

Gerry: My name is Geraldo Cadava, and this is Writing Latinos, a podcast from Public Books.

Latino scholars, memoirists, novelists, journalists, and others have used the written word as their medium for making a statement about *latinidad*. We'll talk to some of them about how their writing illuminates the Latino experience. Some of our episodes will be nerdy and academic, while others will be playful and lighthearted. All will offer thoughtful reflections on Latino identity, and how writing conveys some of its meanings.

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Now, for the show...

**Gerry:** Raquel Gutiérrez is a writer, performer, and educator based in Tucson, Arizona. They are the author of *Brown Neon*, the book we're talking about today. *Brown Neon* was named one of the best books of 2022 by *The New Yorker* and *Hyperallergic*. It was a finalist for the Lambda Literary Prize for Best Lesbian Biography/Memoir and is a finalist for the 2023 Creative Nonfiction Firecracker Award from the Community of Literary Magazines and Presses. Gutiérrez has received numerous fellowships and teaches writing in the MFA program at Oregon State University-Cascades.

The producer and editor, Tasha Sandoval will also be joining us in this conversation today. Hi Tasha.

Tasha: Hi Gerry, thanks again for having me.

Gerry: And thank you so much for joining us Raquel.

**Raquel:** It's my absolute pleasure to be here. Aldo and Tasha, thanks for inviting me.

**Gerry:** So I'll get started. I did not know that this was a Tucson book. I'm, uh, from Tucson and so when I was reading it, you know, all the place names, Barita, Barrio Viejo, and Elto and Rito, it just kind of, you know, really struck me. Um, so can you tell me what your Tucson story is?

**Raquel:** Sure. Um, yeah, so I'm coming up on my seventh year in Tucson from Los Angeles and I moved, um, I had a, a very specific occasion to move to Tucson, and that was to do the MFA at the University of Arizona. But all of my, uh, My, my partner is in Tucson and we started seeing one another shortly before I moved to Tucson.

And so, uh, right off the bat I had a very romantic relationship to Tucson on multiple valents. Um, and so, um, and it's interesting too because I have a psychic that I've been seeing for like almost a decade back in Los Angeles. And, um, Yeah, a decade ago, the Sonora Desert would show up in, in my, in our readings.

Basically, he sits me down and goes through all my chakras and registers all the, all the images that, um, sort of generate from my, my, my seven chakras and, um, Yeah. And the, uh, the snow desert, uh, figured prominently for, for many years until I understood why.

**Gerry:** That's really amazing. And I feel like usually the migration goes the other way from Tucson to Los Angeles.

I'm thinking of like Lalo Guerrero or something like that. You know, uh, usually a lot of Tucsonences end up in LA but you came the other way, and so I wonder. Um, you know, I've made the drive that the same drive you opened the book with from Tucson to Southern California a lot and gone in that direction through Blythe.

But, uh, you know, does it feel any different to you to be heading, does the desert feel any different to you that is to be heading towards Los Angeles or from Los Angeles?

**Raquel:** Um, if the familiarity to, uh, back to Tucson, back to the, to southern Arizona from Southern California, um, it feels like home. So when I'm back in Los Angeles, I mean, I'm in California now, I'm in San Francisco, um, and we're heading back to Tucson.

So, Um, I'm just so eager to be back in, in the desert right now. I'm just like, ah, I'm tired of being cold. I'm tired of wearing a jacket. Let's, let's take off our clothes. Um, but it is, um, a, a, an environment, a space, a topography that agrees with me. Um, this sort of, uh, um, you know, uh, we think that the desert is, is barren.

We think the desert is, uh, um, It's, it's by itself in the sense that it's not, uh, uh, inhabited by a range of, uh, Both humans and, uh, and animal creatures. Um, it's just such a, a full, it's just full of life and it's blooming. Yeah. And it's just a great place to, um, it's been really good to me. I, I feel really good there.

**Raquel:** Yeah. I don't know what my psychic, um, it's so interesting, you know, in the sense it's like the way people kind of see things for you before you're able to, and then arriving to the plates and you're like, oh my God, I have no idea. But this feels completely, um, Like my habitus.

**Gerry:** Yeah. What gets me all the time when I land coming from Chicago is just the openness of the sky and the smell of the earth.

**Gerry:** And I I bet coming from Los Angeles, you feel something similar.

**Raquel:** Yeah. I feel like I can finally, um, relax and breathe. Yeah. And take my time and, um, read all the books. I never got to because I was stuck in traffic.

**Gerry:** Quick quiz. What's your favorite Mexican food in Tucson?

**Raquel:** My favorite Mexican food in Tucson.

**Raquel:** Um, you know, Tacos Apson makes this really weird, like in the sense that I've never had it before, this crispy lengua. Um huh. Or you can put it in anywhere, but like it in tacos.

**Gerry:** Well, the, the other thing I wanted to ask you about Tucson is when I was writing my first book about Tucson and just beginning all of my research when I was first starting to find my way in the city, and I, I was born there and lived there for the first few years of my life, but hadn't lived there.

For another 25 years until I was writing my dissertation and when I was beginning to form relationships, make inroads with local historians, everyone told me that I had to talk to Big Jim Griffith and Thomas Sheridan and Bunny Fontana, and. I, when I read your book, and here you are, another Tucson writer.

I mean, I kind of identified you more in the vein of people like Guadalupe Castillo and Margo Cowan, these women lawyers who kind of started their careers during the sanctuary movement. And people like Isabel Garcia very like, uh, You know, tradition of writing that's very different. Yeah. They're all amazing people.

So, um, you know, a and, and there's just been so much great literature that two have come from Tucson. And what kind of strands of Tucson writing do you most identify with?

**Raquel:** Um, the most, I guess I, I, uh, uh, see of the dead as a sort of a, um, A map of Tucson. Mm-hmm. And, and also it's uh, um, How prescient it was.

Um, and the sort of the lore around its writer, Leslie Marmon Silko, and the way that she has sort of, um, gone underground in Tucson except until that very amazing profile of her in the New Yorker that, um, just like what she, you know, she opened the door for somebody. Um, and, uh,

so in the sense of just like, um, The way she's able to sort of read the, uh, a history of nefarious, um, dispossession and the way in which, uh, uh, settlers made their money and sort of the, um, uh, yeah, the Wild West slash uh, you know, black market, uh, informal economies that, um, sort of animate the, uh, the economic realities in, in Tucson.

[Um, And also to kind of give me a sense of, uh, a, a Tucson before, um, well, you know, before the 21st century, before the Trump era, um, you know, uh, Tucson as the it's nickname, right?The, the Dirty T. Sort of a down and out, kind of like, uh, you know, I love just, uh, as a, as a, as a self-identified dirt bag. I just love Tucson for it's, um, For the, for the home that it, it, it affords me, that gives me in, in the sense of, uh, you know, whatever desires for belonging I have.

Yeah. Um, it's, uh, it reminds me of LA to be honest. It reminds me of LA in the nineties. Yeah. And LA in the nineties was amazing. Um, and so Tucson, when I first arrived just was a great place. Um, To land and to, and to live and to be able to afford my life on my own terms. Mm-hmm. And, um, you know, and that opens up various sort of conversations about gentrification and, and land and history and neighborhoods and, uh, sort of the changes around it.

Uh, which I'm happy to, you know, I'm always happy to sort of engage these, uh, these tensions. Yeah. Um, but that's the thing in the sense like you can't afford your life somewhere. You have to go somewhere else. And I think in some way, I'm interested in, in, um, parsing out the, um, particularities of, uh, of, of movement, mobility and migration.

**Gerry:** Thank you for letting me indulge, um, the Tucson connection a little bit.

**Raquel:** Always. I'm... No, for sure Tucson fascinating. I feel like. Yeah. I feel like we're all, anytime I meet somebody out in the world, out in the wild, uh, has a Tucson connection, so I'm just like, it's so special.

**Gerry:** Yeah. There's like a real connection there.

**Gerry:** There's, um, Always something to talk about when you meet someone else from some Tucson. So thank you so much for that. Appreciate it. Let's, uh, let's talk now about your, uh, book Brown Neon, which is what brought us together here today. And first I just wanna ask you about the title in, in one section.

Uh, uh, one chapter called Behind the Barrier, resisting the Border Wall Prototypes is Art. You Write, I am a Brown Neon sign, and. It's a susceptibility to being noticed against the landscape. And so I'm wondering if you can speak about this metaphor of Brown Neon and tell us how you came about it, um, as your title for the book.

**Raquel:** Um, yeah. I, you know, it was always a title that I had, um, toss back and forth with, uh, Rappa, uh, the visual artist performance artists who have written a about, um, Over the course of both of our, uh, creative trajectories. Um, we thought it'd be great to do some sort of journal or platform, some sort of publishing, um, uh, thing that would, uh, connect writers with artists, you know, writers, um, helping to sort of document and, and, uh, dare I say canonize, you know, the artists that were most, um, important to us.

And, uh, and that never, you know, that didn't, um, That hasn't happened. And so I'm like, okay, well it's been 10 years. I think I'm, you know, it's too good of a title. Not to, not to, um, utilize, uh, for a way to, to, um, you know, talk about the convergences around identity. Right. Uh, queerness brownness Latina that, um, Uh, migrants, children of immigrants, um, the border and, uh, the, the cultural, um, contact zones that we create through our different sort of intersectional points across identity, our investments in community, um, wi you know, the critical witnessing of just the, the changes in our communities and our neighborhoods, um, and making work, right?

That sort of speaks to, um, Well, those, well, what are, what are they changes? Evolutions. Evolutions. Um, so, and I knew I had to figure out a way to, to work Brown Neon into the, um, the body of the work, right? It's like how, how, how does it work, um, in the space of these essays that I'm connecting. Um, and Brown Neon, you know, also sort of speaking to that history of, um, Well, right... those, uh, that infrastructural history that gives us Interstate 10, that gives us the, uh, you know, the, um, the roadways that connect one coast to the other. Um, and on these roads, um, you know, these roads, these things that, that ultimately we had to. Have so much, uh, destruction, right, of the, of the natural environment for these roads to kind of go forward.

The moment, you know, the, um, sort of the car, car culture, road, trip culture, um, route 66 culture, all the ways that, uh, the traces of, uh, of, um, Americana, the kind of dot the landscape and the way that, uh, neon signs, right? Is that, that, uh, um, Yeah, that, uh, back signal or the lighthouse, right? Or these, uh, um, signs of life or signs of like, Hey, driver, you're tired.

Come, you know, come lay your weary head here. So, you know, neon sign kind of playing a role in, um, in broadcasting, uh, various types of, um, well, right safe, uh, refuge food, um, gasoline, like the things you need to kind of keep going.

**Tasha:** I really loved the way you explored queer evolutions from the 90s to today, looking at your butch elders. I want to spend some time talking about the importance of butch identity in your writing. What does butch mean to you , and can you tell me more about Jeanne Cordova herself?

Raquel: Sure. so Jeanne Cordova and I met in, gosh, I wanna say 2008, 2009. So, um, about 15 years ago now, although she did pass away in 2016, early 2016, the day after, or the day before, uh, David Bowie, um, passing.

So just kind of, uh, at one of, you know, this instance of all these, um, Sort of markers of your own youth in the sense that like, I'm not a young person anymore. All of my heroes are, are leaving, uh, the earthly plane. Um, but Jeanne Cordova was a lesbian organizer writer, um, a convener, someone who was also, um, commenting, right, a commentator on, uh, on, on queer, cultural, lesbian culture, activist culture. Um, a journalist and someone who was also, um, uh, a social worker, a former nun. Um, gosh, it's incredible, when I, when I describe her, I'm like, oh, she was like, what? You know, a, a cooler, hotter, sexier, more rebellious, badass, uh, Forrest Gump in the sense that she was able to touch various parts of history in, um, you know, through different vantage points.

Um, she has so many great stories in her memoir "When we were outlaws". And so she had a, um, diverse set of audiences. In that period. Whereas if she was writing today, those audiences would have no problem, kind of, you know, sort of melding in, in, in existing, in one place. Um, but she opens her memoir with, um, with, uh, a really. Incredible anecdote about, um, following Patty Hearst in the Symbionese Liberation Army.

And so to be able to like narrate that very specific history, uh, from her vantage point is an important, um, intervention. The way that we sort of, uh, understand the history of, um, of radical movements, of radical affinities of, um, uh, organizing... You know, the, the, the history of civil rights that we're not always, uh, privy to because, uh, the way in which those histories are narrated are from, uh, well, like, right Aldo from historians, from white historians, you know, sort of a particular set of, uh, of, um, The gatekeepers.

And so, uh, Jeanne as a, as a journalist, was writing about the daddy tank, which was, uh, uh, a really violent, um, uh, holding cell for lesbians and butch lesbians in the, uh, civil brand, institute of, uh, of corrections, the, the women's jail up in City Terrace in East Los Angeles, and was bringing a lot of attention to, um, yeah, just the, uh, uh, the just violent, um, treatment in, I mean, the whole caral system is terrible, but in that period, right, just like a very specific attention to the way, um, butch lesbians were experiencing, um, just, uh, an unfair treatment from the other prisoners.

**Gerry:** I wanted to ask you about space and landscape, um, in Tucson or East Los Angeles or San Antonio, or Marfa, any of the places that feature in your book. And so much of what you write about is the kind of transformation of landscapes, whether it's about, you know, the, the transformation of.

The desert through the imposition of border walls or Barrio Viejo in its colonization and gentrification or, uh, Joshua Tree is a destination for tech lesbians, for example. So, can you talk about the importance of these themes like space and spatial belonging, the loss of that space, and when possible, the reclaiming of that space in your writing?

**Raquel:** Yeah. Um, place has always been, uh, important to me and my writing because I grew up in Southern California, in Southeast Los Angeles and Los Angeles as being, um, uh, so huge and almost incomprehensible, um, you know, hard to navigate. Yeah. Um, and overwhelming. Um, but I am in debt to my parents for, uh, meeting there and settling there.

And so, I come to story through my parents. My mom was an incredible storyteller and was always, um, uh, gifting us just stories of her upbringing in El Salvador. And, um, and, and that, my god, my mom is an incredible storyteller. Also, just so funny, incredible comedic timing. Um, and I think when your, um, when your parents is from another country and you are raised in the us, um, you know, I, I I understand sort of the, the impulse towards, um, a, a sense of fragmentation. Um, up until I had a conversation and, um, would hear my friend Bea Cortez, uh, a visual artist, and actually my former professor at Cal State Northridge.

Um, I had Bea Cortez as a professor in Central American literature and, um, And so it's just, it's just amazing now to sort of see her kind of second life as a, as a visual artist, um, who's making work all over the country. Um, but she has this, uh, idea around simultaneity that she is as a sub. You know, someone who left us at 18 because she was a university student and all her friends were being, um, kidnapped and sort and disappeared and, and it was sure that she'd be next.

[So she came to Arizona at 18, um, but always is in. And is always wherever she is at the moment, whether it's Southern California visiting family, NA, Arizona, maybe up in the hud, the Hudson Valley, where she's, uh, installing new work. But this idea of simultaneity of just like, you're, you're there and you are back where you're from.

And, um, and so I, I like that, um, idea as a space to inhabit, um, not just your identity, but identity in relation to a place and the way in which those places have. Um, histories and if you are tuned into those histories, those histories in, in one way or another, implicate, um, your, uh, you yourself as well as like whatever sort of family situation you belong to and all those sort of, um, The way in which bonds kind of, uh, ripple out, right?

It's like myself, my family, my neighbors, my neighborhood, my community, my town, my city. Mm-hmm. Or like maybe my school and uh, you know, maybe my chess club. Maybe my volleyball team. Um, all the ways in which all these little points of, um, Belonging starts to sort of aggregate. Um, but they aren't able to do so without belong, without being tethered to a particular location.

Um, and the location is amazing because if you live there for an X amount of time, you're witness to the changes and you're witness to the way in which those changes.

**Gerry:** Because when you are, are writing to us about each of these places, you're not just describing a landscape you're kind of describing. Or, uh, interrogating your relationship to that place and your belonging in that place. And I, I think that just comes across perfectly in the San Antonio section where, you know the title is the question.

Do I, what is it? Do I like San Antonio? Do I Love San Antonio? I can't remember. Do I love Santo? Yeah, that's right. So it's not just a, about the place, it's about this question that you have when you enter all these places. Like, do I belong in this place? For sure.

**Raquel:** And I'm always concerned with that, especially in this era where our mobility is so a into question, um, for anybody who leaves a place for another place and the, uh, sort of the, um, Impressions of, uh, displacement, um, or, you know, the, the question of displacement that gets, uh, called in, uh, who am I displacing by showing up in this neighborhood, uh, but also.

You know, understanding like, oh, there are certain neighborhoods that have a high turnover rate just because of the way in which university towns kind of call in people for an X amount of time. Then those people decide to leave or maybe leave that particular neighborhood for a more stable, um, you know, residential neighborhood.

Where they're not living next to a frat house, perhaps, or, you know, other things. But, um, so it's interesting in a sense, you know, I, I do hear conversations about people feeling, um, economically ashamed that they can afford a down payment in a, in a neighborhood that's predominantly, um, you know, Black or Latino.

And I'm like, you know what? It's either gonna be you or a worse person than you, or Black Rock or a bank, um, or Zillow. Um, if you can find a way to connect with people in your community and find a way to have a, um, you know, be stringent in the way you belong to that community, like, help the kids who are your neighbors with their college essays or, uh, you know what?



I don't know. I mean, So, I don't know. I just feel like, um, I've encountered a lot of like impulses towards like, isolationism and, um, and our own sort of, uh, um, reactionary, uh, feelings to, to newcomers in our neighborhoods. I don't know, I just feel like mm-hmm. The border wall is not something between the US and Mexico, but something that we sort of, um, uh, Create to sort of hold onto the things because, um, systemically, uh, at a systematic level, um, you know, the, the, the safety nets are just, um, right, they're, they're getting cut with scissors.

MIDROLL

[MUSIC – “City of Mirrors,” Dos Santos]

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**Tasha:** I would love to talk about the gay bar queer bar space. That comes up quite a bit throughout a few of your essays. So you talk about the plush pony reds. Mustache Mondays. Um, and not only queer spaces, you also talk about the punk scene and sometimes the intersection of those spaces.

**Raquel:** Uh, so I'd love to know how these places influenced your path and your writing and how you're seeing the evolution of those spaces and, and many of them disappearing. Of course. Um, I think it's this, uh, um, something happens when you're a queer writer and, uh, in the sense that if you're writing about, um, Publics, queer publics.

Um, it's always going to involve the bar or the nightclub. Um, these spaces that we're always readily available to, uh, gay men, to, to lesbians, um, to bisexual trans folks. Um, and in the sense that, you know, there's booze and, uh, there's a. A private property, a space that we can sort of, uh, kind of frequent and, uh, go about our, um, meeting one another, uh, our encounters.

And so, and because there are so many and so many, um, bars, uh, clubs are ultimately refracting the community that they cater to. Um, they're really interesting places because they're also, um, Harkening to the neighborhood that they're in, the cities that they're in, and the communities that, um, grow that, you know, that bring up.

Whatever, LGBTQ members of those communities, right? There's, there's just something there to kind of, uh, tease out. Um, what, what does it mean that, uh, the plush pony is kind of hard to find in El um, a neighborhood that, you know is pretty rough, one of, you know, a rougher East

Los Angeles neighborhood, um, that attracts, uh, You know, it's clientele and, um, you know, in Brownie I write that Aguila, the, the link lesbian photographer, uh, set up a little, her, you know, her photos taking station because it was a way for her to.

Um, break the ice, right? It was like, uh, the, the, the photography was her social lubrication. She can kind of like, uh, initiate conversations, invite people to get their photos taken and, um, and so, you know, belong, have a, have some sense of, uh, of social connection. Um, So, yeah, so a lot of, you know, I write about these places because they were also my introduction to the public, a public space outside of my own private domestic space, right?

Whatever nuclear family dynamic my, my family were trying to reproduce. I was, um, not interested in that. I was more interested in, um, in community, in creating communal bonds, in meeting artists. Um, Learning about DJing. Um, you know, I'm just like, oh, what is the, you know, where was the first house, uh, dj, you know, from the us?

Like, why is this music so important to us? Um, uh, what is, you know, what is, why is disco so important? Um, you know, the way that like all these, uh, that are, are, are queer sort of musical forms, uh, emerge and sort of, um, Uh, have their own sort of, um, history. I'm just thinking of like house music during the, um, the height of the AIDS epidemic.

Um, disco sort of, uh, ushering in right. The Reagan era. Um, and, but also, you know, listening to music in the context of, um, To be able to, to appreciate, you know, MBIA, um, all the Spanish language, um, pop music that, um, takes on a whole sort of different listening dynamic because now we're getting to, um, really enjoy this music in the space of our, um, Where, you know, where our desires can run rampant and we don't have to be in the closet and our grandmothers aren't going to judge us, or no one's gonna throw chanclas at our heads for being, you know, uh, cochinos, queer cochinos.

Um, now we can sort of, uh, be free and to be ourselves. So, um, so that was really like amazing. I remember in West Hollywood Wednesday nights of course, because, uh, that's the only night Latinas could get in West Hollywood. Uh, there's a cook called. And, uh, and it was amazing because it was, you know, every, it was like very pop music and then they had a few mbia and salsa and a lot of hip hop.

And you had a lot of, um, Latino kids from like East Los Angeles and San Gabriel, the San Gabriel Valley Long Beach coming out and encountering one another. Um, and it was also the first time, you know, many of us were, were like, oh my gosh, these, there are homeboys here, there are serious straight up DHLs here.

Amazing. Um, so. So many, you know, so many parties. So, and also because I'm Generation X right? I have to also mention the way that we learned about these parties were different than the way we learned about them today. You know, it was a very like word of mouth. Uh, you had to pick up flyers at the, at the community center, right?

At the public health, um, AIDS prevention center and telephone number, and we would find out where the parties were, like how archaic.

**Gerry:** In resisting the border wall prototypes as land art. You write that, um, art is a hostile place and I'm wondering if you could tell us a little bit more about what you mean by that, both in, um, the context of the border wall prototypes, but also in the context of trying to survive as an art maker and art critic.

And, uh, maybe first you could describe the experience of going to see the border prototypes and why you wanted to make that trip.

**Raquel:** Yes. So, um, I learned about the border wall prototypes from, uh, Carolina Mads, uh, reporting for the Los Angeles Times. She's the Los Angeles Times arts art critic and narrated, uh, a trip with the, um, I believe it was MOCA San Diego and, uh, who were hosting the artist Christoff Kel.

Um, and just the, uh, the, the, in the, in inanity of, uh, of, of the fact that this artist, you know, Provo, uh, you know, classic provocateur, someone who, um, made his career, uh, inciting people to, you know, very strong feelings and, um, And, you know, narrating, um, the way in which this artist also called Donald Trump a conceptual artist, all of these things that, you know, were provoking very strong feelings in me.

And so, um, because I couldn't stop thinking about it, um, and because of my proximity to the space, it's, you know, it's, uh, I love a road trip. So it was, um, you know, seven hours and it gave me a chance to see friends. Um, um, but ultimately, you know, get up really early, go to the ote, mea um, entry and, um, order entry and, you know, have a very, have a very, uh, easy experience having a taxi take me and, uh, a friend to the site.

And, um, having folks there who lived, um, in the Shanky towns, um, right. At the fence where you take a big tractor tire and or like several tires and kind of balance your way to, to, to catch a catch sight of the, of the prototypes. I, I, I just needed to see them. I just was like, okay, what are migrants, what are migrants going to experience when they arrived to, um, this point in their journey?

Um, and how te you know, just how terrible, um, Just that anticipatory, uh, grief I felt of, um, imagining what the, what the future of these, uh, prototypes held in, um, in art, you know, the architectural imaginary.

**Gerry:** And what about the, um, the other meaning of art being a hostile place?

**Raquel:** Yeah, I mean, You think about the arts and, um, writing, um, journalism, just these things that are ultimately, um, you know, they are passions. They come, they, they are born from our passions to do these things. And the way in which our passions are, are this thing that, you know, is the weak spot. Right. Um, it's our weak spot.

Um, This is why there's so many unpaid gigs, so many unpaid internships, so many unpaid, um, apprenticeships, um, that, uh, demand a particular, um, economic, uh, support. Um, so it's just hard. It's just hard to feel like you're pa you're, you're, your, your passions are holding you hostage, um, to the thing that you wanna do.

Um, and art, and I, you know, I, I joke that, um, You're going to spend money on art making, writing workshops, editing workshops, software or therapy. Um, both do the same thing. I would rather bet on myself and learn to become a better writer. Then, um, kind of interrogate sort of my, you know, my mother wo my mother wounds with a, with a stranger.

Um, I'd rather, you know, kind of, um, stumble across my mother wounds in a workshop. And know that like, oh, I'm gonna, I'm gonna feel the same way. I'm gonna, I'm gonna feel better no matter what. Um, and in the sense, you know, art is a, is a hostile place because it is a space of healing and it is a space that demands, um, you know, uh, rigorous, uh, self interrogation...

**Gerry:** I mean I like that, I like that idea a lot because, I mean, it comes from a very conflicted place. But I hear it as almost a little inspiring.

I want to ask, um, just a, almost a throwaway question at this point that we ask everyone. what do you say in terms of Latinx or Latine...?

**Raquel:** Latinx because it's so, it's such a car crash, and it's just so, I mean, I'm, I'm my own provocateur and, um, and I've had a lot of interesting arguments with people who kind of, um, you know, sort of, uh, argue, argue their way into a corner, um, argue themselves into a corner. You know, the census was like, it just doesn't sound good.

I'm like, but we're, but we're messing with language all the time. Like, why would there be a . You know, if we weren't messing with language from the jump, it's just like, just say you don't like trans people and move on. Right. And just like, okay, cool. Um, Latina, amazing. Uh, Latinx amazing. The ex, right? I'm, I've always reminded Oof, you know, became, uh, you know, made, made those beautiful photos of, uh, of the, the trans women in, uh, in, so I always feel like the ex, you know, is always, um, Uh, a mode of, uh, self-determination. Hmm. And if you're not down with that, and a lot of people do not like people to self determine themselves, they would like for people to, to be like them and have a toxic desire to be led, uh...

**Raquel:** So, um, Latine yeah, Latinx I think is, uh, is great because it's provocative. Latina is beautiful because, um, cause it sounds nice, right? Mm-hmm. It sounds lyrical. It sounds like a harp. Um, Uh, Latina, Latina. I mean, all of those things are super problematic, but it's a problematic that, that, you know, it inspires and, uh, and provokes more, uh, dialogue and, uh, and an attempt to articulate our ideas around how we carry ourselves, right? ... sort of the ontological relationships, um, and the ways that, you know, just how would we, how do we let structures of power, um, name us?

[MUSIC- "City of Mirrors," Dos Santos]

Gerry:

Thank you for listening to this episode of Writing Latinos—

We'd love to hear your suggestions for new books that we should be reading and talking about. Drop us a line at [geraldo@publicbooks.org](mailto:geraldo@publicbooks.org)

This episode is brought to you by Public Books. It was produced and edited by Tasha Sandoval. Our music is "City of Mirrors" by the Chicago-based band, Dos Santos.

I'm Geraldo Cadava. We'll see you again next time.