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For an author who likes to cross borders Guillermo Gómez-Peña (1955) has certainly reached audiences in both the U.S. and Mexican artistic, literary, theoretical, and political arenas. Now, with the advent of more technological mediums such as the Internet, the borderless artist makes use of the global fetish that, in theory, reaches a global community. As a prelude to his performances, workshops, conferences and lectures, Gómez-Peña's collaborative webiste engages his readers in video-poetic selections, and hypertext poetic medley with topics that are sure to catch their interest with poems such as "Apocalypse," "Sexo," "Militias," and the video-poems "Apocalypse" and "Califas." His "ethno-techno art," as he calls it, does more than disrupt traditional theoretical dialogue using the same jargon and disengaging it from its original context, it satirizes the disciplines that try to give explanations. His online video-art and poetry performances are composed of fragmented thoughts, and a myriad of politically, symbolically and theoretically-charged words that give resonance to a vital verse. The poet is lost and found in the Diaspora of the world as experienced on the Web, in Webspora. We hear the itinerant poet, the artist who's borderless and whose very conscious transgressions make the poet in Diaspora unyielding and not accommodating to any discourse, not from here or there.

"Webspora" a Home Away from Home

Early in his artistic trajectory Gómez-Peña makes it very clear that he has never associated his

border performance art with any site-specific space. The Chilango artist emphasizes how his

borderless identity does not speak of a specific Diaspora, but rather is an all encompassing

experience. He states: "For me, the border is no longer located at any fixed geopolitical site. I

carry the border with me, and I find new borders wherever I go" (*New World Border* 5). His

Diaspora then consists of not belonging and belonging to all, all at once. In fact, Gómez-Peña has always claimed his displacement as a "home," embracing the power of the borderless artist who's art speaks to all and embraces all nationalities, nations, and above all, all those lost in Diaspora all while "raising tough questions regarding access, identity politics and language" (Gómez-Peña "The Virtual Barrio").

As a "reverse anthropologist" he claims he uses the data he gathers to echo the *zeitgeist* (or social consciousness) of society and represent it to that same public, all with the intent of having his audience contemplate and recognize their own thoughts. He enters the virtual world with high aspirations. In his first draft of a manifesto entitled, "Remapping Cyberspace" Gómez-Peña notes that his

> desire is to remap the hegemonic cartography of cyberspace; to 'politicize' the debate; to develop a multicentric theoretical understanding of the (cultural, political and aesthetic) possibilities of new technologies; to exchange a different sort of information (mythopoetical, activist, performative, imagistic); and to hopefully do all this with humor, inventiveness and intelligence. (Gómez-Peña "The Virtual Barrio")

In an earlier interview Gómez-Peña emphasized that the iconography of his characters does draw from Chicano imagery but is meant to express the translatable experience of the uprooted foreigner living in Diaspora (Huízar 207). So, keeping this in mind we can see how the "cybersaints" aim to represent "this process of hybridization of borderization, not just in America, but in the world" ("The Virtual Barrio"). For Gómez-Peña, "artist-made CD-roms and web pages can perform an extremely vital educational function: they can function as community 'memory banks' ('encyclopedias chicanicas'), sites for encounter, dialogue, complicity, and

exchange; and virtual bases of operation and action" (Gómez-Peña "The Virtual Barrio"). The web—a global community—then, becomes a metaphoric home where anonymity is the identity of choice. He has always claimed that border artists like himself would like to "'brownify' virtual space; to 'spanglishize the net,' and to 'infect' the lingua franca" with their participation in the artistic realm of cyberspace. Their goal is to find innovative "grassroots applications to new technologies," he asserts (*Dangerous Border Crossers* 259). His attempt to infect cyberspace with the ethnographic images, language, themes and artistic renderings of social critique has been a project of his and his troupe since the mid-nineties. In his earlier venture with the variables of the Internet as a medium, he solicits audience participation in his *Temple of Confessions* (1995) to specifically address the fears and prejudices of his spectators by using much of the dialogue and topics as subject for his performance scripts. His earlier work with the *Temple of Confessions* (1995), which requests audience participation of confessions of fear or desire, provided the artist with the audience obsessions and reflected these in his performance script. He uses the global-based medium to extrapolate responses from the "phantasmagoric beings," as he calls them, and uses these reactions as material for his work. The audience participations, thus, become the substance of his text. His performance art, then is both a reflection of his audience and a projection of mythical characters that allegorically represent the immigrant experience. He claims, "we use them [the answers] to design our multicultural Frankensteins—our ethnocyborgs." It is Gullermo Gómez Peña's goal to have these ethnocyborgs help the viewer see how American society is "riddled with fear of otherness, differences, change." Ultimately, people should deal with the demons of prejudice and stereotypes and recognize that the concept of "otherness;" thus, for that matter the experience of diaspora is in fact relative to the perspective taken. In that context the global-based medium

served as a mediator between the artist and his public. Now, that the Pocha Nostra website provides such a borderless channel where he can reach a global community, the idea of "borderless" is even more pervasive with the imminent cultural notions of globalization including the growing dominance of western (or even American) forms of political, economic, and cultural life ("westernization" or "Americanization"), and the proliferation of new information technologies (such as the "Internet Revolution").

This virtual and global world is assumed to be a hybrid as it is increasingly dominated by globalization, yet it leads us to question—much like the artist does in his own work—the increasingly segregated technological community that is for the most part perceived as the imperialist gaze of the United States. In this space we can interrogate the poetic representation of the images, sounds and language posted in poetic dioramas on the Internet to be explored and performed at various times and in invariable types of audiences, and spaces. We also see that in Guillermo Gómez-Peña's cyber world the multiplicity and possibility of border identities, and kitsch representations of Latino culture are interrogated only in a way that allows the viewer to deconstruct the performed and commodified visual and written text. In fact, we can see how the web provides this artist with variable ways to recycle texts and fragments of action, whose meaning may or may not play out—in the reader's, the viewer's or participant's interpretation—in the same fashion.

"Tekno-poéticas"

Much like a *performance*, the reading of these "Tekno poéticas" is left open, raw and mixed; the web environment provides an illusory unwavering site-specific location of his performance that changes its dialogic repertoire as it enters the varied private spaces of its public and performer. The performance can no longer attempt to be adapted to speak and reach specific concerns and or communities, his audience is now in a "global" context where the reader is just about anyone. Although, one could also assume that the viewer that navigates to this particular website is well acquainted with the artist's work and is simply looking for more.

The website houses simulated three-dimensional temples where the user/viewer can enter the chamber and confront these "cybersaints." He uses humor and irony in his performance of a varied cartography of identity stereotypes and geopolitical issues to provoke the audience's perceptions of cultural hybridity. He uses elements of poems, performance monologues, spoken word pieces in a combination to weave distinctive textual montages. These may aim to address a given audience, but in reality are left open to interpretation by the global community. The artist has often said that his characters are icons, more about pop-culture processes and the reflections of the *zeitgeist* of the times than about mere ethnic reflections.

In the Pocha Nostra website besides several marketing information regarding his presentations, workshops and lectures and publications, the Museo section houses the "Tekno poética" and the Video Gallery which include several hypertext and video-poems. The "Tekno Poética" is subdivided in three poems: "Militias," "Sexo" and "Theory." These represent the three most politically charged expressions of a culture: the armed forces that protects and in some cases

governs a country; sex as necessary for survival of the human race, but also serves as a vital

indicator of the social state of our civilization, the *zeitgeist*; and finally, theory gives explanations

and answers to the human condition while at the same time it is inevitably linked to the artistic

production. The "Tekno poética" is a hypertext verse of animated words accompanied by

computerized music that adds to the eerie performance of the piece. All three reflect on society's

experience and suggest the uneasiness of the time we are living in. In "Sexo," for instance, the

topic is a universal one, yet by using the Spanglish voice Gómez Peña makes it about the

bicultural and biracial experience. That is, it is the ethnic voice that speaks of sex, it is this ethnic

body that is presumed to be involved. The words flash before the reader, slide from left and right

and disappear instantaneously:

> All we have sex
>
> S E X
>
> Cybersex
>
> Sexo anónimo: without emotional or biological repercussions
>
> Sexo aeróbico: sin facciones, sin identidad
>
> Sin Recuerdo
>
> sin en español es pecado
>
> Sin
>
> Sex

What we have is a double reference to the anonymity of the body in cyberspace: the body that is

not recognized, that does not exist (as in cybersex) and the body whose sexual actions compose

the being, as in:

Sex

o bien

sex intranscendete,

Sex doloroso,

sex extremo,

sexo impersonal,

y sin propósito alguno

en la calle,

bajo niebla

en la misma morgue

as a high spiritual goal

so death is temporarily unattainable

One of the features of this poetic voice is how the body's actions—in regards to sex—make the being what s/he is, and in a sense what society is as a whole. Gómez-Peña houses this unidentifiable ethnic body in a space that both robs him of his specificity and replaces it with the perspective of the Other. In this particular case, cyberspace houses the marginalized body's experience or outlook and decentralizes the hegemonic anglo body's experience. It is an example of how the web functions as a home of the diaspora voice that speaks for all, that uses the marginalized voice to speak of universal truths. "Militias" speaks of the invasion of self-governed armed forces that rob the identity of its constituents "free falling toward c h a o u s." In this poem we also see how the center is de-centered: the poetic "I" ("our cities") is invaded by the "anglo militias." This identity is shown to be at the brink of destruction as these

militias

keep moving north

our identity

freefalling

toward

c h a o u s

Again, the once displaced ethnic voice is privileged. Assumptions can be made of the political

position taken by the artist and his critique of the invading militias. "Theory," on the other hand,

takes a more universal angle and appeals to the reader's search for "truth" or answers. Gómez –

Peña simply proposes that it is with this concept and practice that we find meaning to the world,

because everything else including "friendship, health and love" are temporary. That which is

eternal then is hypothetical discourse and are mere assumptions that give answers to our

questions and support our critiques. And, only "the ephemeral utopias of art, travel and laughter"

allow thinking beings to exist. In this abstract discussion he adds:

These small privileges that make life bearable

Temporarily as we know tomorrow

The earth might open up again

We might get deported

We might get aids

Yes, my dear contemporaries

Uncertainty rules

Our fragile kingdom

And our art

Is an impression

An expression of this uncertainty

Guillermo Gómez-Peña has often said that his performance art is a reflection and analysis of society and his function as a "reverse anthropologist" is to reveal how the marginalized experience and the view of reality place the hegemonic culture in that same perspective. While these poems are not necessarily interactive, they are examples of the artist's attempt at "brownifying" the web with the Spanglish language, the gaze of the Other, and the critique of the dominant culture's fears. The topics chosen do not represent a specific sector of society nor do they speak of ethnic issues; these can in fact be translatable to any culture. In a sense, we can say that he has brought the margins to the center in these examples by speaking of issues that are transferable and yet speak of a particular experience, that of the ethnic in the U.S.

Video Gallery

In his "Video Gallery" we find a more hi-tech poetry that incorporates images, video, music, and verse, all mixed in a mélange of animation, recitation and sound elements. In these particular pieces the reader / spectator / audience participant is an integral component of his dialogical work. These are examples of how web-based video-poetry and hypertext verse, placed in a global medium, both absorbs the reader and requests audience participation making ultimately the effect of displacement and dislocation an exercise that questions not only the physical act of moving and immigration but also the political, theoretical and even philosophical notions of

identity and displacement. These texts serve as examples of concrete social, demographic, and linguistic processes that speak in a mythical language about a "proletariat kind of internationalism," as Gómez-Peña would put it (Huízar 210); processes that are typical all over the world and in a sense international. He refuses to regard these processes as part of globalization because of the colonial connotations and ethnocentric notion that this concept entails. In this section there are two video-poems that reflect the experience of the Other, "Apocalypse," and "Califas." "Apocalypse" uses the city of Los Angeles as subject of this inevitable destruction. It is an "L.A. that nunca vino y nunca llegará." The poem starts with the image of the mex-tech speaking into a microphone—the artist wearing an Aztec head piece—and a satellite view of the geographical area of the city, and then goes on to represent this urban area with the rapid surge of freeway lights that shimmer and daze the viewer. The viewer is thus looking at the space from above, and we know it is the Other looking down as we see the image of the two mariachi figures above the clouds looking down. The spectator takes the same perspective. This city is symbolic of many voices that have contributed to this devastation: the criminals, lawyers, policemen, *políticos*, Hollywood screenwriters. According to Gómez-Peña, they all have participated in a convoluted plot to "join cults to make life bearable" they see no difference between "primal desire and self-expression." We can sense a subliminal effect in the video with the flashing verses, the oral recitation and eerie music. The poet/artist speaks bluntly of an alter reality that exists in this city, or as he says, "fascism with yogurt, to put it bluntly." We hear a critique of the media that treats monumental (war) and entertainment (sports) events with the same level of importance; we see, says Gómez-Peña, "all American boys with big weapons and small aspirations" on the same television broadcast with sports entertainment.

Finally, we can sense how the disembodied body (on the web) is related to the disfranchised body that no longer has a home, not an L.A. nor a U.S. He chants,

> U.S. means not a country
>
> and L.A. not even a city
>
> my house not even a house
>
> L.A. *nunca vino*
>
> *y nunca llegará*
>
> this *pinchi* city doesn't even exist

Los Angeles home to so many immigrants, to so many and varied experiences of Diaspora, in this web experience is the site of displacement for both the immigrant and the citizen, for the concept of urban settlement is debunked by Gómez-Peña when he makes it clear that everyone is afraid of "losing themselves in another culture, another airport, another lover, another trip. . .*que sé yo*." The displaced persona in this piece is the inhabitant that claims to have a home, to live in an L.A. and a U.S. that is actually non-existent. He speaks of the fear to experience other cultures and get lost in these, of getting lost in the transient space of an airport, or in the arms of a lover or the experience of a trip. "Califas" posits the notion of news and the relations between the individual and its relation to world affairs: "Good evening California, good morning Europe." The city is seen as representative of a nation juxtaposed to the individual represented by a continent. The center of the world is situated in "Califas" or California and from here he relates the various events affecting the individual. In this world perspective "*historia* and hysteria" are parallel and simultaneous where outrageous events may might as well seem real: "eight-year old suburban wonder kid kills his parents, neighbors and his toys, claims he ate too much ice cream

and receives 2000 letters of support. A vivid example of global solidarity." On the other hand, the real political issues remain unquestioned and uneventful, "120 Mexicans on death row" does not scandalize the viewer. In this confusion the "border is open tonight" and hysteria replaces history in which FOX Channel 12 makes it happen. In this video-poem Gómez-Peña explores several key factors that affect all individuals, such as the dark sides of globalization, the fear of invasion by immigrant cultures, of "mexicide," for example, a dangerous contaminant similar to those of pesticide and genocide, all of which aim to kill a species. The images posted in this virtual space, this video-poem, confronts the fears and desires of the hegemonic anglo culture and critically suggests a revision of this.

As Thomas Foster succinctly points out, Gómez Peña's technological representations of racialized subjects help analysts think and question how race is represented in a more technological medium. It leads me to question if race can be erased with the possible anonymity and gender-less identification that technology, such as cyber-space, can provide. His "cybersaints" do exactly the opposite, they do not let the viewer forget that s/he is entering a very ethnic space where the protagonists speak Spanglish, raise issues of representation of the "other," question the white hegemonic order, and resist any process of acculturation that would devoid them (the "cybersaints") of differentiation. The fact that these *personas* are unusual grant them a privileged space where the reader/spectator can either identify with them or be appalled by the "hybridity" or unusualness of the character. The fact of the matter is that most viewers that dive into Guillermo Gómez-Peña's website know what to expect, and in fact, seek and embrace the "borderless" representations of race, as its author cites. It might even be safe to say that these spectators are not the average web-surfer, but rather form part of the very specialized, privileged and well-read critics (literary, cultural, theatrical and performance) that find in these

representations an embodied account of the same theories they profess. So, then, does the web, specifically his site, provide a home for the Diaspora experience? I would venture to say that it does. The notions of the racialized body, the ethnic individual's experience, and ultimately the gaze of the Other is privileged; the images conjure an ethnic gaze scrutinizing the anglo-culture's fears. Although Gómez-Peña's site performs a very clear marketing function for his performances, books and CDs, it does provide a strong contribution to the critical representation of how the ethnic body may use the discursive space of the world wide web.

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