COCO FUSCO AND GUILLERMO GÓMEZ-PEÑA'S *CAGE PERFORMANCE* AND LA POCHA NOSTRA'S *MAPA CORPO*:
Art of the [Portable] Border

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> *I have been seriously wounded in the multicultural wars of America and so have many of my beloved colleagues. The greatest casualty, though, has been the death of border art…*[1]

After leaving the binational art collective Border Art Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronteriza (BAW/TAF) in 1990, Guillermo Gómez-Peña published these words in the 1991 issue of the journal *High Performance*. His article "Death on the Border: A Eulogy to Border Art" was controversial at the time, especially considering its tone toward the remaining BAW/TAF members. Gómez-Peña lamented the transformation of border art into "a specialized exercise in grant writing and institutional self-promotion."[2] He also criticized border art's newfound global focus, claiming that "instead of turning the margins into the center, it was bringing the center to the margins."[3] In essence border art as it had been practiced was dead, no longer capable of generating new ideas about borders and international relations. This statement is both uncannily accurate, depicting the end of a programmatic approach to border performance developed during the 1980s, while at the same time misleading. Border art did not die in 1991; at the time it was undergoing deeply rooted changes affecting the very definition of the category. Border artists, including Gómez-Peña, had broadened their outlook in anticipation of major globalizing events.

Gómez-Peña departed the BAW/TAF after the group experienced a series of internal conflicts. Members Emily Hicks and Victor Ochoa later resigned from the collective, leaving Michael Schnorr and Susan Yamagata to recruit a new generation of BAW/TAF artists. Founding members David Avalos, Isaac Artenstein, Sara Jo Berman and Jude Eberhard had left earlier, all citing personal and work-related reasons. Rather than rehashing the internal politics of the BAW/TAF, a task that extends beyond the confines of this study, I mention this conflict because of its relevance to the changing dynamics of border at the start of the 1990s. Without the dissolution of the

original BAW/TAF, it is very possible that border art could have developed along altogether different lines.[4]

Border art, as defined in the work the BAW/TAF, had been confined to the U.S.-Mexico border region during the 1980s. With site-specific performances, such as *End of the Line* (1986), the *Border Realities* series (1985-1989), and *Border Sutures* (1990), the BAW/TAF came to represent a kind of politically-motivated art based on the physical border and dedicated to addressing the social conditions of the region. In the early 1990s two major events led to the expansion of border art. The 1992 Columbus Quincentennial and the resulting commodification of conquest, coupled with the enactment of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) two years later, brought intense focus on the contact zone of the border; epistemic shifts contributed to North American-originated border art on a global scale. Rather than retreating to the physicality of the border and reasserting the primacy of the region, artists insisted upon expanding the concept of border, bringing their art and the issues it addressed to the attention of those outside of the art world. This newly expanded border art became portable in the process of addressing not only regional politics and the immigration debate, but with large-scale international conflict, ethnic and cultural difference, and the social changes brought on by late-twentieth century globalization.

Given a powerful impetus by the economics of NAFTA and the politics of Columbus Day, U.S.-Mexico border art and its constituent ideas became portable through a shift in thinking about international borders and their place in the postcolonial world-system. Rather than being grounded in the specifics of regional politics or concerned with enacting incremental change, as were the Chicano Movement and the BAW/TAF, this portable border addressed a broader audience. In doing so, border artists brought themselves to the center of the postcolonial world-system and considered everyone to be a border dweller. By applying Walter D. Mignolo's concept of "border thinking" as a framework from which to theorize the post-NAFTA developments in border art, I will examine two performance pieces that anticipated the epistemic shift to the portable border by performing it. Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Coco Fusco's 1992 *Cage Performance: Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit…* marks the start of the shift to portability with a performance that consciously elaborates borders between the artists and the audience. In more recent years Gómez-Peña's group La Pocha Nostra

produced *Mapa Corpo* (2003-2009), a piece exploring the relationship between international conflict and borders, positioning the Iraq war as an exercise in human mapmaking. With the combination of border thinking and border mentality, the border became uprooted from its physical location while maintaining its connection to the reality of the site. In this manner the border is reinforced as a highly charged political intersection, while at the same time made relevant to other border situations around the world.[5]

According to Mignolo, border thinking—articulating the means by which knowledge moves from the borders of the world to the mainstream—is the solution to the positioning of subject and object. In understanding borders or peripheries, the problem of objectivity arises. The theorist comes to the borderland from the outside, imposing his or her assumptions produced from mainstream Western discourse. As Mignolo insists:

> To describe in "reality" both sides of the border is not the problem. The problem is to do it from its exteriority.... The goal is to erase the distinction between the knower and the known, between a 'hybrid' object (the borderland as the known) and a "pure" disciplinary or interdisciplinary subject (the knower), uncontaminated by the border matters he or she describes. To change the terms of the conversation it is necessary to overcome the distinction between subject and object...and between epistemology and hermeneutics.... Border thinking should be the space in which this new logic could be thought out.[6]

In these terms border thinking is the generation of knowledge from the borderland, rather than exterior to it. While it is possible to discuss border thinking in terms of the center-periphery model—knowledge moving from the periphery to the center or, more commonly, from center to periphery as in the colonial world—it is more productive to think of the system in terms of internal and external borders, as does Mignolo. At the border, who is considered inside and who is outside? Mignolo makes the point that one needs to validate the object—the known, the borderlands—by acknowledging that it too is "knowing." Through this transposition essentialist categories become hybrid and productive.

It is important to note that Mignolo never refers to a specific border or even international boundaries as he develops his theory. In dealing with border thinking, the emphasis is toward members of previously unrecognized or underrepresented groups—those that push discourse outside the Western canon. This categorization is fundamentally different from the crossing or transgressing of international boundaries. It is my contention that border thinking can be taken further, that this theory can be used to reclassify physical borders and the effects they produce. The term "border" can be used to describe a state of being—border dweller, border milieu, or border mentality—rather than a line dividing nations. By breaking down these terms, the word "border" can thus operate in varying ways and with different levels of significance. It can mean, in the case of the border dweller, a mental state of the permanent outsider, of living between each nation but not belonging to either. It is at this point, within the border dweller or international immigrant, where the physical border joins the mental or metaphorical one, resulting in what I term a "border mentality."

The term border mentality is particularly relevant to this discussion and leads to the concept of the portable border. Derived from border thinking, border mentality sees the entire world-system as comprised of layers of borders. These borders can range from the conventional—borders between nation-states, religions or ethnic groups—to more nuanced expressions of psychological, social or economic borders. It is therefore impossible to determine who or what is outside versus inside. In fact that very question becomes irrelevant. Rather than simply demarcating boundaries or spaces of difference, borders can serve as ties that unite disparate populations into a single commonality: that of the "border subject." In this formulation anyone can be a border subject, constantly engaged in the act of obeying, crossing, or transgressing, established lines. In doing so, borders are re-drawn, which leads to a state of continuous change.

When brought to the arts, border mentality is not a mere destabilization of the canon or the act of allowing previously unknown voices to be heard. This concept allows for a much broader rethinking of the history of art. In essence the "borders" of art history are the points at which different geographical, temporal, and cultural spaces meet, resulting in art that takes on a hybrid form. By studying these hybrids, from contemporary border art production

to other instances of intercultural contact—*mudejar* architecture in Spain, for example—the idea of borders can be used to rethink more traditional periods of art history. Instead of viewing these periods as discrete entities, as fully-formed wholes, these categories can be seen as hybrids in themselves, comprised of conflicting interests.

When applied to modern and contemporary art, border mentality in turn generates the concept of the portable border. This kind of portability has become a way to bring border art from the physical dividing line to other regions, from border dwellers to populations previously unconnected to the border. What does it mean to view the world as borders, and how is this manifested in the visual? Rather than in dividing the world into discrete periods and cultures, the border dweller visualizes the boundaries *within* these established categories. Eventually the previous categories dissolve, allowing new connections to be made among previously disparate subjects. By viewing the world as a series of borders, the artist is now able to make a commentary on subjects originally considered beyond the scope of border art.

The concept of the portable border echoes Robert Smithson's elaboration of "the non-site," as well as his numerous map projects and lost continents, among others. In 1979 Smithson wrote that "*The Non-Site (an indoor earthwork)* is a three dimensional logical picture that is *abstract*, yet it *represents* an actual site in N.J. (The Pine Barrens Plains). It is by this dimensional metaphor that one site can represent another site which does not resemble it - this *The Non-Site*."[7] Although Smithson's earthworks were shards from quarries, fragments of breakwaters, chunks of scree and other rocks removed from their original location and transported to museums and galleries, the portable border acts along similar lines. The artist creates a work—whether performance, installation, or other media—that is generated from the experience of a border. The work then travels—locally, nationally and internationally—and in doing so, serves as a representation of border thinking or border mentality that is removed from the physical site. Through this process, the border, specifically the representation of the border in the gallery, becomes the non-site.

Regarding the act of rediscovering the original site, Smithson describes:

> Let us say that one goes on a fictitious trip if one decides to go to the site of the *Non-Site*. The "trip" becomes invented, devised, artificial; therefore, one might call it a non-trip to a site from a Non-site. Once one arrives at the "airfield," one discovers that it is man-made in the shape of a hexagon, and that I mapped this site in terms of esthetic boundaries rather than political or economic boundaries.[8]

The relationship between site and non-site is a dialectical one that attempts to resolve the tension between representation and abstraction.[9] The non-site is the synthesis of this dialectic, the meeting point between what exists at a given location and what has been removed.

With the non-trip Smithson describes the act of rediscovering the original site. The journey is imaginary because the site becomes mythologized in the act of removing the earth and placing it on display as art. For the artist representing the portable border, the original site is imbued with the mythical qualities of "The Border" and the entire history it represents. Simply invoking the U.S.-Mexico border brings to mind a history of conflict, of lines drawn and redrawn, of early twentieth-century outlaws and present-day drug traffickers. Attempting to bring "The Border" back to the physical boundary line is, as Smithson would describe, a "non-trip."

With Smithson's establishment of the concept of the non-site in 1968, though not published until 1979, art could be both portable and site-specific, a combination that had previously been a contradiction in terms. Smithson's ideas, however, remained applicable primarily to his earthworks, for which he moved fragments away from a single site and into the art world. With the development of the portable border in the early 1990s, site-specificity could now refer to works removed entirely from their physical location that could nonetheless continue to evoke their point of origin. With border art that site is necessarily a border, whether international, mental, cultural or otherwise. The dual concepts of border mentality and the portable border allowed for an opening up of the category of border art beyond its traditional confines. The knowledge generated from the border, as well as the collected history

of its milieu, could flow across boundaries in the practice of portability. The lessons learned from the border can be applied now to the rest of the world.

At the start of the 1990s artists began expanding the concept of the border in anticipation of two significant events. The 1992 Columbus Quincentennial and the 1994 enactment of NAFTA began to stretch the ideas of the border in different directions. In 1992 people throughout the Americas celebrated the five hundred year anniversary of Columbus' 1492 landing in the New World. For many, however, the Quincentennial served to memorialize centuries of colonization and subjugation by European powers. Amid the sea of commemorative plates, t-shirts and other memorabilia emblazoned with Columbus' image, activists and revisionist historians attempted to explain the darker side of the "discovery." Spurred to action by the official celebrations surrounding the Quincentennial, dissenters succeeded in canceling a large number of events, including the replica tour that was to cross the United States.[10]

The decimation of the indigenous populations of the Americas, coupled with the centuries-long European exploitation of natural resources, had a lasting effect on the status of Latin America with respect to the Northern powers. The 1992 Quincentennial necessitated a renegotiation of the history of the Americas, one that emphasized the social and economic disparity between the United States and Mexico. The U.S.-Mexico border is, in the words of feminist writer Gloria Anzaldúa, "*una herida abierta* [an open wound] where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds."[11] She links the border with blood to evoke not only the conquest but also the resulting Spanish dictum of *limpieza de sangre* [purity of blood].[12] The Quincentennial opened further the debate surrounding colonialism, conquest and its place in Euro-American history. In effect the border serves as the greatest reminder of this disparity, and in turn, of the original violence of conquest. The border stretches back through time and marks off the spaces of difference of the past as well as the physical line of today.

As noted above the same year witnessed the beginning of the NAFTA on December 17, 1992. Signed by U.S. President George H.W. Bush, Mexican President Carlos Salinas, and Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, NAFTA officially came into effect on January 1, 1994. The agreement lifted

non-tariff agricultural trade barriers between the United States, Mexico and Canada, with the remaining tariffs phased out over a period of fifteen years. Even prior to its implementation, NAFTA was the source of intense controversy. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) marketed the agreement as a "win-win situation" for America's farmers.[13] The Clinton Administration in 1993 stressed the importance of foreign engagement in general, of which NAFTA was to play a key role.[14] From these stated goals of U.S. foreign policy, it was clear at the time that the trade agreement marked a crucial step on the path toward globalization, and the integration of the North American markets was widely seen as the first step in this direction. On the other hand labor organizers in the United States and Mexico feared a collapse of national economies.

On the day of NAFTA's enactment the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) took up arms in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas and denounced the agreement's marginalization of impoverished indigenous farmers.[15] Among their demands were free elections, the resignation of then-President Carlos Salinas and the cessation of violence against Indians. The Zapatistas timed their uprising to capitalize on and undermine the international attention garnered by NAFTA. The Mexican government sent federal troops to combat the EZLN, which lead to the deaths of an estimated 200 to 300 people, most of them Zapatista.[16] By February international attention and NGO involvement resulted in a ceasefire between the government and the Zapatistas, and on the 21st of that month, EZLN leaders met with government representative Manuel Camacho in the Cathedral of San Cristobal to negotiate territorial concessions.[17]

During the buildup to NAFTA border art, especially the medium of performance, addressed the anticipated economic and social changes. Although the plan to enact NAFTA was public knowledge in 1992, the economic and social impact of the changes was not evident to the general public. Artists such as Gómez-Peña, Schnorr, and Fusco were in a position to analyze these proposed changes and anticipate their consequences through border performances. Artists working with the border increasingly employed notions of portability and globalism in relation to the border and previously regional concerns, knowing that NAFTA marked a significant movement toward internationalism in the Western Hemisphere. As with the Columbus Quincentennial, the concept of border drastically expanded,

but this time spatially to other regions removed from any international boundary. After NAFTA the Mexican state directed art promotion toward inserting younger, more experimental artists into the international art market; forging collaborations with American foundations and the Mexican private sector; and promoting a more contemporary image of Mexican culture.[18]

I would argue that the shift from site-specificity to the portable border was not complete until the definition of border changed accordingly. In the context of the Columbus Quincentennial the artistic responses to controversial status of the border were central to the artists Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña. The two collaborated on a 1992 performance that embodied this shift from site-specificity to portability. Created in response to the oncoming Quincentennial events, and intensely aware of the more integrated future promised by NAFTA, *Cage Performance: Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit…* both "ported" the border and explored its expansion. The performance consisted of Gómez-Peña and Fusco dressed in Western stereotypes of "native" clothing and placed on display in various museums. Fusco "played scientific specimen and exotic curio with her face painted" and wore a grass skirt, wig, sunglasses and tennis shoes, while a bare-chested Gómez-Peña wore a mask, sunglasses and black boots as he carried a briefcase with a snake inside.[19] Each performance lasted three days, with Gómez-Peña and Fusco living in a golden cage in full view of the museum-going public. This arrangement resulted in the conflation of the public with the private, the space of social interaction with the tropes of domestic life.

The piece traveled extensively to museums on three continents and in seven different cities, and the title was amended each time to reflect the location. As perhaps the most striking aspect of the performance, the artists displayed themselves as the couple in the cage in a strictly ethnographic manner. In some cases they did not market the piece as performance art, but as an exhibition of living history. The audience was occasionally under the impression that the people in the cage actually were undiscovered Amerindians, much like the human exhibitions at the World's Fairs of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. In other cases the viewers assumed the couple to be descendants of native Amerindians performing as a tribute to their ancestors.

Fusco thoroughly documented the specifics of *Cage Performance* in her 1994 essay "The Other History of Intercultural Performance." As she describes:

> We called our homeland Guatinau, and ourselves Guatinauis. We performed our "traditional tasks," which ranged from sewing voodoo dolls and lifting weights to watching television and working on a laptop computer.…For a small fee, I would dance (to rap music) and Guillermo would tell authentic Amerindian stories (in a nonsensical language) and we would pose for Polaroids with visitors.[20]

Fusco and Gómez-Peña emphasized the uncanny nature of the encounter. Visitors were not informed ahead of time of what to expect, and the result was an audience caught off-guard. The couple in the cage became a template for visitors, shocked by a return to the practice of exhibiting humans, to express their fears and anxieties of "the other." In some cases this expression turned from mere discomfort into acts of violence.[21] In her essay on the *Cage Performance*, Fusco described bystanders committing acts of aggression from shouting obscenities at the performers to a Buenos Aires viewer throwing acid on Gómez-Peña.[22] The question of violence is an interesting one to discuss. It is not unprecedented for artworks to incite violence, whether a result of extreme anger or passion. For example paintings by Pablo Picasso, Barnet Newman and Kazimir Malevich have been attacked in Amsterdam.[23] However, in the case of *Cage Performance*, I emphasize that the violence is directed against people rather than objects. The attacks were not only provoked by the nature of performance art, but also because many audience members remained unaware that the display was art. In this case the violent incidents revealed a deep-rooted fear of the "other" and all that he or she represents. In London, for example, an undercurrent of anti-immigrant sentiment would have fueled the incident, adding another dimension to the piece. The "undiscovered Amerindians" substituted for the African, South Asian, and other immigrants who populate much of London.

By emphasizing the label "undiscovered," the title implied that these are the people who somehow escaped Columbus, Cortes, Pizarro and other conquistadors. On the eve of the Quincentennial to celebrate the so-called "discovery" of America, the idea of remaining undiscovered functions as an act of defiance. The verb "visit" significantly implies active participation of

the subjects in the exhibition. It is as if these undiscovered Amerindians chose to go on this particular tour in order to visit a number of countries and museums around the globe. The activity of the verb "visit" stands in stark contrast to the visuals of the piece with the two people caged—literally placed behind bars for the viewing pleasure and supposed safety of the audience. The bars thus kept the performers from fully interacting with, or visiting, the spaces to which they traveled.

According to Fusco the artists aimed to generate a "reverse ethnography" by focusing on the reactions of the audience rather than the study of the supposed Amerindian people.[24] I argue that this reverse ethnography writes the existing borders between audience and performer into discourse. The border I describe serves as more than just the boundary between the action on the stage and those passively viewing it; rather this border urges the interaction between the two groups and encourages transgression and crossing. The performance here is not simply a set piece to be viewed passively, but contains the potential to become a conversation between the artists and the audience. In doing so the audience determined the specifics of the performance, as well as the interpretation. When the viewers were unaware of the artistic nature of this spectacle, the piece took on an entirely different dimension than when it was prominently displayed as an artwork (at the Whitney Museum, for instance). For *Cage Performance* border crossing is not physical; the golden cage separates the audience from the performers. Here audience members cross the border through acts of communication and identification with the supposedly indigenous subjects and also through the "otherness" within each viewer. As has been theorized by Edward Saïd, Timothy Mitchell and countless other scholars, the encounter with the "other" exposes and reveals more about the dominant culture than about the one on display.[25] This idea held true in the case of the *Cage Performance*. Public interaction with the "undiscovered Amerindians" lowered viewers' inhibitions, revealing the strange, the alien, and the other within themselves. While not initially recognizable as border art, I argue *Cage Performance* served as the first physical embodiment of the portable border, and this artwork would be followed by the further globalization of border art.

After *Cage Performance* Gómez-Peña collaborated with other artists and eventually formed a troupe called La Pocha Nostra. The name plays on the Sicilian Mafia's "La Cosa Nostra," with the word "Pocha," a slang term for

artificial whiteness. Pocha can mean "bleached," indicating an intentional whiteness expressed by an attitude—a "Pocho" is either clueless about Latino culture and social norms or purports to exist above them. The name La Pocha Nostra refers to both definitions and indicates an ownership of this condition from both sides. Other permanent members of the troupe included Roberto Sifuentes, Gómez-Peña's longtime collaborator, artist/actress Violeta Luna, and dancer/artist Michéle Ceballos. The rest of La Pocha Nostra's roster constantly changes as an influx of international artists joins the troupe for specific performances. The group's goal has been to "provide a base [and forum] for a loose network of rebel artists from various disciplines, generations and ethnic backgrounds."[26] With the changing landscape of the U.S.-Mexico border and its relevance to other border situations around the globe, La Pocha Nostra began to take border art further. Art became a means to comment on broad ranging issues such as neocolonialism, international migration and the state of the immigrant/refugee, and the dynamics of integrated global economies. Border art, as a result, moved away from the specifics of the U.S.-Mexico border, where it would resonate with those exposed to the situation, and toward a more universal kind of symbolism.

Similarly to *Cage Performance*, La Pocha Nostra's 2003 performance of *Mapa Corpo* [*Body Map*] may initially seem distant from the border and the category of "border art." The piece communicates a complex take on U.S. foreign policy and twenty-first century colonialism. Rather than focusing primarily on the boundaries between nations, *Mapa Corpo* brings attention to the transgression of these same boundaries. In the various iterations of this piece from 2003 through 2009, the artists explored an idea of "border" made possible only by the increasing portability of border art. I would argue that *Mapa Corpo* is the twenty-first century culmination of the portable border and its evolution into a global, multi-ethnic and pan-regional border. With this performance Gómez-Peña and La Pocha Nostra use the knowledge and strategies generated from U.S.-Mexico border art to make an effective socio-political statement about the nature of international borders.

For *Mapa Corpo* Gómez-Peña dressed as a shaman and spoke incantations in an imaginary language over a nude woman. Female members of La Pocha Nostra played the nude woman on a rotating basis, and occasionally the troupe hired an actress to perform this role when troupe members were

unavailable or unable to perform.[27] An acupuncturist worked on the woman's body and pressed needles adorned with national flags into her flesh. The flags represented the coalition of nations taking part in the Iraq invasion as the puncture locations corresponded to traditional sites for acupuncture treatment. The proportion of flags of a specific country was directly related to its participation in the war, with the United States representing the largest number of flags. After the acupuncturist completed his work, the audience was then invited to "decolonize" the body by removing the flags, one at a time. Simultaneously artist Roberto Sifuentes posed as an injured soldier as a grieving woman held him in a *pieta* pose. Gómez-Peña described the piece as "a response to the invasion of Iraq… [utilizing] political acupuncture as a metaphor," with the nude body as territory, forty needles with varying flags of the occupational forces, the operation by an acupuncturist, and the audience then invited to extract the flags from the body map.[28]

This concept of political acupuncture deserves further inspection into what the action signifies. A troupe member, or occasionally a curator, played the acupuncturist and colonized the body through flags. In comparing colonization with acupuncture, *Mapa Corpo* interrogates the nature of both. The acupuncturist, intending to heal, takes on a darker role. Rather than alleviating pain or other ailments, he *inflicts* pain by piercing the woman's skin. This dual pain of both infliction and alleviation is inherent to acupuncture, while in the performance, the action implies and underscores the U.S. government's explanation of the war; namely, that in order to heal or resolve territorial conflict, it is necessary to inflict pain or destruction. Acupuncture here serves as a metaphor for the collateral damage expected from conflict, damage that is suffered by the conquered territory rather than the colonizer. Under the guise of intervening in international conflicts or aiding repressed groups, the present-day colonizer substitutes one regime for another and nothing is gained in the process.

The piece was intentionally dark, capturing the post-9/11 mood in the United States and abroad. At the start of the Iraq war, *Mapa Corpo* foreshadowed the violence to come, even as forecasts for the invasion projected instant victory. The use of a female body is itself a statement. Land or nation is feminized, as in constructions of the "motherland." The metaphor can be taken further to emphasize the toll that war has on the civilian population, especially in twenty-first century conflicts when the battle lines are not clearly drawn.

Rather than a soldier on the table, or even simply a male figure, the nude woman evokes vulnerability in the face of war. Women are also frequently the reason or justification of war. From Helen of Troy to the nameless "repressed women" of fundamentalist Islamic regimes, the feminine has literally constituted the territory for which war has been fought.

When La Pocha Nostra initially developed *Mapa Corpo* in 2003, the Iraq war was in its infancy, with strong support for the invasion in the United States and coalition nations. As a result the U.S. art establishment largely passed on the piece when it was proposed. It is important to note that this is Gómez-Peña's personal characterization of the situation, an outlet for his frustration during the early part of the Iraq war. This is not to say that the sentiment was not shared by other artists and cultural elites. From 2003 to 2005, La Pocha Nostra performed *Mapa Corpo* in Mexico and other parts of Latin America, Europe and Canada. Gómez-Peña, angered by the apparent rejection of the piece in the United States, expressed his frustration in an essay entitled "Disclaimer." Later published in a 2006 issue of *The Drama Review*, Gómez-Peña emotionally ranted at the art establishment in the United States. He lamented:

> The air has become extremely rarefied. The continuous defunding of the arts, paired with institutionalized neoconservatism and the imposed culture of panic, prohibition, and high security permeating every corner of society—including our arts organizations—has created an incendiary environment for the production of critical culture, and generated a growing unemployed (or rather "under-employed") class: the "radical" experimental artist.[29]

Despite the controversy, or perhaps because of it, *Mapa Corpo* was extremely popular outside of the United States; *Mapa Corpo* embodied the concept of the portable border as the piece traveled internationally and inter-continentally over the three-year period.

According to Gómez-Peña the social and political situation in the United States eventually led to *Mapa Corpo*'s acceptance. By 2005 the political climate in the United States had changed drastically and support for the war had waned. The socio-political shift, coupled with *Mapa Corpo*'s success in

Europe, led to requests for performances at U.S. art institutions. By the end of 2005 Gómez-Peña and La Pocha Nostra had begun to perform the piece at museums and galleries around the United States. The performance became a literal border crosser, moving around the globe and finally returning to the United States, where—and for which—it had originally been conceived.

The 2005 version of the piece included a second station. As Gómez-Peña describes, it contained:

> [T]he international immigrant, which was a brown man, nude, whose body would be prepared by either a witch or a curator. And the preparation ritual entailed washing him, shaving him…engaging in a kind of exorcism. …In the last part of the show, we would invite the audience to re-colonize his body with statements, with literature, with the poetics of hope, we would give them pencils, crayons and lipstick to write on his body and turn him into a kind of book of border poetry.[30]

The artists added this part of the performance in response to the earlier controversy and to add another dimension to the piece. The audience acts upon the nude man as they had previously acted upon the nude female body. The "international immigrant" is first stripped, and then "exorcised" of the past and of previous relationships. This action is meant to relate to the undocumented immigrant experience, particularly from Mexico into the United States, when the illegal border-crosser loses his or her history and identity in the desert crossing. Finally he emerges only to be re-colonized through his labor by the country he has fought so hard to enter. Undocumented workers in homes, fields, factories and slaughterhouses across the United States constitute not just an underclass; one could speak in terms of invisible labor, and even the rhetoric of the caste system is not out of place in this context. In the case of *Mapa Corpo* (2005), the artists portrayed the immigrant body as generically as possible, with no specific markers to identify his nationality. In the end the physical reality of his brown-skinned body signifies his ethnicity, and the connection with the U.S.-Mexico border experience remains clear.

I argue that, given these associations, both versions of *Mapa Corpo* present a twenty-first century embodiment of the border art concept adapted for

a global age. This development functions as an extension of the portable border, connected as it was by the artist to the United States' act of border crossing in Iraq. Gómez-Peña's *Mapa Corpo* performance dramatized border thinking as it metaphorically clarified how the United States crossed several boundaries: the physical line separating Iraq from the rest of the world, the line between diplomacy and conflict, and the line dividing the United States from its strongest allies. *Mapa Corpo* restaged the Iraq war as a border conflict that links military aggression to the trauma of colonization —the instigation for Latin American "border thinking."

Additionally how does the concept of mapping, invoked by the title "body map," function in this portable and globalized border art? In *Mapa Corpo* the woman herself—or the man in later performances—serves as a living map, breathing and even changing from performance to performance. The frequently employed concept of woman-as-map invokes a centuries-long history of human territoriality and border control. Although initially equated with religious worldviews, by the fifteenth century, maps had become inextricably linked with empire. Originally the very act of mapping a newly "discovered" territory was ground enough for claiming it as one's own. According to cartographic historian J. B. Harley, maps "redescribe the world in terms of relations of power and of cultural practices, preferences and priorities." The surveyor "whether consciously or otherwise, replicates not just the 'environment' in some abstract sense but equally the territorial imperatives of a particular political system."[31]

The gender of La Pocha Nostra's "body map" is also significant when troupe members Violeta Luna and Lorena Rivero de Beer played the nude woman on a rotating basis; both were chosen for their androgynous features. The few outside models contracted to perform occasionally were voluptuous women. In these cases the focus of the piece shifted, as the "body map" charted a sexual topography rather than a colonial geography. According to Gómez-Peña, "The thoughts behind the image, the territories—national territories—maps, have been feminized for centuries…. So we were basically utilizing a kind of expedient metaphor."[32] While it may have been "expedient," Gómez-Peña, Luna, Sifuentes and the rest of La Pocha Nostra engaged with the feminization of the map beyond simply utilizing a metaphor. Rather than the traditional metaphor of female map and motherland, Mapa Corpo brought together cartographic history, Chinese traditional medicine and

U.S. colonial actions. The colonization of the body evokes sexual violence while avoiding the depiction of conflict. The acupuncturist, representative of coalition forces, not only colonizes the woman's body, but these actions meet no opposition. Colonial powers, in the world of *Mapa Corpo*, encounter no resistance, but simply flesh that yields to the touch of a needle.

In developing this performance, members of La Pocha Nostra considered the sexual politics of the nude female and intended for the resulting image to shock viewers. The audience bears witness to her assumed vulnerability, and, as they are invited to "decolonize" her, they do so out of empathy. On the other hand the 2005 version of the piece also allowed the audience to act upon the nude male figure. Rather than removing flags from his body and decolonizing, the audience was invited to recolonize by writing on his skin. The nude man becomes a map for the public's thoughts, fears and hopes in the language of the body map. Had the genders of the figures been reversed, the message could have been vastly different.

Additionally Gómez-Peña utilizes the trope of the shaman to represent borders. Initially a denizen of the physical U.S.-Mexico border, the shaman or *brujo* figure had evolved to embody the multi-ethnic portable border. Originally the word "shaman" comes from the Tungus language of central Siberia. Incorporating "sa," the Tungus word for "knowledge," *sa-man* indicated an extremely knowledgeable person.[33] Shamanism, or aspects thereof, is found in religions around the world, including tribes of Central and South America. Among indigenous Colombians the role of the shaman was the "curing of disease, obtaining of game animals, and fish from their supernatural masters, the presiding over the rituals in the individual life cycle, and defensive or aggressive action against personal enemies."[34] The ritual and defensive aspects of the shaman pervades Gómez-Peña's performance in *Mapa Corpo* as he presides over the acupuncture ceremony.

Mapa Corpo's shaman speaks in multiple languages, including several imaginary tongues. Gómez-Peña, as the shaman, acts as the ringmaster of the event as he connects the audience, the performers, and the nebulous "other." He is at once frightening, clothed as a witch doctor, yet firmly in control as he directs the action and supposedly communes with the divine. Gómez-Peña's shaman looks back to an earlier performance, one that had

come to define border art. In 1989's *Border Brujo* [*Border Magician*] Gómez-Peña created an archetypal figure that came to represent international border-crossers. The artist's *brujo* assumes many forms including those of a *Pachuco*, Native American, broadcast journalist and a drunken, sombrero-clad Mexican. Vacillating between inhabiting stereotypes and producing a more subtle ironic commentary, Gómez-Peña's 1989 performance physically embodied what would later become U.S.-Mexico border thinking.

Giving human form to the border region is work of a distinctly anthropological nature. Gómez-Peña often calls his work "reverse anthropology," a term similar to Mignolo's "border thinking," in which the artist assumes a central position while forcing the dominant culture to the margins.[35] Gómez-Peña's categorizing of border characters has been explored and echoed by others, and social anthropologists have categorized border crossers and dwellers into a variety of types. In his 1994 book *Border People: Life and Society in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* Oscar Martínez presented a taxonomy of many distinct categories, from the relocated Anglo retiree to the transient migrant Mexican.[36] In Martínez' study, however, the border types fall along specific lines according to their subjects' degree of hybridity. For Gómez-Peña and La Pocha Nostra the reality of the border is far more fluid and the categories constantly shift; thus, creating a standard taxonomy proves to be impossible.

The shaman and his incorporation of an entire encyclopedia of border hybrids has been transported from 1989 to 2003, from *Border Brujo* to *Mapa Corpo*. Intervening between the audience and the performance tableau, he represents layers of accumulated border knowledge. In *Mapa Corpo* the shaman stands as a connection between the more literal border art of the late-1980s and early-1990s and the portable border in the post-NAFTA period. The shaman is recognizable as a hybrid figure, a cross between a witch doctor, magician, and psychic visionary. He exists on the borders between life and death, illness and health, the living world and the world of spirits. In fact, according to Marcel Mauss, the shaman or witch doctor acts almost entirely through speech, as he "inhales or sucks disease in…consequently any magical action practiced through the voice belongs to this form of magic."[37] Gómez-Peña's chants take this role and connect the realm of the mystical with the reality of the Iraq invasion. In this manner he

brings the hybrid culture of the border region into prominence on the world stage. This hybridity and fluidity link the U.S.-Mexico border and the Iraq war together in a single border milieu.

Subsequent versions of *Mapa Corpo* incorporated yet another perspective–that of twenty-first century Latin America. For a performance at the 2009 Havana Biennial Gómez-Peña and La Pocha Nostra changed the meaning of the body map again, retitling the piece *Mapa Corpo III*. The piece itself became a border shifter—changing the concept from the Iraq war and U.S. foreign policy to a new map of discord within Latin America and the general lawlessness of the region. Gómez-Peña explained:

> But since the rules of the game have shifted…the tone of the piece has changed, and also the nature of the piece has changed. So now the flags are no longer the flags of the forces of occupation in Iraq, but now the flags of the Latin American countries who are facing crime cartels, and it has become a piece about violence in Latin America….By extracting the flags, we are asking the audience to commit to fight the violence in our countries.[38]

The drug cartels to which Gómez-Peña refers maintained a strong presence in most Mexican border cities since the 1970s, leading to widespread and highly publicized outbreaks of violence on the U.S.-Mexico border through the early twenty-first century. As with the Iraq war, *Mapa Corpo III* portrayed the cartel violence primarily as a conflict of borders and crossings between the U.S. and Mexico and also among the various Latin American nations it affects. The performance makes a relevant commentary on the U.S.-Mexico border that connects it with major global events.

Border artists both anticipated and responded to increasing global integration and broadened the definition of border art. The Columbus Quincentennial and resulting controversy allowed for a revisioning of history and questioned the "discovery" narratives and conquest themes. Border artists explored this dynamic long before the official Quincentennial in 1992, with works that positioned the United States as a continuation of European dominance, standing in for the Spanish empire. BAW/TAF performances such as *End of the Line* (1986) and *Border Pilgrimage* (1987) as well as earlier Chicano works including the Chicano Park Murals, were prominent examples of

this shift in focus away from Spain as colonial power. In turn the specific relationship between the United States and Mexico came to stand for the larger clash of cultures and the economic disparity between the developing world and dominant industrial powers. With its waves of documented and undocumented immigration, the U.S.-Mexico border region came to stand for the dilemma surrounding international migration of all kinds. The 150-year history of the U.S.-Mexico border has produced a template for intercultural integration and an example to be studied.

The performances I have discussed here, *Cage Performance*, *Mapa Corpo*, and to a lesser extent, *Border Brujo*, manifest a vision of the portable border. Portability gives the insights of border art and artists greater latitude and freedom of expression, opening up the concepts of "border" and "border art" far beyond their literal definitions. In doing so artists have brought the lessons of the border and the specified knowledge generated there to places seemingly unrelated to the U.S.-Mexico situation. Ideas regarding the U.S.-Mexico border have been allowed to resonate globally *because* of their portability.

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NOTES:

[1] Guillermo Gómez-Peña, "Death on the Border: A Eulogy to Border Art," *High Performance* (Spring 1991): 8.

[2] Ibid., 9. With the mention of grant writing, Gómez-Peña refers to the BAW/TAF's ability, starting in the late-1980s, to write successful grants. As BAW/TAF member Michael Schnorr said of the period, "We couldn't write a bad grant." Michael Schnorr, Personal Interview, 16 April 2009.

[3] Ibid. This statement is a specific reaction to efforts by the Museum of Contemporary Art to attract international artists to San Diego-Tijuana. The phenomenon of center moving to the periphery would be even more pronounced starting in 1992, with the establishment of the San Diego-Tijuana binational art festival InSite. Widespread global attention would not come to InSite until 1997, six years after Gómez-Peña's *High Performance* article.

[4] This is not to say that the BAW/TAF was the sole source of art on the U.S.-Mexico border. During the 1970s, the San Diego-Tijuana region had experienced a strong wave of public art connected with the social ideas of the Chicano Movement. Artists such as Salvador "Queso" Torres, Mario Torero, and Guillermo Aranda, among others, designed the Chicano Park murals starting in 1973, while the mural and poster movement flourished in both San Diego and Los Angeles. Independent artists, such as San Diego-based Manuel "Zopilote" Mancillas and Robert Sanchez, were also involved in border art and would go on to work with the BAW/TAF collective.

[5] I have limited my scope mainly to the U.S.-Mexico border because of the dangers of attempting to theorize "the border" as a single entity. The politico-economic specifics of different border regions create a great disparity in the way international dividing lines are experienced. The virtually borderless European Union is at one extreme of the spectrum, while the heavily policed borders in much of Africa (the Kenya-Somalia border, as well as Morocco-Algeria in Northern Africa) and Southeast Asia (the Thai-Malaysia and Thai-Myanmar regions, specifically) fall to the other extreme. Because of the variety of border regions, it is impossible to advance a single "border theory." Yet some borders have been more fruitfully theorized than others. In fact it is the U.S.-Mexico border region that has stimulated the most intense theorizing of "border art."

[6] Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000), 18.

[7] Robert Smithson, *Unpublished Writings in Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam, 2nd edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996). Available as "A Provisional Theory of Non-Sites" at http://www.robertsmithson.com/essays/provisional.htm (accessed 18 December 2009).

[8] Ibid.

[9] Susan Kandel, "The Non-Site of Theory," *Frieze* 22 (May 1995), available at http://www.frieze.com/ issue/article/the_non_site_of_theory/ (accessed 18 December 2009).

[10] Coco Fusco, *English is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 38.

[11] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands=La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999, originally published 1987), 25.

[12] The concept of *limpieza de sangre* led to the development of a very specific kind of painting in New Spain. These *casta* paintings were intended to illustrate the cultural mixtures that arose from different racial combinations. For example Spanish + Indian = Mestizo and Spanish + African = Mulatto. In a way these *casta* paintings explored the cultural mixtures of the border long before the establishment of the physical line.

[13] "NAFTA," available at http://www.fas.usda.gov/itp/Policy/nafta/nafta.asp (accessed 10 November 2009).

[14] Anthony Lake, "From Containment to Enlargement," Address at the School for Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, Washington D.C., 21 September 1993, available at http://heinonline. org/HOL/LandingPage?collection=journals&handle=hein.journals/dsptch9&div=118&id=&page= (accessed 10 November 2009).

[15] David Bacon, *Children of NAFTA: Labor Wars on the U.S./Mexico Border* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 19.

[16] Mihalis Mentinis, *Zapatistas: The Chiapas Revolt and What it Means for Radical Politics*

(Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2006), 9.

[17] Niels Barmeyer, *Developing Zapatista Autonomy: Conflict and NGO Involvement in Rebel Chiapas* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009), 42-43; and Mentinis, 11-12.

[18] Fusco, 64. This statement holds true for all forms of Mexican art, not just art that addresses the international border.

[19] Diana Taylor, "A Savage Performance: Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Coco Fusco's 'Couple in the Cage,'" *The Drama Review* 42, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 165.

[20] Fusco, 39.

[21] Ibid., 56.

[22] Taylor: 166.

[23] "Picasso Painting Slashing Puts Museum Officials on Defensive," *Lawrence Journal* (17 May 1999), available at http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2199&dat=19990517&id=PYIyAAAAIBAJ&sjid= DecFAAAAIBAJ&pg=6563,5275473 (accessed 3 March 2010).

[24] Fusco, 57.

[25] For a thorough treatment of this subject, see Edward Saïd, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978) and Timothy Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

[26] Pocha Nostra, "Mission Statement," available at http://www.pochanostra.com/what/ (accessed 3 January 2010).

[27] Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Interview with the author, 23 March 2009.

[28] Gómez-Peña, interview, 23 March 2009.

[29] Guillermo Gómez-Peña, "Disclaimer," *The Drama Review* 50, No. 1 (Spring 2006): 151.

[30] Gómez-Peña, interview, 23 March 2009.

[31] J. B. Harley, *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography*, ed. Paul Laxton (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 35.

[32] Gómez-Peña, interview, 23 March 2009.

[33] Alice Beck Kehoe, *Shamans and Religion: an Anthropological Exploration in Critical Thinking*, (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 2000), 25-26.

[34] G. Reichel-Dolmatoff, *The Shaman and the Jaguar: a Study of Narcotic Drugs Among the Indians of Colombia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1975), 76.

[35] Daniel Belgrad, "Performing Lo Chicano," MELUS Vol. 29, No. 2 (Summer 2004): 253. This term could be seen as an extension of the "reverse ethnography" described by Coco Fusco in relation to the Cage *Performance*.

[36] Oscar J. Martínez, *Border People: Life and Society in the US-Mexico Borderlands* (Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 1994), 67-83. Although Gómez-Peña never specifically cites Martínez in his work, his interest in generating a reverse anthropology indicates that he was most likely aware of this research and others like it.

[37] Marcel Mauss, "Art and Myth," in *Saints, Heroes, Myths and Rites: Classical Durkheimian Studies of Religion and Society*, Marcel Mauss, Henri Hubert, and Robert Hertz, trans. Alexander Riley, Sarah Daynes, and Cyril Isnart (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2009), 27.

[38] Gómez-Peña, interview, 23 March 2009.