

New philosophical Tantrum (2008)

By Guillermo Gómez-Peña

I

You know carnavales, these days, the past goes back only as far as Madonna's "Like a Prayer," and the future is a sci-fi movie shot seven years ago

Said this, I must confess...I'm tired of walking north; so pinche tired...but you are tired as well. I can see it in your gorgeous eyes, señorita. They look so tired and so do yours, carnal.

We are all understandably tired of living in these dangerous times; in this fucked up city of...

Yes I hear you, man. There's no place to hide anymore. No more instant utopias to be found with a lighter or a pill; no more redemption in frivolous trips to the geographical margins,' cause they now hate Americans down there...and the dollar is worthless in Oaxaca

There's no more redemption in sex unless it's "upgraded" with amulets & fetishes, strangulation & shit; but then, after the last orgasm we are tired again; tired of performing the daily ritual of being human or partially human; of feeling like aliens inside our own bodies, or inside the body of our lover. We are definitely tired...

Tired of working all day for very little money; of feeling lonely & disconnected from our heart, our genitals and neighbors; from our country & our so called political representatives; *their* foreign policy, *their* mythical high security, *their* endless war against difference; tired of being afraid; afraid of mythical terrorists and "illegal aliens"; afraid of our own inner demons.

We are all tired...Praise the Lord!

Wait, what's happening to me? I was possessed by Reverend Billy for a second... Did I drink too much in the dressing room? Where am I? Oh yeah, I am in Glasgow writing my script of hope while speaking up in front of my peers (or students). I'm looking for living metaphors, unlikely connections, open doors. I am crying for a vision.

II

No carnavales, I won't celebrate the Democratic Party this year; those slightly less dangerous self-serving motherfuckers...Ni madres. The fact is...I don't believe in government. I don't think it is possible to correct "the problem" from within the system. We've all tried. It doesn't work. The system is the problem, and politics is the art of manipulating the system to perpetrate problems. Being a "radical" within the

system is a mere prestidigitation act; part of the spectacle of radicalism that media consumers require to feel alive and authenticate their identity?

The vatos I would propose as presidential candidates are not even politicians. They are artists and literati, visionaries not functionaries. The country I would like to live in only exists in planet poetry, and planet performance, where radical imagination is the law, art is part of everyday life and everyone practices what they believe.

The crucial question is where does one find the spiritual energy to continue when you don't believe in mainstream politics, and institutionalized religion gives you the creeps? What to do when you are too old to belong to a subculture and participate in the global rave and too strange to get a chic job in academia?

Where do we locate our dissent when dissent is a corporate product, an HBO special, a perfume, Parfame, the scent of resistance, dissent, anarchic, extreme, suicide... or when kids can simply wear a t-shirt that says, "art is resistance" and think the job is done?

What to do when all the master discourses and epic narratives of hope are bankrupt? Which is the best energy drink?

Since 9/11, as my meta-horizons began to fade, I became obsessed with hope, its spiritual source and location. Is hope a deep feeling located on the chest, the abdomen or the sphincter? Is it a distant marker in the horizon that directs our actions, or a mysterious spiritual energy that propels you into the unknown against the laws of gravity? Does hope put you at odds with the state? If so, what to make of the fact that Obama and his "audacity of hope" might soon become the state?

Unlike the presidential candidates, my hope is not connected to God, Country or Economy. My hope is located... somewhere else; in obscure books, films and performances; in small communities that exist under the radar of the media; in the political streets of our cities; in late night conversations at a bar full of outsiders (like at the NRLA), in animal species I've never seen. My hope is always located on the other side of the border...or the mirror. In this very moment, my hope is located...in your arms.

Is love still an option? Love in times of war, disease and global warming? Love amidst earthquakes and floods? Under red alerts and a suspicious purple moon colored by smog and chemical waste? Is it possible to love as if 9/11 and the Invasion of Iraq never happened, as if America was a true democracy and an active member of the world community? Can we love as if the Patriot Act didn't exist? As if the Earth wasn't mortally wounded? As if we had open borders and open hearts?

I think we can...

Love can certainly help us continue but only so far, a few miles, a couple of months, and then, we encounter yet another abyss. Like right now, I'm facing yet another abyss, my beautiful audience...you! Can I stage dive at 52? Should I? I would love to stage dive into your arms but if I miscalculate the risk, one of you will sue me.

But what if I call my stage dive "performance art"? Can I get away with murder?

III

And what about art? Is art our salvation?

In the past art has saved me from deportation, jail and mental hospitals. True. Naming my anti-social behavior “art” has saved me from the jaws of the police, the border patrol, & the IRS. My life would be hollow and cold without art. But I talk about art as critical thought and embodied theory, not as object. I talk about art as in uncompromising art practice, not as in “the art world.”

The art world is full of compromises, humiliation rituals, and complicated power negotiations. It takes a special skill to survive it. If you comply too much you lose your voice, your sharp-edges, your culo. You become someone else you dislike. And one day, when you least expect it, they send you back to the margins where you wait and wait for a 2nd chance that rarely comes...or should you succeed in preserving your ethics, uncompromised, you will eventually be rendered so marginal that no one will know that it was your choice to be inconsequential.

Besides, what if my art leads to my own death? What if I die in the service of art like Pippa Bacca who was tragically murdered as she traveled in Turkey as a bride for peace?

So, between being an art world darling *culipronto* and being poor and bitter, I rather choose to be...an uncompromising dandy, an insider/outsider, a mariachi with a big mouth, a performing contradiction if you will.

Contra-dicción is the name of my favorite lotion. And my job as a performance artist is to avoid simplistic definitions, trends and adjectives, while I continue to ask irritating questions in original ways. What a bizarre job, que no?

IV

Merde, I'm so moody tonight, I feel like an existential wolf that went to sleep in the Arctic Circle and woke up on the rooftop of a Manhattan skyscraper.

I wonder if community is still a source of hope?

Community is one of our obsessions. We all long to belong to a larger “we” because we are obsessed precisely with what we lack.

But you know locos, communities of sameness drive me up the wall, conjure my asthma, give me acute vertigo and claustrophobia. My community is not confined by ideological, national or ethnic boundaries. Mine is a community of difference, and therefore it is fragmented, ever changing and...temporary, always temporary. And that's how I like it. Besides, no one belongs to only one community, not even the Christian right, not even my Chihuahua Sigfrid ne Babalu. He hangs out with rodents, marsupials and ghosts.

Like Babalu's, my peers are scattered all over the pinche planet, howling outsiders jumping all over the planet. Some of you are my peers; others are total strangers in my community of strangers. I long for my peers every night and hopefully, you long for me as well, and every now and then, when we get together, we lick each other's wounds and dance until the morning after like rabid kangaroos, like rebel cyborgs, and then we fall asleep and we dream of a better present.

In this imaginary place we dream about, artists and writers are actually needed and taken care of. We have universal medical insurance, a decent low-rider car and a great studio space in the bohemian hood of our choice. We don't have to write grants. And we get paid decently for what we do. We make important decisions and fix concrete problems for society. In this imaginary place we dream about, schools, hospitals and even airports are re-conceptualized and decorated by artists; the daily papers are written by philosophers, novelists and poets. We have ongoing access to electronic media where we make people think, remember, imagine, and laugh. We collaborate with lawyers, doctors, priests and scientists in the great project of co-imagining a better future for the borderless community of humankind.

Sounds so pinche corny but so appealing que no?

In this imaginary place there is a place for everyone,

almost everyone.