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## Brownout 2

(Performance Script, 2000–3)

### Introduction

*Elaine Katzenberger*

In the summer of 2000, Guillermo Gómez-Peña suffered a health crisis that landed him in hospital in Mexico City for a month. The journey that led from Brazil, where he first became ill while on tour, to San Francisco, through the labyrinth of the US healthcare industry, to finally, in serious crisis, Mexico City, is a story in itself. Suffice to say that upon arriving in Mexico, Guillermo was, as far as he and those who loved him could tell, close to death. He was incapacitated for weeks, hooked up to various machines, poked and prodded each day, semidelirious and semiconscious, tethered to life by the determined refusal of his family and friends to let him go, but most of all by the unlimited and implacable love of his compañera, Carolina. He was spared, only to face what the doctors pronounced would be a severely altered future: One without touring, one without performance.

Luckily for all of us, that's not how it turned out. Although it took time and was initially only a frail hope, he was ultimately able to fully reclaim his health and has since returned to his usual Herculean level of activity and production.

*Brownout 2* is only one of myriad projects he has developed since that crisis, but it is unique—the only one that draws its content from that tenuous period of grave illness and slow recovery. As we sat together revising the texts a year after it all happened, I was struck by the fact that the piece could be developed and staged as a sort of hospital-bed soliloquy, a meditation from the edge of death on the

meaning of life and the possibilities of art. Gómez-Peña was completely taken with the idea and we set to work in our usual fashion, throwing ideas back and forth and trying things out for each other; by the end of the night we had the first draft.

Many of the first-person texts that ultimately came together in the script for *Brownout 2* were written in the hospital and in the months afterward, a time when Gómez-Peña was slowly and painfully regaining his strength, faced with the possibility of having to adjust permanently to what seemed like a puritanically disciplined and bland existence. It was a period of difficult questions, about the past, about the future. What, after all, does a performance artist who has spent over twenty years as a peripatetic provocateur do if he can't travel or perform? How had he arrived at this crossroads? If his years of efforts and experiments were now being framed as a "lifestyle" that his body would no longer tolerate, what were the possibilities for any kind of compelling or rewarding work? And how does one calibrate the effects and the effectiveness of a life lived through art? Were the issues and events that fueled the work really the right ones after all and had the work actually had enough impact? The texts were like semidelirious journal entries, a solitary, unmapped journey through the upside-down landscape of a life interrupted.

Performance is, by definition, a body-based art, so what happens when a performer is faced with the loss of this medium as a means for expression? What might be the inner dialogue that ensues? In this way, *Brownout 2* is about a crisis of the body—the artist's body, the body politic, a body of knowledge, a way of knowing and exploring and challenging. *Brownout 2* is an existential howl, a musing on the meaning of an artist's life, the place of art in society, the body's role in consciousness, the effects of years of cultural transpositioning, on family love, on relationships, on the nature of self. It is a polyphonic, multilingual rant, a *loquito's* cry in the wilderness of facing the future, facing the past, facing death, and bracing for life. It is the summation of Gómez-Peña's twenty-plus years of being a crossborder ombudsman, an intellectual provocateur, a weathervane for the storms blowing through the cultural divide between "high" and "low," Mexicano and Chicano, art and theory, esthetics and politics, self and Other. And, mostly, it is a determined leap of faith into the future, with an affectionate nod to La Pelona (the Mexican death) whose embrace awaits us all, but not quite yet.

### **Type of space**

Ideally a small to medium-size black-box theater. However, the performance can be adapted for galleries, auditoriums, and TV and radio studios.

### **Basic requirements**

A lectern; a table covered with a black cloth for props; good sound equipment and a high-quality boom mike. A dressing room with softlight, big mirrors, and good espresso is desirable. An SPX-sound effect machine is optional but desirable. A minimum of four hours prior to the event with two personable technicians to prepare the space and design sound and lights is necessary.

### **Costumes**

Complete attire of either “El Traveling Medicine Vato,” “El S/M Zorro” or one of my shaman-personas in drag.

### **Props to bring**

Techno-glasses, rubber heart, robotic hand, bandana, stetson hat, tourist “Indian” headdress, “supermojado” wrestler mask, Spanish dagger, scissors, and a handful of “lowrider” prosthetics and braces.

### **Props to be provided by the producer**

Battery-operated megaphone, hospital mask, realistic-looking handgun, “Mr. Clean” bottle filled with blue Gatorade, deodorant “blessing” spray can, and a bottle of Myers rum.

## **Border blessing**

*[To be printed on the hand program]*

*Norte:*

Dear son, my only candle left,  
I promise I’ll protect you from those *norteño* gangs.  
Remember: I am analog—you told me,  
which means, I still know how to use my fists . . . and my legs.

*Sur:*

Dear mother, my historical womb and genetic code,

I promise I will clean up my act before I die  
Clean up my house de paso.

*Este:*

Carolina, *mon amour*, I promise I'll be beside you  
Catering to your most minute desires  
Licking your knees and palms  
Until globalization derails  
And the Popocatepetl ceases to smoke.

*Oeste:*

Dear *clica, familia espiritual*, I ask for your forgiveness.  
My absence was clearly a survival strategy.  
How else was I supposed to outlive the backlash,  
the INS, the IRS and the formalist art critics?  
How else was I supposed to finish this script?

Dear criminals, *pochos, locas y destrampados*  
“Life without you all, my nomadic tribe,  
is virtual *horror vacui en gringolandia*.”

These words are for you, about you.  
My job tonight is to shatter the world  
with the word, my only weapon left.  
Am I delusional carnales?

## The script



*An audio CD plays as the audience walks in and sits down.*

*I walk onstage and position myself behind the lectern.*

*The table where my props lie is behind me; I bless  
the space with my “sacred spray,” then I drink from the  
Mr. Clean bottle and spit it out on the audience.*

## INTRO

Dear audience/listener/viewer,

Tonight from my multiple repertoires of hybrid personae,

I have chosen to come as

the embodied psyche of an existentialist *mojado*

and it’s quite a challenge, my dear friends,

for I’ve been stripped by airport security

of all my robo-baroque paraphernalia,

my ethno-technobilia *ye-ye*,

which means,

no more handmade lowrider prosthetics,

no mariachi robotic bodywear,

no cheesy fog machines,

no hanging dead chickens, nothing,

not even a voice-effect processor

to help me get rid of my accent.

Just one costume

and a bit of make-up

to protect myself.

O sea, back to the basics of performance.

It’s Chicano minimalism,

a contradiction in terms,

but hell, I am a walking contradiction

and so are you . . .

So, dear foreign audience:

Welcome to my conceptual set.

Welcome to my performance universe.

Welcome to my delirious psyche.

Welcome to my border zone,  
to the cities and jungles of my language

*las del ingles y las del español*

kick back,

light up your conceptual cigarette . . .

a prop

*[I light up a cigarette and inhale]*

and breathe in, breathe out,

breathe in, breathe out,

rreelllaaxxxx.

Now, reach over,

grab the crotch of your neighbor

and massage, yes . . .

this is the basic exercise of Chicano tantra

*[I snap my fingers/blackout]*

## DAY 1

*[In a nasal voice]*

**My neverending tour to the outposts of Chicanismo**

**finally crashed into the limits of my body**

**while touring Brazil last year.**

**Two weeks later, I was flat on my back**

**in a Mexico City hospital bed**

**hooked up to some retro sci-fi-looking *maquina***

**staring down my own death, *la pelona*,**

**this time, she looked serious.**

**I laid there in a freefall through my psyche,**

**the digital *mapa mundi* of my *vida loca*.**

**I saw a bizarre infomercial.**

**In it I was a cheesy blond actor  
announcing some unspecific product.**

***Inner Infomercial (en Gringoñol)***

I love . . . Galapagos—I said

[*Mispronounce*]

I mean, Galapenos, digo

Gala-pennis

Jala-penis

Jala-pedos

Jala-peños perdoun

Io soy hapre-hendiendo

Un poquitou di español

Castillian, I mean

Perro io soy solo

Un gringou loco de amorrr

Per una chic-ana calienti

De Mission Street

Me mirra

Como flourrecita de

Chincuo Tamalo, digou

Chingo di Malo, I mean

Sink-oh diMaggio

Translation please?

Viva Coors culeros!

Welcome to the colonized territory of your psyche

Spanglish poltergeist, y que?

***Mojado Existentialism***

[*Donald Duck speak*]

This is the way English sounded to me when I was a kid

[*Indian tongues*]

This is the way my voice sounds when I'm onstage

[*French tongues*]

This is the way my voice sounds when I attempt to be comedic  
*un échec absolu*

Testing, testing . . .

[*Telemundo announcer*]

*En el proximo capitulo de El Malparido*

*un Chicano se enfrenta a los demonios de la lengua*

Testing, testing . . .

This is the way my voice sounds when I'm rehearsing

Testing, testing . . . the limits of my identity . . . testing

This is not my real voice, *probando, probando* . . .

This is clearly not my real voice, *probando* . . .

This is one of my many official costumes

"El Narco Mariachi"

I wear it at least twice a week

'cause I am unable to discern

between myself and my performance personae

between art and life

The dream of last century's avant-garde

finally came true thanks to a Mexican . . .

Not bad, but not true, either.

[*soft rap*]

This is [*name of the theater*],

a place in [*name of city*]

and this is America, a state of mind,

a way of being while forgetting,

a certain pain, a strange malaise,



a cultural pathology,  
an intercultural purgatory.  
America,  
my stage is your purgatory.  
This stage is our battlefield:  
*Robocop vs. the Global Evil Other.*  
This script is my uncertain fate,  
my tongue, my compass, your unbearable headache  
[Chanting]  
*per ipsum, ecu nipsum, eti nipsum*  
*et TV video patri omni impotenti*  
*per omnia saecula saeculeros . . .*  
Ay!, *qué* Catholic I sound!  
Delete!

[In a nasal voice]

**True. It was a Catholic hospital  
and the sisters, bless their hearts,  
were so totally weirded out by my tattoos,  
and pluri-flamboyant personality  
que la madre superiora kept coming to my room  
to offer me confession  
“Confiesa hijo de puta!” she thought,  
as if my death were imminent.**  
[I open my jacket to reveal tattoos]  
**“Madre,” I said  
“these are my tattoos  
they are like . . . heridas estéticas  
insects in the page,  
countries in my biographical map.  
My tattoos are like  
scripted words**

**as opposed to my scars  
which are like unscripted sentences  
in the open book of my body.  
My forty-six-year-old brown body,  
densely covered with Spanglish poetry  
unedited still . . . ”**

Excuse me sir/miss: [*To an audience member*]

Can you read in Spanish?

No? . . . No big deal.

It's just that I'm obsessed with . . .

attempting to establish some basic connections

between body, word, and destiny,

between the politics of language

and the physiology of politics

*verbi gratia:*

*Casa*, my head

*Cuello*, going North

*Lengua*, looking for your lips

*Pecho*, I wish I had humungous freckled breasts

*Panza*, my wisdom shows

*Pito*, *ñonga*, the untranslatable place

*Chocho*, *coño*, volcano

Where all *Vatos* come from,

way before the Bering Strait

way before Europeans first set foot on this continent.

*Piernas*, the journey north continues

*Pies*, migrating in reverse

*Espalda*, wetback

back to the origins, *memoria*

*ombligo, video . . .*

Coño, my writing is getting real obscure

I wonder if it's the medicine or premature dementia . . .

## DAY 2

*[In a nasal voice]*

**I am surrounded by humungous doctors and nurses.**

**They've got this sound scanner up my rectum.**

**I tell you, loca,**

**health and dignity don't always mix very well . . .**

*[Sounds of physical pain]*

If only I'd known before I parted

that California was not a movie,

that this psychotropical paradise sponsored by white hands

was actually maintained by brown hands,

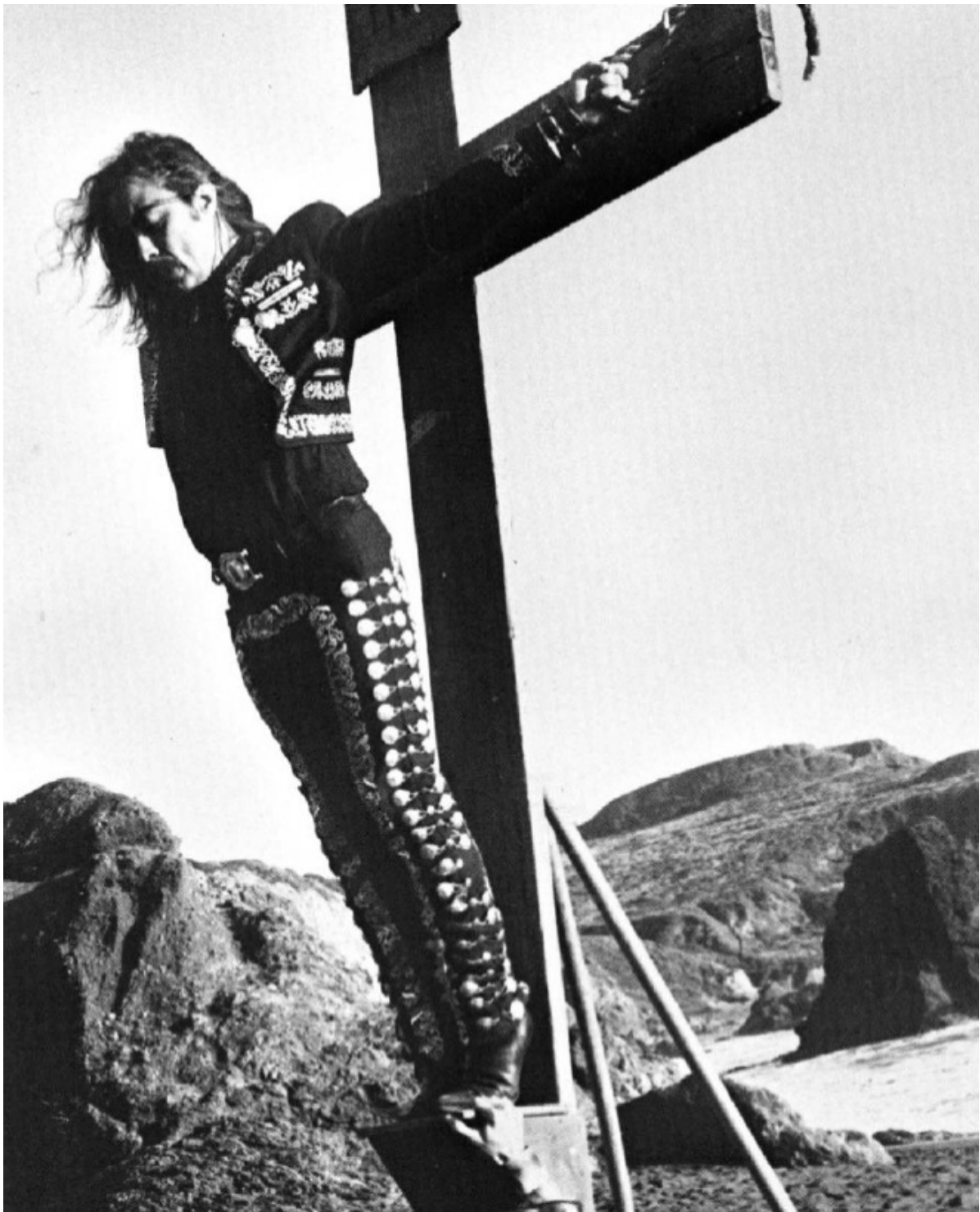
precisely with their undocumented fingers

deep inside America's sphincter.

*[Guttural sounds of sexual pleasure]*

"My fingers, your sphincter," I said on Public Radio

and I lost my job for the third time.



**Performance memory: *The CruXi-fiction Project*.**

Guillermo Gómez-Peña, as a mariachi, crucifies himself in protest of US immigration policy, 1994.

Photo: Neph Nevas.



[*To an audience member*]

You know, the best hamburgers in town  
are cooked by Mexican chefs  
precisely with their undocumented fingers.  
Ese, do you feel them when you eat?  
Can you smell them right now?  
Are my undocumented words vivid enough *o que?*

Dear audience,

I've got forty-five scars accounted for  
half of them produced by art  
and this is not a metaphor.  
My artistic obsession has led me to carry out  
some flagrantly stupid acts of transgression  
including:  
Living inside a cage as a Mexican Frankenstein  
Crucifying myself as a mariachi to protest immigration policy  
Crashing the Met as El Mad Mex led on a leash by a Spanish dominatrix.  
I mean, you want me to be more specific than, say,  
drinking Mr. Clean to exorcize my colonial demons,  
or handing a dagger to an audience member and offering her my  
plexus?

[*Pause*]

"Here . . . my colonized body"—I said  
"My plexus . . . your madness"—I said  
and she went for it  
inflicting my forty-fifth scar.  
She was only twenty, *boricua*  
and did not know the difference between  
performance, rock and roll and street life.  
Bad phrase, delete. Script change.  
But if only I was a radical geography professor . . .

***Lección de Geografía Finisecular en Español Para Anglosajones Monolingues***

Dear perplexed students,  
repeat with me out loud:

México es California

Marruecos es Madrid

Pakistan es Londres

Argelia es París

Cambodia es San Francisco

Turquía es Frankfurt

Puerto Rico es Nueva York

Centroamérica es Los Angeles

Honduras es New Orleans

Argentina es París

Beijing es San Francisco

Haití es Nueva York

Nicaragua es Miami

Quebec es Euskadi

Chiapas es Irlanda

Ramallah es East LA

Your house is also mine

Your language mine as well

And your heart will be ours,

one of these nights.

*[I drink blood from my pulsating rubber heart]*

[*In a nasal voice*]

**A crosseyed nurse asks me to please be quiet.**

**Other patients are losing their patience**

**with my Spanglish poetry. Carajo!**

**I need a smoke real bad!**

Intercut: [*Drunk-like/misspelled gringoñol*]

After the seventh margarita [*hiccups*]

after the twelfth margarita [*hiccups*]

the drunk tourist approaches a sexy señorrita

at “El Faisan” Club, in Merida, Yucatán:

“*oie prreciosa, my Mayan queen*

*tu estarr muchio muy bela*

*con tu ancient fire en la piel*

*parra que io queme mis bony fingers*

*mi pájarra belísima io comprou tu amor con mía mastercard”*

She answers in terrible French:

“Ne me dérangez plus ou je vous arraches les yeux!”

### DAY 3

[*In a nasal voice*]

**I’ve been in and out of consciousness all day**

**writing and sleeping, or rather,**

**writing while sleeping and vice versa**

**writing shit like:**

### ***Poema en Robo-Esperanto***

“Ladies and gentlemen,

*enchiladas y burritos,*

bagels and croissants,

let's imagine for a moment  
a postcolonial robo-baroque Esperanto  
composed of five European languages  
plus Latin, Nahuatl and Chicano slang.  
What would it sound like?  
*Alo? Alo Fortress Europa*  
*Yestem Mexicainskim arteston.*  
*Asken siquieren jodersen.*  
*I wonder que would happen if,*  
*wenn du open your computero,*  
*finde eine message*  
*in esta lingua poluta et disoluta?*  
*No est Englando, no est Germano,*  
*nor Espano; tampoco Franzo;*  
*not even Spanglish ese.*  
*No est keine known lingua aber du understande!*  
*Coño, merde, wat happen zo!*  
*Habe your computero eine virus caught?*  
*Habe du sudden BSE gedevolved o que?*  
*No, du esse leyendo la neue europese lingua de Europanto*  
*Uno cyber-melangio mas*  
*avec la Chicanoization del mondo*  
[Pausa dramatica]

[Gringoñol accent]

In the Americas,  
things are even more complicated  
regarding l'identité

[Stereotypical Vato Loco accent ]

. . . y es que la neta escueta  
we just don't know where exactly  
are the new borders located . . .



Tijuana, Baghdad . . .  
plus au moins?  
Texas, Kabul . . .  
aqui o alla?  
Earthlink, Yahoo . . .  
ceci, cela?  
que esto/que aquello  
ici/là-bas  
que tu/que yo,  
I mean  
not really wanting to decide yet  
'cause  
for the moment, machín  
aujourd'hui  
tlacanácatl el mío  
Il corpo pecaminoso  
hurts un chingo  
especially my feet  
íkchitl  
pero también otras partes del cuerpo-  
po-po-ca, capiscas guey?  
tenepantla tinemi  
y es que la pisca existencial esta ka-ka.  
so drop your cuete mujer  
et fiche-moi la paix  
y hagamos la paz  
con la lengua babe,  
ici, dans la voiture sacrée,  
en la mera rranfla  
my toyota flamígero . . .  
toyó-tl  
la salle du sexe transculturel  
my lowrider sanctuary

tlatoani

I say

je n'ai rien à déclarer:

“El arte nunca será suficiente”

Translation:

Art is just a pretext for . . . for . . . for . . .

[*I scream*]

“Enough pretentious language poetry GP”

—Myself #12 scolds Myself #7

“Get back to script #1 ese

and face the hard facts”:

[*In a nasal voice*]

**Hospital de Santa Catalina, Ciudad de México, 10:00 A.M. . . .**

**I wake up sweating.**

**The IVs are clogged again.**

**My left arm's the size of my thigh.**

**I ring the emergency bell**

**As I wait for the *pinche* nurse**

**I write to Arthur Krock on a napkin:**

**“Estimado señor K.:**

**The posthuman body is not exactly sexy.**

***Saludos desde la frontera del Mictlán.***

**Signed: Mex-terminated”**

### ***Dwelling in Unnecessary Wounds***

But if only I was a good actor

the bastard son of Klaus Kinski and Sophia Loren

or the border twin of Nicholas Cage

none of this would have ever happened.

If only bad acting equalled good performance art or vice versa,  
as mediocre theater directors tend to believe,  
this performance would have never taken place.

*Que* weird thought!

If only I was a furious rocker . . . no.

A trendy painter? . . . no,

I'm bored with art magazines and openings.

A sharp comedian . . . ? Maybe, no, not really,  
performance and comedy don't mix very well:

The result is often a joke that no one understands.

If only I had had the guts to join the Zapatistas for good,  
the guts to fight the *migra* in situ, with my bare hands,  
the guts to tell my family I am truly sorry for all the pain  
my sudden departure caused them twenty-two years ago,  
when I was young and handsome  
and still had no audience whatsoever.

But I was a coward.

I ended up making a twenty-two-year-long performance piece  
to justify my original departure, *el pecado original*.

But if only I had never left in the first place  
what would have been of my life?

It would be considerably simpler, perhaps

I'd be less *loco* perhaps, less angry, less . . . Chicano.

Awkward phrase, insensitive, sorry, delete!

But if only I didn't have to worry about my audience.

Entertaining them with stupid gadgets and jokes,

Entertaining you to pay my bills,

to avoid prison, deportation, and mental hospitals,

to justify intellectually my sociopathic tendencies.

If only I didn't have to perform to exercise my freedoms

for I could do it every day, everywhere,

but that's the subject matter of an essay, not a performance.

Besides, you did not come here to witness  
 a radical political mind at work.  
 Or did you?  
 Do you wish to experience a radical political mind at work?  
 Politics as performance art or vice versa?

### ***Exercise in Political Imagination #18***

*[Either beeping or subvocalizing the “censored” parts]*

OK, I politely ask you to close your eyes  
 and imagine a faraway country  
 controlled by far-right politicians in their seventies.  
 They are supported by religious fundamentalists  
 oil tycoons and gun manufacturers. . . . Just imagine  
 they believe (or rather pretend to believe)  
 that “the liberal media” and experimental art  
 have thoroughly destroyed our social fabric,  
 our moral and family values, our national unity,  
 and they are determined to restore them at any cost.  
 Under the pretext of national security  
 they have decided to carefully scrutinize everything  
 that goes on radio, TV, printed journalism, the Internet,  
 performance art, including this very **[beep]**.  
 So, from **[beep]** to sitcoms, and from news **[beep]** to **[beep]** programming,  
 they have digital censors which can detect key words  
 that trigger ideological or **[beep]** difference.  
 Since it is practically impossible to monitor everything,  
 they have devised a mechanism via which **[beep]**  
 the syntactic and conceptual coherence of a thought is **[beep]**,  
 especially when dealing with conflicting opin**[beep]**.  
 So, when it comes to expressing political di**[beep]**  
 most critical words have been **[beep]**.  
 And I mean, just words, such as **[beep]** or **[beep]** or **[beep]**

in order to ensure that *tende* **[beep]** information  
 does not pollute the minds of American patriots,  
 they have **[longer beep]**  
 forbidding also the use of terminology like **[beep]** or co-**[beep]**  
 or even an innocent term like **[beep]**.

In a world such as this, content would be restricted to **[beep]**  
 and the possibility to make intelligent civic choices  
 would be affecting our funda-**[beep]** to

**[long beep intertwined with diptongues]**

Imagine, what kind of a world would this be?

*[I grab the megaphone]*

*Locos and locas, perdonen*

but if I stop moving, performing, talking back . . .

I simply die.

#### DAY 4

*[In a nasal voice]*

**Today I got to take a shower and write some emails:**

**“You won’t believe it *tocayo* but**

**At first I couldn’t retain any food or liquids**

**and then I started vomiting blood *bien Draculero*.**

**My lower body began to swell up**

**until I looked like some kind of medieval walrus.**

**The American doctors said it was a “tropical disease,”**

**a standard diagnosis for UMP (Unexplainable Mexican Phenomena)**

**at which point, in an act of desperation,**



**Performance memory: Guillermo Gómez-Peña boxing with his tortured alter ego, a hanging dead chicken.**

Mexico City, 1991. Photo: Monica Naranjo.

**I flew to Mexico City,  
and put myself in the hands of the family doctor.  
The tests revealed an alarming catalog of problems:**

**Parasites blocking circulation in my limbs,  
my lungs, infested with scary-sounding bacteria,  
and my liver, my liver had just about quit,  
closed up shop, lights out, kaput.**

**Medical linguists and medieval poets call it “esteatosis,”  
*en latin***

**but in reality I was having a tête-à-tête with my own death.**

**She loves me so much**

**I could smell the Brazilian desire on her breath.”**

*[I brush my face and put on stetson hat]*

### **Border Love/Linguistic Misunderstandings**

*[I sing]*

Kiss me, kiss me, my *chuca*  
*Como si fuera esta noche*  
The last *migra* raid  
Kiss me, kiss me, *pachuca*  
*Que tengo miedo perderte*  
Somewhere in LA.

Ayyyyy!

If only I had known the true motivations of my past lovers  
when falling in love with El Charromantico or El Mariachi Liberacci  
instead of myself #2, El Border Hamlet

*me ama/no me ama*  
*me caso/no me caso*  
*me canso/no me canso*  
Chicano/Mexicano  
*que soy o me imagino*  
*regreso o continúo*  
*me mato/no me mato*

*en Mexico/in Califas*

to write or to perform

*en Inglés* or in Spanish . . .

I hate you, no,

I forgive you, no,

I crave for you locota, Where are you?

Are you still blonde?

[*In a nasal voice*]

**It took me forty-three years to find her.**

**She's here tonight,**

**laying next to me**

**on this hospital bed,**

**her warm hand on my shivering plexus,**

**my right hand on her left breast,**

**blue fog covering the stage.**

**My memory wanders around**

**in the everglades of my laptop.**

If only I had a decent command of English

when I got involved with my past lovers.

If only I had known the difference

between jerk around and jerk off,

between napkin and kidnap,

between prospect and suspect,

between embarrassed and *embarasada*.

If only I had known the difference

between desire and redemption

between political correctness and personal computers



between us and US

between humanity and mankind

We've only got one word for both in Spanish:

*Humanidad, perdóname por ser tan bi-rollero*

If only I had known the difference

between loneliness and solitude . . .

We've only got one word en *español*:

*Soledad.*

Forgive me for being so . . . pa-ra-dox-i-cal

*soledad* on stage, my flaming queen,

forgive me *chuca*

for spilling the beans

of my very spicy beanhood.

“He thinks like Octavio Paz,”

wrote the theater critic of the *Boston Globe*,

“but behaves like Geraldo Rivera on acid.”

But if only I had known the gringo implications of

“*mi casa es su casa*”

meaning, *y tu país también*

or “*Hasta la vista babe,*”

meaning, die fuckin’ meskin

Or *vaya con dios vatous locous*,

meaning, deported back to the origins.

The South is always the origin

and crossing the border is the original sin.

*Placazo:*

*Un emigrante mas equals un Mexicano menos . . .*

Delete!

## DAY 5

*[In a nasal voice]*

**My friends and relatives are all here,  
sitting around my bed.**

**I'm entertaining them  
with a new performance text.**

**The tone is clearly much less personal and tortured.**

Two months before election day,

The Third Party Chicano candidate addresses the Brown House:

Campaigning for the Brown House.

*[I put on dark glasses and bandana]*

Dear Chicanos and honorary Chicanos,

The historical mission of the USA is to put the world at risk

and then to save it from the very risks they created;

for example, to arm other countries,

and then to attack them for being armed;

to provide weapons and drugs to the youth of color

and then to imprison them for using them;

to endanger species and then to raise consciousness

and create programs to save them;

to evict the poor and then punish them for living on the streets;

to turn women and people of color into freaks

and then laugh at us for acting out accordingly.

The historical mission of the USA is very, very peculiar.

*[From now on I take off or put on glasses every time I shift voices]*

*[Bold lines delivered in normal voice/others in hyper-Chicano accent]*

Dear audience,

If I were a politician, would you vote for me?

Despite my outlaw looks, my obvious vices?

Despite my lack of theatrical training?

If this was, say, a presidential campaign  
and not a performance-art piece,  
what would I say? What should I say?

### ***Imaginary political speech #5***

*[Abrasive w/megaphone]*

Dear citizens of the millennial *barrio*,  
We are faced with a very serious dilemma:  
we have now entered the postdemocratic phase  
of advanced capitalism,  
and there's simply . . . no return.

### **Orale! Parezco Malcolm Mex.**

We politicians have total disregard for human pain,  
for the homeless, the migrants from the South,  
our elders and teens,  
the artists, the enfermed, the crazy ones, like you.  
We have gotten used to living without seeing, without sharing.  
For the moment all we share is . . . the moment.  
No, no, no, that's a bad Daoist phrase.  
I'll try imaginary political speech #7.

### ***Imaginary political speech #7***

*[I drop megaphone and raise my right fist]*

*[Grave voice]*

Dear orphans of the nation-state,  
We now live . . .  
we now live in a fully borderized world

composed of virtual nations,  
transnational pop cultures, and hybrid races,  
and all we share is fear and vertigo

[*To an audience member*] Hey, that's a great line  
Fear?  
Fear of the future, of war, love, and loneliness

And vertigo?  
The feeling of standing on the edge of a new millennium.  
Yessss!!  
Pure *horror vacui*: Y2K, *y que*,  
Apocalypse Mañana!  
We feel it in our crotch  
and it goes up our spine  
and into our throat  
and out of our nostrils and eyes  
and it's fucking unbearable!!!!

I'm overdoing it, I know,  
but I see no other way to make my point.  
Wait, there might be another way . . . a joint!

[*I light up a joint and smoke it*]

### ***Imaginary Political Speech #12***

[*Stoner voice*]

Dear generic American citizenry,

If you vote for me  
 I can assure you that as the first Mexican president of the USA,  
 I will fulfill your fears and desires like no other politician ever did,  
 and all your stereotypes will come true *carnales*, uufff!  
 I'll open all borders, legalize drugs,  
 create nude university campuses,  
 make daily sex mandatory,  
 make Spanglish the official language,  
 expropriate all TV stations and hand them over to poets,  
 abolish the police force and the national guard,  
 ban all weapons, from handguns to missiles,  
 deport Bush back to Texas  
 and Ashcroft back to his Episcopalian Inferno.

Orale, feels great to imagine . . .

*[I take out bandana and dark glasses. I drink from Mr. Clean bottle again]*

## DAY 6

*[In a nasal voice]*

**Since my liver can't tolerate the medicine  
 I need to fight the infections,  
 the doctors needed a way to simulate its  
 functions.  
 So, they connected me to a myriad more IVs  
 and made me look precisely like one  
 of my Mexi-cyborg performance characters,  
 like some kind of cheesy self-fulfilling prophecy  
 featured on the sci-fi channel en español . . .**



**Early involuntary performance. Ten-year-old Guillermo Gómez-Peña in drag at his Mexico City home, 1965.**

*[Voice of sleazy Latino TV announcer]*

*A continuación en Telemundo*

*Un emigrante asegura haber sido atacado por Migrasferatu*

*[Normal voice]*

If only I had been more cautious when crossing the border

but, to tell you the truth, I'm glad I wasn't, 'cause

we are who we are,

because of every mistake we've made

and all the locos and locas we've met in the process

including the *pinche migra*

and every caress we've given and received  
including those of our worst lover,  
and if you want to get real He-ge-lian,  
we are who we are  
because of every performance we've done  
and every performance we chose not to do.  
Like tonight,  
I chose not to do a lot of things. For example,  
I chose not to make you laugh too much  
so you wouldn't mistake me for a stand-up comedian.  
I chose not to shock you unnecessarily  
so you wouldn't get a bad impression of performance art.  
I chose not to bring my gun  
so you wouldn't think that all Mexicans are violent.  
And precisely because I chose not to do all these things  
I am who I am,  
doing what I'm doing,  
*echando rollo profeta*  
chance-thinking as I go, go, Go-Mex.  
I'm going,  
we are all going  
through the Biiiiiiiiiiig Smoke,  
[*Tongues*]  
el in-ter-cul-tu-ral Poltergeist,  
[*Tongues*]  
driving along the information superhighway  
[*Tongues*]  
surfing the mindscape of the net  
[*Tongues*]  
the subconscious of America.  
[*Tongues*]  
It's scary,  
but we are all writing this text as I speak.

I spik, you gringo . . . no

I speak, you listen.

Voice change; special effect #187:

[*Mute language for 30 secs*]

[*In a nasal voice*]

**The nurse enters the room stage left.**

**She takes my performance temperature  
and changes one of the IVs. Action:**

**Where is the pinche teleprompter I asked for?**

**I told you guys I was unable to memorize a full script.**

**The nurse does not understand my concern**

I told you very clearly that this was not a theater monologue.

Hey Pancho, that light over there is too bright.

Can we put a blue gel

to add some artificial melancholy to my words?

Tonite, my words are my conceptual stage

And you, my dear audience,

you are my . . . hostage.

Nevermind!

Testing, testing, *probando*

*“Estoy muriendome en voz alta*

*y nadie se da cuenta, probando . . . ”*

This mike sounds crappy ¿qué no?

Don't you guys have another one

That can actually improve my voice?

Make me sound more dignified,

sensual, compassionate, smart



I mean, isn't technology supposed to enhance humanity?

[*Pause*]

Nevermind!

Back to my main subject matter:

Mapping.

Mapping the immediate future

so you and I can walk on it

without falling inside the great faults of history.

You and I, verbally walking together,

You and I, an ephemeral community,

You and I, a tiny little nation-state,

You and I, a one-hour-long Utopia titled "You and I,"

Alone onstage,

Fighting together the World Bank,

the WTO, and the Bush Cartel.

*Tu y yo, juntitos.*

But who are you, really?

[*I powder my face and put on my stetson hat*]

[*In a nasal voice*]

**After a week at the hospital,**

**I look at myself in the mirror**

**and see someone else,**

**a pale skinny man with a frail gaze,**

**I don't recognize myself,**

**and neither do my other selves.**

**I am the most other and fragmented I've ever been.**

**I'm literally talking to this Other self**

**on the other side of the mirror.**

[*House lights*]

[*Addressing an audience member*]

Ese . . .

Where is the border between you and me?

Between my words and your mind?

Between my mouth and your fears?

Where exactly is this performance taking place?

Are we webcasting tonight?

Am I alone onstage?

Where are my dear colleagues? [*Name present friends*]

Are you *locos* still here?

Are you . . . my audience tonight?

Do you feel lonely when I speak?

What time is it, by the way?

It's so fuckin' late in the show!

And I am still asking all these existentialist questions:

Is there still time?

Time for . . . making love . . .

For dreaming . . .

For reinventing ourselves . . .

For returning to the homeland, to her arms

Is there enough time?

to wait

to stop the war, another war

to cry collectively

to cry for the world for no apparent reason,

the way Fassbinder used to cry

whenever he took a city bus

and saw other suffering humans?

their perplexed and lonely faces?

"Ish bin ain Mexicanishes monster in Berlin"

Poor German citizens,

if only they had been born in Mexico

they would be less tortured . . . perhaps.

Bad phrase. Delete.

[*To someone in the audience*]

Miss, why were you crying the last time you cried?

You beautiful, you . . .

Were you truly aching or just performing?

Am I really, sincerely aching, or just performing?

Is this a mere exercise in linguistic manipulation?

[*To someone else*]

Sir, are you in touch with your heart?

Can you see mine, hanging out like a wandering viscera?

[*To someone else*]

*Carnal*, are you in touch with your genitalia?

This guy asked me this question at a party the other night:

What does it mean to be in touch with one's genitalia?

I answered rhetorically with a question:

“to be sensitive to people's eros?

or to engage acritically in sexual harassment

or, in Spanglish, sexual *agárrasment*? ”

Is anyone, right this moment, besides me

experiencing incommensurable horniness?

No one?

[*Pause*]

Anyone willing to come onstage and take off your clothes

As a homage to early performance art?

[*To an audience member*]

Hey, do you know your genetic code?

Do you know your civil liberties?

How many have you lost so far?

[*Hindu accent*]

I don't ever recall asking you if you were a foreigner

[*French accent*]

*ne me dérange plus ou je vous arrache les yeux*

bad French accent, coño . . . *terrible!*,  
I told you I was a bad actor!  
'Cause I was never trained . . .  
to perform . . .  
your desires  
much less to entertain . . .  
the possibility of . . .  
lying.

[*In a nasal voice*]

**La madre superiora, remember?**

**She returns once again to my room to offer me confession:**

**“Confiesa hijo de puta!”**

**she says, encabronada,**

**as if my death were imminent.**

**I turn on my inner TV.**

### ***News Update***

[*Voice of typical American newscaster*]

The war goes on in Baghdad

As the performance continues in [*name of the city where I'm performing*]

*Miento:*

The war goes on at the US–Mexico border

As the performance continues on HBO

Same war, different performance

Blackout!

[*Blackout/I put on a wrestler mask*]

## DAY 7

[*In a nasal voice*]

**Carolina comes in with a hidden avocado torta**

**she smuggled from the corner taco shop.**

**She breaks the good news:**

**I'm leaving tomorrow, orale!**

**This epic is almost over.**

**The older nurse, la coqueta, asks me for the tenth time**

**“Perdone señor, what did you say you were?**

**Per-for-man-que?”**

A contra-dic-tion in terms—*respondo*

A straight transsexual—*elaboro*

a wrestler without a ring

a rocker without a band

a cyber-pirate without “access”

a theorist without methodology

a shaman expelled from his tribe

a poet who writes his metaphors on his body

seven *locos*, locked inside an empty room

my mind, mex-plico?

My mind, not theirs.

**She looks at me**

**with a combination of tenderness and fear and says:**

**“No entiendo nada . . . del arte . . . mo-moderno.”?**

an artist who sells ideas, not objects, not images, not skills

a per-for-man-ce artist, which means that

when I am pissed

I tend to speak in tongues.

[*Angry tongues*]

Performance is a weird religion, I told you

[*Chant*]

*per ipsum ecu nipsum, eti nipsum*

*et T-Video Patri Omni-impotenti*

*per omnia saecula saeculeros,*

*I te watcho*

[*Tongues*]

[*I take off wrestler mask*]

This is the way my voice sounds when I'm losing my mind,

Testing, testing . . .

El Phony Shaman.

[*Fake nahuatl*]

[*I sing the traditional Hare Krishna*]

Hare Krishna, Krisnahuatl Hare grandma, hairy nalga

Ommmmmmmm

[*Imitating powwow-like chanting*]

Christian girls, Christian girls,

Christian girls, Christian girls,

Oh how I love, oh how I love, oh how I love those Christian girls,

Oh how I love, oh how I love, oh how I love those Christian girls.

Ahhhhh . . .

New age girls . . . [*repeats chant*]

Skinhead girls . . . [*repeats chant*]

Muslim boys . . . [*repeats chant*]

[*Shamanic tongues intertwined with words*]

[*Tongues*] . . . Tezcatlipunk

[*Tongues*] . . . Funkahuatl

[*Tongues*] . . . Khrishnahuatl

[*Tongues*] . . . Chichicolgatzin

[*Tongues*] . . . Chili con Carne

[*Tongues*] . . . Taco Bell Chihuahua

[*Tongues*] . . . Santa Frida

[*Tongues*] . . . Santa Selena

[*Tongues*] . . . Santa Pocahontas

[*Tongues*] . . . Santa Shakira

[*Tongues*] . . . Virgen Tatuada

NAFTA, Viagra, Melatonin,

NAFTA, Viagra, Melatonin,

[*Screaming*]

Melatonin!!

Now everybody, take your pill.

Ginseng, Gingko, Guacamole,

Ginseng, Gingko, Guacamole,

[*Screaming*]

Guacamole!!

Now everybody, take a dip.

Kava, ecstasy, chili beans,  
Kava, ecstasy, chili beans,  
[*Screaming*]  
Rosarito!!  
Now everybody, take a shit.

[*In a nasal voice*]

**The day I was released**  
**Doctor Hernandez gave me the bad news:**  
**“Guillermo, you need a total change of lifestyle.”**  
**I hate that pinche word, “lifestyle” . . . “lifestyle” . . . “**  
**I *pinche* hate it.**

### ONE MONTH LATER

[*In a nasal voice*]

**I’m back in San Francisco**  
**learning how to be a laptop intellectual, coño!**  
**I miss the road, the troupe,**  
**our dangerous crossborder adventures.**  
**I badly miss Myers rum and Marlboro reds.**  
**I’m filled with millennial doubts, chingos!**

### POST-SCRIPT: MILLENNIAL DOUBTS

*Damas y caballeros;*  
I’m feeling a bit insecure and introspective tonight.  
I just turned forty-eight,  
and I wonder if I’m still asking the right questions,  
or am I merely repeating myself?  
Am I going far enough, or should I go further?  
North? But the North does not exist,



South? Should I go back to Mexico for good?

*Regresar en español a las entrañas de mi madre?*

But the Mexican nation-state is collapsing as I speak  
so *stricto sensu*, Mexico en español no longer exists



### Guillermo Gómez-Peña as El S/M Zorro.

Liverpool Biennial, 2002. Photo: Manual Vason.

'cause everyday Mexico and the US,  
like Fox and Bush,  
look more and more like one another  
and less and less like you y yo  
which means, “we” are no longer foreigners to one another.  
Follow my Kantian logic?  
Therefore, as orphans of two nation-states,  
we’ve got no government to defend,

no flag to wave.

We've only got one another  
which sounds quite romantic,

I mean, politically speaking,  
but it is a philosophical nightmare . . .

I mean, if neither the North nor the South  
are viable options anymore,

where should I go? East? *EST*?

Should I go deeper into my global psyche  
and become a Chicano Buddhist?

Or should I cross the digital divide west  
and join the art-technologist cadre?

How?

Alter my identity through body-enhancement techniques,  
laser surgery, prosthetic implants,

and become the *Mexica Orlan*?

A glow-in-the-dark transgenic *mojado*?

Or a postethnic cyborg, perhaps?

A Ricky Martin with brains?

That's a strange thought.

Maybe I should donate my body  
to the MIT artificial-intelligence department  
so they can implant computer nacho chips in my \*&^%76%78

implant a very, very sentimental robotic bleeding heart  
and become the ranchero Stelarc?

What about a chipotle-squirting techno-falo jalapeño  
to blind the *migra* when crossing over?

Or an "intelligent" tongue . . . activated by tech-eela?

You know, imaginary technology  
for those without access to the real one.

I mean, I'm arguing for an obvious fact:

When you don't have access to power  
poetry replaces science

and performance art becomes politics

Mex-plico?

No, I got to get me a “real” job, a nine-to-five job.

But the question is, doing what?

Hey, I could be an intercultural detective?

a forensic expert in X-treme identity analysis . . . nay!

*Que tal la pedagogía radical? ?*

Translation please?

I can teach “Chiconics” in jail, I mean Yale,

“What’s up *esos, chinguen a sus profesores.*

*Saquen la mota y el chemo.*

Forever, Aztlan nation.”

How about posing as a model for a computer ad:

*[I put on my techno glasses and stetson hat]*

“El Mexterminator thinks different, *y que?*”

Or posing as a wholesome eccentric for a Ben & Jerry’s poster?

No, I’d have to lose 10 kilos at least

and use lots of coppertone ¿qué no?

Wait,

I could conduct self-realization seminars for Latino dot-commers:

“Come to terms with your inner Chihuahua.”

*[I bark]*

*Que tal* a workshop for neoprimitive Anglos?

“Find your inner Aztec.”

*[I speak in pseudo-nahuatl]*

I look the part ¿qué no? . . . kind of . . .

I could write a bestseller for conservative minorities titled . . .

*Inverted Minstrel: One hundred ways to camouflage your ethnicity to get a better job*

*or Using Make-Up and Wigs to Get a Loan from the Bank*

*or to Buy a Home at a Trendy ’Hood*

I just don't know anymore.

It's tough to find a useful task for a performance artist nowadays.

In the age of the mainstream bizarre, revolution as style  
and globalization gone wrong, weapons of mass distraction,  
asses of evil shoved into your face.

In this time and place,  
what does it mean to be "transgressive"?

What does "radical behavior" mean after Howard Stern,  
Jerry Springer, Bin Laden, Ashcroft, Cheney,  
six-year-old serial killers in the heartland of America,  
a First World Banana Republic . . . Florida,  
tampering with electoral ballots,  
an AA theological cowboy running the so-called "free world"  
as if he were directing a spaghetti western in the wrong set?  
Conan the Barbarian running for governor in California?

Coño, I ask myself rhetorically,  
what else is there to "transgress"?

Who can artists shock, challenge, enlighten?

Can we start all over again?

Can we?

May I

*Mear . . . los?*

Should I burn my bra or my green card?

*Damas y caballeros,*

I thought maybe I might have one more chance  
to make a deal with my personal death

So, I wrote this script

It begins like this . . .

[*Blackout*]

TEMPORARY END