

GUILLERMO VERDECCHIA

(b. 1962)

"The first task of the artist is to decolonize the imagination," Guillermo Verdecchia writes in an essay called "Politics in Playwriting," in which he spells out his unapologetically political credo. As a theatre artist his work is "oppositional and critical." Against "the culture of banality" in which we live he opposes "the vigorous imagination," which recognizes the complexity of our situation and can begin the process of transforming it. But as a product of our culture with its powerful marketing and image-making machinery, even the artist's own imagination is inevitably colonized. So he tries not only to make the audience aware of its ideological blinders but to identify and expose his own complicity in the way things are. Typically then, Verdecchia's plays critique the dominant ideology through a self-conscious character—sometimes called "Verdecchia," sometimes fictionalized or distanced—who acknowledges his own failures and his indulgence in the misplaced values and social crimes he condemns. From the multiple borders on which Verdecchia lives, *Fronteras Americanas* offers a scintillating disquisition on personal and national identities in a post-national world.

Born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Verdecchia came to Canada at the age of two. He grew up in Kitchener, Ontario, dropped out of high school, and studied theatre at Ryerson Polytechnic in Toronto where future director Peter Hinton was an early influence. He worked as an actor for a while, spent the late 1980s in France, then returned to Toronto and collaborated with Hinton and others on a play for young audiences about the police shooting of a black teenager. *i.d.* (1989) won the Chalmers New Play Award and launched Verdecchia's writing career. His next play, *Final Decisions (WAR)*, concerns a woman who discovers that her civil servant husband is involved in political torture during Argentina's "dirty war." Sharon Pollock directed its 1990 premiere at Calgary's Alberta Theatre Projects, and Verdecchia himself directed it in Vancouver.

In France Verdecchia had met Daniel Brooks—soon to enter into creative partnership with Daniel MacIvor—and back in Toronto they found themselves housemates. Discovering a common interest in political philosopher Noam Chomsky, they co-wrote and co-directed a dramatization of Chomsky's ideas about how the hidden biases of the press shape public responses to such events as the Gulf War and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In *The Noam Chomsky Lectures* (1990) Verdecchia and Brooks appear on stage as themselves, lecturing the audience with pointers and slides, drawing examples from the theatre world as well as the larger political sphere, smacking the Artstick or blowing the Whistle of Indignation whenever things become excessively didactic or hectoring. Funny, enlightening and tough-minded ("the real Canadian traditions are quiet complicity and hypocritical moral posturing"), the play opened at Sky Gilbert's Rhubarb! Festival and was remounted three times in the next two years, updated to keep up with current events. It won the Chalmers and earned a Governor General's Award nomination.

Fronteras Americanas was developed through workshops at Canadian Stage and Tarragon with the help of Peter Hinton. Performed by Verdecchia, it opened at Tarragon's Extra Space, played the Festival des Amériques in Montreal, then was remounted at Tarragon's larger Main Space, all in 1993, with subsequent productions in Winnipeg and Vancouver, winning both the Chalmers and Governor General's Awards. *Crucero/Crossroads*, Verdecchia's short film adaptation of the play won awards at five international festivals in 1995.

Verdecchia moved to Vancouver in 1994 after appearing there as Elias in *Amigo's Blue Guitar* and directed *A Line in the Sand* (1995), co-written with Marcus Youssef, for the New Play Centre. Set in the Persian Gulf, the play is based on the notorious torture and murder of a young Somali by Canadian soldiers. Its Tarragon production won Verdecchia his fourth Chalmers. He also directed for Vancouver's Rumble Theatre *The Terrible but Incomplete Journals of John D.* (1996), a solo piece for actor and cellist with echoes of Kafka and Dostoevsky's *Underground Man*. The acute

self-conscious title character examines his own personal failures in the context of his criticizing the "Wal-Mart Universe." Moving back to Toronto in the late '90s, Verdecchia hooked up with Daniel Saks again, co-writing and co-directing *Insomnia* (1998). Its protagonist, John F. (played by Saks), is a direct descendant of John D., trying to work through his guilt about a life badly lived while his marriage falls apart around him.

In addition to his theatre work Verdecchia has written radio documentaries and dramas for CBC, and has published a collection of short stories, *Citizen Suárez* (1998). He has been active in the Association for Canadian Theatre Research, and in 1999 was writer-in-residence at Memorial University. That same year he became artistic director of Cahoots Theatre in Toronto where he lives with his actress Tamsin Kelsey and their two children.

The largely autobiographical *Fronteras Americanas* is rooted in Verdecchia's own feelings, as an immigrant, of cultural deracination and displacement. Writing in the journal *In 2 Print*, he explains: "For years—most of my life—I felt confused and divided in my tongue, my heart, my mind. I was raised as a Canadian, but I did not feel Canadian (whatever that might be), did not want to be Canadian, and secretly thought of myself as Argentinian (whatever that might be). However, when I was as honest with myself I recognized that I was not Argentinian ... I felt like a liar, a fraud, an impostor." The play represents his journey of self-discovery as he travels "home" to Argentina, then comes back to Canada where he finally recognizes that his ultimate citizenship, his real home, is the Border. In that context the apparently straightforward opening line, "Here we are," turns out to be remarkably problematic. Where exactly is *here*? Who exactly are *we*? And what does it mean to be *us*, here, now?

"Learning to live the border" is the challenge the play presents, a challenge aimed in two directions at once. For Verdecchia it involves coming to terms with his own blurry cultural dualism and the expanded sense of personal and political responsibility (and guilt) it seems to entail. For the rest of us—North Americans, Canadians, the theatre audience—it means learning to see through the popular image of Latinos, the people with whom we share this hemisphere in intimate interrelationship, and understanding how our conception of them has been constructed and reinforced. Verdecchia has suggested in an interview that the play need not be quite so culturally specific: "I'd like to see—some day, I hope—a production of *Fronteras Americanas* that is transgendered and performed with an Asian actor, or something. I'd really like to see somebody take the border theme to the next degree." If the trick is to gain new perspective, the play's primary tool for achieving it is the character Wideload, Verdecchia's alter ego, the embodiment of both the privileged insider/outsider position living the border affords, and Verdecchia's own fear of cultural inauthenticity.

With his clichéd appearance and fractured Spanglish, Wideload personifies the most blatant cultural stereotypes of the Latino at the same time as his keen critical intelligence and incisive irony deconstruct them. Both he and Verdecchia set about re-educating the audience à la *The Noam Chomsky Lectures*, using slides and, in the published text, scholarly footnotes. Whereas Verdecchia's lessons are mostly historical and political, Wideload's are primarily sociological. His observations about the Smiths ("my first contact with an ethnic family") and his other "friends from the Saxonian community" point out just how dependent on one's perspective the concept of ethnicity is, and how absurd generalized ethnic labeling can be. In the midst of deconstructing the "I Love Fantasy" he provides the comic *coup de grâce* with his generous reassurance that, while Latinos like him have their rumba, mambo and tango, we "Saxons" too have our own "dance of cultural joy"—the Morris Dance.

Both Verdecchia and Wideload frequently acknowledge the theatrical nature of the proceedings. The theatre is presented as a microcosm of the nation itself, "this Noah's ark of a nation," Canada, with its rich potential for providing border-life's multiple perspectives. The metatheatrics are also a Platonic device, reminding us that this is *theatre*, not reality; that we should not get lost in it, but look back about what we are seeing. At the same time Wideload warns us of the danger of theatrical self-coating: possibly, "it doesn't really matter what I say. Because it's all been kind of funny dis-

evening." This is metatheatre as self-critique, recognizing that theatre itself is an apparatus of cultural construction that needs to be demystified like all the others. Finally, consider the next-to-last section of the play, titled "Consider," in which the "we" of the opening line is perhaps defined at last, and in which the binary, Wideload/Verdecchia—the divided self—comes together for the first time. Remember that the two characters are played by the same actor. This is some kind of theatrical magic. And through it "the old binary models," to quote the Gómez-Peña slide in the play, give way to the "fluctuating sense of self" which represents the true experience of living the border.

Fronteras Americanas was first produced at the Tarragon Theatre Extra Space, Toronto, in January 1993.

VERDECCHIA and
FECUNDO MORALES SECUNDO
aka WIDELOAD MCKENNAH

Guillermo Verdecchia

Directed by Jim Warren
Designed by Glenn Davidson

ACT ONE

FRONTERAS AMERICANAS

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Fronteras Americanas began as a long letter to a close friend that I wrote during a trip to Argentina in 1989. Re-reading it—I made a copy of it for some mysterious reason—I found that hidden beneath the travelogue were some intensely personal questions that I had been struggling with for some time but which I could only now begin to articulate. In an attempt to better understand those questions I began to read, reflect and write.

Fronteras Americanas makes no claim to be the definitive explanation of the Latin experience in North America, or the immigrant experience, or anything of that nature. Our experiences on this continent are too varied, too fantastic to ever be encompassed in any single work. *Fronteras Americanas* is part of a process, part of a much larger attempt to understand and to invent. As such, it is provisional, atado con alambre. In performance, changes were made nightly depending on my mood, the public, our location, the arrangement of the planets ... I hope that anyone choosing to perform this text will consider the possibilities of making (respectful) changes and leaving room for personal and more current responses.

ACT ONE

As the audience enters, James Blood Ulmer's "Show Me Your Love (America)" plays. Two slides are projected.

SLIDE: It is impossible to say to which human family we belong. We were all born of one mother, America, though our fathers had different origins, and we all have differently coloured skins. This dissimilarity is of the greatest significance.

—Simón Bolívar

SLIDE: Fronteras. Borders. Americanas. American.

Welcome

VERDECCHIA enters.

VERDECCHIA: Here we are. All together. At long last. Very exciting. I'm excited. Very excited. Here we are.

SLIDE: Here We Are

VERDECCHIA: Now because this is the theatre when I say "we" I mean all of us and when I say "here" I don't just mean at the Tarragon, I mean America.

SLIDE: Let us compare geographies

VERDECCHIA: And when I say AMERICA I don't mean the country, I mean the continent. Somos todos Americanos. We are all Americans.

Now—I have to make a small confession—I'm lost. Somewhere in my peregrinations on the continent, I lost my way.

Oh sure I can say I'm in Toronto, at 30 Bridgman Avenue, but I don't find that a very satisfactory answer—it seems to me a rather inadequate description of where I am.

Maps have been of no use because I always forget that they are metaphors and not the territory; the compass has never made any sense—it always spins in crazy circles. Even gas-station attendants haven't been able to help; I can never remember whether it was a right or a left at the lights and I always miss the exits and have to sleep by the side of the road or in crummy hotels with beds that have Magic Fingers that go off in the middle of the night.

So, I'm lost and trying to figure out where I took that wrong turn ... and I suppose you must be lost too or else you wouldn't have ended up here, tonight.

I suspect we got lost while crossing the border.

SLIDE: Make a run for the border / Taco Bell's got your order

VERDECCHIA: The Border is a tricky place. Take the Latin–North American border.

SLIDE: map of the Mexico–U.S. border

Where and what exactly is the border? Is it this line in the dirt, stretching for 3,000 kilometres? Is the border more accurately described as a zone which includes the towns of El Paso and Ciudad Juárez? Or is the border—is the border the whole

country, the continent? Where does the U.S. end and Canada begin? Does the U.S. end at the 49th parallel or does the U.S. only end at your living room when you switch on the CBC? After all, as Carlos Fuentes reminds us, a border is more than just the division between two countries; it is also the division between two cultures and two memories.¹

SLIDE: Remember the Alamo?

VERDECCHIA: *The Atlantic* has something to say about the border: "The border is transient. The border is dangerous. The border is crass. The food is bad, the prices are high, and there are no good bookstores. It is not the place to visit on your next vacation."²

To minimize our inconvenience, I've hired a translator who will meet us on the other side. The border can be difficult to cross. We will have to avoid the Border Patrol and the trackers who cut for sign. Some of you may wish to put carpet on the soles of your shoes, others may want to attach cow's hooves to your sneakers. I myself will walk backwards so that it looks like I'm heading north.

Before we cross please disable any beepers, cellular phones or fax machines and reset your watches to border time. It is now Zero Hour.

El Bandito

Music: "Aquí vienen los Mariachi"

SLIDE: Warning

SLIDE: Gunshots will be fired in this performance

SLIDE: Now

Gunshots. The performer appears wearing bandito outfit. He has shifted into his other persona, WIDELoad.

WIDELoad: Ay! Ayayayay! Aja. Bienvenidos. Yo soy el mesonero acá en La Casa de La Frontera. Soy el guía. A su servicio. Antes de pasar, por favor, los latinos se pueden identificar? Los "latinoamericanos" por favor que pongan las manos en el aire ... (*He counts.*) Que lindo ... mucho gusto ... Muy bien. Entonces el resto son ... gringos. Lo siguiente es para los gringos:

Eh, jou en Méjico now. Jou hab crossed de border. Why? What you lookin' for? Taco Bell nachos wif "salsa sauce," cabrón? Forget it

gringo. Dere's no pinche Taco Bell for thousands of miles. Here jou eat what I eat and I eat raw jalopeño peppers on dirty, burnt tortillas, wif some calopinto peppers to give it some flavour! I drink sewer water and tequila. My breath keells small animals. My shit destroys lakes. Jou come dis far south looking for de authentic Méjico? Jou looking for de real mezcal wit de real worm in it? I'll show you de real worm—I'll show jou de giant Mexican trouser snake. I will show you fear in a handful of dust ...

Jou wrinklín' jour nose? Someting stink? Somebody smell aroun' here? Si, I esmell. I esmell because I doan bathe. Because bad guys doan wash. Never.

Bandito maldito, independista, Sandinista, Tupamaro, mao mao powpowpow.

He removes bandito outfit.

Ees an old Hallowe'en costume. Scary huh?

Introduction to Wideload

WIDELoad: Mi nombre es Facundo Morales Segundo. Algunos me llaman El Tigre del Barrio. También me dicen El Alacran ...

Music: "La Cumbia Del Facundo," Steve Jordan

My name ees Facundo Morales Segundo. Some of you may know me as de Barrio Tiger. I am a direct descendant of Túpac Amaru, Pancho Villa, Doña Flor, Pedro Navaja, Sor Juana and Speedy Gonzalez. I am de heads of Alfredo García and Joaquín Murrieta. I am de guy who told Elton John to grow some funk of his own.

Now when I first got here people would say, "Sorry what's de name? Facoondoe?"

"No mang, Fa-cun-do, Facundo."

"Wow, dat's a new one. Mind if I call you Fac?"

"No mang, mind if I call you shithead?"

So, you know, I had to come up with a more Saxonical name. And I looked around for a long time till I found one I liked. And when I found the one I wanted I took it. I estole it actually from a TV show—*Broken Badge* or something like that. I go by the name Wideload McKennah now and I get a lot more respect, ese.

SLIDE: Wideload

WIDELoad: I live in de border ... I live in de zone, de barrio and I gotta move 'cause dat neighbourhood is going to de dogs. 'Cause dere's

a lot of yuppies moving in and dey're wrecking de neighbourhood and making all kinds of noise wif renovating and landscaping and knocking down walls and comparing stained glass.

So I gotta move.

But first I gotta make some money—I want to cash in on de Latino Boom. Ya, dere's a Latino Boom, we are a very hot commodity right now. And what I really want to do is get a big chunk of toxic wasteland up on de Trans-Canada highway and make like a third-world theme park.

You know, you drive up to like big barbed wire gates with guards carrying sub-machine-guns and you park your car and den a broken-down Mercedes Benz bus comes along and takes you in under guard, of course. And you can buy an International Monetary Fund Credit Card for fifty bucks and it gets you on all de rides.

And as soon as you're inside somebody steals your purse and a policeman shows up but he's totally incompetent and you have to bribe him in order to get any action. Den you walk through a slum on the edge of a swamp wif poor people selling tortillas. And maybe like a disappearing rain-forest section dat you can actually wander through and search for rare plants and maybe find de cure to cancer and maybe find ... Sean Connery ... and you rent little golf carts to drive through it and de golf cart is always breaking down and you have to fix it yourself. And while you're fixing de golf cart in de sweltering noon-day sun a drug lord comes along in his hydrofoil and offers to take you to his villa where you can have lunch and watch a multi-media presentation on drug processing.

I figure it would do great—you people love dat kinda *shit*. I mean if de Maharishi can get a theme park going ... And I can also undercut dose travel agencies dat are selling package tours of Brazilian slums. Dis would be way cheaper, safer and it would generate a lot of jobs. For white people too. And I would make some money and be able to move out of the barrio and into Forest Hill.

Ya, a little house in Forest Hill. Nice neighbourhood. Quiet. Good place to bring up like fifteen kids. Course dis country is full of nice neighbourhoods—Westmount in Montreal looks good, or Vancouver you know, Point Grey is lovely or Kitsilano it's kind of like de Beaches here in Toronto. Or de Annex—mang, I love de Annex: you got professionals, you got families, you got

professional families. Ya I could live dere. Hey mang, we could be neighbours—would you like dat? Sure, I'm moving in next door to ... you ... and I'm going to wash my Mustang every day and overhaul de engine and get some grease on de sidewalk and some friends like about twelve are gonna come and stay with me for a few ... years. You like music? Good!
Ya, how 'bout a Chicano for a neighbour? Liven up de neighbourhood.

SLIDE: Chicano: a person who drives a loud car that sits low to the ground?

a kind of Mexican?

generic term for a working class Latino?

a wetback?

a Mexican born in Saxon America?

WIDELOAD: Technically, I don't qualify as a Chicano. I wasn't born in East L.A. I wasn't born in de southwest U.S.A. I wasn't even born in Méjico. Does dis make me Hispanic?

SLIDE: Hispanic: someone who speaks Spanish? a Spaniard?

a Latino?

root of the word spic?

WIDELOAD: Dese terms, *Latino*, *Hispanic*, are very tricky you know, but dey are de only terms we have so we have to use dem wif caution. If you will indulge me for a moment I would like to make this point painfully clear.

De term *Hispanic*, for example, comes from the Roman word *Hispania*, which refers to de Iberian peninsula or Espain. Espain is a country in Europe. Many people who today are referred to as Hispanic have nothin to do wif Hispain. Some of dem don't even speak Hispanish.

De term *Latino* is also confusing because it lumps a whole lot of different people into one category. Dere is a world of difference between de right wing Cubans living in Miami, exiled Salvadorean leftists, Mexican speakers of Nahuatl, Brazilian speakers of Portuguese, Ticos, Nuyoricans (dat's a Puerto Rican who lives in New York) and den dere's de Uruguayans—I mean dey're practically European ... As for me, let's just say ... I'm a pachuco.³

It Starts

VERDECCHIA: Okay, I just want to stop for a second before we get all confused.

ve known that I've been lost for quite some time
w—years and years—but if I can find the
oment that I first discovered I was lost, there
ght be a clue ...

is all starts with Jorge. After I'd been in therapy
a few months, Jorge suggested I go see El
jo. I wasn't keen on the idea, being both
optical and afraid of things like curanderos, but
ge was persuasive and lent me bus fare enough
get me at least as far as the border ...

actually starts before that. It starts in France,
is, France, the Moveable Feast, the City of
ht, where I lived for a couple of years. En
nce où mes étudiants me disaient que je
lais le français comme une vache Catalan. En
nce où j'étais étranger, un anglais, un
gentin-Canadien, un faux touriste. Paris,
nce where I lived and worked illegally, where
would produce my transit pass whenever
licemen asked for my papers. In France, where
was undocumented, extralegal, marginal and
ere for some reason, known perhaps only by
rlos Gardel and Julio Cortázar, I felt almost at
me.

it starts before the City of Light, in the City of
dge: Kitchener, Ontario. There in Kitchener,
ere I learned to drive, where I first had sex,
ere there was nothing to do but eat doughnuts
d dream of elsewhere. There in Kitchener,
ere I once wrote a letter to the editor and sug-
sted that it was not a good idea to ban books in
ools, and it was there in Kitchener that a
anger responded to my letter and suggested
it I go back to my own country.

It starts, in fact, at the airport where my par-
ts and my grandparents and our friends could-
stop crying and hugged each other continual-
and said goodbye again and again until the
wardess finally came and took me out of my
her's arms and carried me on to the plane,
cing my parents to finally board—
aybe. Maybe not.

aybe it starts with Columbus. Maybe it starts
th the genius Arab engineer who invented the
lder. Maybe a little history is required to put
s all in order.

History

SLIDE: An Idiosyncratic History of America

VERDECCHIA: Our History begins approximately
200 million years ago in the Triassic Period of the
Mesozoic Era when the original supercontinent
Pangaea broke up and the continents of the earth
assumed the shapes we now recognize.

SLIDE: map of the world

5000 B.C.: The first settlements appear in the
highlands of Mexico and in the Andes mountains.
1500 B.C.: The pyramid at Teotihuacán is built.
(*SLIDE: photo of the pyramid*)

Early 1400's A.D.: Joan of Arc (*SLIDE: statue of
Joan of Arc*) is born and shortly thereafter burned.
At the same time, the Incas in Peru develop a
highly efficient political system.

1492: Catholic Spain is very busy integrating the
Moors. These Moors or Spaniards of Islamic
culture who have been in Spain some 700 years
suffer the same fate as the Spanish Jews: they are
converted, or exiled, their heretical books and
bodies burned.

SLIDE: portrait of Christopher Columbus

Yes, also in 1492: this chubby guy sails the ocean
blue.

1500: Pedro Cabral stumbles across what we
now call Brazil—Portugal, fearing enemy attacks,
discourages and suppresses writing about the
colony.

1542: The Spanish Crown passes the Laws of the
Indies. These Laws state that the settlers have
only temporary concessions to these lands while
the real owners are the Native Americans.
Curiously, the Spanish Crown does not inform the
Natives that the land is legally theirs. An
oversight no doubt.

1588: The invincible Spanish Armada is defeated.
Spain grows poorer and poorer as gold from the
New World is melted down to pay for wars and
imported manufactured goods from the devel-
oped northern countries. El Greco finishes *The
Burial of Count Orgaz*.

SLIDE: The Burial of Count Orgaz

Lope de Vega writes *La Dragontea*. Calderón de
La Barca and Velázquez are about to be born.

1808: Beethoven writes Symphonies 5 & 6.
France invades Spain and in the power vacuum
wars of independence break out all over New

Spain. Goya paints (*SLIDE: Executions of the Citizens of Madrid*) *Executions of the Citizens of Madrid*.

1812: Beethoven writes Symphonies 7 & 8 and a war breaks out in North America.

1832: Britain occupies the Malvinas Islands and gives them the new, silly name of the Falklands.

1846: The U.S. attacks Mexico.

1863: France attacks Mexico and installs an Austrian as emperor.

1867: Mexico's Austrian emperor is executed, volume one of *Das Kapital* is published and the Dominion of Canada is established.

1902: Gorki writes *The Lower Depths*, the U.S. acquires control over the Panama Canal and Beatrix Potter writes *Peter Rabbit*. (*SLIDE: illustration from Peter Rabbit*)

1961: Ernest Hemingway kills himself, (*SLIDE: photo of Ernest Hemingway*) *West Side Story* (*SLIDE: photo of the "Sharks" in mid-dance*) wins the Academy Award, a 680-pound giant sea bass is caught off the Florida coast (*SLIDE: photo of large fish*) and the U.S. attacks Cuba. (*SLIDE: photo of Fidel Castro*)

1969: Richard Nixon (*SLIDE: photo of Richard Nixon*) is inaugurated as president of the U.S., Samuel Beckett (*SLIDE: photo of Samuel Beckett*) is awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, the Montreal Canadiens (*SLIDE: photo of the 1969 Canadiens team*) win the Stanley Cup for hockey and I attend my first day of classes at Anne Hathaway Public School.

Roll Call

Music: "God Save the Queen"

VERDECCHIA: I am seven years old. The teacher at the front of the green classroom reads names from a list.

"Jonathon Kramer?"

Jonathon puts his hand up. He is a big boy with short red hair.

"Sandy Nemeth?"

Sandy puts her hand up. She is a small girl with long hair. When she smiles we can see the gap between her front teeth.

"Michael Uffelman?"

Michael puts his hand up. He is a tall boy with straight brown hair sitting very neatly in his chair. My name is next.

Minutes, hours, a century passes as the teacher, Miss Wiseman, forces her mouth into shapes hitherto unknown to the human race as she attempts to pronounce my name.

"Gwillyou—ree—moo ... Verdeek—cheea?"

I put my hand up. I am a minuscule boy with ungovernable black hair, antennae and gills where everyone else has a mouth.

"You can call me Willy," I say. The antennae and gills disappear.

It could have been here—but I don't want to talk about myself all night.

Wideload's Terms

WIDELOAD: Thank God. I mean I doan know about you but I hate it when I go to el teatro to de theatre and I am espectin' to see a play and instead I just get some guy up dere talking about himself—deir life story—who cares? por favor ... And whatever happened to plays anyway—anybody remember plays? Like wif a plot and like a central character? Gone de way of modernism I guess and probaly a good thing too. I mean I doan know if I could stand to see another play about a king dat's been dead for 400 years— Anyway—

The Smiths

WIDELOAD: When I first got to América del Norte I needed a place to live and I didn't have a lot of money so I stayed wif a family. The Smiths—Mr. and Mrs. and deir two kids Cindy and John. And it was nice you know. Like it was like my first contact with an ethnic family and I got a really good look at de way dey live. I mean sure at times it was a bit exotic for me, you know de food for example, but mostly I just realized they were a family like any other wif crazy aunts and fights and generation gaps and communication problems and two cars, a VCR, a microwave, a cellular phone and a dog named Buster dat ate my socks.

Dey wanted to know all about me so I told dem stories about my mafioso uncle El Gato and how he won a tank and his wife in a poker game, and stories about my aunt, the opera singer, Luisa la Sonrisa, and about my cousin, Esperanza, about her border crossings and how she almost fell in love.

I came here because I wanted some perspective—you know working for a mafioso gives you a very particular point of view about de world. You know, we all need a filter to look at de world through. Like standing in Latin America I get a clear view of Norteamérica and standing on Latin America while living in Norf America gives me a new filter, a new perspective. Anyway, it was time to change my filter so I came here to estudy. Sí, thanks to mi tío El Gato and my cousin Esperanza who always used to say, "You should learn to use your brain or somebody else will use it for you," I practically have a doctorate in Chicano studies. Dat's right—Chicano studies ... Well not exactly a doctorate, more like an M.A. or most of an M.A., 'cause I got my credits all screwed up and I didn't finish—my professors said I was ungovernable. I lacked discipline. You know instead of like doing a paper on de historical roots of the oppression of La Raza I organized an all-night Salsa Dance Party Extravaganza. I also organized de month-long "Chico and de Man" Memorial Symposium which I dedicated to my cousin, Esperanza, back home.

Going Home

VERDECCHIA: I had wanted to go home for many years but the fear of military service in Argentina kept me from buying that plane ticket. Nobody was certain but everybody was pretty sure that I had committed treason by not registering for my military service when I was sixteen, even though I lived in Canada. Everybody was also reasonably sure that I would be eligible for military service until I was thirty-five. And everybody was absolutely certain that the minute I stepped off a plane in Buenos Aires, military policemen would spring from the tarmac, arrest me and guide me to a jail cell where they would laugh at my earrings and give me a proper haircut.

I phoned the consulate one day to try to get the official perspective on my situation. I gave a false name and I explained that I wanted to go HOME for a visit, that I was now a Canadian citizen and no, I hadn't registered for my military service. The gentleman at the consulate couldn't tell me exactly what my status was but he suggested that I come down to the consulate where they would put me on a plane which would fly me directly to Buenos Aires where I would appear before a

military tribunal who could tell me in no uncertain terms what my status actually was.

"Well I'll certainly consider that," I said.

And I waited seven years. And in those seven years, the military government is replaced by a civilian one and I decide I can wait no longer; I will risk a return HOME. I set off to discover the Southern Cone.

To minimize my risk I apply for a new Canadian passport which does not list my place of birth, (*SLIDE: passport photos*) and I plan to fly first to Santiago, Chile and then cross the border in a bus that traverses the Andes and goes to Mendoza, Argentina.

After an absence of almost fifteen years I am going home. Going Home. I repeat the words softly to myself—my mantra: I Am Going Home—all will be resolved, dissolved, revealed, I will claim my place in the universe when I Go Home.

Music: "Vuelvo Al Sur," Roberto Goyeneche

I have spent the last fifteen years preparing for this. I bought records and studied the liner notes. I bought maté and dulce de leche. I talked to my friends, questioned my parents and practised my Spanish with strangers. I befriended former Montonero and Tupamaro guerrillas and people even more dangerous like Jorge: painter, serious smoker, maître de café. Jorge the Apocryphal, Jorge of the savage hair. Jorge who moved to Italy and left me alone with my memories. I've spent the past fifteen years reading newspapers, novels and every Amnesty International report on South America. I tracked down a Salvador Allende poster, found postcards of Che and Pablo Neruda. I drank Malbec wines and black market Pisco with a Chilean macro-economist whose cheques always bounced. I learned the words and sang along with Cafrune and Goyeneche. I saw *Missing* three times.

Santiago

VERDECCHIA: Santiago, Chile.

Chile, your Fodor's travel guide will tell you, immediately strikes the visitor as very cosmopolitan and is known for its award-winning wines and excellent seafood. Chileans, Fodor's tells us, are a handsome, stylish people known for their openness and hospitality. My 1989 Fodor's guide also tells me that under Pinochet, Chile enjoys a

more stable political climate than it did in the early seventies, but reports persist of government-sponsored assassinations, kidnappings and torture. (Tell me about it man, I saw *Missing*.)

Well, it is now 1990 and the horrific Pinochet dictatorship is a thing of the past. I ride a comfortable bus into Santiago and continue reading my Fodor's: unfortunately, South America's democracies seem to have higher street-crime rates than the police states. I guess it all depends on how you define street crime. I look out the window and read the graffiti: Ojo! La derecha no duerme. I count all the policemen, one per block it seems. What was it like under Pinochet? A policeman in every house?

Music: "Jingo," Carlos Santana

Tired from a ten-hour flight, I check into the Hotel de Don Tito, listed on page 302 of your Fodor's as a moderate, small hotel with six suites, eight twins, eight singles, bar, homey atmosphere, and it's located on one of the main streets in Santiago on Huérfanos at Huérfanos 578. (*Huérfanos*—Spanish for *orphans*.) I shower, shave and take an afternoon nap.

Three blasts from the street wake me up and pull me to the window.

There, three storeys below, directly in front of the moderate and homey Hotel de Don Tito, there on the road, directly below my window, there a man in a suit, his shirt soaked an impossible red, lies writhing as an enormous crowd gathers. I reach for my camera and begin to take photographs. I take photographs with a 135 mm. telephoto and then change lenses to get a sense of the crowd that has built up. I take photographs of the man who was shot on the first day of my return home after an absence of almost fifteen years, as more policemen arrive pulling weapons from their jean jackets. I take photographs as the man in the suit, his lower body apparently immobilized, reaches wildly for the legs that surround him, as the motorcycle police expertly push the crowd away from the Hotel de Don Tito, moderate in Fodor's, Huérfanos 578, homey, page 302. I take photographs as still more policemen arrive waving things that look like Uzis. I take photographs with a Pentax MX and a 35 mm. F2.8 lens as the dying man, one of his shoes lying beside him, his gun on the road, gives up reaching for the legs around him. I take photographs from my room in the Hotel de Don Tito, Huérfanos 578, moderate in

Fodor's, as the press arrives and NO AMBULANCE EVER COMES. I take photographs, 64 ASA Kodachromes, as he dies and I take photographs as the policemen (all men) talk to each other and I wonder if anyone has seen me and I take photographs as the policemen smoke cigarettes and cover him up and I take photographs and I realize that I have willed this to happen.

Dancing

WIDELOAD: Oye, you know I do like you Saxons. Really, you guys are great. I always have a very good time whenever we get together. Like sometimes, I'll be out with some friends from de Saxonian community and we'll be out at a bar having a few cervezas, you know, vacilando, and some music will be playing and "La Bamba" will come on. And all de Saxons get all excited and start tappin' deir toes and dey get all carried away and start doing dis thing with deir heads ... and dey get dis look in deir eyes like it's Christmas an dey look at me and say, "Hey Wideload, 'La Bamba.'"

"Ya mang, la puta bamba."

"Wideload man, do you know de words?"

"Do I know de words?"

"Mang, do I have an enorme pinga? Of course I know de words: pala pala pala la bamba ... Who doesn't know de words?"

Music: "Navidad Negra," Ramiro's Latin Orchestra

WIDELOAD: Espeaking of music I haf to say dat I love de way you guys dance. I think you Saxons are some of de most interesting dancers on de planet. I lof to go down to the Bamboo when my friend Ramiro is playing and just watch you guys dance because you are so free—like nothing gets in your way: not de beat, not de rhythm, nothing. What I especially like to watch is like a Saxon guy dancing wif a Latin woman. Like she is out dere and she's smiling and doing a little cu-bop step and she's having a good time and de Saxon guy is like trying really hard to keep up, you know he's making a big effort to move his hips independently of his legs and rib cage and he's flapping his arms like a flamenco dancer. Generally speaking dis applies just to the male Saxon—Saxon women seem to have learned a move or two ...

Of course part of de problem is dat you guys wear very funny shoes for dancing—I mean like dose giant running shoes with built-in air compressors and padding and support for de ankles and nuclear laces—I mean you might as well try dancing wif snowshoes on. Your feet have got to be free, so dat your knees are free so dat your hips are free—so dat you can move your culo wif impunity.

So dere dey are dancing away: de Saxon guy and de Latin woman or de Saxon woman and de Latin guy and de Saxon, you can see de Saxon thinking: Wow, he/she can really dance, he/she can really move those hips, he/she keeps smiling, I think he/she likes me, I bet he/she would be great in bed ...

Now dis is important so I'm going to continue talking about it—even though it always gets real quiet whenever I start in on this stuff.

Now dere are two things at work here: the first is the fact that whenever a Latin and a Saxon have sex it is going to be a mind-expanding and culturally enriching experience porque nosotros sabemos hacer cosas que ni se imaginaron en la *Kama Sutra*, porque nosotros tenemos un ritmo, un calor un sabor un tumbao de timbales de conga de candomble de kilombo. Una onda, un un dos tres, un dos. Saben ... ?

Dat's de first factor at work and for dose of you who want a translation of dat come and see me after de show or ask one of de eSpanish espeakers in de audience at intermission.

De second component is the Exotica Factor. De Latin Lover Fantasy. And I'll let you in on a little secret: Latins are no sexier dan Saxons—well maybe just a little. De difference is dis: we like it. A lot. And we practise. A lot. Like we touch every chance we get.

Now I doan want you to get de impression I'm picking on you Saxons. Nothing could be further from my mind ... I have de greatest respect for your culture ... and you know, every culture has its own fertility dances, its own dance of sexual joy—you people hab de Morris Dance, (SLIDE: photo of Morris Dancers in mid-dance) and hey, you go to a Morris Dance Festival and it's de Latinos who look silly. You have de Morris Dance—very sexy dance—you know, a bunch of guys hopping around wif bells on and every once in a while swinging at each other. Now, I am not doing de dance justice and I am looking for a Morris Dance teacher so if you know of one

please pass deir name along. You have de Morris Dance and we have de mambo, de rumba, de cumbia, de son, son-guajiro, son-changui, de charanga, de merengue, de guaguanco, de tango, de samba, salsa ... shall I continue?

Latin Lover

WIDELoad: Latin Lovers.

SLIDE: photo of Antonio Banderas

Dis is Antonio Banderas. He is a Spanish actor, a Spaniard from Spain. Dat's in Europe. Some of you may know him from Almódovar films like *Tie Me Up, Tie Me Down* and some of you may know him from de Madonna movie where he appears as de object of her desire and some of you may know him from *De Mambo Kings* based on de excellent book by Oscar Hijuelos. Now according to *Elle* magazine (and dey should know), (SLIDE: *Elle* magazine cover) Antonio Banderas is de latest incarnation of de Latin Lover. It says right here: "Antonio Banderas—A Latin Love God Is Born."

De Latin Lover is always being reincarnated. Sometimes de Latin Lover is a woman—Carmen Miranda for example. (SLIDE: photo of Carmen Miranda) She was Brazilian. Poor Carmen, smiling, sexy even with all dose goddamned bananas on her head—do you know she ended up unemployable, blacklisted because a certain Senator named McCarthy found her obscene?

(SLIDE: photo of Delores Del Rio) Dere was also Delores Del Rio,

(SLIDE: photo of Maria Montez) Maria Montez, some of you may remember her as Cobra Woman,

(SLIDE: photo of Rita Moreno) den Rita Moreno. Today we have Sonia Braga ... (SLIDE: photo of Sonia Braga)

(SLIDE: photo of Rudolph Valentino) For de men dere was Rudolph Valentino,

(SLIDE: photo of Fernando Lamas) Fernando Lamas,

(SLIDE: photo of Ricardo Montalban) Mr. Maxwell House and of course ...

SLIDE: photo of Desi Arnaz

Desi Arnaz whom we all remember as Ricky Ricardo from *Ricky and Lucy* those all-time-great TV lovers. Now Ricky may not exactly live up to de steamy image of unbridled sexuality we

expect from our Latin Lovers but you have to admit he's a pretty powerful icon. Funny, cute, musical and more often than not, ridiculous.

Let's see what *Elle* magazine has to say about Latin Lovers: "He's short dark and handsome, with lots of black hair from head to chest. He's wildly emotional, swinging from brooding sulks to raucous laughter and singing loudly in public. He's relentlessly romantic, with a fixation on love that looks to be total: he seems to be always about to shout, 'I must have you.'" (SLIDE: *I must have you.*) "He is the Latin Lover, an archetype of masculinity built for pleasure."

The article begins by explaining the myth of the Latin Lover and then uses the myth to explain Banderas. Banderas cannot explain himself apparently because his English is too limited.

In *Mirabella*, (SLIDE: *Mirabella cover*) another glossy magazine, there is another article on Banderas and it describes how Banderas pronounces the word LOVE. He pronounces it "Loov-aaa." Ooooh isn't that sweet and sexy and don't you just want to wrap him up in your arms and let him whisper filthy things in your ear in Spanish and broken English? Especially when, as also described in the *Mirabella* article, he wipes his mouth on the tablecloth and asks, "What can I do?" Don't you just want to fuck him? I do. I wonder though if it would be quite so disarming or charming if it was Fidel Castro wiping his mouth on the tablecloth?

SLIDE: *Gentleman's Quarterly cover*

Dis is Armand Assante.

He plays Banderas's brother in the movie *Mambo Kings*.

He is an Italo-American.

The subtitle here says "De Return of Macho." Did macho go away for a while? I hadn't noticed. Anyway, it has returned for those of you who missed it.

According to this article in *GQ*, Signor Assante almost did not get the part in the movie because the studio, Warner Brothers, wanted a name—they wanted a big-name A-list actor—like Robin Williams to play a Cuban. But according to the article the director of the movie had the "cajones" (SLIDE: *cajones*) to buck the studio and give the part to Assante.

Cajones ... Now the word I think they want to use is *cojones*, (SLIDE: *cojones*) which is a colloquial term for testicles. What they've ended

up with in *GQ* magazine is a sentence that means the director had the crates or boxes to buck the studio.

SLIDE: *cojones = testicles*

SLIDE: *cajones = crates*

Could be just a typo but you never know.

Now I find it really interesting that all of the advance publicity for this movie was concentrated in the fashion-magazine trade. When a Hollywood trade-magazine and major newspapers tell me the movie feels authentic and when the movie is pre-sold because its stars are sexy Latino love gods and macho and 'cause they wear great clothes, I begin to suspect that the movie is another attempt to trade on the look, the feel, the surface of things Latin.

It goes back to this thing of Latin Lovers being archetypes of men and women built for pleasure. Whose pleasure? Your movie-going pleasure? The pleasure of the Fashion-Industry-Hollywood complex? Think about it—

In those movies we can't solve our own problems we can't win a revolution without help from gringos, we can't build the pyramids at Chichén Itzá without help from space aliens, we don't win the Nobel Prize, no, instead we sing, we dance, we fuck like a dream, we die early on, we sleep a lot, we speak funny, we cheat on each other, we get scared easy, we amuse you. And it's not just in the movies—it's in—

A loud buzzer goes off.

Dere goes the buzzer—indicating that some of the five minutes of the show have elapsed and that fifteen minutes remain till intermission. Unofficial tests indicate that audiences get restless at the forty-five-minute mark so we're going to take the briefest of breaks and give you the opportunity to shift around in your seats and scratch your culo and whisper to the person next to you.

And during this break we are gonna see some clips from a mega-musical spectacular that will be opening here soon. It's called *Miss Tijuana*. They are gonna be building a special theatre to host *Miss Tijuana* 'cause it's a very big show with lots of extras. It's going to be an Adobe Theatre at Adobe Sound.

Here's the break.

leo clips of cartoons and movies featuring, long other things: Latinos, Hispanics, dopey asants, Anthony Quinn and a certain mouse. eesy music plays. Then the loud buzzer goes again.

vel Sickness

RDECCHIA: When I travel I get sick. I've own up in most of the major centres of the stern world: Paris, Rome, Madrid, New York, don, Venice, Seaforth, Ontario, Calgary ... d it's not just too much to drink or drugs, netimes it's as simple as the shape of the uds in the sky or the look on someone's face he market or the sound my shoes make on the et. These things are enough to leave me king and sweating in bed with a churning mach, no strength in my legs and unsettling ams.

ill, I'm in Buenos Aires and so far I haven't own up. So far, Everything's Fine.

meet in Caballito. And Alberto and I have iner in a bright, noisy restaurant called The le Pigs and Everything's Fine. And now we're rking for a place to hear some music, a place San Telmo to hear some contemporary music, tango and not folklore. Alberto wants to go a band called Little Balls of Ricotta and ything's Fine, but first we have to get the flat on his Fiat fixed. We stop at a gomería, a ord which translated literally would be a bberly," it's a place where they fix tires. I'm ling like I need some air so I get out of the car d Everything's Fine, I'm looking at Alberto in a gomería there's this weird green light in the op and I'm leaning over the car and suddenly I feel very hot and awful and just as quickly I suddenly feel better. I wake up and I'm sitting on a road and somebody's thrown up on me, then realize the vomit is my own and I'm in Buenos es and I'm sick and I've thrown up and we're a tricky part of town and the cops will be ssing by any minute and I haven't done my litary service—

berto puts me in the back of the car. From the mería, Alberto brings me half a Coke can ose edges have been carefully trimmed and d down—a cup of water. I lie in the back of erto's uncle's Fiat as we pull away. There's a ock at the window and I'm sure it's the police ring, "Excuse me but have you got a young

man who hasn't done his military service in there, a degenerate who's vomited all over the street?"—but no, it's the guy from the gomería: he wants his Coke-can cup back.

We drive back to my apartment, not mine actually, my grandmother's, but she's not there for some reason and I'm using it. I'm feeling a little better but weak, can't raise my head, I watch Buenos Aires spin and speed past and around me, through the back window, like a movie I think, ya that's it, I'm in a Costa Gavras film.

I'm on the toilet in my grandmother's apartment, I leave tomorrow, back to Canada, and I ruined this last evening by getting sick, I can't fly like this all poisoned and I have to throw up again and the bidet is right there, and for some reason I remember Alberto telling me how by the end of the month people are coming to his store on the edge of the villa, on the edge of the slum, and asking if they can buy one egg or a quarter of a package of butter or a few cigarettes, and I think yes, in a few years we will kill for an apple, and I throw up in the bidet and I just want to go home—but I'm already there—aren't I? Eventually, I crawl into my grandmother's bed and sleep.

Music: "Asleep," Astor Piazzolla and Kronos Quartet

I dream of Mount Aconcagua, of Iguazú, of Ushuaia and condors, of the sierras yellow and green, of bay, orange, quebracho and ombu trees, of running, sweating horses, of café con crema served with little glasses of soda water, of the smell of Particulares 30, of the vineyards of Mendoza, of barrels full of ruby-red vino tinto, of gardens as beautiful as Andalusia in spring. I dream of thousands of emerald-green parrots flying alongside my airplane—parrots just like the ones that flew alongside the bus as I travelled through the interior.

The Other

VERDECCHIA: I would like to clear up any possible misimpression. I should state now that I am something of an impostor. A fake. What I mean is: I sometimes confuse my tenses in Spanish. I couldn't dance a tango to save my life. All sides of the border have claimed and rejected me. On all sides I have been asked: How long have you been ... ? How old were you when ... ? When did you leave? When did you arrive? As if

it were somehow possible to locate on a map, on an airline schedule, on a blueprint, the precise coordinates of the spirit, of the psyche, of memory.

Music: "El Mal Dormido," Atahualpa Yupanqui

As if we could somehow count or measure these things.

These things cannot be measured—I know I tried. I told the doctor: "I feel Different. I feel wrong, out of place. I feel not nowhere, not neither."

The doctor said, "You're depressed."

I said, "Yes I am."

The doctor said, "Well ... "

I said, "I want to be tested. Sample my blood, scan my brain, search my organs. Find it."

"Find what?"

"Whatever it is."

"And when we find it?"

"Get rid of it."

SLIDES: X-rays, brain scans

They didn't find anything. Everything's absolutely normal, I was told. Everything's fine. Everything's where it should be. I wasn't fooled. I am a direct descendant of two people who once ate an armadillo—armadillo has a half-life of 2,000 years—you can't tell me that isn't in my bloodstream. Evita Perón once kissed my mother and that night she felt her cheek begin to rot. You can't tell me that hasn't altered my DNA.

El Teatro

WIDELoad: Okay, (*the lights come up*) let's see who's here, what's everybody wearing, let's see who came to El Teatro dis evening. What a good-looking bunch of people. What are you doing here tonight? I mean don't think we doan appreciate it, we do. We're glad you've chosen to come here instead of spending an evening in front of the Global Village Idiot Box.

Are you a Group? Do you know each other? No, well, some of you know de person next to you but collectively, you are strangers. Estrangers in de night. But perhaps by the end of the evening you will no longer be strangers because you will have shared an experience. You will have gone through dis show together and it will have created a common bond among you, a common reference point.

That's the theory anyway. That the theatre is valuable because a bunch of strangers come together and share an experience. But is it true? I mean how can you be sharing an experience when you are all (thankfully) different people? You have different jobs, different sexual orientations, different lives, different histories. You are all watching dis show from a different perspective. Most of you, for example, have been awake.

Maybe the only thing you have in common is dat you are all sitting here right now listening to me speculate about what you might have in common and dat you all paid sixteen dollars to hear me do so. But not everybody paid sixteen dollars, my friends get in free. So do theatre critics. Weird, huh?

People do end up in the weirdest places. I mean some of you are from Asia, some from el Caribe, some from Africa, some of you are from de Annex, and you ended up in dis small room with me. And me, I left home to escape poverty and I ended up working in de theatre? Weird. Let's take a break, huh?

It's intermission, ladies and gentlemen. Get your hot chocolate and Wideload wine gums outside.

Music: "La Guacamaya," Los Lobos

ACT TWO

SLIDE: Every North American, before this century is over, will find that he or she has a personal frontier with Latin America.

This is a living frontier, which can be nourished by information but, above all, by knowledge, by understanding, by the pursuit of enlightened self-interest on both parts.

Or it can be starved by suspicion, ghost stories, arrogance, ignorance, scorn and violence.

—Carlos Fuentes⁴

Music: "Peligro," Mano Negra

Call to Arms

VERDECCHIA: (*voiceover*) This play is not a plea for tolerance. This is not a special offer for free mambo lessons nor an invitation to order discount Paul Simon albums. This is a citation, a manifesto. This is a summons to begin negotiations, to claim your place on the continent.

Ferrets and Avocado

DELOAD: NEVER GIVE A FERRET AVOCADO!

DE: *photo of a ferret*

ferret ees a northern European animal—own also as de polecat and related to de bear l de wolberine. Dey are fierce little creatures, d to kill pests like rabbits. De ferret can be nesticated. Some of you may have a ferret of ir own which you have affectionately named yky or Squiggly or Beowulf. Ferrets, as you et-owners will attest, are excellent pets: elligent, playful, affectionate, cute as all-get-. It takes four generations to domesticate a et but only one generation for the ferret to ert to a feral state—dat means to go savage. resting, huh?

avocado is a fruit from de southern hemi-ere—known variously as avocado, aguacate l, for some reason known only to themselves, alta to Argentinians. De avocado is a rich, ritious fruit which can be used in all sorts of /s—as a mayonnaise, in guacamole, spread re on some pork tenderloin for a sandwich ano. Avocados make lousy pets. Dey are not /ful and do not respond at all to commands. /er give a ferret avocado.

ause it will blow up. Deir northern constitu- is cannot process de rich southern fruit. nk about dat.

sic: "Shalode," Wganda Kenya

Deload Gets Attention

DELOAD: I want to draw some attention to self. Some more attention. I want to talk about nasty "S" word: Estereotype. I would like to the record straight on dis subject and state dat r by no means an estereotype. At least I am no e of an estereotype dan dat other person in de w: dat neurotic Argentinian. And I know e's a lot of confusion on dis subject so let me r a few pointers. If I was a real estereotype, I uldn't be aware of it. I wouldn't be talking to about being an estereotype.

was a real estereotype, you would be laughing re, not with me.

I if I was a real estereotype, you wouldn't take seriously and you do take me seriously. Don't ?

the real thing. Don't be fooled by imitations.

Border Crossings

VERDECCHIA: (*speaking to Customs Agent*) "Los Angeles. Uh, Los, Las Anngel—Lows Anjelees, uh, L.A.

"Two weeks.

"Pleasure.

"I'm a Canadian citizen.

"Pleasure." (*to audience*) Didn't I just answer that question?

(*to Customs Agent*) "I'm ... an ... actor actually.

"Ever seen *Street Legal*?

"Well, I'm mostly in the theatre. I don't think ... Okay uh, the Tarragon uh, Canadian Stage, the—

"I'm not surprised.

"Yes, that's my book. Well, it's not *mine*. It's a novel. That I'm reading." (*to audience*) Oh, Jeeezzuz.

(*to Customs Agent*) "A guy, you know, who has a kind of identity problem and uh—

"I told you: pleasure. Come on what is this? I'm a Canadian citizen—we're supposed to be friends. You know, Free Trade, the longest undefended border in the world ... all that?" (*to audience*) I had less trouble getting into Argentina.

(*to Customs Agent*) "No, I'm not unemployed. I'm an actor. I'm between jobs, I'm on holidays.

"Thanks."

(*to audience*) Some borders are easier to cross than others. Try starting a conversation in Vancouver with the following statement: "I like Toronto."

Some things get across borders easier than others. (*SLIDE: large, angry bee*) Killer bees for example.

Music: "Muiñeira de Vilanova," Milladoiro

Music. Music crosses borders.

My grandfather was a gallego, from Galicia, Spain. This music is from Galicia and yes, those are bagpipes. Those of us with an ethnomusico-logical bent can only ask ourselves, "How did the bagpipes ever end up in ... Scotland?"

Ponte guapa que traen el haggis!

The bandoneon, cousin to the concertina and stepbrother to the accordion, came to the Río de la Plata via Germany. Originally intended for organless churches, the bandoneon found its true calling in the whore-houses of Buenos Aires and Montevideo playing the most profane music of all: the tango.

Banned by Pope Pius X, the tango was, at first, often danced only by men because its postures were considered too crude, too sexual for

women—it was after all, one of the first dances in which men and women embraced.

King Ludwig of Bavaria forbade his officers to dance it, and the Duchess of Norfolk explained that the tango was contrary to English character and manners, but the tango, graciously received in the salons of Paris, soon swept London's Hotel Savoy and the rest of Europe. Finally, even polite society in Argentina acknowledged it.

The tango, however, has not been entirely domesticated. It is impossible to shop or aerobicize to tango ... porque el tango es un sentimiento que se baila.

And what is it about the tango, this national treasure that some say was born of the gaucho's crude attempts to waltz?

Music: "Verano Porteño," Astor Piazzolla⁵

It is music for exile, for the preparations, the significations of departure, for the symptoms of migration. It is the languishing music of picking through your belongings and deciding what to take. It is the two a.m. music of smelling and caressing books none of which you can carry—books you leave behind with friends who say they'll always be here when you want them when you need them—music for a bowl of apples sitting on your table, apples you have not yet eaten, apples you cannot take—you know they have apples there in that other place but not these apples, not apples like these—You eat your last native apple and stare at what your life is reduced to—all the things you can stick into a sack. It will be cold, you will need boots, you don't own boots except these rubber ones—will they do? You pack them, you pack a letter from a friend so you will not feel too alone.

Music for final goodbyes for one last drink and a quick hug as you cram your cigarettes into your pocket and run to the bus, you run, run, your chest heaves, like the bellows of the bandoneon. You try to watch intently to emblazon in your mind these streets, these corners, those houses, the people, the smells, even the lurching bus fills you with a kind of stupid happiness and regret—Music for the things you left behind in that room: a dress, magazines, some drawings, two pairs of shoes and blouses too old to be worn any more ... four perfect apples.

Music for cold nights under incomprehensible stars, for cups of coffee and cigarette smoke, for a long walk by the river where you might be alone

or you might meet someone. It is music for encounters in shabby stairways, the music of lovemaking in a narrow bed, the tendernesses, the caress, the pull of strong arms and legs.

Music for men and women thin as bones.

Music for your invisibility.

Music for a letter that arrives telling you that he is very sick. Music for your arms that ache from longing from wishing he might be standing at the top of the stairs waiting to take the bags and then lean over and kiss you and even his silly stubble scratching your cold face would be welcome and you only discover that you're crying when you try to find your keys—

Music for a day in the fall when you buy a new coat and think perhaps you will live here for the rest of your life, perhaps it will be possible, you have changed so much, would they recognize you? would you recognize your country? would you recognize yourself?

WIDELOAD: Basically, tango is music for fucked-up people.

VERDECCHIA: Other things cross borders easily. Diseases and disorders. Like amnesia. Amnesia crosses borders.

Drug War Deconstruction

WIDELOAD: Hey, I want to show you a little movie. It's a home movie. It came into my home and I saved it to share with my friends. It's called *The War On Drugs*. Some of you may have seen it already so we are just gonna see some of de highlights.

An edited drug-war TV movie plays without sound. WIDELOAD explains the action.

Dis is de title: It says DE WAR ON DRUGS. In BIG BLOCK LETTERS. In English. Dis is another title: *The Cocaine Cartel*. Dey're talking about de Medellin Cartel in Colombia.

Dis is de hero. He is a Drug Enforcement Agent from de U.S. who is sent to Colombia to take on de Medellin Cartel. He is smiling. He kisses his ex-wife. (*character on-screen turns away*) Oh ... he is shy.

Dis woman is a kind of judge, a Colombian judge, and she agrees to prosecute de Medellin Cartel, to build a case against de drug lords even though her life is being threatened here on de phone even as we watch. Watch.

n-screen, the judge speaks into the phone; IDELOAD provides the dialogue.

but ... I didn't order a pizza."

is guy is a journalist, an editor for a big Colombian newspaper. He is outspoken in his criticism of the drug lords. He has written an editorial after editorial condemning de Cartel and calling for de arrest of de drug lords. He is a middle-class man, as we can tell by his Volvo car and the presents which he loads into de car to take to his loved ones.

Say, dis is a long shot so can we fast-forward through this part? (*tape speeds up*) He's going home after a hard day at de office. He is in traffic. He is being followed by two guys on a motorcycle. Dey come to an intersection. (*tape resumes normal speed*) Dey estop. De light is red. The guy gets off de motorcycle. Dum-dee-bum-bum. He has a gun! Oooh! And de family-man's motor is killed, and as we can see he is driving one of dose Volvos wif de built-in safety feature that when de driver is killed, de car parks itself automatically. Very good cars Volvos.

Dis is de Medellin Cartel. Dese are de drug lords. Dey are de bad guys. We know dey are bad because dey have manicured hands, expensive jewelry, even more expensive suits and ... dark hair. Dere's a lot of dem, dey are at a meeting, doing business. And dis guy is de kingpin, Pablo Escobar, head of de Medellin Cartel, de baddest of de bad. We know he is bad because he has Italian eyes.

Say, lemme put dis on pause for a second—Dis movie shows us a lot of things. It shows us dat drugs wreck families: in dis case de family of de white guy who is trying to stop de drug dealers—nobody in his family uses drugs—it's because he spends so much time fighting drugs dat his family falls apart.

Dis movie shows us dat de drug lords are nasty people who will not hesitate to kill anybody who gets in deir way. And you all know dat de kingpin, Pablo Escobar is now dead. But did you know dat Señor Escobar was one of the richest men in de world according to *The Economist* magazine? Now Señor Escobar was not only a success in free-market capitalism, he was also very successful in public works, especially public housing. Interesting, huh? De movie doesn't show us dat. What else doesn't de movie show us?

Dis movie does not show us for example dat profits from the sale of cocaine are used to fund wars like de

U.S. war on Nicaragua which left some 20,000 Nicaraguans dead. Dis movie does not show us dat right-wing Miami-based terrorists, major U.S. drug traffickers, de Medellin Cartel, Syrian drug and arms dealers, de CIA, de State Department and Oliver North all worked together to wage war on Nicaragua. It does not show us dat charges against major U.S. drug traffickers—dose are de people who bring de drugs on to dis part of de continent—charges against dose people were dropped once they became involved in the Contra war against Nicaragua.

Some of you are, naturally, sceptical, and some of you have heard all dis before because you have read de Kerry Sub-Committee report. Allow me to recommend it to those of you who haven't read it. It is incomplete at 400 pages but it does outline dese things I'm talking about. It makes excellen' bedtime or bathroom reading. I urge you to pick up a copy. And if you have any questions gimme a call.

So de next time a blatant piece of propaganda like dis one comes on, I hope we will watch it sceptically, and de next time we stick a straw up our nose I hope we will take a moment to make sure we know exactly where de money we give our dealer is going.⁶

Audition

VERDECCHIA: It's two o'clock on a wintry afternoon and I have an audition for a TV movie. (*A dialect tape plays.*) The office has sliding glass doors, hidden lighting fixtures and extravagant windows. There are four or five people seated behind a table including a guy with very expensive sunglasses.

VERDECCHIA sits down in front of a video camera. A close-up of VERDECCHIA appears on a monitor. In the following section, he sometimes speaks to the camera and sometimes off-camera to the audience.

(*on-camera*) Hi, I'm Guillermo Verdecchia. I'm with Noble Talent.

(*off-camera*) For those of you who aren't in the business this is called slating. And when I say the Business I do mean the Industry. Slating is the first thing you do when you audition for a part on a TV show or a movie—you put your face and your name and your agent's name on tape before you read the scene.

(*on-camera*) I'm 5'9". On a good day.

(*off-camera*) That's called a little joke. Always good to get the producers and director laughing.

(*on-camera*) I'm from Argentina, actually. My special skills include driving heavy machinery, tango-dancing, scuba-diving, polo-playing and badminton. I speak three languages including English and I specialize in El Salvadorean refugees, Italian bob-sledders, Arab horse-thieves and Uruguayan rugby-players who are forced to cannibalize their friends when their plane crashes in the Andes.

(*off-camera*) Actually, I've never played a horse-thief or a rugby cannibal but I have auditioned for them an awful lot.

(*on-camera*) No. I've never been on "Really—True—Things—That—Actual—Cops—Do—As—Captured—By—Totally—Average—Citizens—With—Only—A—Video—Camera" before. It's a pleasure to be here. I'm reading for the part of Sharko.

(*off-camera*) An overweight Hispanic in a dirty suit, it says here. I'm perfect for it.

(*on-camera*) Here we go.

Music: "Speedy Gonzalez Meets Two Crows From Tacos," Carl Stalling

(*reads on-camera*) A black Camaro slides into the foreground, the engine throbbing like a hard-on from hell. Cut to close-up on trunk opening to reveal a deadly assault rifle. We hear Sharko's voice. (*VERDECCHIA slips on a red bandanna.*) That's me.

(*reads Sharko's part on-camera*) There it is man. Is a thing of great beauty, no?

Sure man, I got what you ordered: silencer, bullets. I even got you a little extra 'cause I like doing business with you. A shiny new handgun. Come on man, it's like brand-new. I got it off some old bag who used it to scare away peeping Toms.

Ah man, you take all this stuff for two grand, and I'll throw in the pistol for a couple of hundred. If you don't like it, you can sell it to some schoolkids for twice the price.

You already got one, hah? It was a present ... I see. A present from who?

From your Uncle Sam. Dat's nice. I didn't know you had got an Uncle ...

(*with dawning horror*) You're a cop?

(*no longer reading; off-camera*) Well that's that. I should've done it differently. I could've been funnier.

(*on-camera*) Uh, would you like me to do the scene again? I could do it differently. I have a blue bandanna.

Okay. Thanks very much.

Nice to meet you.

SLIDE: Ay ay ay ay I am the Frito Bandito

Music: "Cielito Lindo," Placido Domingo

Santiago Two

VERDECCHIA: I went back to Santiago and looked for some sign of the man who had been shot on the first day of my return. I looked for a stain, a scrape, anything, his shoe perhaps had been left behind. Nothing.

I wondered who he might have been. I remembered the redness of his shirt, the brightness of the sun. It was five o'clock.

A las cinco de la tarde.

Eran las cinco en punto de la tarde.

Un niño trajo la blanca sábana

a las cinco de la tarde.⁷

I saw someone die, I watched him die—that's what it looks like. That's where they end up—gun men, bank robbers, criminals and those brave revolutionaries and guerrillas you dreamed of and imagined you might be, might have been—they end up bleeding in the middle of the street, begging for water.

They end up dying alone on the hot pavement in a cheap suit with only one shoe. People die like that here. Ridiculous, absurd, pathetic deaths.

I came for a sign, I came because I had to know and now I know.

SLIDE: photos of shooting

¡Que no quiero verla!

Que mi recuerdo se quema.

¡Avisad a los jazmines

con su blancura pequeña!

¡Que no quiero verla!⁸

At the hotel they told me he was a bank robber. The papers said the same thing—a bank robber, died almost immediately in a shoot-out, name of Fernando Ochoa, nationality unknown, not interested. Case closed, dead gone erased.

I told them I was a Canadian writer/journalist/filmmaker. They believed me. They let me look at

the files, they let me talk, very briefly, to the cops who shot him, and since no one had shown up to aim them, they let me go through his personal effects. There wasn't much. A Bic lighter, with a tiny screw in the bottom of it so it could be refilled, an empty wallet. A package of Marlboros, with two crumpled cigarettes. There was a letter to someone named Mercedes. It read: Querida Mercedes: It is bitterly cold tonight in my little room but I can look out the window and see the stars. I imagine that you are looking at them too. I take comfort in the fact that you and Mercedes and I share the same sky." There was also a newspaper from August 2nd, the day I arrived, the day he was shot. The headline claimed that former President Pinochet and the former Minister of the Interior knew nothing about the bodies that had been found in the Río Mapocho. I asked about his shoe—the one I saw on the road—no one knew anything about a shoe although they knew he wore size forty-two just like me—

Decompression

VERDECCHIA: I'm sitting in the bar at Ezeiza, in the bar at Heathrow, in the bar at Terminal Sixty-two at LAX and I'm decompressing, preparing to surface. I'll arrive at Pearson at Mirabelle at Calgary International and I know that nothing will have changed and that everything will be different. I know that I've left some things behind—a sock in a hotel in Mendoza, a ring in a slum in Buenos Aires, a Zippo lighter in a lobby in Chile, a toenail in Ben's studio in Montevideo, a combful of hair in the sink in the washroom at Florian in Venice.

These vestiges, these cells are slowly crawling towards each other. They are crossing oceans and mountains and six-lane expressways. They are calling to each other and arranging to meet in my sleep.

The Therapist

VERDECCHIA: So ... I went to see a Therapist. He trained in Vienna but his office was in North York. I didn't tell him that I was afraid my toenails were coming after me in my sleep—I told him now I felt, what was happening. I have memories of things that never happened to me—I feel

nostalgia for things I never knew—I feel connected to things I have no connection with, responsible, involved, implicated in things that happen thousands of miles away.

My Therapist asked about my family. If I'd been breast-fed. He asked about my sex life, my habits. He asked me to make a list of recurring dreams, a list of traumatic events including things like automobile accidents. I answered his questions and showed him drawings.

SLIDES: drawings

My Therapist told me I was making progress. I believed him. (Who wouldn't believe a Therapist trained in Vienna?) At about the same time that I started doing what he called "deep therapy work," or what I privately called reclaiming my inner whale, I began to lose feeling in my extremities. It started as a tingling in the tips of my fingers and then my hands went numb. Eventually, over a period of months, I lost all feeling in my left arm and I could hardly lift it.

My Therapist told me to see a Doctor.

The Doctor told me to rest and gave me pills.

Jorge made me go see El Brujo.

I said, "Jorge, what do you mean brujo? I'm not going to somebody who's gonna make me eat seaweed."

Jorge said, "No, che loco, por favor, dejate de joder, vamos che, tomate un matecito loco y vamos ..."

Who could argue with that? "Where is this Brujo, Jorge?"

"En la frontera."

"Where?"

"Bloor and Madison."

El Brujo

Music: "Mojotorro," Dino Saluzzi

SLIDE: The West is no longer west. The old binary models have been replaced by a border dialectic of ongoing flux. We now inhabit a social universe in constant motion, a moving cartography with a floating culture and a fluctuating sense of self.

—Guillermo Gómez-Peña⁹

VERDECCHIA: Porque los recién llegados me sospechan,
porque I speak mejor English que eSpanish,
porque mis padres no me creen,
porque no como tripa porque no como lengua,

porque hasta mis dreams are subtitled.

I went to see El Brujo at his place on Madison, and you know I'd been to see a palm reader before so I sort of knew what to expect. And he's this normal guy who looks sort of like Freddy Prinze except with longer hair. And I told him about my Therapist and about the numbness in my body and El Brujo said, "He tried to steal your soul," and I laughed this kind of honking sputtering laugh. I thought maybe he was kidding.

El Brujo asked me, "How do you feel?" and I said, "Okay. My stomach is kind of upset."

And he said, "Yes it is," and I thought oh please just let me get back to reclaiming my inner whale.

El Brujo said, "You have a very bad border wound."

"I do?"

"Yes," he said, "and here in Mexico any border wounds or afflictions are easily aggravated."

I didn't have the heart to tell him that we were at Bloor and Madison in Toronto. El Brujo brought out a bottle and thinking this would be one way to get my money's worth, I started to drink.

El Brujo said, "I remember the night Bolívar burned with fever and realized there was no way back to the capital; the night he burned his medals and cried, 'Whosoever works for the revolution ploughs the seas.'"

"You remember that do you?" I said. "That was what 1830 or something?" And I laughed and had another drink. And El Brujo laughed too and we had another drink and another drink and another. El Brujo said, "I remember the Zoot Suit Riots. We were beat up for our pointy shoes and fancy clothes. I still have the scar." And he lifted up his shirt and showed me a gash. It was ugly and ragged and spotted with freshly dried blood. And that's when I first suspected that maybe we weren't at Bloor and Madison. You see, the Zoot Suit Riots were in 1943.

"What do you remember?" he asked.

"Not much."

"Try."

"I remember the Alamo?"

"No you don't."

"No, you're right I don't."

El Brujo said, "Your head aches."

"Yes it does."

"Because your left shoe is too tight. Why don't we burn it?" And maybe because I was drunk

already, or maybe because I really thought that burning my shoe would help my headache, we threw it in the bathtub, doused it in lighter fluid and watched it burn this wild yellow and a weird green when the plastic caught on.

"What do you remember now?" he asked.

"I remember the French invasion of Mexico; I remember the Pastry War.

"I remember a bar of soap I had when I was little and it was shaped like a bear or a bunny and when it got wet, it grew hair, it got all fuzzy.

"I remember a little boy in a red snowsuit who ran away whenever anyone spoke to me in English. I remember la machine queso.

"I remember a gang of boys who wanted to steal my leather jacket even though we all spoke Spanish, a gang of boys who taught me I could be a long-lost son one minute and a tourist the next.

"I remember an audition where I was asked to betray and insult everything I claim to believe in and I remember that I did as I was asked.

"I remember practising t'ai chi in the park and being interrupted by a guy who wanted to start a fight and I remember thinking, 'Stupid drunken Mexican.' I remember my fear, I taste and smell my fear, my fear of young men who speak Spanish in the darkness of the park, and I know that somewhere in my traitorous heart I can't stand people I claim are my brothers. I don't know who did this to me. I remember feeling sick, I remember howling in the face of my fear ...

"I remember that I had dreamt I was playing an accordion, playing something improvised, which my grandmother recognized after only three notes as a tango from her childhood, playing a tango I had never learned, playing something improvised, not knowing where my fingers were going, playing an accordion, a tango which left me shaking and sweating.

"And I remember that I dreamt that dream one night after a party with some Spaniards who kept asking me where I was from and why my Spanish was so funny and I remember that I remembered that dream the first time one afternoon in Paris while staring at an accordion in a stall at the flea market and then found 100 francs on the street." As I passed out El Brujo said, "The Border is your ... "

Music: "Nocturno A Mi Barrio," Anibal Troilo

SLIDE: Cuándo, cuándo me fui?

Other America

RDECCHIA: The airport is clean clean clean. The car that takes me back into the city is big and clean. We drive through an empty land under a big, fairly clean sky. I'm back in Canada. It's nice. I'm back in Canada ... well ...

Why did I come back here?

This is where I work I tell myself, this is where I make the most sense, in this Noah's ark of a town.

I reach into my pocket expecting to find my Bic lighter and my last package of Particulares, instead I find a Bic lighter with a tiny screw in the bottom of it so it can be refilled and a pack of Marlboros with two crumpled cigarettes in it. And written on the package is a note, a quote I didn't noticed before. It says:

estoy en el crucero:

to

equivocarse.¹⁰

DE: *I am not at the crossroads:*

to choose

to go wrong.

to Octavio Paz

then I remember, I remember what El Brujo told me he said, "The Border is your Home."

I'm not in Canada; I'm not in Argentina.

I'm on the Border.

Home.

Et voilà! Alors, je comprends maintenant, mais merde! Je suis Argentin-Canadien! I am a Porteño neo-Latino Canadian! I am the Pan-American highway!

Invasion

LOAD: It's okay, mang. Everybody relax. I'm back. Ya, I been lying low in dis act but let me know I'm here to stay.

It's quiz time. Please cast your memories back and tell me who remembers José Martí?

Who

remembers de Frito Bandito? Who remembers Cheech and Chong?

Who remembers de U.S. invasion of Panama?

It's okay, dat was a trick question.

Who remembers de musical *De Kiss of de Spider Woman*? I do because I paid forty-two bucks to

see it: a glamorous musical celebration of the torture and repression of poor people in a far-away place called Latin America where just over the walls of the prison there are gypsies and bullfights, women with big busts and all sorts of exotic, hot-blooded delights. Dat's one of de hit songs from de show—"Big Busted Women," some of you may recall ...

Who remembers de ad dat McDonald's had for their fajitas not too long ago, featuring a guy called Pedro or Juan, and he says dat he's up here to get some McFajitas because (*reciting with supreme nasality*) "Dese are de most gueno fajitas I ever ate." What de fuck ees dat?

Can you imagine an ad dat went like: "Hey Sambo, what are you doing here?"

"Well, Mistah, I come up here to get some o' yo' pow'ful good McGrits. Mmmmm-mmm. Wif a watahmelon slice fo' deesert. Yasee."

I mean, we would be offended.

So, what is it with you people? Who do you think you are? Who do you think we are?

Yes, I am calling you you—I am generalizing, I am reducing you all to de lowest common denominator, I am painting you all with the same brush. Is it starting to bug you yet?

Of course, it is possible dat it doesn't really matter what I say. Because it's all been kind of funny dis evening.

Dat has been my mistake. I have wanted you to like me so I've been a funny guy.

Silence.

Esto, en serio ahora—

Señoras y señores, we are re-drawing the map of America because economics, I'm told, knows no borders.

SLIDE: *Somehow the word "foreign" seems foreign these days. The world is smaller, so people are thinking bigger, beyond borders.*

—IBM advertisement

Free Trade all de way from Méjico to Chile—dis is a big deal and I want to say dat it is a very complicated thing and it is only the beginning. And I wish to remind you, at this crucial juncture in our shared geographies, dat under dose funny voices and under dose funny images of de Frito Bandito and under all this talk of Money and Markets there are living, breathing, dreaming men, women and children.

I want to ask you please to throw out the metaphor of Latin America as North America's "backyard" because your backyard is now a border and the metaphor is now made flesh. Mira, I am in your backyard. I live next door, I live upstairs, I live across de street. It's me, your neighbour, your dance partner.

SLIDE: Towards un futuro post-Columbian

Consider

WIDELOAD & VERDECCHIA: Consider those come from the plains, del litoral, from the steppes, from the desert, from the savannah, from the Fens, from the sertão, from the rain forest, from the sierras, from the hills and high places. Consider those come from the many corners of the globe to Fort MacMurray, to Montreal, to Saint John's to build, to teach, to navigate ships, to weave, to stay, to remember, to dream. Consider those here first. Consider those I have not considered. Consider your parents, consider your grandparents. Consider the country. Consider the continent. Consider the border.

Going Forward

VERDECCHIA: I am learning to live the border. I have called off the Border Patrol. I am a hyphenated person but I am not falling apart, I am putting together. I am building a house on the border.

And you? Did you change your name somewhere along the way? Does a part of you live hundreds or thousands of kilometres away? Do you have two countries, two memories? Do you have a border zone?

Will you call off the Border Patrol?

Ladies and gentlemen, please reset your watches. It is now almost ten o'clock on a Friday night—we still have time. We can go forward. Towards the centre, towards the border.

WIDELOAD: And let the dancing begin!

Music: "El Jako," Mano Negra

END

Endnotes

1. Carlos Fuentes, *Latin America: At War with the Past* (Toronto: CBC Enterprises, 1985): 8. This 1984 Massey Lecture elegantly explores, in great detail, the divisions expressed by the Mexico–North America border. Although Fuentes focuses almost exclusively on the U.S., his analysis and insights provide a useful perspective for Canadians.
2. William Langewiesche, "The Border," *The Atlantic* 269 (May 1992): 56. This excellent article deals specifically with the Mexico–U.S. border: border crossings, the Border Patrol, drug traffic, economics, etc.
3. The term *Latino* has its shortcomings but seems to me more inclusive than the term *Hispanic*. *Hispanic*—which comes from *Hispania*, the Roman word for the Iberian peninsula—is a term used in the U.S. for bureaucratic, demographic, ideological and commercial purposes. *Chicano* refers to something else again. Chicano identity, if I may be so bold, is based in the tension of the border. Neither Mexicans nor U.S. Americans, Chicanos synthesize to varying degrees Mexican culture and language—including its Indigenous roots—and Anglo-American culture and language. Originally springing from the southwest U.S., Chicanos can be found all over, in Texas, in California, in New Mexico (!), in Detroit, maybe even in Canada. Chicanos speak a variety of regional tongues including formal or standard English and Spanish, North Mexican Spanish, Tex-Mex or Spanglish and even some caló or pachuco slang. See Gloria Anzaldúa's essay, "How To Tame A Wild Tongue," in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Culture* (New York and Cambridge, MA: The New Museum of Contemporary Art and M.I.T. Press, 1990): 203–11. Also of interest are the writing of Ron Arias, the poetry of Juan Felipe Herrera and the conjunto grooves of Steve Jordan.
4. Fuentes, 8.
5. Strictly speaking, Piazzolla's music is not tango with a capital T. Many purists would hotly contest my choice of music here, arguing that Piazzolla destroyed the tango. I would respond that Piazzolla re-invented and thereby rescued the tango from obsolescence. There is no foreseeable end to this argument.

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or a thorough analysis of the actual parameters of the War on Drugs, see Peter Dale Scott and Jonathan Marshall, *Cocaine Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). See also Noam Chomsky, *Deterring Democracy* (London: Verso, 1991).

Federico García Lorca, "La cogida y la muerte," in *Poema del cante jondo/Llanto por Ignacio Sánchez Mejías* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1948): 145.

Lorca, "La sangre derramada," in *Poema del cante jondo/Llanto por Ignacio Sánchez Mejías*, 148.

Guillermo Gómez-Peña, "The World According to Guillermo Gómez-Peña," *High Performance* 4 (Fall 1991): 20. A MacArthur Fellow, Gómez-

Peña has been a vital contributor to the U.S. debate on "multiculturalism," urging a rigorous appraisal of terms such as assimilation, hybridization, border-culture, pluralism and coexistence. A former member of Border Arts Workshop, he continues to explore notions of identity and otherness in his writings, and in performances such as *Border Brujo* and *The Year of the White Bear*, a collaboration with Coco Fusco.

10. Octavio Paz, "A la mitad de esta frase," in *A Draft of Shadows*, ed. and trans. Eliot Weinberger (New York: New Directions, 1979): 72.