

A Linguistic journey to the border

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Language is a powerful tool. Linguistic creativity provides the means to new ways of knowing, thinking, and being, and allows a new set of dialogues to emerge. This paper illuminates how Guillermo Gómez-Peña, a Chicano performance artist, writer, activist and educator uses language to do just this. In this paper, I will specifically focus on Gómez-Peña's use of monolingual English and Spanish, as well as his application of code-mixed dialogue and illustrate how his linguistic innovation reflects his position on Border Culture.

Keywords: bilingualism, codeswitching, language and identity, border culture

Introduction

Language is a powerful tool. Linguistic creativity, breaking free of reified linguistic structures and constraints, provides the means to open up new ways of knowing and thinking and enables a new set of dialogues to emerge. This paper illuminates how Guillermo Gómez-Peña, a Chicano performance artist, writer, activist and educator, uses language to do just this. I highlight his use of code-mixed dialogue and illustrate how his linguistic innovation reflects his identity in and position on Border Culture. The examples cited and the conclusions drawn in this study are based on the readings of two books by Gómez-Peña, *The New World Border: Prophecies, Poems, and Loqueras for the End of the Century* (1996), and *Warrior for Gringostrioka* (1993) as well as a few short pieces available on the Internet.

Following Mahootian (2005), I have opted for using the term codeswitching to refer to the “alternation between languages found in mixed-code discourse”. This includes extrasentential, intersentential and intrasentential codeswitching. My key terminology also includes the term code-mixed as an adjective to describe a particular type of speech available to the proficient bilingual, and Spanglish¹ to define code-mixed English/Spanish dialogue, as well as the more general term ‘code-mixed dialogue’. I capitalize the phrase Border Culture² to indicate that I am referring to a particular paradigm of sociopolitical ethos.

I begin my discussion by reviewing the literature in the area of language and identity. Following this I outline Border Culture theory in general and then

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discuss Gómez-Peña's particular Border Culture ethos. In the last section I cite examples from his writing and performance texts and analyze his linguistic innovation on a semantic and syntactical level illuminating how his manipulation of language is a powerful and key element in his work and his political position.

Language and identity

Language is an integral aspect of identity, both on a personal level and on a broader social level, so much so that Gloria Anzaldúa (1987: 898) has stated, "ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity – I am my language". Ray Gwyn Smith (in Anzaldúa 1987: 75) has asserted, "Who is to say that robbing a people of its language is less violent than war?" –this, the marginalization of minority languages and cultures, is, in fact, a form of colonization (Hetcher 1975; Romaine 1995).

Yet because language can be manipulated, it can also be used as a means to express, reinterpret, redefine and revolt against a static unitary notion of identity and the social world (Anzaldúa 1987). In addition, new ways of seeing the world and one's place in it require new ways to articulate the social reality, and one way this occurs is through linguistic innovation. This can take place, as Flores and Yudice (1990) point out, because people have agency and author themselves. They make discourses their own in the media of speech behavior and genres. Without this linguistic control and creative flexibility, innovation is absent and the range of possibilities is limited.

The relationship between language and identity has been a focal point for many researchers and has been addressed from a variety of angles. For example, it has been argued by Fishman (1971) and Hetcher (1975) that language is a key component of ethnicity. As an extension of ethnicity, Edwards (1985) has discussed nationalism firstly marked by language. Others (Garmandi 1981; Myers-Scotton 1988; Laver and Trudgill 1979) have discussed linguistic variation and its link to identity, and how individuals differentiate themselves positively from others through the use of language (Giles 1977).

More recently researchers have begun to see language and identity construction as situation based, defining identity as multifaceted and changing, and locatable in social contexts with people in interaction. For example, Flores and Yudice (1990) have addressed the relationship between language and identity in a postmodern framework. Paying special attention on Latino identity, they show how it is mediated and constructed through struggles over language under postmodern conditions. In their framework ethnicity is multifaceted, encompassing body, sexuality, and language. Also De Fina (2007) discusses identity as contextual and situational; different identities arise in different contexts. Moreover she supports the idea that identity is constructed locally through practice, both verbal and non-verbal, and that it must therefore be studied through observation of social behavior in context. De Fina, among others (De Fina, Schiffrin and Bamberg 2006; Blackledge and Pavlenko 2001; Bucholtz 1995; Mendoza-Denton 1997), advocates for a view of ethnic identity that is not a predetermined category with a particular set of characteristics, but rather something that is fluid and continually adapts and changes. In these

constructivist perspectives individuals “do” identity work and align or distance themselves from various social groups as they choose.

Ethnographic research in the area of language and identity has shown that speakers often construct allegiances with social groups that are not their own (Blommaert 2005; Rampton 1995, 2006; Antaki and Widdicombe 1998), that they cross traditionally established boundaries between categories by claiming new non-normative identities, and that they enact subtle identity differentiations within groups and communities that are socially constructed as homogenous (Bailey 2001; De Fina 2007). The more recent research on language and identity research has made it clear that individuals author themselves as they create multiple and contextually driven identities, in part through linguistic choices.

Bilingualism and identity: Chicano³ identity and the border

Signed on February 2 1848, The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the U.S.-Mexican war and ceded from Mexico the now U.S. states of California, Nevada, and Utah; as well as portions of Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Wyoming. Hence the current U.S.-Mexican border took form and hundreds of thousands of Mexicans became U.S. citizens overnight. The term Chicano, being politicized in the 70's, now refers to those of Mexican descent born in the U.S, generally in these southwestern states, the border zone.

The border for Chicanos is both a geographic reality as well as a metaphoric site of struggle. Arteaga (1997) comments, “the border is the line of national differentiation that gives birth to Chicanos, not just for having crossed it, or having been crossed by it, but for living in the border zone between nations that the line engenders.” Anzaldúa (1987) has described it as *una herida abierta*, an open wound, and as a place where Chicanos wage undocumented war.

Characterized by being bicultural, being Chicano represents the struggle of being accepted into the Anglo-dominated society of the United States while maintaining the cultural sense of a U.S. born Mexican. Chicano is a statement of defiance, a refusal to assimilate completely. Hence the border is a path of collision, an area along which the cultural practices, diverse histories, and asymmetrical power relations of different groups confront each other. A border zone is the spatial and mental extension of a border's tensions into a large-scale region often defined by violence and desperation, but also by creative cultural intermixture. The border imparts both pain and possibility.

Chicanos are *mestizos* (mixed), of Mexican, Anglo, and Indian descent. Chicano identity is defined by hybridity and this is reflected in linguistic hybridity; the use of Spanish, English, Spanglish, Nahuatl, and various vernaculars such as Calo.⁴ Romaine (1995) discusses how the Pocho and Calo dialects once considered substandard by outsiders came to be a positive affirmation of *Chicanoismo*. The Chicano experience is an integral aspect of Gómez-Peña's work and through identifying himself as and with Chicanos, he is strategically located between countries, cultures and languages in order to declare and carry out his hybrid new world (b)order.

A border language: bilingualism and codeswitching

Despite being a fairly recent area of inquiry bilingualism and identity has also been looked at from a variety of angles. Some early research looked at domain usage: Fishman's 1971 study of Puerto Ricans in New Jersey found that language usage could be characterized as a type of diglossia in which domains determine what language is used and when. It is clear that the ability to choose codes suggests a distinct dimension of identity, yet exactly how this competence is experienced is not yet agreed upon. For example, research into the bilingual brain is still in its infancy and without any definite answers to this complex phenomenon.

Codeswitching has been a popular subject of study in recent decades. Researchers have proposed a variety of explanations for why it occurs and what it means. Gumperz (1976) and Hernandez-Chavez et al. (1975), for example, explain codeswitching as occurring when large minority groups come in close contact with large majority groups under conditions of rapid social change. They conclude that the examples of bilingual communication they collected are closely tied to the position of Chicanos as a minority group within a society with an English speaking majority. Codeswitching is a socially meaningful code choice with a variety of functions (see Mahootian 2000,). For instance, it can be used to affirm solidarity with other bilinguals or it can be used to exclude monolinguals as well as bilinguals who are fluent in other languages.

One defining feature of the Chicano identity is language use which is characterized by codeswitching between Spanish and English. Myers-Scotton (1988) has suggested that codeswitching can be used because the bilingual or multilingual speaker wishes more than one social identity to be salient. Guimond and Palmer (1993) refute the notion of mutually exclusive identities and assert that becoming bilingual cannot be reduced to two distinct languages and hence two identities; instead it results in a new ethnolinguistic identity characterized by the ability to blur linguistic and cultural boundaries. Alvarez-Cáccamo (1990), in turn, place codeswitching in a larger social context and claim that codeswitching is used to make aspects of the situation, the speaker's identity or background relevant. Also Stroud (1998: 322) supports the context-driven definition and maintains "that conversational code-switching is so heavily implicated in social life that it cannot really be understood apart from an understanding of social phenomena". The discussion that follows further provides an example of the inextricable link between language and identity and how the use of codeswitching and the creation of new linguistic codes are used as a resource by Gómez-Peña to express the multiplicity of not only identity but the social world itself.

Border Culture ethos

The notion of border culture as a focal point of a political position emerged in response to the need to describe a unique situation of living in and/or between two cultures. This is most often experienced by immigrants as well as those born into a culture that is not their home culture. In straddling two cultures the border crosser also straddles two languages. This is not a simple experiential

equation. The complex confluence of numerous variables creates a new and unique experience. For many writers and artists this has become a central theme and a political position. Anzaldúa, a Texas born Mexican-American, proudly affirms, "I am a border woman. I grew up between two cultures" (Anzaldúa 1987: 6). In *Warrior for Gringostroika* also Gómez-Peña calls himself a border citizen "which means I'm always the other, but I get to choose my identity depending on context. I can be a Mexican, a post-Mexican, a Chicano..." (Gómez-Peña 1993: 37).

For Flores and Yudice (1990), it is the imposed borders (geographic, linguistic, social/cultural) that emerge as the locus of redefinition and re-signification. They (1990: 80) assert that in order to:

vocalize the border, transversing it is not enough, we must be positioned there, with ready and simultaneous access to both sides. The border houses the power of the outrageous, the imagination needed to turn the historical and cultural tables... The border is the home of diversity and multiculturalism and multilingualism. Articulating the experience of living in this place, where all margins become central and the center is displaced to the margins, is a large part of the Border Culture ethos. And it is the view from the border that allows us to see the arbitrariness of the border itself, of forced separations and inferiorizations.

The experience of being located at the border entails being situated between languages and this necessitates a new language. Since alinguality is not a possibility (the border is *not* nowhere), the border voice is interlingual. Border Culture ethos advocates a new way of conceptualizing social identities by blurring social distinctions. The way we express ourselves as individuals reflects institutional responses to race, gender, and other identity markers. In order to create new possibilities a new language is needed to articulate a new social landscape. In terms of defining social reality, Gómez-Peña (in Flores and Yudice 1990) asserts that in order to record the other (non hegemonic) history from a multi-centric perspective the disenfranchised use inventive languages. Flores and Yudice claim that Latinos do not want to enter into an already given America, but to participate in the construction of a new hegemony dependent on their cultural practices and discourses. The struggle over language signals the opposition to dominant constructions and the desire to change the articulation of history.

Language is the most obvious site of Latino inventiveness whether the wildest extravagance of the bilingual poet or the most mundane comment of everyday life, Latino usage tends necessarily towards interlingual innovation. Interfacing of multiple codes serves to de-canonize all of them. (Flores and Yudice 1990: 73).

This type of trans-creative expression, interlingualism, multidirectional mixing and switching, characteristic of Border Culture, does not serve to solely exclude but to include in a new terrain. It makes possible a plurality of vernaculars and multiple intermingling, infinite permutations and endless possibilities.

Gómez-Peña's Border Culture ethos

Gómez-Peña's Border Culture functions on two levels. One is the relationship between the US and Mexico (his own border experience) and the other is a global Border Culture ethos that includes all peoples everywhere. Gómez-Peña has defined himself as a *borderigena* (a code-mixed term using the English word border and the Spanish nominal suffix *gena*; hence one living on the border). For Gómez-Peña (1996: 5) the border is metaphoric and is not fixed. "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."

In addressing geopolitics, Gómez-Peña is opposed to what he terms the colonial dichotomy of the First World/Third World, and has instead opted for the Fourth World, a conceptual place, "where there is very little room for static identities, fixed nationalities, 'pure' languages, or sacred cultural traditions" (1996: 7). For Gómez-Peña it is the role of the artists and writers who inhabit the Fourth World to elaborate new dialogues, new metaphors and symbols, and new languages to "locate us in these fluctuating cartographies" (1996: 7). This is where monoculturalism and monolingualism are expelled to the margins and diversity and confluence is central.

Following some of the more commonly held notions of codeswitching, Gómez-Peña tends to use monolingual English and Spanish in different domains. He uses English for his critical texts and essays and code-mixed dialogue (including Spanglish, French, German, as well as invented "tongues" and shamanistic chanting) for his performance pieces. For Gómez-Peña *Borderigenas* must be fluent in English and Spanish, but also in Spanglish and Inglespañol, because codeswitching is the language of border diplomacy.

His critical essay writing is more logical and linear than his performance pieces. His code-mixed performance pieces, in turn, illustrate his Border Culture ethos. In the latter Gómez-Peña blurs the most obvious linguistic borders and advocates for finding new languages to express the fluctuating borders and for "experimenting with the fringes between art and society, *legalidad* and illegality, English and *español*, male and female, North and South, self and other, and subverting these relationships" (Gómez-Peña 1993: 44).

While Gómez-Peña explicates his border position in academic English language texts, he demonstrates it in his performance pieces. In his performance pieces (which have been transcribed and published in book form) Gómez-Peña uses multilingual dialogue to make a statement about the flexible and inconsistent nature of identity. His body becomes a text. He uses different costumes that include a variety of cultural symbols to represent exaggerated stereotypes through a variety of characters. He uses props that have symbolic cultural value. He uses different languages and combinations of languages, often inventing new words using mixed codes. He also uses different registers and accents as he changes characters, illustrating the fluid notion of identity.

A linguistic journey to the Border: Language of the border(less)

I will now present some examples of Gómez-Peña's mixed language. The aim of this study is to assess and investigate how Gómez-Peña uses language to express an overarching political position which includes issues of identity and identity construction. I look at various pieces of his writing, mainly from two books, and look at the different codes, how they are mixed and when they are used in order to get an idea of how Gómez-Peña uses language as a tool to promote his position on Border Culture as well as performing and expressing his border culture identity. I will begin by illustrating some of his earliest dabbling in mixed code-innovation.

Gómez-Peña's mixed message began when he was in his teens. He crossed the US/Mexican border for the first time in the 60's, and returned to Mexico influenced by the Hippie culture of the US and labeled himself a *hipiteca* (a code-mixed term the English hippie and the Spanish adjective-forming suffix *teca* to form *hipiteca*), which he claims to be one of the first border characters he internalized. Pursuing his interest in the English language and culture he and some friends formed a rock band singing rock versions of Mexican *boleros* and *rancheros*, and British pop songs all in made-up English. This represents one of his first experiments with linguistic crossings and invented codes. After dabbling in a nationalistic bend of Marxism he became a self-described *krishnahuatl* (a code-mixed word formed from the Krishna and the Spanish Nahuatl) with the objective "to step outside in order to reach 'the ultimate reality'" (Gómez-Peña 1993: 17). The idea of being outside prescribed boundaries and borders in order to find a terrain of possibilities is an overarching theme of Border Culture.

He later studied literature and linguistics at the *Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico*. At this time his literary activity became street performance, an alternative space with no fixed location. He decentralized and de-institutionalized art and literary expression. This was influenced by what Gómez-Peña describes as the experimental ethos and activism that grew out of the 70's zeitgeist in Mexico. He describes Mexico City as the epitome of the postmodern city and says that "those who grew up in it developed a vernacular of postmodern sensibility with cross-cultural fusion at its core," and says this type of "performance gave me a vocabulary and a syntax to express the process of loss, rupture and deterritorialization I was undergoing [as an immigrant in the US]" (Gómez-Peña 1993: 18-20).

The titles of both Gómez-Peña books used in this study are code-mixed; *Warrior for Gringostroika* (The Spanish *gringo* and Russian *stroika*) and *The New World Border: Prophecies, Poems and Loqueras for the End of the Century* (the English title including one Spanish lexical item, *loqueras*, 'craziness'). As these titles already suggest, the structure of Gómez-Peña's books exemplifies his strategic use of language. He writes critical essays in monolingual English with an occasional Spanish word included in italics affirming the fact the text is for an English-speaking audience. While he assumes his audience to be English-speakers, they may not be monolingual, but will at least be proficient in English. Many of his essays have been published in other formats and in other languages to accommodate different audiences. For example "Documented/Undocumented"

(in *Warrior for Gringostroika*) is written in English, yet it has been translated from the Spanish and first appeared in a Spanish language publication.

Gómez-Peña's essays are straightforward literary works with a serious sociopolitical message. This is the writing Gómez-Peña wants his audience to take at face value. The literal meaning is the level of importance. The critical text titled, *The Border is...*, is an interesting exception. In this case he uses language that reflects the idea of borderness (being located at the border), manifesting in two levels of meaning in the text, one the actual semantics of the text, and the other the code-mixed language illustrating the interlinguality of the border.

Code-mixed border characters

Most of the characters Gómez-Peña invents are donned with a code-mixed name. This is intended to express the multiple dimensions of identity. A list of examples follows. I will indicate the languages of each term as follows: Spanish (S), English (E), Nahuatl (N), French (F), and will translate and/or explain the terms that are not commonly recognized.

El Aztec High-Tech –S,S, E, E

Super-Pocho –E, S *pocho* is a derogatory term for an Anglicized Latino often due to not speaking Spanish well or at all.

Border Brujo –E, S *brujo* is a male witch or a warlock

El Mexican't –S, S/E

Cybervato –E, S *vato* is vernacular for male, like 'guy' or 'dude' in English

El Naftazteca –S, S/E

At the end of *New World Border* Gómez-Peña includes a "Glossary of *Borderismos*." Some terms are code-mixed such as:

Chicanadians (Second generation Mexicans living in Canada) –S/E combines Chicano and Canadian

Funkahuatl (Aztec god of funk and night life) –E/N

Supermojado (superhero, Champion of undocumented workers' rights) –E/S 'mojado' is vernacular Spanish for someone who crosses the border without documents or illegally.

Code-mixed texts

The performance text *Border Brujo* is described as "a ritualistic, linguistic, and performative journey across the United States/Mexico border" (Gómez-Peña, 1993: 75). *Border Brujo* unfolds into 15 different personae. Each character is described in the transcribed text as possessing different accents and/or registers and all are dressed as a collage of exaggerated stereotypes. Some of the character voices are: "Authoritative Voice", "Drunken Voice", "Cantinflas-Like Voice", "Redneck Voice" (all speak in monolingual English); "Mexican Soap-Opera Voice" (speaks in code-mixed Spanish/English with parts of Spanish

mispronounced), “Transvestite Voice”, “Normal Voice”, “Voice with Thick Mexican Accent”, and “Tijuana Barker” voice (all speak in Spanglish). The only persona that speaks in monolingual Spanish is “the Agitated Voice”. It is impossible to describe this performance piece on paper in order to gain a sufficient understanding of its complexity, both visually and linguistically, but it clearly represents a way in which Gómez-Peña utilizes different codes and different registers to express what he calls the disnarrative and modular border experience,⁵ and to express the fluidity of identity.

The following (“Merolico Voice” and “el Multimedia Pachuco Voice”) are excerpts from *Border Brujo*. When discussing these longer pieces (in italics) I will number each line and translate them as best I can (the non-italicized numbered lines on the right side of the piece). At the end of a line I will indicate whether it is in English (E), Spanish (S), Latin (L), or French (F), and will translate all the non-English lines. I will also give a brief discussion of what I think Gómez-Peña is trying to express. Yet not being a Chicana I am excluded in many ways that make it impossible to decipher the full complexity of his use of language and semantics.

Merolico Voice (Merolico is a Mexico City street performer)

1 <i>Naci entre epocas y culturas y viceversa</i>	1 I was born between epochs and cultures (S)
2 <i>Naci de una herida infectada</i>	2 I was born from an infected wound (S)
3 <i>Herida en llamas</i>	3 A flaming wound (S)
4 <i>Herida que auuuuulla</i>	4 A howling wound (S)
5 <i>[he howls]</i>	5 Gómez-Peña howls
6 <i>I'm the child of border crisis</i>	
7 <i>A product of a cultural cesarean</i>	
8 <i>I was born between epochs & cultures</i>	
9 <i>Born from an infected wound</i>	
10 <i>A howling wound</i>	
11 <i>A flaming wound</i>	
12 <i>For I am part of a new mankind</i>	
13 <i>The Fourth World, the migrant kind</i>	
14 <i>Los transterrados y descoyuntados</i>	14 The uprooted and disarticulated (physically) (S)
15 <i>Los que partimos y nunca llegamos</i>	15 Those who leave and never arrive (S)
16 <i>Y aqui estamos aun</i>	16 and we are still here (S)
17 <i>Desempleados e incontenibles</i>	17 unemployed and unstoppable (S)
18 <i>En proceso, en ascenso, en transición</i>	18 in process, going up, in transition (S)
19 <i>Per omnia saecula saeculorum</i>	19 For all the centuries upon centuries (for eternity, forever) (L)
20 <i>“Invierta en mexico”</i>	20 “Invest in Mexico”
21 <i>Bienes raíces</i>	21 Real estate
22 <i>Vienes y te vas</i>	22 You come and you go
23 <i>Pudrete a gusto en los United</i>	23 Rot to your heart's content in The (S) United (E)
24 <i>Estate still si no te chingan</i>	24 Stay (S)/ still (E) if not they fuck you up (S)

Gómez-Peña begins this piece in Spanish and comments on being born between cultures. He describes the border as a wound, like Anzaldúa; one that howls as if a monster. While performing this piece Gómez-Peña also howls. He is the wound and/or the wounded. He continues (lines 7 to 10) in English restating what he said in Spanish in the first four lines, illustrating his at least bilingual

identity. Lines 11 and 12 describe how this border culture produces a new identity, one who is constantly in transition and living in the conceptual Fourth world. He continues in Spanish describing how the migrant feels the impermanency of place yet remains in the same situation. Spanish is reserved for describing the emotional conundrum of the immigrant. Line 19 is an interesting addition of Latin, the language of the Catholic Church, and means ‘for eternity’. Lines 19 to 23 are in Spanish yet demonstrate a subtle word play between Spanish and English. Bienes and vienes sound the same in Mexican Spanish as *v* and *b* are allophones of the same phoneme. Lines 22 and 23 begin with *Los Estados Unidos*, the Spanish translation of The Untied States. The phrase, *en los United estate* is a semantic word play between languages. *Estate quieto* is a Spanish saying that is used with children and means “be still/quiet.” Line 23 is a strong statement about the immigrants place in the U.S. basically “be quiet, stay still, if not they will fuck you up.” When a semantic code change occurs it is to describe the clashing of cultures, when immigrant, the uprooted, is placed in a new culture, a culture with a new language and new meanings.

Voice with a Thick Mexican Accent

1 I speak Spanish therefore you hate me
 2 I speak English therefore they hate me
 3 I speak Spanglish therefore she speaks Inglenol
 4 I Speak in tongues therefore you desire me
 5 I speak to you therefore you kill me
 6 I speak therefore you change
 7 I speak in English therefore you listen
 8 I speak in English therefore I hate you
 9 Pero cuando hablo en espanol te adoro
 10 But when I speak in Spanish I adore you
 11 Ahora, why carajos do I speak Spanish?
 12 Political praxis craneal
 13 I mean...
 14 I mean...

This piece is a good example of the use of Spanish in the emotional domain. Gómez-Peña uses English in lines 1 to 8 to speak about being a Latino bilingual and the complexity of choosing which language to use. The Latino that speaks English is seen as ignoring their Spanish-language, culture and roots, and is considered too Anglo. Latinos that speak Spanish in the US often face discrimination for being immigrants. Interestingly, it is a language that no one understands, including the Anglo, “tongues”, (line 4) that provoke desire in the Anglo. This line is a comment on the eroticization of other cultures that Gómez-Peña often critiques. In lines 7 and 8 Gómez-Peña speaks of an internal conflict. The Latino speaks in English and is taken seriously, yet hates him or herself for giving in and speaking like the other. Line 9 is the only full line in Spanish (and is restated in English in line 10). Here Gómez-Peña uses Spanish, his native language, to express an intense positive emotion (*te adoro*). “When I speak Spanish I adore you”. Line 11 is a self-reflexive question and the Spanish word *carajos* indicates the intensity of it “Why in the hell do I speak Spanish?” And the answer is very telling of Gómez-Peña’s position on language and using it as a political tool. He answers in line 12 “political praxis cranial.”

The poem "Freefalling Towards a Borderless Future" describes what life would be like without borders. In this new place the new generation would include *cholo-punks*, *pachuco krishnas*, *Irish concheros*, *butoh rapper*, *cyber-aztecs*, *Gringofarians*, and *Hopi rockers*, among others. The characters that inhabit this place all have code-mixed names and hence identities to express the merging and erasing of borders. This piece is performed with live simultaneous translation into French, Gringoñol, or Esperanto accompanied by music of a variety of genres. Gómez-Peña blurs the boundaries of language in order to express a social phenomenon of eradicating cultural/ethnic boundaries, and to express new identities, both with his culture-fused characters and the multilingual dialogue.

Gómez-Peña's performance text, *The New World Border: Prophecies for the End of the Century*, has been described as "Chicano cyber-punk art" and is a piece in which Gómez-Peña claims to push border aesthetics to the extreme. The performers speak in Spanish, French, English, Spanglish, Frangle, and several made up "robo-languages." The "simultaneous translation" is purposefully incorrect. The idea is to force the audience to experience the cultural vertigo of living in a multilingual/multicultural society. An interesting strategy is used before the performances to achieve the same sense of vertigo. Upon entering the venue the performers "segregate" the audience according to racial and/or linguistic criteria. It is a bit disconcerting to see divisions so clearly and to feel like a minority in your own country, even if for only an evening.

Califas is a bilingual performance poem, told by several characters and the structure is also disnarrative and modular like the border experience. An example from this piece follows:

El Multimedia Pachuco

1 East Los	1 East (E), the (S) (yet can also be the first word in Los Angeles)
2 Nopalera de neon	2 Neon cactus plants (S)
3 A media noche	3 at midnight (S)
4 Irrumpe el punk-mariachi	4 the punk-mariachi bursts in (S)
5 Erupts like magma	5 erupts like magma (E)
6 Entre pyramids de estuco	6 between adobe pyramids (S)
7 Todo es ira y bancarrota	7 everything is ire and bankruptcy (S)
8 Las patrullas rechinando	8 The police cars screech (S)
9 Y la virgin que estrena	9 and the virgin first shows (S)
10 Sus medias de rayon	10 her panty hose (S)
11 Su brassier de concha nacar	11 her mother of pearl bra (S)
12 While los chucos	12 While (E) the Pachucos (S)
13 Tras the curtain	13 behind (S) the curtain (E)
14 Se emperifollan	14 get overly made up (S)
15 2 punos y 15 flancos	15 2 fists and 15 sides (S)
16 To dance the night away	16 to dance the night away (E)

Gómez-Peña describes a typical night in Los Angeles, a city with a large percentage of Mexican-Americans. The use of Spanglish is appropriate to describe this scene since the city is a confluence of language and culture.

Also from *New World (B)order* is a line that includes numerous plays with language:

Les infants *de la chingada* *da-da*
the children (F) of the fucked over (S) da-da"

In this line *the children* may refer to the immigrant. *Chingada* is a strong Mexican word meaning "fucked" and derives its meaning from when the Spanish conquistadors came to Mexico and raped the Mexican women. There are various vernacular phrases that use this expression and are all very strong. The repeated morpheme *da-da* could represent a child that repeats morphemes when first learning to talk. Yet *dada* could refer to the Dada movement, in short an art movement that rejected reason and logic for chaos and irrationality. It was in fact and anti-art, everything is art, movement. It is not difficult to see the connection to Border Culture.

Gómez-Peña's audiences

Gómez-Peña's work reaches different audiences, in part because he crosses media boundaries; he is a performance artist, a writer, a radio personality, and a cultural critic. Therefore his work is performed in different locations as well as printed in books and other types of written publications. He also has an interactive website that greatly enhances his potential audience.

As a performance artist Gómez-Peña works in different realms. He expresses himself in many forms and in many places. He himself is not located. He has fought to deinstitutionalize, destabilize and delocalize art, by taking it to the streets. He has a long history of street performances. In addition he does both collaborative and independent work.

Gómez-Peña's street performances⁶ reach an involuntary, non self-selected audience. Yet, the location of his performance determines who become this involuntary audience. For example, he will reach a very different crowd performing in a multiethnic city center versus an elevator in an apartment building in a suburb. Gómez-Peña also performs in galleries and other private venues where his audience is voluntary and self-selected, and more than likely those already familiar with his work and politics.

As an essay writer Gómez-Peña's audience consists of those who have chosen to read his work or encountered it in academic setting. This audience is a self-selected group who most likely has some familiarity with his position on art and politics. His work has been translated into English and Spanish, so he does reach a multicultural/multilingual self-selected audience. Gómez-Peña's inclusion in a number of websites on the Internet and on his interactive website make his work available for those searching online, but is also there for others to stumble upon.

What does all this say about Gómez-Peña's code choice and intent to include and exclude while advancing his position on Border Culture and broadening his base of supporters? Is he just preaching to the choir in "tongues"? Gómez-Peña's use of multiple codes serves a very important function. Complete exclusion would not allow anyone to understand his political position. And complete

inclusion would not allow the linguistic exclusion that forces everyone of his audience members to become the outsider.

All of Gómez-Peña's performances include Spanglish and most often other codes as well. The linguistic characteristics of each individual in the audience will determine the ratio of linguistic inclusion/exclusion. A fellow Chicano has the highest inclusion/exclusion ratio. They understand the codeswitching of Spanish and English as well as the Chicano vernacular. In this sense he is identifying with Chicanos, lessening social distance and creating solidarity. However, since Gómez-Peña wants everyone to feel like an outsider, Chicanos are excluded when he uses other codes and invented "tongues."

A Spanish/English bilingual has the next highest inclusion/exclusion ratio as they understand most of the Spanglish. Bilinguals are excluded when the Chicano slang is unfamiliar and as with Chicanos when other languages and invented "tongues" are used. Both the monolingual Spanish and monolingual English speaker have a lower inclusion/exclusion ratio. They can only understand the part of the mixed-code dialogue that is in their language hence they are unable to gain a full understanding. Those who speak neither Spanish nor English have the lowest inclusion/exclusion ratio and are lucky if their language is one of the others Gómez-Peña uses, yet even then understanding is momentary and fleeting as his use of other codes is limited.

Gómez-Peña's critical texts are intended as a documentation of his position of Border Culture. They are published in English and Spanish giving the monolingual Spanish and monolingual English readership full linguistic inclusion.

It is interesting to note that despite Gómez-Peña's focus on de-institutionalizing and dislocating art he has gained an esteemed reputation in academia and literary circles. His work has been recognized by literary critics such as Homi Bhabha; he has been invited as lecturer or artist-in-residence at many college campuses; he has performed at such elite cultural institutions as the Smithsonian and Whitney Museums and received many grants, including the MacArthur Genius Award. In fact it is Gómez-Peña himself who said in a blog-like conversation with cultural anthropologist Gretchen Coombs on "socially-engaged art" and the contradictions of the artistic left "Where are the margins located when dissent becomes normalized and even encouraged? Do the margins become conservative (retrieved from <http://www.a-n.co.uk/interface/reviews/single/392829> on 3/20/2007)? I am not sure how Gómez-Peña explains his position in the literary/art world as a dislocated Border Culture artist.

Conclusion

As a performance artist and literary writer Gómez-Peña calls for a borderless society; one that is multilingual and multicultural, where borders that separate and distinguish do not exist; or put another way where all is border and there are no margins. Through his art and writing Gómez-Peña forces his audience to examine the junctions of society, culture and language, and to question the static notion of identity. He uses innovative code-mixing to create a borderless language which in turn represents a borderless society, everyone/thing is

represented yet everyone/thing is excluded to some degree. The stability of understanding does not exist. If safety and security are found in the predictable then Border Culture and Guillermo Gómez-Peña's work are neither. They are risky, (con)fused, temporary, non linear and full of possibilities where nothing is sacred. Nothing is forbidden.

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Endnotes

¹ Spanglish and Ingleñol were both coined by Puerto Rican Salvador Tio in the late 1940's; the former explained a language contact situation in which Spanish is influenced by English and the latter where English is influenced by Spanish. Since Spanglish is a more common phenomenon, Ingleñol receded into disuse until revived by Gómez-Peña, among others. It is interesting to note that these terms use a unicode term to define a mixed-code situation. Gómez-Peña has introduced yet another similar unicode term, Gringoñol as a mildly derogatory term to refer to Anglos, which combines the word 'gringo' with the ending of the Spanish word for Spanish, español.

² See <http://research.ucsb.edu/ccs/biblio.pdf> for a bibliography of writings in Border Culture studies.

³ For a detailed discussion of the term Chicano, its derivation and meaning see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicano>.

⁴ Calo (also known as Pachuco) is an argot or slang of Mexican Spanish initially spoken in the first half of the 20th century in the Southwestern United States by members of the zoot suit or Pachuco culture originally defined the Spanish gypsy dialect. But Chicano Caló is the combination of a few basic influences: Hispanicized English; Anglicized Spanish; and the use of archaic.

⁵ See Juan Velasco's *Performing Multiple Identities: Guillermo Gomez and his dangerous border crossings* in *Latino/a Popular Culture 2002*, (ed.) Michelle Habel-Pallen and Mary Romero for a discussion of Gómez-Peña's famous street performance with Coco Fusco entitled "The Couple in the Cage".

⁶ See *Warrior for Gringostroika* p. 20 for a discussion of Gómez-Peña's twenty-four hour performance in an elevator.

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