

**Bodega Surrealism:  
The Emergence of Latin@ Artivists in New York City, 1976-  
Present**

by

Wilson Valentín

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
(American Culture)  
in the University of Michigan  
2011

Doctoral Committee:

Professor Frances R. Aparicio, Co-Chair, Northwestern University  
Associate Professor Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, Co-Chair  
Associate Professor Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes  
Associate Professor Alexandra M. Stern

©Wilson Valentin 2011

---

All Rights Reserved

A mis Padres,  
Felicitá Escobar (1938-1999) y  
Fidencio Valentín Barreto (1935-2011)  
Que Descansen en Paz.

To the Valentín and Escobar Families,  
especially Eddie, Millie, Brian, Noel, Hector and José

To My Wife, Teresa Irene Gonzales

To the artists of the New Rican Village

Para los pueblos de Moca, Puerto Rico  
y Brooklyn, New York

## **Acknowledgements**

This dissertation owes much debt and gratitude to what feels like a very large community of intellectual mentors, Professors, colleagues, friends, research assistants and family members. I also offer my regards and appreciation to all who supported me in any respect during the process of conducting this study.

I must first thank my committee members: Frances R. Aparicio, Jesse Hoffnung-Garskoff, Larry La Fountain-Stokes, and Alexandra M. Stern. I will forever be grateful to Frances; this dissertation would not have been possible if not for her continued support, patience, and willingness to deal with so many unexpected issues and obstacles. Dr. Aparicio is a role model; she's a generous mother, scholar, professor, friend, and mentor. She has consistently been supportive, patient, understanding, and an ally. Frances, you have helped produce a generation of scholars who will forever be indebted to you. We had a wonderful community at Michigan, and despite some of the challenges that occurred, the Program in American Culture and the Latino/a Studies Program was an energetic place comprised of people who were warm, generous, and eager to engage in activist scholarship modeled after yours.

I'm thankful to Jesse for his patience and willingness to work with me and assume the role of Dissertation co-chair. I'm equally grateful to Larry and Alex; both offered invaluable feedback and support and were willing to serve as

committee members. Larry's close reading of the dissertation, especially in the last minute, was simply amazing. Gracias! Alex, I do recall the many long conversations with you and your partner, Terri Koreck many years ago. Those were wonderful chats that I often recall and come back to. Mil gracias for being a friend and a member of my dissertation committee!

I want to express my sincere gratitude to the artists of the New Rican Village who were generous with their time, resources, and insight. They include: Américo Casiano., Adela Dalto, Sandra María Esteves, Brenda Feliciano, Andy Gonzalez, Adál Maldonado, Jesus Papoleto Melendez, Dina D'Oyen, Pedro Pietri, Ana Ramos, Hilton Ruiz, Mario Rivera, Steve Turre, Dave Valentín, and Angel "Papo" Vazquez. I especially want to thank Andy Gonzalez and Sandra María Esteves for being so supportive of this project. They mentored me along the way and offered a wealth of advice. I also want to thank Roberta Singer for sharing her knowledge and personal library. She conducted ethnographic research on the New Rican Village during its heyday while conducting her dissertation. She was kind of enough to share her audio recordings, field notes, and some interview transcripts. Similarly, I want to thank David Barton for sharing his musical knowledge and digitizing some of Roberta Singer's live audio recordings.

While conducting archival research, I came to appreciate the wealth of knowledge and care involved in compiling a collection. I am hence grateful for the assistance offered to me by the staff at the Centro Library at the Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, CUNY, particularly Pedro Juan Hernandez

Jorge Matos and Mario Ramirez; they helped me identify a wealth of documents that would be helpful for my study.

I thank Mr. Kirsch, one of my grade school teachers from P.S. 164 in Brooklyn, New York who encouraged me to find my own voice and be unafraid of taking risks. He, along with Ms. Greenberg, my third grade teacher, cultivated a joy of learning. Their high expectations, gentle touch, and persistent support planted the seed for my interests in education. For a young, working-class Puerto Rican kid from Brooklyn who regularly faced discouragement and bigotry from so many educators and neighbors, their support and encouragement made a huge difference in my ability to resist mediocrity and failure. Mr. Kirsch was also the first teacher to introduce me to audio-visual equipment and made me the “audio-visual monitor” for the school. That initiation into media established my love for the moving image and all forms of artistic expressions.

I want to thank my high school wrestling coach, Steve “Mendy” Mendelson, for instilling a habit of believing in my abilities and knowing how to push myself beyond what my mind was willing to accept.

I also want to thank the New York Vincentian community who welcomed me as a misbehaving seminarian at St. John’s University and inculcated the love of social justice, liberation theology, and the value of academic pursuits. I particularly want to thank my Godfather, Fr. Joe Agostino, C.M. whose humility, intelligence, and unwavering commitment to community remain examples for so many others and me. I always draw on one particular quote from St. Vincent de Paul that you introduced me to: “It is not enough to give soup and bread, this the

rich can do. It is only for your love alone that the poor will forgive you the bread you give them."

To all my undergraduate Professors at Fordham University who told me that I had the skills and "chutzpah" to pursue an academic career. They include: Clara E. Rodríguez, Susan Berger, Gustavo Umpierre, Patricia Clough, Nicole Fermon, and Barry Goldberg. They taught me the value of using the pen to engage in politics and social change. To Fordham's Jesuits who insisted I continue my studies as I reflected upon my future directions, and suggested I transfer from St. John's to their "Jesuit institution." It was one of the best decisions of my life; I was intellectually challenged and was also introduced to a deeper level of intellectual engagement that still resonates with my learning and pedagogical style. Special thanks to Fr. Gerald "Jeff" Chojnacki, S.J. for introducing me to St. Ignatius of Loyola's Spiritual Exercises and guiding me through a spiritual grounding of engaged social action.

When I arrived to Ann Arbor during the summer of 1993 to begin my graduate studies, I found an incredibly nurturing, creative, and committed community of students of color, mentors, and faculty willing to engage in thoughtful social action while also being fully committed to producing academic knowledge. They made Ann Arbor a wonderful place to live and learn. I'm first thankful to numerous Michigan mentors and Professors outside of my committee, including: Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Richard Cándida Smith, Mark A. Chesler, Dr. Mary K. Clark (and her wonderful family), Susan J. Douglas, Kristin Hass, Travis

Jackson, Earl Lewis, Terri Koreck, Silvia Pedraza, George Sánchez, Margarita de la Vega-Hurtado, and Alan Wald.

I would also like to thank the many friends and colleagues who shared their love and friendship throughout the years; they have become “familia.” They include: Bram Acosta, Robert Adwere-Boamah, José Amador de Jesus, Lucy Arellano, Adrian Burgos, Jr., Dolly Tua-Burgos, Sherri-Ann Butterfield, Jeff Cabusao, Brenda Cárdenas, Maritza Cárdenas, Ines Casillas, Maria Elena Cepeda, Jason Chang, Paul Ching, Cecilia Church, Tehani Collazo, Marta Cruz, Patrice Dickerson, Zaire Dinzey, Heather Dornoff (and her wonderful family), Jason Elias, Eddie Fergus, Tyrone Forman, Emma Garcia, Christina Garza, Charles Gentry, John McKiernan Gonzalez, Tom Guglielmo, Frank Guridy, Laura Halperin, Larry Hashima, Graciela Hernandez, Partrick Hill, Colin Johnson, Moon-Kie Jung, John J. Kerbs, Clara Kawanishi, Richard Kim, Robin Li, Nhi Lieu, Enid Logan, Carla McKenzie, La Tissia Mitchell, Maria-Teresa Macedo Pool, Anthony Macias, Daryl Maeda, Alejandra Marchevsky, Gloria Martinez, Kate Masur, Nancy Raquel Mirabal, Natalia Molina, Renee Moreno, James Neal, Julia Nieves, Hyun Joo Oh, Sylvia Orduño, Anna Pegler-Gordon, Gina Pérez, Estevan Rael-Galvez, Pablo Ramirez, Armando Ramos, Roberto Ramos-Martinez, Jeffrey Rangel, Merida Rúa, Mercedes Rubio, Iliana Santiago, Nora Salas, Sonya Smith, Nick Syrett, Nicole Trujillo-Pagan, Lorelei Vargas, Wayne Alejandro Wolbert, and Cindy Wu.

I’m equally grateful to the wonderful friends at the Ann Arbor Friends Quaker House, including Ashley Bishop, Rachel Diem, Lydia Ahlum Hanson,



Lonnie Harvey, Yes Iman, Eva Leventer, Pablo Quiñonez, Gabe Radeka, and Senay Yitbarek. They welcomed me into their community during the summers of 2009 and 2010 as I finalized the dissertation and wrote feverishly. I love this community and hope to be forever connected to it. I feel like I've become an honorary Quaker as a result of their love and acceptance. I learned much from the Quaker community, and its values of collectivity and social justice are philosophies that have long been fundamental principles in my own life. I've always been an admirer and supporter of the great work conducted by the American Friends Service Committee, thus it has been an honor to partake and be part of this community.

A special thanks to Marlene Moore in the American Culture office who consistently "watched out for me" and provided all the important information necessary to finish the dissertation. I'm greatly appreciative of the financial support offered by both the Program in American Culture and the Rackham Graduate school throughout my graduate studies.

I want to thank the Center for Jazz Studies at Columbia University. With the help of an Andrew W. Mellon Fellowship, I was able to conduct research during the 2001-2002 academic year and take advantage of being in New York City and connect with members of the New Rican Village Cultural Arts Center. Travis Jackson and Robin D.G. Kelley made my one-year visit possible and extremely productive.

I would like to thank John Gennari, Emily Bernard, Laura Fishman, Beth Mintz, Stella Moyser, George Moyser, and Alex Stewart for their friendship and

support while I was a dissertation fellow at the University of Vermont for the 2003-2004 academic year. While living in Burlington, Vermont I became friends with members of the local community, particularly Hector Cobeo and Joanne Molina. Thanks for keeping me rooted and sane during my visit. The weekly salsa music events nourished my soul!

Over the years, the mentoring and guidance offered by a number of scholars have helped me to grow as a scholar. Thanks to Cary Cordova, Juan Flores, Arlene Dávila, and George Lipsitz for their support and interest in my work.

My move to Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts, has allowed me to form connections and friendships with a community of colleagues in the Five College consortium as well as with local residents of the Pioneer Valley. I'm especially grateful to Carollee Bengelsdorf, Aaron Berman, Gloria Bernabe-Ramos Mary Bombardier, Joan Braderman, Djola Branner, Myrna Breitbart, Martin Carrera, Mari Castañeda, Margaret Cerullo, Kimberly Chang, Robert Coles, Diana Coryat, Omar Dahi, Michael Dessen, Marty Ehrlich, Martín Espada, Yaniris Fernandez, Dana Finkelstein, Judith Flores Carmona, Marlene Gerber Fried, Emily Gallivan, Chyrell George, Alan Goodman, Nicole Guidotti-Hernandez, Jennifer Guglielmo John Gunther, Jennifer Hamilton, Christina Hanhardt, Andrew Hart, José Angel Hernández, Beverly Hindle, Frank Holmquist, Amy Jordan, Suzanne Karanikis, Lili Kim, Joseph Krupczynski, Agustín Laó-Montes, Ron Lembo, Susana Loza, Kristen Luschen, Maddie Marquez, Roberto Marquez, Lourdes Mattei, Lestor Mazor, Rogelio Miñana,

Dorothy Mosby, Priscilla Page, Robert Prasch, Bob Rakoff, Sujani Reddy, Flavio Risech, Alberto Sandoval Sanchez, Dan Schnurr, Falguni Sheth, Ellie Siegel, Mariangeles Soto-Diaz, Natalie Sowell, Susan Thomson, Chris Tinson, Berna Turam, Will Ryan, Stanley Warner, and Neil Young. A special shout out to Jennifer Guglielmo who secured study space for me at Smith College, allowing me to find some peace and quiet amidst a sea of noisy and particularly demanding undergraduate students.

I'm indebted to Waleska Santiago and Marcel Mangual for their hospitality, friendship, and love. Ustedes son familia and I'm eternally grateful for your generosity and the many wonderful conversations and laughs we've exchanged over many cups of "cafecito." I'm also thankful to Melissa Nuttelman, Liz Greene, Perrin Hendrick, and Fred and Rosa; you all have made Burts Pit Road in Florence, Massachusetts a wonderful and exciting place to live! My thanks also to Falguni Sheth and Robert Prasch for allowing me to briefly crash in their home as I prepared this manuscript for my defense. Margaret Cerullo: you've been a wonderful friend, colleague, ally, mentor and excellent proofreader. Thank you immensely for reading multiple drafts and bearing with my writing. And thanks for understanding "bodega surrealism."

I'm also grateful to Michelle J. Wilkinson and Priscilla Renta who have been longtime allies, friends, as well as supporters of this project. Michelle, your dissertation was a model for me. As I've said in the past, you're a genius. Priscilla, your scholarship on salsa dance is already rocking the world! I'm looking forward to reading more of it very soon. I appreciate your spirituality,

wisdom, generosity, intelligence and understanding. Our conversations have helped me through some difficult times.

A special thank you to Kristina Ivette Tan, Hayley Victoria Tan, and Jon Tan. Kris, we've been friends since we were 14 years old as we both roamed the crazy streets of Brooklyn. I'm so honored to be Godfather to Hayley Victoria, who is such a blessing to the world! And thank you to Jennie Huertas who has been a loving friend for many years and has witnessed my growth and transformation since I roamed the streets with her daughter.

A special thanks to Lottie Almonte and Laura Castillo; we survived the rigors of our undergraduate studies together.

Andrew Rosa: I love you dawg! I can't say enough about how I value our friendship. You're my homie, brother, and best friend. We met as fellows at Carleton College, two "Boricuas en la luna" as they say, and survived one very cold and long Minnesota winter by supporting each other. You're so amazingly generous, thoughtful, articulate, and patient. You, your mom, Marian Rosa (may she rest in peace), and the rest of your family welcomed me into your home when I initially arrived to the Valley. I would not be defending if it were not for your friendship, support and belief in this project.

To my siblings and my parents: un millón de gracias for being such a wonderful family. Bendición Mommy and Papi. I miss you both dearly. You left your children and me too early. Thanks for teaching me how to love, to work hard, to struggle for social justice, and to live as a proud Boricua. Sería para mí imposible a escribir y completar este proyecto sin su amor y apoyo. Además,

gracias también por su acompañamiento y paciencia durante este proceso. Pop, you passed away on Valentíne's Day, February 14, 2011, el día de nuestro Santo. Your recent passing, along with Mom's death in January 1999, has made the process of writing and concluding this dissertation particularly challenging. Deseo que ustedes se sienten orgulloso de este disertación y intienden un poco más la importancia de este trabajo.

My immediate family: Eddie, Millie, Brian, Hector, Noel, José, Jeanette, Wandy, Libby and Pepe: I can't thank you all enough for bearing with me all these years! Your love and the bond we share gave me the determination to finish this project. And we'll soon have an opportunity to celebrate by dancing salsa on a linoleum floor as we did "en los proyectos."

To my cousins Luis Vazquez and Edwin Valentín for always being supportive as I embarked upon graduate school and researched this project.

To the Gonzales family: Diana, Ricky, Mario, Angela, and Pixel. Thank you for welcoming me into the family. I'm looking forward to sharing many more milestones with you. I'm very blessed to have you in my life through my wonderful wife, Teresa.

Finally, to my partner in crime and the love of my love, Teresa Irene Gonzales. It would have been next to impossible to write this dissertation without your immense love, patience, understanding, and willingness to make numerous sacrifices to see this to completion. Your sharp eye, surrealist sensibilities and wonderful feedback helped me sharpen the analysis I offer in this dissertation. We married and exchanged vows on October 10, 2010 and so many of our

friends thought we were crazy. You're as crazy as I am and so I'm overjoyed you accepted my wedding proposal to share an exciting life together. Without your constant love and understanding, I would not have been able to conquer the final dissertation stage and celebrate a significant milestone. As you remind me all the time, you'll certainly have "many checks to cash" as you embark upon your own research.

*Gracias a Chuito, la Virgencita, y San Judas Tadeo por sus muchas bendiciones.*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Dedication</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>List of Figures</b>	<b>xv</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter</b>	
<b>I: “Freedomland” at the New Rican Village:     The Making of a Puerto Rican &amp; Latin@ Avant-Garde</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>II: New Musical Hemispheres:     Free Flying Rhythms at the New Rican Village     From Musical Refuge to Avant-Clave     to the Fort Apache Ensemble</b>	<b>126</b>
<b>III: El Puerto Rican Embassy:     Civic Agency, Cultural Interventions     and Surrealist Counterpublics</b>	<b>181</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>238</b>
<b>Appendix</b>	<b>256</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>271</b>

## List of Figures

- Figure 1 - New Rican Slogan. The Lourdes Torres Papers. Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY. 34
- Figure 2 - New Rican Village Mission Statement. From the Pedro Pietri Papers. Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora. Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY. 38
- Figure 3 - Beatles Album Cover for Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band. The album cover was created by art director Robert Fraser in collaboration with Paul McCartney and designed by Peter Blake, his wife Jann Haworth, and photographed by Michael Cooper. EMI, 1967. 56
- Figure 4 – “August Arts Festival, 1977.” 57
- Figure 5 – Photo of Mario Rivera (on left) playing the flute and Steve Turre (on right) holding the trombone. A live performance by the Salsa Refugees at the New Rican Village. N.D. Photo by Sandra María Esteves. Photo is part of her personal archive and included here with her permission. 64
- Figure 6 - The Friends of Eddie Figueroa, The New Rican Village and the Puerto Rican Embassy - Latin Jazz Super Star Jam - Rites of Passage II - Celebrating 20 Years of a Cultural Tradition - June 28, 1990. The Pedro Pietri Papers. Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora. Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY. 70
- Figure 7 - New Rican Renaissance 80 Poster, 1980. A renaissance movement captured by The New Rican Village. The Pedro Pietri Papers. Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora. 79
- Figure 8 - Part of a New Rican Village poster used for fundraising and publicity purposes. N.D. 80
- Figure 9 - New Rican Village Benefit Concert, July 17-18, 1977. 87
- Figure 10 - “Stop the Movie Fort Apache Arts Festival.” April 21-23, 1980. 96
- Figure 11 -"Canto del Nuevo Puertorriqueño/Song of the New Rican" 104
- Figure 12 - New York Shakespeare Festival-Summer 1978, Sponsored by Joseph Papp. Featuring The New Rican Village Mobile Theater. Poster



Designed by Sandra María Esteves and part of her personal archive. Included here with her permission.	105
Figure 13 - Expressions of the Cultural Renaissance - May 31, 1981 –	126
Figure 14 - Poster spoofing on the Cuchifrito Music Circuit. The Pedro Pietri Papers. Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora. Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY.	133
Figure 15 - Mario Rivera and the Salsa Regugees. Poster graciously shared by the late Mario Rivera and is part of his personal archive.	134
Figure 16 - Grupo Folklorico y Experimental Nuevayorquino, <i>Concepts in Unity</i> . Salsoul Records. Reissued in 1994. Salsoul Records, 6001.	136
Figure 17 – Conjunto Libre, <i>Con Salsa...Con Ritmo, Volume 1</i> . Salsoul Records, 1976. A prime visual example of the new musical hemispheres spearheaded at the New Rican Village.	139
Figure 18 - Ordinary Women Anthology Poetry Event, March 24, 1978. Poster designed by Sandra María Esteves and part of her personal archive. Included here with her permission.	149
Figure 19 - Desires and Fantasies Music and Poetry Event, June 17 19???. Poster designed by Sandra María Esteves and part of her personal archive. Included here with her permission.	150
Figure 20 - La Cura (The Healer) Presents a Ritual of Healing and Feeling. N.D. Poster designed by Sandra María Esteves and part of her personal archive. Included here with her permission.	151
Figure 21 - Mario Rivera "El Comandante...the Merengue Jazz." Groovin High, 1994.	167
Figure 22 - Jerry Gonzalez, <i>Ya Yo Me Curé</i> . Originally published by American Clavé in 1980 and republished in 1995 by Sunnyside. The album cover here corresponds to the Sunnyside release.	169
Figure 23 - "Pelea de Gallos." Adal Maldonado, 2003. < <a href="http://www.latinart.com/artdetail.cfm?img=pr_maldo_02_th.jpg">http://www.latinart.com/artdetail.cfm?img=pr_maldo_02_th.jpg</a> >	181
Figure 24 - El Puerto Rican Passport by Adál Maldonado. <i>Blue Prints for a Nation</i> (2002). Can also be found at: < <a href="http://www.elpuertoricanebassy.org/blueprints.html">http://www.elpuertoricanebassy.org/blueprints.html</a> >	185
Figure 25 – Puerto Rican Manifesto, Pages 1-4 by Rev. Pedro Pietri in <i>El Passport</i> , 1994.	186

Figure 26 – “Welcome to the End of this Century Chant,” by Rev. Pedro Pietri, <i>El Puerto Rican Embassy</i> , Pages 1 and 2. From the Pedro Pietri Papers, Centro Library and Archives. Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, CUNY.	188
Figure 27 – Altart to la Santa Iglesia de la Madre de Los Tomates (Altar to the Holy Church of the Mother of the Tomatoes) established by Rev. Pedro Pietri, 1976.	189
Figure 28 – “Annexation Proclamatiion.” Bodega Bag Proclamation Annexation New York City to El Spirit Republic de Puerto Rico by Adál Maldonado. <i>Blue Prints for a Nation</i> (2002) and available online at: < <a href="http://www.elpuertoricanembassy.org/blueprints3.html">http://www.elpuertoricanembassy.org/blueprints3.html</a> >	191
Figure 29 – “La Decolonized Brain” by Adál Maldonado	194
Figure 30 – “El Map of El Spirit Republic de Puerto Rico,” by Adál Maldonado in <i>Blue Prints for a Nation</i> (2002). Can be found at:	203
Figure 31 – “Conceptual Jíbaro,” by Adál Madonado, 1990.	206
Figure 32 – “Papa Not Dada,” by Adál Maldonado, 1998. Auto Portrait After René Magritte. < <a href="http://www.latinart.com/artdetail.cfm?img=pr_maldo_10th.jpg&amp;type=exhibit">http://www.latinart.com/artdetail.cfm?img=pr_maldo_10<sup>th</sup>.jpg&amp;type=exhibit</a> >	206
Figure 33 – “Un Safe Mambo” by Adál Maldonado, 1996. < <a href="http://www.enfoco.org/index.php/photographers/photographer/adal/">http://www.enfoco.org/index.php/photographers/photographer/adal/</a> >	207
Figure 34 – “El Satiric Mambo Dancer: Auto Portrait after Andre Kertesz” by Adál Maldonado, 1992. < <a href="http://www.latinart.com/artdetail.cfm?img=pr_maldo_08_th.jpg">http://www.latinart.com/artdetail.cfm?img=pr_maldo_08_th.jpg</a> >	207
Figure 35 - “Mambo Dance Instruction.” <i>Down Beat</i> (December 1954).	208
Figure 36 - “Pre-Post Nuyorican Modern Primitive:	208
Figure 37 - “When Government Engage in Cereal Murder” by Adál Maldonado, 1997.	209
Figure 38 - “Dear Don Dada” Letter by Adál Maldonado.	210
Figure 39 - “El Currency” by Adál Maldonado in El Spirit Republic de Puerto Rico Installation in <i>Blueprints for a Nation</i> (2002). Can also be found at: < <a href="http://www.elpuertoricanembassy.org/blueprints.html">http://www.elpuertoricanembassy.org/blueprints.html</a> >	218
Figure 40 - El Partido Popular Democrático (PPD) Political Party Logo,	220

Figure 41 - “Pelea de Gallos” by Miguel Luciano, 2002.	222
Figure 42 - “Sub-Versive Art” by Adál Maldonado. Exploding Bustelo Brand coffee can placed by “Los Bodega Bombers,” a spurious terrorist cell opposing El Spirit Republic of Puerto Rico’s Annexation of New York City. <i>Blueprints for a Nation</i> (2002).	225
Figure 43 - New York Shakespeare Festival and New Rican Village Mobile Theater Poster, Summer 1978	256
Figure 44 - New York Shakespeare Festival and New Rican Village Mobile Theater Performance Schedule, Summer 1978	257
Figure 45 - New York Shakespeare Festival Performance Program, Delacorte Theater, Central Park, Summer 1978	258
Figure 46 - Joseph Papp Presents Festival Latino in New York, August 8-18 1985	259
Figure 47 – Undated Letter to Joseph Papp by Members of S.W.A.P Informing Him of their Disapproval of Negative Depictions of Puerto Ricans as Represented in a Play titled, “Sancocho-Mondongo.” Papp was Sponsoring this Show.	260
Figure 48 - A Poetry Event Organized by the Latin Insomniacs and the New Rican Village, November 9, 1977.	262
Figure 49 - The First of Many Satirical Posters Announcing the South Bronx Surrealist Festival, July 15, 1977 (or 1978)	263
Figure 50 - El Diario - La Prensa Newspaper Article on the Financial Hardships Facing the New Rican Village, October 21, 1977	264
Figure 51 - A New Rican Village Poster Announcing a Multi-Arts Performance at the Village Gate Music Club, June 28, 1990.	265
Figure 52 - New York Daily News Article Announcing the Eviction of the New Rican Village from its Original location at 101 Avenue A in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, November 11, 1979	266
Figure 53 – An Undated Four-Page Press Release Authored by the New Rican Village Describing and Disputing their Eviction from their South Bronx Location.	267

## **Introduction**

This dissertation describes how the formation of a Latin@, working-class avant-garde art scene in New York City was entangled with and contributed to the rise of a “new Latino Left” beginning in the 1970s at the New Rican Village Cultural Arts Center in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. In the dissertation I investigate how the artists and the art they produced were dialectically constituted by a cultural and political milieu shaped by multiple cultural and social arenas and institutions. By exploring the musical and cultural conversations that emerged between and among these overlapping scenes, I further focus my attention on the musical and intellectual development of a specific demographic of working-class Latin@ avant-garde artists within the performance activities of the New Rican Village as well the performance space of this cultural arts center. Some questions that guide the dissertation project include the following: What was the New Rican Village Cultural Arts Center? Why is it important to investigate? What was its arts programming? What were the goals of this Center? With whom did they collaborate? What impact did the center have on the city and its Latin@ communities? How did musicians active in the scene define and describe their Latin jazz musical explorations and how were particular musical traditions maintained and/or transformed due to the experimentation operating at the center? Furthermore, what role did political, racial and social

events play in cultivating an avant-garde consciousness among the artists in this collective? In what capacity did the musical explorations foster a new aesthetic? And finally, why did the New Rican Village construct itself as an Embassy? What prompted this vision? And how was this vision realized? Why is an embassy an important space for cultural politics, given its formal political structure?

Beginning in 1976 and lasting through the mid-80s, the New Rican Village Cultural Arts Center (NRV) was an inter-artistic space consisting of musicians, poets, filmmakers, dancers, photographers and painters that served as an aesthetic laboratory for an emerging working-class Puerto Rican and Latin@ avant-garde. As a venue firmly committed to artistic exploration, it cultivated a community of what I call "bodega surrealists" who invoked socio-political decolonial dreams, and fostered a communal philosophy of social change, social justice, and artistic agency by an inter-arts community. I use the term "Bodega Surrealism" to name an avant-gardism that is integral to the everyday logics and spaces of resistance within marginalized Puerto Rican and Latin@ communities, and includes the private and public everyday material aesthetics, working-class humor, ways of thinking, and blue-collar strategies artists use to piece together a living amidst the struggles of capitalist exploitation. Bodega surrealism makes use of a Latin@ subaltern bricolage, or an "aesthetic sancocho," the making do with whatever is at hand to engage in activist practices and create surrealist artistic art pieces.

The center emerged as a vital space where "new" and "old" aesthetics were synthesized. The center also blurred the boundaries between "high" and

"low," marginal and commercial, avant-garde and mainstream. Avant-garde experimentation, art activism, or artivism, and a shared commitment to social justice, were primary goals of this collective that was invisible to other writers and scholars writing about the Lower East Side/East Village Bohemian avant-garde scene. Now closed, the conceptual, spaceless, and floating Puerto Rican Embassy replaced the NRV.

As such, this dissertation examines how the spirit of bodega surrealism continues with the current and thriving Puerto Rican Embassy project. I aim to offer a historical perspective that moves from the founding of an arts institution to one that is conceptual and operates beyond the conventional boundaries of an institutionalized arts space, and in doing so, warrants new theorizing that coincides with these shifts.

My project, which parallels the analysis offered by some scholars such as Robin D.G. Kelley, Fred Moten, George Lewis, Coco Fusco, Michelle Wilkinson, Cary Cordova, Yasmin Ramirez, James Harding, and John Rouse, seeks to put pressure on those histories that seem to arbitrarily disconnect transgressive art practices engaged by Latin@s from the historical (white, European, and Euro-American) avant-garde.<sup>1</sup> In challenging the working premises of the avant-garde category, I argue that the community of working-class Latin@ artists at both the New Rican Village and the Puerto Rican Embassy *tell us another story of avant-gardism*; one that celebrates racial and ethnic identity outside the historical frame of primitivism enacted by the European avant-garde. In addition, it demonstrates

how class, read through the lens of race and ethnicity, informs the artists' cultural activism.

Moreover, this project seeks to counter the pathologic optic of the "culture of poverty" prescribed to some poor communities, particularly Puerto Ricans, by Oscar Lewis in relation to the ethnographic studies that emerged in the 60s. His view of "culture," understood as a repertoire that governs actions and non-actions, eviscerated any possibility for a non-fatalist account of people's social and political action.<sup>2</sup> "Culture" for the artists at the New Rican Village and the Puerto Rican Embassy is not the fatalism espoused by Oscar Lewis, but rather a framework of *social action* to subversively topple the analytical tool of racial inequality and replace it with one of anti-colonial and anti-hegemonic social change.

Drawing from the path-breaking work of James Harding and John Rouse,<sup>3</sup> I further demonstrate how Latin@ surrealism was not simply trying to move from the "edge to the center," but to reshift and deterritorialize spatial, ethnic, and racial conceptions of the avant-garde, and recognize multiple art centers without margins. The Latin@ artists in my study do not perceive themselves as the dependent variable of the official avant-garde, nor as the step children of the officially sacrosanct historical avant-garde. Yet, they do engage in cultural practices for aesthetic, social, and political objectives. The cultural activism at the New Rican Village and El Puerto Rican Embassy serve as an opportunity to use the "other" to "reconsider the cultural boundaries that have historically demarcated scholarly conceptions of the avant-garde."<sup>4</sup>

Overall, the NRV artists took the initiative to make interventions across various spaces and mediums, to become historical agents of change through art, and to organize and cultivate new spaces of avant-gardism amongst a marginalized community operating on the fringes of aesthetic recognition, thus marshalling a Latin@ cultural Left. This cultural activism parallels a decolonial objective that resembles Antonio Gramsci's anti-hegemonic "wars of position," a strategy employed by aggrieved communities to challenge or undermine the prevailing ideology of a particular historical moment. Not all struggles, he claims, are geared toward or directed toward seizing state power.<sup>5</sup> The NRV activism, however, was misunderstood and overlooked by those viewing it through a culture of poverty angle, and similarly unclear for those avant-garde subscribers and practitioners who also employed racial prelapsarian tropes of modernist aesthetics onto communities of color. These imposed tropes clouded their abilities to understand the avant-gardism practiced at the New Rican Village.

§§§§

This dissertation is the product of a flood. The accident occurred when I was a dissertation fellow at the University of Vermont during the 2003 to 2004 academic year. The flood, which occurred in my university office, damaged several years of graduate student research, destroying years and years of field notes, hours of audio interviews and video footage, at least 20 boxes of books (possibly more), and several cartons of archival documents. I was simply



devastated. The timing of the event left little time to recover the lost documents and continue with my original dissertation project during the rest of that academic year. The effort to resume this project was nothing short of perseverance and a labor of love that involved numerous sacrifices and support from a very large community of friends and family members, along with an extremely patient and supportive dissertation committee who continuously supported my efforts. It took years to return to this project and to transform it from an idea into a full work of scholarship rooted in well-researched materials. Nevertheless, the accident would unexpectedly present new opportunities that greatly enriched my dissertation.

My initial proposed dissertation project was originally centered on the Latin jazz music scene in New York City beginning in the 1970s through the present moment. But with hardly any of my original research materials available after the flood, I returned to the archive with an effort to examine recently donated materials by the late Nuyorican/Puerto Rican poet, Pedro Pietri. The poet's family had just donated his papers to the Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora at the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College, CUNY. Pietri was a founding member of the New Rican Village Cultural Arts Center, the non-profit center that takes center stage in this dissertation. Thankfully, finding his papers<sup>6</sup> served as a defining moment in my research to explore the NRV's cultural programming and activism. The documents in the Pietri Papers offered an opportunity to shift my research project from one that was primarily concerned with Latin jazz music to one that analyzes an array of art forms that were

sponsored by and produced by the New Rican Village. The archive of documents, like Pietri's poetry, generated new life and new ways of understanding a cultural arts institution that was largely forgotten in the dominant narrative of New York-based Puerto Rican/Nuyorican cultural activism. To this day, the Nuyorican Poets Café has rendered most of the attention given to Latino<sup>7</sup> poetry and the arts, and was even showcased in Leon Ichasio's 2001 film, *Piñero*.

This maneuver to go beyond musical analysis also required that I conduct a wealth of new interviews, which, coupled with the new archival documents, warranted a reconfiguration and reconceptualization of the entire project. From the outset, what emerged from the oral history interviews was the importance of writing about an emerging working-class Latino/a avant-garde. What impressed me was how each artist interviewed for this project – much to my surprise – identified the New Rican Village and the art produced and/or inspired by this non-profit cultural center as a “movement.” As such, it imprinted an alternative model of cultural production and, more importantly, established an art community collectively committed to transgressing aesthetic categories, racial tropes, and creating a new social world free from colonial impositions through their art. Oral history actually offered an opportunity for this community of artists to *define* themselves and construct their art as avant-garde in a manner that departed from conventional, academic perspectives of the historical avant-garde movements. We learn how art becomes an act of *agency*, the faculty to define, shape, move, respond to, give meaning to, and envision a future of possibilities under particular

historical and social circumstances and material conditions in order to create collective social change.<sup>8</sup> This becomes particularly paramount given the marginal social circumstances and colonial conditions the majority of Puerto Ricans migrated from and the conditions and circumstances they settled into when they arrived to the United States mainland.

While Puerto Ricans have regularly migrated to New York City since the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the great migration of Puerto Ricans occurred beginning in the 1950s immediately after Luis Muñoz Marín, Puerto Rico's first democratically elected Governor, instituted both a formal Commonwealth political structure and the Operation Bootstrap economic strategy.<sup>9</sup> Operation Bootstrap initiated a massive departure of mostly unemployed agricultural workers to the United States. Migration to the U.S. was an intentional component to the economic plans spearheaded by Marín's administration. Arriving as colonial migrants, Puerto Ricans immediately experienced a racialization process that departed from many other Latin American immigrants and had more in common with the pre-1960 African American migration to New York City (and other Northern cities). Most arrived with limited formal education, impacting their abilities to enter a labor market that increasingly demanded and looked for skilled laborers, office workers, and formal educational credentials. With increasing dependence on public services, mainland Puerto Ricans were subjected to a stigmatization that statically framed them as a social "problem" and public burden. Puerto Ricans, as Ramon Grosfoguel reminds us,<sup>10</sup> were incorporated into the United States as already racialized colonial subjects. Their coloniality

was intensified immediately upon their arrival, largely relegating them to subordinate locations in the labor market despite their U.S. citizenship status. Because most derived largely from lower-class origins and also settled in large cities, like New York and Chicago, where manufacturing jobs were gradually shifting abroad, most faced economic hardship. And in the context of New York City, Puerto Ricans became racialized not only as an *other*, but black as well. Puerto Ricans lived alongside African-Americans in segregated neighborhoods, fostering a social, political and cultural collaboration between both communities.

Diasporic Puerto Ricans have long faced, according to Ramon Grosfoguel, “racist stereotypes as laziness, stupidity, and uncivilized behavior.”<sup>11</sup> At this time, Oscar Lewis spearheaded his research on Puerto Ricans, describing them as a community with a “culture of poverty,” factors that perpetuate continued patterns of inequality and poverty, making it difficult to escape a cycle of poverty due to cultural beliefs, and behavioral practices. With limited access to networks that would potentially intervene this cycle of poverty, Puerto Ricans, according to Lewis, developed survival skills that perpetuated survival tactics that continue conditions of hardship. One remedy for this cycle of poverty was migration and female sterilization.<sup>12</sup> A new environment would force Puerto Ricans to become less dependent on government sponsored aid programs and seek employment. However, such options were unrealistic given their colonial status, segregation, and limited educational and labor skills. At this juncture, Puerto Ricans and their identity became, according to Laura Ortiz, an “epistemological category.”<sup>13</sup> In this process, the Puerto Rican body or

subjectivity became innately axiomatic of poverty and otherness, a static construction that remains active today. This perspective of racial framing also constituted social policy programs directed towards Puerto Ricans. Yet, these pejorative portrayals and discourses of Puerto Ricans, along with their desolate social standing, propelled them to actively work against these harmful constructions and conditions. This would lay a critical foundation from which Boricuas in Gotham would forge a collective ethnic identity that eventually would develop into a political identity of affirmation, cultural dignity, and collective political activism.

In this light, being Puerto Rican in the U.S. became synonymous not only with poverty, inadequacy, “a culture of poverty,” and working class alienation, but it also served as the basis and the lens that informed grassroots political mobilizing. Within the diasporic context of New York City, and many locations on the U.S. mainland, the Puerto Rican national label became a social and political identity that embodied experiences of otherness and marginality. It created a political character that coalesced with the historical experiences of other aggrieved communities, and lent itself to a point of collective understanding of racial subjugation. It also generated a sociological imagination of Puerto Rican otherness in relation to other Latino/a and ethnic communities. In this light, the confluence of these experiences cultivated a racial consciousness that draws epistemological philosophies of parallel racial discrimination, and becomes a way of understanding a diasporic Puertorriqueñidad (Puerto Ricanness) that is structured by these larger discursive, social and political processes and lenses.

Crucial to this discussion, and referenced earlier, is the distinct racial marking Puerto Ricans underwent, vis-à-vis, other Latin American immigrants. Many Latin American immigrants were subjected to distinct processes of incorporation and racialization upon their U.S. arrival (and most arrived from independent nation-states). Thus, the process of Latino/a formation, or “Latinidades,” as Frances R. Aparicio notes, which consist of those “shared experiences of subordination, resistance, and agency of the various national groups of Latin American descent that comprise the U.S. Latino/a sector” and serves as a “conceptual site that engages the power dynamics behind the deployment of an umbrella ethnic term that occludes the vast heterogeneity of...individual, regional, and national experiences” vary.<sup>14</sup> And many adamantly distanced themselves from being similar to or affiliated with Puerto Ricans (and Dominicans). It is in this context that the Puerto Rican artists of the New Rican Village cultivate a perspective that is distinct and diasporically Puerto Rican – with, admittedly Latino/a sensibilities, collaborations, and perspectives – and is informed by the operative racial histories, or Latino imaginaries<sup>15</sup> of subjugation in the United States. Recognizing, however, that distinct Latino/a racial histories and processes of incorporation call for a nuanced complexity that make it difficult to simply organize around the homogenized “Latino/a” identity and label. Alberto Sandoval Sanchez declared, “[t]he use of any label is a political act that contributes to identity formation.”<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, the use of the label, while it can obfuscate particular identities and historical distinctions within the Latin American and Latino/a Diaspora community, even when engaged in cultural collaborations

and collective social change, have been strategically appropriated and employed in order to respond to particular social conditions and historical moments.

On account of these experiences, the ability to declare a goal in response to structural or material conditions for the NRV artists became expressed through Puerto Rican, Nuyorican and Latin@ art that was creatively fashioned to adapt to and respond to the social and political conditions of the time.<sup>17</sup> The artistic expressions they shared, as well as how they represented themselves to the larger New York community were particularly significant, as they were responding to the colonial, pathological gaze ascribed to Puerto Ricans since the Post World War II migration. More so, this was a working-class U.S.-born Puerto Rican, Latin@ community of artists, whose parents were manual laborers, former sugar cane cutters, mechanics, seamstresses, janitors, and maids. They had experienced the hardships of racial and class alienation in their own lives, a significant departure of the upper-class character among the historical avant-garde. This was a community who had witnessed multiple struggles and alienations, and was now presented with an opportunity to present a historical reconstruction and narrative, a rarity afforded to aggrieved communities but in line with the goals of U.S. Ethnic Studies and the field of oral history.<sup>18</sup>

As narratives that were intentionally anti-hegemonic, and resistant to any level of discursive silencing, the artists' reflections offer a discursive parallelism with the British-based Popular Memory group's description of history as integral to organized resistance because "political domination involves historical definition. History...is at stake in the constant struggle for hegemony."<sup>19</sup> The

products of an art collective, these narratives offered a counter-hegemonic reflection, or a counter-memory, that aimed to reveal the artists' own sensibility and understanding of their cultural agency and work. In addition, the narratives also reversed any potential misunderstandings or silences around the significance of their artistic vision and practice and the institutional meaning of the New Rican Village. This consideration of voices, perspectives, and cultural practices "from the margins," entailed an interpretive and collaborative, versus positivist, method of an analysis that reflects a broader understanding of who constitutes historical producers within historically aggrieved communities. For "the production of historical narratives," Michel-Rolph Trouillot claims, "involves the uneven contribution of competing groups and individuals who have unequal access to the means for such production."<sup>20</sup> This approach to historical reconstruction through oral history, which also corresponds with objectives within U.S. Latino/a Studies,<sup>21</sup> welcomes the collaboration of non-formalized scholars to actively reflect upon and have power in constructing their historical narrative. This is a fundamental premise to the collecting and writing of the oral history interviews for this project.

The numerous interviews conducted along with the archival documents gathered, reveal a community in which fatalism was consistently absent; this was anything but a passive community subsumed by colonial resignation. They constructed themselves as active agents seeking to foster social change through art, and offered a cohesive narrative that collectively proposed an acute sense of historical agency and intentionality through *cultural practices*.



During this historical period and within and through the work of the New Rican Village, we see the emergence of what I identify as a *Latin@ cultural Left*, a community who opened cultural arts organizations, organized public art activities, and aesthetically amended particular forms, which they used to respond to their social, economic, cultural and political alienation and invisibility, a collective process that I define as *artivism*. Moreover, this cultural Left, as revealed through the archival documents and oral histories, also understood that the power to define, frame, and resignify themselves was generated *through their art*, an effort that opened windows to transform a dominant collective mentality of their historical and racial marginality and also create a decolonial world of immediate emancipation. This entailed an unlearning and rejection of servitude, inequality, and a victim mentality, frequently ingested and reproduced by colonized or formerly colonized subjects. This encompasses a ripping apart or disarming of the imperial racial framing and ideology that constructs colonized communities as uncivilized, barbaric, savage, exotic, and simple-minded. Decolonization also entails a total rupture and interruption not only from this discourse, but also from the institutions, laws and practices that have historically oppressed them and their natural resources. These can include various state institutions, systems of education, religion, finance, health, language, law, property, natural resources, the military and other instruments and institutions that maintain hegemonic order and exploitation for an imperial, or neo-imperial governing nation.

For many NRV artists, the imagination, similar to the mental faculties discussed by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, was understood as a space of "colonial alienation" that needed liberation and decolonial recovery from colonial systems of knowledge.<sup>22</sup> The "most important area of [colonial] domination was the mental universe of the colonized, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world. Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others."<sup>23</sup> Yet, the same way in which culture has been used for advancing a hegemonic colonial order, it can also be used, as Antonio Gramsci argues, to resist it and create transformative, counter-hegemonic conditions. This was the view and practice of arts and culture by the NRV artists. Art and culture were understood as a practice and tool that would facilitate and advance this post-colonial development of change and embark on the risks for social change by changing institutions, behavior, and knowledge.

Taking cultural risks was congruent to and an extension of the political risks and activism this community (and numerous other U.S. ethnic communities) organized during the 1970s.<sup>24</sup> The circumstances that fostered the same activism coordinated by organizations like the Young Lords were congruent to those that cultivated the cultural experimentation of the New Rican Village, which included, for example, creating musical performances, organizing the annual South Bronx Surrealist Festival, and producing a multi-arts series at the Delacorte Theater in Central Park, among others. Put another way, the activism

of the New Rican Village artists was comprised of a range of social practices that responded to the alienation these artists collectively experienced up to and during the 1970s and 80s. *The art itself was understood as a series of tactical, decolonial social practices* that sought immediate and long-term resolution and liberation from the discursive constructions of otherness to the political labyrinth of colonialism.

These interventions contagiously influenced this research project. This dissertation, in essence, continues this interventionist tradition. This study became a revisionist undertaking that largely drew from other sources of information, like oral histories, in an effort to unearth the past. Carrying out this objective warranted the *creation* of primary resources, which mostly took form through oral history interviews. I devoted considerable energy creating these, which also served as the basis to fashion a complex counter-narrative. It was a challenge to accomplish this considering the dearth of scholarship from which to model my analysis. The time intensive process of both *producing* the primary research materials for analysis while also navigating the social relationships required to generate these documents became more than a research art form; it required that my relationships with the many artists who were part of the New Rican Village scene share their personal home-based archives. This necessitated some level of collaboration and trust on their part but nevertheless offered opportunity to weave archival documents with oral history interviews.

The new archival documents and oral history interviews prompted an unexpected intellectual shift in the scope and direction for this dissertation.

Although I began by investigating Latin jazz, some of the musicians I interviewed were now directing me to interview non-musician artists active within the collective, like Sandra María Esteves, Américo Casiano, Adál Maldonado, Ana Ramos, Dina D'Oyen, Jesus Papoleto Meléndez and Pedro Pietri. This larger and more diverse pool of narrators further enhanced the theme of counter-memory that emerged from the initial stages of my research, yet it also moved me to incorporate, learn, and analyze other artistic practices. Moreover, this more extensive body of oral history interviews more clearly challenged the dominant narratives, making it possible to rewrite prevailing stories that silenced or rendered invisible the rich cultural activism practiced by the artists who took center stage. These “aggregate[s] of individual memories form the collective memory of a group or community,”<sup>25</sup> helped chronicle a new way of understanding the artists’ cultural agency and historical significance. From these stories, we learn of the artists’ goals to alter public policy and prevailing discourses around Puerto Rican and Latin@ communities, transform the public culture of New York City, enact a counterpublic sphere, and gain an opportunity to also reconceptualize an avant-gardism practiced by working-class artists that transcended theories of modernity as simply an extension of upward mobility and civility.

In honoring their self-definition as an avant-garde, the artists at the NRV necessitated an evaluation of how their construction differed or was similar to the term and artistic category.<sup>26</sup> In the process, it became noteworthy to consider how this construction corresponded with or departed from historical discussions

and definitions of the avant-garde.<sup>27</sup> The avant-garde has generally been understood as encompassing a self-defined and self-conscious artistic community devoted to artistic innovation, aiming to rupture aesthetic categories and also operate outside conventional artistic institutions. It entails a departure from the institutions that ascribe aesthetic value to particular works of art. Alienated from social and economic changes, avant-garde artists constituted an oppositional culture, countering the values of the European Victorian middle class, and perceiving the latter as overly civilized, genteel, inauthentic, and artificial.

For the Victorian community, art was understood as divorced from the social world; it was an escape from the harsh realities of life. The avant-garde sought to challenge this division; “avant gardists connected their [artistic] innovations to cultural transformation and to the future.”<sup>28</sup> They believed that “human creativity could be an avenue to a better tomorrow.”<sup>29</sup> Moreover they contended that people perceive art and the world in a like manner; hence changing perceptions in art can also create changes in the social world. The middle-class served as the breeding ground for the European avant-garde, most whom rebuked its values and lifestyles. In an effort to resist the imposition of homogeneity, the artists designated themselves as arbiters of a new future of social change who “transferred the spirit of radical critique of social forms to the domain of artistic forms.”<sup>30</sup> While neglecting a political ideology or platform as well as aesthetic subscriptions altogether, they sought to “overthrow all the binding formal traditions of art and to enjoy the exhilarating freedom of exploring

completely new, previously forbidden, horizons of creativity. For they believed that to revolutionize art was the same as to revolutionize life.”<sup>31</sup>

The equivalence of art as a mechanism for social change is a critical ingredient that most avant-gardists share, including the artists at the New Rican Village. However, while the artists who were members of this art community believed in and constructed themselves as avant-garde, their experiences of alienation -- another commonality among avant-gardes -- was prompted by migration, colonialism, racism, sexism, and classism, experiences that depart from the historical avant-garde. Thus, while avant-gardists have long been adverse to any form of national or racial labeling, the NRV artists, like similar avant-garde collectives, demonstrate the significance of alienation premised upon social categories and the experiences of marginality they foster. In fact, we come to learn that race, gender, and sexual identities, along with class exploitation and colonial alienation, become the impetus for engaging in avant-garde art; these social experiences and identities of otherness are again absent from the historical avant-garde movement. In this sense, we see a disruptive break that allows us to understand how the NRV was a center for artistic exploration informed by these social identities and political processes. To capture and document this counter-narrative of experiences and perspectives, vis-à-vis the avant-garde, necessitated skillful collaboration and maneuvering.

The skills of collaboration have proven particularly helpful in gathering oral histories and obtaining some very rich archival documents, like mission statements, obscure articles, and numerous posters. This collaborative

approach proves to be the critical difference in my ability to gather primary evidence and address lacunas within the field.

Some of the archives I visited and used in my research were personal files located in the homes of artists, like Sandra María Esteves, Mario Rivera, Andy Gonzalez and Adál Maldonado. To gain access to these materials entailed that I slowly gain the *confidence* of community members and prove the seriousness of my research inquiry, a trust that has taken years to cultivate. In particular, I was keen to avoid replicating the exploitative, hierarchical relationships that partly contributed to the struggles the artists featured in this project previously experienced. Simply “flashing an academic I.D.” to gain access to these personal records would only call for more resistance; it would mostly likely be interpreted as an act of academic pretention and consequently prevent me from ever telling the story of the NRV’s cultural activism. Entry and admittance into the personal archives of various NRV artists entailed gaining *acceptance* into a social world and arts community critical of academics, journalists, and others seeking to document and misuse their work. Given this community of artists has been exploited, misunderstood, and largely invisibilized in the past, it became crucial for them to proactively play a role in the historical reconstruction of their historical narrative.

Conducting alternative approaches to historical writing, including the interviewing and writing of oral histories *within and with* ethnic communities is an important matter engaged by Laurie R. Serikaku. She notes that “[t]he time has come, for historians to focus on the non-scholar as an important [creator] and

consumer of history, an orientation which in oral history projects can help produce a more deeply altered sense of how and for whom historical meaning is produced. When they [community members] are able to participate with historians in the process of creating scholarship, [they] can come to an understanding of how the past has shaped the community's present (73).<sup>32</sup> While I take responsibility for the analysis contained in this project, considerable effort was made to engage in collaborative critiques in every facet of the research and writing process.

As my project shifted its focus in the wake of the flood, I was no longer concerned if the project was fulfilling the goals of a particular discipline, but instead sought to weave a story faithful to the narratives of those who were actively involved in spearheading a community-based arts center that dreamed of new possibilities. The narratives became the engine of how I framed and directed the project; in short, I was conducting grounded oral history research.<sup>33</sup> This entailed that I suspend a deductive approach and allow for an inductive method of inquiry, and not impose or test a theory before engaging in field research, but formulate a framework directly from the oral history interviews. The coding of the interviews laid the foundation for the theoretical framework for this project. And the coding of the interviews, alongside the weaving of information from other primary and secondary sources, formed the basis from which I generated a theoretical analysis. I triangulate archival documentation, oral history interviews, radio documentaries, art installations, live performances and a body of published scholarship in order to produce a holistic, faithful account based on



the evidence currently available. I utilize oral history interviews with Latin jazz musicians, artists, and community organizers to expand upon and hermeneutically converse with text-based historical research; these oral accounts also served as primary sources not yet included and analyzed in the current literature on Latin@ cultural production. In this case, oral histories illuminated how individuals and communities exercised their agency and meaning making through their cultural actions and consciousness. As a scholar committed to unearthing silenced histories and perspectives, this research contributes to a body of scholarship essential to advancing a better understanding of marginalized communities that use creative methods to enact their history and cultural agency.

Finally, the new aim and inductive approach undertaken in this project required that I also draw from a sea of intersecting and disjointed disciplines and fields, including Urban Studies, Puerto Rican Studies, History, Visual Cultural Studies, and Art History, among others. While it was very exciting to learn about all these new fields, it was considerably time consuming. I became a student of new areas and disciplines in which I had little or peripheral background. The end result is a new project that remains interdisciplinary in scope but now proposes a complex counter-narrative of Latin@ cultural agency expressed across a range of artistic media.

## Chapter Outline

The central mission of chapter one is to explore the historical and social foundations of the New Rican Village. Using oral histories and archival documents, the chapter illuminates the central mission of the Center as an inter-artistic, avant-garde space committed to carving out new avenues of aesthetic exploration, and using art as a vehicle for social change. The chapter first provides a historical and social context of U.S. colonialism in Puerto Rico and the migration of Puerto Ricans to the mainland and to New York City in particular spurred by economic strategies spearheaded in 1952 by the Island's first democratically elected Governor, Luis Muñoz Marín and his colonial administration. This context situates the New Rican Village and then moves to discuss its formation from a domestic concept to a formal brick-and-mortar space and then a touring performance company that organized public arts activities throughout the city. This assemblage of art activities created a new Latin@ public sphere that tactically transformed and disrupted the cultural semiotics of the city.

I argue that the use of activism to mark physical and conceptual space by this subaltern community of Latin@ artists reconstructed the denigrated meanings and symbols attached to different urban, oftentimes minority-majority, neighborhoods in New York City. The artists sought to permanently fix and infuse Latin@ bodies into and onto the city's surroundings. Simultaneously, they dislodged and inverted the conceptually excessive social pathology that Latinidad, in particular Puerto Rican identity and history, signified within the

larger public sphere of the city. In essence, these artists sought parallel spatial and cognitive interventions. I examine their aesthetic approaches and their texts to underscore how the New Rican Village artists' public performances intended to re-perform the public landscape of New York City. As a self-proclaimed avant-garde art space, also confirmed as such by critics, artists, and other cultural workers, the artists of the New Rican Village made a number of interventions: at the aesthetic level, the political level, and in the spatial, cultural geography of New York City while also redefining the *avant-garde in their own terms*. Chapter two explores the music scene at the New Rican Village and their new musical explorations. At the New Rican Village, musical experimentation was an important cultural activity that was part of their cultural programming.

Guided by the framework of a “music scene,” where musicians build social and cultural networks that shape musical boundaries, while also being shaped by other expressive art forms and cultural arenas, chapter two describes the formation of Latin jazz at the New Rican Village, monitoring how it developed in relation to other art forms and in conversation with other artists. I argue that the development of Latin jazz music by the musicians active at the New Rican Village marked a significant departure from the traditional mambo big-band musical arrangements of the time, facilitated by the cultural and political ethos shaping multiple cultural arenas and institutions.

In addition to examining the Latin jazz scene at the NRV, I investigate its development in relation to the rise of a “new Latino Left” in New York City, and I demonstrate how the “Latin Jazz Left” was dialectically constituted by a new

political climate of the era.<sup>34</sup> The Latin jazz musical compositions were testament to a process and culture of re-modifications of previous musical traditions; the NRV produced a new style of music – mostly arranged and performed by second-generation musicians – that gave rise to an avant-garde Latin jazz music scene. The NRV Jazz musicians identified as prophets of a new musical doctrine shaped by the Black and Latin@ civil rights movements of the 1960s and 70s. I suggest that the new musicians were harbingers of a new Latin@ identity and style that posited a seamless relationship between aesthetics, racial identity, and society. They also played a primary role in shaping public culture and social change. Crucial to the argument is how Latin jazz comes to replace salsa as the new music of aesthetic explorations and aural relationships and creative possibilities.

The music scene at the New Rican was not part of the “cuchifrito” music circuit, the local music spots often located in working-class neighborhood restaurants throughout New York City, nor was the New Rican connected to the mid-town or “downtown” Manhattan musical venues like the Palladium night club. Paralleling the Jazz loft scene, the Latin jazz at the New Rican was intentionally opposed to the commercial impetus within both aforementioned musical spaces as well as the limited freedom to practice musical experimentation. Notwithstanding that musicians overlap within these communities, performing at venues certain days of the week, the New Rican Village signified a scene of cultural sovereignty committed to transgressing formulaic musical arrangements and expectations. Some of these musical aesthetics were critically conceived as

lacking the intellectual aptitude of the free flying rhythms arranged by New Rican musicians.

El Puerto Rican Embassy, with its historical foundations at the New Rican Village Cultural Center, is the centerpiece for chapter three. In a formal state structure, an embassy is the diplomatic institution that represents a particular nation state to other nation states abroad. Keeping in mind that embassies represent established and recognized sovereign states, what the Puerto Rican Embassy project proposes to address is the issue surrounding sovereignty for a colonial possession. More specific to this chapter, I examine how an embassy is created for a colonized community still negotiating and struggling for its political sovereignty. Some questions that guide my analysis in this chapter include: Can a colonial state create an embassy and also operate independently from imperial governance? If so, whose interests would it represent and what benefits would its citizens have? What sort of visions and programs can this “colonial” embassy propose and defend given the multi-sited membership of the Puerto Rican nation? What passports would this embassy generate and would other state authorities recognize it?

Beginning in the 1970s, a community of artists instituted “El Puerto Rican Embassy” in the Lower East Side of Manhattan (or “Loisada”) at the New Rican Village Cultural Arts Center. Undergoing various incarnations, and building upon earlier activism laid out by the artists at the NRV, this center of cultural production was initially envisioned as an embassy of avant-garde artistic experimentation. This space was envisioned as the Puerto Rican Embassy, the metaphysical

world and sanctuary that transcended all traditional institutional structures and that far surpassed the failed Commonwealth state of Puerto Rico; it is housed and located in its spurious state apparatus, the Spirit Republic of Puerto Rico. The Puerto Rican Embassy project, following the freed and formerly enslaved societies of Black Puerto Ricans in Loiza, Puerto Rico, sought to form a mythical sovereign state outside of the geo-political boundaries of the island-nation and divorced from U.S. management.<sup>35</sup> This sovereign state would double as an artistic sanctuary to invoke surrealist dreams of a liberated and new future. The chapter thus highlights how the goal of El Embassy and its Passport draw attention to social invisibility, cultural independence, and exemplify what I call a “decolonial bodega surrealist imagination.”

I assert that El Embassy creatively responds to the social call of emancipation from dominant institutions, commercial market forces, and colonial mentalities and structures that seeks to open alternative, democratically organized, co-operative, free spaces and worlds.<sup>36</sup> While the chapter begins with a historical perspective that moves from the founding of an arts institution, it also examines its current conceptual, spaceless dimension that operates beyond the conventional boundaries of an institutionalized, brick and mortar embassy institution. Finally, this art project engages the “sovereignty without territoriality” debate spearheaded by Arjun Appadurai where “states are the only major players in the global scene that really need the idea of territorially based sovereignty.”<sup>37</sup> The current spurious territorial representation of Puerto Rico constructed by the Embassy and designated as the Spirit Republic of Puerto

Rico, takes the form of a domino, a satirical reference to the limitations of locality as a geopolitical referent for a transnational community.

The Spirit Republic of the Puerto Rican Embassy, led by Adál Maldonado, photographer and multi-media artist, and one of its leading Ambassadors, created various art projects, including *El Passport*, the *Blueprints for a Nation* Installation, the *Out of Focus Nuyorican* blurred headshots, and the 13-minute video, *West Side Story in Redux*, among other multi-media projects. This chapter analyzes various art pieces of the *Blue Prints for a Nation* Installation, which include the Puerto Rican Embassy, and its parent state apparatus, El Spirit Republic of Puerto Rico. The aforementioned art projects, along with a critique of Adál's "auto-portraits," serve as the basis of my engagement with the audacious political and aesthetic project of El Embassy, from its historical beginnings at the New Rican Village to its fictitious parent state apparatus, El Spirit Republic of Puerto Rico. In sum, the Embassy exemplifies tactical methods of resistance while also engaging a sovereignty without territoriality debate where states are understood as the only major players in the global scene that warrant territorially based sovereignty. Riddled with satire, mimicry, and calculated perversions, El Embassy's art works collectively draws attention to the social possibilities of art to organize a new life praxis from a basis in art, where the social and the imaginative are unified, decolonial freedom is envisioned, subversive codes of meaning are proposed, and formal surrealism is reappropriated, subverted and mocked.

---

<sup>1</sup> See: Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press); James M. Harding and John Rouse in *Not the Other Avant-Garde: The Transnational Foundations of Avant-Garde Performance* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press); Michelle J. Wilkinson, "In the Tradition of the Revolution': The Socio-Aesthetics of Black and Puerto Rican Arts Movements, 1962-1982" (PhD diss., Emory University, 2001); Cary Cordova, "The Heart of the Mission: Latino Art and Identity in San Francisco (PhD diss, University of Texas at Austin, 2005); Yasmin Ramirez, "Nuyorican Visionary: Jorge Soto and the Evolution of an Afro-Taino Aesthetic at Taller Boricua," *Centro: Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies*, 17.2 (Fall 2005): 22-41.

<sup>2</sup> Oscar Lewis, *La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty - San Juan and New York* (New York: Random House, 1965); *West Side Story*. MGM, 1961.

<sup>3</sup> James M. Harding and John Rouse in *Not the Other Avant-Garde: The Transnational Foundations of Avant-Garde Performance* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press).

<sup>4</sup> "Introduction," by James M. Harding and John Rouse in *Not the Other Avant-Garde: The Transnational Foundations of Avant-Garde Performance* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press), 2.

<sup>5</sup> See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 9-10, 60-61, 173-175.

<sup>6</sup> I believe I was the first or second library patron of the Centro Library at the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College, CUNY to visit and read Pedro Pietri's wonderful collection shortly after it was made available to the public.

<sup>7</sup> Latino, Latino/a, Latin@ are used interchangeably. Cognizant of the politics of ethnic labeling within a U.S. context and entwined with a danger of homogenizing difference, I seek to use it as a signifier of U.S. born or raised subjects whose ancestors originated within the Caribbean or Latin America. Their U.S. experiences and racial formation account for a distinctive perspective on race, culture, and ethnicity. Moreover, it also refers to the aggregate of various subjects. As it relates to the project at hand, it may refer to a group of artists whose membership identify is, for example, Puerto Rican, Dominican, Cuban, Brazilian, etc. As a unified whole the Latino, Latin@, or Latino/a designator may simply be applied. Moreover, the label may refer to a particular type of diasporic Latin American nationality within the context of the United States. As discussed later in the chapter, I propose that a Puerto Rican diasporic sensibility may be Latino/a in its practice and product not simply because of its location, but also because of the framing and social experiences that constitute it.

<sup>8</sup> There is an abundant body of literature on agency. Some scholars that engage the theory and debate of agency, structure, and intentionality include: Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990); and Doris Sommer, ed. *Cultural Agency in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006);

<sup>9</sup> See: Clara Rodriguez, *Puerto Ricans: Born in the USA:* (Winchester, MA: Unwin & Hyman, 1989); The History Taskforce, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, *Labor Migration Under Capitalism: The Puerto Rican Experience* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979); Manuel Maldonado-Denis, *The Emigration Dialectic: Puerto Rico and the USA* (New York: International Publishers, 1976); and Ramon Grosfoguel, *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2003).



---

<sup>10</sup> Ramon Grosfoguel, *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2003), 149.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> See Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>13</sup> See Chapter 7 of Laura L. Ortiz's dissertation, "Disrupting the Colonial Gaze: A Critical Analysis of Discourses on Puerto Ricans in the United States" (PhD diss., CUNY Graduate Center, 1998). For example, Ortiz argues that "The 'pathos and deficits' of Puerto Ricans are enunciated as sites from which scientific knowledge can be derived. The Puerto Rican *Other* is operationalized as knowledge for the social sciences. The Puerto Rican as the *pathological* and *pre-modern* subject becomes an epistemological exercise. Within this academic practice Puerto Ricans become an episteme, in which the anthropological gaze is foundational... Puerto Rican life in the slum is the empirical site in which the anthropological gaze is cast on the sexual bodies of the *other*. The new episteme equates being Puerto Rican as axiomatic of the "culture of poverty," a condition transmitted from one generation to another. The anthropological account constitutes an intimate narrative in which Puerto Rican subjectivities are read as a "culture of poverty" (278-280).

<sup>14</sup> Frances R. Aparicio, "Cultural Twins and National Others: Allegories of Intralatin Subjectivities in U.S. Latino/a Literature," *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 16 (2009): 623.

<sup>15</sup> Refer to Juan Flores's chapter essay, "The Latino Imaginary: Meaning of Community and Identity," in *From Bomba to Hip Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 191-203.

<sup>16</sup> As quoted in Frances R. Aparicio, "Cultural Twins and National Others: Allegories of Intralatin Subjectivities in U.S. Latino/a Literature," *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 16 (2009): 622-641.

<sup>17</sup> The literature on agency is quite extensive. Here I'm specifically drawing from Sonja K. Foss, William J.C. Waters and Bernard J. Armada, "Toward a Theory of Agentic Orientation: Rhetoric and Agency in *Run Lola Run*" *Communication Theory* 17 (2007): 205 – 230.

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of U.S. Ethnic Studies, see: Philip Q. Yang, *Ethnic Studies: Issues and Approaches* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2000); Timothy P. Fong, ed. *Ethnic Studies Research: Approaches and Perspectives* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2008). For the relationship between oral history and ethnic studies, see: Gary Okihiro, "Oral History and the Writing of Ethnic History: A Reconnaissance into Method and Theory," *Oral History Review* 9 (1981): 27 – 46; Laurie R. Serikaku, "Oral History in Ethnic Communities," *Oral History Review* 17 (Spring 1989): 71-87.

<sup>19</sup> Popular Memory Group, "Popular Memory: Theory, Politics, Method," in *The Oral History Reader*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (New York: Routledge, 2006 [1998]), 47.

<sup>20</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), xix.

<sup>21</sup> See Frances R. Aparicio, "Reading the 'Latino' in Latino Studies: Toward Reimagining our Academic Location," *Discourse* 21.3 (1999): 3-18.

---

<sup>22</sup> Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1986), 17.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

<sup>24</sup> The body of scholarship on the Young Lords has grown over the last several years. For more information on the Young Lords, see: Darrel Enck-Wanzer, *The Young Lords Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); Agustín Laó-Montes, "Resources of Hope: Imagining the Young Lords and the Politics of Memory," *Centro: Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies*, 7, no. 1 (1995): 34-49; Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, "Puerto Rico en mi Corazón: The Young Lords, Black Power and Puerto Rican Nationalism in the U.S., 1966-1972," *Centro: Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies*, 18, no. 1 (Fall 2006): 148-169; Johanna L del C. Fernández, "Radicals in the late 1960s: A History of the Young Lords Party in New York City, 1969-1974" (PhD diss, Columbia University, 2004); Lilia Fernández, "Latina/o Migration and Community Formation in Postwar Chicago: Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Gender, and Politics, 1945-1975" (PhD diss, University of California, San Diego, 2005); Iris Morales, ¡Palante, Siempre Palante! The Young Lords," in *the Puerto Rican Movement: Voices from the Diaspora*, ed. Andrés Torres and José E. Velázquez (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998); Jennifer A. Nelson, "Abortions Under Community Control": Feminism, Nationalism, and the Politics of Reproduction among New York City's Young Lords," *Journal of Women's History* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 157-180. On Chicano social movements, see: Carlos Muñoz, *Youth, Identity, Power: the Chicano Movement* (New York: Verso, 2007), Francisco A. Rosales, *Chicano!: the History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1997); Ian Haney López, *Racism on Trial: The Chicano Fight for Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003); Ernesto Chávez, "Mi Raza Primero!" (*My People First*): *Nationalism, Identity, and Insurgency in the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles, 1966-1978* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); David Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Alicia R. Schmidt Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Cultural Politics in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New York: New York University Press, 2008); Laura Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Gabriela F. Arredondo, et. al. *Chicana Feminisms: A Critical Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>25</sup> Donald A. Ritchie, "Introduction: The Evolution of Oral History," in *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History*, ed. Donald A. Ritchie (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 13. For a full discussion and analysis of collective memory and history, see: Maurice Halbwachs, trans. Lewis A. Coser, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Patrick H. Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory* (Burlington, VT: University of Vermont, 1993).

<sup>26</sup> For critical perspectives regarding the avant-garde, see: James M. Harding and John Rouse, eds. *Not the Other Avant-Garde: The Transnational Foundations of Avant-Garde Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press; Coco Fusco, "Fantasies of Oppositionality," in *Art, Activism, and Oppositionality: Essays from Afterimage*, ed. Grant H. Kester (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); Timothy Yu, *Race and the Avant-Garde: Experimental and Asian American Poetry Since 1965* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Tace Hedrick, *Mestizo Modernism: Race, Nation, and Identity in Latin American Culture* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2003) and Tatiana Flores, "Clamoring for Attention in Mexico City: Manuel Maples Arce's Avant-Garde Manifesto 'Actual N°1'. *Review: Literature and Arts of the Americas*, Issue 37, Vol. 37, No. 2 (2004): 208-220.

<sup>27</sup> Drawing from the analysis offered by Stuart D. Hobbs, *The End of the American Avant Garde* (New York: New York University Press, 1997). However, numerous scholars offer similar observations. See: Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the*

---

*Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 8. In addition to Foster, others have rebutted Peter Bürger's Euro-centric conception of the avant-garde. For example, see: Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "The Primary Colors for the Second Time: A Paradigm Repetition of the Neo-Avant-Garde," *October* 37 (Summer 1986): 41-52; James M. Harding and John Rouse, eds. *Not the Other Avant-Garde: The Transnational Foundations of Avant-Garde Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press; Coco Fusco, "Fantasies of Oppositionality," in *Art, Activism, and Oppositionality: Essays from Afterimage*, ed. Grant H. Kester (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); Timothy Yu, *Race and the Avant-Garde: Experimental and Asian American Poetry Since 1965* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Tace Hedrick, *Mestizo Modernism: Race, Nation, and Identity in Latin American Culture* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2003) and Tatiana Flores, "Clamoring for Attention in Mexico City: Manuel Maples Arce's Avant-Garde Manifesto 'Actual N°1'. *Review: Literature and Arts of the Americas*, Issue 37, Vol. 37, No. 2 (2004): 208-220.

<sup>28</sup> Stuart D. Hobbs, *The End of the American Avant Garde* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 11. For an overview on the avant-garde, see: Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968); Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987); Stuart Hobbs, *The End of the American Avant Garde* (New York: New York University Press, 1997); Michael Löwy, *Morning Star: Surrealism, Marxism, Anarchism, Situationism, Utopia* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Matei Calinescu, *The Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 112.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Laurie R. Serikaku, "Oral History in Ethnic Communities," *Oral History Review* 17 (Spring 1989): 71-87. Also refer to Gary Okihiro for his analysis of oral history facilitating the writing of ethnic history in his essay, "Oral History and the Writing of Ethnic History: A Reconnaissance into Method and Theory," *Oral History Review* 9 (1981): 27 - 46.

<sup>33</sup> For a lucid and helpful analysis of grounded theory research, see: B.G. Glaser and A.L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Chicago: Aldine, 1967); Kathy Charmaz, "Qualitative interviewing and Grounded Theory Analysis," in *Inside Interviewing: New Lenses, New Concerns*, eds. James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003) 311-330; Kathy Charmaz, "Grounded Theory," in *Approaches to Qualitative Research: A Reader on Theory and Practice*, eds. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 496-521; John W Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998).

<sup>34</sup> The Latin Jazz Left reference is inspired by Herman Gray's work "The Jazz Left," in his book *Cultural Moves: African Americans and the Politics of Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>35</sup> Chapter 3 analyzes various art pieces of the *Blue Prints for a Nation* Installation, which included the Puerto Rican Embassy, and its parent state apparatus, El Spirit Republic of Puerto Rico. The *West Side Story Redux* 13-minute video and the 20 blurred *Out of Focus Nuyorican* headshots warrant a detailed analysis that will be treated in the future.

---

<sup>36</sup> For an insightful discussion about the social context that spurred alternative art spaces, see: Martha Rosler, "Place, Position, Power, Politics," in *The Subversive Imagination: Artists, Society, and Social Responsibility*, ed. Carol Becker (New York: Routledge, 1994), 55-76.

<sup>37</sup> Arjun Appadurai, "Sovereignty without Territoriality: Notes for a Postnational Geography," in *The Geography of Identity*, ed. Patricia Yaeger (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 49.

**Chapter I**  
**“Freedomland” at the New Rican Village:**  
**The Making of a Puerto Rican & Latin@ Avant-Garde<sup>1</sup>**

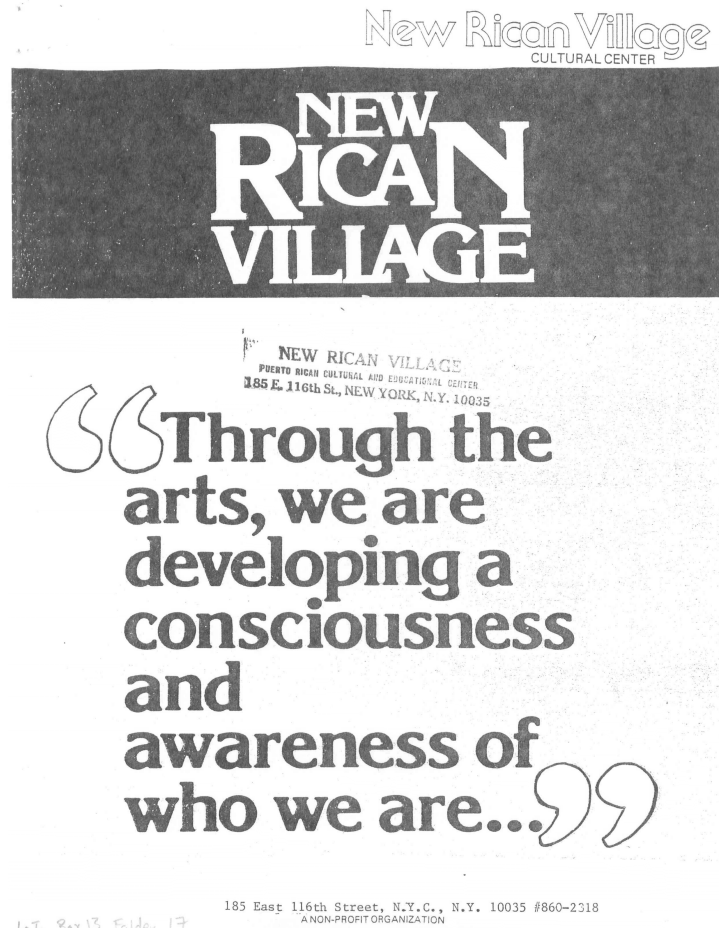


Figure 1 - New Rican Slogan. The Lourdes Torres Papers. Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY.

“...the most radical art is not protest art but works that take us to another place, envision a different way of seeing, perhaps a different way of feeling.”  
Robin D. G. Kelley<sup>2</sup>

“Art should reveal and not conceal.”  
Herbert Marcuse

In this chapter, I provide a historical account of the New Rican Village Cultural Arts Center (NRV). The story unfolds from the center's early days as an informal arts community that gathered in domestic spaces, to a brick and mortar institution based in the Lower East Side ("Loisaida") neighborhood of Manhattan. In addition to the Center, the NRV also operated as a multi-sited touring company that engaged in public art performances throughout the city. Using oral histories and archival documents, the chapter illuminates the central mission of the Center as an inter-artistic, avant-garde space committed to pushing new avenues of aesthetic exploration, and using art as a vehicle for social change. The avant-garde artist collective at the New Rican Village helped to inaugurate, along with other arts institutions, a new Latina/o arts scene in the city, and particularly within the Lower East Side. As a touring company that organized public arts activities throughout the city, in neighborhoods from Loisada to the South Bronx, the New Rican Village fostered a new Latin@ public sphere embodying and also transforming the semiotics of the city. Using art and activism, or artivism, to mark physical and conceptual space, this subaltern community of Latina/o artists reconstructed the denigrated meanings and symbols attached to different urban, oftentimes minority-majority, neighborhoods in New York City. The artists sought to permanently fix and infuse Latino/a bodies into and onto the city's surroundings. Simultaneously, they wanted dislodge and invert the conceptually excessive social pathology that Latinidad, in particular Puerto Rican identity and history, signified within the larger public sphere of the city. In essence, these artists sought parallel spatial and cognitive

interventions. I examine their aesthetic approaches and their performance texts to underscore how the NRV artists' public performances intended to re-perform the public landscape of New York City. Finally, I address how the larger, global, socio-economic, and spatial politics of the Lower East Side and its surrounding New York City neighborhoods played a crucial role in simultaneously cultivating the New Rican Village's artistic vision while also undermining it.

### **Historical and Social Roots to the New Rican Village**

In 1974, concerned about the social, political and economic crises of the time, including the racial hostility that Puerto Ricans and other Latinas/os confronted, Eddie Figueroa, a New York-born Puerto Rican activist, NYU Performance Studies graduate, and former member of the New York Chapter of the Puerto Rican Young Lords Party, desired to create social change within the Latin@ community through artistic expression. Mr. Figueroa and other Latin@ artists inhabiting the Bohemian scene of New York City's Lower East Side and neighboring East Village were concerned with the longstanding social pathology ascribed to their Puerto Rican and Latina/o identities and the economic impoverishment within urban Puerto Rican communities, of which these artists experienced through their working-class roots. These artists understood how space, race, and behavior were inseparably interconnected with other social processes, including how neighborhoods were defined and imagined, how the bodies that inhabited them were interpreted, and how such constructions molded public understandings of the cultural, political, and social activities that emerged

from them. Figueroa and other Latin@ residents and artists were witnessing and becoming victims of larger structural urban policy changes occurring in New York and other cities, such as deindustrialization, urban disinvestment, gentrification of certain neighborhoods, middle- and upper-class white flight from the city at large, and racial succession. The artists responded to such changes by opening a new cultural arts center at 101 Avenue A in the Lower East side (Loisaida) Neighborhood of Manhattan in October 1976, naming it the New Rican Village Cultural Arts Center.<sup>3</sup>

Directed by Eduardo “Eddie” Figueroa, the center was an artistic laboratory “where the concepts and dreams of a new generation of Puerto Ricans in New York [were] given form in theater, dance, music, the visual arts and poetry.”<sup>4</sup> In a moment where new social movements became the latest strategy of resistance, Figueroa and his fellow New Rican Village Latina/o artists, Sandra María Esteves, Andy Gonzalez, Jerry Gonzalez, Mario Rivera, Brenda Feliciano, Pedro Pietri, Ana Ramos, Dina D’Oyen, Papo Vázquez, Steve Turre, Adál Maldonado, Hilton Ruiz, Jorge Dalto, Dave Valentín, Willie Figueroa, and numerous others were unified in using art as a means to revitalize various dilapidated New York City neighborhoods, and to foster a cultural renaissance molded around new diasporic Latin@ identities.



“Through the arts, we are developing a consciousness and awareness of who we are...”



**“A place where Latin artists and members of the community can come, work on their craft, refine it, perfect it, and show it. A place to establish Puerto Rican Art.”**

The New Rican Village is a Cultural Arts Center located in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. It is more than the walls, the ceiling, and the floor of the building at 101 Avenue A between 6th and 7th Streets.

It is a place where the concepts and dreams of a new generation of Puerto Ricans in New York are given form in theater, dance, music, the visual arts, and poetry. A place where the deep images of Puerto Rican culture, history and tradition find contemporary expression. Where the past meets the present to forge cultural traditions for tomorrow.

Since 1976, the New Rican Village has been a home for Puerto Rican arts in New York. During that time, professional artists and the community have used the center as workshop and showcase, developing concepts and expressive techniques to guide the Latin community in spiritual and artistic growth.

Some of the most talented, dedicated young Puerto Rican professionals have come together here to make the New Rican Village the focal point of the Latin cultural renaissance. Through theatrical and musical performances, exhibitions of painting and photography, in the gestures of dance and the verbal images of poetry — the cultural heritage of the Puerto Rican people is reborn in the contemporary context of New York City.



**“The music historically is something that’s always moved through and along with us. The music provides historical continuity through its form and through what it evokes in us.”**

The musical events at the New Rican Village provide a bridge in sound, fusing historical tradition with the contemporary — bringing the geographically distant into the immediate community. Inspired professional musicians have combined traditional Puerto Rican music and dance forms, Afro-Cuban lyrics, classical European material, Afro-American and contemporary Latin jazz to form a new creative expression.



The musical creations emerging from these syntheses serve as guideposts for a community struggling to reconcile their Puerto Rican, African and American heritage.

**“BEST CLUB OF 1978-79 — Soho News Arts Award”**

The music program, under the direction of Andy Gonzales, has consistently brought critical acclaim to the center. A foremost exponent of the Latin musical renaissance, the New Rican Village boasts weekly performances by such musical innovators as *Conjunto Libre* and the legendary *Afro-Cuban Tropic* and *ysus Rumbos*.

The Rican has also hosted *Mario Rivera* and the *Salsa Refugees* with *Brenda Feliciano*, and the *Hilton Ruiz Quintet*. Guest appearances by Puerto Rican folksinger *Roy Brown*, *El Son de La Loma* and *Papa Castillo* have firmly established the Rican as a home for Latin music in New York. Appearances by Cuba’s *Grupo Moncada*, *Iskera* and *Mangüera* prove the center’s connections with the international Latin music scene.



At the alternative educational showcase of the New Rican Village, audience members are exposed to high-quality, expanded repertoires unavailable within the commercial network. Performing artists are given freedom to express the full range of their abilities.

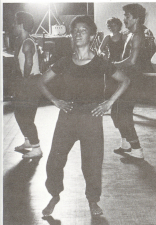
**“There is so much room here, and the audience is so responsive and open. I can do *Vivise 215* here, as well as Afro-Cuban music and jazz. The New Rican Village fulfills our need to play what we want to play, a place for developing ourselves. We experiment here.”**

**“Through the arts, we are developing a consciousness and awareness of who we are — of our history, our culture, and who we are as human beings.”**

From this exploration emerges the “New Rican”, a new personality which is born from the reconnection of Puerto Ricans in New York with their traditional island and ancestral culture. At the New Rican Village, artists and audience undergo a personal transformation — from victims to creators, from feeling displaced to finding home.



Here the new language of the New Rican constructs a song of celebration from the rhythm of the clave, the movements of the dancers, the words of the poets, and the drumming of the conga.



Willie Figueroa — dancer, teacher and choreographer — is educating people and exposing them to the arts as dance director at the New Rican Village. Only at the Rican is he free to draw upon all his varied sources of inspiration — classical, modern, African and Latin folkloric, mambo, Latin hustle, Contemporary Latin Jazz — to create a dance technique and style which reaches directly to the heart of his audience.

The history of Puerto Rico unfolds in movement in the dance piece, “The New Rican”, choreographed by Willie Figueroa. Indian, Spaniard, African and American replay their historical confrontations, moving toward new visions of possible resolution.

In “La Bomba Africana”, the traditional steps of the Puerto Rican bomba receive modern structure. This em-bodied of traditional steps in modern form parallels the transition undergone by Puerto Ricans, who must redefine their cultural heritage in contemporary New York City. Herein lies the key to the Rican’s spellbound audiences. They sense the honesty and the sincerity of the performers. They grasp the meanings, for the performances reach into the essence of their daily lives. Suddenly, the community discovers that art can speak their story.



**OUTREACH.** The genius of the Village reaches fullest expression in the New Rican Village Performing Company. In spectacular presentation, theater, dance, music, poetry and the visual arts are combined to touch the minds, hearts and spirits of the community. Theater and poetry by Pedro Pietri, Jesus Papoleto Meléndez, and other new Puerto Rican poets and playwrights are interspersed and intertwined with rhythm, melody and movement.

The city streets are filled with songs of celebration when the New Rican Village Performing Company tours the city, playing for 35,000 in the summer of 1978. Produced by Joseph Papp, the company played to 2,200 in the Delacorte Theater during the 1978 Shakespeare Festival. They’ve performed at colleges, and in the public schools at District 3, East Harlem. Children find their heroes; adults discover positive images of who Puerto Ricans are, and who they can become.

**“Let’s do performances in the parks.”**

This summer, the outreach program will be expanded into the city parks. Beginning with Tompkins Square Park in the Lower East Side, the New Rican Village Performing Company plans to revitalize the city and the Puerto Rican community with its messages of rebirth, dignity, and respect. The building on Avenue “A” will continue to house the most innovative developments in Puerto Rican art. The weekly music program, with its spirit of experimentation, will continue to foster exciting developments in Latin music. The dance company will astound new audiences with ever more moving creations.

Extensive theatrical productions by new Puerto Rican playwrights, weekly poetry readings, and exhibitions by visual artists Jorge Soto, Marcos Dimas, Fernando Salcicrup and Taler Bonous will etch the mark of the New Rican Village ever more clearly on the map of the arts in New York City. And all these art forms will be interwoven within the space of the New Rican Village and on tour around the city, as the New Rican Village Performing Company forges new ways to express the glory of the “New Rican”.

There are thousands of Puerto Ricans in New York City. They need a place to discover the meaning of their unique cultural transition and experience. They need a place to express themselves in their own terms. They need a forum in which to perform and perform music, dance, theater, and other art forms that they can’t present in other channels.

The New Rican Village is a non-profit institution conceived, founded, and directed by Puerto Rican artists. It provides that place. You can help it continue. You can help us grow.

**Eduardo Figueroa/Artistic Director**

**Executive Committee**

Ana Ramos

Dina Ramos

Andy Gonzalez

William Figueroa

**Administrative Staff**

Louise Torres/Administrative Director

Carmie Vega

Figure 2 - New Rican Village Mission Statement. From the Pedro Pietri Papers. Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora. Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY.

## §§§§

As a former member of the Puerto Rican Young Lords Party, Figueroa articulated the importance of art as an avenue of social and political intervention while also critiquing the relevance of the political strategies the Lords employed: “Politics was a form of theater to me. We [the Lords] had a vision, and for a while we were creative and free. But with time, the political activities of the Young Lords became passé. *New rituals* had to be developed. So as politics served the sixties and early seventies, *art* will serve the eighties.”<sup>5</sup> The new rituals Figueroa references are elaborated in a 1978 article, in which he stresses the importance of cultural activism for social liberation: “Economic and political systems alone cannot free you...People must first develop the feeling, the awareness, of what being free is. To do that...the individual must discover his [and her] inner self.’ Correspondingly, the main objective of the Center has become the expression of the innermost concerns of the ‘New Rican’ - a synthesis of the Puerto Rican’s historical past, present situation, and his [/her] future goals.”<sup>6</sup> In essence, for Figueroa and other New Rican Village artists, art became the new *political strategy* of choice and the conduit for new social possibilities.

In the 1970s, within a climate of civic activism, many artists departed from the elitist practices of modernist pretensions in favor of an alternative form of aesthetic agency and identity that no longer aspired to the paradigms and pretensions of high art institutions.<sup>7</sup> Rather, they organized – with considerable trouble -- new and autonomous institutions of their own in order to have a level of

power in redefining the artistic template that historically excluded and often misunderstood the value of their artwork and vision. Reminiscent of the work by Howard Becker, these artists – many who doubled as arts administrators, and were thus multitasking while also practicing their craft – created an alternative “art world” of their own. Becker understands “the” art world as constituted by a set of co-operative networks where professional collaborations operate on fundamental agreements of what constitutes art and aesthetics.<sup>8</sup> Artists do not operate alone in this world of art, and must find ways to operate within this realm of constructed aesthetic paradigms.

The assembled alternative art world organized by the New Rican Village artists understood art worlds more than, as Howard Becker argues, a network of people within art institutions working within an agreed and reproduced paradigm of aesthetic frameworks. They saw them as well, coinciding with Gregory Sholette, as an “integrated, trans-national *economy* of auction houses, dealers, collectors, international biennials, and trade publications that, together with curators, artists and critics, reproduce the *market*, as well as the *discourse* that influences the appreciation and demand for highly valuable artworks.”<sup>9</sup> That is, they understood the art world as powerful and hegemonic precisely for its linkage between aesthetic paradigms and institutional embeddedness. This dominant art world emerged as an *aesthetic bloc*, an institutionalized cultural hegemony functioning within a “universal” paradigm concealing particular aesthetic, political, gender, class and racial discourses and preferences. Yet, being ascribed to the margins fueled efforts to democratize art, and consequently, reframe the

“conceptual paradigms that shape[d] the avant-garde,”<sup>10</sup> from universal “regimes of truth”<sup>11</sup> to ones that depart from Eurocentric framing practices.

Figuroa and other Puerto Rican and Latin@artists of the 1960s and 70s encountered aesthetic conflict around their artistic principles where the value and “artistity” of their art were consistently questioned, challenged, and outright rejected. Many of these artists interpreted this resistance by members of the mainstream (read white and dominating) art world as an extension of their racial identity and marginality. Moreover, the “legitimate” art world’s unfamiliarity with the tradition of Puerto Rican art further contributed to the discord. Yet, it was the members of this particular art world who served as the power brokers, setting the paradigm from which certain artists and their artwork were deemed valuable and worthy of public support. These experiences of exclusion that Puerto Rican artists encountered were similar if not identical to what other artists of color endured.<sup>12</sup> Serving as the official “arbiters of taste and authority” also rendered an ability to determine who is included within museum displays. The exclusion of artists of color from many metropolitan museums only advanced their invisibility, but more importantly, advanced a social function of museums as shaping public knowledge of human artistic agency and ability. Moreover, Carol Duncan convincingly argues that museums operate with an ideological mentality of national inclusion; that is, museums operate as an extension of social, ritual and ceremonial inclusion in the national polity. Because they operate like ideological institutions that shape knowledge and aim to bring about particular experiences, they seek to promote “a particular kind of contemplation and learning experience

[that demands] a special quality of attention.”<sup>13</sup> This learning experience follows a prescribed narrative that one should relive a prearranged route that essentially informs a collective way of seeing and understanding. What is arguably contentious is how the presentation of art in museums or other similar venues, offer the possibility of *social* interaction between the auteur, the subject of art, and the audience. The selection of all three facets shapes and determines the level of social familiarity fostered. And since most museums function as public institutions, they have an obligation to be accessible not only to its audience, but also to those whose artwork is represented. By deciding which work is represented, the museum, hence “makes visible the public it claims to serve.”<sup>14</sup> In essence, according to Duncan, the museum “gives citizenship and civic virtue...without having to redistribute real power.”<sup>15</sup> Quoting Carol Duncan at length, to direct and operate a museum entails controlling

the representation of a community and some of its highest, most authoritative truths. It also means the power to define and rank people, to declare some as having a greater share than others in the community’s common heritage...Those who are in the greatest accord with the museum’s version of what is beautiful and good may partake of this greater identity....What we see and do not see in our most prestigious art museums-and on what terms and whose authority we do or don’t see it-involves the much larger questions of who constitutes the community and who shall exercise the power to define its identity.<sup>16</sup>

In accord with Duncan’s observations, Mary Ellen Lennon notes that during the 1960s and 1970s, an era of new social movements, “museums were instruments of power no less than political and economic institutions” and understood as harboring “institutional imperialism and racism.”<sup>17</sup> And because

museums are venues in society that help to define itself publicly, “unflattering, embarrassing, or dissonant viewpoints are typically unwanted.”<sup>18</sup> Steven C. Dubin argues that museums are contested sites at the “forefront in struggles over representation and over the chronicling, revising, and displaying of the past.”<sup>19</sup> Such critical accounts were ostensibly integral to alternative art communities like the New Rican; the artists were largely unwelcomed for museums are extensions of a dominant public sphere and ideological polity. Museums mostly featured “displays of power,” a hegemonic approach that highlighted wealth, “great men,” and the ruling elite.<sup>20</sup> New York City art museums and performance venues, which represents the authoritative hub of western art traditions within the U.S., became the center of artist’s discontent and dissent.

In response, the artists of the New Rican Village *created a distinctive art institution* that allowed for creative experimentation, socially critical and activist art, and that became the proponent of their hybridized, trans-creative cultural practices. In so doing, it was an integral assertion of their political and cultural sovereignty. The importance of controlling the creative activity and arts programming, as Marina Roseman observes in the single academic article on the New Rican Village to date, became an extension of *political control* minimally or not found within most commercial and elite arts organizations at the time.<sup>21</sup> Coupled with the larger historical context of U.S. hegemony in Puerto Rico, it was notably important for the New Rican Village artists to have full control of the arts programming as well as the content of their art; in doing so, keeping in mind the political equivalence of art institutions as ideologically loaded structures governed

by what was understood as a racial filter of exclusion, this level of power became synonymous with *both* cultural independence *and* political sovereignty. Being in control meant having power over the “image-making machinery”<sup>22</sup> (the discourse of representation) and the discourse of art. All of which consequently shaped their self-representation away from elite, commercially driven, art institutions, a particular character crucial for many alternative art collectives and avant-garde communities. But more importantly, the impetus for a distinctive art space was to engage the institutionalized power that frames the artistic imaginaries of communities historically barred from dominant art institutions as either too ethnic, folkloric, or too political.

Key to the cultural activism, or *artivism*, of the New Rican Village was not simply the opening of an alternative art space and the cultural traditions performed and transformed, but also *where* such a venue was located. This is key to understanding why Figueroa, and the other founding members, settled on the Lower East Side as a location to open the New Rican Village. As a former member of the Young Lords, Eddie Figueroa had been committed to and adept in working within marginalized disenfranchised New York communities. The Lords understood neighborhood neglect as a symptom of structural racism and classism.<sup>23</sup> The taking over of social services and institutions, such as hospitals and breakfast programs, were part of the organization’s outreach programming. The goals of the Lords were “the unity of the street people with students of working class background.”<sup>24</sup> And the Lower East Side was the neighborhood where the New York Chapter of the Young Lords Party first emerged when

spoken word poet activist and former Young Lord, Felipe Luciano, performed his acclaimed poem, “Jíbaro, My Pretty Nigger,” accompanied by congas in a Tompkins Square Park audience comprised of Black Panthers, Lower East Side residents and activists commemorating the attack on the Moncada Barracks by Cuban rebels in 1953.<sup>25</sup>

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Young Lords’ headquarters was located on East Third Street in the Lower East Side, operating within the Christadora House, located at 143 Avenue B, only blocks away from the New Rican Village and across the street from Tompkins Square Park, an important gathering space for local residents and progressive activists throughout New York City. The Christadora House was home to several social service organizations and other radical groups, like the Black Panthers. The arts became as crucial to neighborhood revitalization as the implementation of social programs. In fact, the Lords regularly published poetry in its newspaper *Pa’lante* and were the first to publish “The Puerto Rican Obituary” poem authored by Pedro Pietri, a founding member of the New Rican Village and one of the most popular artists of the Nuyorican arts scene.<sup>26</sup> In sum, the neglected neighborhoods of the city, many of which were home to Puerto Ricans and other communities of color, were perceived as the frontlines for radical social change. Modeling themselves after the Black Panther Party, the Lords understood that new beginnings would emerge from these lumpen spaces, by engaging within marginalized communities. At the time, the discourse was not to abandon the communities neglected by postindustrial policies, but to fully transform them from



within. The model cheered by the Lords and other activists of the Lower East Side, particularly those who spearheaded the Loisaida movement during the 1970s like Chino García and Bimbo Rivas, was “Mejore, No se Mude” (“Improve, Don’t Move”).<sup>27</sup> Thus, the New Rican Village was established in Loisaida as a verification of activists’s commitment to community renewal through culture.

From this angle, the marginalized Lower East Side location of the New Rican Village Center rendered it institutionally invisible to the legitimate art world, yet its subaltern location emblematically represented new and historically unacknowledged spaces of subaltern avant-gardism and resistance. During the mid-70s, the Lower east side neighborhood was yet to be marketed as a gritty chic area for hipster incomers to explore and/or move into nor an “urban frontier” for reinvestment and colonization;<sup>28</sup> in fact, the level of disinvestment and poverty cast it as a “vast wasteland.”<sup>29</sup> In 1976, according to Liz Sevchenko, “one out of every five lots was either empty or contained the remains of crumbling, abandoned buildings.”<sup>30</sup> Coupled with, as Richard Lloyd reminds us, “the social world of cultural production privileges particular locales”<sup>31</sup> over others, the Lower East Side was both too gritty and distant from the radar of desirability for many artists and critics. The spaces that were privileged for the established avant-garde were the dominant art institutions equipped with the social networks, resources, and organizational power to circulate art works among a cadre of equivalent art spaces. If we observe the European and European-American avant-gardes dominating the focal point of the art world, and all other “neo-avant-gardes”<sup>32</sup> as spatially located in the periphery, the territorial Lower East Side

address symbolically generates a level of cultural authority within the bohemian countercultural Loisaida neighborhood,<sup>33</sup> but the mental ascription of underdevelopment attached to it garners tangential aesthetic power and desirability for those operating within the dominant art world. In essence, the physical address, 101 Avenue A, of the New Rican Village, force us to reconceptualize the spatial, racial, conceptual and cartographic optics through which avant-gardism exists, operate and is constituted. This new perspective results in deterritorializing the privilege directed toward particular art institutions and communities residing in the “center” of the art world, and allowing for excluded and marginalized art venues and artists to be understood as equal, but distinct, members of the avant-garde. In essence, spatial location codifies the underlying ideology of aesthetic exclusion.<sup>34</sup>

This aesthetic “geography of exclusion,” drawing from the work of David Sibley, articulates the intended neglect of knowledge and cultural practices produced by members of excluded groups from academic and other institutions. Sibley argues how excluded bodies relegated to particular geographies condition the other spaces, bringing to light how spaces and institutions are tied together. Excluded and surveilled bodies are inseparable from the knowledge and cultural practices they produce.<sup>35</sup> This effort to institutionalize an alternative art space from the margins within the Lower East Side New York City neighborhood departs from the anti-institutional stance of the recognized, sacrosanct historical avant-garde. The marginalized location assumes a counter-hegemonic posture and platform against the dominant institutional ideology of art, yet underscores

the importance of institutional spaces to promote cultural politics and social change.

This commitment to creative experimentation and social change was a primary mission of the New Rican Village. According to the center's newsletter and mission statement, the center espoused a commitment to fostering conversations across styles, genres, and traditions.

The New Rican Village is a Cultural Arts Center located in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. It is more than the walls, the ceiling, and the floor of the building at 101 Avenue A between 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> streets. It is a place where the concepts and dreams of a new generation of Puerto Ricans in New York are given form in theater, dance, music, the visual arts, and poetry. A place where the deep images of Puerto Rican culture, history and tradition find contemporary expression. Where the past meets the present to forge cultural traditions for tomorrow.<sup>36</sup>

They merged the ancestral drums of the Puerto Rican African heritage with the sounds of New York City streets; where the ideologies of André Breton, Karl Marx, Carl Jung, Ira Progoff and Friedrich Nietzsche, could meet those of revolutionary leaders like Che Guevara, Ramon Emeterio Betances and Pedro Albizu Campos; where Puerto Ricans and other New York Latin@s could reconnect their intrinsic cultural rituals with those of an ever-changing world through painting, theater, poetry, dance, and music as essential to the forward advancement of a marginalized community.<sup>37</sup>

By this time, the post-war U.S. avant-garde, Stuart D. Hobbs argues, were no longer operating within marginal addresses or locations, but absorbed into the prevailing art institutions and commodified as the new artistic frontier of exploration; these institutions absorbed the same artists that were critical of their

hegemony and gate keeping roles. For example, in the 1930s New York's Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), one of, if not the leading museum that also defined U.S. American art values and considered by many critics and collectors as defining an era constituting valuable art, was heavily criticized for its reluctance to feature U.S.-based avant-garde art. The Museum was more interested in highlighting the work or Modern art made by European painters by the likes of Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse. By 1952, however, MOMA eventually responded to the criticism and featured an exhibition "Fifteen Americans," that included Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, and Clyfford Still, and even went as far as purchasing their work for their collection. This resulted in the eventual confirmation and recognition of U.S. modernism, and other museums and galleries eventually followed. "By admitting these American innovators into the stream of artistic development defined by historic avant gardists such as Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, Marcel Duchamp, Henri Matisse, and Joan Miro, MOMA defined a place in art history for the American [sic] vanguard."<sup>38</sup> This exhibition was praised for moving provincial art in the United States, and as a result, created an increased demand, and an eventual art market for abstract expression. This is confirmed in the higher prices, for example, of the work of various artists and the proliferation of galleries that sold avant-garde art.

In the 1940s, there were less than twenty galleries that sold avant-garde, innovative art; by the 1970s, there were close to 300 galleries. In essence, galleries were both responding to and generating demands around avant-garde art. This consumer market demand for avant-garde art, argues Hobbs,

contributed to the avant-garde's demise; their gradual incorporation into the dominant art world, their commodification and appropriation into the corporate world of fashion and advertising, as well as their replication by wealthy suburbanites, would dissolve their oppositional stance. They were "no longer alienated outsiders but accepted trendsetters" leading to their defeat, having lost their historical meaning.<sup>39</sup> But this incorporation of the European American avant-garde and their dominance in the art world is what the New Rican Village artists resisted. The new avant-garde relocated and operated in new, obscure art venues.

Similar to other avant-garde art communities, the New Rican Village sought the merger of cultural expression and life. Operating within a new social and political milieu of New Social Movements, while also observing the acute deprivation in many of their own communities, the artists who were part of the New Rican collective perceived cultural innovation and social change synonymously and as necessary for the fulfillment of social justice. Like many artist collectives before them and simultaneously operating elsewhere, social and cultural renewal derived from the unification of art and the social world.<sup>40</sup> Art was to be understood as an integral enunciation that engenders new political behavior, new ways of thinking, and systemic change, all visions and dreams that had their origins in the initial social interactions that transpired within the homes of the founding cadre of New Rican Village artists and administrators.

## **From Domestic to Artistic Space: The Beginnings of the New Rican Village Cultural Arts Center**

During the 1960s and 70s, artists responded to the social call of emancipation from dominant institutions and commercial market forces, seeking to open alternative, democratically organized, co-operative artist spaces where artists were in decision-making roles. At the time, high culture institutions were criticized for their commercialism, individualism, careerism, and fascinations with specific artists and their artwork. While the push for alternative spaces was the dominant vogue operating within the larger context of countercultures, as well as within emerging voices from the new cultural left, the New Rican Cultural Center instituted an intentional, commercial-free, art world of its own.<sup>41</sup> The strategizing and conceptual artistic social angle for this emerging Latin@ community would first germinate in the homes of artists.

Many of the artists that helped to establish the NRV were meeting in domestic spaces, exchanging ideas, holding workshops, and seeking ways to push each other and formulate new aesthetic formulas for existing forms. The NRV space became an extension of some of the artistic laboratory already occurring in artist's homes. Sandra María Esteves, one of the founding members of the NRV and a longstanding member of the Nuyorican Poetry scene and canon, reflected on the development of how the New Rican Village developed from a domestic space to a performance space and venue in a recorded interview.

Eddie Figueroa, first he was in the Young Lords [Party]. Then he was in the Family [an acting troupe for former incarcerated artists].

So Eddie meets Mickey [Miguel Piñero] and Tito [Goya] from the Family; he [Eddie] was one of the actors in the Family. So that's how I wound up meeting Eddie through Tito because Eddie's in Tito's house for dinner one day. And so Eddie finds out that I'm a graphic artist. And he says, 'Oh well I'm planning to start this theatre. Maybe you could design some things for us,' and, you know, one thing led to another. And at that point I was writing [poetry] already. I was a poet. So that was another way that he could bring me into the company. And it was shortly after that that I remember he got that space [the New Rican Village]. And he got the space around the same time that the Nuyorican poets had their space.<sup>42</sup>

Prior to her formal introduction to Eddie Figueroa, Esteves also considers how various poets came together and shared and exchanged their work. The larger context for these important encounters is the informal network that allows for such interactions and subsequent collaborations to proceed. As Esteves recalls, her connection to Figueroa takes place due to her friendship with Tito Goya, the actor and playwright who co-authored, along with Miguel Piñero, the play, "Short Eyes" that was staged in Lincoln Center by The Family. Her introduction to Figueroa within Goya's apartment frames how both artists interact with each other, which is dependent on their respective friendships with Goya as well as the activity they both attended.

Esteves also highlights the specifics of writing and some of the discussions between writers and poets in domestic spaces:

I remember one time Américo [Casiano] and [Jesús] Papoleto [Meléndez] had this big fight about whether a period and a comma should go wherever it was that they were putting it in their particular poem. And they were arguing that it didn't belong there. One is calling the other one an idiot and what does he know and, you know. And having this intense, intense argument. At the time, the Nuyorican Poets Café did not exist then nor the New Rican Village. But we would basically just meet at each others' houses and at

events, different events that would be happening. Or we'd go and we'd hear other poets, you know. It [would] be like that. What I liked about it was I found it to be a very supportive community. I found the poets looked out for each other and were open to each other. And I had never experienced that quite that way anywhere else. It was kind of an unspoken family. It was like, 'Okay, we'll listen to you. We're willing to listen to you.' That kind of thing was a certain openness that came with the territory; a willingness to hear what you had to say. Where most places people could care less. They don't want to hear what you had to say. Just shut up and do your job, you know.<sup>43</sup>

This openness and the importance of feeling welcomed and cultivating a space of belonging was apparent within the various homes Esteves visited, a quality transferred to the New Rican Village performance space. The collaborative openness also entailed being open to new poetic expressions and perspectives while also highlighting some of the resistance artists, like Esteves, encountered in the various art venues during the 1970s; being told to “shut up and do your job” entails both a discouragement of artistic expression among many poor and working-class communities that favor an idea of proper behavior and use of time within various settings, including schools, the workplace, or home. More importantly, it highlights the marginalization Esteves and other Latin@ artists experienced; many leading artists, art critics, and/or other art professionals and educators equally cast them down. The welcoming community that Esteves describes contrasts this hostility. The NRV, thus, became an extension of the domestic space; the “new” home, or “village”, where artistic exchanges and collaborations would occur. The Village or “pueblito,” building on the East Village vernacular and cachet within the alternative art world scene, would become the



vital space of fashioning a collectively driven, articulated, and formulated new Puerto Rican Diaspora aesthetic among a tight knit community of artists.

This sensibility of family, or collective community, is represented in some of the graphic artwork that Esteves designed. Take for example her “August 1977 Arts Festival” poster (see Figure 3). Dated almost a year after the opening of the New Rican Village, the poster captures the inter-artistic scene of the New Rican Village (to be discussed later) and highlights, among other things, the reconstruction of community within an urban context. Inscribing, and more accurately, envisioning themselves within the landscape of Loisaida, Esteves lays the groundwork for how this artistic community began to imagine, understand, and conceive of their presence not only within the Lower East Side, but within the global city overall.

The racial hysteria that also coincided with the devastating impact of deindustrialization upon many New Yorkers, particularly among the poor and working-class communities of color, did not detract the artists from this collective, as envisioned by Esteves, of making an effort to transform the adverse and alienating effects of this economic strategy.<sup>44</sup> As a poster with a collage aesthetic, which encompasses the intentional disruption of “conventional meanings by an act of recontextualization that juxtaposes seemingly incongruent objects, images, ideas, or performative acts within a conceptual aesthetic construct.”<sup>45</sup> This transfer of objects, or “the radical juxtaposition of meaning,” within a new context that are seemingly “incongruent” is a purposeful intervention and an artistic strategy metaphorically suggestive of the exclusion and liminality

Puerto Rican and Latin@ artists were experiencing, and that also accompanies Diaspora social formations. Esteves' decision to use collage, possibly influenced by the graphic art work that engrossed popular culture and the structure of feeling of the time, seemingly resembling, for example the Beatles album cover, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (see figure 2), fosters "new possibilities of signification" for Puerto Ricans at large, and the emergence of a distinctively emerging working-class community of avant-garde artists in particular.<sup>46</sup> Equally significant is the insertion of "tropical" images onto the northern, urban city, a visual trope repeated by Esteves and other graphic artists illustrated in various New Rican Village posters (see Figures 3, 5, 9 and 13 for the tropicalization of New York City's landscape).



Figure 3 - Beatles Album Cover for Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band. The album cover was created by art director Robert Fraser in collaboration with Paul McCartney and designed by Peter Blake, his wife Jann Haworth, and photographed by Michael Cooper. EMI, 1967.



The collage aesthetic, allows for other insertions and resignifications. As Esteves envisioned, she also raises alternative historical and conceptual accounts of the hegemony of particular artists within the East Village neighborhood, and more specifically, the way in which the East Village has been long constructed as a home for specific bohemian and avant-garde artists. Such dominant conceptions belie some of the hostility that artists of color often faced within this artistic corridor. In reference to the East Village's bohemian community, Christine Stansell reminds us "for anyone black who sought admission, bohemia offered scant hospitality."<sup>47</sup> Such adversity was also extended toward most Puerto Rican and other Latin@ artists and confirmed here by Esteves. This opposition, then, contextualizes the importance of Esteves's active insertion of a Latino artistic collective onto the imagination of critics and other observers, staking claim to the growing Latin@ community and their artistic power as it was emerging at new arts spaces like the New Rican Village, the Nuyorican Poets Café, and other venues. Esteves' collage is more than an insertion of bodies onto a public art sphere, but represent an extension of the overall art and social goals of the New Rican Village. She seeks to enact another aesthetic story that transcends the dominant linear narrative of avant-gardism, while also destabilizing a hegemonic narrative of racial exclusivity within New York City's prominent arts scene.

Collage, as we observe, is an aesthetic of conscious dissonance at multiple levels. There are profound implications for this dissonant collage style as displayed here. As an aesthetics of dissidence and active re-articulation of

dominant narratives embedded within power, collage becomes more than a style, but a metaphoric tool to lay the crucial groundwork for a surrealist counter-narrative vision of possibilities already operating within the artistic core of the New Rican Village. These possibilities also mirror the artistic intentions of Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso, two of the prominent collage artists; the goal is to disrupt perspective and spatial cues of art on the page and to intentionally bring about a new visual revolution. The revolution or intent to disrupt operate between the real and the imagined, that location where Esteves seeks to dismantle the silence of invisibility, yet also raise, in its literal sense, the hopes and intentions conceived by this working-class collective, highlighting how a community choreographs a story within fractured spaces and circumstances.

Following the collage of Cubism, that saw fragments as fractured social realities, Esteves creates opportunities and art within these artistic fault lines, cracks where silenced communities, as she recalls above, sought to establish new spaces of agency that transformed a collective despair within the Nuyorican community. This transformation entailed uprooting and transplanting a discourse that fatalized an entire community. In this sense, the uprooted and transplanted palm trees onto the City's landscape are an intentional gesture that reverses this fatalism, while also, in the tradition of Cubist Collage, resignify the city's semiotics with collaged images of tropicality and Puerto Rican otherness onto the cultural geography of New York City. Representing both othered bodies in artistic motion alongside the palm trees bears resemblance to, as argued by Agustín Laó-Montes, a semiotic reinscription of the metropolis as a city consisting

of “mambo montages,” an assemblage of fragmented and unified voices “and historical worlds and cultural genres” that “impl[y] both a way of imagining Latinidad and an angle of [re-envisioning] the city,” a “Latinized” public display of collective meaning onto the ultimate signifier of urban imperialism that subversively reuses the colonial tropes of Tropicalia.<sup>48</sup> Esteves’ poster, and in others included here, articulate community-based art making, but also expresses, as George Lipsitz observes, “a form of art-based community making,”<sup>49</sup> which sought to foster a welcoming community within the space of the New Rican Village, the Lower East Side, and New York City overall.

Several musicians also echo Esteves’ reflections of how the New Rican Village became an extension of the domestic collaborations between poets, playwrights, and actors. Steve Turre, an early member and participant within the NRV scene, is a multi-instrumentalist whose principal instruments remain the trombone and the seashell. Turre, a Chicano/Mexican-American West Coast-born musician who was performing with a number of prominent musicians as he was introduced to the New Rican Village community, also became actively involved with several ensembles that emerged out of the New Rican Village, including “Conjunto Libre” (later changed to “Manny Oquendo and Libre”), one of New York City’s oldest salsa and continuing music bands co-founded by Andy Gonzalez and the late percussionist, Manny Oquendo. Turre, also a member of Mario Rivera’s “Salsa Refugees” (see figure 4), the “Jerry Gonzalez and the Fort Apache Band,” among others, was a recent newcomer to the music scene in New York City, and became involved in the New Rican Village first through his

introduction to Andy Gonzalez, the bassist, bandleader, and educator, and the musical director for the NRV. Andy would invite musicians to his parent's house first on Gildersleeve Avenue in the Southeast section of the Bronx and hold music clinics and jam sessions. The Gonzalez family first lived in public housing projects before purchasing a small house in the working-class neighborhood of Andy and his elder brother, Jerry, bandleader, trumpet player and percussionist, would lead the gathering, and have musicians listen to classic Cuban, Brazilian, Puerto Rican and Jazz recordings, among other styles, in order to gain a musical history to the music performed locally. Turre was one of those invited musicians:

Turre: I used to go over and hang out with Andy and Jerry a lot and they would play records for me and show me about the history of the Latin music.

Valentín: You were going to their parents' house?

Turre: Once or twice, yeah. On Soundview.

Valentín: And you'd listen to music.

Turre: Some. More--Andy got some records up at his apartment, you know, and we used to go over there.

Valentín: So you'd just go there and play some old Cuban tunes or just a variety of different things?

Turre: All of that. Yeah, I mean they turned me onto Arsenio Rodríguez and all, you know, the roots, Felix Chapottin, and, you know, [Israel] Cachao [Lopez], and the whole lineage and I started to realize that there's a lineage in this just like there's lineage in jazz and it's kind of a parallel evolution and, you know, it's deep. And then I found out then that the same thing happened in Brazil. There's a parallel evolution with their music. You know, and that's some beautiful music too. I love Brazilian music, you know. So it's--I like the idea of what Dizzy had, of the United Nations, the music of the Americas. It's all family in a certain sense, you know, it's all family whether it's jazz or gospel or funk or Blues or Afro Cuban or bomba playing or merengue or calypso or reggae, steel drum band, samba, cumbia, or bossa nova, it's all family, it all got its roots in Africa. It's just different branches of the tree, same root.<sup>50</sup>



Turre recounts these early workshops, which began in the 1970s and carried over to the New Rican Village. The wide array of music, facilitated by those music listening sessions, are understood as part of the African musical tree, promoting a circum-Atlantic musical network of overlapping black Diasporas, connected through one particular lineage. By locating these early domestic workshops within that genealogy, he places himself within this Afro-Diasporic tradition, and conceives of himself as a student, descendant, practitioner, and later an innovator of these musical styles.

These early workshops continue, as Turre notes, when he was first invited to participate in the New Rican Village. In this case, as a performance space, the New Rican Village allowed for a larger community of musicians to participate in the jam sessions and workshops. In an interview, he specifically recalls how the music was discussed and opens up with a mock discussion to demonstrate their informality.

Turre: [He recalls and changes his voice as though he's imitating someone's voice] "Hey man, we're playing down in Alphabet City...at the New Rican Village. C'mon down and play something with us." You know, "We're experimenting, we're trying out some stuff. Bring a tune. You got some tunes?" I said, "Yeah." "Well c'mon down and we'll try 'em out. Let's just, let's do something." And that's how, we were just talking about music and stuff. We just went and did it. And we'd talk about music. We'd say, "Hey man, what you doin' Thursday?" "Nothing." "Then c'mon down." You know, "Okay." And we'd go down there and do something. Sometimes you'd bring some music and if they get to it, they get to it. You bring it next time, whatever. And we jam some tunes in there and then at a certain point everybody used to try a tune. "You got a tune, let's try it." "You got a new one this time?" "Nah, I didn't bring one." "Okay, you got a tune? Let's try your tune." You know. Other times, "Well let's play--last week we played Giant Steps, let's play it merengue this time." "Okay." So we'd try it with a merengue

beat. And it worked, you know. And we were just, you know, trying stuff. You know, it was like that.<sup>51</sup>

Turre reflects on the informality that continued within the New Rican Village and the discourse of musical experimentation (discussed in chapter 2); yet, this level of communal informality becomes an extension of the interactions that took place in the Gonzalez household. The reference to performing “Giant Steps,” a bebop jazz standard originated by the Jazz musician, bandleader and arranger, John Coltrane, in the style of a Dominican merengue rhythm, is first conceived by the late Mario Rivera, the multi-instrumentalist and bandleader of the “Salsa Refugees” ensemble. Turre’s narrative of a domestic artistic scene and its conceptual and educational exchanges that crossed over to the NRV parallels Sandra María Esteves reflections, too.



Figure 5 – Photo of Mario Rivera (on left) playing the flute and Steve Turre (on right) holding the trombone. A live performance by the Salsa Refugees at the New Rican Village. N.D. Photo by Sandra María Esteves. Photo is part of her personal archive and included here with her permission.

One of Steve Turre's musical mentors and collaborators was the Dominican born bandleader Mario Rivera who settled in New York City when he was 21 years old. In my interview with the acclaimed musician, he corroborates both Esteves' and Turre's account. He recalls how the New Rican Village started by way of the domestic scene that first emerged in Gonzalez's house and continued on to the Lower East Side. The extensive excerpt of the interview offers a context to how Rivera employs the music workshoped and performed at the New Rican Village as a musical rupture from the big-band Latin jazz that emerged in the 1950s and initiated by Dizzy Gillespie, Chano Pozo, Mario Bauzá, and Frank "Machito" Grillo. In this account, he also implicates himself with this new musical style, a particularly significant aspect to the artistic exploration that was paramount to the identity and goals of the New Rican Village.

Valentín: Tú piensas que la música que ustedes tocaban en el 'New Rican' era diferente de la música antepasado?

Rivera: Bueno sí, era diferente porque antes lo que hacían era mambo instrumental. Estaban tocando 'Be-Bop tunes' con ritmo Latino. ¿Entiendes? Entonces tratamos ese engranaje entre, sea, continuando una cosa que ya lo habían comensado ya por Machito y Charlie Parker, esa gente. Pero, que eso se quedo en el olvido, hasta que salio "Rican Village" y ahí es donde comensó todo, de verdad.

Valentín: Ustedes empesaron....

Rivera: A formar la música. ¿Entiendes? Yo me recuerdo que yo tocaba una canción, "Giant Step," como merengue. Y me dicen, "¿Oye, como es posible?" Sí, porque ya estábamos oyendo en la casa [de Andy] "jazz." ¿Entiendes? Y tocábamos con Latinos. Pues, entonces nos reuníamos para descargar en la casa de Andy, allá en la Bronx. Soy Big fan de la casa, y ahí tocábamos, o aquí, tú sabes. Y Hilton Ruiz, too. Venía todos los días a trabajar conmigo, Hilton Ruiz.

Valentín: A practicar?

Rivera: Sí, a aprender las canciones y cosas. Eramos serio de la música. Yo estoy mas serio que toditos. Como yo era mas viejo, tú sabes (laughs).<sup>52</sup>

Rivera astutely notes how he, along with other musicians, were able to build on and transform the Latin Jazz big-band music that emerged in the 1950s *because* they were already practicing and listening to music at Andy's house. In a weeklong series of interviews where Andy Gonzalez discussed his involvement with the New Rican Village, he shares how he initially became aware of the New Rican Village and it's connection to the listening and musical jam sessions at his parents' house.<sup>53</sup>

Andy Gonzalez: I heard about the New Rican Village through some people. I was working with [Conjunto] Libre already. But the idea--. You know, since we were jamming at my house all the time we were looking for—

Valentín: Your parents' house?

AG: Yeah. We were looking for a spot, you know.

And I used to work down on the Lower East Side not far from there [the New Rican Village], like on 6<sup>th</sup> Street and Avenue A...So I knew the area and I knew what was going on around there, Tompkins Square Park and all that, you know. I mean we were part of that scene for a minute, you know. But when we started the New Rican, we were all doing a lot of cultural kind of things, you know, before the New Rican Village.

Both Rivera and Andy Gonzalez collectively paint a picture of a musical community engaging in musical conversations, exchanges, and workshops domestically before the opening of the NRV. Yet, as he notes, “we were looking for a spot,” presumably consisting of the other musicians who were attending these music workshops and eager to have a formal, independently operated venue to workshop and experiment new musical possibilities.

Angel “Papo” Vázquez, a North Philadelphia-born trombonist who came to New York City at the young age of 14 years, was adopted by the New Rican Village musical community and describes the workshops as a “school” responsible for creating a new musical formula and approach to performing Latin jazz:

Valentín: Can you describe what that was like for you, being at the New Rican and playing with this community of musicians and artists?

Vázquez: Well, for me, I was like the youngest guy there. I was like the kid.

Valentín: You were the kid?

Vázquez: I was like the kid, you know. And you know, that was my school, man. That was probably like the best school I ever went to in my life.

Valentín: Why so?

Vázquez: Well, they gave me the opportunity to learn, to develop something, and that was the only place that existed in New York. See, when I got to New York, there was no Latin jazz, even though I don’t think Latin jazz exists; it’s just real music, you know. There was no Latin jazz, there was nothing happening like that. There was no scene happening like that. And I want to say that we, we invented the term Latin jazz, or whatever the hell you want to say. You know.

Valentín: You’ve said you disagree with the Latin jazz term.

Vázquez: Well, you know, it makes no sense, it doesn’t. What the hell is Latin jazz? We got it from Greek? From a Greek god playing a mambo, or shit? Yeah, that’s bullshit. This, you know, this is music.

Vázquez’s rather engaging views captures another facet of the New Rican Village, but presented differently. Similar to Mario Rivera, Vázquez identifies some distinction to the music at the New Rican Village as a departure from the big band Latin jazz of Dizzy Gillespie and Cub-op, the term assigned to the musical genre of the 1950s landmark performances and recordings led by both the Gillespie and Machito orchestras. Later in the chapter, Vázquez elaborates

on this musical distinction more comprehensively. Interestingly, Vázquez also identifies the New Rican Village as a school, a venue where he learned how to play, as he calls it, “real music.” This pedagogical role was similar to the musical workshops in the Gonzalez house for other musicians. In many ways, this speaks to a community creating its own resources of instruction that were unavailable elsewhere. As Vázquez and others note, there were no other venues where this level of interaction and instruction were taking place. Most of the musical venues had a commercial orientation where musical and aesthetic examination and discovery was forbidden.

When woven together, both the musical and poetry communities converge at the New Rican Village joined later by visual artists, dancers, and theatre actors. These overlapping conversations and collaborative formations are part of an informal network first operating domestically largely due to the dearth of institutional spaces that welcomed and equally encouraged such aesthetic approaches and philosophies. Interestingly, drawing on the work of Earl Lewis where he observes how formal segregation still allowed African-Americans to create community, or a sense of congregation within a hostile and unreceptive Jim Crow environment,<sup>54</sup> the “arts congregation” of the NRV constituted this informal network largely because of their ethnicity, artistic preferences, ideology, and their interest and pursuit to push and create new aesthetic practices. Moreover, while El Museo del Barrio was just taking off, few Nuyorican art spaces were dedicated to fostering avant-garde music, and inter-artistic public arts programming. El Taller Boricua in Spanish Harlem also shared the avant-

garde vision held by the NRV, but this institution centered largely on painting and the visual arts.<sup>55</sup> The congregation that formed at the New Rican, whose concept developed domestically, was ironically on account of the hostility many Latin@ artists encountered within established arts institutions. We come to learn that these artists were not passive, but operating within institutional constraints and limited resources. Drawing on Lewis again, despite institutional barriers, these artists interweaved a sense of both self and community to transform community *and* the arts through their impulse and drive to interact within the only spaces they controlled: their homes or apartments. Yet, their dreams transcended the domestic sphere; the early community at the New Rican became a reality for some seeking to build upon established traditions, and also seize new avenues to organize and create a new space of possibilities that will eventually organize inter-arts festivals in collaboration with other art venues, cultural workers, and cultural organizers and lead to a Latin@ New York-based public sphere.



THE FRIENDS OF **EDDIE FIGUEROA**, THE **NEW RICAN VILLAGE**  
AND THE **PUERTO RICAN EMBASSY** PRESENT

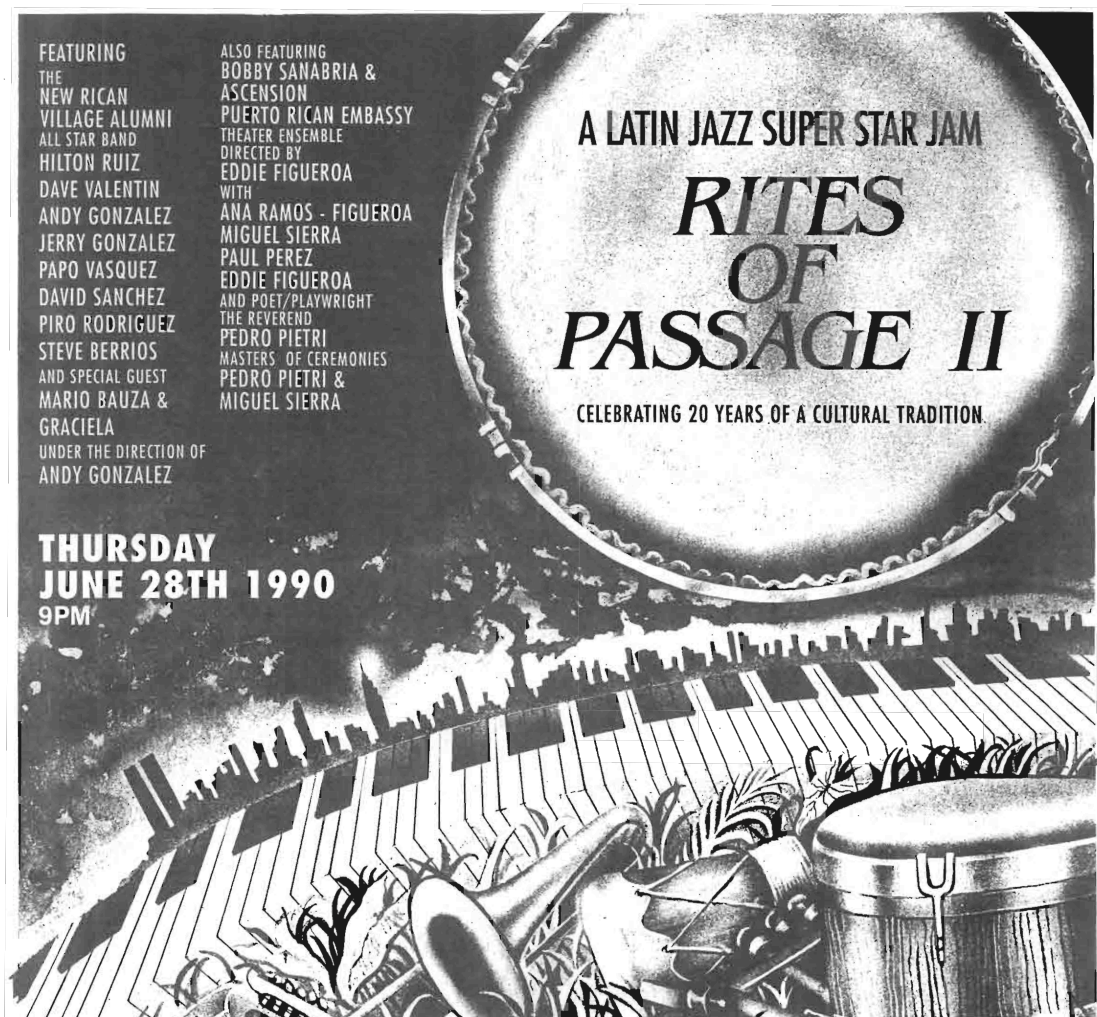


Figure 6 - The Friends of Eddie Figueroa, The New Rican Village and the Puerto Rican Embassy - Latin Jazz Super Star Jam - Rites of Passage II - Celebrating 20 Years of a Cultural Tradition - June 28, 1990. The Pedro Pietri Papers. Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora. Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY.

### **From the Island to Loisaída – The Village on the East Coast of the Island**

Akin to other minority groups who resided in U.S. cities during this time, many of the artists who were part of the New Rican Village Cultural Arts Center

were witnesses to and often directly affected by the spatial displacement, redlining, social neglect, racism, joblessness and under-employment that affected New York City residents and that contoured the experience of the Latino working class. These processes would eventually inform the artists' activism, their racial consciousness, and ultimately, how they viewed art as not simply a personal aesthetic expression, but one that fostered social transformation. To better understand the social context from which the New Rican Village emerged, as well as how Nuyorican and other Puerto Rican communities developed, warrants a brief historical review.

As an official U.S. controlled territory, authorized by the U.S. congress through the Foraker Act of 1900, U.S. citizenship was imposed upon Puerto Ricans through the Jones Act of the United States Congress in 1917.<sup>56</sup> U.S. hegemony over Puerto Rican land, its economy, its legal, educational, health systems, and the marking of bodies through citizenship, along with the creation of U.S. military bases, created a stranglehold over every facet of Puerto Rican life.<sup>57</sup>

Increased political hostility and resistance against U.S. rule reached its apex during the 1930s. This prompted the development of a new political and economic strategy led by one of Puerto Rico's most respected political and cultural leaders, Luis Muñoz Marín. As the island's first democratically elected Governor (1948-1964), and the leader of the newly formed Partido Popular Democrático (PPD – the Popular Democratic Party), Marín's Commonwealth "Estado Libre Asociado" (Free Associated State) platform initiated a new epoch

of continued colonial relations with an ostensible or minimal level of “sovereignty.”<sup>58</sup> Recognized as an economic disaster, and even as “imperialism by invitation,”<sup>59</sup> the PPD, along with U.S. economic strategists, inaugurated a neo-liberal model of economic development and named it “Operation Bootstrap.” In the name of “decolonization” it sought an economic plan that largely transformed an agriculturally dependent economy led by government initiatives into a privately invested export producing manufacturing development program.

To lure foreign industry, mostly American and other companies to the island, the Puerto Rican government guaranteed low wages, and beginning in 1976, tax incentives under Section 936 of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code. The rapid industrialization of the island whereby capital-intensive factories employed only a small percentage of the unemployed agricultural majority sector caused huge unemployment. For example, while Operation Bootstrap was instituted in the 1940s, unemployment rarely fell below 15 percent, and the labor force participation rate was below 45 percent.<sup>60</sup> This economic engineering was marketed as a viable plan to “uplift” the island from its acute poverty.

Teodoro Moscoso, the architect of Operation Bootstrap, declared that mass migration to the U.S. was necessary for the economic policy to be “successful,” serving as the safety valve to restrain the island’s massive unemployment and the increased frustration by the large unemployed sector.<sup>61</sup> From the beginning, it was understood that the importation of business would still leave a large sector of the population unemployed. And Moscoso and Marín sought to avoid another era of 1930s anti-government hostility, a historical

juncture that prompted the most ardent unrest and anti-American resistance and sentiment in the island's history thus far.

Operation Bootstrap spurred mass migration to mostly settle into existing Puerto Rican U.S. "colonia" communities. Now becoming growing Latino enclaves, the mass migration began in the 1950s and reached its apex through the 70s,<sup>62</sup> where 12% of New York City's residents were Puerto Ricans who were either born on the island or second-generation New York natives (Nuyoricans). This massive exodus and settling into New York City and other U.S. cities prompted hysteria and reactionary backlash to the once highly regarded Latino migrants. Many Puerto Rican migrants were "shipped" and sent to the United States under the official auspices of the Puerto Rico Department of Labor Migration to various cities and rural towns, working either as farm or factory workers throughout the United States, and many others remained unemployed seeking manual labor positions at a time when the process of deindustrialization and a post-Fordist economy was also taking root. With a declining manufacturing sector coupled by a largely unqualified and untrained labor force, many Puerto Ricans were either unemployed or under-employed. The largest Puerto Rican communities centered mostly throughout the East coast and the city of Chicago.

While there were Puerto Ricans residing in New York City prior to this mass migration of the 1950s, (their Gotham residency and activism started well before and after U.S colonization of Puerto Rico in 1898,<sup>63</sup>) the 1950s migration coincided with a global economic shift and the U.S. government's initiative to remake cities from what were perceived as urban slums into middle-class friendly

safe havens, and enact policies that welcomed the infrastructure of private industry to urban spaces. The new federal plan was to semantically shift the public perception of cities as havens for poor, racial minorities, and welcome white-middle class U.S. Americans into living in urban spaces like New York City. Many middle-class, oftentimes white, citizens and politicians perceived the dramatic rise of U.S. Puerto Rican migration into the city as causing the problem of manufacturing displacement.

The push to recruit private industry also warranted a change in urban housing policies. Robert Moses, one of the foremost urban redevelopers drawing from these federal funds, responded to the federal government's concern to earmark urban spaces for the middle-class (highly racialized and synonymous with Euro-American communities), to re-organize and re-segregate New York City by race, class, and ethnicity, directing poorer, and racial minorities into particular urban neighborhoods.

It is this massive migration, the accompanying trope of unemployment, and a change in urban development and housing that accompanied Puerto Rican migration that spurred considerable white anxiety and fear, and which were represented in popular culture, public policy, and anthropological studies.<sup>64</sup> Up to the present day, the colony of Puerto Rico continues to serve as a reservoir of resources for the United States. It is this larger social, economic, and political context and the ultimate failure of the Commonwealth discourse and its corresponding economic strategies that informs the political ideology and the

various forms of cultural resistance to U.S. hegemony for the Puerto Rican and Latin@ artists actively participating at the New Rican Village.

The artists of the NRV were collectively concerned with the repercussions of post-industrial planning upon unemployed and increasingly underemployed Latin@s. They saw Puerto Ricans as pathologized through policy, and understood how political, educational and housing policies affected working-class Puerto Rican life prospects and therefore their “lifestyles” and future life chances. Although Figueroa and fellow working-class avant-gardes may have traversed class lines due to advanced educational opportunities, income, increased cultural exposure, et cetera, these artists were shaped by their history and upbringing as both working-class and (im)migrant citizens, the type of education they received in public schools, and the lack of opportunities/resources available to them as working-class subjects. This history proved to frame much of their activism and radical thinking. As a result, these artists embodied the avant-garde in the sense that the avant-garde “came to designate the small group of advanced ...artists who transferred the spirit of radical critique of social forms to the domain of artistic forms.”<sup>65</sup> The arts provided a space for social change, where the full integrating effect of traditional culture could be reconciled with the very modern realities of Latin@ life in New York. The “traditional,” experimental, and the contemporary were interwoven, giving birth to new ways of thinking, new aesthetic forms, and a new society.

**The Margins Representing Themselves:  
The Latin@ Avant-Garde, Inter-Artisticity, and the Development of a  
Diasporic/Latin@ Imaginary**

Andy Gonzalez, a South-Bronx born musician, musical director and visionary of the NRV, co-founder of New York City's oldest salsa group, Libre, founding member of one the leading Latin jazz ensembles, Jerry Gonzalez and the Fort Apache Band, and one of the leading bass players of the jazz and Latin jazz idioms, underlines the fusion that produced something subversive and something new within the NRV. Gonzalez noted the mere representation of Puerto Rican and Latin@ arts in a performance venue were significant:

We were revitalizing and...bringing back that which was forgotten or not known to new generations. Then we wanted to open the field wide open [in order] to show how much talent there was in the Puerto Rican community. That we weren't the Puerto Ricans depicted in the movie Fort Apache, the Bronx. And that Latin@s are gifted artists at all levels. [The Puerto Rican renaissance] alone was change, because it was starting to manifest itself. And when you have something that shows up in front of an audience that wasn't there before[hand], that [promotes social] change.<sup>66</sup>

Gonzalez, Figueroa and the other Latin@ artists inhabiting the Bohemian scene of New York City's Greenwich Village did not perceive themselves as passive agents unable to proactively change their environment; rather, they believed they had the ability to forge social change through artistic expressions that would cultivate and promote a Latin@ public sphere and social transformation in the here and now through simply "doing" what came "natural." The like-minded artists also embraced the revolutionary goals proposed by Don Pedro Albizu Campos and other independence advocates, like Lolita Lebrón and Rafael

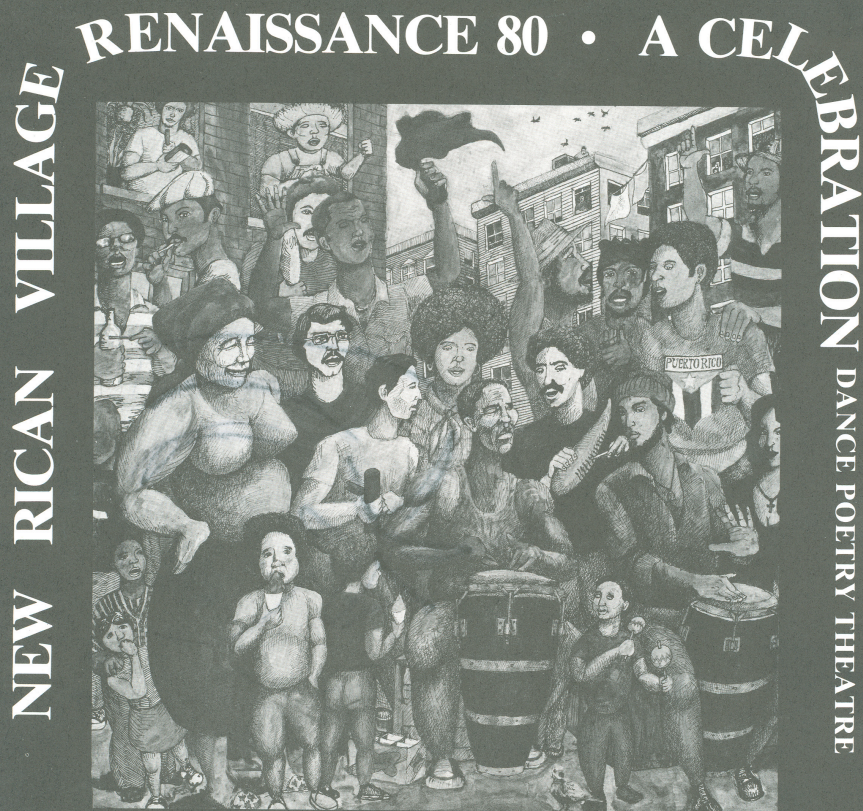
Cancel Miranda. They understood a parallel strategy in their aesthetic activism to revolutionary activity and social transformation.

Interestingly, this openness and rearticulation to supporting Puerto Rican nationalism was part of the ethos of the Puerto Rican Left during the 1970s.<sup>67</sup> Campos, Lebrón, and Miranda were decolonial heroes struggling to bring about social change within the Island's colonial political structure. Such goals were congruent to this artist collective. Moreover, because these revolutionary heroes were absent from the larger historical narrative of U.S. colonialism as well as their own political culture, it only intensified their solidarity as both sets of activists aimed to disalienate, define, and decolonize. This representation of silenced Puerto Rican histories became an extension of affirming their diasporic identity and their current struggle to challenge the ideological and cultural hegemony silencing their own surrealist visions of a new world; such perspectives and cultural practices were the ideological seeds to cultivating a new consciousness reversing a collective colonial primitivity and historical indolence that was compounding the pervasive fatalism within pockets of this diasporic community.

In accord with Stuart Hall's idea of "new ethnicity,"<sup>68</sup> the artists at the New Rican Village were promoting an idea of being a "new Rican" forging a renaissance they coined as the "New Rican Renaissance" (see Figures 6 and 7) or the "Latin cultural renaissance," that entailed efforts to proactively self-represent and affirm their diasporic identities, cultural histories, and artistic talents while also building upon older aesthetic traditions. As professed in their mission statement, "some of the most talented dedicated young Puerto Rican



professionals have come together here to make the New Rican Village the focal point of the Latin Cultural renaissance. Through theatrical and musical performances, exhibitions of painting and photography, in the gestures of dance and the verbal images of poetry-the cultural heritage of the Puerto Rican people is reborn in the contemporary context of New York City.”<sup>69</sup> The impetus for this self-representation, similar to the goals within the Harlem Renaissance, was a conscious maneuver to undermine the racial primitivism spurred by the historical representation of Puerto Ricans that emerge from social science research at the time, such as Oscar Lewis’s *La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty-San Juan and New York* as well as some cinematic representations, like *West Side Story* (1961) and *Fort Apache, the Bronx* (1980).<sup>70</sup> Both sets of representations depicted Puerto Ricans as criminal, irrational, and fiery, unassimilable racial subjects who perpetuated their own poverty and behavior. As a vanguard collective leading this renewal within the diasporic crossroads of New York City during the 1970s and 80s, the NRV artists built upon the ethos and structure of liberation, critical consciousness, and new social movements. They ultimately sought to build an arts institution that codified these ideological visions with innovative cultural practices.



with

**LIBRE**

**NEW RICAN VILLAGE**  
Performance Co.

Comedian

**RICK AVILES**

**Pepe Castillo, Totico, Gene Golden**

*Directed By EDUARDO FIGUEROA*

*Dance Director WILLIE FIGUEROA*

*Music Director ANDY GONZALEZ*

*Poetry PEDRO PIETRI*

**FRIDAY FEB. 29, 1980 7:30 PM**

**Aaron Davis Hall at Davis Center of  
Performing Arts City College  
135th St., Convent Avenue**

Tickets \$7.00 and \$8.00

Info: 876-1566  
690-8176

Figure 7 - New Rican Renaissance 80 Poster, 1980. A renaissance movement captured by The New Rican Village. The Pedro Pietri Papers. Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora. Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY.

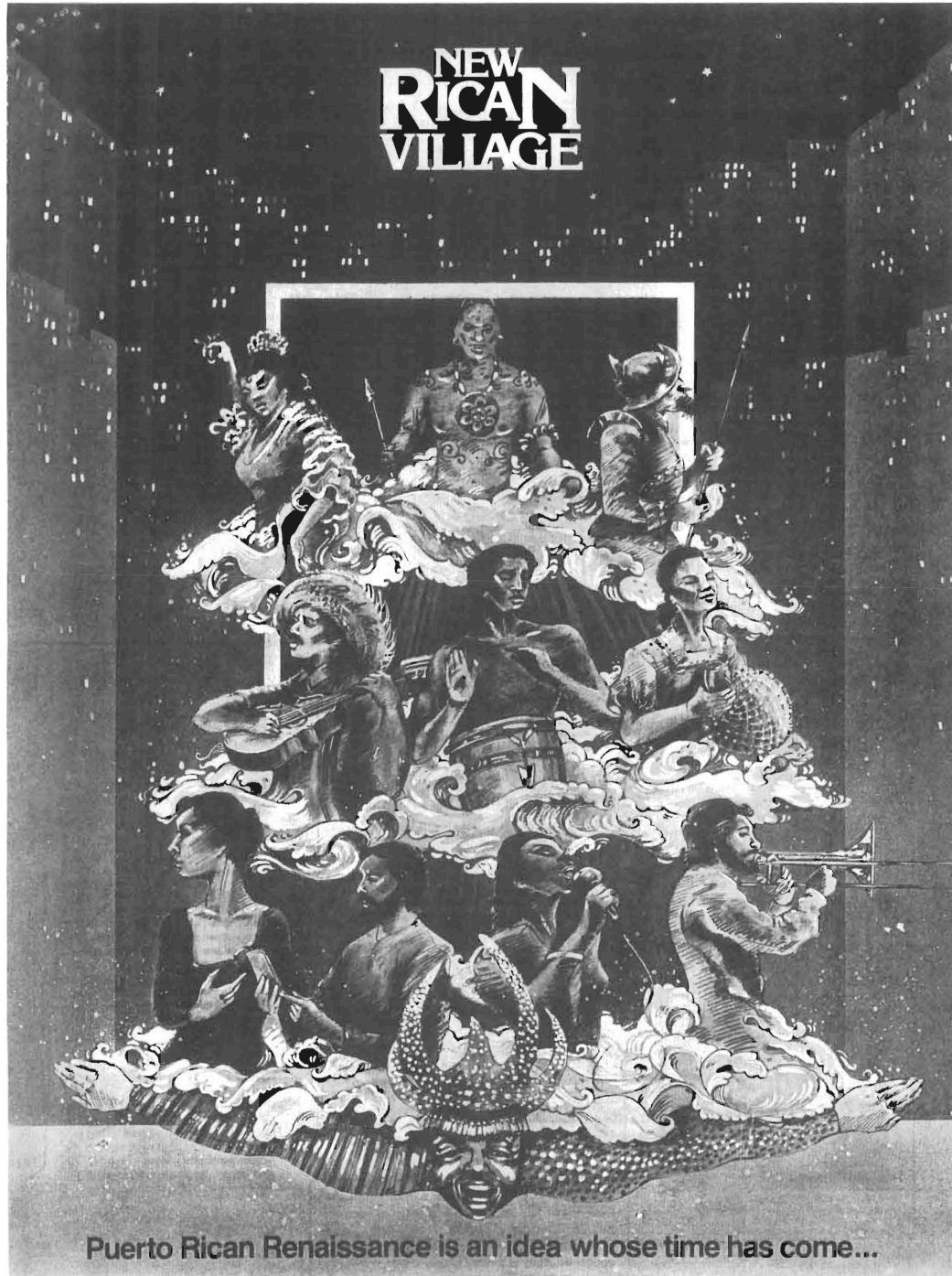


Figure 8 - Part of a New Rican Village poster used for fundraising and publicity purposes. N.D. Note the Puerto Rican renaissance reference. The New Rican is framed as leading and helping to create this renaissance. The Pedro Pietri Papers. Archives of the Puerto RicanDiaspora. Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY.

The “new ethnicity” they were forging was shaped not by the nostalgic yearning for the purity of previous forms, but a commitment to engage in their transformation and transculturation. Ana Ramos, an actress, community organizer, and active member of the New Rican Village, describes the diasporic avant-gardism that operated in various cultural events and practices at the New Rican Village.

The [new] aesthetic that we were practicing was based on the idea of a fusion of the folkloric images and rituals with the avant-garde. The idea was that this is where we’re celebrating our cultural heritage. And it is still alive and breathing and evolving into [something] new, going into new directions. And the whole idea was that this kind of process [would] actually revive a community. And [then], that community [w]ould be inspired. And, from the spirit of this whole process, [the New York Puerto Rican community would] be celebrating its roots, its foundations and go off into new areas.<sup>71</sup>

These cultural commitments molded a new Latin@ diasporic cultural aesthetic, such as Nuyorican art, poetry, theatre, hip-hop, salsa and Latin jazz. The NRV artists believed these new aesthetic forms were accompanied by also cultivating new social worlds.<sup>72</sup> Years away from André Breton and the European surrealists, they similarly invoked “an expanded awareness of reality”, and shied away from an “art for arts sake” platform, to an aesthetic realism and surrealism, and a unity of the internal dreams with external materiality.<sup>73</sup> Ron Sakolsky summarizes surrealism as a movement that seeks “to create a truly free society in which the age-old contradictions between dream and action, reason and imagination, subjectivity and objectivity, have been resolved. Both collectively and individually surrealists have sought nothing less than a world turned upside

down where life can be a wondrous festival fueled by the liberation of the passions, inspired laziness, and an absolute divergence from the tired and oppressive game of social injustice and self-degradation.”<sup>74</sup> At the New Rican Village, as they noted in their mission statement, “artists from Puerto Rico would meet artists from New York, Puerto Rican bomba and plena music would meet African American bebop, and the past and present would form a dynamic movement into the future.” This new cultural sensibility was successful in an urban context of global and local diversity, joining disparate but equally marginalized and aggrieved communities to forge cultural collaborations that were extensions of their racial identities and diasporic histories, many of which were understood as inconceivable.

Their diasporic location was undergoing a shift from being subjected to the inscribed gaze of otherness from within their diasporic surroundings, while also contending with a discourse of otherness constructed by many in Puerto Rico, to an imaginary that solidified -- drawing from Stuart Hall -- “a change of consciousness, a change of self-recognition, a new process of identification, [and] the emergence into visibility of a new subject.”<sup>75</sup> Constructed as a splitting, the emergence of a Nuyorican culture was identified as a distinction, or “differánce,” operating in a third space of liminality, inside the colonial space within the metropole. What emerges, as Hall describes, are two histories, “one over here [and] one over there,” the “aquí y allá” of the Puerto Rican “charco” (lake) perspective accompanied by ruptures in narrative and representation. And this narrative, of which cultural aesthetics and activism are essential, “is how and

where the margins begin to speak. The margins begin to contest, the locals begin to come to representation,<sup>76</sup> calling forth an “imaginary political re-identification, re-territorialization and re-identification.” With this, the cultural activism enacted by the NRV collective was a dual response to this double silencing and alienation, a contestation against their estrangement from identifying as Puerto Ricans, or from being part of the Puerto Rican patrimony, while also rejecting the secondary social citizenship they experienced in the U.S. and its various institutions. “Through the arts, we are developing a consciousness and awareness of who we are – of our history, our culture, and who are as human beings” thus says a New Rican Village artist.<sup>77</sup>

In their mission statement, we see a clear articulation of the importance of how art builds a sense of belonging, while also cultivating personal and collective transformation. “From this [artistic] exploration emerges the “New Rican,” a new personality which is born from the reconnection of Puerto Ricans in New York with their traditional island and ancestral culture. At the New Rican Village, artists and audience undergo a personal transformation--from victims to creators, from feeling displaced to finding home.”<sup>78</sup> The collective imaginary they conceived had to be externally manifested. In doing so, they forged spaces of belonging through their public performances and cultural activism, enacting “sentiments of longing to be in a particular location.”<sup>79</sup> Belonging, or in need of emplacement,<sup>80</sup> in the midst of dislocation and racial hostility had to be proactively affirmed, a stance originally proposed by the Young Lords.

The impetus for such an undertaking was “predicated on hierarchically defined rights of access to territory,”<sup>81</sup> or that territory and location implicitly defined identities and behavior, and automatically marked bodies that belonged and others that were marginal. It was not enough to dream and *think* that one belonged within a particular space or location for such was conflictive with the phenomenology of locality or lived experiences for many Puerto Ricans and other Latino/a New Yorkers. While the NRV artists valued their surrealist philosophical position – an imaginary of conflicting possibilities that can forge revolutionary change – the praxis of their surrealist vision became a crucial component of their ideology. In essence, *Surrealism became an activity.*<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, this fusing of disjointed elements reflected some of the cultural actions in earlier movements elsewhere, yet it also contained a Latin@ “particularity” that organically developed parallel to surrealist principles.

Ed Morales accounts for the supernatural mysticism that was part of Eddie Figueroa’s life and shaped his approach to art and social change. In his book, *Living in Spanglish: The Search for Latino identity in America*, Figueroa is described as a “Spanish mystic, a guy whose job it was to turn the gibberish at the intersection of the material and spiritual world into a...street logic of liberation. He [Figueroa] insisted he was visited in his dreams by espiritistas, mystic priests of his mother’s church. The espiritista doctrine speaks of perpetual change and transformation, of another world behind the perceptible one.”<sup>83</sup> Moreover, Figueroa explains that the “New Rican is an open-ended idea to unify our identity...Our culture is the culture of the future...life doesn’t proceed

in fuckin' straight lines, you know."<sup>84</sup> Figueroa's spiritual influences assume a Hegelian-like formation that also synthesizes the dialectical intersections between dream and reality: "the mental world of veridical data and the world of the imagination, of dreams and illusions, are both absorbed by a deeper mental realm named the surreal. Such is the philosophical position of Surrealism. The things of the outer world, though real in the sense that they have their own independent existence, lose this reality in our thoughts and enter into new relationships which are psychological, not physical."<sup>85</sup> But more importantly, his spiritual visions assume a parallel role to surrealist visions of reality, although the inspiration may not necessarily draw directly or only from André Breton.

This intentional alternative art community's practice of avant-garde principles as method and praxis of choice as historically congruent with those of Surrealism, a topic treated more rigorously in chapter three, inspires a discussion on the "difference" of their surrealist visions. According to Tristan Menecke, surrealism's democratic principles "open[s] the doors of real creativity for all, and therefore undermine[s] the stifling domination of established critics, gallery proprietors, and museum directors."<sup>86</sup> Moreover, "surrealism is much more than Art," argues Menecke; it is also "a way of looking at things, a way of life...giv[ing] us truly living myths...that transform every aspect of everyday life...offer[ing] a real hope beyond the ordinary limitations of human existence," which can be "transcended by the mind, and...overcome [through] free creative activity."<sup>87</sup> In essence, "Surrealism is not [simply] an aesthetic doctrine but an international revolutionary movement concerned with the emancipation of thought."<sup>88</sup> It is this



intentional emancipation of assigned relationships between signifier and signified, thought and action, art and race, geography and artistic production, and, more importantly, between bodies, race, gender, and behavior, that the NRV aimed to dislodge through their cultural activism. But their surrealist philosophy constituted their activism; surrealism became more than an angle of vision of seeing the world and bringing forth the unconscious possibilities of change, but a praxis from which a new world was possible, an urban renaissance and revival brought on through cultural action within performance spaces, through institution building, and by organizing public art activities, which became “a form of representation” within neighborhood settings.

And equally crucial to these public performance activities is how such forms of cultural activism enacted by the New Rican Village collective also constituted a struggle to claim a “right to the city.” The surrealist “practices of everyday life” allowed this collective to partake in cultural politics through public art to mark physical space, represent civic ideas, or design collective gatherings that “engage in critical reflection,”<sup>89</sup> and collectively promote the development of a distinctive aesthetic community, public sphere, and the creation of a “soft infrastructure.”<sup>90</sup> This constitutes an urban architectural aesthetics that closely resembles the performative functions of urban casitas within the brick-and-mortar infrastructure and landscape of the city, a community image regularly represented in some of the poster artwork for the New Rican Village (see figure 9).

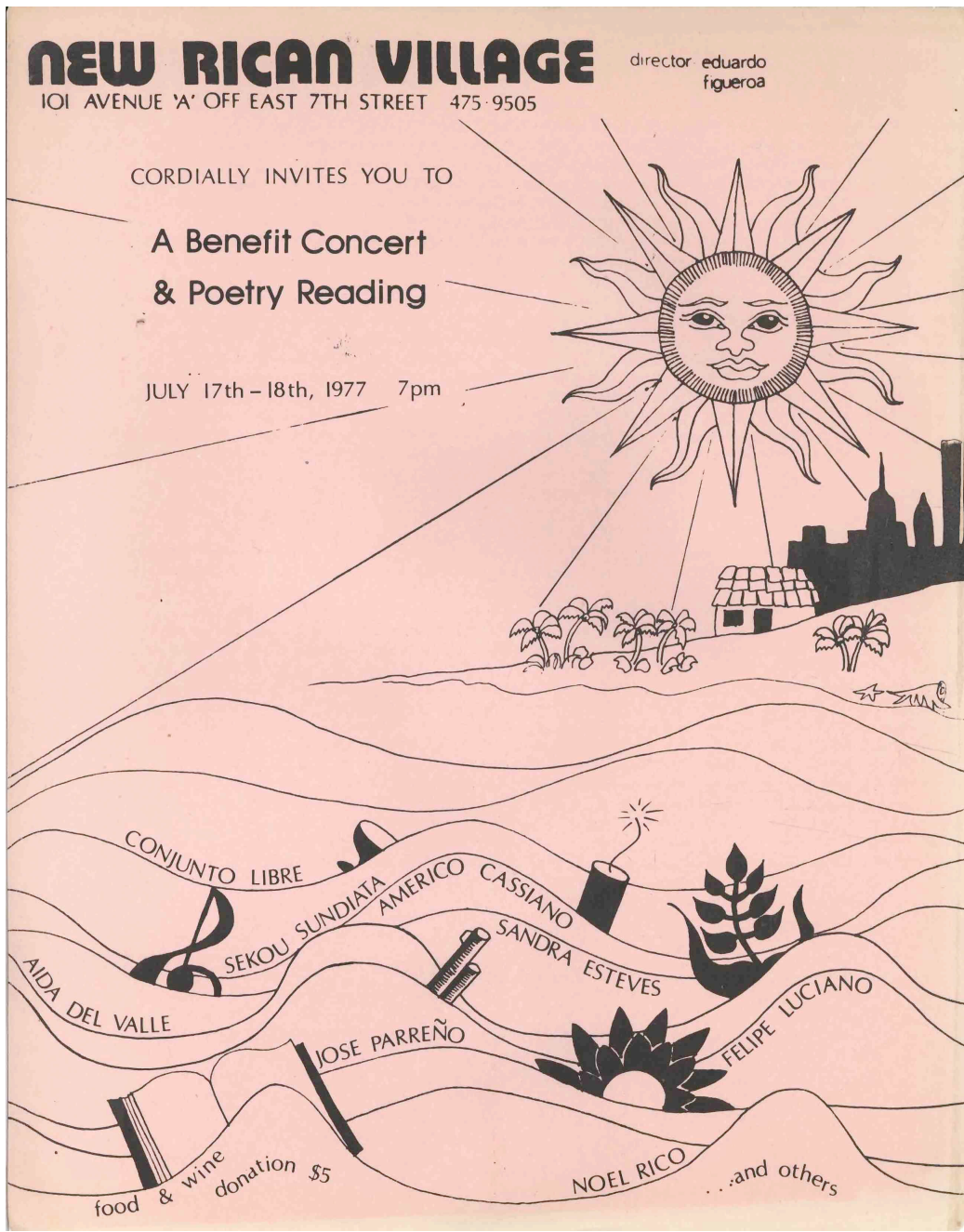


Figure 9 - New Rican Village Benefit Concert, July 17-18, 1977.  
 Poster Designed by Sandra María Esteves.  
 The poster is part of her personal archive and included here with her permission.

Casitas are small wood buildings often built within urban abandoned lots and have a physical and spatial dimension and also represent an action of both placemaking and community building.<sup>91</sup> They inscribe belonging and new

identities within real spaces; “the practice of building casitas imparts identity to the urban landscape...an act of reterritorialization that affirms the power of culture in space while offering resistance to further deterritorialization by appropriating place in the urban environment.”<sup>92</sup> But of equal importance regarding the soft infrastructure of the city is the performative value of casitas; as local institutions, they host and sponsor music and other social and cultural activities and gatherings. For Juan Flores, however, *casitas are performance*. From an aerial view, taking into consideration a city’s skyline and built environment, casitas, when juxtaposed with adjacent skyscrapers and other buildings, seem out of place. However, its aesthetic value, “where the surrounding buildings, sidewalks and streets, and the whole urban design come into play, that performance refers to an act of imaginative transposition...For the community, building and being at the casita kindles a performative sense of vividly imagined place and time,”<sup>93</sup> symbolically transposing Puerto Rican culture in a diasporic context, articulating an architectural distinction within the larger built environment. It symbolizes a declaration of difference on both the formal urban architecture as well as the cultural activities that comprise the soft architecture of performance practices.

This approach of performing difference while resisting a homogenized celebration of social and cultural levels of multiple planes of difference also bears a resemblance to a “critical cosmopolitanism” put forth by Walter D. Mignolo.<sup>94</sup> Because there exists unequally valued publics and public art practices and styles,<sup>95</sup> there are stratified and often “invisible” cosmopolitan urban spaces

squeezed between physically built urban economies. These cultural economies, drawing on bell hooks, operate on public spaces as a form of aesthetics inscribed on the ground; it “is more than a philosophy or theory of beauty; it is a way of inhabiting space, a particular location, a way of looking, and becoming.”<sup>96</sup> From this view, the cultural activism of the NRV resembles “cosmopolitanism from the perspective of coloniality,” a critical cosmopolitanism that puts forth “other options beyond both benevolent recognition and humanitarian pleas for inclusion.”<sup>97</sup> New York City became the proscenium stage, a canvas discursively claimed and semantically refashioned, through placemaking, collectively “enacting a dramatic visibility”<sup>98</sup> and milieu that stamped a new semiology onto the city and its Latin@ performers.<sup>99</sup> Through placemaking, the process of “transforming the places in which we find ourselves into places in which we live...a fundamental human activity that is sometimes almost invisible and sometimes dramatic,” the New Rican Village also provided a civic function by fostering connections with people living in New York City. “Placemaking is not just about the relationship of people to their places; it also creates relationships among people in places.”<sup>100</sup> In this realm, the New Rican’s surrealist ideology keenly promoted a “civic function” that brought forth ideas about living together while fostering a new public of civic engagement through the arts, “becom[ing] a vehicle of connection, a means to realize and recognize the commons, a medium for people to gather together to reflect on the very idea of being together.”<sup>101</sup> As a result, the Latin@ artists that comprised the New Rican Village assumed a civic practice for the arts that promoted a Latin@ public sphere.

## **Geographies of Resistance within the Loisaida Movement**

During the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, activists, community organizers, and artists came together to redefine and revive the Lower East Side neighborhood surrounding the New Rican Village. In 1976, the same year that the New Rican Village opened, there were 100 vacant lots and 150 vacant buildings in the 36-block radius that constitutes the neighborhood.<sup>102</sup> Figueroa's vision was congruent with and part of what's been called the "Loisaida movement", which intended to endow, or "Puerto Ricanize," a Puerto Rican identity and agenda onto this geographical area of the city.

This decision to revive the community through the arts also helped to revitalize the city. According to Dina D'Oyen, a founding member of the Center and its assistant director, music, film, dance, theater, and poetry were performed not only within the physical parameters of the New Rican Village performance space, but were also carried out in various sections of the Lower East Side neighborhood. While Latin@s were alienated and disempowered from effecting national political change, they contested their marginality by asserting their collective agency at the local level.

We wanted local residents to know that, despite the horrible physical conditions of the area, we would share our love, our vision, and our spirit with members of the Loisaida community. We knew that what we were doing was significant, especially because Puerto Rico is a colony. We can't control our country, but at least we...can [determine] what happens in our neighborhood. The horrible conditions that we faced weren't going to stop us from doing this....

We had something special at the New Rican, and we thought that we can create change by having performances in public [spaces].<sup>103</sup>

During a radio interview on WKCR, Columbia University's public radio station, Andy Gonzalez makes an important declaration of how the New Rican sponsored events is crucial to Loisaida's renewal and renaissance in a manner that resembles Dinay D'Oyen's reflection.

The New Rican Village is holding a fundraising marathon, Sunday, February 18th. It's gonna run all day from the early afternoon on. There's a lot of things happening; a lot of surprises, a lot of good music, good vibes, etcetera. [Conjunto] Libre is gonna be there...We're gonna have some other live music there; Totico and his Rumberos will be there. A whole lot of Latin jazz; all kinds of guests coming down. We're gonna show some films and play live music. And there's a photo exhibit, too. There's a lot of things going on that day. We just want everyone to turn out because the Lower East Side is continuing its renaissance.<sup>104</sup>

Both the New Rican Village and Lower East Side activists worked to define a cultural identity for the neighborhood and its residents that reflected the new experiences of Diaspora Boricuas living there, an effort that came to be known as the Loisda movement.<sup>105</sup> For some, what put Loisaida on the "cognitive map" was the activity of these artists and activists who gave shape to the idea of Nuyorican culture and identity in the realm of aesthetics and urban space. "The work of the Nuyorican and Latin@ artists was related to the neighborhood and the efforts to improve its physical conditions."<sup>106</sup> Making claims to the neighborhood space of Loisaida was inextricably entwined with NRV's cultural programming for it was a local effort to reimagine community and what it signified to the City's residents, politicians, and investors.

These struggles for space that the New Rican Village participated in fostered what Juan Flores calls a “Latin@ imaginary,” one that changed “a community in itself,” that is the numeric aggregation of Latin@s as a physical presence, to a “community for itself,” a community that promotes “a unity fashioned creatively on the basis of shared memory and desire, congruent histories of misery and struggle and intertwining utopias.”<sup>107</sup> The historical memory of colonialism and the economic exploitation, racism, housing and other struggles linked to imperialism, were transposed into the current context for housing rights and placemaking. For Puerto Ricans and others involved in the renewal of Loisaida, understood this as a resistance movement connected to historical struggles over power and sovereignty. When one considers that Puerto Ricans do not have full political and legal jurisdiction over their homeland, and have been displaced due to colonialism, the struggle around self-determination, space, and power – whether in the Loisaida neighborhood or the cultural arts center of the New Rican Village – a decolonial imaginary wrapped around Latinidad, or more specifically around diasporic Puertorriqueñidad, is realized around these related local struggles to resist social marginality.<sup>108</sup>

The social marginality imposed on Latin@s in general, and Puerto Ricans in particular, ironically served to “consolidate a cohesive self-identity and collective project.”<sup>109</sup> The Latin@ artists at the New Rican, much like other art collectives of marginalized artists, like the Association for the Advancement of Colored Musicians and the Black writers of the UMBRA workshop in New York City, to name a few, worked together because and in spite of race.<sup>110</sup> Indeed,

their class, racial, and ethnic identities *informed* their activism, their artwork and their avant-gardism. Similar to the departure from the “arts for arts sake” position that many avant-gardes assume, these artists clearly understood that art, in its creation/production, reception, and distribution, operated (and continues to operate) within a larger complex world conditioned and shaped by extra-aesthetic, social and systemic political factors ideologically woven with the hegemonic logics that inform prevailing social structures.<sup>111</sup> We learn from Jacques Rancière that politics is aesthetics “because it reconfigures the common field of what is seeable and sayable.”<sup>112</sup> The concerns by these marginalized artists echo those of the French philosopher; *for who can “say” something is often the same as whose art is appreciated and recognized*. Rancière notes that “an order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying, and see that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task; it is an order of the visible and of the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not; that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise.”<sup>113</sup> As it relates here, these artists are departing from their relegated *roles or places*, and engaging in the unimaginable.

The imaginary constructions of the Lower East Side were informed by dominant depictions of Puerto Ricans in the popular media, as mentioned earlier. The impact of films like, *Fort Apache*, *The Bronx* and *West Side Story* left an indelible imprint on how Puerto Ricans were and remain largely imagined.<sup>114</sup> To the general audience, there is no distinction between the Puerto Rican poverty in



either the Fort Apache, South Bronx or the Loisaida neighborhoods. Space, in the form of neighborhoods, becomes racially marked taxonomies with embedded signifiers of otherness, criminality, poverty, and neglect. The cinematic representations that essentially codified the culture of poverty ideology espoused by Oscar Lewis were perceived as mimetic representations of the urban reality of poor black and Puerto Rican neighborhoods and its residents. Following this logic, it is understandable why the New Rican Village established the mobile theatre to perform within and before these same neighborhoods. It would allow them to engage in multi-sited activism in communities where Puerto Ricans and Blacks resided. In fact, most of the membership of the NRV membership lived and derived from the same neighborhoods in which they performed and also constituted the names of their performances and ensembles.

For example, during the 1980s, the National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights, led by former Young Lords Richie Pérez and Diana Caballero, organized an effort against the Fort Apache movie, forming an organization called CAFA: the Committee Against Fort Apache. Numerous members of the New Rican Village were members of CAFA and instrumental in organizing demonstrations as well as cultural and social activities that aimed to halt the production of the movie (see figure 10).<sup>115</sup> This organizing effort played a critical role for the musician, Jerry Gonzalez. On account of the negative publicity and attention this movie sought to bring to the neighborhood and its residents, he decided to name his Latin jazz music ensemble in honor of the neighborhood: Jerry Gonzalez and the Fort Apache Band. Both Andy and Jerry Gonzalez were originally raised in

this Bronx neighborhood and thought it was crucial to represent the space and contest, demystify and overturn the stereotypes depicted in the film. Musical aesthetics and location are performed in a manner where space becomes an arena of represented cultural practices.<sup>116</sup> Jerry Gonzalez, in essence, hopes to re-construct and decenter the prevailing and negative construction of space and identity through his musical performances. It was as though he and the members of this ensemble attempted to say: “We might be poor, but we’re not the stupid, lazy, uncivilized, drug-addicted savages depicted in the ‘Fort Apache’ film. We’re going to blow you away and shock you with our musical abilities. At the end of our music performance, I’m sure you’ll better understand that we’re not the subjects depicted in the film.” For Jerry Gonzalez and the NRV artists, self-representation entailed the work required to amend the relationships that structure hegemonic representation. Representation that process through which meaning occurs and constructs “a set of correspondences or a chain of equivalences between things, people, object, events abstract ideas, etc. and a system of concepts, our conceptual maps,”<sup>117</sup> entailed a heightened sense of responsibility because of the signifying “equivalences” between depiction and concept or subject. Art, in particular Gonzalez’s music in this example, responds to the gap between representation and responsibility and operates as an instrument of civic participation and a pledge or promise of “how things are” or should be.<sup>118</sup> In other words, responsible representation involved a sense of the possible. Cultivating relationships with the New York public through cultural

practices and alternative representations became a gateway for ideological intervention rested on racial conceptual maps of Puerto Rican otherness.

NEW RICAN VILLAGE AND THE COMMITTEE AGAINST "FORT APACHE"

INVITE YOU TO

MUSIC BY  
"LIBRE" AND FRIENDS  
CORTIJO DAVE VALENTIN  
RAY BARRETTO



POETRY BY  
AMERICO CASIANO  
GYLAN KAIN  
PEDRO PIETRI

**STOP THE MOVIE  
"FORT APACHE"  
ARTS FESTIVAL  
APRIL 21-22-23, 1980 9PM**

CENTRO ARCHIVES  
NOT TO BE COPIED OR  
REPRODUCED WITHOUT  
PERMISSION

AT  
**SOUNDSCAPE**  
500 WEST 52 ST NYC 5TH FL. . . . .  
**THIS PROGRAM FREE TO ALL**

CENTRO LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES  
HUNTER COLLEGE  
395 PARK AVE.  
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021

information 860-2318 581-7032

Figure 10 - "Stop the Movie Fort Apache Arts Festival." April 21-23, 1980. The Pedro Pietri Papers. Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora. Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY.

Considering the racially generic representation of blighted Puerto Rican neighborhoods, it is clearer why the New Rican Village established the mobile theatre to perform within them. Facilitated by funds from the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), the National Endowment of the Arts, and New York State, the New Rican Village organized public art outreach programs in an effort to revitalize these neglected communities and reverse the denigrating effects of racial representation.<sup>119</sup> As noted in their Mission Statement, “The city streets are filled with songs of celebration when the New Rican Village Performing Company tours the City...revitalizing [it] with its message of rebirth, dignity, and respect.” This rebirth can be found in an abandoned South Bronx where Eddie Figueroa implored that Broadway was now in the South Bronx, a topic addressed in the subsequent section.

### **The Jazzmobile, Joseph Papp, and the NRV**

Cities are often praised for their heterogeneous cultural economies. They consist of overlapping “contact zones” where disparate cultural and racial communities exist and often compete over a city’s scarce resources, including the commodified public spaces of alterity and difference.<sup>120</sup> Urban(e) residents and citizens struggle to claim a “right to the city” either through a public sphere that fosters an “institutionalized arena of discursive interaction,”<sup>121</sup> or via artistic or cultural citizenship. These “practices of everyday life” allow artists and non-artists alike to partake in public art to mark physical space, represent civic ideas, or design collective gatherings that “engage in critical reflection,”<sup>122</sup> collectively

promote the development of distinctive aesthetic communities and multiple publics, and to create a “soft infrastructure.”<sup>123</sup> These “forms of social exchange”<sup>124</sup> constitute an urban architectural aesthetics. For many urban scholars, social and cultural interactions around multiple planes of difference constitute a homogenized global cosmopolitanism. Yet, how cities are imagined and mapped within this framework overlooks the ways particular social groups develop unequally valued publics, artistic practices, and/or cultural styles,<sup>125</sup> creating stratified and often “invisible” cosmopolitan urban spaces squeezed between physically built urban economies. In agreement with bell hooks, cultural economies operating on public spaces are a form of aesthetics inscribed on the ground that “is more than a philosophy or theory of beauty; [but also] a way of inhabiting space, a particular location, a way of looking, and becoming.”<sup>126</sup> From this angle, aesthetics is thus an extension of the “social history of groups, power relations, institutions, and...practices and conventions.”<sup>127</sup>

On March 16<sup>th</sup>, 1965 a press release authored by the Office of Cultural Affairs of the City of New York, announced the establishment of the Harlem Cultural Council. The ceremony aimed to recognize a milestone in the history of Harlem and for Manhattan’s Community Planning Board No. 10, the local government unit that administers the neighborhoods of Harlem and the Polo Grounds in the Upper West Side of Manhattan. Established only months earlier in June 1964, the Planning Board’s initial goals for the Harlem Cultural Council corresponded to national efforts to promote artistic citizenship and public arts programming in major urban cities in an effort, according to Randy Martin, “to

balm social unrest and...stimulate urban redevelopment<sup>128</sup>” in a period that coincided with a demise of national unity and urban flight. The Harlem Cultural Council was indeed operating in an environment that equated public art and cultural agency to civic practice and place making<sup>129</sup>.

Three weeks later, the members of the Board met again and according to the minutes of that meeting, determined that the Harlem Cultural Council would aim to “establish an understanding between peoples of diverse economic and ethnic backgrounds; the achievement of understanding rooted in pride of self, heritage, or origins and in sympathetic awareness of the discrepancies engendered in the struggles of each group to maintain itself.” To fulfill these goals, the Council wanted to create a “cultural movement” that would help Harlem’s residents know more about themselves, and gain a better sense of their history and their cultural contributions to the US and the world. They understood Harlem to be a physical and spiritual community, a referential Mecca for Afro-diasporic social and cultural movements.

Also concerned with the public’s misunderstanding and racial fear of Harlem, the Cultural Council would “embrace cultural programming” as a foundation to offer a rich Black cultural education to local residents as well as dispel the general public’s misleading perception of Harlem as an isolated neighborhood to avoid. The founding board included an internationally renowned community of artists, such as Katherine Dunham (dancer), Hall Johnson (composer and arranger), Don Redmond (jazz musician), Billy Taylor (pianist,

jazz musician, and educator) Charles Alston (muralist, painter, and educator) and Romare Bearden (painter), among numerous others.

Drawing from city, government, private, and foundational funding resources, the Harlem Cultural Council would establish an annual festival which included music, theatre, dance performances and art exhibits, as well as symposiums, seminars, and workshops, presented over several weekends. Additionally they sought to institute a Center in Harlem as a showcase for professional artists and a training ground for emerging talented youth.

Under the supervision of acclaimed jazz musician and educator Billy Taylor, the Harlem Cultural Council also launched the Jazzmobile, a non-profit organization that sponsored major jazz, Latin jazz, and salsa music artists to perform in complimentary concerts in the streets of Harlem, the Lower East Side, the Bronx, and Brooklyn. As the first major project of the Harlem Cultural Council, the Jazzmobile, which would later be supplemented by the Dancemobile, aimed to bring free musical programs to culturally deprived areas and stimulate the youth of the community into a more active participation in musical and dance performances. "Through the medians of plastic arts, music, dance and drama" the Council was "able to teach Black history."

Thus, the Jazzmobile fulfilled the mission declared in its original statement: "to export and import culture; to bring back to Harlem that which has moved out into the world from Harlem and been proven, for Harlem now to enjoy; to encourage what is now Harlem and then take it out into the world; to bring people to Harlem to see, hear, and experience what Harlem has to offer the

world.” Harlem transcended its geographic boundaries-“its mystique extend[ed] to Black people everywhere-and [thus far] the Council [and its cultural programs] responded to that appeal and succeeded” proclaiming “we are Black artists and professionals working for all Black artists to ‘do their thing.’”

Catching wind of this cultural organizing, Joseph Papp, the successful theatre director and founder of New York’s *Public Theatre* and the *New York Shakespeare Festival*, proposed plans for a Harlem Cultural Festival for the summer of 1965. According to the *New York Times*, the cultural benefactor and interdisciplinary cultural arts organizer and tireless advocate of artistic freedom was, “impressed by an overflow turnout...summer performance of [Shakespeare’s] ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’ in [Harlem’s] Mount Morris Park” the previous summer (1964). His outreach coincided with the already established plans for a Harlem Arts festival (dance, theatre, music, and the graphic arts), originally proposed by the Harlem Cultural Council.

Realized in October 1965, the Harlem Arts festival included performances by the Hall Johnson Chorus, the Harlem Opera Society, the Symphony of the New World, a jazz band under the direction of Billy Taylor, an “evening of Puerto Rican Culture,” as well as a five-week art exhibit. The initial program celebrated Black culture, but also cast a wide net by including Puerto Rican culture in its programming, the first of regular collaborations between Taylor, the Jazzmobile, and the Latin@ community. Interestingly, while Taylor and his fellow organizers had a Afro-Diasporic sensibility that paralleled the vision of Black Bibliophile of the African Diaspora, Arturo Schomburg, a *New York Times* article describing the



establishment of the Harlem Cultural Council and the Jazzmobile ignored this significant historical and cultural relationship that operates throughout the Americas and between said communities in the city (New York Times, 1965).

The cultural arts programming by the New Rican Village built upon traditions instituted by Joseph Papp's Shakespeare in the Park and Billy Taylor's Jazzmobile and the Dancemobile. This tradition of public arts programming, a concept of bringing the arts "to the people" within public spaces, draws its inspiration from Augusto Boal's *Theater of the Oppressed*, a tradition that emerged in Brazil and filtered through the rest of Latin America and brought to the U.S. through Luis Valdez's brainchild, "El Teatro Campesino." El Teatro operated as the cultural arm of the United Farm Workers movement and sought to invoke cultural practices that could bring about social change through raising the collective consciousness.<sup>130</sup>

Drawing from these practices, the New Rican Village used public arts programming to not only perform in front of other Puerto Ricans who might not be able to witness theater on Broadway, but to also perform for a wider audience. The artists at the NRV believed that by their mere presence within particular cultural circles, especially within spaces that were officially regulated for sound, as Paul Chevigny argues, also served as an extension of bodily surveillance and control, demonstrating their effort to perform before audiences that had authorized their exclusion.<sup>131</sup> Yet, knowing full well that music and art, following Simon Frith, are often extensions and signifiers of identity(ies),<sup>132</sup> the effort to perform within or around hostile audience spaces was a concerted effort to

shatter the pejorative trope of Nuyoricans as demons, lazy migrant workers, or welfare queens depicted in the national media. Nor were they simply seeking to demonstrate they were “well-behaved” modern racial subjects, but rather a community that intelligently articulated imaginative expressive practices that often transcended conventional categories of artistic comprehension. Within New York City, both the Jazzmobile and Papp’s Shakespeare in the Park paved the way for the NRV to expand upon an already radical conception of public arts programming before multiple audiences (see figures 11 and 12).

# NEW RICAN

Vol. I, No. 1  
August, 1979

## "Canto del Nuevo Puertorriqueño" "Song of the New Puerto Rican"

"For us, the arts are new rituals that allow us to experience our traditions on a deep personal level, and to communicate them to our people. In a sense, we're working to set up a 'process of initiation' into the deep images of our culture and history. For us, the great experiment and challenge is working on our own personalities to evolve a new person, a new consciousness of who we are as human beings, in order to transcend our present limitations. We are creating our own realities and conditions, instead of being victims of our environment."

With these ideas and perspectives, Eddie Figueroa, Willie Figueroa (dancer, choreographer and actor) and Ana Ramos (dancer and actress) opened the doors of the New Rican Village in October of 1976.

*(continued on page 2)*

*Featuring:*  
Conjunto Libre

*with guests:*

Hilton Ruiz  
Pepe Castillo  
Milton Cardona  
Gene Golden  
Frankie Rodriguez  
Totico y Sus Rumberos  
New Rican Village Performing Group

(Reading works by Pedro Pietri)

*And special surprise guests*

Sponsored by Friends of New Rican Village, Joseph Papp &  
The New York Shakespeare Festival, and Department of Cultural Affairs, City of New York  
For information: New Rican Village - 476-9505 / Delacorte Theatre - 535-5630

JOSEPH PAPP  
*presents*  
A Special Free Concert

# NEW RICAN VILLAGE

AT THE DELACORTE THEATRE

81st Street and Central Park

Monday, August 20, 1979, 8 p.m.



Figure 11 -"Canto del Nuevo Puertorriqueño/Song of the New Rican"  
The New Rican Village at the Delacorte Theatre in Central Park,  
Monday, August 20, 1979. The Pedro Pietri Papers. Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora.  
Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY.

New York Shakespeare Festival  
 Department of Cultural Affairs, City of New York  
**Mobile Theater Summer 1978**

JOSEPH PAPP presents  
 An Evening At  
**New Rican Village**  
 Music Poetry Dance Theater

Eduardo Figueroa: Director  
 Choreographer: Willie Figueroa Poetry: Pedro Pietri and Sandra Esteves Musical Arranger: Oscar Hernandez

**P.S. 117**  
 108th St. & Third Ave.  
**Tues. & Wed., August 15 & 16**

**Evenings at 8:00**  
**ADMISSION FREE**

Figure 12 - New York Shakespeare Festival-Summer 1978, Sponsored by Joseph Papp. Featuring The New Rican Village Mobile Theater. Poster Designed by Sandra María Esteves and part of her personal archive. Included here with her permission.

## **New Rican Village as Traveling Theater: “Broadway in the South Bronx” Collaborations with Joseph Papp and the New York Shakespeare Festival**

On August 18, 1978, a late summer evening welcomed a large community gathered to see a live performance on an abandoned lot in the South Bronx, located at 156<sup>th</sup> street and St. Ann’s Avenue, about a mile away from the famous Yankee Stadium. An eager ensemble of artists active at a cultural arts center based in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, prepared an evening of cultural activities for the mostly working poor, and unemployed Puerto Rican residents of this neighborhood. Joseph Papp’s Shakespeare Summer festival, whose purpose was to bring public performances on flatbed trucks in various urban neighborhoods and parks, similar to Billy Taylor’s Jazz mobile and Luis Valdez’s El Teatro Campesino, sponsored the evening’s activities. This evening, however, was a special event; it did not include the Shakespeare shows that Papp usually organized. Instead, this evening featured the mobile traveling performance troupe of the New Rican Village Cultural Arts Center. By this time, the Center was already reaching out to New York’s communities by participating in and organizing public art performances. For Figueroa, Gonzalez, Esteves, Pietri, and others, the New Rican Village was understood as being more than “the walls, the ceiling, and the floor” of its brick and mortar space, located at 101 Avenue A.

The Center was now following in the footsteps of public art theatrical performances like those organized by Joseph Papp and his mobile theatre festivals and performances (see appendix for sample posters on public art events organized by the NRV and Joseph Papp). Also part of their collective artistic

imaginary were the music performances and workshops organized by Billy Taylor's Jazzmobile (and later the Dancemobile). This evening's activities were in accord with the Center's vision of the social role of the NRV for exploring possibilities for a new generation of New York Puerto Ricans, or Nuyoricans, in the arts, particularly music, theater, dance, the visual arts and poetry.

In his introduction to the performance, Eddie Figueroa declared that while the "space was once a dump it is now Broadway in the South Bronx" with imported grass from Yankee Stadium. The curiosity of the New Rican Village was fueled by Figueroa's opening comments:

The New Rican Village is a cultural and educational center in the Lower East Side. We do theatre, dance, music, art exhibitions, dance concerts, and we have professional workshops in dance and theatre. And what we believe in is you. We believe in our people, in la cultura Puertorriqueña. We believe in the power and spirit of our culture. What we're working to do is through our art forms, to bring our culture not only to our people, but also to people all over [New York] city. We want to share with everybody our good feelings about who we are, about our experiences. The old and the new, the traditional in Puerto Rico and the traditional here in New York. That's who we are: the New Ricans, the old and the new.<sup>133</sup>

The inspired bodega surrealism of Eddie Figueroa is manifest here in his refusal of the stark materiality of the abandoned South Bronx as the final word. He sees it instead as a landscape of buried dreams and social critique that art can evoke and awaken. The Surrealists, Ron Sakolsky reminds us, seek "nothing less than a world turned upside down where life can be a wondrous festival fueled by the liberation of the passions...and an absolute divergence from the tired and oppressive game of social injustice and self-degradation."<sup>134</sup> Not to be discounted, either, is the characteristic Surrealist reliance on satire as

subversion, as Eddie Figueroa, in posing the apparent incongruity of Broadway in the South Bronx, calls out the elitist and exclusionist official culture of New York City. The distance of its venues from the racialized neighborhoods of the poor who are not assumed to have the financial resources to attend Broadway shows is turned upside down when living theatre comes to the South Bronx on a flatbed truck.

From the perspective of the creative nucleus that organized the NRV, the social crises, juxtaposed with the “structure of feeling” of the 1960s, produced new artistic forms in the 1970s that would pave the way to create innovative aesthetic modalities. These modalities would aim to deconstruct and challenge the pathological, criminal and culture of poverty depictions of Latin@s. Figueroa and his comrades sought to destabilize these conventions by creating a forum where Latin@ cultural traditions would not simply be articulated and honed, but transformed and presented in public spaces inhabited by non-Latin@s. This would foster a Latin@ cultural citizenship and public sphere that would transform the public culture of New York. Unlike other movements that produce culture for their own communities, the stated intention to educate a non-Latin@ audience is crucial to understanding the distinctive vision of the New Rican Village. The New Rican Village mission echoes that proposed by Arjun Appadurai and Carol Beckenridge regarding public culture; public culture encompasses a “zone of cultural debate” serving as “an arena where other types, forms and domains of culture are encountering, interrogating and contesting each other in new and unexpected ways.”<sup>135</sup>

## Conclusion

Beginning in 1976 and lasting through the mid-80s, the New Rican Village was an inter-artistic space that served as an aesthetic laboratory for an emerging working-class Puerto Rican and Latin@ avant-garde. As a venue firmly committed to artistic exploration, it cultivated a community of what I call "bodega surrealists" who invoked socio-political decolonial dreams, and fostered a communal philosophy of social change, social justice, and artistic agency by an inter-arts community consisting of musicians, poets, filmmakers, dancers, photographers, and painters. The NRV, now closed and replaced by the conceptual, spaceless, and floating Puerto Rican Embassy (discussed in chapter 3), emerged as a vital space where "new" and "old" aesthetics were synthesized. The New Rican Village also blurred the boundaries between "high" and "low," marginal and commercial, avant-garde and mainstream. Avant-garde experimentation, art activism, or activism, and a shared commitment to social justice, were primary goals of this collective that was invisible to other writers and scholars writing about the Lower East Side/East Village Bohemian avant-garde scene.

Focusing on the cultural activities of the New Rican Village, this chapter investigates the historical trajectory of the NRV, then moves to examine the New Rican public arts programming during the late 70s through the 80s in collaboration with the acclaimed public arts organizer, Joseph Papp and Billy



Taylor. This interdisciplinary study, informed by cultural studies, sociology, ethnic studies, and revisionist historiography, engages in a rethinking of the Latin@ arts movement in general, and the Nuyorican arts movement in particular. Specifically, this study showed how the growing interest in ethnicity and avant-garde art also coincided with gentrification in the Lower East Side. That is, the culture and the real estate industries used avant-garde art and ethnicity to change the racial and class composition of the Lower East Side neighborhood.

In operating within New York's larger public sphere, I also demonstrated that the artists at the New Rican Village transformed the urban semiotics of the city, the "soft infrastructure" that signifies meaning through its highly intended elements. In "visibilizing" their bodies and voices through performance art, the collective articulated their cultural citizenship by claiming a level of cultural authority over spaces that often excluded their bodies. Inscribing and reimagining themselves in these physical spaces refashioned their own cognitive and surrealists possibilities of where and what they can do, while also promoting a cosmopolitanism from below, and making public "projects located...from a colonial [racial] experience."<sup>136</sup> The New Rican Village helped to facilitate the formation of a "new Rican aesthetic imagination." This aesthetic imagination, I contend, subverts "discursive colonialism" that is, master-narratives that write subaltern subjects into a colonial location and diminish their historical and artistic agency and significance. As active cultural diasporic agents, they creatively "[produce] new cultural forms out of many disparate pasts," but also from converging cultural practices, and texts.<sup>137</sup> Following the logic of Stuart Hall, the

“margins [then] come into representation.”<sup>138</sup> The liminality of a diasporic location mediates new identities, so that you “could not discover, or try to discuss the Black [social and cultural] movements in the modern world without the notion of the rediscovery of where people came from, the return to some kind of roots, the speaking of a past which previously had no language.”<sup>139</sup>

The New Rican Village, entwined with the Loisaida movement, collectively organized to redefine and revive the Lower East Side neighborhood. The goal of self-determination by both the Loisaida movement and the New Rican Village was challenged through the process of gentrification beginning in the late 70s. Sharon Zukin defines gentrification as a “spatial restructuring that includes an expansion of downtown’s physical area and of its cultural power. Gentrifiers seek ‘authenticity’ which they find in some older and ethnic neighborhoods.”<sup>140</sup> As the geographer Neil Smith tells us, “gentrification and art came hand in hand,” especially during the late 70s. In the Lower East Side, the culture industry fueled gentrification by representing the neighborhood as a cultural hot spot.<sup>141</sup> The shifts in global economic expansion, the rise of the service economy and information economy, and the emergence of “world cities” had a local impact upon the Lower East Side. David Harvey suggests that because global capitalism diminishes spatial barriers, space [becomes] an intensifying point of social struggle.<sup>142</sup> Realtors co-opted the Loisaida movement to market the neighborhood, and begin the process of gentrification. In an effort to create a cultural renaissance and an avant-garde Latin@ aesthetic, the New Rican Village unconsciously played a role in gentrifying the neighborhood. Unable to afford to

keep up with the rental rates orchestrated by local realtors, the NRV was forced to close its brick-and-mortar doors in 1985 (see appendix for article on the closing of the center).

The following chapter offers a historical perspective that moves from the founding of an arts institution to one that is conceptual and operates beyond the conventional boundaries of an institutionalized arts space, and in doing so, warrants new theorizing that coincides with these shifts that actively resemble Antonio Gramsci's anti-hegemonic "wars of position." The surrealism that emerges from both projects culminates into decolonial activism that opposes both the U.S. Empire as well as the current neo-colonial state of Puerto Rico. Like other avant-garde art communities, the New Rican Village and the Puerto Rican Embassy (discussed in chapter 3) sought the merger of cultural expression and life. For this avant-garde, social and cultural renewal derived from the unification of art and the social world. The artists comprehended their cultural innovations as making social interventions, an aestheticism that serves as the basis through which a new decolonial world is constructed, and thus presupposes human praxis and social emancipation from ideologies that foster inequality and hate, liberated and transformed through artistic action/agency. Aestheticism is thus not an analysis of the content of art, but rather its social function. Taking on this role, art contained the power to change dominant conceptions, thoughts, and institutionalized ideologies that long affected members and communities in society. These organized efforts resemble what Michael Denning describes as "cultural politics" and "aesthetic dialogues" in

relation to his work on the cultural front in the United States.<sup>143</sup> And I believe the artists at the New Rican Village undertook a similar approach. By “cultural politics,” Denning is referring to the “politics of allegiances and affiliations and aesthetic dialogues [as] the politics of form.” The former encompasses the sort of relationships and alliances artists forge, the political stances they take and resist, as well as their “declarations of dissent.” Moreover, it includes “the politics of the cultural field itself, the history of the institutions and apparatuses in which [they] work. For the kinds of political stances [they] take depend upon their understanding of the ground on which they work.”<sup>144</sup> The New Rican Village as an institution was a response to a crisis within the New York art world, the exclusion of purposeful neglect to the art advanced and made by New York Latin@s. The center was “their ground” from which they engaged in activism, and from which they framed their collective work. For the latter, aesthetic ideologies seem to assume an aesthetic activism; an approach to form that uses art as a weapon while also advancing a strategic “politics of form.”<sup>145</sup> That is, they made aesthetic interventions and used various art forms, like theatre, music, visual arts, and poetry, as a platform to “establish [new] ways of seeing and judging,”<sup>146</sup> articulate new ethnicities, name, codify, and transform experiences of marginality, and transmit and educate surrealist visions of decolonial possibilities.

---

<sup>1</sup> The use of Freedomland in the title derives from an interview with Jerry Gonzalez, the Latin jazz musician active at the New Rican Village Cultural Arts Center, featured in the documentary, *Calle 54*. In the interview, Gonzalez references a music club that once existed adjacent to the Freedomland amusement park. Co-op City replaced the amusement park when it closed in 1964. The use of Freedomland here is a metaphor for the goals and cultural programming spearheaded by the New Rican Village as well as their vision for the world they sought to create. To see the reference made by Jerry Gonzalez, see: Fernando Trueba, *Calle 54*. Burbank, California: Miramax Home Entertainment, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press), 11.

<sup>3</sup> The official name of the center varies in the documents that I've located, ranging from "The New Rican Village" to the "New Rican Village Cultural and Educational Center." Because both terms were interchangeably used, I will follow this usage. Moreover, the center is also referenced in everyday usage as "The Rican" or "The New Rican" or "The NRV." I will also employ these names throughout.

<sup>4</sup> From the New Rican Village Mission Statement. N.d.

<sup>5</sup> "Song of the New Puerto Rican/Canto del Nuevo Puertorriqueño". *New Rican* 1, No. 1 (August 1979). Emphasis added.

<sup>6</sup> José Torres, "The Inner Rican." *Nuestro: The Magazine for Latinos*, May 1978. *Nuestro* was the first national English monthly published by and for Latinos in the United States.

<sup>7</sup> See: Richard Candida Smith, *Utopia and Dissent: Art, Poetry, and Politics in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Cher Krause Knight, *Public Art: Theory, Practice and Populism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008); Suzanne Lazy, *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1995); Stuart Hobbs, *The End of the American Avant Garde* (New York: NYU Press, 1997); Shifra M. Goldman, *Dimensions of the Americas: Art and Social Change in Latin America and the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Shifra M. Goldman, "Between 'Aqui' and 'Alla': Thirty Years of the Taller Boricua," in *Homenaje Alma Boricua: XXX Aniversario: Presentacion Portafolio Comemorativo Taller Alma Boricua: Museo de Las Americas, Cuartel de Balajá, 19 de Septiembre de 2001 al 19 de Febrero de 2002* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Galerías Prinardi, 2001), 20-28; Michelle J. Wilkinson, "In the Tradition of the Revolution': The Socio-Aesthetics of Black and Puerto Rican Arts Movements, 1962-1982" (PhD diss., Emory University, 2001); T.V. Reed, *The Art of Protest: Culture and Activism from the Civil Rights Movement to the Streets of Seattle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2005).

<sup>8</sup> Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982). Vera Zolberg engages a wonderful discussion of Becker's writing on the art world in her book, *Constructing a Sociology of the Arts* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>9</sup> Gregory Sholette, "Heart of Darkness: A Journey into the Dark Matter of the Art World," in *Visual Worlds*, eds. John R. Hall, Blake Stimson, and Lisa Tamaris Becker (New York: Routledge, 2005), 92-93, emphasis added.

<sup>10</sup> "Introduction," by James M. Harding and John Rouse in *Not the Other Avant-Garde: The Transnational Foundations of Avant-Garde Performance* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press), 2.

---

<sup>11</sup> “Truth isn’t outside power....Truth is a thing of this world; it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth; that is the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true, the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned...the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.” Michel Foucault, quoted in “The Work of Representation” by Stuart Hall in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997), 49.

<sup>12</sup> See: Michelle J. Wilkinson, “‘In the Tradition of the Revolution’: The Socio-Aesthetics of Black and Puerto Rican Arts Movements, 1962-1982” (PhD diss., Emory University, 2001); Cary Cordova, “The Heart of the Mission: Latino Art and Identity in San Francisco (PhD diss, University of Texas at Austin, 2005); Mary Ellen Lennon, “A Question of Relevancy: New York Museums and the Black Arts Movement, 1968-1971,” in *New Thoughts on the Black Arts Movement*, ed. Lisa Gail Collins and Margo Natalie Crawford (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> Carol Duncan, “Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 91.

<sup>14</sup> Carol Duncan, 93.

<sup>15</sup> Carol Duncan, 94.

<sup>16</sup> Carol Duncan, 102.

<sup>17</sup> Mary Ellen Lennon, “A Question of Relevancy: New York Museums and the Black Arts Movement, 1968-1971,” in *New Thoughts on the Black Arts Movement*, ed. Lisa Gail Collins and Margo Natalie Crawford (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 93.

<sup>18</sup> Steven C. Dubin, *Displays of Power: Controversy in the American Museum From Enola Gay to Sensation* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 3.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>21</sup> See Marina Roseman’s essay (the only academic essay on the New Rican Village) “The New Rican Village: Artists in Control of the Image-Making Machinery,” *Latin American Music Review / Revista de Música Latinoamericana*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Spring 1983): 132-167.

<sup>22</sup> See Marina Roseman essay.

<sup>23</sup> The body of scholarship on the Young Lords has grown over the last several years. For more information on the Young Lords, see: Darrel Enck-Wanzer, *The Young Lords Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); Agustin Laó, “Resources of Hope: Imagining the Young Lords and the Politics of Memory,” *Centro: Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies*, 7, no. 1 (1995): 34-49; Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, “Puerto Rico en mi Corazón: The Young Lords, Black Power and Puerto Rican Nationalism in the U.S., 1966-1972,” *Centro: Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies*, 18, no. 1 (Fall 2006): 148-169; Johanna L del C. Fernández, “Radicals in the late 1960s: A History of the Young Lords Party in New York City, 1969-1974” (PhD diss, Columbia University, 2004); Lilia Fernández, “Latina/o Migration and Community Formation in Postwar Chicago: Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Gender, and Politics, 1945-1975 (PhD diss, University of California, San Diego, 2005); Iris Morales, ¡Palante, Siempre Palante! The Young Lords,” in *the*

---

*Puerto Rican Movement: Voices from the Diaspora*, ed. Andrés Torres and José E. Velázquez (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998); Jennifer A. Nelson, "Abortions Under Community Control": Feminism, Nationalism, and the Politics of Reproduction among New York City's Young Lords," *Journal of Women's History* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 157-180.

<sup>24</sup> Michael Abramson quoted by Agustín Laó in "Resources of Hope: Imagining the Young Lords and the Politics of Memory," *Centro: Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies*, 7, no. 1 (1995): 36.

<sup>25</sup> Agustín Laó, "Resources of Hope: Imagining the Young Lords and the Politics of Memory," *Centro: Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies*, 7, no. 1 (1995): 36

<sup>26</sup> Mario Maffi, "The Other Side of the Coin: Culture in Loisaida," in *From Urban Village to East Village: The Battle for New York's Lower East Side*, ed. Janet L. Abu-Lughod, et al. (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 142-143.

<sup>27</sup> Liz Sevckenko, "Making Loisaida: Placing Puertorriquenidad in Lower Manhattan," in *Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York*, ed. Agustín Laó-Montes and Arlene Dávila (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 307.

<sup>28</sup> For a discussion of gentrification and urban frontier, see Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>29</sup> Liz Sevckenko, "Making Loisaida: Placing Puertorriquenidad in Lower Manhattan," in *Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York*, ed. Agustín Laó-Montes and Arlene Dávila (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 293.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Richard Lloyd, *Neo-Bohemia: Art and Commerce in the Postindustrial City* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 162.

<sup>32</sup> For a critical account of the static notions of the avant-garde and the "neo-avant-garde" descriptor see: Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996).

<sup>33</sup> There is a wealth of published sources on the countercultural Lower East Side/East Village/Greenwich Village New York City neighborhood and the relationship between arts and gentrification. See: Christopher Mele, *Selling the Lower East Side: Culture, Real Estate, and Resistance in New York City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2000); Sharon Zukin, *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989); Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996); Anne Bowler and Blaine McBurney, "Gentrification and the Avant-Garde in New York's East Village: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly." *Theory, Culture and Society* Vol. 8 (1991): 49-77.

<sup>34</sup> This process parallels David Sibley's "geographies of exclusion," where he argues the intended neglect of knowledge and cultural practices produced by members of excluded groups from academic and other institutions. Sibley observed that excluded and surveilled bodies are inseparable from the knowledge and cultural practices they produce. Moreover those bodies relegated to particular geographies also condition the other spaces, bringing to light how spaces and institutions are tied together. Refer to David Sibley, *Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>35</sup> See David Sibley's *Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

---

<sup>36</sup> From the New Rican Village Mission Statement, illustrated in Figure 7.

<sup>37</sup> "Song of the New Puerto Rican/Canto del Nuevo Puertorriqueño." *New Rican* 1, No. 1 (August 1979)

<sup>38</sup> Stuart D. Hobbs, *The End of the American Avant Garde* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 128. For a discussion on the incorporation of U.S. avant-garde communities, see Part III of Hobbs's book. For an excellent critique of modernism in New York, see William B. Scott and Peter M. Rutkoff, *New York Modern: The Arts and the City* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

<sup>39</sup> Hobbs, 139.

<sup>40</sup> Peter Bürger refers to this process as "aestheticism." Art serves as the basis through which a new world is created, and thus presupposes human praxis and social emancipation from ideologies that foster inequality and hate codified through artistic action/agency. Aestheticism is thus not an analysis of the content of art, but rather its *social function*. Taking on this role, art contains the power to change dominant conceptions, thoughts, and institutionalized ideologies that long affect members and communities in society. As Bürger notes, aestheticism sought to re-organize the social world while also rejecting it, standing to "organize a new life praxis from a basis in art." See: Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 49.

<sup>41</sup> For an insightful discussion about the social context that spurred alternative art spaces, see: Martha Rosler, "Place, Position, Power, Politics," in *The Subversive Imagination: Artists, Society, and Social Responsibility*, ed. Carol Becker (New York: Routledge, 1994), 55-76; Julie Ault, ed. *Alternative Art New York, 1965-1985: A Cultural Politics Book for the Social Text Collective* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

<sup>42</sup> Sandra Maria Esteves Interview conducted by the Author, August 1, 2001.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> The literature on the impact of deindustrialization and its impact on New York City and some of its residents abound. For a discussion and analysis on its impact on Puerto Ricans in New York, see: Clara Rodriguez, *Puerto Ricans: Born in the USA*: (Winchester, MA: Unwin & Hyman, 1989); The History Taskforce, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, *Labor Migration Under Capitalism: The Puerto Rican Experience* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979); Christopher Mele, *Selling the Lower East Side: Culture, Real Estate, and Resistance in New York City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Janet L. Abu-Lughod, ed. *From Urban Village to East Village: The Battle for New York's Lower East Side* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994); Sharon Zukin, *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989); Anne Bowler and Blaine McBurnery, "Gentrification and the Avant-Garde in New York's East Village: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly," *Theory, Culture and Society* Volume 8 (1991): 49-77.

<sup>45</sup> James Harding, *Cutting Performances: Collage Events, Feminist Artists, and the American Avant-Garde* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2010), 19. For a discussion of collage aesthetics and the avant-garde, also see: Gregory L. Ulmer, "The Object of Post-Criticism," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983), 83-110.

<sup>46</sup> Thanks to Frances R. Aparicio for making this comparison and connection.



---

<sup>47</sup> Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010 [2000]), 68.

<sup>48</sup> Agustin Laó-Montes, "Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York City," in *Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York*, ed. Arlene Davila and Agustin Laó-Montes (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 3. For the city as text, and the semiotics of urbanity, see: Graeme Gilloch, *Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1996); M. Gottdiener, *Postmodern Semiotics: Material Culture and the Forms of Postmodern Life* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995); M. Gottdiener and Alexandros Ph. Lagopoulos, ed. *The City and the Sign: An Introduction to Urban Semiotics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); Paul Makeham, "Performing the City," *Theatre Research International* Vol. 30 No. 2 (2005): 150-160.

<sup>49</sup> George Lipsitz, *American Studies in a Moment of Danger* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 181.

<sup>50</sup> Steve Turre Interview conducted by the Author, January 3, 2002.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Mario Rivera Interview conducted by the Author, August 23, 2001.

<sup>53</sup> Andy Gonzalez Interview with the Author, August 14-19, 2001.

<sup>54</sup> Earl Lewis, *In their Own Interests: Race, Class and Power in Twentieth-Century Norfolk* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

<sup>55</sup> For a discussion on El Taller Boricua, see: El Museo del Barrio, *Taller Alma Boricua: Reflecting on Twenty Years of the Puerto Rican Workshop, 1969-1989* (New York: El Museo del Barrio, 1990), Yasmin Ramirez, "Nuyorican Visionary: Jorge Soto and the Evolution of an Afro-Taino Aesthetic at Taller Boricua," *Centro: Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies*, 17.2 (Fall 2005): 22-41.

<sup>56</sup> For a discussion on the Foraker act and its impact, see: José A. Cabranes, *Citizenship and the American Empire: Notes on the Legislative History of the United States Citizenship of Puerto Ricans* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979); Bartholomew H. Sparrow, *The Insular Cases and the Emergence of American Empire* (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2006); Christina Duffy Burnett, Burke Marshall, José A. Cabranes, et. al. *Foreign in a Domestic Sense: Puerto Rico, American Expansion, and the Constitution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001)

<sup>57</sup> Discussion on Michel Foucault's concept of "governmentality" abound. Refer to *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality, with Two Lectures by and an Interview with Michel Foucault* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

<sup>58</sup> For an informative explanation of the PPD and the Associated Free State (Commonwealth) platform conceived by Luis Muñoz Marín, see his self-authored essay, "Puerto Rico and the U.S., their Future Together." *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 32, No. 4 (July 1954): 541-551.

<sup>59</sup> See José Padin's Doctoral Dissertation, "Imperialism by Invitation: Causes of a Failed Development State Project in Puerto Rico, 1940-1950" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 1998).

<sup>60</sup> See César Ayala and Rafael Bernabe, *Puerto Rico in the American Century: A History Since 1898* (Durham: The University of Carolina Press, 2007), 269.

---

<sup>61</sup> See the wonderful documentary, *Manos a La Obra: The Story of Operation Bootstrap*. A Production by the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, City University of New York. DVD. Pedro A. Rivera and Susan Zeig, (New York: Cinema Guild, 1983 [2005]).

<sup>62</sup> For a discussion on colonias, and the once positive image and reception of Puerto Ricans in the states prior to mass migration spurred by Operation Bootstrap, see Virginia Sanchez-Korrol's seminal book, *From Colonia to Community: The History of Puerto Ricans in New York City*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). For a contemporary analysis of Puerto Rican history see: César Ayala and Rafael Bernabe, *Puerto Rico in the American Century: A History Since 1898* (Durham: The University of Carolina Press, 2007); Lorrin Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen: History and Political Identity in Twentieth Century New York City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010). For an analysis of economic migration, see: Emilio Pantojas, *Development Strategies as Ideology: Puerto Rico's Export-Led Industrialization Experience* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1990); Manuel Madonado-Dennis, *Emigration Dialectic: Puerto Rico and the U.S.A* (New York: International Publishers, 1980); James L. Dietz, *Economic History of Puerto Rico: Institutional Change and Capitalist Development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); History Taskforce, Centro de Estudio Puertorriqueños, *Labor Migration Under Capitalism: The Puerto Rican Experience* (New York: Monthly Review, 1979); Carmen Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia: Puerto Rican Workers and Postwar Economies* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001). For an insightful discussion of the shipping of Puerto Ricans on cargo planes, see the very informative essay by Eugenio "Gene" Rivera, "La Colonia de Lorain, Ohio," in *The Puerto Rican Diaspora: Historical Perspectives* ed. Carmen Whalen and Victor Vázquez-Hernández (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), 151-173. For an excellent analysis comparing Puerto Rican Labor migration from the period of Operation Bootstrap to the Mexican-American/Chicano Braceros Program, see Lilia Fernández, "Of Immigrants and Migrants: Mexican and Puerto Rican Labor Migration in Comparative Perspective, 1942-1964." *Journal of American Ethnic History* Vol. 29, No. 3 (Spring 2010): 6 – 39.

<sup>63</sup> See: Nancy Mirabal, "'No Country, but the One We Must Fight For': The Emergence of an 'Antillean' Nation and Community in New York City, 1860-1901," in *Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 57-72, Virginia Sánchez-Korrol, *From Colonia to Community: The History of Puerto Ricans in New York City, 1917-1948* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994).

<sup>64</sup> The most popular film examples include *West Side Story* (1961), and *Fort Apache, The Bronx* (1981). The most popular anthropological analysis of Puerto Ricans remains Oscar Lewis's, *La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty-San Juan and New York* (New York: Random House, 1966). For a comprehensive analysis of the various colonial gazes imposed on Puerto Ricans, see: Laura L. Ortiz, "Disrupting the Colonial Gaze: A Critical Analysis of Discourses on Puerto Ricans in the United States" (PhD diss., CUNY Graduate Center, 1998). For an analysis of *West Side Story*, see: Alberto Sandoval Sanchez, "A Puerto Rican Reading of the America of 'West Side Story'," in his book *José, Can You See?: Latinos On and Off Broadway* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999) 62-82; Richie Pérez, "From Assimilation to Annihilation: Puerto Rican Images in U.S. Films," in *Latin Looks: Images of Latinas and Latinos in the U.S. Media*, ed. Clara E. Rodríguez (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 142-163; Frances Negron-Muntaner, "'West Side Story' and the U.S. Puerto Rican Identity," *Social Text* 63, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Summer 2000), 83-106. For a discussion on the movie *Fort Apache, The Bronx* see: Richie Pérez, "Committee Against Fort Apache: The Bronx Mobilizes Against Multinational Media," in *Cultures in Contention*, ed. Judith F. Baca, Douglas Kahn, Diane Neumaier (Seattle: Real Comet Press, 1985), 180-197; Raymond Serrano & C.A.F.A. (Committee Against Fort Apache), "A Community Stands Together and Makes Nation-Wide News," *Latin N.Y.* n.d., 33-37.

<sup>65</sup> Mattei Calinescu, *The Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 112.

---

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Andy Gonzalez by Author. August 2001, pages 17-18

<sup>67</sup> See Roberto Rodríguez-Morazzani, "Political Cultures of the Puerto Rican Left in the United States," in *The Puerto Rican Movement: Voices from the Diaspora* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 25-47.

<sup>68</sup> "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities" by Stuart Hall, pp. 41-68, in *Culture, Globalization and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity* edited by Anthony D. King (University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

<sup>69</sup> New Rican Village Mission Statement. N.D.

<sup>70</sup> See: Oscar Lewis, *La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty-San Juan and New York* (New York: Random House, 1965); *West Side Story*. MGM, 1961. , *Fort Apache, The Bronx*: New York, NY: HBO Video, 1993 [1981].

<sup>71</sup> Ana Ramos. Interviewed by Author. July 23, 2001 (pages 33-36). Emphasis added.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Franklin Rosemont, *What is Surrealism? Selected Writings*, by André Breton, p. 24.

<sup>74</sup> Ron Sakolsky, "Surrealist Subversion in Chicago: The Forecast is Hotter than Ever!" in *Surrealist Subversions: Rants, Writings and Images by the Surrealist Movement in the United States*, p. 27.

<sup>75</sup> Stuart Hall, "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities" in *Culture, Globalization and the World-System*, ed. Anthony D. King (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 54.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 53.

<sup>77</sup> New Rican Village Mission Statement. N.D.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Nadia Lovell, "Introduction," , in *Locality and Belonging*, ed. Nadia Lovell (New York: Routledge, 1998), 1.

<sup>80</sup> See Nadia Lovell, "Introduction," in *Locality and Belonging*, ed. Nadia Lovell (New York: Routledge, 1998), 1-23.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>82</sup> André Breton often noted, surrealism is more than a doctrine, but an *activity*. As quoted by James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 23, No. 4 (October 1981), 539.

<sup>83</sup> Ed Morales, *Living in Spanglish: The Search for Latino Identity in America* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2002), 90.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Charles E. Gauss, "The Theoretical Backgrounds of Surrealism," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 2 No. 8 (Autumn, 1953), 38.

---

<sup>86</sup> Tristan Meinecke, "Opening the Doors of Creativity for All," in *Surrealist Subversions: Rants; Writings, and Images by the Surrealist Movement in the United States*, ed. Ron Sakolsky (Brooklyn, New York: Autonomedia, 2002), 239.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. 239.

<sup>88</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press), 5.

<sup>89</sup> Randy Martin, "Artistic Citizenship: Introduction" in *Artistic Citizenship: A Public Voice for the Arts*, ed. Mary Schmidt Campbell and Randy Martin (New York: Routledge, 2006), 2.

<sup>90</sup> Paul Makeham, "Performing the City," *Theatre Research International* 30, No. 2 (2005): 153.

<sup>91</sup> Luis Aponte-Parés, "What Yellow and White and Has land All Around it?" Appropriating Place in Puerto Rican Barrios," *Centro: Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies* 7, no. 1 (1995): 8-19.

<sup>92</sup> Aponte-Pares, 14.

<sup>93</sup> Juan Flores, *From Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 73.

<sup>94</sup> Walter Mignolo, "The Many Faces of Cosmo-polis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism," in *Cosmopolitanism*, ed. Carol A. Breckenridge, Sheldon Pollock, Homi Bhabha, and Dipesh Chakrabarty (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 159.

<sup>95</sup> See Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Spere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 120.

<sup>96</sup> bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 104.

<sup>97</sup> Walter Mignolo, "The Many Faces of Cosmo-polis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism," in *Cosmopolitanism*, ed. Carol A. Breckenridge, Sheldon Pollock, Homi K. Bhabha and Dipesh Chakrabarty (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 160.

<sup>98</sup> Janine Marchessault and Will Straw quoted in Paul Makeham, "Performing the City," *Theatre Research International* 30, No. 2 (2005), 153.

<sup>99</sup> Roland Barthes, "Semiology and the Urban," in Neil Leach, ed. *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge), 91-110.

<sup>100</sup> Lynda H. Schneekloth and Robert G. Shibley, *Placemaking: The Art and Practice of Building Communities* (New York: Wiley 1995), 1.

<sup>101</sup> Randy Martin, "Artistic Citizenship: Introduction" in *Artistic Citizenship: A Public Voice for the Arts*, ed. Mary Schmidt Campbell and Randy Martin (New York: Routledge, 2006), 4.

<sup>102</sup> Liz Scevenko, "Making Loisada: Placing Puertorriquenidad in Lower Manhattan," in *Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York*, ed. Agustín-Laó-Montes and Arlene Dávila (New York: Columbia University), 295.

<sup>103</sup> Interview with Dina D' Oyen by author. March 3, 2002. New York, N.Y.

---

<sup>104</sup> Andy Gonzalez Interview on WKCR, Columbia University. Audiotape. N.D. Andy Gonzalez generously gave me a copy of the original interview.

<sup>105</sup> See Scevenko; Christopher Mele, *Selling the Lower East Side: Culture, Real Estate, and Resistance in New York City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Janet L. Abu-Lughod, et al. *From Urban Village to East Village* (Cambridge: MA, Blackwell, 1994).

<sup>106</sup> Scevenko, 300.

<sup>107</sup> Juan Flores, *From Bomba to Hip Hop* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000) 198.

<sup>108</sup> Also see Marina Roseman, "The New Rican Village: Artists in Control of the Image-Making Machinery," *Latin American Music Review* 4.1 (Summer 1983): 132-167.

<sup>109</sup> Margaret R. Somers and Gloria Gibson, "Reclaiming the Epistemological 'Other': Narrative and the Social Construction of Identity," in *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: Blackwell 1994), 38.

<sup>110</sup> Lorenzo Thomas, "Alea's Children: The Avant-Garde on the Lower East Side, 1960-1970," *African American Review* 27, No. 4(1993). For additional information on the AACM, see: Ronald Rodano *New Musical Figurations: Anthony Braxton's Cultural Critique*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994; George Lewis, *A Power Stronger than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008).

<sup>111</sup> For a discussion on how art is woven within a larger ideological discourse of power and hegemony, see: John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (New York: Penguin, 1972; Janet Wolff, *Aesthetics and the Sociology of Art* (Winchester, MA: George Allen & Unwin, 1983); Vera Zolberg, *Constructing a Sociology of the Arts* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>112</sup> Beth Hinderliter, et al. Eds. "Introduction" in *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 8.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.* 7.

<sup>114</sup> There is abundant literature on representation, too many to list here. Some that inform my thinking on Puerto Rican representation, include: Richie Pérez, "From Assimilation to Annihilation: Puerto Rican Images in U.S. Films," in *Latin Looks: Images of Latinas and Latinos in the U.S. Media*, ed. Clara Rodriguez (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), 142-163; Richie Pérez, "Committee Against Fort Apache: The Bronx Mobilizes Against Multinational Media," in *Cultures in Contention* (Seattle: Real Comet Press, 1985), 180-197; Alberto Sandoval, "A Puerto Rican Reading of the America of *West Side Story*," in José, *Can You See?: Latinos On and Off Broadway* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 62-82; Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Stuart Hall, ed. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1997); Stuart Hall, "Culture, Media and the Ideological Effect," in *Mass Communication and Society*, eds. James Curran, Michael Gurevitch, and Janet Woollacott (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1979 [1977]), 215-348; Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation," *Framework* No. 36 (1989): 68-81.

<sup>115</sup> See Richie Pérez, "Committee Against Fort Apache: The Bronx Mobilizes Against Multinational Media," in *Cultures in Contention* (Seattle: Real Comet Press, 1985), 180-197. Also an effort to halt a play as documented in a letter addressed to Joseph Papp by members of a special committee identified as S.W.A.P, Serious Writers and Poets. The letter addresses SWAP's disagreement over Papp's decision to feature the play, "Sancocho-Mondongo."

---

According to SWAP, the play is “degrading, demeaning, and insulting to the Black and Latin people it professes to represent. Innocent, hard-working victims of political, economic and social oppression are portrayed as ignorant, backward, helpless, subhuman creatures, incapable of intelligent thought or decision-making.” See Appendix for a copy of this letter.

<sup>116</sup> There is abundant literature on the social (re)construction of place through music. See for example: Susan J. Smith, “Performing the Soundworld,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 18 (2000): 615-637; Sara Cohen, “Identity, Place, and the Liverpool Sound,” in *Ethnicity, Identity, and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*, ed. Martin Stokes (New York: Berg, 1994): 117-134; Martin Stokes, ed. *The Musical Construction of Place* (New York: Berg, 1994); Andrew Leyshon, David Matless, and George Revill, eds. *The Place of Music* (New York: Guilford Press, 1998), and Sheila Whiteley, Andy Bennett, and Stan Hawkins, eds. *Music, Space and Place: Popular Music and Cultural Identity* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004). Part of this analysis is also inspired by an article authored by Ashraf Ghani, “Space as an Arena of Represented Practices: An Interlocutor’s Response to David Harvey’s ‘From Space to Place and Back Again,’” in *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change*, eds. Jon Bird, et al. (New York: Routledge, 1993), 47-57.

<sup>117</sup> Stuart Hall, “The Work of Representation,” in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997), 19.

<sup>118</sup> W.J. Thomas Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 421. Mitchell offers an illuminating discussion and critique on the relationship between representation and responsibility.

<sup>119</sup> See: Steven C. Durbin, *Bureaucratizing the Muse: Public Funds and the Cultural Worker* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987); Grace A. Franklin and Randall B. Ripley, *CETA: Politics and Policy, 1973-1982* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984); Cher Krause Knight, *Public Art: Theory, Practice and Populism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008); Mary Schmidt Campbell and Randy Martin, eds. *Artistic Citizenship: A Public Voice for the Arts* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002); Harriet F. Senie and Sally Webster, eds. *Critical Issues in Public Art: Content, Context, and Controversy* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992).

<sup>120</sup> See Mary Louise Pratt, *Ways of Reading*, ed. David Bartholomae and Anthony Petroksy. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999.

<sup>121</sup> Fraser, Nancy “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy” pg. 110 in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Edited by Craig Calhoun. Cambridge, MA and London, UK: MIT Press.

<sup>122</sup> Randy Martin, “Artistic Citizenship,” in *Artistic Citizenship: A Public Voice for the Arts*, ed. Mary Schmidt Campbell and Randy Martin (New York: Routledge, 2006), 2

<sup>123</sup> Makeham Paul, pg. 153. “Performing the City.” *Theater Research International* 30(2): 150-160. 2005.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Fraser, Nancy “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy” pg. 120 in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Edited by Craig Calhoun. Cambridge, MA and London, UK: MIT Press.

- 
- <sup>126</sup> bell hooks 1994, pg. 104 *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. Boston: South End Press.
- <sup>127</sup> Janet Wolff, *Aesthetics and the Sociology of Art* (London: Allen & Unwin Press, 1983), 16.
- <sup>128</sup> Randy Martin, "Artistic Citizenship." 2
- <sup>129</sup> Ibid. 2-5
- <sup>130</sup> For a discussion of building on Augusto Boal's theatre of the oppressed within Chicano and Black communities, see: Yolanda Broyles Gonzalez, *El Teatro Campesino: Theater in the Chicano Movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994); Harry Elam, *Taking it to the Streets: The Social Protest Theater of Luis Valdez and Amiri Baraka* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997).
- <sup>131</sup> Paul Chevigny, *Gigs: Jazz and the Cabaret Laws in New York City*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005).
- <sup>132</sup> Simon Frith, "Music and Identity," in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1996) 108-127. Also See Keith Negus and Patria Roman Velázquez, "Belonging and Detachment: Musical Experience and the Limits of Identity," *Poetics* 30 (2002): 133-145.
- <sup>133</sup> Eddie Figuroa, *An Evening at the New Rican Village*, South Bronx, N.Y. September 18, 1978.
- <sup>134</sup> Ron Sakolsky, "Surrealist Subversion in Chicago: The Forecast is Hotter than Ever!" in *Surrealist Subversions: Rants, Writings and Images by the Surrealist Movement in the United States* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2002), 27.
- <sup>135</sup> Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge, "Why Public Culture?" *Public Culture Bulletin* 1 No.1 (Fall 1988): 6.
- <sup>136</sup> Walter Mignolo, "The Many Faces of Cosmo-polis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism" in *Cosmopolitanism*. ed. by Carol A. Breckenridge, Sheldon Pollack, Homi K. Bhabha, and Dipesh Chakrabarty (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 160.
- <sup>137</sup> Robin Kelley "The art ensemble of Chicago – All About Freedom," in *Surrealist Subversion: Rants, Writing and Images by the Surrealist Movement in the United States*. Edited by Ron Sakolsky (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Autonomedia, 2002), 640
- <sup>138</sup> See Stuart Hall, page 34. "The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity." In Anthony King, *Culture, Globalization and the World System*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997. pp. 19-39.
- <sup>139</sup> Ibid, 35.
- <sup>140</sup> Sharon Zukin, *Landscapes of Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 187.
- <sup>141</sup> See Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontiers* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 17-18
- <sup>142</sup> David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1989), 226-39.
- <sup>143</sup> Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth-Century* (New York: Verso Press, 1996).

---

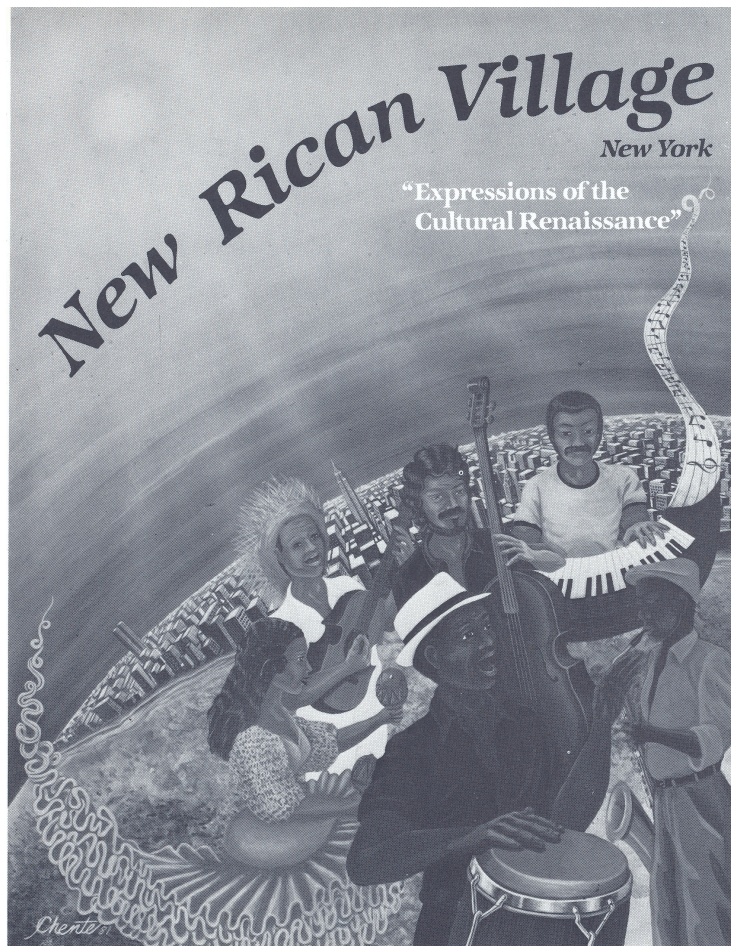
<sup>144</sup> Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth-Century* (New York: Verso Press, 1996), xix.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, xix.



**Chapter II**  
**New Musical Hemispheres:**  
**Free Flying Rhythms at the New Rican Village<sup>1</sup>**  
**From Musical Refuge to Avant-Clave**  
**to the Fort Apache Ensemble**



**A Concert**  
**Sunday**  
**May 31, 1981**  
**at 3 & 7pm**

**with:**  
**Andy Gonzalez**  
*Bass*  
**Jerry Gonzalez**  
*Congas, Trumpet*  
**Mario Rivera**  
*Saxes*  
**Nicky Marrero**  
*Timbales*  
**Papo Vasquez**  
*Trombone*  
**Daniel Ponce**  
*Congas*  
**Jorge Dalto**  
*Piano*  
**Orlando (Puntilla) Rios**  
*Percussion, Vocals*  
**Steve Berrios**  
*Drums*  
**Milton Cardona**  
*Congas*  
**Barry Rodgers**  
*Trombone*  
**Gene Golden**  
*Percussion*  
**Vincent George**  
*Percussion*  
**Edgardo Miranda**  
*Guitar*  
**Pepe Castillo**  
*Accordion, Vocals*  
**Wilfredo Velez**  
*Saxes*  
**Alufemi**  
*Vocals*  
**Brenda Feliciano**  
*Vocals*

**SPECIAL GUESTS**  
**Hilton Ruiz**  
*Pianist*  
**Machito**  
**POETS:**  
**Pedro Pietri**  
**Piri Thomas**

**TOWN HALL**  
 123 West 43rd Street  
 (between Broadway and Avenue of the Americas)  
 New York, New York  
**Tickets:** \$10, \$9, \$8  
**Information:** 775-4735  
 775-4700  
 827-5405

**Tickets Available at:**  
**Soundscape** 500 West 52nd Street, 664-9065  
**Taller Boricua** 1 East 104th Street, 631-4333  
**Townhall Boxoffice** 840-2834  
 produced by New Rican Village and Eduardo Figueroa

This program is part of the "Latino Cultural Renaissance Project 81" —  
 a two month cultural celebration —  
 Other important dates —  
**May 18, 1981 — Public Theatre** 7pm/538-7100 — music from New Rican Village  
**June 3 (Wednesday) — Soundscape** 9pm — 500 W. 52nd St.  
 Concert (poetry and music)  
**June 17, 18, 19 (3 days) — 4th Annual South Bronx Surrealist Festival**  
 Theatre, Music, Poetry — Fun and Games  
**Soundscape** 500 W. 52nd Street  
 Call for more information

Figure 13 - Expressions of the Cultural Renaissance - May 31, 1981 –  
 Performing at Various Venues throughout New York City. The Pedro Pietri Papers. Archives of  
 the Puerto Rican Diaspora. Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter Collge, CUNY.

Of all the cultural programming that occurred at the New Rican Village, music was surely the most popular. Voted the best music venue by Soho News in 1978 and 1979, it was a regular stomping ground for some highly acclaimed jazz and Latin jazz musicians, such as Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, Machito, Tito Puente, Paquito D’Rivera, and even visited by members of the Cuban ensemble, Irakere. Under the direction of Andy Gonzalez, the musical collective made their aesthetic mark by serving as a experimental refuge for musical exploration, hosting some of the premiere salsa and Latin jazz music ensembles and musicians, and in the process, creating a “new” New York sound that marshaled innovative approaches that remain respected today. Some of the bands and musical concepts that originated at the New Rican Village include Grupo Folklorico y Experimental Nuevayorquino, Jerry Gonzalez and the Fort Apache Band, Mario Rivera and the Salsa Refugees, Merengue Jazz by Mario Rivera, and Bomba Jazz by Papo Vazquez. The aesthetic imprint and their musical goals take center stage as the musicians sought to foster untouchable new musical galaxies, engage in transcultural musical improvisations, and form new musical juxtapositions that transcended conventional musical categories. Building on the musical activities already documented in Chapter 1, this chapter highlights some of the collaborations between musicians, the formation of Latin jazz music within the New Rican Village, and how their musical and cultural experiments enunciated their avant-garde vision.

## §§§§

The artists at the New Rican Village were intentionally departing from a folkloric or static view of culture, and intended to create new musical arrangements, document new poetry, and create new dance forms to a fusion of rhythms as part of the new renaissance they envisioned and led. In seeking to forge new aesthetic possibilities, this collective also resisted commercial control of their art and cultural programming.<sup>2</sup> “At the alternative educational showcase of the New Rican Village, audience members are exposed to high-quality, expanded repertoires unavailable within the commercial network. Performing artists are given freedom to express the full range of their possibilities.”<sup>3</sup> As one artist recalled: “There is so much room here, and the audience is so responsive and open. I can do Varese 21.5 here [music for the solo flute], as well as Afro-Cuban music and jazz. The New Rican Village fulfills our need to play what we want to play, a place for developing ourselves. We experiment here.”<sup>4</sup> Various NRV artists repeatedly articulated such imaginations and aesthetic reconfigurations specifying this particular collective goal.

In an interview with Sandra María Esteves, she notes the unique community that existed at the NRV, and its distinction from other venues.

There was nothing like it anywhere in New York City.... It was a family of creative individuals who were constantly experimenting, constantly growing, searching to push the envelope of their creativity....The New Rican Village was a gathering place for Latin@s, for young Latin@s who considered themselves to be hip and avant-garde artists to come. It was a public place where you could go to every week. This was like an intellectual center because people would hang. People would talk. You could just go

for the music. It was different. It wasn't commercial. It wasn't commercialization.<sup>5</sup>

The artists at the NRV aimed to move away from the commercialization of their art. For instance, Andy Gonzalez, the bandleader, bassist, and musical director of the New Rican Village gave the name “Libre” (meaning freedom) to the group that he co-founded because he wanted to be free from the constraints that recording labels impose on musicians' creativity and integrity. It also captured the sentiment of decolonial freedom for Puerto Rico as it pertained to the goals and platform of the Young Lords Party.<sup>6</sup> Gonzalez wanted music to create “movement:” kinesthetic, musical and political. Mario Rivera, the founder of the “Salsa Refugees,” an ensemble consisting of Hilton Ruiz on Piano, Brenda Feliciano on vocals, Steve Turre and Papo Vázquez on trombone, Milton Cardona and Frankie Malabe on percussion, Jerry Gonzalez on trumpet, and Rivera on Saxophone and flute, had similar sentiments (see figure 15); he reflects on the move and imposition of commercial labels upon salsa and their aesthetic restrictions, which at the time was Fania Records (and their subsidiaries).

This commercial music scene in New York City is often referred to as the “cuchifrito circuit” [Puerto Rican fast food], a term that refers to local music venues or spaces that cater to mostly blue-collar, Latin@ audiences, and that feature live salsa ensembles and/or a salsa music DJ performing dance music instead of avant-garde “listening” music (see figure 14).<sup>7</sup> These venues are known for paying below scale, but are welcome performance spaces for some musicians and bands for their accessible location and the dance acuity of their

audiences. Important to the cuchifrito music circuit is the fostering of community, often miles away from the glitter and media attention of midtown venues like the Palladium, “the home of the mambo,” or even the Cheetah Club, the midtown Manhattan venue where the salsa label, Fania records, recorded the documentary, *Our Latin Thing/Nuestra Cosa*, filmed by Leon Gast in 1972.<sup>8</sup>

Figure 14 is an example of a satirical reference to the cuchifrito circuit, described as music performed “back at the “Chinese take-outs, the all night laundromats, [and] occasionally a very hip gas station [where]...we lived and dreamed and suffered[;] this music was our justification for the time spent in your neighborhoods.” But it was obvious for Rivera, Valentín, and all the other musicians that The New Rican Village’s goal was a conscious departure from the formulaic musical blueprint customary in these cuchifrito venues. They wanted to “free” salsa and Latin jazz from these constraints and move them onto another aesthetic level.

Valentín: Why were you going to the New Rican Village? What were you performing at the New Rican?

Rivera: To get together, to play the music that we wanted to play, really. You see because we were playing salsa, we were playing for...I was playing with [Eddie] Palmieri; we [referring to Andy and Jerry Gonzalez, and himself] played with Palmieri at that time. We did that record “Sentido” que etá “Isla Linda” [sings the “Puerto Rico” harmony]; from that time then, we used to go to the New Rican Village. I used to play on Tuesday; Jerry [Gonzalez] used to play on Mondays, and I forgot the other guys, you know. Hilton Ruiz used to play with me, and Andy and Jerry and Nicky Marrero, too. You see, well then, you know we started doing that thing, right. And that’s when somebody told me, we were playing one night, I have pictures of that too here, I have pictures of that here, I have some pictures, and then someone asked me, “what’s the name of your band?” I didn’t know what to say, so I said, the “Salsa Refugees!” [laughing]

Valentin: Why the Salsa Refugees? What was the concept behind that?

Rivera: Well, the concept was that we were playing Latin Jazz, using the rhythm with the jazz harmonies, and because we were salsa musicians, right? That place was like a *refuge* to play what we wanted instead of having to play in the cuchifrito circuit, you know what I mean? And that's how it started. You see...the "Salsa Refugees" we would play salsa and that was like our *refuge*...to play whatever we wanted, you see. We were very avant-gardist. We were doing very important things there... [and] politically...the Salsa Refugees you can say it was political because, nosotros nos metiamos ahi, and represent! That that's our refuge - to play what we want to. So that was a political statement, really. We were just rebels against the system for whatever reason.<sup>9</sup>

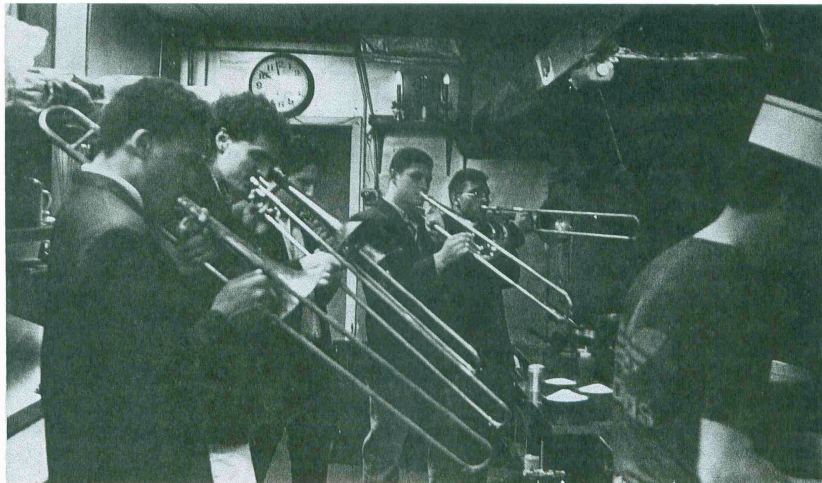
The importance to "play whatever we wanted" was possible in a non-commercial music space like the New Rican Village. Freeing the ensemble from playing from particular social dance settings and discovering new musical relationships is also echoed by Dave Valentín, an active participant in the New Rican Village scene, and acclaimed South Bronx-born Nuyorican flutist. He describes the bandstand as a classroom, and a space of new musical possibilities.

But the point was of the New Rican Village, we didn't know what it was. It was just a place to hang. *But it was the place to explore possibilities* [emphasis added]. But we didn't know we were doing that....We knew we were trying different things. So then...we'd go back home and learn the tune, you know, and...just so I can come back and play it again better. And everybody was going through that process just to explore possibilities. And it was a very special place. It was a place where people came together, musicians especially, and anybody that were not musicians. And I have to say the people that don't play a musical instrument are musicians because they know what the music is. And that's what that place was about; *we explored different possibilities*. And that was the beauty of it.<sup>10</sup>

The ability to explore these noted possibilities was the rejection of commercialism and the insistence to operate as a non-profit performance space where

compensation was not the goal. Analogous to other avant-garde communities, these artists often equated commercialism with dehumanization, a key component to the rejection of mass distribution of art, as simple manipulation of tastes.<sup>11</sup> Such manipulations were part of the economic priorities that overshadowed and often conflicted with the artist's interest in organically experimenting with new aesthetic relationships not driven by economic gain or power.

We played in your neighborhoods, awkward gigs in unlikely places. We did the take-out Chinese circuit and would bicker at the end of the night for an extra five dollars or a complimentary container of fan-tail shrimp. We played the bars, The Hideaway on 263rd Street, The Cul-De-Sac on Wyandotte Avenue, performing nervous duets with a large-screen TV which always flashed the deciding game of some championship series, hecklers shouting for us to turn down. We heard your tales of basement clubs buzzing with inspiration and activity, twisted streets populated with a garrulous array of artists and models, lovely and demure women in upstairs apartments waiting to share their whole lives, and although we searched and searched, we could find none of the things of which you spoke. Instead we took our music back to the Chinese take-outs, the all-night laundromats, occasionally a very hip gas station, anyplace that could fit our equipment, always waiting for our big break, although we weren't exactly sure what that meant. We invented imaginary bands such as The Stop Payments from the 1950s, The Court-Appointed Lawyers from the first decade of the 21st Century, and then went about recreating their music. We tried forming some community within the driest spell in modern times, but it was very difficult to reach you and to make you understand that we were here, that we lived and dreamed and suffered, and that this music was our justification for the time spent in your neighborhoods.



CENTRO LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES  
 HUNTER COLLEGE  
 695 PARK AVE.  
 NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021

**For a FREE Twenty % Tippers cassette  
 Call (212) 567-5243**

CENTRO ARCHIVES  
 NOT TO BE COPIED OR  
 REPRODUCED WITHOUT  
 PERMISSION

*PePi Box 65 Folder 8*

Figure 14 - Poster spoofing on the Cuchifrito Music Circuit. The Pedro Pietri Papers. Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora. Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY.





APPEARING AT

**NEW RICAN VILLAGE**  
 101 AVENUE 'A' OFF EAST 7TH STREET 475 - 9505

*Cultural Center*  
 Director  
 EDUARDO FIGUEROA

contribution \$3

EVERY MON & THURS  
 9PM



a non-profit org

# LATIN JAZZ

*with*

## MARIO RIVERA

&

THE SALSA REFUGEES

*featuring*

MARIO RIVERA sax  
 HILTON RUIZ piano  
 JERRY GONZALEZ trumpet  
 CACHETE MALDONADO conga  
 JOE SANTIAGO bass  
 PAPO VASQUEZ trombone  
 CHARLEY SANTIAGO timbales

*guest vocalist*

BRENDA FELICIANO

Figure 15 - Mario Rivera and the Salsa Regugees. Poster graciously shared by the late Mario Rivera and is part of his personal archive.

In my interview with Adela Dalto, the Chicana-born singer whose ex-husband, the deceased Argentinean pianist, Jorge Dalto, one of the many musicians who participated in the New Rican Village and a founding member of the Fort Apache band, was also “freed” to push for the avant-garde concept within Latin jazz and explore new musical relationships. She declares that her husband, using a different name for the now acclaimed ensemble, originated the concept that evolved into the Fort Apache musical formula.

Adela Dalto: Before the Fort Apache Band, it was Avant Clave. And that came to be because they had called Jorge to sub for somebody at 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue South [a music venue]. Somebody had cancelled and they called Jorge to come and put a band together so he called Mario [Rivera] and he called Jerry and Andy and Nicky Marrero and it became the--it was the Avant Clave.

WV: Avant Clave? Like Avant Garde but Avant Clave?

AD: Yeah. At 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue South. Then the next gig, Jorge couldn't make it because he was at, you know, his regular gig was with George Benson. And so it became Jerry's band, Fort Apache. He said, "Jerry, you take the band," so Jerry put the band together and that's when it became the Fort Apache Band.

Mario Rivera corroborates Adela Dalto's rather delicate assertion, given that the dominant historical narrative has it that Jerry Gonzalez conceived of the Fort Apache ensemble and name.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, to move the clave to an avant-gardist level is testament to the ways this musical community was envisioning and forging new musical formulas, within a commercial-free art zone.

Similarly, and building on the theme of freedom, we have a musical unity reconceptualized in the music put forth by Grupo Folklorico y Experimental Nuevayorquino, as exemplified in their album, *Concepts in Unity* (see figure 16).<sup>13</sup> The music is conceptual, and is represented by the musical transcultural blending that was occurring in the Diaspora city of New York: "the feeling of freedom to do away with formalities and inhibitions in order to play...[This is] music of survival and liberation. The reality of Latin music is that it can and does absorb new elements without losing its identity, that it is in fact, capable of evolving."<sup>14</sup> Moving forward and absorbing elements lends to the musical relationships fostered by the social spaces musicians navigated and also reflected within the New Rican Village music scene. This freedom to do away

with formalities is of utmost importance for this musical community, since it is also a denunciation of the chief and well-established salsa-recording label at the time, Fania Records.



Figure 16 - Grupo Folklorico y Experimental Nuevayorquino, *Concepts in Unity*. Salsoul Records. Reissued in 1994. Salsoul Records, 6001.

The rejection of the commercial was also a rejection toward Fania records, the leading salsa music recording label during the 1970s and 80s and the institution that sponsored and produced concerts, documentaries, radio and

television programs, and had a stranglehold on which bands performed at particular venues. With this level of hegemonic aural power, what Marisol Negrón terms the “Fania Formula,” some musicians and bands vehemently opposed and rejected Fania’s marketing infrastructure, financial exploitation and musical approach and maintained their independence, refusing to adhere to a market that they understood as Fania’s interest in imposing financial interests over aesthetic creativity.<sup>15</sup>

One prime example is the Salsoul music label recording of Conjunto Libre, which Cesar Miguel Rondón, the well known Venezuelan DJ and journalist who authored one of the early definitive texts on salsa music, and engages what Frances Aparicio coined the “plural sites of salsa”<sup>16</sup> by offering an analysis of how salsa music developed transnationally. In doing so, he also decenters the Cuban-centric musical linear narrative offered by so many scholars, journalists and critics. Rondón described Libre as one of the best avant-garde salsa music ensembles:<sup>17</sup> “El Conjunto Libre (the Free Ensemble), which as its name suggests, operated outside any impositions or restrictions, whether commercial or conceptual.”<sup>18</sup> Free from commercial restrictions, the ensemble understood their music as operating in an other musical hemisphere, a musical formula echoed in the artwork used for their first album, *Con Salsa....Con Ritmo Volume 1* (See Figure 17).<sup>19</sup> Rondón recalls seeing Libre perform at the New Rican Village, a performance that was particularly memorable for him:

I remember the first time I saw Conjunto Libre perform. It was in July 1977 when they played at a modest venue known as Nuyorican [sic] Village, a sort of refuge for Puerto Rican poets, musicians, and actors, obviously intent on reaffirming a cultural identity that they

felt was threatened. That evening I witnessed an extraordinary musical manifesto. On the margins of the commercialized 'salsa,' already as clearly packaged and nondescript as ketchup, these musicians showed what was possible.<sup>20</sup>

Interestingly, Rondón astutely recognizes not only the talents exemplified by Libre and the other artists active at the New Rican, but also how it was a “refuge,” affirming “a cultural identity...that was threatened.” This is a topic further explored in chapter 3 as demonstrated in the work of the Puerto Rican Embassy and Adál Maldonado.

In brief, Figueroa and the other administrators understood the New Rican Village operating as an Embassy where a formal state structure has diplomatic relations with other nation states. As officially recognized international and state institutions, embassies have the privilege of operating as extraterritorial entities within a particular nation state, meaning entrance into this space requires some level of authorization from the embassy administration. In other words, the New Rican Village was an embassy representing sovereignty and immunity from commercialism, and fostered a level of decision-making control through cultural and aesthetic activism. As such, it served as a refuge for artists seeking to reimagine themselves and the world they encompassed despite the social marginality that Puerto Ricans and many other Latin@s faced in New York and the U.S. overall. In essence, the New Rican enabled avant-garde artistic experimentation and represented and became an activist refuge oftentimes operating in another galaxy. As Dina D'Oyen, one of the arts administrators at the NRV noted, “The New Rican Village was a space for the New Ricans...we were so avant-garde...that we belonged in space....”<sup>21</sup> Thus, Rondón's

description does capture the intention and goals of the New Rican Village as a space of refuge, fortifying Mario Rivera's unplanned naming of his ensemble, the "Salsa Refugees."



Figure 17 – Conjunto Libre, *Con Salsa...Con Ritmo, Volume 1*. Salsoul Records, 1976. A prime visual example of the new musical hemispheres spearheaded at the New Rican Village.

For Figueroa, Pietri, and later Adál Maldonado, the dream of seeking refuge was equivalent to the larger systems that degraded their creativity and humanity. Capitalism, racism, sexism, and colonialism degraded their creative capacities, hindered their human rights, and constrained their abilities to live autonomously from numerous structural constraints. The Victorian values of sacrifice and morality dictated a life of self-deprivation, an alienation that paralleled a structure of multiple estrangements. In an effort to disalienate, the

New Rican Village mirrors the tactics employed by Dadaists and Surrealists by using cultural and artistic forms to mock and satirize the manifold alienations of their current diasporic, hybrid, out-of-focus condition. Thus, art is used in activist ways for complete social transformation.<sup>22</sup>

The unification of art and experience was a result of enduring multiple alienations. However, distinct from the historical European avant-garde, this community of marginalized artists was also familiar with the alienation prompted by forced dislocation, social, economic, and political marginality, racism and classism, as well as the “trauma” that accompanies (neo) colonial structures and conditions. This need to perform creatively within a space of refuge is a reconciliation of this condition. Factoring that Rivera and the other community of artists of the New Rican Village were alienated from the dominant art worlds and salsa music industry, emancipation from these conditions was necessary in order to facilitate *collective* recovery from decolonial inhumanity. In an effort to disalienate, Rivera seeks musical and cultural exile in an effort to fully recover from coloniality, commercial control, and racial, class and aesthetic marginalization. Creativity was then understood as the avenue through which humanity is regained, and the tool to resist forces that opposed this process.

The musicians sought to engage in transcreative practices by fusing multiple genres and styles together. Interestingly, the ethnic label of their cultural texts positioned their musical merging under a separate avant-garde category. Despite the fact that Latinidad constituted their avant-gardism, it also positioned it as “other.” An outsider might then consider this Latin@ avant-garde as “low-high

culture.” We observe that these artists define the avant-garde as rupturing and moving musical tradition forward, away from commercialism and “exploring new possibilities.” In their search “to enjoy the exhilarating freedom of exploring completely new...horizons of creativity,” they sought to “move against the stylistic expectations of the general public” as well as particular sectors of society.<sup>23</sup> In essence, unlike what had come before within the Latin@ community, the NRV was partially responsible for forging new paths previously unknown, paving a cultural and political road that others would eventually follow.

### **Music Scenes and Inter-Arts Spaces**

The New Rican Village was an inter-artistic space that hosted an art gallery, poetry recitals, theatrical productions, dance choreography and live music events. As such, the artists and their art forms were intertextually constituted in this performance space that provided an underground vehicle for enlightenment, transculturation, and sub-altern experimentation. As an alternative arts institution, the inter-artistic programming of the New Rican was cultivating a commercial free arts “scene” that was, in tandem with other emerging Latin@ cultural arts centers, original and innovative, and played a critical role in developing what is often described as a formal music scene. In documenting the historical specificities of the New Rican Village, one learns of the aesthetic interventions made, the inter-artistic programming organized, as well as the way in which it also offered an opportunity to re-examine the concept and theory of the music scene.



Drawing from the foundational critique of Howard Becker's *Art Worlds*, Will Straw, Barry Shank, and Holly Kruse offer a provocative perspective on understanding the music scene as a social arena and process that intersects with artistic dreams. The Sociologist Howard Becker describes an "art world" as the spheres within which several individuals or groups work together to produce a work, an object, or a show. These collective actions take the form of networks of cooperation governed by a series of agreed upon conventions and goals followed by artists, support staff and patrons.<sup>24</sup> Becker's sociological analysis foregrounds the institutional networks that describe how an art world functions. In a similar vein, the concept of the music scene, proposed by Will Straw, is that "cultural space in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of trajectories of change and cross fertilization."<sup>25</sup> A music scene<sup>26</sup> relies on collaborations and alliances within and across musical boundaries. Participants have the ability to shape musical styles through their relations with other music, musicians, and audiences. Straw disagrees with this level of fluidity between scenes. Instead, he believes musicians can easily enter into a scene without adapting to the distinct approaches musicians within a particular scene employ. Straw's views are challenged by the work of Holly Kruse.

Kruse accounts for how local conditions, relations, and social processes inform local musical production, what she identifies as the relationship "between *situated* musical practices and the construction of identity."<sup>27</sup> What's important for Kruse is how a local music scene is distinct from others. Such a view

emphasizes not only unique aesthetic sensibilities, but accounts for the fluid and varying relationships and material conditions to engage in musical explorations.

The work of Barry Shank is helpful to advancing the music scene concept. Shank understands a musical scene as a “signifying community.”<sup>28</sup> Music and space become synonymous but fluid. How we come to understand and equate a location with a genre or style becomes increasingly challenged on account of the acute movement of people and the flow of technology and musical exchanges that travel between and across varying locales. The movements of musical participants within scenes also give rise to aesthetic changes within those spaces, which in turn, warrant a change in how we conceptualize the character and identity of those spaces. The musical meanings that were once attached to geographically specific necessitate conceptual remapping. This essentially entails revising how we assign a genre and style to specific spaces. As Travis Jackson nicely summarizes, “scenes for Shank are precisely predicated on the interaction between older notions of community -- geographically and historically rooted -- and translocal processes of capitalism, communication and identification.”<sup>29</sup> While the concept of scene has played an important role in popular music and cultural studies, Shank particularly highlights the importance of local and translocal actors, which include the roles played by musicians, social movements, record labels, and neighborhood dynamics.

Although these scholars complicate general understandings of music, community, and institutions, a consideration of the role of other art forms, such as poetry, visual arts, modern dance, and theatre, have in reconstituting a music

scene would enhance their analysis and theory. Numerous non-musicians and other artists within a scene have a dialectical impact upon the process of music making. The dynamic interplay between various artists contributes to a particular and ever changing organizational aesthetic that guide the scene and the artists' work. The inter-artistic component of the New Rican, comprised of varying art forms, aesthetic formulas, philosophies, and social traffic, or "ethnoscapes," provides us with an opportunity to expand the concept of the music scene.

Sandra Maria Esteves draws on this dynamic interaction between music and the written arts in her poetry. As one of the founding writers of the Nuyorican poetry scene, and active member, graphic artist, and organizer at the New Rican Village, she notes that this institution was unique at the time because of the collaborations between poets and Latin jazz musicians.

The Nuyorican Poets Café, [the well known performance space located only several blocks away from the New Rican Village and also featured in the cinematic production, *Piñero*] was mostly about poetry. At the New Rican Village, however, you could find singers, poets, dancers, and musicians performing in one night. [This is what made this] space unique. As a growing poet, it was exciting to recite my poetry with musicians, like Andy Gonzalez, his older brother Jerry, the flutists Nestor Torres and Dave Valentín, and the pianist Hilton Ruiz. Just hearing my words through their ears and their voice, the voice of their instruments [...] was something very special."<sup>30</sup>

Within the confines of the NRV, the arts scene and the music scene converged into an inter-artistic milieu where various art mediums influenced one another, shaping the aesthetic imaginaries and practices of the artists, and providing new ways of thinking and understanding. Gonzalez offers a similar to reflection to the

inter-artistic conversation, highlighting how their respective commitments to push new aesthetic boundaries mutually constituted the artists and their art.

Writers, poets, artists, you name it, they were at the New Rican. I mean we had art exhibits there. We had paintings, you know, the whole shebang. Every facet of art in the whole world of Latin@s at one time or another passed through the New Rican Village.<sup>31</sup> This allowed me to approach music in a common manner that the other artists would approach in their art. I guess we shared similar philosophies toward our respective forms. These philosophies rubbed off on each other.<sup>32</sup>

At the same time as the primacy of inter-artisticity expands the concept of “scene,” another crucial element overlooked in the literature is the way gender is constituted across various art forms. Absent is an analysis of how a music scene, a collaboration of actors shaping behavior, ideas, musical and cultural performances, and the knowledge each participant brings with them, are all gendered processes that operate independently and continue to operate within a scene. For example, within the Latin jazz genre, with the exception of the opera singer and songwriter, Brenda Feliciano, and the flutist Andrea Brachfeld, women rarely shared the stage as musicians. Gender informed and constituted which instruments to perform and in what setting. In the New Rican Village venue, women, were active in the other art forms, like poetry and dance, that often coalesced with and shaped musical performance. Seen from a particular angle, the active role of Latinas as organizers, photographers, dancers, poets, and visual artists, also provides a window to challenge and expand the paradigmatic conventions of the music scene. Absent is the primacy of gender in shaping how cultural agency is enacted in an inter-artistic space, as well as it’s role as the

ideological subtext guiding performances either for the artists, the administrators, or the audience members. Gender becomes invisibly inscribed in definitions of the music scene, privileging male and masculine agency within a collective musical community and takes for granted gendered relations that mark acceptable performing bodies within a particular aspects of a scene. Moreover, the inter-artisticity of the New Rican Village also demonstrates how the literature on music scenes fell short in considering how gender becomes associated with community history, artistic categories and movements, as well as collective agency.

A useful and expanded theory of music scenes encompassing a poetics of gender (as well as race) would complicate the current discussion. For example, male identified artists are repeatedly professed as “innovators” and “artists” while women identified artists are unconsciously assigned as “entertainers,” “organizers,” and cultural caretakers and administrators. In the case of the New Rican, Andy Gonzalez, as the musical director, dictates which music should and can be performed, which musicians can be included in the jam sessions, and to some degree, determine what music events to organize and which musical ensembles should and can be featured. The paradigm of determining these musical acts are often made by social relationships and “standards” that are themselves gendered constructions of proficiency. Brenda Feliciano, opera singer and actor, and Andrea Brachfeld, flutist and bandleader, are not afforded this privilege, although admittedly they were not part of the center’s founding and organizing unit. Sandra María Esteves, one of the original founding members,

directs the poetry events while Willie Figueroa, a gay professional modern dancer, choreographer and educator, directs the dance performances. Such assigning of performance modes to gendered identities informs how a cultural scene is also performing gender and sexuality. In other words, a scene performs a series of gendered identities as they pertain to socially constructed ideas of what constitutes performance as well as the spatializing of gender within that scene.

Distinguishing between space as a series of interrelations and place as a location, the relationships that *define* space and generate meaning also contribute to, in this case, what the New Rican Village signifies. A scene, operating on the cultural construction of space, is the solidification of the material and the symbolic; the brick and mortar design of its location, coupled by the social relations enacted within the location *and around it*, as well as the ideological idea and imaginary of what the space signifies, a collective process of merging disjunctive elements paralleling what Stuart Hall describes as the “articulations” between these separate elements.<sup>33</sup> The unity of different elements, under certain historical and social conditions, rearticulates a linkage of coherent relationships and meaning between them. Merging gender, space, location, and performance bring about a collective articulation of a scene, and how the New Rican Village as a collective whole is performed, imagined, and received among other artist communities, the Lower East Side, Latin@s, and the larger New York City community. As a scene, it conveys, without a doubt, a new cultural Latin@ avant-gardism, an unexpected juxtaposition, provoking shock to

some locked into racial tropes of cultural ingenuity; for others, it also conveyed a feminist space where Latina women organized and addressed patriarchy, healing, sexism, and inequality (see figures 18, 19, and 20). However, many of these performances from which such imaginaries derived, were built upon gendered conventions of performance and sexuality.

**“Hear these voices—fresh, loving,  
urgent, delicate, courageous,  
strong . . .” —Honor Moore**

---

Ordinary Women Anthology  
presents  
An Evening of Poetry

Sandra Maria Esteves  
Lois Griffith  
Sara Miles  
Janet Sternberg  
Eugenie Eersel  
Aqua Lezli Hope  
Molly Vox  
Aida Del Valle  
Brenda Feliciano



Exhibiting Artists

Nitza Tufiño  
Cándida Alvarez

March 24th, 1978

Donation — \$2.50

**New Rican Village  
101 Avenue A, New York, N.Y. 10009  
(Bet. 6th & 7th Sts.)  
(212) 475-9505**

---

Figure 18 - Ordinary Women Anthology Poetry Event, March 24, 1978. Poster designed by Sandra María Esteves and part of her personal archive. Included here with her permission.





Figure 19 - Desires and Fantasies Music and Poetry Event, June 17 19??. Poster designed by Sandra María Esteves and part of her personal archive. Included here with her permission.

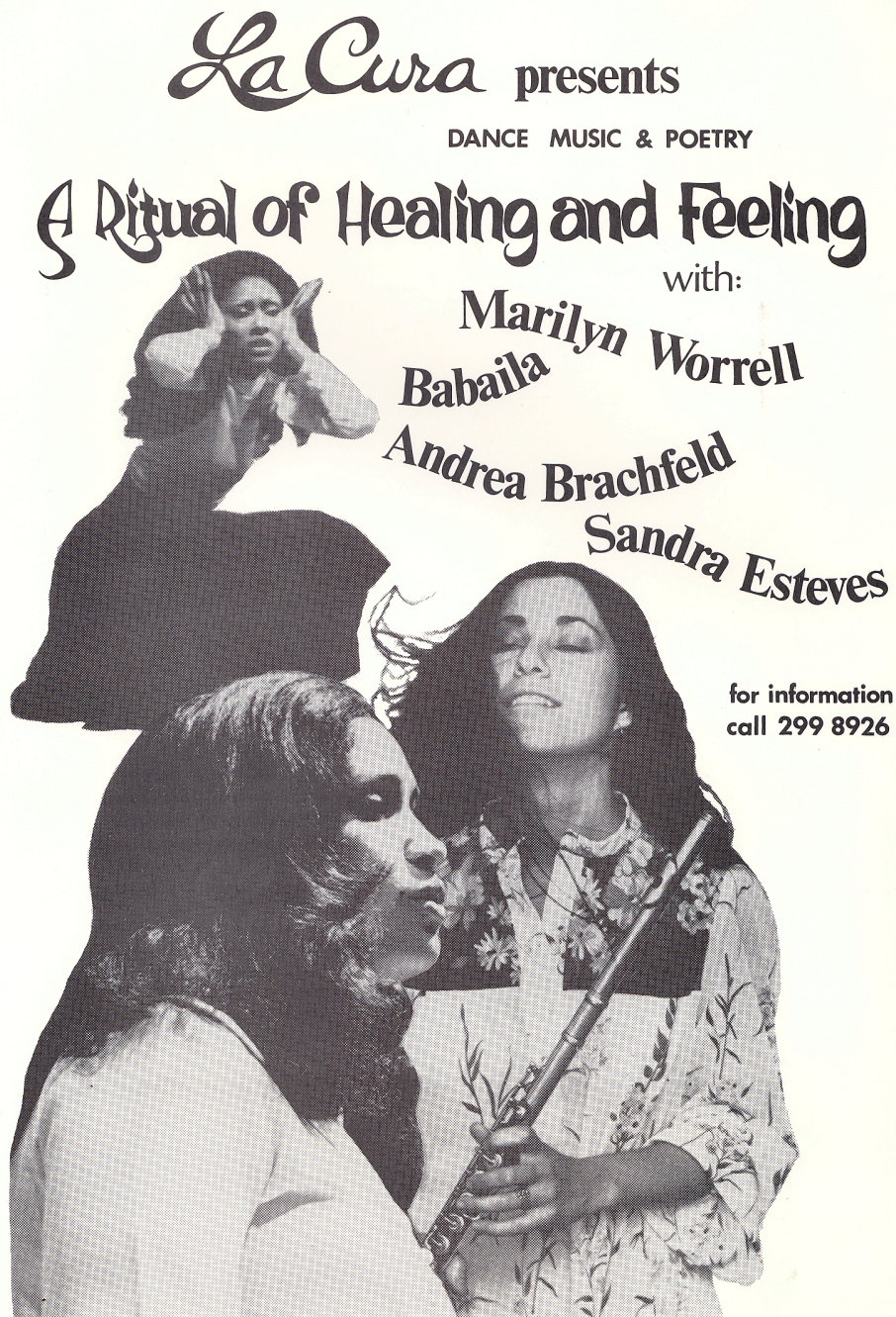


Figure 20 - La Cura (The Healer) Presents a Ritual of Healing and Feeling. N.D. Poster designed by Sandra María Esteves and part of her personal archive. Included here with her permission.

It appears that the literature on the music scene placed women simply as followers or by standards not vanguards. Women are viewed as minor players with only marginal significance in the arena of aesthetic creativity and innovation. As it applies in this case, the inter-artistic character of the NRV allowed women to play a more active role in its daily performance schedule and within its aesthetic paradigms and organizational structure. The artistic practices articulated by women within the space of the New Rican Village accounted for not simply their inclusion and impact on musical practices, a space that accounts for transcreative art forms, but allows for opening new avenues of analysis on how the gendered domain of art expressions and accompanying scenes can transcend those particular art publics in fostering new social dynamics within said spaces.

The women at the New Rican Village, while perhaps afforded limited musical agency, with the partial exception to Brenda Feliciano, the established opera singer and actress and wife of acclaimed Cuban music, Paquito D' Rivera, forcefully pushed not only the male-gendered boundaries around musical production and its corresponding musical space, they did so by practicing other forms within this inter-artistic venue. While poetry, for example, may have been ascribed a porous gendered space that normalized women's participation, poets like Sandra María Esteves still had an impact on musical production because of the dialectical inter-artistic exchange between the various art forms. In short, what we learn is yet another crucial element of sub-alternity: that even in the face of exclusion, feminist agency and presence are realized and expressed

through the back door, subverted often in disguise. Overall, the intersectional dynamics of how gender – and other social identities – constitutes a scene should be re-examined and rigorously factored into future perspectives. The New Rican Village and other inter-artistic venues are prime examples of how we can reconceptualize the intersections between space, performance, meaning, and new artistic practices.

### **A Latin@ Avant-Garde**

We can see that the inter-artistic working-class community at the New Rican Village also provides an opportunity to expand our understanding of the avant-garde concept. In agreement with the African American cultural historian Robin D.G. Kelley, the term avant-garde has the potential to both “obscure” and “reveal.”<sup>34</sup> Prior observations of the avant-garde have been tainted by a universal western definition of this concept, combined with failing to depart from its historical emergence. The two prevailing scholars writing on this topic, Renato Poggioli and Peter Bürger, provide a foreground to this study.<sup>35</sup>

Poggioli and Burger both agree that the term “avant-garde” was used originally to describe the fusion of revolutionary, social, political, and artistic goals. For them, the European avant-garde, similar to Walter Benjamin’s perspective, was to seize “tradition away from a conformism,” disrupting a continuous development in the arts by transgressing naturally ascribed expectations. Yet the two differ in their perceptions of history and legacy. Poggioli saw the development of two avant-gardes, one that was cultural-artistic and the other sociopolitical in France until 1880. He proposes that the cultural-

artistic did not fully abandon a social agenda in their artistry, but provided a social purpose by functioning as therapy through art, music, and literature. For him, these art forms were previously riddled with thoughtlessness and mediocrity, thus sharing a common vision of art jazz with the critical theorist Theodore Adorno.<sup>36</sup>

Peter Bürger saw Poggioli's definition of the avant-garde as too historically elastic. By perceiving the development of an avant-garde community as early as the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, Poggioli was ignoring historical shifts. Bürger proposed to view the avant-garde not as individual acts of particular artists, but as a collective whole entwined within social institutional frameworks that include artists, museums, dealers, critics, and collectors. Bürger notes that a radical shift occurred early in the twentieth century, when what he calls "aestheticism" forged an historical avant-garde that criticized art as an institution. Art serves as the basis through which a new world is created, and thus presupposes human praxis and social emancipation from ideologies that foster inequality and hate codified through artistic action/agency. Aestheticism is thus not an analysis of the content of art, but rather its *social function*. Taking on this role, art contains the power to change dominant conceptions, thoughts, and institutionalized ideologies that long affect members and communities in society. Thus, departing from strict Marxist formulas, art was not simply a reflection of reality, or an instrument deviating from the ideological clarity of "true" political and social thought. In many cases, as Bürger notes, within this vogue, aestheticism sought to re-organize the social world while also rejecting it, standing to "organize a new life praxis from a basis in art."<sup>37</sup> From this angle, artists and their art are betwixt and between, engaging

the daily praxis of life while contradictorily rejecting the world, simultaneously being aware of the social processes that shape art and how its sponsoring institutions function. Nevertheless, art is an independent, agentic force *shaped* but not *dictated* by the means of production, yet entwined within a social structure of class, gender, race, and power that constitutes it.

It is this simultaneous space of independence and social constitution that enables the utopic utility of art and the breakdown of the artificial distance between art and life, as well as the liminal contradictions avant-garde artists navigate. In other words, expressions in art, literature, music, and other creative mediums have the ability to transform perceptions and consciousness of their audiences and concurrently stimulate the collective imaginary worlds through which they navigate. In order to seek their transformation, avant-gardes employ a socially familiar discourse that speaks to current realities, yet also departs from them. The ultimate goal is to disrupt the conscious or unconscious logics that frame aesthetic paradigms and orientations and recognize, as Janet Wolff reminds us, that they “originate and are practiced [under] particular conditions, [while] bar[ing] the mark of those conditions.”<sup>38</sup>

A principal shortcoming in Bürger is the historical selectivity to his avant-garde concept as a static definition belonging to the “historical” European avant-garde, like André Breton, Marcel Duchamp, Louis Aragon, and John Heartfield. As Hal Foster notes, Bürger dismisses the “postwar avant-garde as merely *neo*.”<sup>39</sup> This dismissal of all other artists and collectives who engaged in similar aesthetic framing also created a static, sacrosanct construction of the avant-

garde category that became synonymous with a particular formula, vision and trajectory, leaving little room for other communities to emerge. Such theoretical perceptions also resulted in an avant-gardist hierarchy.

In agreement with Michelle Wallace, both descriptions of the avant-garde movement is informed by Western European formations, and as such, cannot simply be imposed across national borders and different historical contexts.<sup>40</sup> Peter Bürger's avant-garde coalesces with Howard Becker's art world; they provide a description of the social world that constitutes art, a world that seems to have particular racial inflections. That is, "art" and the avant-garde become synonymous with whiteness and "high" culture. The theories of art, art worlds, and the avant-garde are predicated under a racially and class-coded system. Whiteness, Western European culture, and power codify theoretical and historical notions of the avant-garde.

Recognizing the importance of what Stuart Hall describes as the "margins representing themselves," the artists at the New Rican Village took the initiative to *make meaning; to make interventions* across various spaces and mediums, to *become historical agents of change through art*, and organize and cultivate new spaces of avant-gardism amongst a marginalized community operating on the fringes of aesthetic recognition. In an effort to defy commercialism as well as resist commercial images of their "otherness," the cultural politics and activism was doubly misunderstood and even "unthinkable" by those viewing it through a culture of poverty angle, and similarly unclear for those avant-garde subscribers

and practitioners who also employed racial prelapsarian tropes of modernist aesthetics onto communities of color.<sup>41</sup>

Surrealism, while known for its revolutionary claims, was an avant-garde form that also fell into such troping. “Surrealism,” André Breton notes, “is allied with peoples of color, first because it has sided with them against all forms of imperialism and white brigandage...and second because of the profound affinities between Surrealism and primitive thought. Both envision the abolition of the hegemony of the conscious and the everyday, leading to the conquest of revelatory emotion.”<sup>42</sup> We come to see that even the founder of Surrealism along with other elite members of the avant-garde held racially static and romantic ideas of people and artists of color that were equivalent to those held even by the staunchest subscribers of progressive or revolutionary art. Elaborated upon in chapter 3, this impulse toward exotic desire was due to the alienation brought on by industrialization.

Surrealists, in an effort to return to a “true self” believed that such an undertaking was best realized in societies and communities marked as “primitive” and “exotic.” Yet, such power to appropriate and reconcile themselves in the name of cultural democracy maintained a structural hierarchy of otherness that surrealists intended to transform.<sup>43</sup> The consequence of such appropriation was that the “exotic” and “primitive” subjects, of whom Puerto Ricans and other Latin@s were and remain largely included, were *incapable* of avant-gardism and were essentially relegated to being *art objects instead of the authors of avant-garde art*; it was outside the constructed taxonomy of many critics and scholars,



such as Peter Bürger, David Lehman, and others that such was and remains possible.<sup>44</sup> In fact, Lehman argues for the demise of the avant-garde during the 1960s and 70s, historically overlapping when artists of color, including those within the New Rican Village, were engaging in avant-garde art, arguments fortified by the research conducted by Michelle J. Wilkinson and Cary Cordova.<sup>45</sup>

While people of color were the source of primitivity for European artists, their primitivity confined them to lacking the intellectual faculties for modernist art practices, a racial trope that dates back to colonial encounters. Drawing from the path breaking work authored by James Harding, the New Rican Village collective was not simply trying to move from the "edge to the center" of the avant-garde world, but reshifting and deterritorializing spatial, ethnic, and racial conceptions of the avant-garde, and recognizing multiple art centers without margins. Neither did they perceive themselves as the dependent variable of the *official* avant-garde as Bürger argues; they were not the stepchildren or protégés of the officially sacrosanct historical avant-garde. Overall, the cultural activism at the New Rican Village, and later El Puerto Rican Embassy, serve as an opportunity to examine how the "other" "reconsider[s] the cultural boundaries that have historically demarcated scholarly conceptions of the avant-garde, for in doing so we can lay the foundation for a substantially retheorized notion of the avant-garde."<sup>46</sup>

## Diasporic Intimacy

While the artists of the New Rican Village drew from the cultural reserves of their parents and ancestors, they also engaged other surrounding subaltern communities, most particularly African Americans in their avant-gardist efforts. As Juan Flores notes in *Divided Borders* and *From Bomba to Hip-Hop*, many Caribbean Latin@ communities share a cultural and racial history with African Americans in the New World.<sup>47</sup> The shared experience of sub-alternality, racial violence, political disenfranchisement, and class exploitation, and geographic proximity in racialized, segregated urban neighborhoods also cultivate what Paul Gilroy and George Lipsitz describe as “diasporic intimacy.”<sup>48</sup> This “diasporic intimacy” is historical, physical and sociocultural. The proximity of common social spaces between African Americans and Latin@s regularly facilitates a dialectical exchange between artists; they will collectively read poetry, perform and dance to each other’s music, and cooperatively imprint shared imaginative landscapes onto the material urban canvas.

“Diasporic intimacy” also extends into what I call “transcultural improvisation.” That is, we can listen to African American funk, blues, and ragtime alongside the Afro-Caribbean rhythms of bomba, plena, danza, merengue and guaguanco. Yusef Lateef reminds us, “the sound of the improvisation seems to tell us what kind of person is improvising. We feel that we can hear character or personality in the way the musician improvises.”<sup>49</sup> When listening to a solo performed by Hilton Ruiz, Andy Gonzalez, or Mario Rivera, we also gain an aural diasporic history of their imagination as well as a

transcultural imagination. The dynamic interplay between personal, racial and cultural history, social location, and artistic imagination in improvisation highlights the musicians' agency to modify aural expectations and aesthetics, to transgress artistic boundaries, and more importantly, to tell us where they've been as well as where they're going.<sup>50</sup> Some listeners of Latin jazz music, for example, may not be too concerned with its technique or on how it is made, but instead may be interested in the story it tells.<sup>51</sup> In addition, when we consider how music not only represents the social relations between communities, we also grasp how the aesthetics of music simultaneously enacts those social relations; we acquire a sense of their communal identity.

This "dynamism of diasporic interchanges"<sup>52</sup> also serves as a translocal cultural scaffolding that fosters the complicated qualities that resemble the aesthetic collages discussed earlier. Ana Ramos, an active member of the NRV, describes a musical collage that encompassed a range of significations that were regularly reformulated on the improvised NRV proscenium stage. She recalls how choreographed dance presentations as well as the Latin Jazz jam sessions would go "everywhere", highlighting the hybrid, avant-garde, bricolage qualities of the art at the NRV.

In terms of dance...Willie Figueroa, [the dance choreographer at the New Rican] would [direct] pieces that were a combination of Puerto Rican bomba and plena, which would go into modern dance and then into jazz dance. He'd incorporate classical ballet with the conga drum. And then there were evenings when there was [some dynamic] Latin jazz too. At times [the musicians performed] [Cuban] rumba. And at other times the rumba had electric guitars mixed with African American doo-wop. Then you have the pianist Hilton

Ruiz, who would combine everything. I'll never forget there was one piece that all of a sudden went everywhere. During a fifteen-minute solo, I'm listening to the American national anthem in minor chord. [The arrangement] eventually [wound up going] into the Puerto Rican nationalist anthem "La Boriqueña" and...by then, people were just [going] nuts.<sup>53</sup>

Ramos' observations of Ruiz's performance draw our attention to both the subversive tendencies of the artists and their subversion of avant-garde paradigms and doing so through transcultural improvisation. While it is assumed many avant-gardes subscribe to a post-nationalist ideology, this community espoused a critical nationalism because it became synonymous with their ethnic identity of colonial resistance. Interestingly, the Puerto Rican nationalist anthem, "La Boriqueña," is arranged and performed using minor chords. Thus, Ruiz was not simply performing a musical quotation or discography, but rather "Puerto Ricanizing" the American national anthem by playing it in minor chord.

This musical quoting resembles the language practices analyzed and theorized by Frances Aparicio as a tropicalizing gesture that destabilizes hegemonic discourses, and in this case, aural syntaxes from "within." It's an aural gesture of a hidden transcript, while also embodying the qualities of post-modern collage operating within an avant-gardist impetus of artistic exploration. In agreement with Aparicio's literary analysis, this sub-version of transposing a musical syntax of "La Boriqueña" while playing the American national anthem, which incidentally recalls a Bhabian analysis of mimicry (discussed in chapter 3), may on the surface suggest a double sub-version: using a musical syntax of a Puerto Rican nationalist anthem "under" (the sub-verse) the American national anthem to resignify its dominant meaning, while also "transforming [the] signifiers

with cultural meanings, values, and ideologies of the subordinate sector.”<sup>54</sup> Indeed, this musical resemanticization entails inserting “the self using the tools of the Master,” to explore “new possibilities of metaphors...syntax and rhythms.”<sup>55</sup>

Considered the “vanguard of the avant-garde,” the Latin jazz musicians at the New Rican Village actively fused Afro-Caribbean rhythms with Afro-American Jazz. The “diasporic intimacy” that exists between both communities can be heard in their arrangements and playing styles. Borrowing from the scholarship of the ethnomusicologist Shannon Dudley, what makes the Latin jazz music that came out of the NRV avant-garde and distinct from 1940s and 1950s big-band Latin jazz is the “consistent musical logic and composite aesthetic effect of many [instruments] which interact[ed] together rhythmically.”<sup>56</sup> At particular moments, we can listen to a Latin jazz arrangement and recognize salsa intonations; other times the “interactive rhythmic feel” of the instruments resembles the African American “jazz aesthetic.”<sup>57</sup>

With many of the musicians who performed at the New Rican, we can often identify both “aesthetic approaches” simultaneously. Consider for example Angel “Papo” Vázquez’s reflection of the various approaches to Latin Jazz. He identifies a distinction between “Jazz-Latin” and “Latin-Jazz,” a term that he claims derives from Chico O’Farrill, a Latin jazz pianist, professor, and bandleader and son of Arturo O’Farrill, one of the early exponents of Latin jazz. I would also add that some Latin jazz ensembles, like the Fort Apache Band that sprung from the New Rican Village, also perform conventional “jazz” and “Latin” styles independently within a musical performance. Similar to linguistic practices,

some Latin jazz ensembles and musicians have the capacity to perform these styles interchangeably and synthetically. At times the percussive component of an arrangement will drive the harmony, at other times, the harmony will drive the arrangement and percussion will play a secondary role. The former case is a prime example of Latin jazz, while the latter is Jazz Latin. The range of rhythms is another component, which can encompass Cuban rumba, Dominican merengue, Brazilian Samba or Puerto Rican bomba. For Vázquez, this level of facility requires full command of both musical idioms, and constitutes the range of what encompasses Latin jazz, a term he also rejects. But he has a legitimate concern about the semantics of Latin jazz; for him, Latin jazz has become synonymous with Cub-op or Cuban jazz.

Vázquez: You know, it, it either tends to be one thing or the other. It tends to be either more jazz than Latin, or more Latin than jazz, or either, more Afro-Cuban than jazz, or it could be more jazz than Afro-Cuban. Or like Chico O'Farrill said, it's either jazz-Latin or Latin-jazz. You understand what I'm saying?

Valentín: So what would be the distinction? Can you elaborate?

Vázquez: I'll give you an example of an arrangement I just wrote. Even though it has more improvisation, it's more típico. Or, it's a danza [Puerto Rican ballroom music and dance similar to the Waltz]. [The arrangement] starts with a danza, for example, and it doesn't have a God damn thing to do with jazz, right, then it goes into a yubá [a bomba rhythm] right, but we write chords and stuff, and improvisation on top of it, but it's still more yubá, more bomba. Understand what I'm saying? It's bomba. If you listen to it, it's more Puerto Rican music, it's leaning more to what it really is, and we play Puerto Rican music, we play a danza and a bomba, so it's Puerto Rican music. That's what it is. It's not Cuban, it's not Latin jazz, it's a Danza and a Bomba. Latin jazz, that's fucking limiting, that's limiting the music. You can't put everything under Latin jazz, immediately whenever you say Latin jazz everyone thinks it's

fucking Afro-Cuban. That's bullshit! Now basically, what we mostly played around at the New Rican village or Soundscape was more rumba and shit. So that's Afro-Cuban.

Vázquez: You know, *la verdad es la verdad*. But it was being played by Puerto Ricans. The majority of the people there, the majority of this whole Latin jazz scene now or basically that came out of there, were mostly Puerto Ricans. We were mostly playing Afro-Cuban jazz.

Valentín: Did you perform anything that you would call Puerto Rican jazz, or Bomba jazz?

Vázquez: Bomba jazz, I came up with that idea when I was in Puerto Rico, when I was living in Puerto Rico. I came up with that name for my band in Puerto Rico.

Vázquez's account seems to fall in line with a counter musical narrative; declaring, "eso es la verdad," or "that is the truth," an oppositional posture. He intentionally breaks with the dominant narrative and highlights distinctions that he identifies as worthy of recognition; a bomba jazz is distinct from a rumba jazz and the latter was the dominant form of jazz performed at the New Rican Village. By highlighting this difference, Vázquez also seeks to decenter rumba jazz as the dominant musical formula for Latin jazz. Because Latin jazz arrangements vary significantly by rhythm and arrangement style, for Vázquez, such identification calls for particular *national* specificity. By identifying the rhythms used in a Latin jazz arrangement, one is also, by extension, identifying the nation from which those rhythms derive. However, given the complexity of how communities and corresponding musical genres and styles migrated throughout the circum-Caribbean and the larger Black Atlantic, it becomes increasingly challenging to linearly identify musical construction and creativity.<sup>58</sup> Such identifications often become entwined with and extensions of a nationalist discourse. However, there

is intra-Latin@ racism that operates within musical discourses, creating a tension within the U.S. Latin@ and transnational musical community. Some of those tensions have fostered resistance, but nevertheless serve as prime examples of how music is an extension of national supremacy and dominance.

While the younger generation of musicians respected and paid homage to the big-band formula of Latin jazz, they also consciously departed from it.<sup>59</sup> Here Vázquez complicates the narrative and includes some musical details, and importantly makes other distinctions regarding Latin jazz. Vázquez is challenging the generic Latin jazz term and promulgates a nationally oriented term to distinguish between the various rhythms used within a Latin jazz arrangement, e.g. Bomba jazz, Brazilian jazz, Afro-Cuban jazz, etc. While he offers an example that would qualify for a collage of distinct musical elements, his elaboration in describing the assortment of musical arrangements is particularly important for this discussion.

In fleshing out the difference between Jazz-Latin and Latin-Jazz, Vázquez also seeks to have us listen to the multiple musical languages that are discursively framed by the Latin jazz term. He seems principally concerned with an invisible rendering and a hegemonic, dominating musical approach or formula in Latin jazz, synonymous with Afro-Cuban jazz musical approaches. The term is so loosely used that it obfuscates other musical rhythms that originate from non-Cuban entities, a similar criticism rendered to salsa. However, the new context from which this music emerges highlights its translocality, and moves beyond a nation-state approach.<sup>60</sup> While Latin jazz is an overarching term that overlooks



crucial musical distinctions, as a Diasporic music that emerged in New York City, and whose compositions consist of an array of musical styles, including rumba, samba, songo, comparsa, yuba, sica, danza, and a litany of other styles and rhythms, in addition to 4/4 jazz harmonies (and other jazz elements), Latin jazz may be an effectual equivalent to the salsa term.

Drawing from Willie Colon, who notes “salsa is not a rhythm but a concept,”<sup>61</sup> the same can be applied in reference to Latin jazz. Latin jazz entails the freedom to improvise using the history of Afro-Diasporic improvisation, and syncretically fuse an assortment of Afro-Diasporic musical rhythms and genres together, including traditional African American jazz repertoires. This level of transcultural synthesizing can take the form of simultaneous interchange, substitution, or merging. Similar to the arguments made by Angel Quintero Rivera and Luis Manuel Alvarez, Latin jazz, like salsa, “no es un particular ritmo o forma musical. Es más bien ‘una manera de hacer música’ que incluye y combina diversos ritmos y géneros, imprimiéndole un carácter moderno áspero-urbano a formas del Caribe hispano, lo cual se inscribe en las transformaciones que las ‘clases populares’ experimentan en nuestros países.”<sup>62</sup> Latin jazz is not limited to the Caribbean-based genres and styles, as they suggest for salsa. Nevertheless, the reach of these arrangements can vary based on the intent or repertoire of the arranger or musicians. For example, Mario Rivera invented merengue Jazz, while Papo Vázquez spearheaded bomba Jazz (see figure 21). In a given CD/album, one may listen to distinct musical arrangements that may encompass conventional jazz throughout an arrangement and then find another

track that may be conventionally described as “Latin,” and also find another that is a combination of both.



Figure 21 - Mario Rivera "El Comandante...the Merengue Jazz." Groovin High, 1994.

One can aurally identify these musical elements, schemas and approaches in some of the music spearheaded by Jerry Gonzalez and the Fort Apache band (see figure 22). For example, “Agüeybaná Zemi”, the opening arrangement featured in his first album, *Ya Yo Me Curé*, follows a rumba style, with a 2-3 clave pattern across two musical bars, while Jerry Gonzalez performs

more conventional rumba style “street” patterns on the tumbadora (congas). The ostinato bass lines performed by Andy Gonzalez whereby he’s playing repeating notes that mimic a syncopated slow moving train: dum-dum-dum-dum-dum-dum. The chorus, with a call and response, follows repeatedly singing, “Agüeybaná.” After about 16 bars, the arrangement builds to a crescendo, becoming louder like an arriving train, or rather, a jam session where the tempo increases, the bass line is faster, along with up-tempo repeating piano guajeos (repeating piano riffs) performed by Hilton Ruiz. The Cuban tres also takes a solo, performed by Nelson Gonzalez. Throughout, the percussion or “Latin” elements lead throughout entire arrangement with Jerry Gonzalez interspersing jazz harmonies on trumpet, collectively rendering it a Latin jazz, or more accurately, a rumba jazz.



Figure 22 - Jerry Gonzalez, *Ya Yo Me Curé*. Originally published by American Clavé in 1980 and republished in 1995 by Sunnyside. The album cover here corresponds to the Sunnyside release.

Of equal interest and importance is the arrangement's title; "Agüebaná," which is also the name of the son of Agüeybaná, the Taino leader who welcomed the Spanish into Puerto Rico upon their arrival. However, his son, Agüeybaná II, centuries later nicknamed "El Bravo," rebelled against the Spanish and was killed in battle by Spanish soldiers. Invoking him as a zemi, or cemi, this ensemble is granting him the stature of a deity or martyr. More important for the discussion at hand is the national musical crossing of a rumba-based Latin jazz to represent the level of resistance within Puerto Rican history, and more specifically, how Nuyorican musicians employ a level of cultural and political resistance in this first

music track for an album largely recognized for breaking new ground within the world of Latin jazz. The level of rebellion or resistance by Agüeybana toward the Spanish is invoked as a model for the kind of rebellion and independence these musicians have toward their cultural production and the level of resistance required to practice this kind of music within the larger artworld. It is also a testament to how they're viewing the use of culture, and music in particular, as entwined with cultural activism. The oppositional meaning of this arrangement, one that also parallels this collective's allegiance to Puerto Rico's revolutionaries, like Lolita Lebrón, Rafael Cancel Miranda, and Pedro Albizu Campos, among others, demonstrates how resistance continues with the younger diasporic offspring, and within a diasporic setting, continuing a lineage of how some exiled Caribbean leaders like José Martí, Eugenio María de Hostos, and Ramon Emeterio Betances, organized for Antillean independence from within New York City.<sup>63</sup> A crucial difference, however, is that most of the members of The Rican and the Jerry Gonzalez ensemble are U.S. born Latin@s, not Caribbean intellectuals, writers, or revolutionaries temporarily residing *in* the states. This musical socio-political aesthetics is in keeping with Caribbean music's socio-political tradition.<sup>64</sup>

Perhaps also revealing is how Cuban-rumba, music whose history derives from marronage resistance, takes on this level of national resistance in a Diasporic Latin@ setting. The genre's history is certainly known, but crosses national lines as a tool defying colonial authority and artistic hegemony, lending

to how Diaspora settings serve as fertile ground for such musical collages and transcreative subversions.

This musical formula importantly serves as a metaphor of social and political insurgence that many of the musicians in the New Rican Village scene subscribed to. For example, in an interview with Andy Gonzalez, he describes this connection to music and resistance movements. He notes how many of the former members of the Puerto Rican Young Lords Party were actively present at the New Rican Village and seemed to play a fundamental role in the scene.

Andy Gonzalez: Richie Pérez [the former Young Lord and co-founder of National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights] was always [at the New Rican Village]. See because Eddie Figueroa was once a Young Lord. A lot of people used to pop in even like established Puerto Rican figures like Miriam Colon. And I mean quite a few people used to pop in.

Valentín: I'm wondering how did the presence of being surrounded by this community of activists shape your identity or your musical style. How did talking to people who were taking over the Statue of Liberty and espousing to a Young Lords' philosophy affect you?

AG: Well we were always attuned to that. I mean I was. I didn't become a Young Lord but I was very supportive of them. And I used to...We used to play events for them, when they were just starting. And I was with Ray Barretto's band at that time. We used to, you know, we used to do events for the Young Lords. And we always stayed in touch. I mean all the people from Pablo "Yoruba" Guzman, and Felipe Luciano. And Américo Casiano, the poet, he was a Young Lord, also. And, you know, he used to recite poetry at the New Rican Village. You know, Sandra María Esteves you know, I mean all these people....We used to hang. You know we were part of a *cultural movement* and we used to hang out a lot.

Valentín: That's interesting the way you're phrasing a cultural movement, and that moment.

AG: Yeah. *And it was all our own doing.* It was like, you know, it just naturally happened, you know. Everybody just started getting together.

The meaning of relating to what was occurring within the New Rican as a cultural movement and doing so “like it was all our own doing,” is a principal decoration of both the musical formula and the erected, administrative structure and philosophy required to undertake a new Latin jazz sound.

The new sound, as intervention, served as a metaphor for the social interventions this community made. This New Rican Village school of musicians also helped to create a new sound of Latin Jazz because they practiced a different philosophical approach to how musical instruments were performed within particular arrangements.<sup>65</sup> That is, they honed the Jazz-Latin, Latin-Jazz, Jazz, and “Latin” musical collages that comprise much of their musical arrangements, an aesthetic character also apparent in the New Rican Village posters and in the other art forms.

## **Conclusion**

Departing from the class and racial inflections of the avant-garde, the New Rican Village facilitated an environment that cultivated a sub-altern avant-gardist imagination and aesthetic among a working-class community of Latin@ artists. Their musical explorations, facilitated by the freedom that comes with a non-commercial venue and also managed by the artists, put forth new experiments and musical relationships in Latin jazz. Building on particular musical traditions, the musicians at the New Rican village were able to advance a cultural scene

that allowed for inter-artistic collaborations and shared philosophical orientations to pushing new boundaries and sensibilities. As such, these artistic relationships pushed forth a new way of looking at music scenes, while also re-examining avant-gardism among working-class artists of color, a topic of importance further explored in chapter 3 through the analysis of the Puerto Rican Embassy and the formation of what I call a “Bodega Surrealism.” In analyzing these scenes this chapter examined the contradictory identities, cross-cultural productions, and inter-artistic improvisations related to the historical formation of a Latin@ working-class arts scene. In so doing, my research analyzed the overlapping and reciprocal exchanges between various artists within this creative space, and paid special attention to how these artists asserted their racial and cultural agency to resist public notions of Latin@ pathology and coloniality. By locating the formation of Latin jazz music in relation to other art forms, I sought to expand the discourse regarding music scenes. Departing from previous writings and definitions of the avant-garde, I also proposed new theoretical terms for understanding this concept.

By reappropriating the term within a specific ethnic and racial trajectory, I intentionally divorced myself from its strict historical usage. I argue that the ethnic marker of Latinidad has the potential to reconceptualize racial and class-specific associations of the avant-garde. Finally, linking local scenes to the larger national and international activities of global capitalism provides an understanding of how the NRV was locally situated, translocally informed, and



entangled in the larger web of economic processes, such as urban neighborhood renewal (what the Young Lords renamed urban removal).

Art making and institution building became the avenues through which the New Rican Village sought to make multiple interventions: at the aesthetic level, as evidenced by their new artistic innovations, particularly their Latin jazz and salsa music experiments, and their insistent opposition to performing a commercially prescribed formula of Afro-Caribbean music; at the spatial level, the New Rican Village touring company used art to revitalize local Puerto Rican communities throughout the city, performing in various locations, from empty lots in the South Bronx to the Delacorte Theatre in Central Park and to street festivals in Loisaida; and lastly, as an extension of their performing company, this artists' collective sought to use art to reshape the public discourse and understanding of Puerto Rican and Latin@ cultures and histories, while also serving as a wellspring for new emerging cultural knowledges and expressions for the growing Nuyorican Puerto Rican community. With this collective, we come to understand art not simply as epiphenomenon to political, social, and economic imperatives. Rather, art became an integral component to advancing a movement and a renaissance of social change, a medium while informed by social processes, is not determined by them, but is a primary means through which manifold changes can occur at the level of individual consciousness and through collective structural change.

The following chapter further develops the idea of what I call "Bodega surrealism" and discusses how the aestheticism of this surrealism sought to re-

organize the colonial world while also rejecting it, standing to “organize a new life praxis from a basis in art.” To accomplish this I discuss the New Rican Village Cultural Arts and Education Center and the Puerto Rican Embassy Project as expressions of a new form of aestheticism that engages the fusion and transformation of the colonial social world.

---

<sup>1</sup> Part of the title for this chapter derives from an essay published in *Clave Magazine*, “The Salsa Beat: For Those Who Just Can’t Get Enough,” 1, no. 3 (November 14, 1977): 9-10.

<sup>2</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley, page 641.

<sup>3</sup> New Rican Village Mission Statement, N.D.

<sup>4</sup> This quote is featured in the New Rican Village Mission Statement. The artist is unknown.

<sup>5</sup> Sandra María Esteves. Interview by Author. August, 1, 2001. 68.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Andy Gonzalez by Author. August 14-19, 2001.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the New York salsa music *cuchifrito* circuit see: Marisol Negrón, “*Hecho in Nuyorican: An Analysis of the Creation, Circulation, and Consumption of Salsa in 1970s New York*” (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Leon Gast. *Our Latin Thing: (Nuestra Cosa)*. S.I.: Vampisoul, 2004.

For an excellent discussion on the importance of marginal Latin@ musical communities refer to David Garcia, “Contesting that Damned Mambo: Arsenio Rodríguez, Authenticity, and the People of el Barrio and the Bronx in the the 1950s,” *Centro: Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies* 11 No. 1 (2004): 154-175.

<sup>9</sup> Mario Rivera Interview with Author. August 23, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> Dave Valentín Interview with Author. September 23, 2001.

<sup>11</sup> Matei Calinescu, *The Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 95-148.

<sup>12</sup> Mario Rivera Interview with Author. August 23, 2001.

<sup>13</sup> Grupo Folklórico y Experimental Nuevayorquino, *Concepts in Unity*. Salsoul Records, 6001. Originally issued in 1975 and Reissued in 1994.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* Liner notes written by Joe Falcon.

<sup>15</sup> Marisol Negrón, “*Hecho in Nuyorican: An Analysis of the Creation, Circulation, and Consumption of Salsa in 1970s New York*” (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> See Frances R. Aparicio’s, *Listening to Salsa: Gender, Latin Popular Music, and Puerto Rican Cultures* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998)

<sup>17</sup> Cesar Miguel Rondón, *The Book of Salsa: A Chronicle of Urban Music from the Caribbean to New York City*, trans. Frances R. Aparicio with Jackie White (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 248 - 255.

<sup>18</sup> Rondón, 248.

<sup>19</sup> Conjunto Libre, *Con Salsa...Con Ritmo, Volume 1*. Salsoul Records, 1976.

---

<sup>20</sup> Rondón, 250-251.

<sup>21</sup> Dina D'Oyen Interview with the Author, March 3, 2002.

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion on the quotidian, see both Michael Sheringham's *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2006) and Michael Gardiner's *Critiques of Everyday Life: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>23</sup> Matei Calinescu, *The Five Faces of Modernity*, 118.

<sup>24</sup> Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

<sup>25</sup> Will Straw. "Systems of Articulation, Logics of Change: communities and Scenes in Popular Music." *Cultural Studies* 5.3 (1991): 373.

<sup>26</sup> I'm drawing from the analysis offered by Travis A. Jackson. As Dr. Jackson was one of my mentors and professors at the University of Michigan, his perspectives on scene shaped my thinking on the subject. I'm thankful for the analysis. See: Travis A. Jackson,. Refer to pages 37-42.

<sup>27</sup> Holly Kruse, "Subcultural Identity in Alternative Music Culture" *Popular Music* 12.1 (1993): 33-41. Emphasis added.

<sup>28</sup> Barry Shank, *Dissonant Identities: The Rock n' Roll Scene in Austin, Texas*. (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 125.

<sup>29</sup> Travis A. Jackson, "Performance and Musical Meaning: Analyzing 'Jazz' on the New York Scene." PhD diss., Columbia University, 1998, 39.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Sandra María Esteves by author. August 1, 2001.

<sup>31</sup> This is corroborated by a magazine article authored by Gary Jardim, "The New Rican Village." N.d. According to Jardim, frequent visitors to the New Rican Village were Miriam Colon, actress and founder of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, Tito Puente, Machito, Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, and Raul Julia.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Andy Gonzalez at the Iridium Jazz Club by the Author. August 14-19, 2001.

<sup>33</sup> See Lawrence Grossberg's interview with Stuart Hall, "On Postmodernism and Articulation: An Interview with Stuart Hall," in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (New York: Routledge, 1996), 131-150. For the definition of articulation, see pages 142-143.

<sup>34</sup> Robin D. G. Kelley, "New Monastery: Monk and the Jazz Avant-Garde." *Black Music Research Journal*, 19 No. 2 (Fall 1999), 136.

<sup>35</sup> See: Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968).

<sup>36</sup> See Adorno, 1962.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

---

<sup>38</sup> Janet Wolff, *Aesthetics and the Sociology of Art* (Winchester, MA: Allen & Unwin, 1983), 16.

<sup>39</sup> Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 8. In addition to Foster, others have rebutted Peter Bürger's Euro-centric conception of the avant-garde. For example, see: Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "The Primary Colors for the Second Time: A Paradigm Repetition of the Neo-Avant-Garde," *October* 37 (Summer 1986): 41-52.

<sup>40</sup> Michelle Wallace, "Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Problem of the Visual in Afro-American Culture" in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*. Eds. Russel Ferguson, et. al. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990).

<sup>41</sup> See Coco Fusco's "The Other History of Intercultural Performance," in her book *English is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 37-63. For Fusco's discussion of European appropriation of primitivity in the name of modernity, see pages 44-47.

<sup>42</sup> André Breton interview with René Bélance (1945). Quoted in Louise Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>43</sup> See Louise Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>44</sup> Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); David Lehman, *The Last Avant-Garde: The Making of the New York School of Poets* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999). For an excellent critique and deconstruction of colonialist, exotic mentalities, and what he calls the "the rhetoric of empire," see David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

<sup>45</sup> See: Michelle J. Wilkinson, "'In the Tradition of the Revolution': The Socio-Aesthetics of Black and Puerto Rican Arts Movements, 1962-1982" (PhD diss., Emory University, 2001); Cary Cordova, "The Heart of the Mission: Latino Art and Identity in San Francisco (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2005). Also see Coco Fusco, "Fantasies of Oppositionality," in *Art, Activism, and Oppositionality: Essays from Afterimage* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), ed. By Grant H. Kester, 61-75, and her book, *English is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas* (New York: The New Press, 1995).

<sup>46</sup> James Harding and John Rouse, "Introduction," in *Not the Other Avant-Garde: the Transnational Foundations of Avant-Garde Performance*, ed. James M. Harding and John Rouse (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

<sup>47</sup> Juan Flores, *From Bomba to Hip Hop*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000; and *Divided Borders: Essays on Puerto Rican Identity*. Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1993.

<sup>48</sup> George Lipsitz, *Dangerous Crossroads: Popular Music, Postmodernism, and the Poetics of Place* (New York: Verso Press, 1994), 43. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 16.

<sup>49</sup> Yusef Lateef, "The Pleasure of Voice in Improvised Music *Views on Black American Music* 3: 1985-88, 44.

<sup>50</sup> Paul Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) 222.

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 275.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Frances R. Aparicio, "On Sub-versive Signifiers: U.S. Latina/o Writers Tropicalize English," *American Literature* 66 (1994): 797.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Shannon Dudley "Judging 'by the Beat': Calypso versus Soca." *Ethnomusicology* 40.2 (Spring/Summer 1996), 270.

<sup>57</sup> Which is "individuality of expression, constant variation, sparing use of repetition, and patterns set up to be broken. Chris Washburne. "The Clave of Jazz: A Caribbean Contribution to the Rhythmic Foundation of an African American Music." *Black Music Research Journal* 17 no. 1 (Spring 1997): 1 – 11.

<sup>58</sup> See: Ruth Glasser, *My Music is My Flag: Puerto Rican Musicians and Their New York Communities, 1917-1940* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995); Angel Quintero Rivera and Luis Manuel Alvarez, "La Libre Combinacion de las Formas Musicales en la Salsa," *David y Goliath* 57 (Octubre 1990): 45; George Lipsitz, *Dangerous Crossroads: Popular Music, Postmodernism, and the Poetics of Place* (New York: Verso Press, 1994); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993); Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., "Black Music in the Circum-Caribbean," *American Music* 17, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 1-38.

<sup>59</sup> Mario Bauza, Machito, and Dizzy Gillespie. These musicians often included a conga instrument to "spice-up" the Jazz arrangements (what Jelly Roll Morton calls "the Spanish Tinge").

<sup>60</sup> See Ruth Glasser, *My Music if My Flag: Puerto Rican Musicians and their New York Communities, 1917-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). My review of Raul Fernandez's book, *From Afro-Cuban Rhythms to Latin Jazz* (Berkeley: University of California Press/Center for Black Music Research: Berkeley, CA and Chicago, IL: 2006) which appeared in *Latino Studies* 6 (2008): 348-354, engages some of the poetics of musical labeling as well as the elements of Latin jazz music.

<sup>61</sup> See Lise Waxer, editor. *Situating Salsa: Global Markets and Local Meanings in Latin Popular Music* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>62</sup> Angel Quintero Rivera and Luis Manuel Alvarez, "La Libre Combinacion de las Formas Musicales en la Salsa," *David y Goliath* 57 (Octubre 1990): 45.

<sup>63</sup> See Nancy Raquel Mirabal, "No Country But the One We Must Fight For," in *Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York*, eds. Agustín Lao-Montes and Arlene Dávila (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 57-72.

<sup>64</sup> For example, see: Kenneth M. Bilby, "The Caribbean as a Musical Region," in *Caribbean Contours*, eds. Sidney W. Mintz and Sally Price (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 181-218; Peter L. Manuel, Kenneth M. Bilby and Michael D. Largey, *Caribbean Currents: Caribbean Music from Rubma to Reggae* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006); Richard D. E. Burton, *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition, and Play in the Caribbean* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

---

<sup>65</sup> For music samples, listen to music produced by Jerry Gonzalez and the Fort Apache Band and compare it to the music arranged by Dizzy Gillespie, Mario Bauza, and Tito Puente.

**Chapter III:  
El Puerto Rican Embassy:  
Civic Agency, Cultural Interventions,  
and Surrealist Counterpublics**



Figure 23 - "Pelea de Gallos." Adal Maldonado, 2003.  
<[http://www.latinart.com/artdetail.cfm?img=pr\\_maldo\\_02\\_th.jpg](http://www.latinart.com/artdetail.cfm?img=pr_maldo_02_th.jpg)>

"The familiar is not necessarily the known."

"Art is the collective expression of a society rather than an individual voice."

G.W.F. Hegel

"...we were actually the 'New Ricans'...we were so avant-garde...[t]hat we belonged in space...our place was the next space."

Dina D'Oyen<sup>1</sup>



Since the inception of the modern state, embassies have been the institutions through which states advance their national interests and foster relationships with others. Genuine improvement in information, communication technology, and the increasingly complicated movements of diasporic communities residing outside of traditional state boundaries make for the increasing importance of embassies in an era of global ethnoscap<sup>2</sup>. Keeping in mind that embassies represent established and recognized sovereign states; can one be created for a national community still negotiating and struggling for its political sovereignty? Can a colonial state, like Puerto Rico, for example, create an embassy? If so, whose interests would it represent? What sort of visions and programs can it propose and defend given that the majority of Puerto Ricans reside outside the geo-political borders of Puerto Rico? What sort of “colonial dilemma” would it uncover, if any, given Puerto Rico’s colonial relationship to the United States and migratory dispersions of its indigenous communities? Who would be its ambassadors? What passports would this embassy generate and in what ways would we expect other state authorities to recognize it? How could such an Embassy bypass state regulations and law enforcement, while also circumventing nation-state structures? And finally, drawing from the work of Performance Studies scholar Richard Schechner, “can such an art project enact its own brand of citizenship?”<sup>3</sup>

Beginning in the 1970s, a community of artists instituted “El Puerto Rican Embassy” in the Lower East Side of Manhattan (or “Loisaida”) in an effort to declare Puerto Rico a sovereign state outside of the geo-political boundaries of

the island-nation and divorced from U.S. management. A colony of the United States since 1898, and a Commonwealth since 1952, Puerto Rico and its Diaspora have long battled over their political status and collective identity. The Spirit Republic of the Puerto Rican Embassy, led by its cultural ambassadors, the late Eddie Figueroa and Pedro Pietri, along with Adál Maldonado and María “Mariposa” Fernández, among others, produced and circulated their own Passport. They created various art projects, including *El Passport*, the *Blueprints for a Nation* Installation, the *Out of Focus Nuyorican* blurred headshots, and the 13-minute video, *West Side Story in Redux*. This chapter analyzes various art pieces of the *Blue Prints for a Nation* Installation, which include the Puerto Rican Embassy, and its parent state apparatus, El Spirit Republic of Puerto Rico.<sup>4</sup> Adál Maldonado, photographer and multi-media artist, and the current leading Ambassador of the Puerto Rican Embassy, compiled this installation with assistance from Pedro Pietri and inspired by Eddie Figueroa, the founder of the New Rican Village Cultural Arts Center. The aforementioned art projects, along with a critique of Adál’s “auto-portraits,” serve as the basis of my engagement with the audacious political/aesthetic project of El Embassy, from its historical beginnings at the New Rican Village to its fictitious parent state apparatus, El Spirit Republic of Puerto Rico.

## El Puerto Rican Embassy

Described by *El Diario/La Prensa* newspaper as “the most brilliant art collective in all of New York City,”<sup>5</sup> El Puerto Rican Embassy, under the leadership of Adál Maldonado, Pedro Pietri, Eddie Figueroa and Maria “Mariposa” Fernández, captured considerable attention for their vision of a “Spirit Republic.” In a Communiqué issued on April 8, 1994, Adál Maldonado and El Reverendo Pedro Pietri announced the inauguration of El Puerto Rican Embassy at a welcoming reception, held at The Kenkeleba Gallery in New York City. El Embassy, the letter described, “serve[d] as a forum for the meeting of our most creative minds [where] a new generation of Puerto Rican artists working within – as well as on the margin of established art movements – who take risks [to] illuminate contemporary issues and question established cultural aesthetics and dominant political issues.” Thus, El Embassy was both a name adopted for the collective that established it; and a designation of an imaginative space, “a forum for the meeting of our most creative minds” that would sometimes materialize in galleries, videos, and performances.

At the inaugural ceremony, El Reverendo Pedro Pietri and Adál issued “conceptual passports” (Figure 24), displayed the Embassy’s “Manifesto” (Figure 25), and sang its Spanglish National Anthem. Years later the circulation of passports were accompanied by Nuyorican baptisms (see Pietri’s baptismal prayer in Figure 26) performed into the “Church of Our Mother of Los Tomates” (see altar in Figure 27), the spurious religious institution sanctioned by the Spirit Republic of Puerto Rico. El Spirit Republic, a fictitious territory located “10

degrees latitude just west of a place called Eden,” is an imagined sovereign state created as a response to U.S. colonialism instituted in Puerto Rico since 1898. In addition, it is a conceptual amorphous state apparatus with accompanying state authorized institutions, documents, symbols, proclamations, and political structures, including an embassy, a national anthem, its own currency, secular religious iconography and accompanying saints, an aerospace program (called “Coconauts in Space”), and even underground resistance fighters known as “Bodega Bombers.”



Figure 24 - El Puerto Rican Passport by Adál Maldonado. *Blue Prints for a Nation* (2002). Can also be found at: < <http://www.elpuertoricanembassy.org/blueprints.html>>

## EL MANIFESTO

Notes on EL PUERTO RICAN EMBASSY

We are a Sovereign State of Mind well aware of the fact that it is almost 1898 once more and our own Embassy is long overdue for the most interesting minds of our great multicolorful generation to congregate as Heads of State and keep our own aesthetic *sancocho* warm enough to escort our eternal tropical contemporary urban life style into the 21st Century phase of the per-suit of liberty & justice on the dance floor of the hap-piness promised our existence by the multi-lingo Spanglish creator of man and womankind!

Because war has never been on our agenda of survival our only mission is to live and let live in peace & harmony with all the citizens of the remarkable Planet Earth. We hold no animosity against anyone even after 400 years of endeavoring to be fluent in Spanish against our will to then be instructed to learn English on short notice for the next one hundred years by other total strangers who were so impressed with our island that they decided to stay and told us to leave and find a better way of life.

El Puerto Rican Embassy is necessary if Puerto Ricans are to be excluded from the list of endangered species. Without it our destiny is at the mercy of foreign minds who don't understand that the imagination has always been an independent country with a spontaneous sense of survival. It is there that the beginning of time became relevant!

And why shouldn't we be independent? We know how to sing and dance and paint and write poetry and educate each other.

To be free means to be proud of yourself!  
To be proud of yourself means to be creative!  
To be creative means to defend your dreams!  
To defend your dreams means to have courage to make your dreams come true in your lifetime!  
And once your dreams come true you will never have to worry about dying for as long as you live.

What do we want? What every human wants! The right to dance *la Plena* whenever we please like dignified human beings of tropical brilliance who time after time their fine minds have proven that you can be in two Islands at the same time dancing to supernatural down to Earth rhythms from solitary jukeboxes from the past, present and future!

If we are to live forever it is imperative that we have an Embassy where we can all get together to share secrets of eternal life and acknowledge that we will always be related to each other in every artistic discipline imagined.

We are not a government in exile! This is where we live! As a collective of indigenous survivors who have always voted for self-preservation wherever we have been located at the time of endeavoring to keep making ends meet, *Vaya!* Ambassador Eduardo Figueroa said, "We are a Spirit Republic! No one understands a rainbow better than Puerto Ricans who are a physical and spiritual combination of all Nations of the world. Everywhere you travel you will meet yourself."

In the history of our memory of thousands of years ago we all remember being Taino Indians before Columbus invaded our eternal beaches of everlasting magnificent resources the Earth provided the indigenous population of our Island. The power of memory eliminates the threat of extinction. We have no intentions of forgetting who we were & who we are and will continue to be for now & forever & beyond!

Your body can't be free if your mind is still in prison. There is nothing original about you, you are practicing what someone else preaches which deprives your imagination of equal rights! And that is the biggest error committed against yourself and those who depend on you for knowledge.

Because the subconscious doesn't believe in collectivity individual dreams is what keeps the world from becoming aesthetically insignificant. Every individual has a secret down to earth harmless ulterior motive for staying alive and as long as it doesn't prevent others from allowing their dreams to come true there is nothing wrong with you and El Puerto Rican Embassy welcomes you with open arms regardless of your temporary political sentiments, *Vaya!*

Our surrealistic history has proven that we are immune to mediocrity. Therefore, the future has resourceful plans for us. Working together isn't impossible but inevitable. We are a Nation of one and many millions of eternal Ricans who need to visit each other more often to keep up with the latest *bochinches* in the artistic and political circles.

Everyone's imagination is a Sovereign Nation!  
Freedom of expression has no boundaries to impede the individual from reaching the other side while alive to communicate with the dead & escort them back to life; to reassure us that we need no man's permission to be free. To reassure us that we are digitaries *porque somos hermanos y hermanas* on the same side of the mirror that our *Isla del Encanto* admirably stares at us from!

El Puerto Rican Embassy is necessary to explain how our rain forest functions! And why we came here in the first place. Not to better our standard of living but to expand our vision of how the world really began and celebrate the fact that we are all related to each other!

That's why our Proclamation of Independence is nothing to fear BUT something to enjoy together with whoever is serious about living forever peacefully in the house of everyone's universal ancestors, Earth, which gives everyone this day their daily identity, *Vaya!*

El Puerto Rican Embassy MANIFESTO  
by ©Rev. Pedro Pietri, 1994

Figure 25 – Puerto Rican Manifesto, Pages 1-4 by Rev. Pedro Pietri in *El Passport*, 1994.

(Welcome to the end of this Century chant)

*Rev. Pedro's Baptisimal Liturgy*

Not everyone  
Can be a Nuyorican  
Regardless of what  
Non-nuyorican  
Said about nuyoricans  
In the New York Times  
Once upon a nuyorican time  
When it was and **still** is  
Considered a crime  
To be and not be nuyorican  
Without receiving  
El official unofficial baptism  
From el coco que habla  
El poeta Jorge Brandon  
En el nombre de  
In the name of:  
(Names of departed  
Literary & artistic dignitaries:  
(Painters / Actors / Dancers, etc.)  
Of our interplanetary  
Puerto Rican Embassy  
En una ciudad so **nice**  
Que they named it twice  
New York New York  
Whose capital is Manhattan  
And whose majority is **Latin**  
**Porque** Albany es too cold  
**To be** its Capital  
So much Salsa rhythms  
**Combine** con free verse  
From el wisdom  
Of el palm trees  
That gives us this **day**  
Our daily coconut milk  
To drink **and** take  
A bath **with** when  
The **landlord** goes on strike

NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021  
695 PARK AVE  
HO FOR COLLEGE  
COLLEGE OF LIBERAL AND ARTS

PERMISSION  
NOT TO BE COPIED  
REPRODUCED WITHOUT  
CENTRO ANTONIO

PeP: Box 71 Folder 1

Against hot and cold water!  
Which will not stop us  
From cooking arroz  
Con dandules y chicken  
Y pernil y ensalada  
De endangered aguacate  
To enjoy after  
El nuyoricán baptism!  
With coconut milk  
Throught la ceremonia  
Con fellow Poets y mellow Musicians  
Y Painters & Actors & Dancers & Comedians  
At El Caney en la noche de this day!

13 Dec. 1997

Ole!

Figure 26 – “Welcome to the End of this Century Chant,” by Rev. Pedro Pietri, *El Puerto Rican Embassy*, Pages 1 and 2. From the Pedro Pietri Papers, Centro Library and Archives. Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, CUNY.



Figure 27 – Altar to la Santa Iglesia de la Madre de Los Tomates (Altar to the Holy Church of the Mother of the Tomatoes) established by Rev. Pedro Pietri, 1976.  
Altar created by Adál Maldonado, 2001.  
Go to: <<http://www.elpuertoricanembassy.org/blueprints4.html>>

The home of this Republic is New York City, although its management offices are specifically located in the Lower East Side of Manhattan (Adál Maldonado’s apartment), the original neighborhood of the *New Rican Village*. On September 15, 1999, El Embassy issued “the Annexation Proclamation” (see figure 28 of Brown Bag) declaring “New York City a Commonwealth of El Spirit Republic de Puerto Rico.” In a reversal of *real* politics and a declaration of artistic civic agency, the brown paper-bag written decree is, as noted in the Annexation Proclamation (Figure 5) “not a proclamation of occupation but a celebration on the occasion of being related to each other in the house of a more



enlightened and chevere civilization.” It declares, in an action that follows the vision of Victor Hernández Cruz, the humane gesture of tropicalizing<sup>6</sup> all New Yorkers, “regardless of race, religion or color [in] the fostering arms of an out of focus [rather than under surveillance] and free nation, in pursuit of liberty [and] justice on the dance floor of our imagination, as we escort our tropicalized urban lifestyle into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” The effect of such annexation, according to El Embassy, is the “immediate decolonization of each citizen’s brain [Figure 29], the release from all programmed ways, removal of audio-visual listening devices, the appointment of a head of State for this New Commonwealth henceforth to be known as El Nuevo Hybrid State of NuYol, the issuance of El Passport, born-again Nuyorican baptisms into La Santa Church of la Mother of los Tomates, midnite classes in the official Spanglish sandwich language...in the Hybrid State of NuYol in the Sovereign State of Mind of El Spirit Republic de Puerto Rico.” Resembling surrealist strategies, the process of decolonization first occurs in the imagination for “the liberation of the imagination is a precondition of revolution.”<sup>7</sup> The pursuit of a multi-art medium of decolonial activist praxis becomes essential for this transformation because “language, representation, and perception are all means of production that must be seized if emancipation is to be won.”<sup>8</sup>

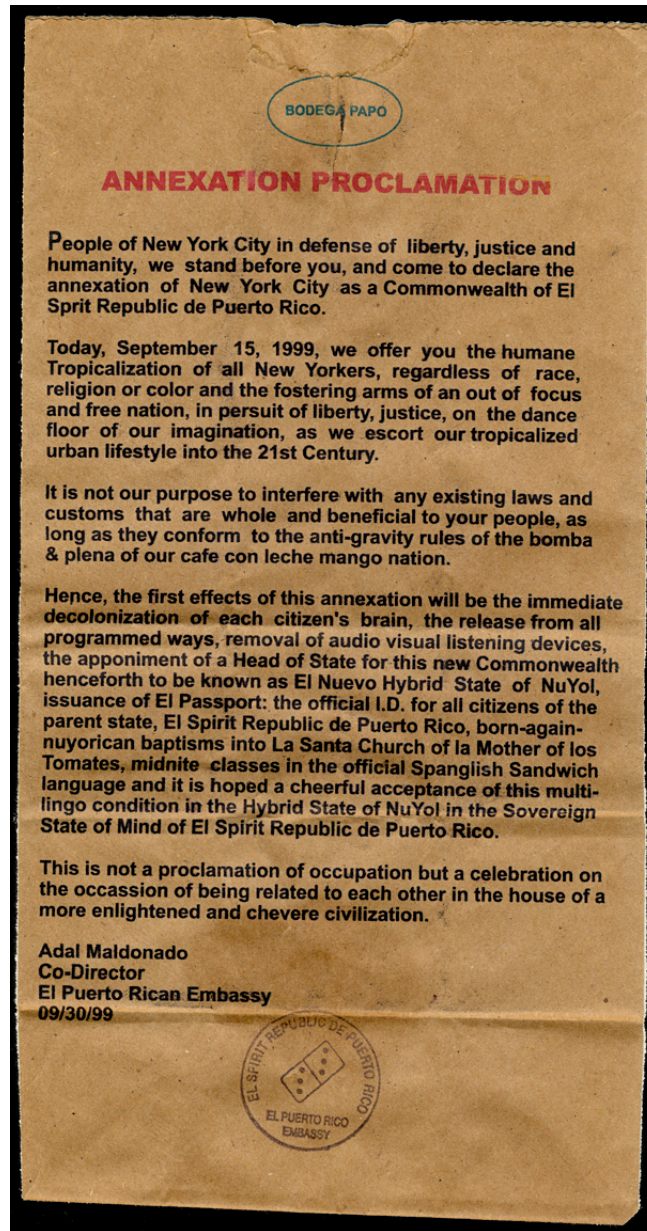


Figure 28 – “Annexation Proclamatiiion.” Bodega Bag Proclamation Annexation New York City to El Spirit Republic de Puerto Rico by Adál Maldonado. *Blue Prints for a Nation* (2002) and available online at: < <http://www.elpuertoricanembassy.org/blueprints3.html>>

El Embassy does not wait for the colonial U.S. administration to declare the end of occupation in Puerto Rico, but assumes that responsibility by a self-declaration of freedom. The artists echo Abraham Lincoln’s “Emancipation Proclamation,” which freed slaves in the states in rebellion against the Union

during the Civil War.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, el Embassy's actions follow the tradition of subversive mimicry, which consists of mockery, parody, resemblance, and menace, while also demonstrating the limitations of the authority of colonial discourse.<sup>10</sup> In this case, the ideas and discourse of freedom, as in Lincoln's decree, are mocked largely because they represent only a symbolic gesture of emancipation. In resembling the "Emancipation Proclamation," El Embassy mirrors the discourse and vision of the U.S. while also enacting some difference. In essence, not only is El Embassy disclosing the shortcomings of this U.S. discourse, it also seeks to disrupt its authority by usurping the discourse of freedom while also tropicalizing the space of New York City. El Embassy seeks to free the City's residents from neo-liberal global financial burdens and insist they conform to the "anti-gravity rules of the bomba and plena," two Afro-Boricua musical genres that derive from marronage resistance. Seeming like homage to the U.S. administration, the discourse of equality and emancipation are used against it. The "Annexation Proclamation" culminates into a written text of counter-memory that aims to redirect colonial faculties by undoing "programmed ways." While the brain is the locus of colonization, the imagination, linked to the unconscious, is the "dance floor" that escorts "the pursuit<sup>11</sup> of liberty, [and] justice" for the "out of focus and free nation." Moreover, the material use of a brown paper bag that derives from "Papo's Bodega" shop -- perhaps located on the Lower East Side, as well -- illuminates both the socio-aesthetics and the sites where the counter narrative derives from and operates. This is in the everyday events and local institutions, like corner grocery stores where community

members gather. The Proclamation is an exemplar of what I call “Bodega Surrealism,” an avant-gardism that is integral to the everyday logics and spaces of resistance within marginalized Puerto Rican and Latino/a communities. These are places in which, as El Reverendo Pietri’s baptismal prayer invokes, it “was and still is considered a crime to be Nuyorican,” and where residents are left to pray for “coconut milk” when the “landlord goes on strike” and “turns off the water.”

Similar to other avant-garde art communities, the decision to perform an avant-garde direction stemmed from the experiences of multiple alienations attendant on making art in capitalist societies. However, distinct from the historical European avant-garde, this community of marginalized artists was also familiar with the alienation prompted by forced dislocation, social, economic, and political marginality, racism and classism, as well as the trauma that accompanies (neo)colonial structures and conditions. Emancipation from these shared conditions was necessary in order to facilitate recovery from a “false self” and regain collective “focus.” Following Frantz Fanon’s idea of decolonization, alienation did not simply operate on the individual “psychological” cognitive level. Fanon proposed a theory of “dis-alienation;” not simply psychological freedom, but also a shift in narratives of self and community.<sup>12</sup> A shift in consciousness necessitated emancipating oneself and one’s community from self-hatred by accounting for how socio-historical and material processes of inequality become internalized and inform individual, and by extension, collective subjectivity. To work against this dialectical alienation requires a level of *social intervention*, not

individual healing, paralleling the goals of avant gardism. At the same time, these experiences of alienation, Stuart Hobbs reminds us, also “provided the creative energy for the constructive characteristics of avant-gardism” as they did for the founders of the New Rican Village and the Puerto Rican Embassy.<sup>13</sup>

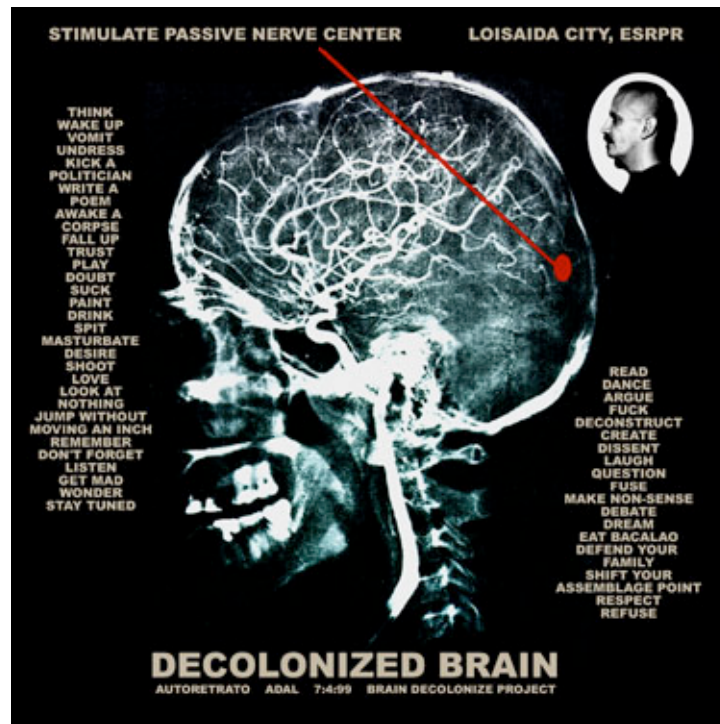


Figure 29 – “La Decolonized Brain” by Adál Maldonado  
<<http://www.elpuertoricaneembassy.org/blueprints2.html>>

We can thus begin to understand how the goals of surrealism come together with the project of decolonization and disalienation proposed by El Embassy. The art world they organized is a counter art (re)public that collectively fashions a particular form of citizenship that operates both within and outside questions of participation in political life.<sup>14</sup> The public constructed by/as El Embassy is a subaltern<sup>15</sup> site of belonging that contests the neo-colonial Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and its management by the United States. Yet, a

public sphere presumes political sovereignty. It is a sphere of democratic exchange of debate and opinion over the character and future of the nation. How can a marginalized colonial transnational community propose and engage a counter-public when its political agency is constrained and multi-sited? Who participates and on what terms do members of this marginalized community marshal an alternative discourse? Kenneth H. Tucker emphasizes the many “*non-linguistic and playful dimensions*” of political participation in collective action and the public sphere.<sup>16</sup> In fact, he astutely recognizes that at stake in the public sphere as a requisite for democratic participation is more than rational debate about public issues. It is also about opening space for new forms of participation, multiple performances of self and group identity, broadening in the process the issues and themes that come up for discussion.<sup>17</sup>

What we see developing in the work of the Puerto Rican Embassy is an art (re)public that cultivates (an)other social imaginary through these “playful dimensions.” It invites participation by marginalized diasporic subjects to stake claims to belonging, to a place of their own making, within and between the various national projects (U.S. and Puerto Rico) that exclude or marginalize them. It calls upon the dominant colonial power structure of the U.S. to recognize them by simultaneously imitating, appropriating and playfully mocking its signifiers of authority -- embassies, ambassadors, and passports. The artists/cultural ambassadors of El Embassy conjure the imaginary nation that would have a place for them, a free Spirit Republic open at the same time to all New Yorkers, “regardless of race, religion or color.” The vision of the Embassy is

more than surrealist banter of a “cuchifrito”<sup>18</sup> and “chevere civilization;” it is an example of marginalized avant-garde artists engaging multiple publics while also constructing one (or several) of their own, despite lacking the presupposed requisite of sovereignty to participate in such political discourse.<sup>19</sup> It is perhaps even more important now to recall the project of the Puerto Rican Embassy in a moment in which Puerto Rican art spaces, like *El Museo Del Barrio*, have undergone a programmatic shift to a more inclusive Latino/a cultural citizenship, a decision, argues Arlene Davila, that has invisibilized and displaced members of the same Puerto Rican diasporic community that forged its institutional origins.<sup>20</sup> What El Embassy contributed to the Puerto Rican imaginary is a conceptual, imaginary, floating, multi-sited space of belonging that transformed a marginal location into a space-less, yet real site of decolonial resistance.

### **Quotidian Surrealism + Nuyorican/New Rican Style = Bodega Surrealism**

In the context of the United States, this merger of art with politics coincides with the emergence of “subaltern avant-gardes” rising alongside the political dissent and social transformation beginning in the 1950s. The work of Robin D.G. Kelley, James Harding, John Rouse, and Coco Fusco, shed light on this matter by underscoring the shared avant-garde principles many subaltern avant-gardes had with those of European-based surrealists. In an interview with Adál Maldonado,<sup>21</sup> the principal proponent of the Puerto Rican Embassy after the deaths of Eddie Figueroa and Pedro Pietri, he reflects upon his shared vision of

surrealism with the European avant-garde when he first enrolled in the San Francisco Art Institute in 1968:

Maybe about 2-3 weeks after I started handing in my assignments one of my professors says to me, "Adál, do you realize you're a Surrealist?" I had no idea what he was talking about, and I said, "*No I'm not, I'm Puerto Rican!*" And everybody started laughing. After everybody started settling down he says, "Well you, what you just said was surreal. What just happened here was a surreal moment. You know, people aren't laughing at you. You just said something that was funny and absurd." However he said, "What I want you to do is when this class is over, I want you to go over to the school library and check out the Surrealists, because you have something in common with these people." So I did.

When I came back a few days later to the same class the Professor calls on me again and asks me, "So, did you find the Surrealists and did you realize you're like them?" And I said, "Yeah, I did and *I found they're like me.*" He says, "How do you mean?" And I said, "Well, I read about these guys and I find that these were artists, particularly, especially in those days, you know these were middle class and above kind of people who had money, and who could travel the world and they were taking frequent trips to the Caribbean, they were going to the far east, they were going to Africa and they were experiencing and investigating all this art that was based on some subjective realities. You know and they brought that stuff back to Paris and introduced some sort of repressed sexual Freudian concepts and called it surrealism. *And you know, that's been my condition.* That's how I grew up, you know, looking at images of crown of thorns on hearts and saints that levitate and talk to animals, and you know, people in my family who talk to spirits, that's the way that I was raised and that's everyday common occurrences to me and here I find out that there's a movement called surrealism, the same shit that I've been doing all my life!" I come from that place and what I'm glad I found those people because I find that it has a history in the academic and the scholarly world and it's interesting to find this information.

So after that I familiarized myself with all the Dada people, with [Marcel] Duchamp, and with [René] Magritte, and with [Salvador] Dalí. I found out about [Gabriel] García Márquez and the Latin American magic realists. I found out about [Jorge Luis] Borges and all these people, you know; I just absorbed all that stuff. I ended the



course and then I found on my own personal experience being in San Francisco, then I was introduced to the Chicano art movement, and that was another revelation.

Adál Maldonado's knowledge of surrealist avant-gardism echoes that of other artists at the New Rican Village. And we also learn of his introduction to avant-garde artists within the Chicano movement, exemplifying a *horizontal* instead of a vertical or hierarchical orientation that parted company from envisioning European avant-garde as the model to follow.

Drawing more on his influences, in an interview conducted by Ricardo Viera that appears in the *Blueprints for a Nation* Installation (2002) catalogue, Adál reflects upon his artistic influences and highlights his own experiences as overlapping with those of surrealism.

I was raised a 'jibaro' [agricultural worker/farmer] in rural Puerto Rico and my earliest memories are deep-rooted in Catholic symbolism: consider the bleeding heart of Jesus in flames, Saint Francis of Assisi talking with animals, female saints with bleeding eyes, Santeria, spiritualism and 'jibaro' tall tales flavored in mysticism. So when I was challenged to develop a visual language I drew from my life and memory experience. My imagery may seem inspired in Surrealism to those familiar with art movements, but I lacked knowledge of these same art history influences at the beginning of my formal art studies [at the San Francisco Art Institute]. I started developing a visual language based on images I had stored from my *personal experiences*....'Jíbaro' Existentialism.<sup>22</sup>

What is striking here is the initial terms of inclusion of Adál into the art world by his professor, "Did you discover the surrealists and realize you're like them?" and Adál's ironic, up-ending, counter-narrative in response: "I discovered them and realized they're like *me*." He spontaneously rewrites the canonical historical narrative that begins with the European surrealist art world subject whose

voyages to the periphery contribute to his own enhancement while also resisting the imperial marking of modernity upon his subjectivity. This defiant maneuver also reverses the “Columbus Effect(s),”<sup>23</sup> a concept proposed by Wilson Valentín-Escobar to describe the work of artists and entrepreneurs such as Ry Cooder in his discovery of the Buena Vista Social Club. It refers to a move enacted within a hegemonic discourse that confers significance about subaltern subjects and communities once their cultural rituals of performances are “discovered” by an authoritative body, institution or individual.

According to David Spurr, colonial subalterns “stumble upon things” while imperial authorities construct themselves as active explorers.<sup>24</sup> The ability to claim an antecedent “jíbaro existentialism” before adopting the language, mission, and standpoint of European surrealism also mirrors Spurr’s analysis of how non-Western people are represented as mute or incoherent. “They are denied a voice in the ordinary idiomatic sense – not permitted to speak - and in a more radical sense - not recognized as *capable of speech*.”<sup>25</sup> This classroom encounter, as recounted by Adál, exhibits the Professor’s surprise at his “coherent” abilities and resistive posture. Paralleling the critique offered by Robin D.G. Kelley regarding Richard Wright, Aimé Césaire, and other Black and Afro-Caribbean artists, Adál Maldonado and others, “did not have to go out and find surrealism, for their lives were already surreal.”<sup>26</sup> These artists of color “found in surrealism confirmation of what they already [knew]...the power of the unconscious.”<sup>27</sup>

While French theorists like Michel de Certeau, Roland Barthes, Henri Lefebvre, and Georges Perec are acknowledged for theorizing the surrealism of everyday life,<sup>28</sup> the invisibility of Adál's jíbaro surrealist aesthetic reveals how "the production of historical narratives involves the uneven contribution of competing groups and individuals who have unequal access to the means for such production."<sup>29</sup> This Puerto Rican diasporic Surrealism of the everyday goes unacknowledged within the European or Eurocentric canon, but presence or visibility is not the only marker of power. *Power is also demonstrated through its invisibility*; what goes unrecognized is the power these French theorists have had in shaping the discourse of quotidian Surrealism, while a "jíbaro/bodega Surrealism" -- rife with its own inadequacies -- is not remotely present within their paradigm of surrealist discourse because of its ethnic otherness and "particularities." Yet, the universal power of French surrealist discourse is received as the prevailing discourse regarding quotidian thought. This tension between marginality in relation to certain dominant art world canons and theoretical, historical, narrative power absolutely saturates Surrealism, forming a historical bloc from which new, dissident, alternative surrealist visions must be understood and theorized. Like Dadaists and Surrealists before them, the everyday for their Diaspo-Rican and Nuyorican proponents was the locus of socio-cultural inquiry where a politics of liberation would be waged.

Adál's account of Surrealism begins in the everyday life world of peripheral subjects like himself. This new awareness and interpretation of working-class Surrealism, of everyday magical worlds and imaginations, and

“jibaro” style Surrealism is what operates in the transnational and Nuyorican barrios and local spaces like corner store grocery stores, or “Bodegas,” accounting for a “Bodega Surrealism” that constitutes both the private and public lives of many communities. The everyday material aesthetics, working-class humor, ways of thinking, and blue-collar strategies to piece together a living amidst the struggles of capitalist exploitation give way to a Latina/o subaltern bricolage, or an “aesthetic sancocho,” (see Manifesto Document, Figure 25) the making do with whatever is at hand.<sup>30</sup> In agreement with Levi-Strauss, these cultural practices of “making do” with disparate expressive ensembles and materials have “brilliant unforeseen results on the intellectual plane.”<sup>31</sup> Adál makes these points forcefully in his auto-portraits and in the other items of the Spirit Republic.

Take for example murder by junk food as represented in the Corn Flakes cereal box (see figure 37), a broken fan, and immersion in the bathtub possibly to beat the heat, a woman holding a maraca, and reclined on the couch exhausted from mambo dancing and/or sex, and the brown paper bag (Figure 28) with the “Bodega Papo” stamp, and the “Papa and Not Dada” portrait (Figure 32) with the suspended potato in front of Adál’s nose. Another example is the domino that serves as the map of El Spirit Republic (Figure 30), a fictitious territory located “10 degrees latitude just west of a place called Eden,” a play on the relationship between cartography and colonialism. Mapping was essential to the exploration and domination of the non-European world. Adál is trying to “undo” colonialism by also redoing the map of Puerto Rico through the map of El Spirit Republic in

the form of a domino game piece, a popular game of leisure played mostly by men (and occasionally women) in bodega store corners, at front or back porches, in basements, and on kitchen dining tables. Playing the game of dominoes requires mathematical talent, a skill also necessary for explorers. He's also challenging the idea that national identities are strictly associated with or relegated to a defined geography, location, or country, defined by a traditional state boundary and apparatus. In its ill-defined locality, adjacent to Eden, the Spirit Republic's home is a utopia of pleasure, devoid of colonial gazes, and where, as stated in the manifesto, "all have the right to dance to la plena [music] whenever we please, like dignified human beings of tropical brilliance." Adál is also taking the Spirit Republic off the map of possible imperial invasion.

In relation to the cereal box titled "When Government Engage in Cereal Murder," Adál seems to hint at the dominance of the imported American diet in Puerto Rico. As an unmarked Corn Flakes box, it resembles those that are circulated by the government sponsored WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children) program of the Food and Nutrition Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. From another angle, it can be a substitution for surreal art and highlight government pursuit of artistic censorship, while attempting to curtail the freedom of speech of artists and art organizations, like in the 1997 legal decision, *Henderson v. City of Murfreesboro (TN)*. The judge presiding over the case decided in favor of the artist, Ms. Maxine Henderson, declaring the removal of her painting, which included an image of a nude woman, was a violation of the First Amendment. Years later, in 2004, we

learn of the FBI's pursuit and harassment of the members of the Critical Art Ensemble that ended in 2008 with a decision clearing them of mail and wire fraud.<sup>32</sup>

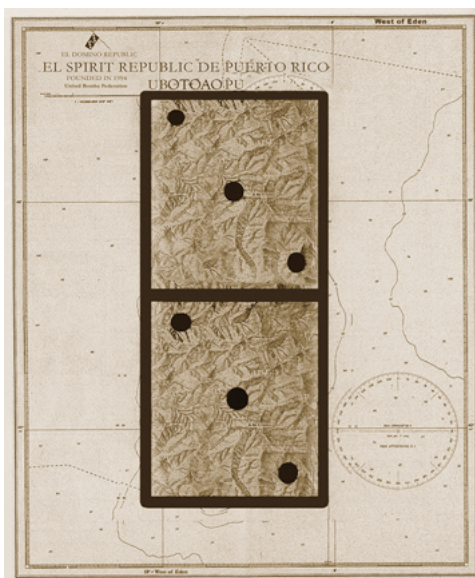


Figure 30 – “El Map of El Spirit Republic de Puerto Rico,” by Adál Maldonado in *Blue Prints for a Nation* (2002). Can be found at: <http://www.elpuertoricanembassy.org/blueprints.html>

### **From the Margins of Surrealism: Sur-Ricanism at El Embassy and El Spirit Republic of Puerto Rico**

Reflections from two New Rican Village artists and administrators, Sandra María Esteves and Dina D'Oyen, also highlight the importance of El Puerto Rican Embassy project since the beginning of the New Rican Village Cultural Arts Center. Esteves recalls:

I remember Eddie Figueroa was talking about wanting to start the New Rican Village center. And I remember him talking about the Puerto Rican embassy, too. But I think at the time it was like a *concept*. And I think he was talking about the Puerto Rican

embassy even before he actually started the New Rican Village. But I remember him talking about it then; this was around 1975 going into 1976, somewhere around that time.”<sup>33</sup>

Dina D'Oyen shares a similar account on the founding of the Puerto Rican Embassy while highlighting some of its avant-garde qualities and goals:

We were avant-garde, and if you're avant-garde, then you're ahead of your time, so I do believe the thought of the Puerto Rican Embassy was already there, was beginning already, way before it actually started taking off. Yes, I know for a fact that it was, because I remember Eddie Figueroa and Pedro Pietri talking about this...we're [the New Rican Village], an avant-garde center...only conceiving and organizing things that belong to the New Rican Village concept of 'out there' you know, in the future time, that's what we were about.<sup>34</sup>

The Artists of El Puerto Rican Embassy consciously engaged in avant-garde surrealist principles as method and praxis of choice for it overlapped with their own artistic vision. According to Tristan Menecke, Surrealism's democratic principles “open the doors of real creativity for all, and therefore undermine the stifling domination of established critics, gallery proprietors, and museum directors.”<sup>35</sup> In this vein, “Surrealism is much more than Art,” argues Menecke; it is also “a way of looking at things, a way of life...giv[ing] us truly living myths [like the Spirit Republic conjured by El Embassy]...that transform every aspect of everyday life...offer[ing] a real hope beyond the ordinary limitations of human existence,” which can be “transcended by the mind, and...overcome [through] free creative activity.”<sup>36</sup> Similarly, Ron Sakolsky reminds us that “Surrealism is not [simply] an aesthetic doctrine but an international revolutionary movement concerned with the emancipation of thought.”<sup>37</sup> Its goal is “to create a truly free society in which the age-old contradictions between dream and action, reason

and imagination, subjectivity and objectivity, [are] resolved” envisioning “nothing less than a world turned upside down where life can be a wondrous festival fueled by the liberation of the passions, inspired laziness, and an absolute divergence from the tired and oppressive game of social injustice and self-degradation.”<sup>38</sup>

Artists like Adál Maldonado whose work departs from traditional “ethnic” art aesthetics confounds those who favor and look for Puerto Rican or “Latino” realism in his work. Adál’s work is neither primitive nor realist; and his art, inline with Bhabha’s concept of liminality, maneuvers across constructed aesthetic *and political* categories, demonstrating a knowledge of multiple art aesthetics, from Boricua jíbaro to French surrealist. Much like the Afro-Caribbean musicians that Ruth Glasser and Kenneth Bilby analyze, Adál demonstrates an *aesthetic continuum* of disparate but intersecting traditions, showing he can “converse” and “signify” within and across the interstices of coloniality and art scenes and worlds.<sup>39</sup> As one can see from what he describes as “auto-portraits,” Adál fashions surrealist absurdity and humor into his photographs.





Figure 31 – “Conceptual Jíbaro,” by Adál Madonado, 1990.  
<<http://www.enfoco.org/index.php/photographers/photographer/adal/>>



Figure 32 – “Papa Not Dada,” by Adál Maldonado, 1998. Auto Portrait After René Magritte.  
<[http://www.latinart.com/artdetail.cfm?img=pr\\_maldo\\_10<sup>th</sup>.jpg&type=exhibit](http://www.latinart.com/artdetail.cfm?img=pr_maldo_10<sup>th</sup>.jpg&type=exhibit)>

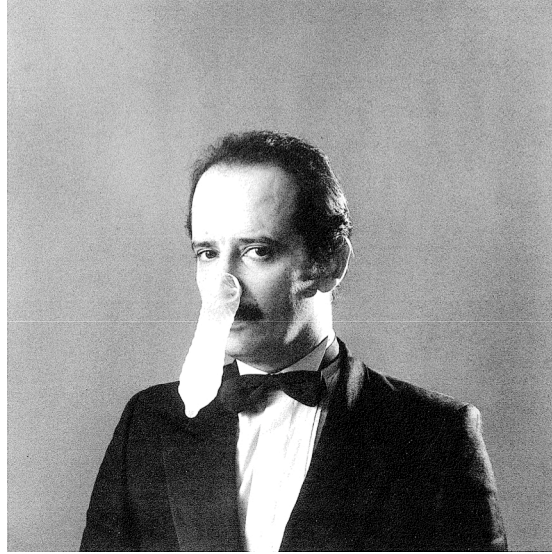


Figure 33 – “Un Safe Mambo” by Adál Maldonado, 1996.  
<<http://www.enfoco.org/index.php/photographers/photographer/adal/>>



El Satiric Mambo Dancer:  
Auto-Portrait after Andre Kertesz

Figure 34 – “El Satiric Mambo Dancer: Auto Portrait after Andre Kertesz” by Adál Maldonado, 1992. <[http://www.latinart.com/artdetail.cfm?img=pr\\_maldo\\_08\\_th.jpg](http://www.latinart.com/artdetail.cfm?img=pr_maldo_08_th.jpg)>

DOWN BEAT December 1, 1954

### The Mambo

A very exciting variation of the Rumba is now very popular—the Mambo. The Mambo is to Rumba what Jitterbug or Swing is to Fox Trot.

**THE FIRST HALF OF BASIC MAMBO STEP**

**MAN'S PART**

**START**

1. Step directly forward on left.
2. Draw right foot up to left.
3. Step forward with left, accenting with left foot.

Note that Step 1 is done slowly; 2 and 3 are taken quickly. This is the standard Arthur Murray way of counting the Rumba or Mambo.

**THE SECOND HALF OF BASIC MAMBO STEP**

4. Step back with right foot.
5. Draw left up to right.
6. Step back with right foot, accenting with right foot.

After mastering the Mambo steps forward and backward, combine them and practice

**THE MAMBO TURN**

To turn, simply repeat the above, but as you step forward and backward, turn to left on the first of every three counts. (Keep turning to left only.)

After you have thoroughly mastered the Basic Mambo step, in releasing your partner in the Mambo Break, illustrated above.

(Above example from Arthur Murray's How To Be a Good-Dancer. Reproduced with permission.)

Figure 35 - "Mambo Dance Instruction." *Down Beat* (December 1954).<sup>40</sup>



Pre-Post Nuyoricain Modern Primitive:  
Auto-Portrait after Leonardo Da Vinci

Figure 36 - "Pre-Post Nuyoricain Modern Primitive:  
Auto Portrait after Leonardo Da Vinci," 1998.  
Adál Maldonado. <[http://www.latinart.com/artdetail.cfm?img=pr\\_maldo\\_11\\_th.jpg](http://www.latinart.com/artdetail.cfm?img=pr_maldo_11_th.jpg)>

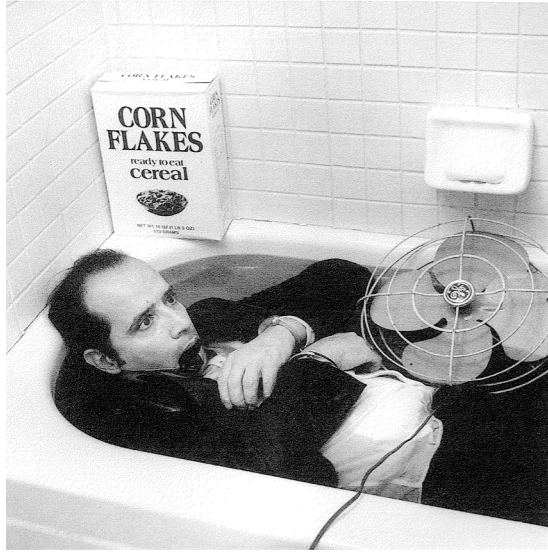


Figure 37 - "When Government Engage in Cereal Murder" by Adál Maldonado, 1997.  
<<http://www.enfoco.org/index.php/photographers/photographer/adal/>>

---

PUERTO RICAN  
EMBASSY

---

EL BARRIO, NEW YORK

Dear Don Dada:

The Puerto Rican Embassy  
represents a new generation of  
experimental Puerto Rican artists  
working at the margin of established  
Art movements - who take risks  
which illuminate contemporary  
issues, question established cultural  
aesthetics and challenge dominant  
political issues

Respectively Yours,  
Embassy Adal

PePi Box 70 Folder 8

Figure 38 - "Dear Don Dada" Letter by Adal Maldonado.  
From the Pedro Pietri Papers, Centro Library and Archives.  
Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, CUNY.

In a continuous act of defiance, “blasphemous parody,”<sup>41</sup> and mimicry, Adál responds to the sacrosanct art establishment in both his auto-portrait pictures and in his letter to “Don Dada” (see Figure 38). With a personal note to the movement that inspired Surrealism, Adál announces that “the Puerto Rican Embassy represents a new generation of experimental Puerto Rican artists working at the margin of established art movements who take risks, which illuminate contemporary issues, question established cultural aesthetics and challenge dominant political issues.” The undated letter seems to suggest that “a new avant-garde” is in town and attention should be directed to their surrealist work, which would otherwise be imperceptible to most Dadaists, because of their ethnic difference, and because they’re now operating in the dominant art institutions while these new artists are working within the margins of established art movements,” a bash at the hegemony of some avant-garde communities, including the Dadaists.

Adál’s auto-portraits fortify this claim. In a reversal of a gaze Adál inversely turns the camera’s attention onto himself in order to mock the surrealist artists. As a marginal subject who is consistently “in focus” through the surveillance camera, he overturns the gaze of marginality taking on a central position in the photos. The “Papa not Dada” (Figure 32) reference is Surrealism with a *differánce*, a difference of meaning, or in this case, a difference in the surrealist script, as well as a deferral from the past to the transhistorical present. Adál is both stepping into and displacing/replacing the central subject of the images that fall victim to his parody. While the artists are not highlighted in their

own work, Adál's camera takes on a double refraction where they also become *present by their absence through his presence*. This resembles a double displacement as Adál transforms the art from image to real, that is toward himself, a "Pre-Post Nuyorican Modern Primitive." His smirk in the Da Vinci auto-portrait (see Figure 36) suggests his maneuver to not be seen as the Mona Lisa, but to propose the secret in his parodic image and smile that says: "she is like me." In all these portraits, he attempts to be modern while also engaging in "jíbaro existentialism," drawing upon a repertoire of signifiers that derive from Puerto Rican diasporic memories and everyday life. The elongated condom on the nose in the "Un Safe Mambo" portrait (Figure 33) can simply be read as a humorous safe sex advertisement. From another angle, it draws on the ascription of erotic identity to colonial subjects, and in this case, the historical sexual gaze on "primitive colonial subjects." The floating condom and the floating "platano" (plantain) also serve as essentialized tropes of a particular Caribbean Latinidad, displacing Magritte's bird and apple. The penis and the penile-like platano replace Magritte's apple, the alluring fruit of desire and sin.

The subtext of uninhibited desire and passion, part of the surrealist vision of pleasure, are also apparent in "El Satiric Mambo Dancer" (Figure 35). In this case, building on the appropriation of the primitive by earlier artists and surrealists, Adál is teaching others how to be a "satiric" mambo dancer, spoofing those who sought Mambo dance lessons when the music and dance form first became internationally popular in the 1950s, and was most prominently celebrated in the Palladium night club in midtown Manhattan (See Figure 35).

The Mambo dancer is perceived as a primal being, antithetical to modern, urban sophistication, and expected to dance with “feeling” while suspending the kinesthetic logic of time, rhythm, movement and space.<sup>42</sup> Adál is the bearer of knowledge while the woman reclines on the couch in an evocative pose holding a “maraca” (a rattle made from wood and a hollowed dried gourd used as a percussion instrument) in her right hand, as she also smiles and looks directly at the camera during the simulated Mambo dance class. As an example of the “tropics of consumption,” where nature, culture, geography, and people are “tropically” identical and open to exploration and consumption, the pineapple, one of the ultimate symbols of “tropicalization” next to Carmen Miranda’s outlandish headgear, is another signifier of primitive tropicality that Adál is simultaneously appropriating, mocking and subverting.<sup>43</sup> Adal’s board illustrates mambo dance steps like those found at dance studios, suggesting a homogenous dance standard to follow, a technique that departs from individual improvisation, a principal attribute to most Afro-Caribbean music and dance, but also read as social advancement within the professional dance community.<sup>44</sup> This standardization is also the approach of cultural mass production and commodification, an element that most avant-garde artists regularly reject. When combined, Adál is potentially equating the public fascination and desire to learn the mambo dance as equivalent to wearing a Carmen Miranda-like headpiece, assuming a level of tropical desirability onto one’s body and identity. Adál is surely cognizant of the intersections between photography, anthropology, and colonialism, where the advent of photography was used by anthropology to



“construct and disseminate persuasively real representations of otherness” while also supplying the technology of surveillance. Adál’s pictures seem like an intentional departure from the exotic or demonized tropes that “transfixed difference, rendering [colonial subjects] as inert, passive, and powerless.”<sup>45</sup>

### **‘Imagination is a Sovereign Nation’**

Indeed, Adál’s surrealist photography is anything but passive, and as they are grounded in the imaginative possibilities of dreams and the unconscious, an artistic mode well established within avant-garde communities. Rather than rely on realist approaches, Adál’s style suggests a social utopia of possibilities “not yet won” or achieved, a photography of surrealist alterity, departing from and suspending the “rational” discourse because it is equated with colonialism and a continued pragmatism found within the PPD Commonwealth economic and political platform of continued relations with the United States. For Adál this prevailing rational platform and strategy is *politically irrational* and unsustainable, a position that follows Bretonian logic, who in his *Surrealist Manifesto* (1924) fends off rationalism for “it has fixed limits of discursive reason, is always in agreement with common sense, and hence confines itself to the tautological possibilities of traditional logic.”<sup>46</sup> To practice “realist” art subscribes to and restricts the utopic possibilities of the imagination. In agreement with Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, “realist positive portrayals [of marginalized individuals and communities] are not the only way to fight racism or to advance a liberatory perspective.”<sup>47</sup> The constructed real has been, extending the logic of Louis

Althusser and Mikhail Bakhtin,<sup>48</sup> mediated by the world of ideology, suggesting colonial continuities also shape dominant and marginal public spheres. Given that the creative process is understood as a form resistance, for Herbert Marcuse social liberation and change through the arts is possible because, “[a]rt is a location -- a designated imaginative space where freedom is experienced. At times it is a physical entity, a site – a painting on the wall, an installation on the floor, an event chiseled in space and/or time, a performance, a dance, a video, a film. But it is also a psychic location—a place in the mind where one allows for a *recombination of experiences, a suspension of the rules that govern daily life, a denial of gravity*. It challenges the monopoly of the established reality by creating ‘fictitious worlds’ in which one...does not find an outlet in the present reality.”<sup>49</sup> Consider the following, as illustrated in both the “Decolonized Brain” (Figure 29), designed by Adál, and the “Welcome to the End of this Century Chant” (Figure 26) used in the baptismal ceremony for El Spirit Republic by Pedro Pietri as an example of “the suspension of rules”: “think,” “wake up,” “vomit,” “undress,” “kick a politician,” “dissent,” “write a poem,” “make non-sense,” “debate,” “trust,” “doubt.” For examples of the “denial of gravity”: “fall up,” “jump without moving an inch,” “shift your assemblage point.” Constructing a fabricated “interplanetary Puerto Rican Embassy” and a world where “el coco habla” (the coconaut talks), and New York City is full of “palm trees,” where these coconuts grow “to drink and take a shower with when the landlord goes on strike against the hot and cold water” becomes “more real than reality itself.”<sup>50</sup>

Such a configuration resembles André Breton's surreal dreams of an alternative reality, a liberated imagination, the "immediate decolonization of each citizen's brain, and [a] release from all programmed ways" as well as a recognition of their mass mediated sources: "removal of all audio visual listening devices." The departure from programmed ways is also evidenced in the concrete poetic style of the "decolonized brain," allowing one to read in any order and create unscripted, suspended free associations. The random words on the page make for the liberatory sensibilities of freedom and meaning, proposing a linguistic space of surrealist semiology and potentially trigger new, even "illogical" possibilities. Marcuse believes art is the last space of these alternative possibilities and can become the location from which *social activity* ("kick a politician," "write a poem," "awaken a corpse") arises. Breton's fusion of the states of illusions and dreams are absorbed into *social action* through the expressive forms articulated in the work of Adál, Pietri, and others ("salsa rhythms combine con free verse...con fellow artists and mellow musicians y painters and actors and dancers and comedians at el Caney en la noche de this day!"). Expression, as Breton notes in his second manifesto, is the key to surreality, the hidden or "real" self articulated, culminating into a synthesis of spirits.<sup>51</sup> And these spirits are embodied into the constructed, indefinable Embassy and the Spirit Republic of Puerto Rico. The "Spirit" of the Republic (versus the "spirit") resembles the liberated psychic zone or utopia of a decolonial visualization of understanding the post-colonial Boricua trans-nation. As claimed in the Spirit Republic Manifesto, "the imagination has always been an

independent country.” Essential to this utopic decolonial vision *is the vision itself*, the space of the mind to embark upon a *non-colonized vision of possibilities*.<sup>52</sup> “We are not a government in exile! This is where we live!” claims the Spirit Republic’s Manifesto. In agreement with Jorge Duany, the circular and consistently migrating Puerto Rican nation, or “guagua aérea” [the air bus] between the island of Puerto Rico and the states, a “nation on the move,” fosters a decentered transnational practice of the nation.<sup>53</sup>

The cultural nationalism that emerges, of which El Embassy both articulates and departs from, highlights that a state apparatus is inessential in generating national and transnational identity and an imaginary. Thus, a national, transnational, and even a post-national vision of a Puerto Rican community exist, despite living under colonial rule for over 500 years. El Embassy project offers us an opportunity to examine how the imagination remains a space of decolonial revelations and possibilities, attained through an ideology that parallels surrealist principles and departs from a traditional nationalist discourse that puts forward an agenda of political independence as a gateway to national and cultural distinction.

## Jíbaro Existentialism and Imperialist Subversions



Figure 39 - "El Currency" by Adál Maldonado in El Spirit Republic de Puerto Rico Installation in *Blueprints for a Nation* (2002). Can also be found at: <http://www.elpuertoricanembassy.org/blueprints.html>

A suggestive example of how bricolage is also apparent in the jíbaro style Surrealism, or "jíbaro existentialism" and aesthetics that Adál Maldonado references is in the "Spirit Republic Currency" (Figure 39). A rooster's head takes center stage in this 100-dollar bill, replacing Benjamin Franklin. The replacement becomes an act of *displacement*, the taking over of a position, and claiming a new home for a displaced, transnational community. Replacing/Displacing suggests a community subversively envisioning itself within the metropolis, but, in the tradition of both mimicry and bricolage, Adál makes do and hybridizes U.S. colonial currency with a cultural repertoire of his own. Using a colonial trope of the rooster ironically exemplifies the "otherness" of Puertorriquenidad (Puerto Ricanness) while also satirically referencing anthropological fascinations with imperialist nostalgia of rural, pre-modern communities and "virgin land." Echoing Renato Rosaldo, "much of imperialist nostalgia's force resides in its association with (indeed, its disguise as) more

genuinely innocent tender recollections of what is at once an earlier epoch and a previous phase of life.”<sup>54</sup> The image of innocence juxtaposed with static savagery, recalls a colonial inertia stabilized in imperial imaginations. Adál builds on this recollective history and subverts it in the tradition of mimicry, an act that emphasizes the ambivalent relations between colonizers and colonized.

A mission of colonialism is to institute a technology of empire, that is, institutions governed from afar by the imperial nation, socializing and also replicating or cloning social, economic, medical, religious, educational and legal structures that aim to civilize colonial subjects from afar and reproduce cultural habits and ideologies from the colonizing country. Imparting this goal is, however, met with various forms of resistance, often in the guise of mimicry. The result is a “blurred copy of the colonizer that can be quite threatening...because mimicry is never far from mockery. [It] locates a crack in the certainty of colonial dominance, an uncertainty in its control of the behavior of the colonized.”<sup>55</sup> Described as the “art of revenge” by Homi Bhabha,<sup>56</sup> mimicry camouflages resistance while seemingly suggesting deference to colonial traditions, yet with a menacing specter. Thus, “reproduced as almost the same, but not quite,”<sup>57</sup> as Bhabha posits, the currency reveals the limits of colonial authority, and more specifically, how colonial items and ideology are deconstructed and exposed.



Figure 40 - El Partido Popular Democrático (PPD) Political Party Logo, which reads “Food, Land, and Liberty.”

Despite the failure of PPD’s economic plan detailed earlier, the party’s use of rural images of the male Puerto Rican peasant farmer, or jíbaro rural worker (Figure 40), was well entrenched in the political iconography of Puerto Rican politics, and thus represented a political party that advocated for the “common man” through the official “Common/wealth” economic strategy. In this continuous gesture of masculine political iconography and usurping the “common man” discourse of the PPD, the creative insertion of a rooster in the 100-dollar bill, perhaps also makes reference to these historical and political aesthetics, and exposes the effects of the 100 years of U.S. colonial rule in Puerto Rico. But more important to the discussion is the metaphor of the rooster, as backward, pre-modern, violent, and unsophisticated (cock fighting), a perception that corresponds to the anthropological gaze of Puerto Rican working-class otherness constructed onto U.S. Puerto Rican communities.<sup>58</sup> One wonders if Adál is also blurring the binary lines between rural and urban, backward and cosmopolitan, as it relates to surrealist practices. He seems to remind followers of the damaging affects of surrealist “primitive” inspirations and appropriations in the

early days of the movement, which stemmed from Breton's idea of healing by returning to the primitive aspects of the human experience, which reside in the sub-conscious and unconscious, after enduring the trauma's induced by the First World War.<sup>59</sup> He replicates but also reappropriates the primitive through the rooster, a subversive rejoinder that doubly announces a mockery of the early appropriation. The symbol of the injured rooster also signifies the physical exploitation and the psychological trauma that accompanies colonialism and circular migration, which are significant social experiences that inspire Adál's work.<sup>60</sup> Keeping true to the spirit of decolonial cultural resistance of the Spirit Republic, the rooster is also known for its aggressive fighting behavior, as frequently observed in "la pelea de gallos" or cockfights. The rooster will defend his flock, an "instinctual" action toward a perceived predator or an underling, this serves as a metaphor to guard and shield from threatening spirits, ideologies, or "bodega bombers" that counter the Spirit Republic's mission -- as noted in its Manifesto -- to protect Puerto Ricans so that they "be excluded from the list of endangered species."

An example of this symbolic battle is also found in Miguel Luciano's painting, "Pelea de Gallos" (Figure 41; also see Figure 1 for Adal's rooster), which illustrates the American rooster, "Cornelius" of the Kellogg cereal company -- absent in Adál's cereal box -- battling with a smaller Puerto Rican rooster from the Puerto Rico-based poultry brand, Pollos Picú. The painting serves as a metaphor of resistance to U.S. colonial rule, and suggesting the imperial modern (the United States), utilizes cock symbols and branding, too. According to an



interview with Luciano, the image also represents the hegemonic battle over consumer culture on the island.<sup>61</sup>



Figure 41 - "Pelea de Gallos" by Miguel Luciano, 2002.  
Can be found at: < [http://www.miguelluciano.com/More\\_Paintings.html#>](http://www.miguelluciano.com/More_Paintings.html#>)

The theme of reappropriation is continuously used in other parts of the currency. Adál humorously wants the citizens of the Spirit Republic to “reappropriate and prosper” while enjoying the Afro-Puerto Rican genres of “Bomba and Plena,” the two musical styles where our trust should reside, also suggesting we reverse our disavowal toward the “African” syncretism in Puerto Rican cultural traditions. He also puts forth a challenge to trust the discursively constructed marginalized and “criminalized” Afro-Puerto Rican sector on the island and the U.S. Puerto Rican Diaspora. The bank authorizing this currency resides in the Loisaida/Lower East Side neighborhood of New York City, perhaps only doors away from Papo’s Bodega store and serving as the official bank for this business and the Spirit Republic. Cultural (re)appropriation from “below” is

nothing new, as the Spanglish unification of English and Spanish have been used to create new languages, the linguistic bricolage of everyday conversation. But insisting its users “prosper” is a departure from the imaginary of struggle articulated in the early poetry and narratives of Puerto Rican migration, and compatible to the surrealist vision of pleasure, desire, enjoyment and liberation.<sup>62</sup> The jíbaro aesthetics and the hidden transcript of resistance and mockery lends to a bodega Surrealism that fortifies and further reappropriates another liminality of cultural resistance.

Adál’s auto-portraits and the other creative artwork of El Embassy, demonstrate some of the new semiotic possibilities that resist and bypass social realism through Surrealism and mimesis, for realism is understood as loaded with hegemonic ideology and mimesis creatively unmask and counters the underlying but prevailing hegemonic logics and representations of colonialism. Bypassing realist, or socialist realist aesthetics may also have been a rejection of orthodox ideological compliance with the formal Communist Party, who emphasized the artist’s social responsibility over creative freedom. Employing non-realist, hybridized surrealist aesthetics Adál proposes an alternative political decolonial discourse of liberation, encompassing a Post-Nuyorican aesthetics of resistance.

### **Heterotopia: A Nation without a Place**

Adál Maldonado’s reflection on The *Blueprints for a Nation* Installation, which consists of El Puerto Rican Embassy, *the Out of Focus Nuyorican*

portraits, and the “West Side Story Redux” video, evokes Michel Foucault’s concept of “heterotopia.” In reflecting upon the avant-garde sensibilities of these projects, and the imaginary visions of a new future, Adál “mimics” – with a level of irony – the heterotopia that Foucault proposes:

Adál: I don’t feel that these worlds that I create are utopias- even though I feel comfortable in them- they’re not intended to be utopias. I don’t consider them to be my attempt to go back to the Garden of Eden.

Valentín: What are you intending them to be?

Adál: I don’t intend them to be like a Garden of Eden, because for me a Garden of Eden, or a utopia is an attempt to homogenize, to create a perfectly peaceful environment through sameness, and I feel that whenever more than two people are in an environment that there’s going to be differences of ideas, and differences of ideas is going to bring some kind of conflict, you know? So I think that differences of opinions and tolerating difference of opinion is what this journey should be about, and learning from that shared experience, and not to try to be like anyone else. Tu sabes- so that’s why I introduced the Bodega Bombers [Figure 42] into my imaginary world, and have some people going around and creating havoc because I think conflict is very important. However, I was trying to create a world where at least there were some references that were familiar to me, and a *place where I can be empowered through my own creative activity, my own creative action.*

Valentín: In the surrealist tradition there’s often an individual act of dreaming, of going beyond the immediacy of the moment; it would be very self-referential trying to resolve personal alienation. I’m wondering whether your art work- is it about you, or is it about community?

Adál: *It’s about both. It’s about, it’s about me and at the same time I find, I see myself as part of a larger community.* The thing is that there are many different connections. There are many different places this is connected to. The idea of feeling inferior at certain times of my life, inferior, insecure, and needed to find a place, and a way to empower myself - relates to this. As soon as I politicized my mind, and then realizing that the colonialism and the effect of

colonialism on my brain had quite a bit to do with that sense of insecurity on my part. Entonces, I created a world that, in a way, was a response to Puerto Rico's dependency and colonialism to the United States. So to answer your question, absolutely without question.<sup>63</sup>



Figure 42 - "Sub-Versive Art" by Adál Maldonado. Exploding Bustelo Brand coffee can placed by "Los Bodega Bombers," a spurious terrorist cell opposing El Spirit Republic of Puerto Rico's Annexation of New York City. *Blueprints for a Nation* (2002).

Can also be found at:

<<http://www.elpuertoricaneembassy.org/blueprints2.html>>

As Adál elaborates, El Embassy and the Spirit Republic installation and concept were an effort to fortify a sovereign state of mind, being and identity. As an act of disalienation with the intention of making an intervention upon the impact of colonial ideology on the brain and psyche (feelings of inferiority, insecurity and

belonging nowhere), Adál conceives of a surrealist Spirit Republic as a decolonized space where everything is in “focus.” Equating colonialism with prison (see Manifesto, Figure 25), El Spirit Republic is a social act of emancipatory liberation that aims to disalienate by erecting a counterpublic that rewrites dominant colonial narratives of powerlessness through satirical artistic parody.

As a result, the imagined Embassy embodies Michel Foucault’s concept of “heterotopia”, a counter-site, a place *without* a place, or a nation without a place, where “everywhere you travel you will meet yourself” (Manifesto). A heterotopia, for Foucault, is “a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted.” Moreover, it is “a space of illusion that exposes every *real* space” or creates a space that is “other, another real space, as perfect, meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled.”<sup>64</sup> El Embassy and the Spirit Republic exemplify Foucault’s heterotopia, for they illuminate experiences of colonialism while also drawing on the possibilities of fostering a new space of belonging that transcends the limitations of these real spaces. The Spirit Republic simultaneously is mythic and *real*, an inverted world that ironically mimics the early constructions of the colony it seeks to resist, and is now a model “that ‘La Isla del Encanto’ [Puerto Rico] admirably stares at” (Manifesto). It captures a disposition of a liberated consciousness, a way of thinking that draws in the social realities of colonialism but responds to them through the spirit of Surrealism: “Our surrealist history has proven that we

are immune to mediocrity” (Manifesto). This erected heterotopia importantly excludes the primitive tropes and desires employed by the early surrealists.

It is this simultaneous space of independence and social constitution captured in the Spirit Republic’s heterotopia that *enables* its utopic possibilities and offers it credibility. It disrupts the conscious or unconscious logics that frame aesthetics as being divorced from their social worlds. Aesthetics, Janet Wolff observes, “originate and are practiced [under] particular conditions, [while] bear[ing] the mark of those conditions.”<sup>65</sup> The heterotopia of El Spirit Republic bears the mark of particular historical and social conditions of colonialism, transnationalism, invisibility, trauma, and Diaspora, which are codified in the form of its aesthetic qualities and frame El Embassy’s vision. In keeping with Hebert Marcuse’s perspective on art and social liberation, the Spirit Republic and El Embassy are “imaginative space[s] where freedom is experienced...a fictitious world...that does not find an outlet in the present reality.”<sup>66</sup> As declared in a recent state authorized communiqué: “El Embassy is a conceptual *space* in response to the United States government’s refusal to acknowledge the political, social and cultural needs of Puerto Ricans as [they] enter the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.”<sup>67</sup> In essence, the fictitious, deterritorialized Spirit Republic and Embassy are illustrative of a “decolonial imaginary”<sup>68</sup> that aims to reverse the affects of colonialism on the body, memory and psyche, and anticipates a liberatory existence outside of existing colonial political structures and ideologies. It is, as Dina D’Oyen declares in the opening epigraph, “the next space.”<sup>69</sup>

## Conclusion

Using oral history interviews and archival documents, this chapter documents and analyzes the development, significance, and cultural activism of the New Rican Village Cultural Arts Center and the Puerto Rican Embassy, both located in the Lower East Side neighborhood of New York City. We learn of the Center's historical origins as an inter-artistic space that served as an aesthetic laboratory for an emerging Puerto Rican and Latina/o avant-garde arising in the 1970s and 80s. El Puerto Rican Embassy, with its historical foundations at the New Rican Village Cultural Center, is the centerpiece in this chapter; it is a conceptual space responding to the social call of emancipation from dominant institutions, commercial market forces, and colonial mentalities and structures that seeks to open alternative, democratically organized, co-operative, free spaces and worlds.<sup>70</sup> The chapter offers us a historical perspective that moves from the founding of an arts institution to one that is conceptual and operates beyond the conventional boundaries of an institutionalized, brick and mortar state apparatus.

The heterotopia of El Embassy exposes and mocks the performative elements of state authority and the military, as demonstrated by the Bodega Bombers and the Cocoanuts in Space Program; regulatory institutions, as demonstrated through passports and embassies; ideological hegemony, as exemplified through religion, the baptism, and the decolonized brain; and cartography, as seen in the map of El Spirit Republic taking the shape of a

domino game piece. It proposes to take to the limits the question: “what is a sovereign state?” a question that has found no resolution. Until now, that is.

By usurping its signifiers, El Embassy suggests in one imaginative blow the hollowness of colonial state power, its dependence on widespread popular participation in its rituals and acceptance of its signifiers, and thereby its right to govern. Given the failures of Operation Bootstrap and all subsequent economic strategies on the island along with the failed authority of the colonial state, coupled with a transnational community that has faced historical marginalization, invisibility, and exploitation, the construction of a conceptual embassy and its parent Spirit Republic invokes a post-national initiative that transcends the numerous failed attempts to remedy and overturn colonialism. Using Surrealism as an instrument and philosophy, a surrealist heterotopia is constructed: it is an imaginative world of social possibilities that transports and transforms, and that decolonizes through disalienation. El Embassy addresses the status dilemma that has occupied the island since the U.S. entered in 1898. In a 1998 Plebiscite where island voters were asked to vote on the political status of Puerto Rico, a fourth option, “none of the above,” garnered the majority vote (50.3%).<sup>71</sup> The artists at el Embassy humorously interpreted this as a vote for El Spirit Republic de Puerto Rico, thus an affirmation of how artistic imaginations can address social and political dilemmas. Following this logic, the results also suggest that new social and political resolutions are attainable outside conventional political and institutional settings.



Crucial for Adál as an artist and other members of El Embassy, and as way back from its New Rican Village foundations, is the important, organic perspective of reconceptualizing the Eurocentric authority over the conventional histories of avant-gardism. We learn through Adál how his surrealist visions predate his formal introduction to Surrealism and the avant-garde. He finds that the French surrealists are like him; he did not have to go out and find Surrealism; his life and artistic vision were already surreal, a perspective that he calls jíbaro existentialism. The story that emerges out of this analysis is to pressure those histories that seem to arbitrarily disconnect transgressive art practices engaged by Latinas/os from the historically static category of the sacrosanct avant-garde. In challenging the working premises of the avant-garde category, I also argue that the community of Latina/o artists at the New Rican Village and the Puerto Rican embassy tell us another story of avant-gardism; one that celebrates racial and ethnic identity, and demonstrates how class, read through the lens of race and ethnicity, inform their cultural activism.

The art republic the New Rican Village and El Puerto Rican Embassy envisioned is indeed an art and social world turned upside down, an inverted carnivalesque-like counterpublic, inspired by jíbaro existentialism and what I term, “bodega Surrealism,” a Surrealism operating in the Latina/o margins of resistance and conceiving of unconscious social possibilities and political reversals. We see these existential and surrealist perspectives in the photographic artwork and installation pieces authored by Adál, Pedro Pietri, and others, as demonstrated in El Currency, El Passport, the Altar to the Santa

Iglesia de la Madre de Los Tomates, the Annexation Proclamation, the Decolonized Brain, Adál's auto-portraits, the Bodega Bombers/Sub-Versive Art, El Map of El Spirit Republic de Puerto Rico, and the Letter to Don Dada.

Riddled with satire, mimicry, and calculated perversions, the New Rican Village and El Embassy's art works collectively draw attention to the social possibilities of art to "organize a new life praxis from a basis in art."<sup>72</sup> Here, the social and the imaginative are unified, decolonial freedom is envisioned, subversive codes of meaning are proposed, and formal Surrealism is reappropriated, subverted and mocked. This desire for social change and dream of new social possibilities were integral to both the New Rican Village and El Embassy, serving as a candid expression of protest against the social and political institutions and ideologies responsible for their marginality and colonial experiences.

---

<sup>1</sup> Interview with the Author, March 3, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> This is a notion developed by Arjun Appadurai to refer to the increasingly splintered geographies of group identity. See his essay, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy" in *The Phantom Public Sphere*, ed. Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 269-295.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Schechner, "A Polity of Its Own Called Art?" in *Artistic Citizenship: A Public Voice for the Arts* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 33-41.

<sup>4</sup> This chapter analyzes various art pieces of the *Blue Prints for a Nation* Installation, which included the Puerto Rican Embassy, and its parent state apparatus, El Spirit Republic of Puerto Rico. The *West Side Story Redux* 13-minute video and the 20 blurred *Out of Focus Nuyorican* headshots warrant a detailed analysis that will be treated in the future.

<sup>5</sup> Javier Martinez de Pison, "Pasaporte Boricua," *El Diario/La Prensa*, 10 July 1994, 5-11.

<sup>6</sup> To tropicalize entails, according to Frances Aparicio and Susana Chávez-Silverman, "to imbue a particular space, geography, group or nation with a set of traits, images and values" (8). See: Frances R. Aparicio and Susana Chávez-Silverman, eds. *Tropicalizations: Transcultural Representations of Latinidad* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1997). Also see Victor Hernandez Cruz, *Tropicalizations* (New York: Reed, Cannon & Johnson Communications Co., 1976). The authors distinguish between hegemonic tropicalization, an action that resembles Edward Said's orientalism, which fixes a hegemonic, western and static gaze toward the Arab world, marking both bodies and geographies as fixed with particular traits, such as barbarian, primitive, violent, different, incoherence, immoral, and uncivilized. Tropicalization from below, or self-tropicalization, however, observes the multiple ways Caribbean Latinas/os consciously infuse and transform the social, cultural, and geographic world -- including institutions -- in terms they define.

<sup>7</sup> Kobena Mercer, "Diaspora Culture and the Dialogic Imagination: The Aesthetics of Black Independent Film in Britain" in *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*, eds. Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 254.

<sup>8</sup> Donald LaCoss, "Introduction: Surrealism and Romantic Anticapitalism," in *Morning Star: Surrealism, Marxism, Anarchism, Situationism, Utopia*, Michael Löwy (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), xxvii.

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion on the origins and meanings of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation see chapters seven and eight in David Blight's *Frederick Douglass' Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989). Also refer to chapters six and seven in Eric Foner and Olivia Mahoney's *A House Divided: America in the Age of Lincoln* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990).

<sup>10</sup> See Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>11</sup> "Pursuit" is misspelled in the original as "persuit" and is unknown if the error is intentional or accidental. It's corrected here in order to avoid confusion.

<sup>12</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967) xiv.

<sup>13</sup> Stuart Hobbs, *The End of the American Avant-Garde* (New York: NYU Press, 1997), 10. For an overview on the avant-garde, see: Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*

---

(Cambridge: Kelknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968); Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987); Stuart Hobbs, *The End of the American Avant garde* (New York: New York University Press, 1997); Michael Löwy, *Morning Star: Surrealism, Marxism, Anarchism, Situationism, Utopia* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009). For critical perspectives regarding the avant-garde, see: James M. Harding and John Rouse, eds. *Not the Other Avant-Garde: The Transnational Foundations of Avant-Garde Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press; Coco Fusco, "Fantasies of Oppositionality," in *Art, Activism, and Oppositionality: Essays from Afterimage*, ed. Grant H. Kester (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); Timothy Yu, *Race and the Avant-Garde: Experimental and Asian American Poetry Since 1965* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Tace Hedrick, *Mestizo Modernism: Race, Nation, and Identity in Latin American Culture* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2003) and Tatiana Flores, "Clamoring for Attention in Mexico City: Manuel Maples Arce's Avant-Garde Manifesto 'Actual N°1'. *Review: Literature and Arts of the Americas*, Issue 37, Vol. 37, No. 2 (2004): 208-220.

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion, elaboration, analysis, and reapplication of Jürgen Habermas's concept of the public sphere, its multiple dimensions, and contemporary critiques, see Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 109-142; Nancy Fraser, "Transnationalizing the Public Sphere: On the Legitimacy and Efficacy of Public Opinion in a Post-Westphalian World," *Theory, Culture and Society* 24 no. 4 (2007): 7-30; Kenneth H. Tucker, Jr. "From the Imaginary to Subjectivation: Castoriadis and Tourraine on the Performative Public Sphere," *Thesis Eleven* 83 (November 2005): 42-60; Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," *Public Culture* 14 no. 1 (2002): 49-90.

<sup>15</sup> While there are varying uses of the subaltern term, I am loosely using it as a process describing a historically formed community denied structural power.

<sup>16</sup> Tucker, Jr. *From the Imaginary to Subjectivation*, 42. Emphasis added.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 43. "A public sphere of performance is founded on social practices and bodily imagery as well as shared language...emphasiz[ing] the creation of distinctive cultural styles and new forms of participation in a broadly defined 'politics' that is as much about contested images of legitimate self and group presentation as it is about rational debate about public issues."

<sup>18</sup> I'm drawing from Biran Parks' newspaper article here. See Brian Parks, "Out-of-Focus Puerto Ricans: Cuchifrito Nation," *Village Voice*, April 2, 1996. In its literal sense, "Cuchifrito" is a general term used to describe Puerto Rican fast-food restaurants that may closely resemble taco fast food stands or restaurants in U.S. Mexican/Chicano neighborhoods. When used as a signifier in everyday parlance, it may have a class connotation or quality, suggesting "cheap," "greasy," or "low quality." As it relates to the argument offered here, it's related to the quotidian aspect to everyday conversations exchanged by working-class and poor communities occurring in these eating establishments, much like the barbershop scene in the African-American community. The cuchifrito restaurants, coupled with Bodega corner stores, make for interesting spaces where, as argued here, one encounters more than "small talk" taking place, but are vital local institutions that bring about alternative and counter public spheres that operate under the dominant radar of public debate and popular opinion. For a discussion on the historical significance of Bodegas in Puerto Rican Diaspora communities, refer to Virginia Sanchez-Korrol's, *From Colonia to Community: The History of Puerto Ricans in New York City*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

<sup>19</sup> For a discussion on the relationship between nation-states, sovereignty, and publics, see Nancy Fraser's essay, "Transnationalizing the Public Sphere: On the Legitimacy and Efficacy of

---

Public Opinion in a Post-Westphalian World.” *Theory, Culture and Society* Vol. 24, no. 4 (2007): 7-30.

<sup>20</sup> Arlene Davila, “Culture in the Battleground: From Nationalist to Pan-Latino Projects,” *Museum Anthropology* 23, no. 3 (2000): 26-41.

<sup>21</sup> Adál Maldonado Interview conducted by the author, October 30, 2007.

<sup>22</sup> *Blueprints for a Nation* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Art Galleries, 2002), 26. Emphasis added.

<sup>23</sup> See Wilson A. Valentín-Escobar, “Marketing Memory/Marketing Authenticity in Buena Vista Social Club Recordings.” LASA Congress Presentation, Hyatt Regency Hotel, Miami, 16 March 2000. For the smart use of this concept, see the great work of María Elena Cepeda, *Musical Imagination: U.S.-Columbia Identity and the Latin Music Boom* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); “Columbus Effect(s): Chronology and Crossover in the Latin(o) Music ‘Boom.’” *Discourse* Vol. 23 No. 1 (Winter 2001): 63-81; “Mucho loco for Ricky Martin, or the Politics of Chronology, Crossover and Language within the Latin(o) Music ‘Boom.’” *Popular Music and Society* Vol. 24 No. 3 (Fall 2000): 55-71.

<sup>24</sup> David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 92-108, Chapter 6: “Negation: Areas of Darkness.”

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 104. Emphasis Added.

<sup>26</sup> *Freedom Dreams, The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press), 183.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* 184-185.

<sup>28</sup> For a discussion on the quotidian, see both Michael Sheringham’s *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2006) and Michael Gardiner’s *Critiques of Everyday Life: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>29</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), xix.

<sup>30</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966) and Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (New York: Routledge, 1979). Strauss (21): “Bricolage entails “the continual reconstruction from the same materials, it is always earlier ends which are called upon to play the part of means: the signified changes into the signifying and vice versa.” A “sancocho” is a soup consisting of a variation of food elements, like chicken, read meat, fish, vegetables, and slowly stewed in a broth flavored by a range of spices.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* 17.

<sup>32</sup> For legal details regarding the Critical Art Ensemble case, go to: <<http://caedefensefund.org/index.html>>.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Sandra María Esteves by Author, August 1, 2001.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Dina D’Oyen by Author, March 3, 2002.

- 
- <sup>35</sup> Tristan Meinecke, "Opening the Doors of Creativity for All," in *Surrealist Subversions: Rants, Writings, and Images by the Surrealist Movement in the United States*, ed. Ron Sakolsky (Brooklyn, New York: Autonomedia, 2002), 239.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 239.
- <sup>37</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press), 5.
- <sup>38</sup> Ron Sakolsky, "Surrealist Subversion in Chicago: The Forecast is Hotter than Ever!" in *Surrealist Subversions: Rants, Writings and Images by the Surrealist Movement in the United States*, p. 27.
- <sup>39</sup> Ruth Glasser, *My Music is My Flag: Puerto Rican Musicians and their New York Communities, 1917 – 1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Kenneth Bilby, "The Caribbean as a Musical Region," in *Caribbean Contours*, ed. Sidney W. Mintz and Sally Price (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1985), 181-218. Bilby offers the concept of "musical continuum" which highlights the broad musical knowledge of Caribbean-based musicians largely fostered through inter-Caribbean migration and the colonial penetration of various imperial empires in the region, allowing for musical syncretism across and within spaces. Moreover, from another angle, due to colonial structures, musicians often were required to learn various musical styles for employment, many of which were imported into the islands. As a result, this created a pressure to display a gaze of modernity before colonial authorities and cultural elite, becoming synonymous with upward mobility and abandonment of "pre-modern" ways.
- <sup>40</sup> Image copied from David Garcia, "Going Primitive to the Movements and Sounds of Mambo," *The Musical Quarterly* Vol. 89 (2007): 505-523, but originally published in the *Down Beat* (1954) *Magazine*.
- <sup>41</sup> See Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 71.
- <sup>42</sup> For a wonderful analysis of the various readings of Mambo music and dance, see David Garcia, "Going Primitive to the Movements and Sounds of Mambo," *The Musical Quarterly* Vol. 89 (2007): 505-523.
- <sup>43</sup> See: Ian Cook, Philip Crang and Mark Thorpe, "Tropics of Consumption: 'Getting with the Fetish' of 'Exotic' Fruit?," in *Geographies of Commodity Chains*, eds. Alex Huges and Suzanne Reimer (New York: Routledge, 2004), 173-192; Juliana Mansvelt, *Geographies of Consumption* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005); John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2002).
- <sup>44</sup> See David Garcia article for a full discussion.
- <sup>45</sup> Helen Gilbert, "Bodies in Focus: Photography and Performativity in Post-Colonial Theatre." *Textual Studies in Canada* 10/11 (1998), 17.
- <sup>46</sup> Charles E. Gauss, "The Theoretical Backgrounds of Surrealism." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 2, No. 8 (Autumn, 1943), 37.
- <sup>47</sup> Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 210.
- <sup>48</sup> See: Louis Althusser, "Ideological State Apparatuses" in *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays* (London: New Left Books, 1971), 127-188; For an analysis of Mikhail Bakhtin, refer to

---

Shohat and Stam (180): “Human consciousness and artistic practice, Bakhtin argues, do not come into contact with the ‘real’ directly but rather through the medium of the surrounding ideological world. Literature, and by extension cinema, do not so much refer to or call up the world as [they] represent its languages and discourses. Rather than directly reflecting the real, or even refracting the real, artistic discourse constitutes a refraction of a refraction; that is, a mediated version of an already textualized and ‘discursivized’ socioideological world. This formulation transcends a naïve referential verism without falling into a ‘hermeneutic nihilism’ whereby all texts become nothing more than a meaningless play of signification. Bakhtin rejects naïve formulations of realism...without abandoning the notion that artistic representations are at the same time thoroughly and irrevocably social, precisely because the discourses that art represents are *themselves* social and historical and historical. Indeed, for Bakhtin art is incontrovertibly social, not because it represents the real but because it constitutes a historically situated ‘utterance’ – a complex of signs addressed by one socially constituted subject or subjects to other social constituted objects, all of whom are deeply immersed in historical circumstance and social contingency.”

<sup>49</sup> Carol Becker, “Herbert Marcuse and the Subversive Potential of Art” in *The Subversive Imagination: Artists, Society and Social Responsibility*, ed. Carol Becker (New York: Routledge, 1994), 117. Emphasis added.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. See Adál’s “Decolonized Brain” and the “Welcome to the End of this Century Chant” used in the baptismal ceremony for El Spirit Republic by Pedro Pietri to understand the quoted references.

<sup>51</sup> Charles E. Gauss, “The Theoretical Backgrounds of Surrealism.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 2, No. 8 (Autumn, 1943): 37-44.

<sup>52</sup> For the possibilities avant-garde artists respond to and create, see: Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996).

<sup>53</sup> See Jorge Duany, “Nation, Migration, Identity: The Case of Puerto Ricans,” *Latino Studies* Vol. 1, No. 3 (424-444). Also refer to his book, *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island and in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

<sup>54</sup> Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Routledge, 1989, 1993), 70.

<sup>55</sup> *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1998), edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, 139.

<sup>56</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 80.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. 86.

<sup>58</sup> For an insightful critique on the tensions that exist *within* the Puerto Rican community regarding tensions between U.S. Puerto Rican communities and those living on the island as well as those who return to Puerto Rico after living in the United States for some time (what Juan Flores coins as the return Diaspora, or the “Re-aspóra”), see: Gina Perez, *The Near Northwest Side Story: Migration, Displacement, and Puerto Rican Families* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); and Juan Flores, *The Diaspora Strikes Back: Caribeño Tales of Learning and Turning* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>59</sup> See: Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijalkowski, eds. *Surrealism Against the Current: Tracts and Declarations* (London: Pluto Press, 2001); Louise Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Amanda Stansell, “Surrealist Racial Politics at the Borders

---

of 'Reason': Whiteness, Primitivism, and Négritude," in *Surrealism, Politics and Culture*, eds. Raymond Spiteri and Donald LaCoss (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 111-126.

<sup>60</sup> Adál Maldonado Interview conducted by the author, October 30, 2007. Also refer to the interviews included in the catalogues, *Blue Prints for a Nation* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Art Gallery), 2002, and Adál Maldonado's *Out of Focus Nuyorican* (Cambridge: David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, Harvard University, 2004).

<sup>61</sup> See: "Converging Cultures." *Art Through Time: A Global View*. Documentary Series. PBS. 2009. WNET, New York.  
<<http://www.learner.org/courses/globalart/work/86/index.html>> (accessed on July 15, 2010). Thanks to Dr. Lawrence LaFountain-Stokes for this astute connection and recommendation.

<sup>62</sup> Pedro Pietri's landmark poem, "The Puerto Rican Obituary" begins with: "They worked, They worked /They were always on time/ They were never late/ They never spoke back when they were insulted/ They worked /They never took days off that were not on the calendar /They never went on strike without permission/They worked ten days a week and were only paid for five/They worked/They worked /They worked/and they died/They died broke/They died owing/They died never knowing what the front entrance of the first national city bank looks like/Juan/Miguel/Milagros/Olga/Manuel/All died yesterday today/and will die again tomorrow/passing their bill collectors on to the next of kin..." See: *Puerto Rican Obituary* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973).

<sup>63</sup> Adál Maldonado Interview conducted by the author, October 30, 2007.

<sup>64</sup> Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 27. Emphasis added.

<sup>65</sup> Janet Wolff, *Aesthetics and the Sociology of Art* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1983), 16.

<sup>66</sup> Quoted in Carol Becker, 117.

<sup>67</sup> "Urgent Communiqué." El Puerto Rican Embassy. 2009.

<sup>68</sup> Emma Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999).

<sup>69</sup> Interview with the Author, March 3, 2002.

<sup>70</sup> For an insightful discussion about the social context that spurred alternative art spaces, see: Martha Rosler, "Place, Position, Power, Politics," in *The Subversive Imagination: Artists, Society, and Social Responsibility*, ed. Carol Becker (New York: Routledge, 1994), 55-76.

<sup>71</sup> Satirizing the results of the 1998 Plebiscite, El Embassy displayed a portrait of a bare-chested "nun" representing the "Order of the Church of Our Mother of the Tomatoes." The "nun" spoofed the surprising results, highlighting that neither of the dominant options were victorious. These are results of the 1998 plebiscite: Commonwealth: .6%; Independence: 2.54%; Statehood 46.49%; None of the Above: 50.3%. For a discussion and "imperial" report on the results of this election and for the unresolved status of Puerto Rico, refer to: *Report By the President's Task Force on Puerto Rico's Status*. United States. December 2005. To see the image of the "nun of the above," see: *Blueprints for a Nation* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Art Galleries, 2002), 47.

<sup>72</sup> Peter Bürger, 49.



## Conclusion

This dissertation tells a story of an artist community that believed in making interventions at multiple levels through a path of cultural practices. The study offers a snapshot of collective efforts to dream a new future of emancipation and equality under particular circumstances and a historical moment. The work and activism of the New Rican Village allow us to reflect on the historical tensions between structure and agency for a largely colonial migrant community of Puerto Ricans in New York City beginning in the 1970s. The artists in this study, I claim, sought to invoke ideological, aesthetic, social, political, and spatial changes through the use of cultural practices *in their own terms*. The study suggests, however, that this effort to engage in these goals of change was a challenge for a variety of reasons.

First, in an effort to institute an avant-garde space and community, the artists of the New Rican Village encountered misunderstanding and resistance from within the same community they derived, represented, and with whom they hoped to engage in decolonial practices. However, while they were often misunderstood by members of the Puerto Rican/Nuyorican and Latina/o New York community, they were also resisted by dominant avant-garde art circles. From the evidence gathered, Joseph Papp, the founder of the *Public Theatre* and the *New York Shakespeare Festival*, was the most prominent non-Latino/a

cultural arts programmer who understood and supported the work and goals of the NRV. And while Papp certainly had the financial and cultural capital to sponsor and authorize their public performances and in-city tours, the NRV wrestled between performing the “traditional culture” of their ancestors with the new trans-creative cultural practices that reflected their diasporic identities and artistic sensibilities. If one recalls Eddie Figueroa’s opening presentation before a live South Bronx audience where he introduced the New Rican Village (see chapter 1) as “Broadway in the South Bronx,” we observe how Figueroa aims to describe and also anticipate bewilderment by audience members of the forthcoming concert. The performance, he cautioned, would not present typical Puerto Rican culture, but rather “the old and the new, the traditional in Puerto Rico and the traditional here in New York.” Figueroa understood that the NRV would potentially be viewed as being less authentically Puerto Rican for its avant-garde character; it was assumed that audience members might be unaware of the avant-garde traditions that informed and inspired the performance.

Interestingly, members of the dominant (read white) avant-garde circles also grappled with NRV performances. This collective was perceived as simply too ethnic. In this regard, this community of critics and spectators require the Puerto Rican cultural knowledge and background (and potentially the interest) to appreciate and comprehend the aesthetic interruptions that the NRV enacted. Nevertheless, this tension of being misunderstood by what they believed to be their own communities and also the dominant, non-Latina/o artist communities

and critics both left the NRV in an indeterminate state, which may explain their historical invisibility.

While the NRV self-defined as avant-garde and hoped to bring about social change within the Nuyorican/Latina/o communities, their intention to enact a distinct cultural repertoire that built upon and transformed well-entrenched traditions was not always welcomed, understood, or appreciated. Historically, many avant-garde collectives have faced this dilemma. While undertaking an avant-garde role of collective public representation and aesthetic innovation, we witness a community perceived as potentially pretentious for its cultural work and also unfairly “representing” Puerto Ricans through public performance in a manner incompatible with lumpen and working-class conceptions of “cultural authenticity.” Although not explicitly stated, we can conclude that Figueroa and his fellow NRV artists faced dismissal by fellow Latina/o New Yorkers for both their detected cultural blasphemy and perceived elitism, and as inauthentic avant-gardists by members of the dominant art world. Yet, this dilemma has customarily alienated avant-garde communities. Avant-gardes are inadequately understood and theorized when first active. It takes retrospective studies such as this one to help historically frame and conceptualize their significance within a historical moment. While avant-garde communities are recognized for their aesthetic practices and insistent connections between art and the social world, an inability for the NRV community to evince their worthiness of acceptance and recognition in their own terms remained a battle under the conditions in which this battle was waged.

Because they were at the mercy of public funding sources, such as the federal government's CETA (Comprehensive Employment and Training Act) program, arts funding from the City of New York, Joseph Papp's *Shakespeare in the Park Festival*, and individual donations, their claims to engage in aesthetic innovation operated on a plane of material social practices, as Raymond Williams claims.<sup>1</sup> The ability to have performances at the New Rican Village Loisaída's performance space or tour under Papp's *Shakespeare in the Park* festival were wrapped in financial conditions mostly controlled by others. According to the numerous interviews conducted for this study, most of the patrons' contributions at the NRV barely covered monthly rental fees. The struggle to pay the monthly rent to the building's landlord and their eventual failure to pay rent is what prompted the landlord to terminate the lease and seek a new tenant (the Pyramid Club). This also occurred at a time when most landlords were terminating leases in an effort to bring about businesses that catered to the entering gentry of the neighborhood. The claims of aesthetic innovation are constrained when financial matters are decided by others and market forces. Politicians and political priorities, not artists, shape fiscal budgets.

Fundamentally, artistic sovereignty and aesthetic innovation remain encircled within a capitalist market system. It informed the NRV's resistance to commercial art forces as well as their aesthetic distinction. Most music venues at the time were part of what's called a "cuchifrito" music circuit; this scene of venues largely caters to the dancer and financially capitalizes on a successful musical formula for entertainment. These fiscal priorities favored a set-formula of

success, and countered the musical, extemporaneous improvisations NRV musicians preferred and practiced. Moreover, NRV musicians were able to “afford” to perform and experiment at weekly jam sessions because they performed in the commercial spaces on weekends. This schedule afforded them an opportunity to earn a living while they participated in NRV performance workshops on weekday evenings and weekend afternoons. Financial matters constituted both the commercial, *cuchifrito* scene as well as the aesthetic experimentation at the NRV. While the NRV was an experimental sanctuary that welcomed and supported aesthetic innovation, it was short lived on account of the Center’s reliance on external funding. Funding obstacles became a form of social control, a factor this collective resisted but eventually yielded to.

For example, the regular pressure to apply for funds and engage with fundraising practices commonly imparted ambiguity for the future of the NRV institutional space. The artists’ insistence to engage in avant-garde practices was certainly admirable, but it also generated minimal revenue for the center. They were thus forced to substantiate their aesthetic mission and preferences through grant proposals, and hence consistently rely on Federal, State and private financial support. Given that their artwork was largely a Puerto Rican arts space engaging in diasporic Latina/o cultural activities, there existed limited private funding sources available to them. There was no perceived “market” or legitimate community of taste embedded within the institutional culture of the New York art world.<sup>2</sup> Wealthy Boricua benefactors were uninterested in the artwork practiced at the NRV for it defied traditional art conventions; this

collective also held contempt for the class hierarchies within capitalism and that shaped the artworld in general. NRV artists also understood that private benefactors would potentially impact their cultural programming, generating a level of aesthetic authority that contradicted the Center's philosophy. Joseph Papp was the only known private benefactor of the NRV whose cultural visions matched the NRV's mission. One can speculate if the NRV adjusted its principles of art, innovation and institutional sovereignty as well as their private, non-profit status they may have survived the volatility that is an inevitable component of alternative, marginal art spaces and organizations. "The main issue is not *if* artists must make certain adjustments; rather the task is to determine what distinctive shape the predominant form of mutual adjustment assumes. It is not a matter of freedom *or* control, but how much of each can be discerned in a concrete situation."<sup>3</sup> Holding steadfast to the Center's vision without particular adjustments may have contributed to its temporary closure. But one would be remiss to overlook how racism, sexism, censorship and other discriminatory beliefs account for which arts institutions receive public funding.

With the elimination of CETA programs and decreased funding for the arts during the 1980s and 90s, less funds were available for arts programming, and even less were available for political, avant-garde and "ethnic" arts performances, programming and institutions. This eventually led to the Lower East Side closing of the NRV in 1979. Forced to move, the NRV temporarily relocated to el Barrio and the South Bronx, two locations consisting of mostly poor and working-class Puerto Ricans. Unlike the bohemian sensibility of the

Lower East Side, with a longstanding history of avant-garde movements and artists, both neighborhoods were not a haven or a magnet for avant-garde artistic institutions, although that did not preclude avant-garde experimentation occurring in them. There was no entrenched avant-garde arts scene in these settings. While the real estate market was much more affordable it lacked an informed audience able to appreciate the NRV's artistic innovation. The neighborhood thus did not have the same "regulars" that often attended the weeknight performances at the Loisaida location. The dwindling audience eventually led Eddie Figueroa to close these two sites and find temporary shelter at other existing venues, such as the Soundscape music club in the West Side of Midtown Manhattan. A converted loft space, the Soundscape was one of several arts venues replacing the abandoned factories on account of deindustrialization. Regularly pitched as "An evening with the New Rican Village at Soundscape," the artists were now beholden to the generosity and aesthetic preferences and decision-making power of its owner, Verna Gillis, as confirmed in an interview with her.<sup>4</sup>

As the NRV closed, the Soundscape club opened.<sup>5</sup> I argue that the New Rican Village's Latin jazz experimentations made it possible for this genre to thrive at Soundscape, especially because the music and loft scene had existed through the musical explorations performed by NRV musicians. The NRV laid the foundation for the genre's popularity and growth. The musical audience they cultivated followed them to this recently inaugurated venue. Yet, they were no longer an autonomous institution. While they moved around to various private

and non-profit venues, similar to their previous in-city tours, they were now obligated to maintain a market audience interested and able to afford entrance fees at for-profit venues like Soundscape.

Despite avant-gardist claims of transcending the social world, this avant-garde was very much constituted by it. In essence, the avant-garde is very much embedded in the economic realities they aspired to circumvent and transcend. The desire for autonomy, performance space, aesthetic interventions, and social change came in conflict with material social practices. Consequently, the insight this study offers is that these economic processes (1) constrained the NRV's ability to create a lasting impact within the local cultural arts scene, (2) influenced their historical visibility, and (3) hampered their public arts programming. This ultimately impacted recognition of their artwork.

A response to these constraints was the virtual reality of the Puerto Rican Embassy project. As discussed in chapter 3, the Puerto Rican Embassy is a spaceless institution that exists virtually on the Web and emphasizes emancipation as a conceptual and decolonial imaginary/space. El Puerto Rican Embassy and the accompanying Spirit Republic of Puerto Rico are fictitious worlds that do not find a home in the current social reality of colonialism, economics, and the limitations of sovereign territory. It is a creative response to the material constraints afforded to a colonized community still struggling for adequate resources. In addition, it prompts a disruption of the "nationality" as "location" equation and promotes the existence of translocalities and mobile sovereignties where national, exiled and diasporic communities can exist. Soil is



no longer the sought after variable of national identity: “While soil is a matter of spatialized and originary discourse of belonging...” not all national communities “are concerned with territorial integrity in the same way and for the same reasons.”<sup>6</sup> The Puerto Rican Embassy is still enacting a collective sense of placemaking, but the places are plural and not singular. The autonomy and control derives from the ability to foster a surrealist imagination of exilic existence.

While Eddie Figueroa and the community of NRV artists instituted an artistic venue that engaged in avant-garde practices, from the beginning of the institution’s existence, they consistently wrestled with the desire to belong and mark an autonomous space they could control. In the long run, they constantly negotiated the utopist intentionality of their own agency with the structural limitations that constitute the social world. The NRV became a placemaking entity that embodied belonging; and their public performances facilitated their goal to actively inscribe their bodies and attendant identities within real and semiotic spaces *within the city*, placemaking Gotham as a Latin@ territory they can claim.

The chapters in this study ultimately chronicle an alternative, counter narrative of avant-gardism rooted in working-class activism; they highlight the importance of agency and interventions made within and through Latin jazz; and finally, they propose that the NRV cultural arts programming went beyond the simple display of public performances, but served as an intervention upon the cultural public sphere of New York City. The NRV created a new Latin@ public

sphere that tactically transformed, tropicalized, and disrupted the cultural semiotics of urban space. We observe subaltern, colonial bodies of disruption claiming a “right to the city” through their activism.

### **Future Directions for this Study**

The limitations of a dissertation format require one to build an initial study and develop it in the future. I propose to expand upon and examine new areas and themes already addressed in the dissertation. For example, a new chapter that focuses on the visual productions created under the banner of the Puerto Rican Embassy, such as the “Out-of-Focus Nuyorican Portraits” and the “West Side Story Redux” video, both created by the multi-media artist, Adál Maldonado, would generate a much needed visual analysis that connects to Adál’s principal concern: how to construct visual representations that deconstruct colonialism and its accompanying narratives while also using media as an instrument to propose alternative perspectives on the colonial and racial dramas that constitute Puerto Rican diasporic everyday life. These two installations coincide with bodega surrealism and act as a response to invisibility and trauma caused by colonialism, migration and racism. The 13-minute West Side Story video imaginatively uses creative visual and auditory techniques to reverse the effect that both the theatrical musical and film had of criminalizing the Puerto Rican Diaspora community. On the theme of disalienation and invisibility, Adál compiled 20 headshots of various artists and “Ambassadors,” most whom are well known actors, musicians, and artists. These blurred pictures visually represent the

political ambiguity of the status of the island, the seen but largely ignored and deemed invisible Puerto Rican Diaspora community, and the psychological trauma that accompanies colonialism and racism.

Also warranted is elaboration on the interconnections between Puerto Rican and Chicano avant-garde artists and their historical significance for Latina/o communities. Scholars such as Tomas Ybarra-Frausto and Cary Cordova have theorized Chicana/o Avant-gardism; likewise Michelle Wilkinson and Yasmin Ramírez initialized a foundation to theorize the Nuyorican avant-garde. In the near future, I seek to elaborate on the interconnections between both communities and theorize the similarities and differences between them and draw upon how both communities propose new ways of theorizing U.S. avant-gardism “from the margins” in an effort to pressure those histories that seem to arbitrarily disconnect transgressive art practices engaged by Latinas and Latinos from the “historical” (white, European) avant-garde.

The Latin Jazz music programming of the New Rican Village necessitates further analysis. Latin jazz music emerged as a vital form for musical creativity, breaking away from salsa music as a primary space for innovative exploration. Similarly, the work of particular ensembles and artists, such as the late Mario Rivera, Hilton Ruiz, Steve Turre, Brenda Feliciano and the ongoing Fort Apache Band, will illuminate the musical interventions Latina/o artists undertook, paving the way to understand how a younger, well-informed generation of musicians used music to foster a refuge of creativity while intentionally making interventions from previous musical styles and traditions, many of which are erroneously

assigned to the Caribbean. Of crucial importance are the ways in which musical production advanced a cultural scene across other artists and forms, offering an opportunity to analyze how such relationships were mutually constituted and advanced.

Further analysis on the collaborations that occurred between Joseph Papp's *Shakespeare in the Park Festival*, and Billy Taylor's *Jazz and Dance Mobile* programs, along with the public arts programming of the New Rican Village, will offer important historical perspectives that also resemble the racial and cultural exchanges that have traditionally operated within Gotham's urban streets. All three organizations engaged in significant collaborations that call for a more detailed discussion. Mr. Papp, largely known as laying the groundwork for public arts programming within New York City, was instrumental in supporting and cultivating the work of many public arts initiatives that were primarily organized by small, but culturally significant and often underfunded cultural arts organizations. Through Papp's guidance and support, many of the premiere arts events that are part of the cultural catalog of New York City came about because of Papp's involvement and sponsorship. Moreover, he was ideologically supportive of the social and political goals espoused by both the New Rican Village and the Jazz Mobile. As two arts organizations that have been largely ignored, this collaboration brings together the importance of Black and Nuyorican/Latin@ organizational efforts that represent the on-the-ground cooperation and transcultural exchange that emerged in parts of Latin America and the Caribbean and continued within U.S. diasporic social spaces,

neighborhoods, and venues. This process also highlights how New York Latina/o music was part of the musical programming marketed to a larger public as Black music, confirming some of the musical scholarship spearheaded by Ruth Glasser, Juan Flores, and George Lipsitz.

The NRV came about in the mid-70s, during a time in which other New York based cultural arts organizations were also or recently established. Subsequent critiques of the goals, distinctions, and collaborations across these various cultural arts institutions would potentially reveal interesting and varying ways “culture” was and remains understood and used within the historical moment of the 1960s through the current moment. Numerous cultural arts organizations like El Museo del Barrio, the Nuyorican Poets Café, El Taller Boricua (the Puerto Rican Workshop), the Puerto Rican Traveling Theater, Pregones Theater, the Charas/El Bohio Cultural and Community Center, the Clemente Soto Vález Cultural and Educational Center, the Bronx Museum of the Arts, the Longwood Arts Project, Performance Space 122, the Association of Hispanic Artists, and the Soundscape music club were established during this historical window, and many share similar aesthetic philosophies and approaches with the NRV. Histories of these institutional art organizations would help shed light to how art became an extension of social struggles for change in New York City.

Finally, the Soundscape music venue, established in the 1979 by Verna Gillis, became a musical sanctuary when the NRV lost its lease at the 101 Avenue A location. Soundscape became a crucial loft space during the 80s, and

much like the NRV, showcased improvised musical jam sessions by some of the premier Jazz, Latin jazz, and “world” musicians and ensembles. Little has been written about the Soundscape as a music venue and its centrality as a temporary haven for Latin jazz musical experimentation. Interestingly, while the NRV showcased mostly local artists and had a distinctive musical vision of ethnicity, culture, and politics, the Soundscape’s opening coincided with and was inspired by the “world music” and “world beat” genres that became popular during this time. Along with the historical migration of the Cuban musicians that arrived to the U.S. mainland on account of the 1980 Mariel Boatlift, Gillis, as the owner and musical programmer for Soundscape, emphasized Cuban and world music over what she conceived as less authentic, ethnic music in her lineup. From her view, the Cuban musicians who arrived to the United States, like Paquito D’Rivera and Daniel Ponce, were largely more gifted and authentic than the mostly second-generation musicians from the NRV.

World music, and Gillis’ musical preferences, was, for some NRV musicians, more than semantics, but served as an extension of racial ideology regarding culture, music, and race. The “premodern” representations that coincided with world music discourses countered the racial gaze that NRV artists wrestled to dismantle. Such representations were thus contradictory to the uncivilized tropes that had long constituted diasporic Puerto Ricans. There was considerable tension between Gillis and the NRV musicians. Her preferences for the recently arrived Cuban musicians like Paquito D’Rivera and Daniel Ponce certainly fostered a pecking order that emphasized musical authenticity operating

within particular nation-state locations and contradictorily seemed incompatible with the fundamental premises of the transnational, deterritorializing of place, identity, and music that ostensibly informed the aesthetic tenets of the Soundscape venue. Moreover, location became synonymous with “authority” of ownership to musical claims.<sup>7</sup> “Struggles over musical propriety,” Susan McClary observes, “are themselves political struggles over whose music, whose images of pleasure or beauty, whose rules of order shall prevail.”<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, this distinct understanding of cultural production became an equivalent extension of a racial hierarchy of its cultural agents. The tension that developed between the NRV musicians now performing at Soundscape and Verna Gillis’s cultural views speaks to larger issues around institutional sovereignty as integral to cultural production and how cultural agency is constrained and framed in ways that go beyond artists’ control. This is a vital history that will be included in a future manuscript of this study.

Since the early days of the historical avant-garde, the arts have served as a refuge for freedom. The cultural production of the NRV enacted a similar vision of the arts. As the late multi-instrumentalist Mario Rivera noted in an interview, the NRV served as a refuge from the exploits of colonialism and capitalism. I only hope the analysis in this project demonstrates how the New Rican Village undertook a similar vision of emancipation through the arts and served as a sanctuary for a community struggling to shape its future. This art collective, at a critical historical moment, instituted a cultural blueprint for subsequent Latin@

generations and institutions to envision the arts as a central agent and social practice for liberation.



---

<sup>1</sup> See: Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 158-164.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of Latina/o ethnicity as a market, see Arlene Davila's *Latinos, Inc.: The Marketing and Making of a People* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). For an excellent discussion on the tensions between national and pan-ethnic labeling and funding in the arts, see: Arlene Davila, "Culture in the Battleground: From Nationalist to Pan-Latino Projects," *Museum Anthropology* 23.3 (2000): 26-41.

<sup>3</sup> See Steven C. Durbin, *Bureaucratizing the Muse: Public Funds and the Cultural Worker* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987) 156. Emphasis in the original quote.

<sup>4</sup> Verna Gillis, Interview by author. October 27, 2007. New York, N.Y. Here's an excerpt of that interview that confirms the control Gillis had over Soundscape's musical programming.

Verna Gillis: Soundscape opened in 1979. This thing with Eddie Figueroa was right away. And in a certain way, it's what helps put it right on the map.

Wilson Valentín: You mean Soundscape?

VG: Yeah. Definitely.

WV: Did you find that as a music space or center, were there similarities between Soundscape and Nuyorican village?

VG: Oh, yes. Eddie brought it in and then Eddie kind of faded out.

WV: How so?

VG: I'm not sure. So many other complicated things were going on at that time. He didn't have the same--*it was my space*. Do you know what I mean? He had definitely founded another home, *but his relationship to it changed*.

WV: So the New Rican Village was now at Soundscape. Did Eddie Figueroa have a say in any of the programming?

VG: No. I was doing the programming.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Palmer, "Cuban Jazz Finds Home in 52<sup>nd</sup> Street Loft," *New York Times*, June 12, 1981, C21.

<sup>6</sup> Arjun Appadurai, "Sovereignty without Territoriality: Notes for a Postnational Geography," in *The Geography of Identity*, ed. Patricia Yaeger (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 46-47.

<sup>7</sup> For an analysis on world music, see: Steven Feld, "Notes on World Beat," *Public Culture* 1.1 (1988): 31-37; Steven Feld, "From Schizophonia to Schismogenesis: Discourses and Practices of World Music and World Beat," in *The Traffic in Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology*, ed. George E. Marcus and Fred R. Myers (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 96-127; Steven Feld, "A Sweet Lullaby for World Music," *Public Culture* 12.1 (2000): 145-171; Veit Erlmann, "The Aesthetics of the Global Imagination: Reflections on World Music in the 1990s," *Public Culture* 8.3 (1996): 467-487.

---

<sup>8</sup> Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2002), 28.

# Appendix

**New York Shakespeare Festival**  
**Department of Cultural Affairs, City of New York**  
**Mobile Theater Summer 1978**

JOSEPH PAPP presents

An Evening At  
**New Rican Village**  
 Music Poetry Dance Theater



POSTER © 1978 DESIGN SANDY ESTEVES PHOTOGRAPHY JOSE ANSEL SERRA/JOSE OMBRESI

LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES  
 YERK COLLEGE  
 PARK AVE.  
 YORK, N.Y. 10021

NOT TO BE REPRODUCED OR  
 REPRODUCED WITHOUT  
 PERMISSION

**Eduardo Figueroa: Director**

Choreographer: Willie Figueroa Poetry: Pedro Pietri and Sandra Esteves Musical Arranger: Oscar Hernandez

<p><b>MANHATTAN &amp; STATEN ISLAND:</b>                      Thurs. &amp; Fri., Aug. 10 &amp; 11                      EAST RIVERS PARK                      Athletic Field at 6th St.</p> <p>Sat. &amp; Sun., Aug. 12 &amp; 13                      FOX HILL PLAZA                      Targee St. &amp; Vanderbilt Ave., S.I.</p> <p>Tues. &amp; Wed., Aug. 15 &amp; 16                      P.S. 117                      108th St. &amp; Third Ave.</p>	<p><b>BRONX:</b>                      Thurs. &amp; Fri., Aug. 17 &amp; 18                      E. 156th ST. &amp; ST. ANN'S AVE.                      Interim Site                      Improvement Ballfield</p> <p>Sat. &amp; Sun., Aug. 19 &amp; 20                      MULLALLY PARK                      Jerome Ave. &amp; 162nd St.</p> <p>Tues. Aug. 22                      VAN CORTLANDT PARK                      Broadway &amp; 250th St.</p>	<p><b>QUEENS:</b>                      Wed. &amp; Thurs., Aug. 23 &amp; 24                      QUEENSBIDGE PARK                      Vernon Blvd. &amp; 41st Ave., L.I.C.</p> <p>Fri., Aug. 25                      ST. ALBANS PARK                      Merrick Blvd. &amp; 113th St.</p> <p>Sat. &amp; Sun., Aug. 26 &amp; 27                      FLUSHING MEADOWS PARK                      111th St. &amp; 49th Ave.</p>	<p><b>BROOKLYN:</b>                      Tues., Aug. 29                      MCCARREN PARK                      Driggs Ave. &amp; Union Ave.</p> <p>Wed. &amp; Thurs., Aug. 30 &amp; 31                      FT. GREENE PARK                      Willoughby Ave. &amp; Washington Pk.</p> <p>Fri., Sept. 1                      RED HOOK RECREATIONAL CTR.                      Bay St. &amp; Columbia St.</p> <p>Sat. &amp; Sun., Sept. 2 &amp; 3                      SUNSET PARK                      6th Ave. &amp; 44th St.</p>
---	---	--	---

**Evenings at 8:00**  
**ADMISSION FREE**

PeP, Box 66 Folder 4

Figure 43 - New York Shakespeare Festival and New Rican Village Mobile Theater Poster, Summer 1978

New York Shakespeare Festival Mobile Theater - Summer 1978

AN EVENING WITH THE NEW RICAN VILLAGE

Evenings at 8:00  
ADMISSION FREE

Touring Schedule

Manhattan & Staten Island:

Thurs	Aug 10	East River Park, Athletic Field at 6th Street
Fri	Aug 11	East River Park, Athletic Field at 6th Street
Sat	Aug 12	Fox Hill Plaza - Staten Island - Targee Street and Vanderbilt Avenue
Sun	Aug 13	Fox Hill Plaza - Staten Island - Targee Street and Vanderbilt Avenue
Mon	Aug 14	DAY OFF
Tues	Aug 15	P.S. 117 108th Street & Third Avenue
Wed	Aug 16	P.S. 117 108th Street & Third Avenue

Bronx:

Thurs	Aug 17	
Fri	Aug 18	
Sat	Aug 19	Mullaly Park, Jerome Avenue & 162nd Street
Sun	Aug 20	Mullaly Park, Jerome Avenue & 162nd Street
Mon	Aug 21	DAY OFF
Tues	Aug 22	Van Cortlandt Park, Broadway & 250th Street

Queens:

Wed	Aug 23	Queensbridge Park, Vernon Blvd & 41st Avenue
Thurs	Aug 24	Queensbridge Park, Vernon Blvd & 41st Avenue
Fri	Aug 25	St. Albans Memorial Park, Merrick Blvd & 113th Ave
Sat	Aug 26	Flushing Meadows Park, 111th Street & 49th Avenue
Sun	Aug 27	Flushing Meadows Park, 111th Street & 49th Avenue
Mon	Aug 28	DAY OFF

Brooklyn:

Tues	Aug 29	McCarren Park, Driggs Avenue & Union Avenue
Wed	Aug 30	Ft. Greene Park, Willoughby Ave & Washington Park
Thurs	Aug 31	Ft. Greene Park, Willoughby Ave & Washington Park
Fri	Sept 1	Red Hook Rec Center, Bay Street & Columbia Street
Sat	Sept 2	Sunset Park, 6th Avenue & 44th Street
Sun	Sept 3	Sunset Park, 6th Avenue & 44th Street

CENTRO ARCHIVES  
NOT TO BE COPIED OR  
REPRODUCED WITHOUT  
PERMISSION

CENTRO LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES  
HUNTER COLLEGE  
195 PARK AVE.  
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021

PeP: Box 65 Folder 11

Figure 44 - New York Shakespeare Festival and New Rican Village Mobile Theater Performance Schedule, Summer 1978

NEW YORK SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL  
and the  
Department of Cultural Affairs, City of New York

Delacorte Theater

Central Park

Summer 1978

JOSEPH PAPP

*presents*

## **New Rican Village**

*Conceived & Directed by* EDUARDO FIGUEROA  
*Choreography by* WILLIE FIGUEROA  
*Musical Direction by* ANDY GONZALEZ

*Associate Producer* BERNARD GERSTEN

### PART ONE—OLD VILLAGE IN PUERTO RICO

### PART TWO—RICAN RENAISSANCE: MUSIC, DANCE, POETRY

Poetry by Pedro Pietri  
*performed by* Luis Perez, Eduardo Figueroa

"Blue Bossa"  
Mario Rivera and the Salsa Refugees

"New Ricans" (Latin Jazz)  
New Rican Village Dance Company

"Loving Madness"  
Brenda Feliciano with Mario Rivera and the Salsa Refugees  
Mario Rivera and the Salsa Refugees featuring Hilton Ruiz at piano

INTERMISSION (*fifteen minutes*)

### PART THREE—AN EVENING AT NEW RICAN VILLAGE

"Wanting You"  
Brenda Feliciano with Mario Rivera and the Salsa Refugees

"Mystic Voyager" by Sandra Maria Esteves  
Andy Gonzalez and Nestor Torres, flute and bass duet

"Amandote Siempre"  
Nancy Cruz and Willie Figueroa  
Music played by Andy Gonzalez and Nestor Torres

"Tres Palabras"  
Andy Gonzalez and Nestor Torres

Poetry by Pedro Pietri

Music with Libre

"Libre" by Americo Casiano

Figure 45 - New York Shakespeare Festival Performance Program, Delacorte Theater, Central Park, Summer 1978

CENTRO ARCHIVES  
NOT TO BE COPIED OR  
REPRODUCED WITHOUT  
PERMISSION

**Joseph Papp  
presents**

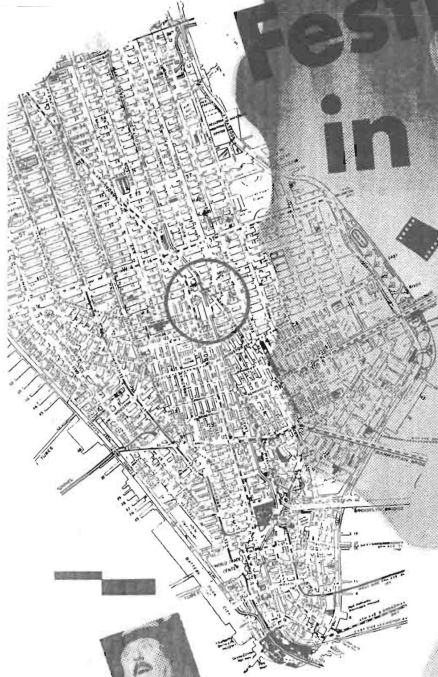


**Festival Latino in New York**, August 8 to 18. For the fifth year, Joseph Papp brings to New York City the best of Latino theater, film, music and dance. This major cultural event gathers award-winning productions from 15 Latin American countries, Europe and the United States.

**Festival Latino in New York**, with companies from: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Puerto Rico, Uruguay and Venezuela, as well as Spain and the United States.

**Festival Latino in New York**, one of a kind: 60 shows, in 5 languages (translation available for many of them) and over 400 performers.

# Festival Latino in New York



**Festival Latino en Nueva York  
La Festa Latina a Nuova York  
O Festival Latina em Nova Yorqui  
Le Festival Latin a New York**

**August 8-18 1985**

**Oscar Ciccone, Director  
Cecilia Vega, Associate Director**



PePi Box 64 Folder 9

Figure 46 - Joseph Papp Presents Festival Latino in New York, August 8-18 1985

Mr. Joseph Papp  
New York Shakespeare Festival  
Public Theatre  
425 Lafayette Street  
New York, New York 10003

NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021  
THE NEW YORK  
SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL  
PUBLIC THEATRE  
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

CENTRO ARCHIVES  
NOT TO BE COPIED  
REPRODUCED WITHOUT  
PERMISSION

Dear Mr. Papp:

We write as concerned citizens who are shocked and distressed at your choice of material for use and development in the workshop productions financed by our tax dollars. We feel that it is incumbent on the New York Shakespeare Festival PUBLIC Theater, as a publicly funded institution, to recognize and respond to the needs, interests and desires of its constituents, i.e. the people of New York.

We are referring specifically to your current workshop production of "Sancocho" or "Mondongo", by Ray Ramirez and a staff of collaborators. The choice of this "work in progress" over the wealth of available completed dramatic material is quite a disappointment. "Sancocho-Mondongo" is degrading, demeaning and insulting to the Black and Latin people it professes to represent. Innocent hard-working victims of political, economic and social oppression are portrayed as ignorant, backward, helpless, subhuman creatures, incapable of intelligent thought or decision-making. The characters of "Sancocho-Mondongo" are hackneyed caricatures of racial and ethnic stereotypes, totally devoid of any vestige of individuality, credibility or basis in reality. There is not a single personality in "Sancocho-Mondongo", just a collection of cliches.

"Sancocho-Mondongo" is suffering from a pitiful want of a script. Having already reached Version H, this "work in progress" still lacks a plot or characters. In order to compensate for this paucity of dramatic substance, Ramirez et al, have inserted the diversionary tactic of flamboyant song and dance numbers. Serious theater leaves an audience with the option to learn something new or to broaden their perceptions of what is already familiar. The intent here is pure, mindless entertainment -- a vaudeville act.

There is nothing inherently wrong with vaudeville, but it is not an appropriate theatrical medium for the representation and portrayal of a serious historical episode. The migration of Puerto Ricans to the United States is the direct, predetermined result of a series of events beginning with the United States acquisition of Puerto Rico from Spain during the Spanish-American War of 1898, when the United States immediately established a military government in Puerto Rico. In 1917, the United States Congress passed the Jones Act, unilaterally conferring upon Puerto Ricans United States citizenship with all its contingent responsibilities.

Figure 47 – Undated Letter to Joseph Papp by Members of S.W.A.P Informing Him of their Disapproval of Negative Depictions of Puerto Ricans as Represented in a Play titled, "Sancocho-Mondongo." Papp was Sponsoring this Show.

The United States also instituted its well-known industrialization policy, which replaced a traditional agrarian economy with North American light manufacturing enterprises employing mainly women. A whole society of agricultural laborers were made irrelevant to the Puerto Rican economy. As a result, during and immediately after World War II, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, with the cooperation and collaboration of the State of New York, began to actively encourage immigration of this superfluous population to fill the need for a large, cheap labor force on the mainland.

In "Sancocho-Mondongo" this historical reality is not only totally misunderstood and misrepresented, but is also reduced and cheapened to the level of low slap-stick comedy. This is demeaning and degrading to a whole generation of Puerto Ricans, as well as to their descendants, including many prominent New Yorkers. Among this group are many respected and renowned writers, whom the Public Theater seems to have conveniently overlooked in its frantic search for the new Latin musical smash hit of the seventies.

Instead of consulting with or utilizing the talents of these established literary artists, the Public Theater has opted for the artificial creation of a new author, with no previous record of writing or publication. This type of tactic is an affront to all serious writers, and particularly to those who have committed themselves to the sincere portrayal of the Puerto Rican experience on the mainland.

Just in case you are not familiar with these writers and their work, we have attached for your information a documented lists of names, addresses, publications and theatrical productions. We hope this will be helpful to you in your ongoing search for Latino dramatic talent.

Until Further Notice

**S.W.A.P.**

(Serious Writers And Poets)



THE LATIN INSOMNIACS M.C., INC. and THE NEW RICAN VILLAGE C.C.  
present

AN EVENING OF  
**MACHO  
POETRY**

WITH

Pedro Juan Pietri Aponte  
Jesus Papoleto Melendez

Dr. Willie Pietri  
Richard Davidson  
Jose - Angel Figueroa  
Sammy Diaz  
Juan Valenzuela

AT

**NEW RICAN VILLAGE** *Cultural Center*  
101 AVENUE 'A' OFF EAST 7TH STREET 475-9505

WED. NOVEMBER 9<sup>th</sup>, 1977 - 8:00 PM - \$2.00 FREE ADMISSION

Ladies Wear Dresses

Figure 48 - A Poetry Event Organized by the Latin Insomniacs and the New Rican Village,  
November 9, 1977.

CENTRO ARCHIVO  
NOT TO BE COPIED  
REPRODUCED WITHOUT  
PERMISSION

CENTRO LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES  
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE  
100 PARK AVE  
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021

THE SOUTH BRONX SURREALIST FESTIVAL THE FIRST

July 15, 1977: (or 1978)

all the signs that direct traffic & pedestrians  
gave us instructions to do whatever we please,  
it was christmas again in this foreign country and  
we were fully dressed-up in colorful wrapping paper  
avoiding thoughts of alarm clocks & calenders  
tuned in to hit songs nobody listens to anymore  
colliding with clothing lines many feet above  
earth level where old friends are glad to meet again  
to discuss the future of the past, to turn on  
fire hydrants on this very hot incorrect time of day  
& night if you are into shutting & opening your eyes  
in the process of taking the 1st step forward,  
into the smile in the eyes of elated children,  
who told their parents they were going to church  
& when the coast was clear enough to see nothing  
their faces were painted by poets & painters &  
& carpenters assigned to repair clouds in the sky,  
they were fed up with the presence of desperation  
in the faces of the windows of abandoned buildings  
where card games continue after everybody moves out  
& it's still safe to shoot up on the missing roof,  
you can stop a child from fantasizing with threats  
of maturity, but you will never keep them away from  
the land where it's legal to make believe daily,  
a well dress well fed well mannered family of five  
pose for an instamatic colorful photo in front of  
a flattened out tenanment where music is still heard  
coming from the lost memory of a disfigured victrola  
from a funeral parlor where weddings were celebrated

Figure 49 - The First of Many Satirical Posters Announcing the South Bronx Surrealist Festival,  
July 15, 1977 (or 1978)

# Fundación del New Rican Village Está Acreditada Por el Movimiento Cultural de Artistas Hispanos

Por ALBERTO ALONSO

Se ha desatado un movimiento cultural por el área neoyorquina del Lower East Side que obligó a fundar el New Rican Village Cultural Center, hace escasamente un año.

Atardecido en la formación de programas artístico-culturales encontramos a Eduardo Figueroa, actor y director teatral arceibeno que hizo el papel de Juan cuando "Short Eyes", e Miguel Piñero, subió a escena de la Iglesia Riverside y del Iwan Beaumont Theatre, enclavado en la zona del Lincoln Center.

"Estamos luchando porque el Concilio de las Artes nos ayude financieramente, con la finalidad de subsistir en este medio y continuar funcionando como organización de arte y cultura", nos señala de inmediato -con la manga al codo- el hijo zodiacal de Virgo que ha cursado estudios de psicología en el profesor hebreo Ira Progoff.

Dos semanas atrás el New Rican Village tuvo en su local el Teatro de Orilla con la producción "Bongo, Pongo y Mungo", de Rodolfo Santana, dirigida por Jorge Rodríguez e interpretada por Soledad Romero, Francisco Prado y Norberto Zerner. De inmediato el grupo prepara la escenificación de una obra en inglés del autor boricano Pedro Pietri, que el público verá en noviembre próximo.

"Sin dinero hemos desarrollado una serie de actividades que incluyen exhibiciones de arte -pintura, dibujo, etc.-; baile, conciertos, películas, lectura de obras, un festival de arte y, en las pasadas, teatro, con "Bongo, Pongo y Mungo", expresa Eddie Figueroa, que sin cortar el hilo de la información revela: "Los lunes y jueves por la noche presentamos el Conjunto libre, que está tocando por lo que se cobra en puerta... Otras noches tenemos otros artistas, sin pago, como un aporte de arte".

### Filosofía

Firme creyente de que en la vida "hay cosas más allá de lo que uno ve", Eduardo Figueroa, de nombre y apellido iguales al estelar lanzador de los Yankees, su compatriota que hace unos días amenazó con abandonar el equipo; se ciñe a los valores filosóficos de que "existen otras perspectivas humanas" y que las cosas más importantes en nuestra envoltura física son "la mente, el corazón y el espíritu".

"A nosotros se nos unen muchos artistas, pues el movimiento de integración por el arte y la cultura es grande, y es un movimiento que no está penetrado por un interés económico excesivo, pues sus lineamientos son de "perspectivas humanistas". El arte es una de las maneras de convivir, de brindar algo en beneficio de los demás... De comunicarse. Por eso nuestros objetivos se encaminan, profesionalmente, a integrar -desarrollar compañías de teatro, de baile, musicales... seguir dando conciertos, exposiciones, con miras a la consolidación de ese movimiento hispanoamericano".

Próximamente el Consejo para las Artes del Estado de Nueva York, hará revisión de la planilla de solicitud de fondos que le dirigió el New Rican Village, por la suma de \$5,000. De concedérsele dicha cantidad, la agrupación proseguirá el sendero trazado: difundir arte y cultura en inglés y español, como vehículos de comunicación y acercamiento popular.

"Incluso planeamos traer artistas de Puerto Rico, situando sus obras en inglés o español; porque si existe alguna diferencia entre el artista de acá y el de Puerto Rico, es de localización ambiental... unos allá y otros acá, pero el fin es el mismo; arte y cultura... ; y a eso vamos!

Junto a Eduardo Figueroa figuran como responsables en el New Rican Village, Ana Ramos, Miguel Sierra y Willie Figueroa.



LABOR: Eduardo (Eddie) Figueroa, director del New Rican Village Cultural Center, lucha por una subvención del Consejo para las Artes del Estado de Nueva York, mientras Willie Figueroa (arriba) imparte una clase de baile, y la profesora Ana Ramos (izq.) baila con Li sette González. La organización abrió hace un año en la parte baja de Manhattan.

EL DIARIO-LA PRENSA, Viernes, 21 de Octubre de 1977

To Box 10 Folder 19

Figure 50 - El Diario - La Prensa Newspaper Article on the Financial Hardships Facing the New Rican Village, October 21, 1977

The Friends of Eddie Figueroa, The New Rican Village and The Puerto Rican Embassy

*present*

# A LATIN JAZZ SUPER STAR JAM RITES OF PASSAGE II

Thursday, June 28, 1990  
9 PM

Celebrating 20 Years of a Cultural Tradition

*featuring*

THE NEW RICAN VILLAGE ALUMNI/ALL STAR BAND

*with (partial list)*

HILTON RUIZ DAVE VALENTIN ANDY GONZÁLEZ JERRY GONZÁLEZ PAPO VASQUEZ  
DAVID SANCHEZ PIRO RODRÍGUEZ STEVE BERRIOS

*with Special Guests*

MARIO BAUZA AND GRACIELA

*under the Musical direction of Andy González*

*also featuring*

BOBBY SANABRIA AND ASCENSION

Puerto Rican Embassy Theater Ensemble

*with ANA RAMOS FIGUEROA, MIGUEL SIERRA, PAUL PÉREZ AND EDDIE FIGUEROA*

*directed by EDDIE FIGUEROA*

Poet and Playwright

THE REV. PEDRO PIETRI

Master of Ceremonies

PEDRO PIETRI, MIGUEL SIERRA, AND SPECIAL MC COUNT GUILLERMO, FROM THE HEREAFTER/NOW

## *The Village Gate*

Bleecker and Thompson Streets

Tickets \$20

Information 212 534-1645/212 242-3374

### *The Party Continues Into the 21st Century*

PePi Box 66 Folder 5

PUERTO LIBRARY AND ARCHIVE  
PUERTO RICAN COLLEGE  
695 PARK AVE.  
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021

CENTRO ARCHIVES  
NOT TO BE COPIED OR  
REPRODUCED WITHOUT  
PERMISSION

Figure 51 - A New Rican Village Poster Announcing a Multi-Arts Performance at the Village Gate Music Club, June 28, 1990.

DAILY NEWS, SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 1979



Tom Middlemiss/Daily News

Miguel Sierra (left) and Ana Ramos meet with Ed Figueroa, artistic director of New Rican Village, outside the group's padlocked former headquarters.

## New Rican Village victim of hard times

By BOB HERBERT

**D**ESPITE A NEW COAT OF PAINT, the building at 101 Avenue A on the Lower East Side is no prize. It's an old, dirty tenement in the middle of a deteriorating neighborhood.

For the past three years, however, the first floor and basement have been a haven for a group of Puerto Rican artists and intellectuals who have banded together in an organization called New Rican Village.

The tenement — drafty walls, bare wood floors and all — became their cultural center and it has been the scene of some of the most innovative music, dancing, acting and poetry to come out of the Puerto Rican community in several years.

But recently disaster struck. The group's poets, painters, actors and musicians have been put out, the center has been padlocked and the landlord says he'll never let them back in.

"Why?" says landlord Sheldon Evans. "The reason's very simple — they haven't paid the rent."

"Everybody is in a panic," says Eduardo Figueroa, the village's artistic director. "It's like throwing somebody out of a church."

He acknowledges that the village owed Evans \$3,500 in back rent when it was evicted one month ago.

"We have the money now," says

Figueroa, "but he won't take it."

According to Figueroa, the New York State Council on the Arts gave the group a grant that has enabled it to meet its financial obligations and begin the next step of their work.

The eviction comes right on the heels of the New Rican Village's biggest triumph, a rousing third anniversary concert at the Delacorte Theater in Central Park last Aug. 20, sponsored by Joseph Papp and the New York Shakespeare Festival.

As for the village's eviction, Figueroa complains that the group was thrown out because the members had renovated their portion of the building and Evans now feels he can get a higher rent from someone else.

"This place was run down when we came in," says Figueroa. "The walls were collapsing, the floors had holes in them. We put in maybe \$14,000 worth of renovations."

Figueroa says the village was paying \$600 a month rent but after the eviction Evans asked the group to pay an additional \$150 a month, give up the basement, and sign a six-month lease.

Now, says Figueroa, Evans is seeking \$1,400 a month from new tenants.

Evans declined to discuss the details of the dispute. Asked if he would let the artists return to the building now that they can pay the back rent, he replied only:

"Would you?"

Lo To Box 10 Folder 19

Figure 52 - New York Daily News Article Announcing the Eviction of the New Rican Village from its Original location at 101 Avenue A in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, November 11, 1979

# New Rican Village

CULTURAL CENTER

EMERGENCY PRESS STATEMENT  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, PLEASE

CONTACT: EDUARDO FIGUEROA  
(212) 594-7703/ 9 AM-1 PM  
Mon. through Fri.

## NEW RICAN VILLAGE CONTINUES PROGRAMS

### IN FACE OF EVICTION DISPUTE!

Juan  
Miguel  
Milagros  
Olga  
Manuel

All died yesterday today  
and will die again tomorrow  
Hating fighting and stealing  
broken windows from each other  
Practicing a religion without a roof  
The old testament  
The new testament  
according to the gospel  
of the internal revenue  
the judge and jury and executioner  
protector and eternal bill collector  
from "Puerto Rican Obituary"  
by Pedro Pietri

NOISSIMED  
PERMISSION  
REPRODUCED WITHOUT  
NOT TO BE COPIED OR  
CENTRO ARCHIVES

CENTRO ARCHIVES  
HUNTER COLLEGE  
695 PARK AVENUE  
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021

It was about nine o'clock on a Tuesday pre-summer morning in South Bronx. Staffers of New Rican Village were already busy stuffing envelopes for the upcoming South Bronx Grassroots Run. Unexpectedly, word filtered to Village director Eduardo Figueroa that blue-uniformed officials of the ASPCA were on the premises. A bizarre chain of events quickly unfolded. In a matter of minutes, the animal protectors were joined by members of the NYPD, city building inspectors, a white-collared cleric and most conspicuously, members of United Hispanic Construction Workers (UHCW) -- who until that moment had shared quarters with New Rican Village -- and United Bronx Parents.

The melee expanded chaotically with the arrival of reporters and

PiPi Box 66 Folder 13

Cont'd .....

Figure 53 – An Undated Four-Page Press Release Authored by the New Rican Village Describing and Disputing their Eviction from their South Bronx Location.

a camera crew from Channel 41. UHCW members took up the chant, "We are evicting you"! The invasion's true purpose now unfolded clearly: force New Rican Village out of its renovated six-story home at 834 E. 156th Street and claim it on behalf of the UHCW-UBP group. Village staffers fled into the street. Director Figueroa found himself locked out of the city-owned building facing an unrelenting stream of enraged invective.

New Rican Village, the nine-year old cultural organization that had drawn much acclaim for its artistic and musical work both in the East Village and the South Bronx, and had recently acquired a net lease on the one-time tenement building, now a cultural facility, on East 156th Street and had looked forward to enlarging its links with other groups in the South Bronx community.

Struggling with a minimal budget and the support of a devoted Board of Directors and circle of friends, the Village met all obstacles head-on, including a recent shut-off by Con Ed of all gas and electricity in the building in a dispute over a reasonable payment schedule.

- The UHCW-UBP claim the building was not properly maintained.
- IN FACT, New Rican Village, despite very limited resources, has painted the building, opened two new galleries and provided full, daily maintenance of all six floors.
- THEY claim that pipes and other plumbing have been vandalized from the building.
- IN FACT, New York City property inspectors found no traces of any vandalism anywhere in the building. On the contrary, New Rican Village has bought and installed several hundred dollars worth of new plumbing fixtures.
- THEY claim that the building has been underused by the Village's failure to provide programs and services.

Cont'd.....

-- IN FACT, the Village has introduced a rich program of activities, since February, 1985, alone including:

- \* Dance, poetry, music and painting, featuring many well-known New Rican artists.
- \* Thursday night Latino Jazz series.
- \* Young people's showcase for street rappers and break dancers.
- \* A regular series of play readings.
- \* Special events, such as a concert by Conjunto Libre at the Bronx Museum, a seminar and performance at the Hunter College Center for Puerto Rican Studies during Hispanic Awareness Week, a workshop presentation for Manhattan Community College Continuing Education Program.

Yet despite this unjustified assault against New Rican Village the center is looking to the future and continuing its planned programs:

- \* August 18, '85 - Second Annual South Bronx Grassroots Run and Community Cultural Celebration at Crotona Park.
- \* July 29, '85 --- Arts Festival at the Public Theater.
- \* September 22'85- All-day Arts Festival sponsored by the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College.
- \* Ongoing young people's theater workshop, including a presentation of Shamsul Elam's "Vampires", nominated for a Pulitzer prize.
- \* Performance of Pedro Pietri's "No More Bingo At The Wake", originally produced by New Rican Village.
- \* Theater presentation at Manhattan Community College's Triplex Theater.
- \* Outdoor summer performances on the streets of the South Bronx.

In addition, the following groups have joined with New Rican Village to build the showcase cultural center at 834 E. 156th Street:

- Johnny Colon's East Harlem Music School
- The Afro-Caribbean Poetry Theater, under the direction of Sandra  
Cont'd.....



Maria Esteves

-Latin Insomniac Motorcylce Club Ensemble Theater

-A studio collective of New Rican visual artists.

As a result of UHCW-UEP's unsubstantiated charges, the Department of General Services, Division of Real Property has suspended the New Rican Village's net lease and has denied access to the building.

In this dispute, New Rican Village has two simple objectives: to reinstate its lease with New York City for a cultural and arts facility throughout the entire six-story building and to find a swift resolution of this dispute that only serves to deprive the South Bronx community of a vibrant and much-needed cultural center.

#####

## Bibliography

### Archives

Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College CUNY, New York.

The Lourdes Torres Papers, Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College CUNY, New York.

The Pedro Pietri Papers, Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College CUNY, New York.

The Richie Pérez Papers, Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College CUNY, New York.

Rogers and Hammerstein Collection, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center.

Theater on Film and Tape Archive, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center.

The Billy Rose Collection, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center.

General Research, New York Public Library Schomburg Center.

Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books Collection, New York Public Library Schomburg Center.

Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, Bobst Library, New York University.

Labadie Collection, University of Michigan Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

### ***Also from the Personal Archives of:***

Sandra María Esteves

Andy Gonzalez

Mario Rivera

Dr. Roberta Singer  
**Oral Histories**

***Conducted by Author:***

Berrios, Steve. Interview by Author. October 25, 2001. New York.

Casiano, Americo. Interview by Author. February 24, 2002, New York.

———. Interview by Author. March 30, 2002, New York.

Dalto, Adela. Interview by Author. January 31, 2008, New York.

D'Oyen, Dina. Interview by Author. March 3, 2002, New York.

Esteves, Sandra María. Interview by Author. August 1, 2001, New York.

Feliciano, Brenda. Interview by Author. March 8, 2008, New York.

Gillis, Verna. Interview by Author. October 27, 2007, New York.

———. Interview by Author. August 14-19 2001, New York.

———. Interview by Author. August 2, 1996, New York.

———. Interview by Author. February 1, 1997, Ann Arbor, MI.

———. Interview by Author. December 4-5, 1997, New York.

Maldonado, Adál. Interview by the Author. October 30, 2007. New York.

Meléendez, Jesús "Papoletto". Interview by Author. March 16, 2002, New York.

Ramos, Ana. Interview by the Author, New York.

Rivera, Mario. Interview by Author. August 23, 2001, New York.

Ruiz, Hilton. Interview by Author. September 26, 2001, New York.

Turre, Steve. Interview by Author. January 3, 2002, New York.

Valentín, Dave. Interview by Author. September 23, 2001, New York.

Vazquez, Angel "Papo". Interview by Author. September 25, 2001, New York.

## Books, Articles, and Media

- Abu-Lughod, Janet L., ed. *From Urban Village to East Village: The Battle for New York's Lower East Side*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994.
- Althusser, Louis. "Ideological State Apparatuses." *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*. London: New Left Books, 1971. 127-188.
- Aparicio, Frances R., and Susana Chávez-Silverman, eds. *Tropicalizations: Transcultural Representations of Latinidad*. University Press of New England: Hanover, 1997.
- Aparicio, Frances R. "Cultural Twins and National Others: Allegories of Intralatin Subjectivities in U.S. Latino/a Literature." *Identities: Global Studies* 16.623 (2009): 622-641.
- . *Listening to Salsa: Gender, Latin Popular Music, and Puerto Rican Cultures*. Hanover, NH: Published by University Press of New England [for] Wesleyan University Press, 1998.
- . "On Sub-Versive Signifiers: U.S. Latina/o Writers Tropicalize English." *American Literature* 66 (1994): 795-801.
- . "Reading the 'Latino' in Latino Studies: Toward Reimagining our Academic Location." *Discourse* 21.3 (1999): 3-18.
- Aponte-Parés, Luis. "What's Yellow and White and has Land all Around it? Appropriating Place in Puerto Rican Barrios." *Centro: Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies* 7.1 (1995): 8-19.
- Appadurai, Arjun, and Carol A. Breckenridge. "Why Public Culture?" *Public Culture Bulletin* 1.1 (1988): 5-9.
- Appadurai, Arjun. "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy." *the Phantom Public Sphere*. Ed. Bruce Robbins. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993. 269-295.
- . "Sovereignty without Territoriality: Notes for a Postnational Geography." *The Geography of Identity*. Ed. Patricia Yaeger. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996. 40-58.
- Arredondo, Gabriela F., et al, eds. *Chicana Feminisms: A Critical Reader*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.

- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds. *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*. New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Ault, Julie, ed. *Alternative Art World, 1965-1985: A Cultural Politics Book for the Social Text Collective*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.
- Ayala, César, and Rafael Bernabe. *Puerto Rico in the American Century: A History since 1898*. Durham, NC: University of Carolina Press, 2007.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. M, and Michael Holquist. *The Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays*: Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.
- Ballester, Diogenes, and Museo de las Americas. *Homenaje Alma Boricua, XXX Aniversario: Presentación Portafolio Comemorativo Taller Alma Boricua = Taller Alma Boricua Portafolio Exhibit[i]on : Museo De Las Americas, Cuartel De Ballaja, 19 De Septiembre De 2001 Al 19 De Febrero De 2002*. San Juan, P.R.: Galerias Prinardi, 2001.
- Barthes, Roland. "Semiology and The Urban." *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*. Ed. Neil Leach. New York: Routledge, 1997. 91-110.
- Becker, Carol. "Herbert Marcuse and the Subversive Potential of Art." *The Subversive Imagination: Artists, Society, and Social Responsibility*. Ed. Carol Becker. New York: Routledge, 1994. 113-129.
- Becker, Carol. *The Subversive Imagination: Artists, Society, and Responsibility*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Becker, Howard Saul. *Art Worlds*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.
- Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. New York: Penguin, 1972.
- Berliner, Paul. *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Bilby, Kenneth. "The Caribbean as a Musical Region." *Caribbean Contours*. Eds. Sidney W. Mintz and Sally Price. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985. 181-218.
- Blight, David. *Fredrick Douglass' Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1989.
- Blueprints for a Nation*. 2002. Lehigh University Art Galleries, Bethlehem, PA.

- Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990.
- Bowler, Ann, and Blaine McBurney. "Gentrification and the Avant-Garde in New York's East Village: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly." *Theory, Culture, and Society* 8 (1991): 49-77.
- Briggs, Laura. *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.
- Broyles Gonzalez, Yolanda. *El Teatro Campesino: Theater in the Chicano Movement*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1994.
- Buchloh, Benjamin H. D. "The Primary Colors for the Second Time: A Paradigm Repetition of the Neo-Avant-Garde." *October* 37 (1986): 41-52.
- Burchell, Graham, and Collin Gordon, eds. *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality, with Two Lectures by and an Interview with Michel Foucault*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.
- Bürger, Peter. *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
- Burton, Richard D. E. *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition, and Play in the Caribbean*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997.
- Cabranes, José A. *Citizenship and the American Empire: Notes on the Legislative History of the United States Citizenship of Puerto Ricans*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979.
- Calinescu, Matei. *The Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1987.
- Cepeda, María Elena. "'Columbus Effect(s): Chronology and Crossover in the Latin(o) Music 'Boom'.'" *Discourse* 23.1 (2001): 63-81.
- . "Mucho Loco for Ricky Martin, Or the Politics of Chronology, Crossover, and Language within the Latin(o) Music 'Boom'." *Popular Music and Society* 24.3 (2000): 55-71.
- . *Musical Imagination: U.S.-Columbia Identity and the Latin Music Boom*. New York: New York University Press, 2010.

- Charmaz, Kathy. "Grounded Theory." *Approaches to Qualitative Research: A Reader on Theory and Practice*. Ed. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. 496-521.
- . "Qualitative Interviewing and Grounded Theory Analysis." *Inside Interviewing: New Lenses, New Concerns*. Eds. James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003. 311-330.
- Chávez, Ernesto. *Mi Raza Primero! (My People First): Nationalism, Identity, and Insurgency in the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles, 1966-1978*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.
- Chevigny, Paul. *Gigs: Jazz and the Cabaret Laws in New York City*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Clifford, James. "On Ethnographic Surrealism." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23.4 (1981): 539-564.
- Cohen, Sara. "Identity, Place, and the Liverpool Sound." *Ethnicity, Identity, and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*. Ed. Martin Stokes. New York: Berg, 1994. 117-134.
- Collins, Lisa Gail, and Margo Natalie Crawford. *New Thoughts on the Black Arts Movement*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2006.
- Conjunto Libre. *Con Salsa...Con Ritmo, Volume 1.*, 1976.
- Cook, Ian, Philip Crang, and Mark Thorpe. "Tropics of Consumption: Getting with the Fetish of 'Exotic' Fruit?" *Geographies of Commodity Chains*. Eds. Alex Hughes and Suzanne Reimer. New York: Routledge, 2004. 173-192.
- Cordova, Cary. "The Heart of the Mission: Latino Art and Identity in San Francisco. 3215349." Ph.D. University of Texas at Austin, 2005.
- Creswell, John W. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998.
- Davila, Arlene. "Culture in the Battleground: From Nationalist to Pan-Latino Projects." *Museum Anthropology* 23.3 (2000): 26-41.
- . *Latinos Inc: The Marketing and Making of a People*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.
- de Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

- del C. Fernandez, Johana L. "Radicals in the Late 1960s: A History of the Young Lords Party in New York City, 1969-1974." Ph.D. Columbia University, 2004.
- Denning, Michael. *The Cultural Front: Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth-Century*. New York: Verso Press, 1996.
- Deutsche, Rosalyn. *Evictions and Spatial Politics*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996.
- Dietz, James L. *Economic History of Puerto Rico: Institutional Change and Capitalist Development*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986.
- Duany, Jorge. "Nation, Migration, Identity: The Case of Puerto Ricans." *Latino Studies* 1.3 (2003): 424-444.
- . *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island and in the United States*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.
- Dubin, Steven C. *Displays of Power: Memory and Amnesia in the American Museum*. New York: New York University Press, 1999.
- Dudley, Shannon. "Judging 'by the Beat': Calypso Versus Soca." *Ethnomusicology* 40.2 (1996): 269-298.
- Duffy Burnett, Christina, Burke Marshall, and José A. Cabranes, eds. *Foreign in a Domestic Sense: Puerto Rico, American Expansion, and the Constitution*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001.
- Duncan, Carol. "Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship." *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991. 88-103.
- Durbin, Steven C. *Bureaucratizing the Muse: Public Funds and The Cultural Worker*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- El Museo Del Barrio. *Taller Alma Boricua: Reflecting on Twenty Years of the Puerto Rican Workshop, 1969-1989*. New York: El Museo Del Barrio, 1990.
- El Puerto Rican Embassy. *Urgent Communiqué*. 2009.
- Elam, Harry. *Taking it to the Streets: The Social Protest Theater of Luis Valdez and Amiri Baraka*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1997.
- Enck-Wanzer, Darrel. *The Young Lords: A Reader*. New York: New York University Press, 2010.



- Erlmann, Veit. "The Aesthetics of the Global Imagination: Reflections on World Music in the 1990s." *Public Culture* 8.3 (1996): 467-487.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 1967.
- Feld, Steven. "From Schizophrenia to Schismogenesis: Discourses and Practices of World Music and World Beat." *The Traffic in Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology*. Ed. George E. Marcus. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995. 96-127.
- . "Notes on a World Beat." *Public Culture* 1.1 (1988): 31-37.
- . "A Sweet Lullaby for World Music." *Public Culture* 12.1 (2000): 145-171.
- Fernandez, Johanna L del C. "Radicals in the Late 1960s: A History of the Young Lords Party in New York City, 1969-1974." PhD Columbia University, 2004.
- Fernandez, Lilia. "Latina/o Migration and Community Formation in Postwar Chicago: Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Gender, and Politics, 1945-1975." Ph.D. University of California, San Diego, 2005.
- . "Of Immigrants and Migrants: Mexican and Puerto Rican Labor Migration in Comparative Perspective, 1942-1964." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 29.3 (2010): 6-39.
- Fernandez, Raul. *From Afro-Cuban Rhythms to Latin Jazz*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.
- Flores, Juan. *The Diaspora Strikes Back: Caribeño Tales of Learning and Turning*. New York: Routledge, 2009.
- . "The Latino Imaginary: Meanings of Community and Identity." *From Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000. 191-203.
- Flores, Tatiana. "Clamoring for Attention in Mexico City: Manuel Maples Arce's Avant-Garde Manifesto 'Actual N°1'." *Review: Literature and Arts of the Americas* 37.37 (2004): 208-220.
- Floyd Jr., Samuel A. "Black Music in the Circum-Caribbean." *American Music* 17.1 (1999): 1-38.
- Foner, Eric, and Olivia Mahoney. *A House Divided: American in the Age of Lincoln*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1990.

- Fong, Timothy. *Ethnic Studies Research: Approaches and Perspectives*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2008.
- Foss, Sonja K., and William J. C. Waters. "Toward a Theory of Agentic Orientation: Rhetoric and Agency in Run Lola Run." *Communication Theory* 17 (2007): 205-230.
- Foster, Hal. *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996.
- Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces." *Diacritics* 16.1 (1986): 22-27.
- Franklin, Grace A., and Randall B. Ripley. *CETA: Politics and Policy, 1973-1982*. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1984.
- Fraser, Nancy. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of an Actually Existing Democracy." *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Ed. Craig Calhoun. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994.
- . "Transnationalizing the Public Sphere: On the Legitimacy and Efficacy of Public Opinion in a Post-Westphalian World." *Theory, Culture, and Society* 24.4 (2007): 7-30.
- Frith, Simon. "Music and Identity." *Questions of Cultural Identity*. Ed. Stuart Hall. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1996. 108-127.
- Fusco, Coco. *English is Broken here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas*. New York: The New Press, 1995.
- . "Fantasies of Oppositionality." *Art, Activism, and Oppositionality: Essays from Afterimage*. Ed. Grant H. Kester. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998: 61-75.
- Garcia, David. "Contesting that Damned Mambo: Arsenio Rodríguez, Authenticity, and the People of El Barrio and the Bronx in the 1950s." *Centro: Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies* 11.1 (2004): 154-175.
- . "Going Primitive to the Movements and Sounds of Mambo." *The Musical Quarterly* 89 (2007): 505-523.
- Gardiner, Michael. *Critiques of Everyday Life: An Introduction*. New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Gast, Leon, Dir. *Our Latin Thing: (Nuestra Cosa)*. Perf. Anonymous Film. Vampisoul, 2004.

- Gauss, Charles E. "The Theoretical Backgrounds of Surrealism." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 2.8 (1953): 38-44.
- Ghani, Ashraf. "Space as an Arena of Represented Practices: An Interlocutor's Response to David Harvey's 'from Space to Place and Back again'." *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change*. Eds. John Bird, Barry Curtis, and Tim Putnam. New York: Routledge, 1993. 47-57.
- Giddens, Anthony. *The Constitution of Society: Outline the Theory of Structuration*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
- Gilbert, Helen. "Bodies in Focus: Photography and Performativity in Post-Colonial Theatre." *Textual Studies in Canada* 10.11 (1998): 17-32.
- Gilloch, Graeme. *Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1996.
- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Glaser, B. G. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. Chicago: Aldine, 1967.
- Glasser, Ruth. *My Music is My Flag: Puerto Rican Musicians and their New York Communities, 1917-1940*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.
- Goldman, Shifra M. "Between 'Aqui' and 'Alla': Thirty Years of the Taller Boriqua." *Homenaje Alma Taller Boricua XXX Aniversario*. San Juan: Museo De Las Américas, 2001. 20-28.
- . *Dimensions of the Americas : Art and Social Change in Latin America and the United States*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Gonzalez, Andy. N.D. *Interview on WKCR, Columbia University*. New York, NY. Vol. Audiotape.
- Gonzalez, Jerry. *Ya Yo Me Curé*. Sunnyside Communications. 1995.
- Gottdiener, Mark, and Alexandros Ph. Lagopoulos, eds. *The City and the Sign: An Introduction to Urban Semiotics*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.
- Gottdiener, Mark. *Postmodern Semiotics: Material Culture and the Forms of Postmodern Life*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995.
- Gray, Herman. *Cultural Moves: African Americans and the Politics of Representation*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.

- Grosfoguel, Ramon. *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.
- Grossberg, Lawrence. "On Postmodernism and Articulation: An Interview with Stuart Hall." *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*. Eds. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen. New York: Routledge, 1996. 131-150.
- Grupo Folklórico y Experimental Nuevayorquino. *Concepts in Unity*. Salsoul Records, 1994 [1975].
- Gutiérrez, David. *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.
- Halbwachs, Maurice. *On Collective Memory*. Trans. Lewis A. Coser. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Hall, John R., Blake Stimson, and Lisa Tamiris Becker. *Visual Worlds*. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Hall, Stuart. "The Work of Representation." *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* Ed. Stuart Hall. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997. 13-74.
- . "The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity." *Culture, Globalization, and the World System*. Ed. Anthony D. King. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997. 19-39.
- . "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities." *Culture, Globalization, and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity*. Ed. Anthony D. King. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997. 41-68.
- Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation." *Framework* 36 (1989): 68-81.
- . "Culture, Media and the Ideological Effect." *Mass Communication and Society*. Eds. James Curran, Michael Gurevitch, and Janet Woollacott. Beverly Hills: Sage, 1979 [1977]. 215-348.
- Hall, Stuart, and Open University. *Representation : Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1997.
- Haney López, Ian. *Racism on Trial: The Chicago Fight for Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Bellknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003.

- Harding, James Martin, and John Rouse. *Not the Other Avant-Garde: The Transnational Foundations of Avant-Garde Performance*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006.
- Harding, James Martin. *Cutting Performances: Collage Events, Feminist Artists, and the American Avant-Garde*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2010.
- Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1989.
- Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. New York: Routledge, 1979.
- Hedrick, Tace. *Mestizo Modernism: Race, Nation, and Identity in Latin American Culture*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003.
- Hernandez Cruz, Victor. *Tropicalizations*. New York: Reed, Cannon & Johnson Communications Co., 1976.
- Hinderliter, Beth, et al. "Introduction." *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics*. Eds. Beth Hinderliter, et al. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2009. 1-28.
- History Taskforce, Centro de Estudio Puertorriqueños. *Labor Migration Under Capitalism: The Puerto Rican Experience*. New York: Monthly Review, 1979.
- Hoare, Quintin, and Geoffrey Nowell, eds. *Antonio Gramsci: Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. New York: International Publishers, 1971.
- Hobbs, Stuart D. *The End of the American Avant Garde*. 37 Vol. New York: New York University Press, 1997.
- hooks, bell. *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. Boston: South End Press, 1990.
- Hutton, Patrick H. *History as an Art of Memory*. Burlington, VT: University of Vermont, 1993.
- Jackson, Travis A. "Performance and Musical Meaning: Analyzing 'Jazz' on the New York Scene." PhD diss., Columbia University, 1998.
- Jardim, Gary. "The New Rican Village." N.D.
- Karp, Ivan, Steven Lavine, and Rockefeller Foundation. *Exhibiting Cultures : The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991.

- Kelley, Robin D. G. "The Art Ensemble of Chicago - all about Freedom." *Surrealist Subversion: Rants, Writings, and Images by the Surrealist Movement in the United States*. Ed. Ron Sakolsky. Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2002. 640-644.
- . *Freedom Dreams : The Black Radical Imagination*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2002.
- . "New Monastery: Monk and the Jazz Avant-Garde." *Black Music Research Journal* 19.2 (1999): 135-168.
- Knight, Cher Krause. *Public Art : Theory, Practice and Populism*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008.
- Kruse, Holly. "Subcultural Identity in Alternative Music Culture." *Popular Music* 12.1 (1993): 33-41.
- Kwon, Miwon. *One Place After another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002.
- LaCross, Donald. "Introduction: Surrealism and Romantic Anticapitalism." *Morning Star: Surrealism, Marxism, Anarchism, Situationism, Utopia*. Michael Löwy. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009. vii-xxx.
- Lacy, Suzanne. *Mapping the Terrain : New Genre Public Art*. Seattle, Wash.: Bay Press, 1995.
- Laó-Montes, Agustin. "'Resources of Hope: Imagining the Young Lords and the Politics of Memory'." *Centro: Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies* 7.1 (1995): 34-49.
- . "Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York City." *Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York City*. Eds. Agustin Laó-Montes and Arlene Davila. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001. 1-52.
- Lateef, Yusef. "The Pleasure of Voice in Improvised Music." *Views on Black American Music* 3 (1985): 43-47.
- Lehman, David. *The Last Avant-Garde: The Making of the New York School of Poets*. New York: Anchor Books, 1999.
- Lennon, Mary Ellen. "A Question of Relevancy: New York Museums and the Black Arts Movement, 1968-1971." *New Thoughts on the Black Arts Movement*. Ed. Lisa Gail Collins and Margo Natalie Crawford. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2006. 92-116.

- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *The Savage Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966.
- Lewis, Earl. *In their Own Interests: Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth-Century Norfolk*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- Lewis, George. *A Power Stronger than itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- Lewis, Oscar. *La Vida; a Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty--San Juan and New York*. New York: Random House, 1966.
- Leyshon, Andrew, David Matless, and George Revill, eds. *The Place of Music*. New York: Guilford Press, 1998.
- Lipsitz, George. *American Studies in a Moment of Danger*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.
- . *Dangerous Crossroads: Popular Music, Postmodernism, and the Poetics of Place*. New York: Verso Press, 1994.
- Lloyd, Richard. *Neo-Bohemia: Art and Commerce in the Postindustrial City*. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Lovell, Nadia. "Introduction." *Locality and Belonging*. Ed. Nadia Lovell. New York: Routledge, 1998. 1-23.
- Löwy, Michael. *Morning Star: Surrealism, Marxism, Anarchism, Situationism, Utopia*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009.
- Maffi, Mario. "The Other Side of the Coin: Culture in Loisada." *From Urban Village to East Village: The Battle for New York's Lower East Side*. Ed. Janet L. Abu-Lughod. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1994. 142-143.
- Makeham, Paul. "Performing the City." *Theatre Research International* 30.2 (2005): 150-160.
- Maldonado, Adál. *Out of Focus Nuyorican*. Cambridge, MA: David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, 2004.
- Maldonado-Dennis, Manuel. *Emigration Dialectic: Puerto Rico and the U.S.A.* New York: International Publishers, 1980.
- Mansvelt, Juliana. *Geographies of Consumption*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005.

- Manuel, Peter L., Kenneth Bilby, and Michael D. Largey, eds. *Caribbean Currents: Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006.
- Martin, Randy. "Artistic Citizenship: Introduction." *Artistic Citizenship: A Public Voice for the Arts*. Eds. Mary Schmidt Campbell and Randy Martin. New York: Routledge, 2006. 1-22.
- Martinez de Pison, Javier. "Pasaporte Boricua." *El Diario/La Prensa*: 5. July 10 (1994): 5-11.
- McClary, Susan. *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*. 2nd ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.
- Meinecke, Tristan. "Opening the Doors of Creativity for all." *Surrealist Subversions: Rants, Writings, and Images by the Surrealist Movement in the United States*. Ed. Ron Sakolsky. Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2002. 237-239.
- Mele, Christopher. *Selling the Lower East Side: Culture, Real Estate, and Resistance in New York City*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
- Mercer, Kobena. "Diaspora Culture and the Dialogic Imagination: The Aesthetics of Black Independent Film in Britain." *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*. Eds. Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur. Malden MA: Blackwell, 2003. 247-260.
- Mignolo, Walter. "The Many Faces of Cosmo-Polis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism." *Cosmopolitanism*. Eds. Carol A. Breckenridge, et al. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002. 157-187.
- Mirabal, Nancy. "'No Country, but the One we must Fight for': The Emergence of an 'Antillean' Nation and Community in New York City, 1860-1901." *Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York*. Eds. Agustin Laó-Montes and Arlene Davila. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001. 57-72.
- Morales, Ed. *Living in Spanglish: The Search for Latino Identity in America*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2002.
- Morales, Iris. "¡Palante, Siempre Palante! The Young Lords." *The Puerto Rican Movement: Voices from the Diaspora*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998. 210-227.
- Moten, Fred. *In the Break: the Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.



- Muñoz Marín, Luis. "Puerto Rico and the U.S., Their Future Together." *Foreign Affairs* 32.4 (1954): 541-551.
- Muñoz, Carlos. *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement*. New York: Verso, 2007.
- Negron, Marisol. "Hecho in Nuyorican: An Analysis of the Creation, Circulation, and Consumption of Salsa in 1970s New York." PhD Stanford University, 2006.
- Negron-Muntaner, Frances. "'West Side Story' and the U.S. Puerto Rican Identity." *Social Text* 63 18.2 (2000): 83-106.
- Negus, Keith, and Patria Roman Velázquez. "Belonging and Detachment: Musical Experience and the Limits of Identity." *Poetics* 30 (2002): 133-145.
- Nelson, Jennifer. "'Abortions Under Community Control': Feminism, Nationalism, and the Politics of Reproduction among New York City's Young Lords." *Journal of Women's History* 13.1 (2001): 157-180.
- New Rican Village. *New Rican Village Mission Statement*. N.D.
- Ogbar, Jeffrey O. G. "'Puerto Rico En Mi Corazón: The Young Lords, Black Power and Puerto Rican Nationalism in the U.S., 1966-1972'." *Centro: Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies* 18.1 (2006): 148-169.
- Okihiro, Gary. "Oral History and the Writing of Ethnic History: A Reconnaissance into Method and Theory." *Oral History Review* 9 (1981): 27-46.
- Ortiz, Laura. "Disrupting the Colonial Gaze: A Critical Analysis of Discourses on Puerto Ricans in the United States." PhD CUNY Graduate Center, 1998.
- Padin, José. "Imperialism by Invitation: Causes of a Failed Development State Project in Puerto Rico, 1940-1950." PhD University of Wisconsin, 1998.
- Palmer, Robert. "Cuban Jazz Finds Home in 52nd Street Loft." *New York Times*, sec. C21: June 12, 1981.
- Pantojas, Emilio. *Development Strategies as Ideology: Puerto Rico's Export-Led Industrialization Experience*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1990.
- Parks, Brian. "Out-of-Focus Puerto Ricans: Cuchifrito Nation." *Village Voice*. April 2, 1996.
- Pérez, Emma. *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999.

- Pérez, Gina. *The Near Northwest Side Story: Migration, Displacement, and Puerto Rican Families*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.
- Pérez, Richie. "Committee Against Fort Apache: The Bronx Mobilizes Against Multinational Media." *Cultures in Contention*. Eds. Judith F. Baca, Douglas Kahn, and Diane Neumaier. Seattle: Real Comet Press, 1985:180-197.
- . "From Assimilation to Annihilation: Puerto Rican Images in U.S. Films." *Latin Looks: Images of Latinas and Latinos in the U.S. Media*. Ed. Clara Rodriguez. Boulder: Westview Press, 1997: 142-163.
- Perks, Robert, and Alistair Thomson, eds. *The Oral History Reader*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Pietri, Pedro. "Puerto Rican Obituary.", New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973.
- Poggioli, Renato. *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Cambridge, MA: Kelknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968.
- Popular Memory Group. "Popular Memory: Theory, Politics, Method." *The Oral History Reader*. 2nd ed. Ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson. New York: Routledge, 2006. 43-53.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. "Arts of the Contact Zone." *Ways of Reading*. Eds. David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999: 605-618.
- Pulido, Laura. *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.
- Quintero Rivera, Angel, and Luis Manuel Alvarez. "La Libra Combinacion De Las Formas Musicales En La Salsa." *David y Goliath* 57 (1990): 45-51.
- Ramirez, Yasmin. "Nuyorican Visionary: Jorge Soto and the Evolution of an Afro-Taino Aesthetic at Taller Boricua." *Centro: Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies* 17.2 (2005): 22-41.
- Reed, T. V. *The Art of Protest : Culture and Activism from the Civil Rights Movement to the Streets of Seattle*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005.
- Richardson, Michael, and Krzysztof Fijalkowski, eds. *Surrealism Against the Current: Tracts and Declarations*. London: Pluto Press, 2001.
- Ritchie, Donald A., ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

- Rivera, Eugenio "Gene". "La Colonia De Lorain, Ohio." *The Puerto Rican Diaspora: Historical Perspectives*. Eds. Carmen Whalen and Victor Vázquez-Hernández. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005. 151-173.
- Rivera, Mario. "El Comandante"...the Merengue Jazz. Groovin' High, 1994.
- Manos a La Obra: The Story of Operaton Bootstrap*. Dir. Rivera, Pedro A., and Susan Zeig. Prod. Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, City University of New York. 1983[2005]. DVD.
- Rodano, Ronald. *New Musical Figurations: Anthony Braxton's Cultural Critique*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Rodriguez, Clara. *History Taskforce, Centro De Estudios Puertorriqueños, Labor Migration Under Capitalism: The Puerto Rican Experience*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979.
- . *Puerto Ricans: Born in the USA*. Winchester, MA: Unwin & Hyman, 1989.
- Rodríguez-Morazzani, Roberto. "Political Cultures of the Puerto Rican Left in the United States." *The Puerto Rican Movement: Voices from the Diaspora*. Eds. Andrés Torres and Jose E. Velázquez. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998. 25-47.
- Rondón, Cesar Miguel. *The Book of Salsa: A Chronicle of Urban Music from the Carribean to New York City*. Tran. Frances R. Aparicio. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008.
- Rosaldo, Renato. *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*. Boston: Routledge, 1989.
- Rosales, Francisco A. *Chicano!: The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*. 2nd ed. Houston: Arte Público Press, 1997.
- Roseman, Marina. "'The New Rican Village: Artists in Control of the Image-Making Machinery'." *Latin American Music Review/Revista de Música Latinoamericana* 4.1 (Spring 1983): 132-167.
- Rosemont, Franklin, ed. *André Breton what is Surrealism? Selected Writings*. Trans. Samuel Beckett, et al. New York: Pathfinder Press, 1978.
- Rosler, Martha. "Place, Position, Power, Politics." *The Subversive Imagination*. Ed. Carol Becker. New York: Routledge, 1994. 55 - 76.
- Sakolsky, Ron. "Introduction: Surrealist Subversion in Chicago: The Forecast is Hotter than Ever!" *Surrealist Subversions: Rants, Writings, and Images by*

- the Surrealist Movement in the United States*. Ed. Ron Sakolsky. Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2002. 23-108.
- "The Salsa Beat: For Those Who Just Can't Get enough." *Clave Magazine* 1.3 (1977): 9-10.
- Sanchez-Korrol, Virginia. *From Colonia to Community: The History of Puerto Ricans in New York City*. 2nd ed. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994.
- Sandoval-Sanchez, Alberto. "A Puerto Rican Reading of the America of 'West Side Story'." *Jose, can You See?: Latinos on and Off Broadway*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999. 62-82.
- Scevenko, Liz. "Making Loisada: Placing Puertorriqueñidad in Lower Manhattan." *Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York*. Eds. Agustin Laó-Montes and Arlene Davila. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001. 293-317.
- Schechner, Richard. "A Polity of its Own Called Art?" *Artistic Citizenship: A Public Voice for the Arts*. Eds. Mary Schmidt Campbell and Randy Martin. New York: Routledge, 2006. 33-41.
- Schmidt Campbell, Mary, and Randy Martin, eds. *Artistic Citizenship: A Public Voice for the Arts*. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Schmidt-Camacho, Alicia R. *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Cultural Politics in the U.S. - Mexico Borderlands*. New York: New York University Press, 2008.
- Schneekloth, Lynda H., and Robert G. Shibley. *Placemaking: The Art and Practice of Building Communities*. New York: Wiley, 1995.
- Senie, Harriet F., and Sally Webster, eds. *Critical Issues in Public Art: Content, Context, and Controversy*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992.
- Serikaku, Laurie. "Oral History in Ethnic Communities." *Oral History Review* 17 (1989): 71-87.
- Serrano, Raymond, and C.A.F.A. (Committee Against Fort Apache). "A Community Stands Together and Makes Nation-Wide News." *Latin N.Y.* (N.D.): 33-37.
- Shank, Barry. *Dissonant Identities: The Rock n' Roll Scene in Austin, Texas*. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994.

- Sheringham, Michael. *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Shohat, Ella, and Robert Stam. *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Sholette, Gregory. "Heart of Darkness: A Journey into the Dark Matter of the Art World." *Visual Worlds*. Eds. John R. Hall, Blake Stimson, and Lisa Tamiris Becker. New York: Routledge, 2005. 91-107.
- Sibley, David. *Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Smith, Neil. *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Smith, Susan J. "Performing the (Sound)world." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 18 (2000): 615-637.
- Smith, Richard Cándida. *Utopia and Dissent : Art, Poetry, and Politics in California*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.
- Somers, Margaret R., and Gloria Gibson. "Reclaiming the Epistemological 'Other': Narrative and the Social Construction of Identity." *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*. Ed. Craig Calhoun. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994. 37-99.
- Sommer, Doris, ed. *Cultural Agency in the Americas*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.
- "Song of the New Puerto Rican/ Canto Del Nuevo Puertorriqueño." *New Rican* 1 (1979).
- Sparrow, Bartholomew H. *The Insular Cases and the Emergence of American Empire*. Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2006.
- Spurr, David. *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993.
- Stansell, Amanda. "Surrealist Racial Politics and the Borders of 'Reason': Whiteness, Primitivism, and Négritude." *Surrealism, Politics, and Culture*. Eds. Raymond Spiteri and Donald LaCross. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003. 111-126.
- Stokes, Martin. *Ethnicity, Identity, and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*. New York: Berg, 1994.

- Straw, Will. "Systems of Articulation, Logics of Change: Communities and Scenes in Popular Music." *Cultural Studies* 5.3 (1991): 368-388.
- Thomas, Lorenzo. "Alea's Children: The Avant-Garde on the Lower East Side, 1960-1970." *African American Review* 27.4 (1993): 573-578.
- Thomas, Lorrin. *Puerto Rican Citizen: History and Political Identity in Twentieth Century New York City*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.
- Torres, José. "The Inner Rican." *Nuestro: The Magazine for Latinos*. May 1978.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1995.
- Calle 54*. Dir. Trueba, Fernando, Eliane Elias, Michel Camilo, et al. Miramax Home Entertainment: Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2001; 2000.
- Tucker Jr., Kenneth H. "From the Imaginary to Subjectivation: Castoriadis and Tourraine on the Performative Public Sphere." *Thesis Eleven* 83 (2005): 42-60.
- Tythacott, Louise. *Surrealism and the Exotic*. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Ulmer, Gregory L. "The Object of Post-Criticism." *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*. Ed. Hal Foster. Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983. 83-110.
- Urry, John. *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002.
- Valentín-Escobar, Wilson. "Marketing Memory/Marking Authenticity in Buena Vista Social Club Recordings." *LASA Congress Presentation* (Miami, Florida: March 16, 2000).
- Wa Thiong'o, Ngugi. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. London: James Currey, 1986.
- Wallace, Michelle. "Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Problem of the Visual in Afro-American Culture." *Out there: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*. Eds. Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, and Trin Minh-ha. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990.
- Warner, Michael. "Publics and Counterpublics." *Public Culture* 14.1 (2002):49-90.

- Washburne, Chris. "The Clave of Jazz: A Caribbean Contribution to the Rhythmic Foundation of an African American Music." *Black Music Research Journal* 17.1 (1997): 1-11.
- Waxer, Lise. *Situating Salsa: Global Markets and Local Meanings in Latin Popular Music*. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Whalen, Carmen. *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia: Puerto Rican Workers and Postwar Economies*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001.
- Whiteley, Sheila, Andy Bennett, and Stan Hawkins, eds. *Music, Space, and Place: Popular Music and Cultural Identity*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004.
- Wilkinson, Michelle Joan. "'In the Tradition of Revolution': The Socio-Aesthetics of Black and Puerto Rican Arts Movements, 1962--1982." Ph.D. Emory University, 2001.
- Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Wolff, Janet. *Aesthetics and the Sociology of Art*. Winchester, MA: George Allen & Unwin, 1983.
- Yaeger, Patricia., ed. *The Geography of Identity*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996.
- Yang, Philip Q. *Ethnic Studies: Issues and Approaches*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2000.
- Young Lords Party, and Michael Abramson. *Palante: Young Lords Party*. 1st ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971.
- Yu, Timothy. *Race and the Avant Garde: Experimental and Asian American Poetry since 1965*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009.
- Zolberg, Vera L. *Constructing a Sociology of the Arts*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Zukin, Sharon. *Landscapes of Power*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.
- . *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989.