuatl nimopo
 néhuatl oic onimitzcocolli'
 says Cuauhtémoc to Cortéz
 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 salsa 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
 aquí, tu miedo encarnado
 en mi cuerpo

I stand up.

Military chant:

my body elastic
 mi cuerpo celluloid
 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 Ricardiaco 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 Mendieta
 my father, Sid Vicious, Pedro Vargas . . .

'more men than women die
women are always stronger'

Normal:

said Granpa 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 Cortéz 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
 cambio:
 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 rrazzza . . .
 can you hear me?
 I'm standing right on the US-Mexico borderline
 with a foot on each country, siiii . . .
 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 Gómezz
 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 tí
 tu sombra espanticida
 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
 injertado en las entrañas del etcétera
 the metropolitan area that extends
 from Méjico Deefe 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 Krishnahuatl
 & I'm about
 to escape once more
 from the prison of your perceptions
 voilaaaa . . .

cambio de canal

Normal:

Ici c'est la Radio Publique Montreal
 September 23, 1989
 by the way, I just turned 34

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 undescribable 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 Geronimó
 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

Spanglish Lesson

XXIV

Didactic Pachuco:

okey vatos
 repeat with me:

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

Memory

XXV

Normal:

I remember the cool waters of Veracruz
 where Cortéz 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 cárnales
 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 Cortéz
 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
 Cortéz welcome to Tenochtitlan
 Baker, welcome to the source of the Nile
 Herzog, welcome to Peru
 Gaugin, 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

Pirate 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 comercio
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
ironía, 100% ironía

today, November 20, 1989
your Führer has invaded Panama
in search of a bad performance artist
Noriega hides in the Vatican embassy
imagine, qué 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:

camára, 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
Ixtaccíhuatl 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 regrezar 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 carnales 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

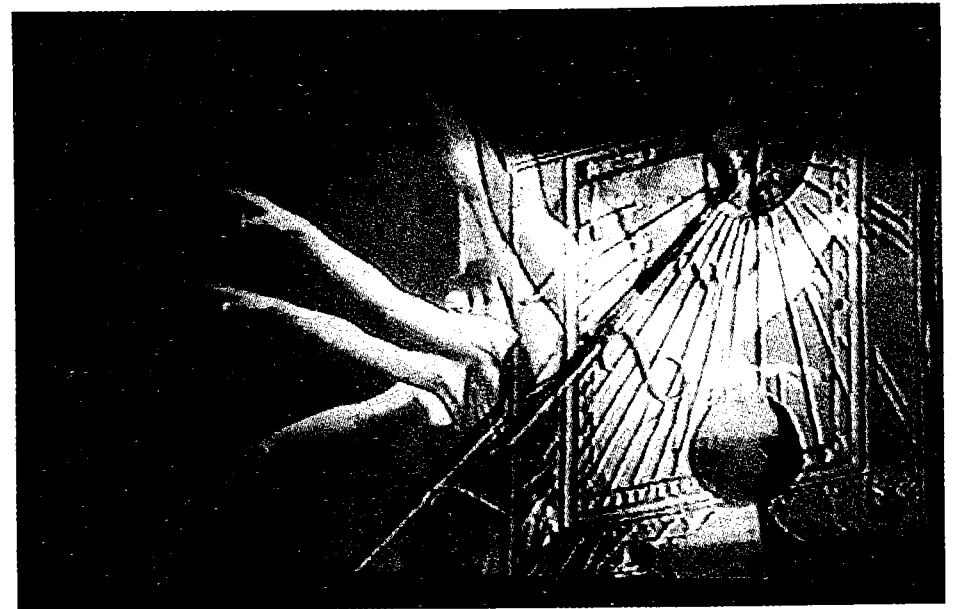


Photo by Phil Woodward

