

**Cross-contamination: The Performance Activism
and Oppositional Art of La Pocha Nostra
(Manifiesto, 2004)***

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In 1993, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Roberto Sifuentes, and Nola Mariano founded La Pocha Nostra in Los Angeles, California. The objective was to formally conceptualize Gomez-Peña's collaborations with performance artists such as Sifuentes, James Luna, and Sara Shelton Mann. In 1995, La Pocha Nostra moved to San Francisco's Mission District, where it has been based for the last nine years. In late 2001, La Pocha completed the process of incorporation and became a non-profit-organization. As of June of 2004, members include performance artists Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Emiko R. Lewis, Michelle Ceballos, Violeta Luna, Juan Ybarra, and over thirty associates worldwide. Projects range from performance solos and duets to large-scale performance installations using video, DVD, photography, audio, and cyber-art. This text attempts to articulate the complexities of this most unusual "organization". We truly hope to inspire our colleagues across disciplines to develop similar models and methods. Feel free to pirate any of the following ideas.

I. La Pocha Nostra: an ever-evolving manifesto

La Pocha Nostra is an ever morphing trans-disciplinary arts organization based in San Francisco with branches and factions in many other cities and countries. As stated in our mission statement, "[We] provide a base for a loose network and forum of rebel artists from various disciplines, generations and ethnic backgrounds." If there is a common denominator, it is our desire to cross and erase dangerous borders between art and politics, practice and theory, artist and spectator. We strive to eradicate myths of purity and dissolve borders surrounding culture, ethnicity, gender, language, and *métier*.

La Pocha Nostra is neither an ensemble nor a troupe. We are more of a conceptual laboratory—a loose association of rebel artists thinking together, exchanging ideas/aspirations, and jumping into the abyss together.

La Pocha Nostra has died and been resurrected dozens of times. It has manifested itself as a garage performance troupe, an experimental side show, an interactive living museum and curiosity cabinet, and a politicized fashion show. It has

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expressed itself as a performance clinic, a town meeting, an intelligent rave, and a virtual resource center. Pocha is frequently a Trojan horse: two or three artists may be invited by a major institution but we bring ten to twenty others and involve them all in the process.

La Pocha Nostra is a virtual *maquiladora* (assembly plant) that produces brand new metaphors, symbols, images, and words to explain the complexities of our times. The Spanglish neologism "*Pocha Nostra*" translates as either "our impurities" or "the cartel of cultural bastards." We love this poetic ambiguity. It reveals an attitude towards art and society: *Cross-racial, poly-gendered, experimental, y que?*

La Pocha challenges the traditional art world mythologies of the "*Artiste*" as a suffering bohemian and misunderstood genius. La Pocha artists are social critics and chroniclers, inter-cultural diplomats, translators/mis-translators, informal ombudsmen, media pirates, information architects, reverse anthropologists, experimental linguists and radical pedagogues. To us, the artist is, above all, an active citizen immersed in the great debates of our times. Our place is the world and not just the "Art World."

La Pocha is by nature anti-essentialist and anti-nationalist. We claim an extremely unpopular position in the US: "No homeland; no fear; no borders; no patriotism; no nation-state; no ideology; no censorship." We are committed to presenting a poly-cultural and diversified America—an internationalist, humanist, and progressive perspective that has nothing to do with U.S. unilateralism, the Bush doctrine, or the Patriot Act.

La Pocha collaborates across national borders, race, gender and generations as an act of citizen diplomacy and as a means to create ephemeral communities of like-minded rebels. The basic premise of these collaborations is founded an ideal: If we learn to cross borders on stage, we may learn how to do so in larger social spheres. We hope others will be challenged to do the same.

La Pocha is an ever-changing community. Depending on who is sitting at the table at any given moment, Pocha can be two people or fifty. We create regenerative sources of labor built from concentric and overlapping circles. The inner circle comprises six to eight artists and scholars whose membership is determined by their degree of commitment and time. The next circle includes performance artists, musicians, filmmakers, and designers working part time on several Pocha projects. There is also a series of outer and overlapping circles of artist associates, theorists, and producers who live around the world. They may collaborate on a project if the time and place are right. Members and associates can move from one circle to another. The constant change of membership inevitably alters the nature of the work and contributes to the permanent process of reinvention.

La Pocha functions through an open belief system. We strongly trust in the idea that consciousness is stimulated through non-traditional presentational formats. Therefore, we view performance as an effective catalyst for thought and debate.

Through *sui-generis* combinations of artistic languages, media, and spontaneous performative formats, we explore the interface of globalization, migration, hybrid identities, border culture, and technology. Our rehearsals and workshops, weekly staff meetings, and quarterly board meetings always involve intense discussions of hot issues. We foreground the theoretical and methodological possibilities of performance to address these issues and the changing role of the artist in society.

La Pocha encourages public dialogue. We hope our performative-ritual formats are less authoritarian and static than those we see in academia, religion, pop culture, and politics. We constantly challenge theorists to be more performative and artists to explore intellectual avenues. It works most of the time. Every now and then we engender a monster, and that's also fine.

La Pocha was created out of our necessity to survive as Chicano/Latino artists in a racist Art World. The fact is that Chicanos and other "artists of color" don't have the funding support enjoyed by the Anglo avant garde. We must respond with complexity and imagination to this endemic lack of funds and access.

La Pocha's performance pedagogy performs a major role in our political praxis. Why? It challenges authoritarian hierarchies and specialized knowledge by creating temporary utopian spaces where interdisciplinary dialogue and imagination can flourish. These utopian spaces are framed by, but not contained within, a pentagon-shape of radical ideas whose vertices are community, education, activist politics, new technologies, and experimental aesthetics.

La Pocha is a unique aesthetic. Our robo-baroque and ethno-techno-cannibal aesthetic samples and devours everything we encounter: Border and Chicano pop culture; TV; film; rock & roll; hip-hop; comics; journalism; anthropology; pornography; religious imagery, and, of course, the history of the visual and performing arts. We cross-reference this information, embody it, and then re-interpret it for a live audience thereby refracting fetishized constructs of otherness through the spectacle of our "heightened" bodies on display. We are a live crossover jam culture.

La Pocha's aesthetic praxis involves ethnic and gender-bending, cultural transvestitism and power inversions. Many of our images show women and/or people "of color" in control. In our world, cultural borders have moved to center stage while the alleged mainstream is pushed to the margins and treated as exotic and unfamiliar. We place the audience member/viewer in the position of a "foreigner" or a "minority." It sounds "heavy," but it's actually a lot of fun.

La Pocha crosses dangerous aesthetic borders. We cede both our will and the stage to the audience. We invite them to co-create the piece and to participate in our extreme performance games riddled with post-colonial implications. (Please refer to **Pocha Live** below.) These games are integral aspects of our work.

La Pocha is an ever growing archive comprising thousands of photographs, videos, books, magazines, soundtracks, documents, props, and costumes. We are

permanently searching for interns to help us to organize a functional working archive. Sadly, we have never had enough hands, space, or filing cabinets to complete this task. We are currently in the process of turning our performance video archives into an educational DVD series. The first one of the series is already available.

La Pocha is an informal service organization. In addition to providing ethno-techno body language, imagery, and poetics, we offer new ways of thinking about art and community, multi-community outreach, and new audience development. It's part of the Pocha package.

La Pocha is, above all, a utopian idea. Our "utopia" is a marker in the political distance, a philosophical direction, and a path we often lose. Unfortunately, our frail egos and financial hardships occasionally cause us to fall into personal voids and temporarily forget our goals. One Pocha responsibility is to inspire each other to recapture strength and clarity.

La Pocha is committed to a permanent process of reinvention. This means La Pocha's membership and projects may have changed when this open text is finally published. Unfortunately permanent reinvention and ever shifting multi-dimensionality hinders sustainability. This is one of our systemic problems. How do we solve this dilemma? We still don't know but we are willing to accept suggestions (www.pochanostra.com).

II. Pocha live: a cross-cultural poltergeist

Over the past years, perhaps our most significant contribution to the field has been in our hybrid realm of performance/installation. We create interactive "living museums" that parody various colonial practices of representation. This often includes the ethnographic diorama (as found in museums of natural history), the Freak Show, the Indian Trading Post, the border curio shop, the sex shop/strip joint window display, and their contemporary equivalents in global media and corporate entertainment. We exhibit our highly decorated bodies sometimes as specimens from an endangered tribe or border saints from a persecuted religion. We surrender our will to the audience and assume composite identities dictated by the fears and desires of museum visitors and/or Internet users.

The composite identities of our ethno-cyborg personae are manufactured with the following formula in mind: one quarter stereotype; one quarter audience projection; one quarter aesthetic artifact; and one quarter unpredictable personal/social monster. These artificial savages are cultural projections of First World desire/fear, of its surrounding subcultures, and the so-called Third World Other. The live performance becomes the process via which we reveal the morphology of intercultural fetishes and the mechanisms propelling the behavior of both our "savages" and our audiences.

The audience steps into a total environment. Our ethno-cyborg personae are

displayed on platforms of varying heights and sizes for three to four hours a night, sometimes over a three-day period. Live and prerecorded music, multiple video projections and slides, fog, cinematic lighting, embalmed animals, old-fashioned medical figurines and ethno-kitsch design motifs all help to enhance our ethno-techno and robo-baroque aesthetic and create a heightened state for the spectator/participant.

The experience is purely voyeuristic in the first hour of the performance. The ethno-cyborgs create slow motion emblematic *tableaux vivants*. A catwalk connecting two platforms becomes a revolving stage for short performances by local artists commenting on fashion, gender and ethnicity. All action happens simultaneously. This ritualized action samples and mixes radical political imagery, religious iconography, extreme pop culture, sports, racially orientated fashion, and theatricalized sexuality. Symbolic sexuality is everywhere. Some performers feel inclined to eroticize political violence and even war while others utilize performative sexuality as syntax to gel religion and politics. Creating symbolic sexuality is also a means to invert power relations and media images of demonized Otherness. These ever morphing *tableaux vivants* overlap with each other creating surprising juxtapositions and fleeting glances of unique third meanings, which develop above and beyond our original intentions.

The performative structure is open and non-coercive. Audience members walk around the dioramas designing their own journey. They can stay for as long as they wish, come in and out of the space, return hours later, or even the following day. They can participate in our performance games or simply watch. No one is ever judged.

As the evening evolves, what began as a purely voyeuristic experience becomes increasingly participatory. We begin to make ourselves available for audience members to explore and play with us. They can touch us, smell us, even hand feed us. They can tag (spray-paint) us, braid our hair, change our make-up and props, and try different wigs and headdresses on us. In other words, they get to use the performers as human dolls. They can point guns at us to experience the feeling of having another human surrender at their feet. Some spectators even put dog leashes around our necks and engage in consensual power games with us. Audience members sometimes suggest combinations we've not attempted before, in which case we have to try and respond to their challenge. The menu of possible performance interactions changes from site to site.

We often set up a diorama station where audience members can choose a temporary ethnic identity and become their favorite cultural other using make-up and costumes. They are encouraged to integrate themselves into our living dioramas once their instant identity change takes place. Audiences love this part. Almost everyone is willing to escape their ethnicity and gender as long as there are no physical or social repercussions. Again, we don't exercise judgment on anyone.

We also give audience members the option to take off their clothes and *symbolically* perform their inter-racial sexual fantasies. We are always surprised by the number

of people willing to be sexually performative in public. This even happens when we are performing in conservative cities or in countries not used to performance art or experimental theater. (We can't stress enough that the nature of this play is strictly symbolic and never crosses over to include actual sexual acts. Sometimes it becomes necessary to point this out repeatedly to the audience).

Occasionally we incorporate an open mike in the center of the space to allow audience members to speak up or talk back. They can read their own poetry, voice their opinion on the proceedings, express an outrageous fantasy or desire, or give commands to the performers. We politely persuade them to hand the mike to others if their performance is uninteresting or too long.

Both audience members and performers are continuously making aesthetic, political, and ethical decisions. The subtext of these performance games seems to read: "We are all racist and sexist; we are all horny, tender, playful and violent; it's human nature; we are all implicated in this madness. Let's figure it out together. Let's cross each other's borders and see what happens." It is precisely in these raw interstices of tolerance/intolerance where we can really further a dialogue on intercultural relations. We try to avoid hollow gestures of sympathy and empathy that superficially transform human relations. Challenging the audience to choose whether or not to participate in this or that performance game means it becomes necessary for them to exercise their civic muscles and political intelligence. We strongly believe that performance furthers dialogue by creating various pathways, trajectories, and unsuspected intersections which are mostly discovered/learned through the body and later circulated through language and action. This is precisely where the true political power of the work lies.

In the last hour of the performance, we reverse the gaze and step out of our dioramas. We then create *tableaux vivants* with the most responsive and audacious audience members. We manipulate their personae by sculpting their bodies or by adding or subtracting costumes and props. The distance between performer and audience is completely erased. This is our favorite part of the performance.

Inspired by director Richard Gough, we sometimes set up a food station in the performance space where a local chef cooks his/her favorite dishes. These delicious food snacks are sold with names invented by us to suit the atmosphere of the event. We place the audience member in the uncomfortable position of being a cultural tourist by situating the food station right in front of the catwalk (where an extreme fashion show takes place). We also set up a bar inside the performance space. This encourages a carnival atmosphere throughout the experience. The behavior of the audience changes as they become dramatically less inhibited during and after the ingestion of tropical cocktails or shots of strong liquor. This scenario allows for a more revealing performance for both performers and audience members. We are fully aware that this scenario is dangerous, particularly during the last hour when we frequently give up total control of our dioramas. We often find that post-colonial demons are dancing all around us.

Unless we detect the potential for real physical harm, we let all this happen. Why?

Our objective (at least the conscious one) is to unleash the millennial demons, not to pontificate. As performance artists we wish to understand our new role and place in this culture of extreme spectacle. We believe that these bizarre millennial rituals and games trigger a long-term process of reflexivity in the psyche of the viewer. We hope this leads to deeper ethical and political questions. This heightened awareness allows spectators to look at and accept images they would usually reject as impossible, distasteful, or unrealistic. Later on, the audience will recall them and will have to deal with their own memories in the cold light of day. This allows them to critically question what they have seen and their feelings towards such imagery.

What the live audience ends up experiencing is a stylized anthropomorphization of their/our own post-colonial demons and hallucinations—a kind of cross-cultural poltergeist. The space between self and other, us and them, fear and desire, becomes blurred and unspecific. It becomes ground zero in intercultural relations. In this sense, the performance/installation functions both as a bizarre set design for a contemporary enactment of cultural pathologies and as a ceremonial space for people to reflect on their attitudes toward other cultures.

For the moment, our job is merely to open the Pandora's Box of our times and let the demons loose; to open the infected border wound so to speak. Others (academics and activists) will have to help us understand those demons.

III. Producing Pocha

Producing a large-scale performance by La Pocha Nostra is an exciting pain in the ass. The performance begins to take shape when our eccentric tech-rider arrives. An old-fashioned barber's or dentist's chair, taxidermied animals, realistic-looking weapons, raw meat, prosthetics, and braces are just a few of the items necessary to produce the performance.

The Prop list of "local ethnic kitsch and motifs of problematic depictions of Other cultures" is always the most challenging. The "local" prop list brings together a range of unpredictable elements that will depend on the locality, the resources available to the host producers, and their willingness to search for these arcane, site-specific items.

The producer will need to designate someone from his/her institution / team to lead the scavenger hunt for props, costumes, and design motifs. It may be one person or a group, a pop-archeological brigade. This individual or group of people will have an enormous influence over the look of the final piece. Their local knowledge and connections are essential.

Ideally (for a major project), two other teams will be created alongside the prop team. The technical team (who must understand our aesthetic praxis), and the performance team (these people actually take the workshop and perform) are formed a few weeks before Pocha members arrive at the venue. Once we arrive in town, and our jet lag has worn off, we begin to consolidate these teams and their labor at the

first production meeting. We go over our technical needs, get to know the local artists (or students) who will be working with us over the next few weeks, and check the status of props and costumes that have been collected and those that are still to be found.

At a typical meeting or rehearsal, we'll have good food, some wine (and rum if we're lucky), and lots of strong coffee. Conversations about war, immigration, globalization, and new technologies are interwoven with contemporary art theory and practice. Current affairs and politics are considered in nearly every aesthetic discussion and decision. There is *always* a lot of laughter. A strong feeling of community quickly develops. Rudeness and disrespect are simply not tolerated within the group. Our aim is to avoid, at all costs, the self-destructive existential malaise of the alternative art world—spiritual exhaustion, political quarreling, and cannibalism.

Every performance project we undertake is site, time, and theme specific. Each piece is framed by a different meta-fiction congruent with the cultural and political specificity of the site and/or the overall project. Whether the meta-fiction is some kind of expo, a futuristic museum of ethnography, a Chicano cyber-punk religion, a multi-media opera, an extreme fashion show, or an intelligent rave, it permeates the overall aesthetics of the installation, the performative strategies of each participant, and the advertising campaign.

An example of a Pocha meta-fiction

(For the production of "Ex-Centris" at Tate Modern, 2003)

Written by U.S. performance theorist Leigh Clemmons

A message from our corporate sponsors:

This has been a time of unprecedented global cultural expansion for Ex-Centris, a subsidiary of HysTerra Mimetics, Ltd., p.l.c. As the originators of the now-obsolete World Wide Web of the 20th century, we have now expanded into the far reaches of the world, dominating ethnic fashion, ethnic-specific "real sex" Websites, discount shopping, gourmet coffee, fossil fuel dispersion and the international art market. Ex-Centris realizes HysTerra's dream of the Experimental Prototype Collective-Unconscious Community of Tomorrow (Epcot).

HysTerra, in this case, turned the idea of Epcot into a fantastic theme park showcasing the world's cultural diversity. Now, we bring the spirit of Epcot-Futura to the global market, satisfying your desires for intercultural fetishes, stylized violence, and tastes of culture more crumbly than the cheapest Cornish Pastie. Our favorite component in the HysTerra Ethnographic Showcase, Ex-Centris offers its answer to the Magic Kingdom's *Este es un Mundo Pequeño*. "The Global Adventure" captures the Seoul, so to speak, of this wondrous planet and brings it to life with stirring performances by ethno-cyborg symbionts in their authentically simulated environments. You can enjoy the chance to "interact" with them and opportunities abound for you to enjoy the full pantheon of authentic cultural experiences: from transforming into your ethnicity of choice and engaging in fun S&M "power games," to firing a machine gun at a live Mexican. The heart of the

Panethnic Showcase and home to one of the most incredible ethno-cyborg symbiont shows in HysTerra-y is the Altar to World Religion, featuring the Self-Crucifixion Center, where various ethno-cyborg symbionts will stretch their bodies into culturally dictated religious positions. Finally, you will find assorted educational films to enhance your "total audio-visual experience." Ex-Centris is by far the most "adult" of all the theme parks, but don't be fooled; there is plenty to see and do here and fun for all. We are glad that you have decided to spend a few hours in our world. Neutralizing identity has many challenges. HysTerra will not deny; we will not ignore; we will not pass along our problems to other generations. We will confront them with focus, and clarity, and courage. And we will prevail. Have a nice day!

--Mora Leikmee, Official Quotacon, HysTerra, Ltd.

Disclaimer: No ethno-cyborg simbionts were harmed or exploited in this showcase. After the mandatory six-week quarantine period, all have tested negative for HIV and tuberculosis.

La Pocha Nostra's specific performance marketing techniques are very creative. We regard our marketing campaign as part of the actual performance project. Some of the techniques we have used in the past include: creating fake posters of alleged conservative groups objecting to us being in town, contacting diverse media outlets, community organizations, activist groups, and assorted underground club communities. Our email campaigns are written in performance mode and are intended to create some hype before the piece opens.

An example of Pocha's marketing methods

For a touring project titled 'The Museum of Fetishized Identities', we utilized the following promotional email:

POCHA ANNOUNCES FIRST IN A NEW LINE OF "ETHNO-CYBORGS" DELIVERED TO YOUR LOCAL ART VENUE

Is your cultural institution currently suffering from a lack of audience attendance and/or funds, or post-9/11 philosophical direction?

Pocha Nostra is launching the first in a new line of 'ethno-cyborgs', designed to revive art institutions and performance spaces. All Pocha Nostra Latino performance cyborgs are made in Taiwan.

Named "La Cyborg Chellista #56790*" she comes complete with a range of settings from "empathy" to "search and seizure." She provides you with a wide variety of tools to improve:

- *Multi-Culti Audience Development
- *Identification of new receptive funding sources, and
- *Design of high-tech performative events catering to multiple communities.

For the latest 2003 designs, look out for our fall cyber-catalogue!

For orders and bookings, please call Teknola Mariano at (phone number) or email her at (e-address)

Physically piecing together all the staging elements of a large scale Pocha performance / installation takes between two and three days and involves a minimum of three techs, an on-site producer, between four and eight stagehands, and the performers. All this happens in dialogue with the two or three Pocha artists on site.

The Pocha member's performances are already developed to a certain extent (around 60%) before we get to the site. (We already have a catalogue of personae we can choose to perform. During the workshop we will decide which personae we feel most appropriate for that particular performance). However, if time permits, we may develop new material for a persona during a workshop. We will usually have a rough idea of the structure for our individual performances before the final stages of the workshop. For example, we will have thought about the order in which we might perform the personae, which actions might work better towards the beginning of the piece as more static images, and which would work better near the end so we could involve the audience. We will have decided what tasks we ask the audience to perform and the type of audience member we are looking for to carry out specific actions. The final structure is always unique to the particular site and will emerge organically from the workshop.

Generally, we find the participants and their material need to be poured into our preexisting mold in order for the event to come together over such a short period of time. Given a longer residency, three or more weeks, participants are able to work on and develop new material and may also come up with ideas that might change the structure. However, given our regular two-week time frame, we have to have a tight structure. There is enough flexibility for individuals to find unique performative actions and to create settings for their personae.

The most fixed element is the physical staging of the performance. We work with platforms and a catwalk in the vast majority of our performances. Any successful rehearsal-performance process needs a structure. Structure is the most important element particularly when the workshop involves so many unknowns. Each performance is unique and individual because of these unknowns but we need something to guide us before we (as a group) find our own way. Again, over a longer period of time we may come up with a different structure that could work better in a particular site or with a certain group of performers.

The day before the performance we should have everything in place: video, slides, music, costumes, transitions, audience interactions. There may be unexpected last-minute performers and elements that are integrated into the performance. Some recent examples: In Chicago, a graffiti artist became part of the performance by working on a wall in the gallery. His participation was negotiated a couple of hours before we opened the doors. In Baton Rouge, we involved a real pig and its handler in the piece when we performed in a former rodeo arena called the Pig Palace. They decided to accept our eccentric invitation the day before the performance. In Zurich, we had six huge taxidermied animals, including a seven-foot lion, a mountain goat posed with the Swiss flag, and a monkey. They all arrived in the space on the day of the opening. In San Francisco, our hometown (as in Sydney, Australia), several local performance artists showed up at the last minute with very strong proposals.

We chose to include them in addition to the troupe that had taken the workshop (clearly, not without consulting them first). We managed to find a suitable place for each of them on different nights. Often, these surprise elements work so well, we re-try them again in different contexts. An unexpected element can become the new standard for the next piece.

Up to the rehearsal before opening, we continuously ask ourselves: "How can we make it more complex, layered. At the same time, how can we make it more clear and succinct?" How can we push the outer limits of the piece just 10 % more? Early on opening day, the final, *final* decisions have to be made. This is the point where we say, "OK, now we *have* to stop adding props, costumes, movements, videos, and parachuting performance artists and stick with what we know works." However, since it is an interactive performance, there are more surprises, new juxtapositions, and unpredictable performative audience members who will change the course of the performance over the next three days. The performance will always look and feel different.

Opening night is always the most exciting and dangerous day. We usually meet four hours before call to apply make-up, put on our costumes, refurbish our props, tweak the final details of our "diorama" or individual installations, and warm up. An hour before the performance we stage photographs for a local photographer (pre-selected by us) and we ritually toast our ephemeral, but nonetheless solid, performance troupe. The second adventure begins when the doors open. (Please refer to **Pocha Live** above.)

By the end of the process, we have all become a part of the same dysfunctional family. Real bonds and true artistic, intellectual, and personal friendships are created. A few weeks later, we start the process all over again in another city or country with yet another incredible group of artists and troublemakers. The community grows larger as our health slowly deteriorates and our hearts continue to ache. It's beautiful and painful; what more can we say?

IV. "Ex-Centris": La Pocha's international cultural exchange as political praxis

"La Pocha was born out of the connections made by migrant artists encountering one another on the road. In this sense, Pocha is a way to formalize those connections and maintain an open global network of ongoing artistic and political communication and collaboration."

-Roberto Sifuentes

La Pocha emphasizes the creation of intercultural, cross-border collaborations with performance artists from many countries. Why? It is a direct response to the ironic global phenomenon that immigrants of the "third-world" live within (and redefine the culture of) the much touted first-world (many in the very country responsible for the homeland's hardships). We have challenged ourselves to locate artists in other countries who are involved in the mapping of parallel artistic territories. We seek

out artists who occupy the space between homeland and host country; between cultural memory and present politics; between troubling notions of gender and race. We named our networking project an "*Ex-Centris* (out of center) internationalism."

Our fundamental objective has been to bypass hegemonic centers of cultural power by drafting an ever-evolving cartography that inter-connects nomadic, immigrant, hybrid, and subaltern rebel artists from various countries. We are interested in the cultures generated by the millions of uprooted peoples—the exiles and migrants from so-called Third World countries, the orphans of crumbling nations and states who are moving North and West in search of the source of their despair. In the process, these "orphans" of the developing world are creating a new fusion of high/low culture, which is anti-colonial, oppositional, and experimental. We are interested in their meeting places. In this imaginary cartography, Chicanos and other U.S. Latinos are closer to British Pakistanis, French Algerians and German Turks than to New York City; and the U.S.-Mexico border extends to the Eastern European borders. In this cartography, East L.A. may be closer to Ramalla or the São Paulo favelas than to Santa Monica.

The result has been a series of long-term collaborative performance projects between individuals deemed "artists of color" in the U.S. and artists from the U.K. (London, Birmingham, and Wales), Spain (Barcelona, Cantabria, and the Canary Islands), First Nations Canada, Germany, Poland, Australia, Brazil, Cuba, Peru, and Mexico, among other countries. We seek to articulate another kind of global culture. Emerging from grassroots communities, this hybrid culture often resists, consciously or unconsciously, the "legitimate" forces of globalization. In this sense, we are part of the "Other Global Project." With these concepts in mind, we create collaborative artworks involving between two and fifteen artists from our host country (depending on the time spent in each location and what is possible financially) and three to four Pocha Nostra artists. The workshop and rehearsal process prior to the presentation of the performance searches for thematic connections and an aesthetic common ground.

Once the performance takes place, the next goal is to give continuity to the project. We challenge ourselves to complete the circle by bringing a version of the piece to the U.S. We have to face the provincialism of U.S. funding boards every time we bring one of our international collaborations home. They simply don't understand the political importance of international cultural exchange. We often end up funding and producing the "international" project ourselves. No biggie. Estados Unidos está muy tapado. It's just the way it is.

V. 10 Questions we haven't yet found answers for

1. What is our new place and role as performance artists in the new century?
2. What are the future possible formats for performance art?
3. What do words like "radical," "transgressive," "rebellious," and "oppositional" mean after 9/11?

4. Where are the new borders we must cross?
5. What are the new reasons for sitting at the table together, so to speak, in a time where all progressive political projects seem to be bankrupt?
6. What binds *our* otherwise extremely diverse ethnic identities, aesthetics and community concerns? Is it perhaps the search for radical tolerance and for a new way of presenting and distributing important idea? Or is it the need to find a new spirituality emerging out of the debris of our recently fallen world?
7. Are we able to recuperate the possibility of change in a society like ours, in which all changes implode or are instantly commodified?
8. Is it possible to make politically pertinent art (not "political art") in the face of globalization gone wrong, government censorship, panic culture, mindless interactivity, Reality TV, and the general passivity of the citizenry?
9. How can we continue to deal with extremely sensitive issues without sounding self-righteous or scaring away our audiences?
10. Can we get our audiences to co-create the work with us?