# New Performance Cartographies in the City of San Juan

by

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation I use Henri Lefebvre's concept of the production of social space to study how political theatre companies and artists in the city of San Juan, Puerto Rico, appropriate and resignify, through performance, their current social space as a strategy to contest Puerto Rico's neoliberal state policies. As Lefebvre suggests, modern industrial cities like San Juan maintain hegemonic power relations through spatial practices, processes through which users and inhabitants of the city conceive, perceive and live space. Lefebvre further suggests that for social justice to be possible, space must be resignified in ways that expose otherwise invisibilized struggles for social belonging and differentiation. I argue that theatrical performance, by staging various social conflicts and contradictions between the dominating space and the appropriating space, can produce new "performance cartographies" through which its audiences – in large part disenfranchised from the neoliberal processes so celebrated elsewhere on the island – may find ways to resignify space or envision new spaces for social justice on their own behalf. Specifically, I examine five theatre groups and artists from oppressed sectors in San Juan, whose work is to various degrees in opposition to neoliberalism, to reveal how both their artistic and quotidian performances might be resignifying space toward these ends. How does the work of Agua, Sol y Sereno, Y no había luz, Teatro Breve, Deborah Hunt and Tito Kayak strategically claim or appropriate space? What kind of knowledges emerge from these spatial tactics, and how are they helping envision new forms of living and social justice in the city?

# DEDICATION

A mis hijas Elena y Amalia.

A mi esposa Isel.

A mis padres Ana y Jorge.

Gracias por acompañarme en este viaje.

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# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION: NEW PERFORMANCE CARTOGRAPHIES IN THE CITY OF SAN JUAN.

In this dissertation I use Henri Lefebvre's concept of the production of social space to study how political theatre companies and artists in the city of San Juan, Puerto Rico, appropriate and resignify, through performance, their current social space as a strategy to contest Puerto Rico's neoliberal state policies. These policies create and maintain a small government with little or no intervention in the ways global companies and industries like Wal-Mart or Walgreens do business in the city of San Juan. The local government usually overlooks how these companies relate to their neighborhoods and communities, how they deal with consumers, how they manage their work force, or how they use the island's natural resources for their economic benefit. This government scheme creates an ideal environment to promote the presence of these powerful businesses and industries in the city of San Juan, in the belief that a continuous participation in the global free market will result in an improvement in the economy of the island.

For this dissertation, my approach in conceptualizing neoliberalism coincides with what geographers Jamie Peck and Adam Tickkell describe as:

> an elite intellectual project (increasingly) closely intertwined not only with state power but also with some of the key circuits of financialized capitalism; as a makeshift family of practices and policies held together by "strong discourses" of market rationality and competitive progress; as a relatively opportunistic

> ideology, powerfully shaped by both the crises it purports to resolve and by the (de)regulatory dilemmas generated by its own failures, limits and contradictions. (Leitner, 26)

These characteristics of neoliberalism create particular concerns about social justice and civil rights in the city of San Juan, where Puerto Rico's economic policies are progressively minimizing the state's contributions to public services, directly affecting the marginalized sectors of the city that depend daily on government support. These policies exclude low income and middle class communities from participating in the city's economy, forcing them to live under deplorable conditions; they live in constant fear of murders and robbery due to drug trafficking and poverty, unaffordable housing, unemployment, drug addiction, and poor access to public healthcare and education. This dissertation research was conceived with the purpose of understanding the transformative potential of space to create social justice in the city, in particular by means of performance.

As Lefebvre suggests, modern industrial cities like San Juan maintain hegemonic power relations through spatial practices, processes through which users and inhabitants of the city conceive, perceive and live space. Lefebvre further suggests that for social justice to be possible, space must be resignified in ways that expose otherwise invisibilized struggles for social belonging and differentiation. I argue that theatrical performance, by staging various social differences from the conflicts and contradictions between the dominating space and the appropriating space, can produce new "performance cartographies" through which its audiences – in large part disenfranchised

from the neoliberal processes so celebrated elsewhere on the island – may find ways to resignify space or envision new spaces for social justice on their own behalf.

The term "performance cartographies" was coined by communications scholar Karma R. Chávez to describe how storytelling works as a "mechanism utilized to map space and the subjectivities and identities it produces" (167). Chávez proposes a remapping of the current space of Latinidad to include other possible performances and identities. I apply this concept to my study of theatrical performances to see how these performances remap the city of San Juan.

Specifically, I examine five theatre groups and artists from oppressed sectors in San Juan, whose work is to various degrees in opposition to neoliberalism, to reveal how both their artistic and quotidian performances might be resignifying space toward these ends. How does the work of Agua, Sol y Sereno, Y no había luz, Teatro Breve, Deborah Hunt and Tito Kayak strategically claim or appropriate space? What kind of knowledges emerge from these spatial tactics, and how are they helping envision new forms of living and social justice in the city?

**Theoretical Review**

Lefebvre explains how what we call ideology "can only achieve consistency by intervening in social space and in its production" (*Production* 44). It is produced and maintained through the body, its lived experiences, and its relation to space (*Production* 49). These ideological concepts, as Lefebvre states, define our way of seeing social life, and our experience of the modern city. These ideological concepts are reproduced through the dynamics of three moments in our social space. The first is the conceived

space, or what Lefebvre also calls "representations of space." Usually performed and imposed by the most powerful sectors of society, it establishes social practices and politics of production by means of urban planning, architecture, and industry, among others. These conceptions determine the ways individuals experience space and the production/consumption practices that space imposes (*Production* 38-39). Second is the lived space, or "representational spaces," which are performed by oppressed sectors of society, and by "artists, writers and philosophers" who appropriate the imposed space and try to re-signify it (*Production* 39). Finally, the perceived space, or "spatial practice," is performed by all sectors of society, and consists of accepting the imposed space through daily social practices which give these spaces a certain logic and order that sustains them (*Production* 38). These moments that define social, economic, and political ways of living occur within what Lefebvre calls "abstract space" (*Production* 49). Capitalism creates an abstract space that can only be changed through the contradictions between representational space and representation of space. The exposition of differences that emerge from the contradictions in space could produce what Lefebvre calls a "differential space," which carries the potential of producing new spatial knowledges (*Production* 52). While the abstract space "tends towards homogeneity, towards the elimination of existing differences or peculiarities, a new space cannot be born (produced) unless it accentuates differences" (*Production* 52). These differences, as Lefebvre explains, "arise on the margins of the homogenized realm, either in the form of resistance or in the form of externalities" (*Production* 373). The social life of these sectors, how they live and work in the outsides of the city, as in "the vast shanty towns of Latin America (favelas, barrios,

ranchos)," for example, "survives inasmuch as it fights in self-defense and goes on the attack in the course of class struggles in its modern forms" (*Production* 373). Lefebvre describes how these differences emerge as follows:

> Their poverty notwithstanding, these districts sometimes so effectively order their space – houses, walls, public spaces – as to elicit a nervous admiration. Appropriation of a remarkably high order is to be found here. The spontaneous architecture and planning ('wild' forms, according to a would-be elegant terminology) prove greatly superior to the organization of space by specialists who effectively translate the social order into territorial reality with or without direct orders from the economic and political authorities. The result – on the ground – is an extraordinary spatial duality. And the duality in space itself creates the strong impression that there exists a duality of political power: equilibrium so threatened that an explosion is inevitable – and in short order. (*Production* 373-374)

This temporary exposition of the contradictions and conflicts in space creates moments for the production or envisioning of differential space. I study how the body of the oppressed and marginalized sectors, in performance and daily life, could produce a temporary exposure of the city's socials differences. This research will identify the relations of social differences beyond Lefebvre's idea of "class struggles" in a capitalists

vs workers sense, to include other critical social differences in terms of race, gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, age, religious beliefs, etc., to see how these performance cartographies remap the city of San Juan.

Other scholars from different fields have expanded and problematized Lefebvre's concept of the production of social space to further understand the current relations between politics and spatiality in cities around the world. Postmodern political geographer Edward Soja uses Lefebvre's concepts of space; first, to propose a spatial awareness and try to decenter hegemonic historical narratives about the creation of social differences and struggles in the city. He does this by creating what he calls "the trialectics of being," a critical methodology that re-describes Lefebvre's plan in *The Production of Space,* to try to balance knowledges about the city using "spatiality", "historicality" and "sociality". (*Thirdspace* 71). Furthermore, Soja describes how scholars usually approach space by categorizing it as real or imagined, similar to the way Lefebvre's categorizes space as perceived or conceived. From what seems to Soja as a spatial crisis emerges his concept of Thirdspace, which is "another mode of thinking about space that draws upon the material and mental spaces of the traditional dualism but extends well beyond them in scope, substance and meaning" (*Thirdspace* 11). Soja's Thirdspace becomes an interesting insight to look at marginality differently, "as a space of radical openness," and to challenge our spatial concepts about it beyond the rigidity of the Firstspace, the real, or Secondspace, the imagined (*Thirdspace* 12). While the Firstspace looks at the city in terms of its geography, and the Secondspace is concern about how theses spaces are conceptualized, the Thirdspace is were Firstspace and Secondspace come together.

Focusing on the Thirdspace as a methodology further helps in the understanding of space and spatiality, by studying how different sectors and communities experience a particular space.

Geographer Doreen Massey uses a similar approach to study the geographical imagination of cities, focusing particularly on spatial differences and identities. Similar to Lefebvre's theory, Massey explains how economic organization produces space, and how this space reinforces social relations, including those of gender. (*Space* 183). As an answer to what implies the hegemonic male body and a heterosexual male experience as a cartography of power, Massey proposes a spatial methodology that inquires into "the ways in which space and place are currently being conceptualized" by purposely "challenging the current dominant form of gender definitions and gender relations" in space (*Space* 2). I apply Massey's insights to this research to consider performance cartographies "in the light of gender specificity and oppressive gender constructions and relations" (*Space* 182).

I'm also interested in applying a hemispheric approach to my study of the actual body in performance, following Diana Taylor's idea about the body as an important form of "transmission of social knowledge and memory" (xviii). My intention is also to continue Taylor's idea about studying "social memory and cultural identity" in the Americas by engaging and analyzing "embodied behaviors" in order to make visible other possible "stories, memories and struggles" that "would not be recognize in text and documents" (xviii). Taylor's ideas align well with Lefebvre's, who argues that "any revolutionary 'project' today, whether utopian or realistic, must, if it is to avoid hopeless

banality, make the reappropriation of the body, in association with the reappropriation of space, into a non-negotiable part of its agenda" (166-7). I argue that as cultural groups and artists engage in space appropriations, they are able to challenge the ways space is traditionally represented and experienced by constantly questioning how bodies relate to and reproduce space, and transmit and perform knowledges. As Lefebvre explains, it is through the body that the space is perceived, lived and produced (162). I argue that these artists/groups/activist might be producing new spaces of social justice by using performance as a strategy to rethink hegemonic given knowledges embedded in space, and to question how their bodies usually signify these knowledges through their culture, traditions, and identities.

Throughout the dissertation, I identify and analyze some of the moments in which these theatre groups and artists produce new spaces through performance. The sectors in power constantly produce spatial *strategies*, as Michel de Certeau suggests, "to create spaces in conformity with abstract models" and "to produce, tabulate and impose these spaces" (29-30). Therefore, I focus on the spatial *tactics*, from the marginalized sectors of Puerto Rican society. These spatial tactics, as de Certeau explains, manage to "use, manipulate and divert these spaces" (30). As I argue, these groups/artists perform appropriations of space through their artistic work and/or their ideological negotiations. In this context, spatial tactics are practices and moments in which performance transform the relation between spectators/communities and space. Spatial tactics also include those moments in which performance visualizes changes in the spaces of the city, and/or how it is being conceived. I use the term "tactics" because it means that these performative acts

were conceived purposely to transgress space and engage in political struggles to transform the city's spatial dynamics. Theatre groups and artists perform spatial tactics to produce, imagine, or resignify the city. Through spatial tactics, the spectator is able to envision, if not embody, conceptions and knowledges about space differently from the ones established. Through spatial tactics, spectators are presented with a new spatial order, with new rules to engage with the city, like in abandoned buildings, streets, and around the spaces in which they work and live. By embodying spatial tactics, new knowledges about space are appropriated, transmitted, negotiated, and resignified.

I identify spatial tactics that might be challenging and transforming the relation between the bodies of participants, artist/performer, audience/community, and space. How are bodies being used in these performances to produce or rethink new social space? As my methodology, I look for spatial tactics in performances on the street and inside theatrical spaces, to see how these performances move and transform their communities' relations with space. My analysis of spatial tactics includes a study of the artists' theatrical presentations with a critical approach toward their literary texts, subjects and content; how they are conceiving their social differences in their texts, images, costumes, sceneries, lighting, makeup and rehearsal processes. I study spatial tactics by analyzing how they use media to represent space in their communities and for the state, through internet, emails, blogs, webpages, Facebook, local newspapers and TV news. I engage in interviews with the artists, as well as with some of the active members of their communities. These interviews focus on their perspectives and experiences of living in the city under the government's neoliberal policies, to see how they might be conceiving

spatial tactics. Finally, I narrate my personal experience with these spatial tactics. As audience and member of some of these communities, I was able to experience many of their performances and rituals. I am interested in demonstrating and recounting my understanding of the possible forms in which I was able to live or perceive space differently.

To study their performances it is important to understand the social expectations about national culture in Puerto Rico. The state and other mainstream cultural institutions collectively envision political theatre as a contributor to the improvement of local economies. But how are these artists visualizing themselves participating in a cultural global market? And, in what ways do they both, the artists and the state, negotiate their participation in cultural events? How does the state expect artists to be part of the established economical structures in the island, and how do they negotiate with these cultural policies to continue their cultural endeavor? I analyze the way they organize themselves financially and politically. Furthermore, I focus on the actual artistic performance, their rituals as spatial tactics that could possibly appropriate, reimagine, or transform the current neoliberal "abstract spaces" in the city of San Juan.

The historical process of colonialism in the island developed a strong discourse of resistance to the US colonization process that formed most of these groups and individuals. This enabled an approach to these spatial practices, not only in a context of resistance to capitalism and neoliberal injustices, as it is usually used by other scholars when referring to neoliberal industrial cities in first world countries, but also in studying performances as spatial practices to resist colonialism. The context of this approach

helps, as Mignolo suggests, to "unravel the geo-politics of knowledge from the perspective of coloniality, the untold and unrecognized historical counterpart of modernity" (xi). According to Mignolo, there must be a "shift in the geo-politics of knowledge" that considers the limitations of postmodern critical theorists because their knowledge is still Eurocentric. A geo-political shift decenters knowledges by privileging "the histories of the borders" from "territorial histories created by Europeans and US expansionism" (9). In other words, the historical context of these spatial practices represents the complex ongoing process of colonialism and modernization in the island but also in the broader Caribbean, the rest of the Americas, and neighboring global communities. I study how the results from these spatial tactics enables the deconstruction of common perceptions about ideologies of political theatre artists and the state working in binary oppositions. George Yúdice explains how ideologies are not as polarized as the state and the media portrays them. He explains that the media and the state have created a "national fantasy," a totalizing ideological plan that regulates our perceptions of ideologies and identities by connecting particular identities with specific ideologies (Yúdice 44). This social construction that sets ideologies in binary opposition makes it difficult for subjects to collaborate with sector from other cultural identities.

In Chapter 2, "Performing Rituals: Reimagining the City," I begin by analyzing the spatial tactics of theatre group Agua, Sol y Sereno. This company is known for performances outside conventional theatre spaces, such as street processions, where performers walk in stilts and masks, along with traditional Puerto Rican music and costumes. They created a ritual sponsored by the state named *Ceiba de los Reyes Magos*

("The Three Kings' Ceiba Tree"). It consists of a religious-like procession around the streets of Old San Juan carrying a 10-foot sculpture of a ceiba tree that was constructed on-site, a week before the performance, with help from people of different sectors of the Old San Juan community. In this performance the artists and their audience embody appropriations of the traditional Puerto Rican culture.

I study how these spatial tactics, presented in a celebrative and unifying tone, interpellate members from many different sectors of Puerto Rican society, including sectors of resistance as well as from the groups in power, groups representing the state, religious groups, politicians, artist, young people and old people, temporarily exposing the social differences embedded in Puerto Rican society. Furthermore, by exposing the struggles and social differences embedded in space through an act of appropriation of Puerto Rican cultural knowledge, Agua, Sol y Sereno manages to resignify, through the staging of public rituals, how members of the Old San Juan community perceive space, and how they see themselves participating in a negotiation/production of social space in the future. This chapter tries to understand how these public rituals appropriate the traditional Puerto Rican discourses of power, embedded in space. How might they be transforming how the audience perceives space? What kind of negotiations occurs in performance between the group perception and the state conception of space? I argue that the constant reproduction of space of Puerto Rican culture through public rituals, and the involvement of the audience/community participation enables ideological negotiations and the possible production or envisioning of a new social space.

In Chapter 3, "Performing Community: Everyday Practices in the City," I include everyday life practices as they are examined in the work of two theatre companies: Teatro Breve (Short Theatre), a political theatre company whose performances consist of simple comedic sketches, very similar to short televised sitcoms; and Y no había luz ("And There Was No Light"), a non-profit theatre group that combines the use of masks and puppets with experimental and traditional stage plays. I'm interested in studying how these groups might be appropriating spaces by producing with alternative forms of living and working in the city. I try to establish a comparison between two forms of spatial tactics, one that looks to reproduce local/hemispheric knowledges in their everyday life, theatrical representations and communities, while the other reproduces global knowledges.

I focus on the districts of Río Piedras and Santurce, where these spatial tactics are usually taking place. These two districts of San Juan are currently experiencing the displacement of their communities through a process of gentrification, a fragmentation of communities within a social space that encourages global neoliberal practices. These current city dynamics produce a sense of isolation and detachment with which these communities struggle. But the city also works as an ideal space for negotiation, whose transitional social spaces produce the ultimate conditions for political theatre groups to engage in spatial tactics and social change. To understand the complexity of these social spaces within a global culture in Latin America, I apply Néstor García Canclini's concept of "hybridity" to my analysis. According to Garcia Canclini, postmodern spaces of heterogeneous cultures and knowledges facilitate a better understanding of "the oblique

pathways, full of transactions, in which those forces come into play. It allows us to study the diverse meanings of modernity not only as simple divergences among currents but also as a manifestation of unresolved conflicts" (11). From a Latin American perspective, García Canclini sees a decentering of the forces of modernity through the hybridity of cultures. I explore the complexity of this phenomenon García Canclini has suggested by locating San Juan's spatial practices within a hybrid social space, whose representation of border voices are far from the normative narratives of modernity. The kind of specific dynamics occurring in the reproduction of power relation that contains these communities in resistance enables the consideration of alternative spaces for social justices. As a result, the performance appropriates space by exposing the social differences among the members of the audience. I analyze and question how the negotiation and manipulation of the theatrical space exposes the city's social differences among members of a single community, further exploring how this spatial strategy enables the community to envision new knowledges about how to perform in their daily life, at work and in community.

As a conscious and unconscious strategy, Teatro Breve members perform reenactments of the US hipster community through their daily life. They perform a particular language and aesthetics on stage, on their Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram accounts, and by the promotion of their individual and collective interest in "healthy" food, support of small and trendy local businesses, artsy coffeehouses, artisanal beer, vintage clothing, indie music, and expensive hipster-fashion and technology like Ray Ban sunglasses and Apple computers. In contrast, Y no había luz usually reproduces the traditional Puerto Rican discourses of resistance against colonialism, global marketing,

and local government neoliberal projects. Their creative process maintains a constant experimentation and a recreation of innovative theatrical forms. I study their spatial tactics, to see how they are able to produce new discourses of resistance by strategically appropriating the theatrical space and use it to negotiate the different forms in which members of their communities perceive space. Their spatial tactics consist of both artistic and social performative acts that reproduce common identities and/or a sense of belonging in their daily life activities. I argue that Y no había luz's spatial tactics privilege and expose the existence of different subjectivities in their communities by enabling each member to experience their participation in their theatrical representations differently.

As I argue, these performances, through their arts, lifestyles and forms of consumption might potentially create differential space. The main questions for this chapter are: first, what kind of specific challenges do they embody in these everyday practices? And second, how are these strategies transforming the way these communities perceive the city and their possible new roles in it? I also establish comparisons between both theatre groups' spatial tactics, and local or/and global strategies, to identify differences in how they are conceiving and producing space. By the end of this chapter, I use gender and women studies scholar Miranda Joseph's theories about life in community to question how community negotiations work as a disciplinary and exclusionary process, embedded with possible acts of racism, sexism, and violence. She explains how "capitalism and, more generally, modernity depend on and generate the discourse of community to legitimate social hierarchies" (viii). She continues by adding how the

"communal subjectivity is constituted not by identity but rather through practices of production and consumption" (viii). Using Joseph's concept, I argue that Teatro Breve's performance of counterculture community suffers the effects of a space embedded with the ideas of global capitalism and the promotion of exclusionary modes of consumption. Although globalization contributes in facilitating connections with other communities and their resistance strategies around the world, it can also create a gap in the sense of belonging, specifically if belonging relates to a particular place/space. As I argue, these experiences could eventually displace the voices of some members of their community that are unable to fulfill the expectations of consumption this lifestyles imposes, a condition that affects the bigger strategy of disrupting the current production of space in the city of San Juan.

In Chapter 4, "Performing Differences: Occupying the Body and the City," I study how the body can resignify space through its identity. How can identities work as spatial tactics? For this part, I study two individual artists and activists; first, puppeteer and mask artist Deborah Hunt, an artist originally from New Zealand who established herself in Río Piedras and served as the administrator and head artistic director, educator, and performer of Teatro Estudio Yerbabruja. I'm interested in studying her performances to see how they are informed by her cultural identity, and how her cultural identity exposes differences in terms of gender, race, nationality and sexual preference. Secondly, I study the performances of Alberto de Jesús Mercado, better known as Tito Kayak, a middle-class electrician, environmentalist and activist who became popular in Puerto Rico in 2000 when he installed himself at the end of a shooting range on a USAmerican

military base in the Puerto Rican town /island of Vieques. I'm interested in studying how Kayak´s identity appropriates and resignifies space through life- threatening acts of occupation of private buildings around the city.

I examine the body and its identity as a site of resistance, as a possible spatial strategy to appropriate the hegemonic social and economic structures embedded in space and resignify it. The idea of this chapter is to respond to some of the complications and contradictions exposed at the end of the third chapter concerning spatial tactics in communities. I study two individual artists whose identity might have excluded them from some of these communities in resistance, Deborah Hunt because of her nationality, and Tito Kayak because of his social background and education. I analyze artist/activist Deborah Hunt to see how her identity could appropriate space through performances that resignify given concepts like national culture and Puerto Rican identities. I complete this study by exploring Tito Kayak's identity function as a spatial tactics exposing social and cultural differences, in terms of race, gender, sexual preference, social class and nationality, through life-threatening performance of occupying private buildings, streets and cultural landmark around the city. As I argue, this performance enables the participation of different voices from many unrepresented sectors of Puerto Rican society, and possibly the production or envisioning of different spaces of social justice.

Feminist scholar Elizabeth Grosz points to the need "to dissolve identity into difference" (88). She explains how oppressed communities should "transform the ways in which identity is conceived so that identities do not emerge and function only through the suppression and subordination of other social identities" (89). Grosz proposes

"difference as a generative force in the world, the force that enacts materiality (and not just its representation), the movement of difference that marks the very energies of existence before and beyond any lived or imputed identity" (91). By studying Tito Kayak and Deborah Hunt, I examine the moments of struggle in communities, by pointing, not at their cohesion, but at the moments of differences within identity groups in order to see how political theatre groups in Puerto Rico could be disrupted by them. That might be the case of Deborah Hunt, whose artistic work, like that of other political theatre groups in Puerto Rico, denounces social inequalities, repressive government policies and the injustices of the free market, but her identity, as a naturalized, female artist immigrant from New Zealand, resignifies her cultural production.

Caren Kaplan, a women and gender studies scholar, also suggests "a politics of location that investigates the productive tension between temporal and spatial theories of subjectivity that can help us delineate the conditions of transnational feminist practices in postmodernity" (*Scattered Hegemonies* 138). Kaplan's approach to feminist identities as a counter hegemonic strategy can also be applied to other identities of resistance in the island: those unrepresented voices whose histories also demand complex reviews and narratives. As Kaplan describes, "in identifying marginal space as both a site of repression and resistance, location becomes historicized and theoretically viable – a space of future possibilities as well as the nuanced articulation of the past" (*Scattered Hegemonies* 143-144). As I observe, there are moments in which Hunt's cultural/political performance, because it is located at the borders of traditional discourses of resistance, might produce a destabilization of the totalizing social spaces of the city. To explain this,

I describe the moment in which Hunt, with the help of other cultural groups in Río Piedras, participated in the occupation of a theatre space that had been abandoned for more than 20 years. The occupied building, just like many other buildings in Río Piedras, was destined to be demolished replaced by a parking lot or a shopping center. Hunt, together with members of the Río Piedras' community, decided to organize an occupation of the New Victoria theatre space, one that had been occupied before, as a shelter for drug addicts and homeless people. That particular morning, this collective of artists, students and scholars invaded it illegally, claiming the need for common spaces for the development of culture in the Río Piedras community. My approach to this performance is to explain how otherness, within a social space whose anti-hegemonic community still preserves oppressive discourse, resists and contests neoliberalism through an act of occupation that materializes the visions of new social conditions in the city. As I argue, this symbolic occupation of a building, painting it, and putting up a sign that read, "New Victoria: Colectivo Casa Teatro" (Collective House Theatre), Hunt's performance materializes the community's utopian visions.

Fredric Jameson perceives postmodern art forms as agents of social and political change. He proposes that the "reinvention of Utopian visions" could be possible through postmodern art forms that reconsider the "interrelationship between time and space," what he calls "spatialization,… the will to use and to subject time to the service of space" (*Postmodernism* 154). Jameson believes that some postmodern artistic projects are able to challenge capitalism by rethinking the concepts of time and history embedded in their spatial knowledges. In a similar vein, Hunt's appropriation of space performs a

continuation of the socialist utopian projects of the 1960s but in a postmodern, late-capitalist form. Jameson describesp  a return to the "phenomenom of spatialization" in which artistic performances produce "a whole range of properly spatial Utopias in which the transformation of social relations and political institutions is projected onto the vision of place and landscape, including the human body" (*Postmodernism* 160). I consider Hunt's performance as a "Utopian vision" within its social space. I propose that it produces future utopic discourses of resistance in San Juan, and that her identification with the usually unrepresented voices and communities in the urban centers of Puerto Rico, helps in the creation of these new social and political knowledges.

The second half of this chapter focuses on activism as spatial tactics in the work of. Alberto de Jesús Mercado/ Tito Kayak, a middle-class electrician, environmentalist and activist. In 2007, Tito occupied a construction site of an expensive building complex, Paseo Caribe, in the city of San Juan, climbed on top of a construction crane and stayed there for a week in order to demand the return of the construction land to the "Puerto Rican people."  As part of his demand, he was asking for the government to return to the "citizens of the island" their rightful access to this public area, specifically the area where colonial structure San Geronimo Fort is located which was being blocked by the private construction. By studying this performance, I try to answer, how did Tito Kayak, by occupying a building through a life-threatening act, put his body on the line and and deploy his identity, usually unrepresented in Puerto Rican society, to resignify space? As Lefebvre describes, "the moment the body is envisioned as a practico-sensory totality, a decentring and recentring of knowledge occurs" (*Production* 62). Observing this idea, I

study and analyze how Kayak's performance decenters knowledge from discourse, time, and history, and locates it on the body -- a body that by strategically occupying the city space, produces differential space.

Finally, in the Conclusion I return to Lefebvre's and Soja's theories about the production of space, to reflect on how the use of artistic and social performances as spatial tactics might produce or envision new spaces of social justice in the city. Furthermore, spatial tactics that appropriate space and negotiate differences could offer notions of everyday practices to other theatre companies and communities in cities and urban centers around the world, helping them understand how to engage in social transformations.

# CHAPTER 2

## PERFORMING RITUALS: REIMAGINING THE CITY.

Every Saturday morning, my wife and I take our six-year-old to ballet class in Old San Juan (OSJ), the colonial area of the city. These classes take place at the Cuartel de Ballajá, a monumental square building surrounding an interior plaza. It was built by the Spanish militia between 1854 and 1864, and sits next to the iconic Fort of San Felipe del Morro and the Plaza del Quinto Centenario in the heart of OSJ. The Ballajá barracks building houses various cultural institutions: the Museo de las Américas, the ballet and flamenco dance school and cultural space, a music school for folkloric music and instruments, a publishing house, an art and paper store, the Puerto Rico Academy of Spanish Language, and the State Office of Historic Conservation. On any Saturday morning, when walking through the old cobblestones on the interior patio of the Ballajá building, one can hear an Aguinaldo being played on the cuatro, a Puerto Rican guitar-style instrument usually related to the Christmas season, being played in the hallways by music students of all ages. The building is surrounded by other colonial structures that are dedicated to the arts and Puerto Rican cultural life, like the School of Fine Arts, the Art League, the National Gallery, the San Juan Museum and the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture. On our way to ballet class we might encounter a variety of cultural events like public activism, craft bazaars, art shows, exhibitions, live music concerts, theatre festivals, parades, carnivals, and local food markets. Generations of Puerto Ricans have grown accustomed to stumble upon specific elements of culture and community living within the limits of OSJ. The original purpose of the Spanish colonial fortress city—

military defense--resignified, helps to generate and maintain local and tourist consumption of national culture and heritage. Surely there are other more accessible ballet schools close to where we live and with free parking, but the spatial practices and meanings historically embedded in the colonial architecture and geographical location of OSJ appears to legitimate and enhance the level of authenticity of the ballet school, along with the experience of local culture as a whole. OSJ has become too cramped. That we, as well as many other Puerto Ricans, painstakingly drive into OSJ to participate in cultural events, exemplifies the material ways location, space or spatial configuration may determine our consumption and perception of culture. It reveals how communities privilege a particular location for its perceived connection with a cultural practice or meaning. Furthermore, it demonstrates the economic priorities of the state, a broader national project set in motion during the past decades for the improvement of the public, private, local and global OSJ economy.

**The National Landscape**

In this chapter I examine the ways the work of theatre group Agua, Sol y Sereno (ASYS), intervenes and subverts the politics of space in OSJ, and how it creates new knowledges concerning the city through cultural performance and community rituals. ASYS, a largely state-sponsored theatre company located in OSJ, persistently recreates in their work a kind of national imaginary that is historically linked to Puerto Rico's political Left.[1] The performance of ASYS produces spatial practices similar in ways to what Lefebvre defines as "representational space"---when an oppressed social group

[1] In Chapters 3 and 4 I discuss, at length, the emergence, constitution, and reproduction of political theatre in Puerto Rico.

appropriates an imposed space and tries to resignify it (*Production* 39). These spatial practices involve the use, appropriation, production, and transformation of space through social and cultural performance. The concept of "representational space" gives way to new ways of knowing the city by subverting the established social meanings of space and producing new meanings for/through it.

I identify some moments in which ASYS produces geographies of resistance, imagining alternatives to the state and private companies' spatial plan. How does the city's geography enable them and their community to visualize their problems and find solutions? How does their performance understand the current spatial logic of OSJ? How does it challenge the logic of local and global economy through spatial practices? How do they produce a counter space in which to deal with their economic and social problems? How does their ritual performance map a new landscape for their community and assign new meanings to an oppressive space?

Historically, the geography, architecture and landscape of the city determines, as in many other developed cities, human behaviors, and their way of living and consuming. At one point OSJ was the center of economic activity in the island. As the city expanded so did the economy. After the expansion and transfer of big business from OSJ into the outskirts of the city and into other districts around the metro area, the colonial part of the city, which connects to the mainland through a bridge and a ferry, became the center of the island's cultural project. For the past six decades, the government of Puerto Rico aligned with private economic interests articulated a cultural project for the OSJ area guided by a neoliberal agenda. This project established a common, material purpose for

OSJ in favor of a national imaginary ready-for-consumption by citizens and tourists alike. Henri Lefebvre defines these configurations by explaining that the most powerful sectors of society impose social practices and politics of production through social space (*Production* 38-39). As a result, OSJ's cultural production, architecture, streets, plazas, chapels, and galleries are commodified for profit within the tourism and entertainment industries.

This national project certainly improves the local economy by maintaining the flow of capital while preserving the architecture and geographic distribution of the fortress city. The project succeeds in generating and maintaining capitalist modes of production/consumption, consequently reducing and discouraging the possibility of alternative dialogue and knowledges that could emerge from the society of consumers and users in these geographical configurations. Even activist performances are contained by regulatory efforts of the state. The national cultural plan in OSJ works by awarding a common meaning to space. Other possible significations about OSJ must be contained in order to maintain capitalist alignment in the city. Cultural policies in the city contain non-hegemonic experiences of the city. Theatre groups like Agua, Sol y Sereno manage to maintain their cultural production in OSJ by negotiating the ways they perform their community's collective memories.

**Agua Sol y Sereno**

ASYS began performing in Puerto Rico during the 1980s. Their director, Pedro Adorno, met Peter Schumann and the company Bread and Puppet during their first visit to Puerto Rico, invited by local theatre professor and director Rosa Luisa Márquez. Bread

and Puppet, a radically political puppet-theatre group in Vermont founded during the sixties, to this day operates under the concept of an artistic space integrated within the community. As the name suggests, they believe in creating a place where puppets and theatre are as fundamental in the social life of their community as bread and food. Pedro Adorno knew that taking a workshop with Bread and Puppet at the University of Puerto Rico in Cayey would excuse him from going to classes for a whole week, so he did. Pedro recalls how he climbed on ten-feet-high stilts for the first time without any direction, and started walking as fast a possible around the university campus. He felt a sense of incomparable freedom, "el teatro me hizo sentir grande" (personal interview). "Theatre made me a grownup.[2]" For the first time, theatre transformed Pedro's experience and view of the world. This transformation matured into a collective one when Pedro began changing the life of others in his community through theatre. In addition to the construction and use of stilts, Pedro learned how to construct masks, stories, and costumes, but more importantly, the craft of an ensemble group. Pedro explains how Schumann, now a dear friend, has always insisted on politics and social work as the base for the company's artistic creation. Something that Pedro also integrates in his work.

> La experiencia de vivir tres años en la compañía de Bread and Puppet y estar relacionado con Peter Schumann durante los últimos 20 años de mi vida ha transformado la forma en que hago teatro. Peter Schumann lo que hace es que cualquier reflexión política y cualquier

[2] A note on translated material: unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

situación de justicia social la usa como pie forzado para crear su poética. . . Agua, Sol y Sereno nos sentimos parte de lo que ha sido un movimiento de activismo político y social, que es más una búsqueda poética, que un teatro de agit-prop. De las compañías de teatro en Latinoamérica, como MECATE en Nicaragua, Teatro la Candelaria, y el Teatro Experimental de Cali de Enrique Buenaventura, adoptamos la integración de la comunidad misma---los niños, los jóvenes, las mujeres, los adictos---al trabajo teatral. (Pedro, personal interview.)

The experience of living three years with the Bread and Puppet and being in contact with Peter Schumann for the last 20 years of my life have transformed the way I have done theatre. What Peter Schumann does is that any political concern, any social justice issue, he uses it as a starting point for his poetics. In Agua, Sol y Sereno, we feel part of what has been a political and social activist movement, something more as a poetic search than an agitprop theatre. Many of the Latin American theatre companies like Mecate in Nicaragua, Teatro la Candelaria, y el Teatro experimental de Cali de Enrique Buenaventura, we adopted the integration of the community---the children, the youth, women, drug addicts--- in our theatrical work.

Pedro narrates how he learned to see mainstream theatre in the industrialized city of San Juan as an elitist cultural manifestation that needs to be rescued and questioned by all sectors. Pedro wanted to create a particular distinct voice that considers, in terms of aesthetics and politics, Puerto Rican society. While the Bread and Puppet theatre was constituted during the civil revolutions of the sixties, framed by the Vietnam War protests in the United States, ASYS began in a different political context and locale. ASYS was born in an island of the Caribbean, a colony of the United States, immersed in working-class struggles, surviving the neoliberal, technological and industrial development projects of San Juan; a troupe shaped by the disenchantment of the political Left of Puerto Rico long after the supposed failure of its socialist revolutions within Latin America during the 1990's.

Pedro explains how the company decided to perform politics by practicing folkloric rituals that would transform their community. This idea is not far from how cultural projects have been conceived in the island by leftist groups. Historically, the political Left has privileged the folkloric heritage of Puerto Rico, defined by the cultural contributions of the racial triad: the Taíno tribes, the Spaniards, and the African slaves. According to this discourse, what defines national identity comes from an imaginary hybrid culture created by the language, religions, foods, music, rituals and traditions of these groups. The performance of ASYS recreates the Puerto Rican carnivals that have for centuries been performed in the island. The theatre group began by recreating folkloric events like the Ponce Carnival, an on-going folkloric celebration for the past 50 years. They have also recreated the African slave dances and rhythms of the bomba and

plena. Their masks and costumes are influenced by the 200 hundred year-old mask designs of the Hatillo Mask Festival. The troupe also performs rituals that cite the Loiza Carnival, a religious parade that celebrates the African heritage of the island. The ritualistic performances of ASYS re-imagine ancestral myths by intertwining the traditional cultural manifestations of the island with Latin American and Caribbean mythology and culture, like the Cuban drum rhythms of the Yoruba religion, West Indian mask designs, and Mexico's Día de los Muertos.

The return to these rituals embodies a strategy to connect with their usual audience, the leftist sectors of the island. As Pedro explains, ASYS is not necessarily interested in the disarticulation of capitalism, or the questioning of the actual market-driven hegemonic culture of the city. They recreate rituals and carnivals to give their audience the experience of performing the ritual themselves, of creating the masks and the costumes themselves, of getting their audience on stilts, of making their audience act and move around the city, an opportunity to give voice to the usually underrepresented sectors of society. For more than 20 years, ASYS has represented a theatre inspired by the social effects of rituals, by imagining ancestral forms in representation of their collective memory. These performances manage to construct some form of resistance by performing a collective memory that seems pre-destined to be erased. By recreating forgotten past struggles, they look to give visibility and maintain their struggles in the face of the neoliberal progress of the city. These cultural manifestations help the members of the troupe recreate their own history, their own experiences about the city, their own collective memory. While they are inspired by socialist revolutions within

Latin America, as a state sponsored organization they are forced to participate in global development projects happening locally. In many cases, these contradictions create conflict in their artistic work. How can they take part in a neoliberal state development project without abandoning or betraying their opposing political convictions and cultural identity? The members of the group constantly deal with these issues because they identify themselves with the island's leftist ideologies, which advocate causes like economic and social justice, ecological conservation, local agriculture and business, public health, and education, and gender equality. However, in their effort to sustain themselves economically, they are commissioned to work for private corporate businesses, many of which contradict the afore-mentioned causes. These types of complex social contradictions are reflected in the artistic creations of the ensemble vs. the types of jobs they must take in order to continue to operate as a company. For example, one group member performs for a McDonalds TV commercial, while another dances in a misogynist reggaetón musical video; another works in an advertising agency selling global brands competing with local products, while another creates a campaign for the Banco Popular of Puerto Rico, the most powerful bank in the island.

The ideologies of the group are constantly challenged and dismantled by the way they must exist in the city. They criticize a society that is eventually supported and validated by their actions, creating among them a collective existential crisis, an unbearable cultural anxiety. Ironically, through these cultural ambiguities they manage to survive socially and economically. While the individual members of the group find ways to support themselves, the self-proclaimed resistance theatre company ASYS continues

its cultural endeavor through the economic support of state institutions and big global companies. Their need to maintain a $2,000-a-month workshop space big enough to construct sets, store materials, and rehearse and perform work forces them to negotiate with the state and accept its economic intervention. They fequently produce performances as part of the state's cultural program in the OSJ area. The group finds themselves constantly strategizing cultural activism against the institutions and private companies sponsoring them, in ways that cannot, at least outwardly, represent a threat to these same companies or the state. They persuade the state and the big brand companies, like Coors Light or Pepsi, to continue their economic sponsorship while managing to maintain their audience support. These contradictions create a conflict in space that recalls what Lefebvre defines as "differential space", produced by the accentuation of social differences and class struggles in performance (*Production* 52). Through these negotiations, ASYS transmits their collective memory, their personal marginalized identities, one that is different, particular, and far from the historical and spatial narratives included in the state plan. They embrace this cultural difference through their rigorous training and discipline of their bodies, and through ideological negotiations that produce new discourses of living the city. I use two examples of ASYS's performances to explain how they perceive, imagine and transform space through performance. The first one is *Una de cal y una de arena*, a theatre play conceived originally for traditional theatrical spaces, and, second, *La ceiba de los reyes magos*, a ritual performed through the streets of OSJ.

***Una de cal y una de arena***

The title itself serves as a double entendre. *Una de cal y una de arena*, one part lime, one part sand, are the materials needed to make concrete. It is also a popular saying equivalent most closely to "you win some, you lose some." *Una de cal y una de arena*, the most popular and represented performance of the ASYS with over one hundred individual performances, tells the story of workers on a construction site who mistakenly dig a hole that takes them to what seems to be an archaeological site. By exploring the remnants of a primitive early civilization in the island, the workers believe they have discovered part of their own history, or a new representation of themselves. This performance maps the cartographical transformation of the city and how it transforms the way of living in their communities. From the beginning of the performance, *Una de cal y una de arena* stands against the urban development of the city. It sets urban development as a threat to Puerto Rican national well-being, an idea validated by the theatre company as a continuation of the commonly reproduced leftist idea that questions how modern technologies intervene negatively on human beings. The performance clearly articulates its stance against the construction of new shopping centers, expensive living complexes, and highways in Puerto Rico, arguing, as Left groups have done, that massive construction gradually creates the economic alienation of the working class, destroys nature and diminishes our national identity. The story of this performance is narrated through the character of a homeless woman, Deambulante, a wise, almost shamanic character that functions as the narrator of the play but also as the conscience of the audience. Although we never know how Deambulante ended up being homeless, we as

an audience identify with her, as it is implied that she has been a victim of the gentrification and dislocation effected by rampant construction and capitalist expansion in the city purported by neoliberal policies. Throughout the performance, the constant search for the past, for the ancestral, helps Deambulante map a new cartography of the city buried under cement, one keeping her in isolation, and struggling to survive.

The Deambulante character occupies the construction site. She walks hunched over like a caveman adorned in garbage bags from head to toe, an image of a disposable human, tossed aside by society, forgotten, like the culture and history she embodies. The sound and melody of her voice and the ways she speaks reminds us of a spiritual leader of sorts, a shaman. She is out of her element, unprotected in the midst of what appears to be chaos. The scenery portrays the construction site as a dangerous place, with huge PBC pipes jutting out towards the audience, caution tape, and several large truck tires. Two tall scaffolds covered with orange vertical debris nets line the blue tarp that serves as a backdrop. Scattered around the stage are a few plastic white and blue barrels, concrete blocks, metal buckets, a wheel barrow, traffic orange cones, shovels, rib steel panels cover de side of the stage, all materials that may have been sought out from real construction sites. During the performance, all characters but Deambulante, enter stage wearing yellow construction hard hats, high visibility yellow safety vests, and big boots. As Deambulante enters, she reminds us of our forgotten past, the better days of our community, the better way of life of our ancestors, all that has been now destroyed. The argument is presented in a way that the audience could easily agree with. Deambulante observes the construction site with disappointment and says: “Justamente aquí estaba su

balcón. A la verdad que esto ha cambiado en cantidad. ¿Me habré yo olvidao del lugar que yo vi? (*Una de cal* 1). "Just here was the front porch. It's true that this has changed a lot. Have I forgotten the place I have lived in?" By remembering a balcón (front porch) that is not there anymore, the Deambulante seems to be looking for traces of a past spatial configuration that disappeared. By remembering a particular place with nostalgia, Deambulante establishes an emotional connection between space and historical memory. The front porch is important, not only as a place to sit and rest but as a public/private space for social encounters. The front porch is one of those strong architectural elements of the traditional "casa criolla puertorriqueña" that used to be built in the urban centers of the island by the end of the nineteenth century and some are still preserved by the government and the Institute of Culture of Puerto Rico. This particular architectural element, el balcón, not only defines a historical building but a historical era in the island. By saying "the front porch was right here" Deambulante implies tradition as well as culture and the national way of living was right there but now it is gone, it has been erased by progress and modernity. More specifically, the front porch was a meeting place; a place in front of the house, facing the street, where families and friends transit and connect, a place to do businesses, festivals, cultural events, funeral processions, and all other elements that define the life of their past communities. Deambulante implies that the new architecture of the city, the current public and private spatial configurations and developing projects dehumanizes Puerto Rican communities. When Deambulante asks "¿Dónde están los ríos que estaban aquí?" (*Una de cal* 1) "Where are the rivers that were here?," she claims for the land and the natural sources being destroyed by development

companies. The performance clearly privileges the cultural rituals from the past and the disappearing elements of the social life in Puerto Rico through the transformation of space.

Presenting this argument at the beginning of the performance seems to be an ideological strategy nodding to the more leftist's liberal audience that usually attends their performances. The construction industry in the city affects the social development of its communities in many ways, but the impact it causes on the quality of life could also be considered as an advantage by/for these communities, depending on their views of political justice; how democratic are they, and how they consider equality, diversity, freedom, and civil rights. But the performance continues a one sided questioning of the spatial transformations of the city and the negative effects on their lives. After Deambulante exposes what seems to be the thesis of the performance, four construction workers enter. Each picks up a shovel, and all start working together mixing concrete. All of a sudden, the sound of the shovels on the floor turns into music. They all start playing a rhythm together that accompanies Deambulante's narrative. This Caribbean rhythm follows a choreographic ritual of music and dance on center stage. The percussion and movement routine continues throughout the play. The construction workers make Stomp-like music by using shovels, PBC tubes, buckets, helmets, blocks, cell phones and their voices as their main instruments. At one point they shake out plastic buckets filled with metal objects that produce a kind of impressively life-like cement drilling sound. This innovative and entertaining part of the show, their musical talent and body control, draws a broader popular audience, one that would go to the theatre just for the entertainment.

*Una de cal* seems to be copying the concept from Stomp, the popular Broadway musical show, as they both use non-conventional percussion instruments to make their music. There are many similarities between both spectacles. The common act of copying a USAmerican artistic concept is considered by some to point to our colonized condition. As Bhabha reminds, the colonized subject mimics the forms of the colonizer but never quite right. Both Stomp and *Una de cal* are themed within the context of the city, about the sounds of the city. Stomp narrates the story of a utopian city. The interpretation of musical rhythms with trashcans, plastic tubes, newspapers, brooms and cookware represents a democratized city, a place where culture could be accessed by anyone living the city. The working class appropriates the rustic instruments of the city and resignifies them to gather and produce culture together. Moreover, these performances of percussion and dance evoke a return to ancestral times, an ontology of music and dance, a ritual of a tribe gathering to make music together. The same occurs during *Una de cal*, but the members of this city perform Caribbean rhythms influenced by the African slave music in the island. Just as in Stomp, the characters in *Una de cal* represent an oppressed working class, but they are also construction workers, they are the ones transforming the spatial configurations of the city, creating new cartographies, new knowledges, and new forms of living. Deambulante's spatial discourse evolves into actors onstage embodying the city, their actual concerns, questioning of the city's spatial configurations through dance and music. The use of their bodies onstage evokes a collective memory that questions the formation of new spatial meanings and knowledges in the city. It is a ritual, a collaboration process, incomplete, fragmented, based on physical movements, on

sounds, and about their past and personal stories. These personal and collective recollections and memories of the space contest the traditional discourses about space from leftist groups in the island. These embodiments identify with the oppressed and alienated condition of the working class in the city of San Juan. After a few minutes, the construction workers stop the music and the dancing to verbalize their concerns. A worker interrupts and asks: "¡Espérate un momento! Mira, Johny, ¿y la 65 de Infantería? ¿Y el expreso Luis A. Ferré? ¿Quién hizo eso?" (*Una de cal* 1). The worker complains about the work and effort they have done in the city, contributing in developing projects throughout the history of Puerto Rico. By mentioning developing projects like the Puerto Rico highway 65 (Infantry) and the Puerto Rico highway 52 (Luis A. Ferré), two of the longest highways built in the island at the end of the nineteenth century, the worker sees himself as integral to those spatial transformations. They call themselves the "fuerza bruta," (brute force), implying how they provide the force to transform the city, but brainless, as it seems they have never questioned the effects of these transformations in their communities. Another worker asks, "¿Y el morro quién lo hizo?" (*Una de cal* 1) ("And who made El Morro"?. Another worker answers, "…si tú cogiste historia, deberías saber que el Morro lo hicieron los españoles" (*Una de cal* 1). ("If you took a history class, you should have known that the Morro was built by the Spaniards." By questioning the social implications and even the privileged location of the OSJ fortress El Morro, they question an imaginary representation of the Puerto Rican national identity that doesn't seem to represent them anymore. The workers seem to understand how geography, and its social implications, determines "national identity." An angry worker replies, "¿Y qué

hicieron los negros? ¿Los indios que pusieron su primera piedra allí?" "And what did black people do? The natives that put the first rock in there," while another worker answers, "Lo mismo que haces tú y que yo, y todos nosotros. Lo bruto. La fuerza bruta" (*Una de cal* 1). "The same that you and all of us do. Brute. Brute force."

The construction workers question the participation of the working class in the construction of a hegemonic geography in the city. They see themselves as the "fuerza bruta" (of the city), a class force that builds, precisely, the structures, buildings, shopping centers and highways that would eventually isolate them, limit their mobility, and reduce their capacity to relate with their own community in the city. The current spatial logic keeps the "fuerza bruta", the working class, from participating in the public and private economic projects of the city. A strategy, the "fuerza bruta" manages to appropriate tools and elements of the city and resignify them as musical instruments for their gatherings. Through the embodiment of dances and rhythms in these gathering, the workers realize new possibilities to live the city, to envision possible economic and social sustainability.

By the end of *Una de cal*, the construction workers run into archeological artifacts that they find inside a deep hole that's been dug in the construction site. The archeological discovery stops the construction, a perception of a happy ending to their journey. The encounter of the construction workers with their history stops them from continuing their participation or contribution on these oppressive spatial development projects. The audience easily recognizes the problem of the working class, as it has been manifested in the traditional discourses of the Left in the island. What makes this important is how they are being reminded of these issues. Their conversations, arguments

and the conclusions of the construction workers throughout the performance denote simplicity. It is through the rituals embodied onstage by the construction workers that the audience might understand how space defines them, and how it is defining the way they live in their communities. ASYS manages, on an abstract level, to imagine new cartographies, by privileging their own identities and memory through rituals. Their bodies perform these rituals onstage, representing the complexities of their current realities through the search of an ancestral memory, and the myths of their pasts. ASYS's rituals of space create what Lefebvre defines as "differential space", an appropriation of the current imposed neoliberal "abstract spaces" in the city of San Juan and a resignification of it. The constant reproduction of space of Puerto Rican culture through public rituals, and the constant participation and embodiment of the audience/community in these rituals enables ideological negotiations and the production of new social spaces.

What occurs in the images created onstage in *Una de cal* goes further when ASYS takes their performances out into the actual city. At one point they presented the play within an actual construction area in the center of the district of Río Piedras while the famous, and now dying, shopping street, Paseo de Diego, was being remodeled, blurring the lines between theatre and life.

### ***La ceiba de los reyes magos*: Rituals in the City**

While *Una de cal* was initially conceived for theatrical spaces, other performances of ASYS like *La ceiba de los reyes magos*, a ritual celebration and parade of the Three Kings, engages with the community in ways that reimagine the city's landscape and spatial logic.

Throughout the years I have been fortunate enough to collaborate as a playwright and scholar with ASYS and some of their community projects. I collaborated with the group in a theatre workshop in El Barrio (Spanish Harlem), in a theatre festival with Pregones, the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre in the Bronx. I was able to see their performance of *Una de cal* at Teatro de la Luna in Washington DC, and work with them on a theatre workshop at the Fortín Conde de Mirasol in the island of Vieques, and in the construction of masks and props at their San Juan studio in OSJ.

It is common for their audience to collaborate in the creation of every new artistic work they engage in. They want their audience and community to be part of the creative process as much as the final product, and to understand what the creative process means for the group. They manage to create a connection with their audience by trusting them, their creative knowledges, and their techniques, exposing artistic progression and letting their audience recognize their craft and intervene in it. At the end of the collaborative process, when the final performance plays itself out, the audience develops a sense of belonging that strengthens the theatrical community being created by ASYS. My experience with the company throughout the years could describe some of the group's social effects in our theatrical community. This diverse community consists mostly of artistic colleagues and audiences of all ages, current and former university students and scholars, elementary and high school students, teachers, artists, collaborators, middle class families, community leaders, politicians, businesspeople and tourists. Most from the community are interested in ensemble theatre, community based theatre, politics,

performance art and Puerto Rican tradition and folklore. They constitute ASYS's community for the past 20 years.

ASYS's performance/rituals map the actual cartographies of OSJ by appropriating and transforming its meaning through an embodied ritual of the city. They seem to be on a constant journey between ritual and theatre, between a religious event and entertainment, between tradition and modernity, between socialist struggles and the capitalist market, between Victor Turner's concepts of liminal and the liminoid. For Turner, as a result of the industrial revolution in global societies, humans have stopped participating in liminal acts like tribal rituals or mask performances. They now manifest themselves through liminoid acts, isolated social performances in marked spaces, like a rock concert, a football game or a film. Turner believed that these liminal tribal acts as well as the social liminoid phenomenon of the social civilization, in different ways, are performed to understand and transform their actual social conditions. The work of ASYS seems to be located at both ends, as an attempt of the group to follow their collective instincts while still belonging to an individualist society. Turner defines the liminal phenomenon as one integrated to the social processes with emotional and intellectual collective symbols, while the liminoid is defined as an economic and political process, and generated by a group or a particular individual. ASYS seems to be producing both manifestations; by performing community rituals, they learn how to live in the city, between pre-modernity, modernity and post-modernity. But what is most important about this study is the focus on the city and the ways these performances live the city limited by

the global economy and the cultural policies aimed to promote cultural consumption in specific spaces.

ASYS manages to engage with spectators by presenting their performance as a community ritual, as an alternative to what the industrial city has to offer in terms of cultural production. Richard Schechner explains, "Industrial cultures separate and standardize functions and expressions; communal societies combine many functions and expressions in extended, complicated events. Industrial cultures specialize in sequencing univocal actions while communal cultures generalize by means of events that are multivocal" (*Performance Theory* 155). Schechner sees how these performance rituals are usually produced as a response to the alienation of urban life, and to overcome the fragmentation of city living. They are usually born form political movements in different cities of the world, as well as from groups whose identities have been marginalized by race, gender, and sexual preference. These groups search for unity through the creation of a sense of community that can be accomplished through performance rituals that unite them (*Performance Theory* 155). Schechner describes these performances in the following way:

> This work is not atavistic, not a wild attempt to dismantle industrialism, or halt its spread. It is an active seeking to find places within industrial societies – even within the industrial process itself – for small-scale communities to exist. And to demand a restructuring of the social order to meet the needs of communities for person-to-person interactions or "meetings," as Grotowski says. The problems of

> alienation, reification, and anomie are clearly not problems of capitalism alone. Experiments of the kind I've been talking about are taking place in socialist states too. These experiments, still relatively scattered and tentative, and always being pressed back by a hostile establishment, are showing signs of taking root. They address themselves to the audience not as sticks of money-paying individual strangers, or as forced participants in a show of solidarity (as in mass rallies, parades, or coercive church-going), but as a community, even a congregation. The goal of such performances is to entertain, to have fun, and to create what Victor Turner calls "spontaneous communitas," the dissolution of boundaries shutting people off from each other. The resulting experience is of collective celebration. This contemporary tendency originated in the experimental theater as a movement toward ritual. (*Performance Theory* 156)

The City of San Juan, an industrial city whose spatial order is constantly, as Schechner would concur, "undergoing great changes in social organization by means of modernization" presents moments in which its communities manage to imagine alternatives and new spatial orders through performance rituals (*Performance Theory* 155). *La ceiba de los reyes magos* was performed during the year 2000 through the streets and buildings of the OSJ area. Pedro Adorno explains how every year, near the Christmas season, the mayor's office and the Department of Art and Culture in San Juan hires a company to decorate the Plaza de Armas, the main square of OSJ, with a nativity

scene, a human size nacimiento. Plastic and fiberglass figures of Mary, Joseph and Jesus next to animals in a barn with Christmas lights and colors decorated the plaza for years until Pedro proposed to the mayor to substitute the decoration of the nativity scene in the plaza with an original 10-foot sculpture made by ASYS.

La Plaza de Armas, like other main squares throughout colonial Latin American cities, was designed as a place for its citizens to hide during possible attacks in wartimes. The Plaza de Armas' original design creates an open safe space in the center of the city surrounded typically by the mayor's office, a church, and other important cultural and political headquarters where citizens would gather arms to defend themselves. Nowadays, the mayor's office uses the Plaza de Armas as one of the main cultural platforms for the development of economic projects for tourism and local business. By appropriating the space of Plaza de Armas and using it for cultural events, the government mobilizes local and international tourists into OSJ to experience a city organized and structured for cultural consumption that won't benefit the marginal communities not participating in these economic arrangements. In other words, these spatial appropriations of the state suggest a continuation of a global plan to maintain a neoliberal economy, continuously ignoring the deplorable conditions and the needs of the citizens living out of the spatial configurations of OSJ. Taking advantage of the spatial configurations of the colonial city, the state manages to symbolically and geographically guard its economic interests by giving citizens a particular manipulated culture as their arms to protect them from possible economic insurgencies. The intervention of ASYS in these complicated spatial

schemes results in the creation of non-hegemonic cultural performances that challenge the state's project, the city itself, and how it is lived.

For two weeks, the company established their artistic workshop at the marquesina, a gated open space on the right wing of the Teatro Tapia building in OSJ. The Teatro Tapia is one of the oldest theatres in the Caribbean. For many years, during the nineteenth century and the first half of the 20th century, the theatre served as the cultural center for the city. Nowadays, the theatre is administered by the mayor's office and has lost it prominence as the cultural center due to its difficult access, limited parking space, the narrow cobble streets of Old Sand Juan and its constant heavy traffic. But beyond its accessibility, the cultural production at the Teatro Tapia may be suffering a continuous decay because its productions ceased to offer dialogue and connect with any particular community. The theatre now serves the economic interests of the state's cultural plan for OSJ. For the group ASYS, the use of the marquesina instead of the main stage of the theatre already implies an intended distance from the traditional cultural events sponsored by the state. This particular interest in doing theatre on the margins, and the way in which the troupe appropriates the building and rethinks its usage of space, works as a tactic to attract alternative audiences and make them perceive the city in a different way. Nevertheless, these tactics present an incomplete cartography of possible cultural projects beyond the spatial implications of OSJ. In Chapters 3 and 4 I further describe how other theatre companies intervene spaces in the city in areas distanced form the spaces whose symbolic and material signification escapes from the state's cultural project with a significant impact on their communities.

In the beginning of the journey of the two-week performance, the theatre group used the marquesina to work on the making of a 10 foot tall sculpture in the shape of a ceiba tree, whose roots turned into horses and the branches turned into each of the Three Wise Men: Melchior, Caspar and Balthazar. The Three Kings and the Ceiba tree represent common elements of resistance and national identity in the Puerto Rican imaginary. Both images have been represented by leftist groups in the island to challenge foreign hegemonic Christmas celebrations, usually presented around the figure of Santa Clause. The use of horses instead of camels represents one of the many local adaptations to the traditional representation of the Three Kings. The idea of shaping the sculpture as a Ceiba Tree and the Three Kings, as Pedro explains, came up on a dream he had a few days before the proposal. On some level, Pedro sees himself as a medium, someone who could mediate communication between the ancestral world and the world of the humans. All the members of the group do not necessarily share this idea. Some work on the sculpture for the money, some for their passion for the arts, and others to find something to do. Nevertheless, the connection established between dreams and reality, the use of mythological and ancestral references, works to validate the performance among their audience.

The papier mâché technique used to create the sculpture was learned and adapted through their collaborations with the Bread and Puppet theatre in Puerto Rico and Vermont. A Styrofoam base is covered in clay to mold the details of the sculpture. When the sculpture has been finished, it is covered with a thin plastic bag that protects the clay from drying, and enables it to be re-used. Several layers of papier mâché are pasted on

with a homemade glue of cornstarch and water. When the papier mâché is dry, it is separated from the clay mold and painted. Members of their artistic community, OSJ residents, visitors or tourista walking the streets of Fortaleza or the Plaza Colón in front of the theatre could see the process of construction of the sculpture as they were working on it day by day. During the second week of the project, the passersby were asked to come into the marquesina, to have the opportunity to watch closely and even participate in the construction. They participants were asked to write down two wishes on a piece of paper, one personal and one for humanity in general, then cover the paper with glue and put it as part of the ceiba tree sculpture as an offering and petition to the Ceiba Tree God. The theatre group promises that the Ceiba Tree God will grant the wishes on the year to come. As one of the active participants in the construction of this sculpture, I felt as if we were sculpting our own cultural manifestation. By participating in the construction of the sculpture, we were contributing in passing on our collective memory and the symbolic construction of an alternative culture that managed to engage with our community and represent it. I wrote my two wishes, and I was lucky enough to have them granted. Regardless of my religious beliefs, I was transformed through the active participation in the gathering and ritual of the performance, just as many other members of the troupe and their audience was also transformed.

As part of the two weeks of performances, ASYS organized academic conferences and forums in the public plaza next to the marquesina with scholars explaining the symbolic and ecological significance of the ceiba tree, the Three Kings, and Puerto Rican Christmas traditions. The troupe also organized musical concerts, but

mostly toques de tambor (drum gatherings). These toques de tambor and dancing, traditionally performed in Santería rituals as part of spiritual ceremonies, were performed throughout the two-week celebration as an offering to the three kings. With the staging of music and dance as religious offering, and the performance conceived as a religious manifestation, there is a return to ancestral tradition and ritual. The actors become audience and the audience become actors while performing the rituals. Through the discourse embedded in their storytelling, on stage and in their everyday lives, ASYS manages to negotiate politics and the city.

At the end of the two weeks, when the sculpture is finished the troupe takes the sculpture to the Plaza de Armas in a solemn procession accompanied by music, dance, masks, and actors on stilts. The purpose is for the entire community to walk to the Plaza to place the decorative sculpture, which now belongs to the community. It becomes a way of appropriating the Plaza, for the community to envision the city as their own, and as a symbolic intervention in the cultural tradition of OSJ. Spectators approach the performance in various ways and from different places in the city. Some walk with the entire procession, others join in along the way. Some are there to accompany family or friends; others wait at the Plaza for the procession to arrive. Some unknowingly stumble upon the procession and decide to join in. Passers by, tourists, and residents observe from their balconies, while others, especially colleagues and artists that identify as part of the artistic community, feel the need to take part of this ritual in order to cement their belonging and support for their community. Many offer promises, wishes and thanks to the Three Kings. The event becomes a necessary ritual with a transformative end.

Witnessing the arrival of the sculpture at the Plaza reminded me of the wishes I wrote a week before on the sculpture. In some ways, the process of carrying the sculpture to the Plaza made me contemplate my personal problems along the way, and helped me to understand and resolve them. What is most interesting about this procession is the ways we all walked the city. For many of us it seems that with every step we took towards the Plaza we were writing a new collective memory. These multiple stories of the city would be exposed for the rest of the season, in symbolic and material ways, to local and international tourists, to the state, and to other communities who transit the Plaza de Armas daily.

At the end of the performance, the plaza, the streets, and the old theatre building has been appropriated and resignified. The ceiba sculpture impressively stands as a symbol of all who took part in the process and integrated our dreams and life in the construction of the tree, and for the ontological meanings of the tree as a preserved indigenous treasure. The tree itself can be seen as a cultural act of resistance to previous Christmas decorations like Santa, and snow. Nature has been a common symbol of the struggle against development projects in the city. The ceiba tree also reconfigures the Plaza as an ancient ancestral gathering place. According to local archeological narratives, the ceiba tree was the center for gatherings of the Taíno tribe. They would gather around the tree to celebrate, sing, and resolve their community's problems. A ceiba was placed at the center of many town plazas throughout the island during the beginning of the 20$^{th}$ century. They would grow so big that they would end up destroying the pavement. To contemplate this tree sculpture in its entire splendor at the center of the Plaza de Armas

suggests a return to the past, the possibility of being represented as a community within the spatial logic of OSJ.

It could be noted that ASYS clearly resides in a place of privilege for being commissioned by the state to create a representation of national identity that coincides and contributes with the city's tourist economy. Although the event manages to mobilize tourists as well as cultural groups towards OSJ in order to generate consumption of commodified culture, this occurs in a space free of association to a community other than the followers and supporters of ASYS's work. In this sense the performance fulfills a very specific function for a small artistic community. It falls short of performing any significant transformations upon the sanctioned and "legitimate" representation of OSJ. The walled city is not a blank canvas on which artists showcase their work. It is not easily manipulated as other more marginalized and forgotten spaces would be. Its cultural signification is highly guarded and officially agreed upon by appointed cultural monitors like the Institute of Culture. The state protects this antique sector limiting the possibilities of envisioning a different kind of city, including alternative forms of economic development ironically making space for global chains like Starbucks, Marriott Hotels, and other designer corporations to quietly settle within the city.

**Conclusion**

The formation and sanction of a "national identity" in Puerto Rican theatre comes from what has been determined by geography and economic order. It is a consensus agreed upon by cultural guardians that concur with the idea that culture should safely reside in its most obvious symbols of history. According to this consensus, the most ideal

place to preserve, show and sell national culture and identity is OSJ. The city sponsors cultural events that maintain, preserve and reaffirm its compromise with that identity and with traditional Puerto Rican culture. ASYS does not seem to pose a threat to the state's agenda. However, the group makes an effort to challenge mainstream culture and produce new cultural forms that transform how the city is perceived. In this sense the ASYS theatre collective become practitioners of history that perform an alternative history through community ritual on the streets and plazas of OSJ. They appropriate and resignify the folkloric references of national culture and the historical significance of colonial spaces within the city. While these performances do seem to transform its participants by making them recognize a collective memory and rethink the city through a new community ritual, they fall short due to the symbolic and material limitations of the space they occupy. OSJ seems like the most hermetic space for culture in the entire city. It is the state's most guarded fort, in every sense of the word. The confines and ends of the city have been decided upon long ago. Historically the state has taken advantage of the strategic spatial distribution of the walled city to establish its control. That is why OSJ is shown as the face of the island for cultural consumers, tourists and investors alike. It exemplifies the ways economic policies determine the distribution and signification of space. The greatest consequence of this city project can be observed in the deterioration of other areas of the city, like Río Piedras and Santurce that don't seem to participate in the same kind of economic development projects as OSJ. OSJ's material and symbolic space overtakes and overruns the creation of new cultural projects in the rest of the city. If these cultural groups are able to understand this they could use it as a strategy to

endeavor in other spaces with alternative and more open significations. They would have to move beyond the borders of OSJ and focus their efforts on areas of the city that are less guarded, devise work that exposes the different identities within these marginal areas, and try, even if only abstractly, to resignify these spaces. The ideal situation would be for the state and its cultural guardians to deflect its emphasis on the consumption of commodified culture within OSJ and to reinvent a cultural policy that imagines the old city as an ideal space for the defense of marginal voices, a space to defend civil rights and diversity.

# CHAPTER 3

## PERFORMING COMMUNITY: EVERYDAY PRACTICES IN THE CITY.

For the past several years the current government of Puerto Rico has recognized the importance of culture in the process of improving the economy and the quality of life in the areas of the city that have most suffered the effects of globalization and the state's own neoliberal policies. In a most recent press conference, the mayor of the city of San Juan, Carmen Yulín, announced the installation of wi-fi Internet service in some public plazas, most of these within OSJ, but also in the Plaza de la Convalecencia within the Rio Piedras area. The economy and quality of life in the most marginalized areas of Rio Piedras and Santurce, both belonging to the municipality of San Juan, have been ravaged in the face of aggressive global economies and policies of state that commonly overlook these areas and toss them aside.

In the press conference that took place in the Plaza de la Convalecencia, Yulín explained that providing free wireless Internet access there was meant as "un esfuerzo por ocupar los espacios públicos y democratizar la información," "an effort to occupy public spaces and democratize information" (Quiles). The mayor's speech demonstrates knowledge of the discourses that empower the most marginalized areas, of the ways that the citizens of those abandoned areas could come to participate in an economic, albeit neoliberal, resurgence. But these ideas are abundant with contradiction. To offer free wireless Internet access in this plaza seems like a bad joke precisely because of the problems these communities face like violence, homelessness, and high crime. With the almost null police surveillance around this plaza, I can only imagine someone trying to

pull a laptop out of a bag without being mugged. It seems that the announcement is a compromise directed more towards potential business and commerce than the disadvantaged. Micro-business, the educated middle class who could be interested in intervening in these spaces, receive the promise of a more viable city, ready for business and economic development. The mayor adds, "Este esfuerzo nos ayuda a ocupar los espacios públicos. Ayudamos a la gente a salir de sus casas, a vivir en comunidad, a ocupar los espacios públicos y al ocupar los espacios públicos, la gente que vive al margen de la ley tiene que desplazarse a otro lugar." "This effort helps us occupy public spaces. We want to help the people leave their houses, to live in community, to occupy public spaces, and by occupying public spaces, the people that lives on the fringes of the law will have to go somewhere else" (Quiles). That mayor Yulín intends to punish "la gente que vive al margen de la ley" seems to contradict the purpose of habilitating public spaces for the people of Río Piedras, precisely because these citizens have been forgotten and therefore obligated to live on the margins of the law due to the imposition of an economy in which they cannot take part. Although these neoliberal policies seem to be brought about with the best intentions of progress and amelioration for these abandoned areas, to not consider the actual inhabitants of these spaces and pretend for them to be displaced by progress actually brings about exclusivity and social injustice.

In this chapter I will argue that within the constant transformation of the symbolic significance of city spaces, some theatre groups like Teatro Breve, and Y no había luz, manage to take advantage of those unstable changes brought about by urban spatial policies to develop their organizations through performance and everyday life practices.

Lefebvre explains how ideology "can only achieve consistency by intervening in social space and in its production" (*Production* 44). It is produced and maintained, through the body, its lived experiences, and its relation to space (*Production* 49). These ideological concepts define our way of seeing social life, and our experience of the modern city. The strategic position of these theatre groups within the material and symbolic spaces of the city that have been tossed aside in deterioration, and lack the monitoring of other more preferred areas, determine the performances and everyday practices of these groups. Although the logic of the city in some ways determines their everyday practice, it does not contain them completely, making these spaces ideal for alternative cultural projects. This occurs in areas like Río Piedras and Santurce because, as I mentioned earlier, the government has not been able to attract new business, improve the economy, reduce crime, unemployment, violence, or homelessness. This produces what Lefebvre calls differential space; spaces whose signification is much more manipulable by artists, the marginalized and oppressed. In this chapter I focus beyond the state's assigned space for culture. These forgotten spaces, home for marginalized communities, victims of gentrification, have been most important for revisioning the current cultural and economic development of Puerto Rico. In other words, the spaces in which these cultural communities manifest themselves have symbolically distanced themselves from global neoliberal practices and the policies of the state that reinforce it. This has facilitated a new and alternative cultural production in the area. Michel de Certeau describes these spatial phenomena in the city:

> Today, whatever the avatars of this concept may have been, we have to acknowledge that if in discourse the city serves as a totalizing and almost mythical landmark for socioeconomic and political strategies, urban life increasingly permits the re-emergence of the element that the urbanistic project excluded. The language of power is in itself "urbanizing," but the city is left prey to contradictory movements that counter-balance and combine themselves outside the reach of panoptic power. The city becomes the dominant theme in political legends, but it is no longer a field of programmed and regulated operations. Beneath the discourses that ideologize the city, the ruses and combinations of powers that have no readable identity proliferate; without points where one can take hold of them, without rational transparency, they are impossible to administer. (95)

De Certeau explains how the subject can escape the spatial logic of the city that purports to create totalizing ideologies of consumption. In some ways, the subject always appropriates the city through “spatial practices” defined by the “contradictions between the collective mode of administration and the individual mode of reappropriation” (96). The oppressed subject then might undertake certain “spatial practices” as a form of resistance, that consist of a particular appropriation or displacement (99). Artistic production can play a key role in both resisting and reproducing these logics.

Even when these urban spaces do not seem to be producing profitable economic development, during recent years, the city has witnessed the birth of important cultural events, among them two of the most prominent theatre groups of the past ten years. In order to understand how these groups came about and how they function in a poor economy, it is first important to examine the ways modernity has been implemented in the island since the beginning of the 20th century, its relationship to the construction of a national identity, and its role in the definition not only of a great part of the cultural policy of the state, but also in the transformation of the symbolic and material spaces of the city. Academics and artists on the island and throughout Latin America have long debated the ramifications of the modernizing process, often viewing it as perpetuating an uneven modernity by erasing local identities, cultures and ways of life. In this view, modernization on and of the island, which includes technological innovations and ways of living in the city that mimic those of world cities, continues to represent a process of colonization through which the island has been and continues to be subjected. Many sectors continue to question how these global processes maintain or undercut who we are, or what defines our national Puerto Rican identity. The construction and reification of a national identity, which for some is an obstacle in the development of modernity, for others is necessary in order to resist the disappearance of our culture and national way of life.

José Joaquín Brunner argues that for us, in Latin America, modernity gives us everything but it also constantly transforms us, making us lose everything that we are or were. It has been seen as a process of liberation against power but at the same time

strongly related to an imposition of hegemonic and foreign sources. At various times, this concern seems to come mostly from elite groups and Latin American intellectuals; scholars and intellectuals in Latin America that perceive modernity and the expansion of mass culture as a threat to the privileges they gained through a pre-modern order. In the arena of cultural production, those elite classes promoted the need and/or nostalgia for past structures even when they have, ironically, continued modernizing themselves. Most of these intellectual artists that studied abroad in the beginning of the twentieth century, returned to the island to start cultural projects that tended to copy or reproduce the vanguard, modernist styles they learned abroad. At the same time, many looked to find ways of commenting on national identity issues, including its constant process of transformation, through their art. As a result of this complexity, new artistic knowledges about Puerto Rican national(ist) identity were formed aesthetically and in discourse. Magic realism seems like a good example of a cultural creation that would link artistic manifestation with national identity; or as Emil Volek notes, it signals the use of a construction, a fantasy or a projection resulting from the impossibility of Latin America to modernize itself (233). The question about whether this artistic creation was ontologically Latin American or not is not as important for this research as the implications these revolutionary aesthetic forms had on the ways Latin America was understood by the majority of its intellectuals and the popular masses.

Regardless of its, possibly, good democratic intentions, the modernization project that began in the city of San Juan and other Latin American cities at the end of the nineteenth and throughout the twentieth centuries, for many artists and intellectuals in the

island, became a symbol of an external imposition; a cultural hegemony. As a form of resistance to the new cultural, social and economic structures being imposed by the national state and its public institutions, intellectuals in the island created and developed nationalism, a national artistic movement that would represent Puerto Rican traditions and culture. As Jorge Duany states, in the case of Puerto Rico, since the 1950s, the majority of Puerto Rican intellectuals, after many struggles and historic prosecutions against and in favor of modernity, decided to advance the decolonizing project of social sciences while marking it under the Caribbean and Latin American social condition. It was a matter of "modernizing the nation or nationalizing modernity" (*Modernizar* 205). It's interesting, as Duany suggests, that this cultural project excluded and erased the different classes, races and genders among Puerto Ricans. It is now time for the new generation of Puerto Rican artists and intellectuals to deal with these issues (*Modernizar* 205).

Globalization is an active process that adapts itself to specific contexts, and Latin America is no exception in producing its own "flavor" of globalization. But the project of globalization, regardless of its possible good democratic intentions, requires the destabilization of artists and intellectuals. Even when current discourses have accepted the idea that identities are in constant transformation, it looks as if in the case of Puerto Rico, the matter of identity is still a constant cause for debate among political, academic, and artistic forums as well as among spectators and consumers. In Puerto Rico, most political theatre groups insist on the creation of performances that portray a construction, a recreation of the traditional forms of representing the nation. Most of the time, these

approximations fall short of proposing a postmodern Latin America, a place of coexistence between the pre-modern and modern; a cultural hybrid that manages to preserve important components of its cultural identity. Political theatre in the island traditionally focuses on representing the negative aspects of Latin American hybridity and its encounter with modernity and foreign hegemonic discourses. Magic realism reflected an idealized era of revolution and struggle, a specific moment in time, but the time of magic realism is over now. The need for renovated artistic and hybrid forms is constantly arising; forms that grow from resistance. As García Canclini believes, "In these unresolved vacillations and contradictions of consumption are manifested the ambiguities of modernization, the coexistence of diverse cultural tradition, and the unequal appropriation of the patrimony" (*Hybrid Cultures* 103). No matter how logical it sounds, the attachment to establish cultural forms, because they define the human being and his/her behavior, will make it difficult to deal with and propose innovative cultural transformations.

Teatro Breve and Y no había luz were born from this fragmentation of the city within Río Piedras and Santurce. I am interested in studying some of the ways these groups visualize the spatial logic of the city in their work, and how this logic transforms their cultural production, and how they construct new cartographies of the city. I will argue that precisely these areas of the city that have been most displaced and disintegrated, produce the necessary spatial conditions for these artistic groups to thrive. This is mainly because there is a space available for alternative participation in the local economy and a consistency within these very different groups of maintaining these

structures in place. First, however, it is important to understand how cultural policy operates more generally in San Juan. I turn next to the exemplary case of the Centro de Bellas Artes in Santurce.

**Spatial Cultural Policies**

As I mentioned above, modernization, neoliberalism, the cultural policies of the state have tried to define and control the formation and development of the city's cultural groups. In order to better understand the current cultural policies, I will discuss how the Centro de Bellas Artes in Santurce has functioned within this frame. This cultural center, administered by the government, could give us an idea of the cultural geography designated by the state.

The Centro de Bellas Artes complex of Santurce was built in 1981 with the intention of developing the cultural life of the country. It accommodates four comfortable stage spaces: The Sala de Festivales which seats 1,800 audience members, the Sala de Teatro with 750 seats, the Sala Experimental with 200 seats, and the Sala Sinfónica with 1,300 seats. Bellas Artes is located in the heart of Santurce. As mentioned before, Santurce, like Río Piedras, is an area that has suffered the most damage under the current neoliberal agenda. Modernist development began in Santurce during the 1920's after OSJ's spatial limitations pushed commerce outside the old city limits. This turned Santurce into San Juan's most important cultural and financial center during the 1950s. Since then, the construction of roads, and modern buildings, destined for cultural and financial development, have in fact deteriorated the conditions of the city through a processes of corporate apropriation, privatization, expansion, and transformation. These

violent transformations brought about the displacement and gentrification of many communities in Santurce and Río Piedras, now visibly divided by these new spatial orders. The construction of the Baldorioty de Castro expressway, for example, divided and displaced many of the communities of Santurce, along with its economic and cultural centers. Beyond the nefarious effects of the current economic crisis, the city and the space comprising the cultural project of Bellas Artes has also been affected by the continuous government administration changes, politics, funding cuts, and the strict bureaucratic exigencies of licenses and permits for companies and organizations. Fewer and fewer communities are able to enjoy the center's cultural offerings due to high ticket costs, difficult access, limited and costly parking fees, and restrictive (elitist) policies and dress codes. It comes to my attention that the current director of operations, Ricardo Cobián, seems to consider the appropriation and resignification of the city's public spaces as a determining factor in its transformation and improvement, as evidenced in his, project, "Pórtico de las Artes," which aims to remodel a new entrance for the center. The project proposes several changes to the geographic composition of the center's surroundings, and the nearby public plazas and businesses. Cobián explains his interest in transforming this space in an interview arguing, "Debemos orientarnos de manera frontal y directa a la gente, a la ciudad. Por alguna razón la entrada del CBA se diseñó de lado, y creo que es el momento de abrirnos, de girarnos hacia la ciudad." "We most face forward, directly into the people, to the city. For some reason, the entrance of the CBA was designed sideways, and I think it is time to open ourselves, to turn into the city"

(Landini). It is interesting that among the many funding and administrative problems that the CBA has, its director decides to focus on its geographic transformation.

> Queremos ser de verdad una plaza pública, con actividad artística, con participación ciudadana. A mi me da mucha pena cuando a veces encuentro la plazoleta vacía, desolada. Me gustaría que el espacio exterior del centro albergue una presencia y participación continua por parte de la gente (en definitiva, para ellos fue construido este espacio)."
>
> We want it to truly be a public plaza, with physical activities, with citizen participation. I get very sad when I see this empty plaza. I would like the exterior space of the Center to have the continuous presence and participation of the people (for whom this space was built). (Landini)

The idea of opening up the entrance of the CBA building for the citizens to be able to view and walk into the interior plaza more freely seems pertinent to the state's plan of including the areas that have usually not participated in the cultural events that take place there. Most importantly, CBA's director understands the ways the manipulation of space can promote the movement of capital and consumption of culture, in this case national culture. Cobián describes the project for the center's interior plaza,

> Proyectamos una galería abierta y le añadiremos un techo, para que la gente tenga un espacio donde se puedan reunir para conversar y beber o comer algo. Quiero que sea un espacio con un espíritu más europeo, un

> lugar de encuentro, de una gran sinergia. Hay que asumir de una buena vez por todas como parte de la vida cultural el ámbito urbano. Estamos en el corazón de Santurce, un barrio que ha ido adquiriendo una conciencia urbana extraordinaria, y hay una generación que está empujando para mejorar la calidad de la vida urbana, apropiándose del espacio público, y nosotros queremos ser una parte activa de ese proceso.

> We envision an open gallery, and we will add a roof so the people can have a space to meet, to talk, drink or eat something. I want it to be a space with a more European spirit, a place of encounter, of great synergy. We need to once as for all, address, as part of our cultural life, the urban scope. We are in the heart of Santurce, a district that is acquiring an extraordinary urban conscious, and there is a generation that is moving to improve the quality our urban life, appropriating public space, and we want to be part of that active process. (Landini)

In theory, Cobián knows the kind of power embedded in space in order to transform society and create social justice; however, he fails to include the marginalized areas in his discussion. Like mayor Yulín, his project seems to protect state interests in which he aims to include CBA as part of city's restructuring economic tendencies and negotiations. His conjuring of a "more European spirit" for the city demonstrates a continuation of the

project of modernity for Puerto Rico, which privileges foreign ways of living the city, and perpetuates a form of cultural coloniality. Most recently, however, Cobián conducted an intervention in one of the spaces near CBA that could indicate a move towards more inclusive spatial policies. Many of the businesses and buildings near CBA, like the rest of Santurce and Río Piedras, are abandoned or have been forced to close. The abandoned building right next to CBA is almost in ruins. What's left of its architectural design reminds us of the city's splendorous past. The first floor housed a Burger King restaurant that ceased operations ten years ago. As with many other abandoned buildings around the city, these have been appropriated by homeless and drug addicts, and pose a security threat to the people that come to see the shows next door. The director proposed the removal of the wooden panels sealing the old windows and doors, and the cleaning of the inside. Passers by, including homeless and drug addicts, or anyone, for that matter, can enter the clean space freely. In some ways, this symbolic and material access to a space that sits right next to the city's top cultural center, in my mind opens up many possibilities and ideas for performance, appropriation, and rescue. These administrative attempts at restructuring the city spaces, although well intentioned, when trapped within an already disorganized and fragmented city fall short of achieving, much less pursuing social justice.

Currently, one of the few theatre companies on the island that deals relatively successfully with these contradictory ethical dilemmas is Teatro Breve, in both their performance and management techniques. The members, five actors who started in their mid- and late twenties, have been performing together for the past eight years, standing

for what they believe without what they might consider selling themselves to the market. In the parts of the city where they perform, they must survive the continuous process of being excluded by the current process of modernization that works in their cultural formation, as well as with many other intellectuals, academics, and artists from their marginal community.

**Teatro Breve**

Teatro Breve is a good example of how the spatial logic of places, like Rio Piedras, enables the creation of alternative cultural projects that step away from the sanctioned cultural policies of the state. Mikephillippe Oliveros, playwright, actor, director and founder of Teatro Breve earned his BA in theatre from the University of Puerto Rico in Río Piedras. As a young theatre artist looking for a more stable source of income, Oliveros offered himself to work as a bartender in Taller Cé. Founded in 2006, Taller Cé consisted of a cooperative of independent musicians that managed their own artistic space. They bought a small building in Río Piedras, on a neighborhood right by the University of Puerto Rico. Working class Dominican immigrant families and college students mainly populate this area. Many streets around this neighborhood turned into spaces of prostitution and high crime. During that time, the Taller Cé building was maintained by its members; they collectively paid the mortgage, maintained the facilities, produced and participated in artistic performances, and ran the business of the bar and restaurant. It was also used as a rehearsal space and recording studio. At the time Mikephillippe started working there, he had to compose a song in order to be a member of the musician cooperative; most of the performances presented there were from these

independent Puerto Rican music composers and singers. They did their shows on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays. Mike explains how no one wanted to present on Sundays so he decided it was a great opportunity to do theatre on that day and was granted the time and space. Because he only had a week to create a theatre piece, he wrote short 10-minute skits about his daily life struggles, his problems finding good jobs, paying the rent, failed love relationships, family issues and other common problems of his generation. It was a clearly political theatre. His plays exposed problems of crime and violence, poverty, school, unemployment, differences of social class, youth hobbies and hangouts, etc. These have been the principal subjects of Teatro Breve performances; a simple recreation of their daily life, of the struggles of being low working class in their 20s in the island. Many young students around Río Piedras identified with these performances because they represented the identity of a working class college community, and found that. The many particular ways the stories were told, through their own voices, was something quite rare in the few sanctioned theatrical spaces of the island.

After Mike would finish writing the scripts, he would invite a few of his theatre colleagues for a two-day rehearsal before the presentation. As the name suggests, Teatro Breve ended up putting a few short pieces on stage to be shown once a week. They needed them to be short, 10 to 15 minutes, in order for the actors to be able to memorize the lines, and also, in the beginning, to maintain the attention of their audience, mostly students and musicians not used to theatre presentations. Because of the short time to develop the characters, their characters usually featured similarities with the actor who

portrayed them. The sketches were mostly simple comedy. No proper publicity was made for the first shows; only the crew personally called and invited their friends to see it. They created a new space to have fun, for the actors and the audience, a theatre community without any cultural pretension, to enjoy theatre together while having your favorite drink and food. Teatro Breve became, to many of Mike's friends and colleagues, a pure theatrical experience, a celebration, a place to enjoy what a theatre community should be.

Sunday after Sunday, month after month, more and more people came to see their theatre sketches. It grew from the original audience of friends, to 15, to 50, to 250 by the end of the first year. First it was for free. Then they started charging two dollars, then five. Soon, Sunday became the most popular and crowded day of the week at Taller Cé and the Río Piedras cultural scene. All the musicians in the Taller Cé collective, as well as all his colleague actors, now wanted to be part of it. The general interest to participate in this cultural community forced the group to reorganize and rethink the ways theatre was performed, and consequently sell their shows. They took advantage of their popularity. Once the shows grew, and the restructuring of the shows began, their audience changed as well as the content and length of their performances. Prices were higher for longer shows. And they switched performance spaces several times. Eventually the politics of their performances also changed.

Among the things that defined Teatro Breve's spatial practices were the ways in which they use new technologies available at the time including Facebook, Myspace and Youtube, and a long email mailing list to announce their next presentations. The actors

controlled their own publicity as a way to maintain their owns aesthetics and ideologies. But the aesthetic of the graphics and content of their publicity simulated, almost as an exact copy, the mainstream multinational marketing publicity and advertisements for companies like Pepsi or The Gap. And imitation of the mainstream advertisements worked as a marketing strategy for them, first, because their audience understood it as a joke, as if they were laughing at these global companies; and second, the recreating of the mainstream aesthetic helped them in getting access to an audience that usually won't go to see theatre or any high art at all. The company laughs at global advertisements to displace the power of mainstream esthetics but at the same time, uses it to gain audience. Among the "traditional" political theatre community this strategy could be interpreted as a lack of commitment or solidarity or respect to the local economic sectors of the island.

Eventually, Teatro Breve moved towards more traditional forms of performing theatre, out of the marginal spatial configurations of Río Piedras and into other hegemonic spaces that represent ideal settings for selling and profiting, for the exchange of cultural products, including private sponsorship. As a marketing strategy, Teatro Breve travels between community-based theatre and commercial global theatre. As much as they wish to follow a more socialist process and use theatre to expose the underlying means of cultural production, ironically, they must now also submit themselves to the strict requirements of the market. This does not happen often to other artistic groups in the island because their work seems too academic or overtly political, or their aesthetics not commercial enough to garner the attention of a more popular audience and therefore

the private enterprise. Also these other theatre groups would not agree to restructure their work in order to gain notoriety or private sponsorship.

As Teatro Breve developed new marketing strategies, their popularity increased beyond that marginal space in which they developed their artistic product. Big multinational companies like Coca-Cola, T-Mobile, Red Bull, Heineken, and Coors Light among others, eventually approached them offering good money and mass distribution of their theatrical "product" in exchange for publicity. Strategically, the group manages to alow some brand sponsoring without having to negotiate the integrity of their product. All these years, they have been clear about their position against the state neoliberal policies. But at the same time, they believe nothing was wrong with "massifying" their art, with trying to access as many different social classes and diverse groups as possible with their product.

Other spatial practices of Teatro Breve consists of creating sketches that are usually very similar in form to a US TV comedy sitcom. They started inviting famous TV personalities to act as guest stars in their performances. This strategy diversified their audience; spectators going to their theatre space to see their famous TV personalities live, to have the opportunity at the end to take pictures or even have a drink with them. Communities of young students and workers not used to going to the theatre were now enthusiastic and willing to watch these performances. In that process, Teatro Breve manages to integrate them into the mass culture scene. They started using their sketches to laugh about what historically have been the traditional forms of doing political theatre in the island. As an example, they created a sketch call *Rosa y Toño*. It presents a voice-

over, "an almost exact replica" of an eloquent conversation about arts, culture and academic subjects between two of the most prolific political intellectuals in the country: theatre director Rosa Luisa Márquez and visual artist Antonio Martorell. While the voice-over conversation is on, two actors on stage are dressed as Rosa and Toño, acting the conversation grotesquely. This performance represents some of the contradictions of Teatro Breve's endeavor. On one side, they challenge the established discourses of academia, Puerto Rican left ideology, the high-art discourse and the aesthetics of political theatre through parody, but the references they use are so specific that ironically, just a few members of the audience – the elite, the well educated or from their university community – will get the joke. Still, the performance seems to destabilize traditional ideological formations and beliefs. By performing this political comedy sketch, they purposely separate themselves from the elite classes and locate themselves in another symbolic space, not the space for the mass culture or on the traditional anti-hegemonic artists, but in a hybrid space; one between the elite and the masses (Oliveros, personal interview).

As García Canclini states, "…the most defined feature, the least indecisive adjective in the discourse of cultural functionaries, is not of nationalist or indigenist or modern but the one that designates society as pluralist" (*Hybrid Cultures* 103-104). According to García Canclini, "hybrid" postmodern spaces of heterogeneous cultures and knowledges among the global cultures of Latin America, facilitate a better understanding of "the oblique pathways, full of transactions, in which those forces come into play. It allows us to study the diverse meanings of modernity not only as simple divergences

among currents but also as a manifestation of unresolved conflicts" (*Hybrid Cultures* 11). From a Latin American perspective, García Canclini sees a decentering of the forces of modernity throughout the hybridity of cultures in the city. Following García Canclini's idea, seeing San Juan's spatial cultural practices within a hybrid social space shows how marginal voices manage to live the city far from the normative narratives of modernity. The kind of specific dynamics occurring in the reproduction of power relation that contains these communities in resistance enables the consideration of alternative cultural production for social justice. In the case of Teatro Breve, one of the main economic survival strategies they have designed to negotiate their identities and ideologies is to ensure that their plays, their aesthetics, and their message is a representation of their fragmented and contradicting generation, and that their work represents the hybridity and plurality of their community (Oliveros, personal interview). This is a complicated idea, because at times Teatro Breve's work seems to validate rather than question the island's social problems. For example, their most recent show *Pionono 2: La Venganza del Comandante*, is a sci-fi comedy that deals with the life of a group of Puerto Ricans in the future that survive the destruction of the planet, and have ended up stranded in space looking for a habitable planet. With this play they reimagine traditional forms of making theatre in the island, by copying popular sci-fi aesthetics like *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*, and adopting the parody style of other comedic sci-fi movies like *Galaxy Quest* and *Spaceballs*, something usually shunned by cultural intellectuals as a foreign cultural imposition. Secondly, the story occurs outside of the specific history of the island. The Left tends to reject this type of theatre because it suggests Puerto Rico's insertion in a

global world and moves away from the traditional discourses of resistance and national identity which include hermetic ideologies of time, history, and space. These new forms of making a political Puerto Rican theatre do not seem all that political. For example, the antagonist character of the play, General Black Honey, a parody of Star Wars' Darth Vader, is played by one of the few black actors in the company. When the group laughs at social problems in that way they prolong the media's and society's prejudice concerning race and difference, especially when the back actors and women of the company always end up with the secondary, weak, sexual, or dumb characters. At one point in the play, Black Honey strangles one of the members of the ship, Especialista Kuai. While she holds her neck she screams breathless, " I can't breathe," a clear reference to the phrase coined in the recent case of Eric Garner, in which a white police officer strangled a black man to death in New York City. The video and images circulated the media of this man struggling to breathe and repeating the phrase "I can't breathe" make it difficult and uncomfortable for those of us who saw them and understand the violent racial implications of this event to laugh at the joke. Some spectators laugh, but not without an uncomfortable silence of realization. To reference this event in such a mindless manner reveals a certain compromise of the group's previous ideological/political commitment.

*La Casa II* (The House II), one of Teatro Breve's most recent plays, deals with ghosts, *Ghostbusters* style. Developers threaten to demolish an old house in order to build a restaurant chain (Cheesecake Factory) instead. The ghosts live in fear that the house, which they haunt, will disappear with them in it. *La Casa II* shares the message of *Una*

*de cal* against excessive corporate construction. The house could very well represent the country and its values, which are being threatened by outside interests. Wendel, one of the house ghosts explains to a live character who is in love with on of the ghosts, "La casa es lo único que nos mantiene en la tierra. Si derrumban esta casa, te puedes despedir de todos nosotros para siempre, incluyendo a tu amada " "The house is the only thing that keeps us on earth. If they tear down this house you can say goodbye to all us forever, including your lover" (Oliveros 14).

It is easy for the spectator to identify against excessive corporate construction because of a long history of development in the island viewed as colonial oppression. Teatro Breve manages to demystify this idea by identifying with other ideological postulates. For example, the Vampiro de Moca character, a colloquial vampire character of popular Puerto Rican culture, has been evicted from his home nearby, and arrives to the house claiming, "Me desalojaron. Unas máquinas derumbaron la casa donde vivía y unas cuantas propiedades aledañas. Como sea para hacer un caserío me voy a dar una encabroná." . "I was evicted. The trucks tore down the house I lived and some other properties around. If I find out that they're doing it to build public housing I will get really pissed" (Oliveros 19). As a spatial strategy, Teatro Breve apparently presents themselves ambivalent in the face of ideological issues that could lessen the political undertones of the play. This helps them attract a wider audience who may not necessarily identify against capitalism per say or against unrestrained globalization.

Three years ago, after moving through several performance spaces throughout the city, Teatro Breve, settled into an old almost abandoned theatre building in Santurce that

seats 350, called El Josco. The arrival of Teatro Breve to this area happened at a time in which the city was already undergoing a transformative urban process. As a conscious and unconscious strategy, Teatro Breve members started recreating the US hipster community through their public daily life. They perform a particular language and aesthetics on stage, on their Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram accounts, and by the promotion of their individual and collective interests in "healthy" food, support of small and trendy local businesses, artsy coffeehouses, artisanal beers, art galleries, apartments in the city, vintage clothing, indie music, and expensive hipster-fashion and technology like Ray Ban sunglasses and Apple computers. I articulate a close reading of how they use some of these everyday practices of the hipster movement culture, like the use of single-gear, fixed bicycles to move around the city, and how this mode of transport enables them to perceive the city in different ways and therefore disrupt their social space, and envision new forms of living the city. These performances appropriate elements of the broader global culture, like the US hipster's contemporary counterculture movement that is emerging as a global trend around cities and urban centers. I also problematize the social consequences and contradictions of performing neoliberal hegemonic modes of consumption. On an article in *Adbusters*, "Hipsters: The Dead End of Western Civilization," Douglas Haddow describes some of these contradictions. He perceives hipster communities as a "consumer group – using their capital to purchase empty authenticity and rebellion" (Haddow). The members of the Teatro Breve community might be constantly struggling to consume the products that in effect produce them, in order to belong to the global hipster community. I argue how these particular

contradictions recreate the same exclusionary effect of hegemonic discourses conceived by the state and its neoliberal city. For example, their theatre El Josco is located in the heart of one of the biggest Dominican communities in the city. Ironically, very few members of these marginal communities, if any, visit their theatre.

One of their most popular sketch characters, Belkis, is a young Dominican woman who marries Marquitos, a rich Puerto Rican of Arabic decent, and owner of a gas station in Santurce. On stage, Belkis's mannerisms, her accent, her way of speaking with a strong Dominican accent, her dress, and her strong flamboyant gestures, is a caricature of a young poor immigrant woman of color. This character, performed by a Puerto Rican actress for an audience of mostly Puerto Ricans, perpetuates critical stereotypes that validate and reify unequal relations of race, class, and nationality. Furthermore, while the people living around the streets, parks and buildings of this poor neighborhood deal with the struggles of violence, unemployment and gentrification, Teatro Breve brings a nightly audience from multiple sectors and classes willing to play to be entertained and disconnect themselves for the critical political issues concerning this area of the city. Gender and women studies scholar Miranda Joseph studies life in community and questions how community negotiations work as a disciplinary and exclusionary process, embedded with possible acts of racism, sexism, and violence. She explains how "capitalism and, more generally, modernity depend on and generate the discourse of community to legitimate social hierarchies" (viii). She continues by adding how the "communal subjectivity is constituted not by identity but rather through practices of production and consumption" (viii). Following this idea, Teatro Breve's performance of

counterculture community suffers the effects of a space embedded with the ideas of global capitalism and the promotion of exclusionary modes of consumption. The results are confusing because, although globalization contributes in facilitating connections with other communities and their resistance strategies around the world, it can also create a gap in the sense of belonging, specifically if belonging relates to a particular place/space and body. These performance experiences could eventually displace the voices of some members of their community that are unable to fulfill the expectations of consumption this lifestyle imposes, a condition that affects the larger strategy of disrupting the current production of space in the city of San Juan.

**Y no había luz**

Current political theatre groups in the island face new challenges, especially in the midst of the global economic crisis and the current neoliberal policies dominating the city. Even so, some theatre groups have successfully negotiated their theatrical production with their relationship to the marginal spaces they inhabit without having to negotiate their ideology and the rights and inclusion of the communities with whom they co-inhabit. This is the case of Y no había luz, a young puppet theatre group contemporaneous with Teatro Breve, that has kept producing theatre nonstop since 2006 within the confines of a marginalized urban space. Some years ago, and with much difficulty, Y no había luz was able to secure a performance/workshop space that fits 75 audience members in the area of Santurce. There they established a space to construct and store their puppets, offer workshops, rehearse, and perform their shows, as well as offer their space for other theatre groups to use. Like most of the members of Teatro

Breve, the members of Y no había luz learned their craft at the Drama Department of the University of Puerto Rico, but they also trained outside the university. One of the members, Yussef Soto, studied circus and clown in Brazil, Yari Helfeld studied modern dance, Julio Morales is a plastic artist. Most have formal music training, and have taken playwriting and devising workshops abroad. Aside from the group work they devise, most of them work as teachers in specialized schools, and offer community workshops throughout the island. The group sustains itself with money they charge at performances, and commissioned work for private companies like MC'ing events, public arts funding sources like the Institute of Culture and the Departamento del Trabajo, and participating in local theatre festivals, as well as abroad. However, this hardly is enough to pay for rental of their space, materials, production and equipment. No one in the group fills the role of director proper, and they are not interested in that either. They are only interested in working through a collective devising system. This slows down their process considerably, but it does not diminish the quality of their work. For Y no había luz not having a formal leader is the realization of a utopian dream, the possibility for all of them to have a say in the creative process without affecting the democratic dynamics of the group and the quality of the work. As a result of this process of work they are able to produce performances with a very unique aesthetic, and negotiate their present political and social agendas with those of the theatrical Left. Even though this does not bring them the economic and commercial profit that Teatro Breve has garnered, they have impacted their community with new ways of performing the city.

The work of Y no había luz focuses on a rigorous theatrical investigation and work discipline, and experimenting with movement and texts. They meet religiously three times a to talk about possible projects, train, and explore with movements and ideas. As part of this process, one of the members, Yussef Soto explains how they begin devising dramatic outlines and texts that they write as a group. These texts serve as inspiration for the creation of larger more complex pieces, which include objects, movement and the performance space. Through experimenting with these they begin to establish a set of images and choreographic narratives that become the final product. Deborah Hunt taught much of this process to them.[3] They all met during an intensive 10-month workshop that Hunt offered called Bestia, in which they constructed stories and characters through masks and puppets. In this workshop the group had to confront a rigorous process of physical training, and the creation of an aesthetic concept that gave way for the formation and definition of Y no había luz's work today. Their group bonds through their common aesthetic, political, ideological and passionate artistic interest. Their economic circumstances make it very difficult to reproduce and fulfill the discourses and agenda of the cultural Left, which aims to rescue the essence of Puerto Rican identity through art. Groups like Y no había luz, seen as the intellectual artists of their generation, have no other option than to accept and confront the very challenging global market from their own perspectives of cultural resistance mired within the modernization process of the city. In other words, they must find ways of negotiating the apparent invasions and cultural impositions of the globalized world, and insert

[3] In Chapter 4 I describe in more details the performance and contribution of artist Deborah Hunt.

themselves and survive within the economies of a theatre industry without selling out—i.e., compromising their political stance. This proposes a new national theatre that responds better to the multiple subjectivities composing the current social context of Puerto Rico. With their performances, Y no había luz proposes new knowledges, something very rare in the theatrical production of the island.

One of Y no había luz's most well-known plays, *Cu-tendencias*, was first performed in 2006 as part of the Primer Festival del Objeto Performático, organized by Deborah Hunt at Teatro Estudio Yerbabruja de Rio Piedras. This was the first time they worked together as a company. The piece narrates the life of a character called Cuten, a clownish character, with a square nose and square head who only moves in square geometric patterns. The character discovers that he lives in a square world, surrounded by other characters just like him, square, who also move in the same square patterns. Cuten interacts with other Cutens in a choreographic play of movements inspired on the cube shape. They play and mimic each other for a while until they get bored. Suddenly another figure enters the space, a new Cuten, but this Cuten is round. He plays with the audience, letting them in on the fun of being different. He is soon silenced by the square Cutens that do not allow his difference. It is interesting to note that geographic space determines these characters' condition. The characters let their spatial dimensions dictate their behavior, proposing the importance of spatial logic in the ways we interact, and live our lives. It could be said that the city is Cuten's territory, which is then appropriated, and resignified by the round Cuten who makes us visualize other possibilities of living in the city.

After this, the Cutens fall asleep, and in their dream appears the character of Camilo, a puppet moved by the three actors playing Cuten. Camilo is locked in a room as he narrates his life:

CAMILO- Cada día siento que las paredes están más cerca. La claustrofobia era algo desconocido para mi. El miedo a las arañas era lo que atormentaba mis sueños. Es decir, mis sueños eran atormentados por el miedo a las arañas. Pero ahora la ausencia de espacios, hace que mis huesos tiemblen. Y que mi aire se limite a un suspiro. Es triste. Considerando que desde chico siempre quise ser astronauta. Viajar por el espacio. La sensación de inmensidad. Gravedad cero. Llegar al solo. Wiiii. (Suena un teléfono, contesta y es una voz Mr. Hammerson, no entendemos lo que dice Hammerson pero conversa con Camilo en inglés) Yes, sure, como no, enseguida. (Cuelga el teléfono.) Ay tengo mucho trabajo, mi lista de tareas es interminable, y las paredes cada vez están más cerca. ¿Con quién voy a conversar si no creo que pueda compartir estas cuatro paredes con alguien? (Al público) ¿Usted quiere compartir conmigo, un café? Poco a poco siento que un lado de mi cara no siente nada. (Se le coloca al títere una nariz cuadriculada) La sensación de que mi cabeza es redonda perdió ya todo el sentido. Solo encuentro más y más y más trabajo. (Suena teléfono otra vez. Es Mr. Hammerson otra vez, suena un poco más

ácido que la primera vez. Camilo habla en inglés) Ok, I will do my best. Enseguida! (Cuelga el teléfono) Me quiero ir, siempre me quiero ir. Pero no se qué empacar si no tengo nada. (Salen unas maletas que Camilo agarra con sus manos) ¿Podré meter una maleta todos mis recuerdos? ¿Podré concretizar la abstracción de mi memoria, de mis ideas, de mis pensamientos? ¿Los podré meter yo todos dentro de una maleta? Tengo muchas ganas de pedir ayuda. A veces pienso que una bala en mi cabeza podrá aliviar esta maldita ansiedad. Acaso será esto el sueño americano. América TM. América te arma. (canta) "América, América, ñaña ñañaña ñaaa…." (Suena el teléfono es Mr. Hammerson y Ms. Waterstone, desesperan a Camilo con exigencias incomprensibles) Si como no enseguida! Mi cuerpo se acostumbra a todo. (Se le coloca una cabeza Cuadrada a Camilo) Me encojo con todo. Me siento encadenado, mas no veo las cadenas. El mundo lo siento al revés. Pero estoy seguro, de que todo esto ocurre en mi cabeza.

CAMILO- Every day I feel that the walls are getting closer. Claustrophobia was unknown to me. The fear of spiders tormented my dreams. I mean, my dreams were tormented by the fear of spiders. But now, the absence of space make my bones tremble. It limits my air to a sigh. It's sad. Considering that as a kid I always

wanted to be an astronaut. Travelling through space. A sensation of immensity. Zero gravity. To make it. Weeee. (The phone rings. He answers. It's the voice of Mr. Hammerson. We don't understand what he's saying. He talks to Camilo in English.) Yes, Sure, why not, right away. (Hangs up the phone.) Oh, I have too much work. My work list is endless. And the walls are getting closer. Who am I going to talk if I don't think I can share these four walls with anyone? (To the audience.) Would you like to talk to me? Have a coffee? Little by little, I feel one size of my face getting numb. (Puts a square nose on the puppet.) The sensation of having a round head is not making sense anymore. I can only see more, and more, and more work. (The phone rings. It is Mr. Hammerson again. He sounds angry this time. Camilo speaks in English.) Ok, I will do my best. Right away. (Hangs up the phone.) I want to leave. I want to leave. I don't know what to pack if nothing is mine. (Suitcases enter stage. Camilo grabs them with his hands.) Can I put in a suitcase all my memory? Could I make an abstraction of my memory, of my ideas, my thoughts? I really want to ask for help. Sometimes I feel that a bullet in my head would relieve all this damn anxiety. Could this be the American dream? America TM. America te arma. (Singing.) "America, America, ñaña ñañaña ñaaa…." (The phone rings. It is Mr. Hammerson and

> Mr. Waterstone. They make Camilo frenetic with their demands.) Yes, sure. Right away! My body gets used to everything. (A square head is fitted on Camilo.) I cringe at anything. I feel chained, but I can see the chains. I feel the world upside down. But I'm sure all of this is only in my head. (Y no había luz, *Cu-tendencia*).

After Camilo's monologue, the Cutens wake alarmed, and the theatre fills with round colorful balls of all sizes. They overflow the stage and the audience. The Cutens in a panic decide to hide under a huge cube. We see what they perceive as a secure space as a confined cage. The audience plays with the balls while the Cutens hide.

Camilo dreams of becoming an astronaut and flying through space. His fantasy is to flee this room because he knows it's the only way of someday achieving his dream. Space here is shown as determinedly oppressive. This oppression comes from Mr. Hammerson, an English/gibberish speaking character who we don't really understand. Mr. Hammerson controls Camilo's space. The relationship between Camilo and Mr. Hammerson illustrates the colonial relationship between the Puerto Rican subject and the imposition of a cultural hegemony defined within a spatial logic. This relationship cites the traditional ideologies of the Left in the island. What makes this performance different, however, is the interest in showing space as a determining factor in the marginalized conduct of our oppressed lives.

Another very popular piece by Y no había luz is *Sobre la mesa 3; Macabrón* (Over the table 3: scarier/better), one of the small plays within a larger project, consisted of various short, individually devised, puppet pieces, that had to fit on a table, and shared one object in common. One of the rules for this project was to omit the figure of the director. Each artist created his or her 3-minute piece individually during a particular frame of time. At one point they all met to show each other their piece and they all offered notes and critique on each other's performance. Each performer was free to offer his or her own interpretation of the object and it would not be eliminated from the show. In this way the group keeps the democratic element of the process intact.

In *Macabrón*, the rules were the following: all performances should be about and around the subject of terror, they were all supposed to be elaborated with puppets and over a small table, at some moment of the play, the performances must last exactly three minutes, and, at some point, they must use and integrate a little mousetrap. During the presentation for the audience, the small theatre space of Teatro Estudio Yerbabruja in Río Piedras, was divided with makeshift curtains for each individual piece. Three small groups of 6 people would travel through each performance simultaneously, but in different order. During the performance, a sound will go on every three minutes to notify the audience that is time to move to another space. Signs hang on the curtains indication where to move.

Although each performer developed the idea of terror differently there was a harmony of politics unifying the pieces. Some of them created short stories, others developed stories specifically alluding to the terror lived by the citizens of the island. In

many cases the terror stemmed from the violence of the country, or the unsure economic future. This contrasts with the lack of political compromise in Teatro Breve's performances, maybe as a strategy of resistance against the traditional forms of the Left in Puerto Rico. But Y no había luz's theatre seems to believe in theatre as politics, and its capacity to change the world they live in.

The structure of *Macabrón* enables the performers as well as the audience the possibility of agency. The theatrical experience in this case is very different to each of the participants in this piece. At the beginning of the play, the actors divide the audience in small groups and take them to the small space where they will start watching the play. This structure positions the audience as protagonist, in the style of Julio Cortazar's novel *Rayuela*, which presents various possibilities of beginnings, middles, and ends. These performance structures transmit the political ideologies of the group and their ways of seeing and experiencing the world. The group transforms the performance space in a representation of the city of San Juan. Even if the spectators' travel through the performance has been established, each spectator's experience of the performance is different, as if each audience member is free to move around the performance as they wish. The most important thing to understand is that there is no single or correct way to experience the performance. All recorridos are equally valuable. The audience then travels through each performance cubicle, almost like a symbolic "city" of the performance producing some spaces of agency and creating their own conclusions.

Yussef Soto narrates the interest of the group in making theatre far away, outside the city limits.

> Desde que comenzó el grupo, siempre hemos soñado con algún día poder hacer y crear una comunidad en algún lugar de Puerto Rico fuera del área metropolitana. Esa sería una de nuestra metas más grande. Hace poco trabajamos en Casa Pueblo, un barrio de Adjuntas que trabaja con voluntarios de una comunidad que se organizan para trabajar la tierra y preservar del ambiente. Nosotros quiéremos algún día llevar instalar el teatro de Y no había luz. Lo mas lejos possible de la ciudad. Así como lo hizo el Bread & Puppet. Esa sería nuestra utopía.
>
> Since the group started, we have always dreamt of one day being able to create a community somewhere in Puerto Rico, out of the metropolitan area. That would be one of our biggest accomplishments. A few weeks ago, we worked at Casa Pueblo, a neighborhood in Adjuntas that works with volunteers from a community organized to work the land and protect the environment. We would love to move our theatre company Y no había Luz over there. To a place located far from the city. Just the way Bread & Puppet did. That would be our utopia. (Yussef Soto, Y no había luz)

For Y no había luz, the spatial logic of the city seems to represent such a violent financial and cultural imposition, which they are tired of trying to resist and transform, that they wish to escape. At times they feel it would be easier to reorganize their community and

settle in a different location as far a way as possible. Just like the Puerto Rican members of Pinonono 2 were escaping oppression on a spaceship, searching for another planet to begin a new civilization, or like Camilo in *Cu-tendencia* who dreams of becoming an astronaut and living in outer space.

**Conclusion**

Works like Teatro Breve's could serve as a point of reference for other political theatre groups in Puerto Rico to disseminate their art to larger audiences. In order to achieve it they must rethink the ways in which they can maneuver through the global marketing of products to the masses, taking note not to reify prejudiced points of view concerning race and gender, and consider a more fair representation of the more marginalized sectors in their area. The promotion and creation of diverse theatre spaces and projects directed towards diverse audiences that promote inclusion, participation, and dialogue between different social classes without the need to establish oppressive or limiting or offensive politics and aesthetics of representation. Due to the complexity of the context in which ideological negotiations happen and of the globalized social environment in which this work presented, it is necessary to decentralize and disarticulate traditional leftist discourses of how political theatre should be made in Puerto Rico, as well as the commodity discourses of consumption that dictate how, where, and who can consume it.

We should focus on how space helps in the development of democratic cultural projects for a diverse audience, one where different social classes should have access to it, and whose receptors may not necessarily agree in their preferred forms of

representations and approaches. As Larrain suggests, we must finally accept that we live in a world of computers, McDonalds and shopping centers, a world that is controlled by mass media and marketing (*Identity and Modernity* 189); we must understand that these symbols might represent Puerto Ricanness as well as our national identity discourse; we must see them all together as part of our cultural hybridity.

These young cultural political groups like Teatro Breve and Y no había luz are constructing new performative cartographies in the city, one more in negotiation with global culture, the other in more active resistance. These young artist are mapping new discursive tendencies that question concepts of nation, identity, race, gender, and economy within a city that continues to remind us of its change and its potential for more transformation.




Figure 1. Front view of Centro de Bellas Artes next to an abandoned building on the left. (Photo by Jorge González.)

# CHAPTER 4

## PERFORMING DIFFERENCES: OCCUPYING THE BODY AND THE CITY.

*"Yo creo que nuestra nación y*
*todas las naciones tienen el*
*derecho a la independencia."*
Tito Kayak

The challenges brought about by globalization, the cultural policies of the state and its neoliberal projects within Puerto Rico, force its most affected areas to rethink the established "way of living" and promote new social and economic structures. These new proposals, however, usually fail to understand or take unto account the ideas and needs of all classes, specially the most oppressed. Furthermore, many of these cultural productions and their communities fall short of recognizing or challenging the spatial logic they reside in. This situation generates great challenges for future generations of artists in the island to be able to develop work while sustaining themselves economically without undermining their communities' civil rights.

In this chapter I study two cultural performances in which the body and its identity, in terms of race, gender, social class and ideology, works as a site of resistance. Following along the lines of Diana Taylor's idea concerning the body as an important form of transmission of social knowledge and memory, my interest is to engage with the "embodied behaviors" of Deborah Hunt and Tito Kayak through their spatial performances, and analyze the ways their bodies, as representations of "social memory and cultural identity," carry other possible "stories, memories and struggles" that "would not be recognized in text and documents" (Taylor xviii). In both Deborah Hunt's and Tito Kayak's cases, by exposing the body to life-threatening acts and spatial appropriations

and resignifications of a different city space, these performances promote new dialogues and more democratic knowledges about the economic and political social structures of the marginal sectors of the island.

The purpose of this chapter will be to consider the ways in which contemporary and future cultural groups in the island can perform alternative social and economic structures, negotiate their cultural and ideological impositions, and approach new understandings and knowledges about the complexities of their global environment. First, I will study the occupation/intervention of an abandoned theatre building in the district of Río Piedras by Deborah Hunt and other cultural producers. Then, I will study the performativity of Tito Kayak's activism when he manages to stop the construction of the residential and commercial luxury building Paseo Caribe in San Juan. In both cases, the public act of illegal appropriation of space, as well as the deliberate use of the media to promote these spatial interventions, gave a diverse Puerto Rican audience an opportunity to rethink their social fantasies, and multicultural coexistence in order to make those fantasies happen. Lefebvre explains how cultural differences "arise on the margins of the homogenized realm, either in the form of resistance or in the form of externalities" (*Production* 373). The social life, lived and worked at the outskirts of the city, as it is in "the vast shanty towns of Latin America (favelas, barrios, ranchos)," for example, is a different kind of social life that "survives in as much as it fights in self-defense and goes on the attack in the course of class struggles" (*Production* 373). The way these oppressed sectors manage to effectively organize themselves and resignify abstract space exposes an "appropriation of a remarkably high order", a display of "spontaneous architecture and

planning" sometimes even "greatly superior to the organization of space by specialists" (*Production* 374). This temporary exposition of the contradictions and conflicts in space creates moments for the production or envisioning of differential space. I will be studying how the body of the oppressed and marginalized sectors, in performance, could produce a temporary exposure of the city's social differences. This chapter will identify the relations of social differences beyond Lefebvre's idea of "class struggles" in a capitalists vs. workers sense, to include other critical social differences in terms of race, gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, age, religious beliefs, etc., to see how these performance cartographies remap the city of San Juan.

In order to understand the performance of Deborah Hunt and Tito Kayak, it is important to be familiar with current leftist ideologies and identities in the city. As Chamsy el-Ojeili and Patric Hayden describe "the emergence of the alternative globalization movement," these political theatre groups, as an alternative social movement in the city, usually "do not oppose a globalization *per se*, but a particular version of globalization that currently dominates" (186). These cultural groups developed socialist ideals in their constant search for "social justice, equality, community, and . . . the elevation of social values over the values of profit making and growth" (186). As a general result of the Left's representation throughout history in the island, these groups align themselves with causes most traditionally supported by the theatrical Left in Puerto Rico. In many cases this limits the causes with which they identify because they construct their resistance on an ideological identity that poses no threat to the established spatial order.

When these groups only identify with historically-traditional politics of resistance, far from creating social change, as Yúdice suggests, they reproduce a well established "social fantasy" (*Expediency* 51). Yúdice describes his concern as follows: "The overarching social fantasy that compels us to perform conformity with and rejection of a series of roles and identities that give U.S. cultural politics its particular flavor is the product of a conjuncture of conditionings by the media, the market, the welfare state, and the political and juridical systems" (*Expediency* 51). Yúdice describes how culture has been constituted and managed as a resource for commercial and social purposes by the state and private institutions on a global social context. But even more important to understand the production of space in the city though performance studies lens is Yudice's idea about the complexity of the formation of cultural identities as the "conditionings, elicitations, and pressures exerted by the multidimensional field of social and institutional relations" (*Expediency* 39). The symbolic and material spatial logics of the city construct the social subject, its ideologies and identities. Following Judith Butler's concept of performativity, Yúdice argues that the subject and his identities form themselves though the social performance or the constant repetition of a cultural performative "force" that is "generated by differently arranged relations among institutions of the state and civil society, the judiciary, the police, schools and universities, the media, consumer markets an so on." (*Expediency* 43). In other words, culture works as a "performative force," a "framing of interpretation that channels the meaningfulness of speech and act" (*Expediency* 60). To this idea we must add the way in which the city is structured for the development of an economy of consumption, that

oppresses many areas of the city. How could it be possible then for cultural groups aligned with causes of resistance to produce new knowledges about civil rights and living the city? What kind of anti-hegemonic performances can produce social change? Can these performances transform the Puerto Rican national fantasy, the traditional identity of political leftist groups, and its hegemonic knowledge and power embedded in the spatial relation to the city through performance? In this chapter, I will present two spatial performances that, through their marginal identity, are able to produce a resignification of the cultural globalized space logic of the city.

What is interesting about these two particular artists is precisely their identities. One is a female artist who immigrated to Puerto Rico from New Zealand, and the other an electrician who also performs independent activism and does not belong to any elite intellectual circle traditionally dominating local artistic activism. Both Hunt and Kayak work outside the traditional molds historically established to supposedly produce social change. Both have possibly had less formal education than the voices formally authenticated by the local Left. Hunt's and Kayak's work manages to be seen and heard because they produce material appropriations of the city's spaces, identifying with and exposing the island's most marginalized voices. This generates interest in their performances and enables a space for dialogue. These artists seem to have escaped the contagion of the ideological doctrine of nation. What distinguishes their performances is that they insert and resignify their marginal bodies within the spaces they occupy. The combinations of their marginal identities with what at times are life threatening acts function as an effective resource (an expediency if you will) to begin to etch a new, more

equitable cartography of the city, that envisions new economies that takes into account the most communities possible.

**The Left of the Left**

As I mentioned above, the district of Río Piedras in the city of San Juan, its buildings, its streets, as well as the people who walk daily through its symbolic and material spaces, have become victims of social and economic impositions. They have been affected by the global and neoliberal policies that govern the island. Río Piedras, a district that for years may has been the economic and cultural center of the metro area now looks like a city in ruins trying to resist imposed social and economic structures. In the last few years, many political and social projects, proposed by different social sectors, have been implemented to try and revitalize the district's cultural production and economy. But the majority of these political and urban projects have failed to consider the different subjectivities of the inhabitants and visitors of this heterogeneous community, constituted mainly by students from the Río Piedras campus at the University of Puerto Rico, as well as low income families and Dominican immigrants. Politicians, academics, intellectuals, the private sector and artists, from diverse ideologies, have imagined a rebuilt Río Piedras from their own experiences. The most powerful sectors usually propose transformations to the urban space by the construction of new buildings and new economies while gentrifying those sectors that will not participate in them. In order to have effective social changes, it is important to include projects that will consider these usually forgotten voices.

A few new cultural groups and spaces have formed out of these past years of economic crisis in Río Piedras, among them: Teatro Estudio Yerbabruja, Taller Cé, Club 77, Sala Teatro Beckett (previously Teatro Diplo), and El Boricua. Most of these local businesses and its cultural communities, as I argue, have been built or made visible, from their resistant standpoint, new social and economic alternatives not only among their artistic community but also for the rest of the community. In order to do so, these cultural groups have been forced to live under a particular social order that gives them no option other than to challenge and negotiate their ideologies in order to survive. These common ideologies, even when they come from a place of resistance, were constituted from historic and hegemonically powerful identities that need to be dismantled. Sociologist Michel De Certeau describes how a person identifies with the place in which she lives as well as with the "ways and customs" that are "accepted and reproduced" by the social groups from those places. But because of the "extension of acculturation phenomena, that is, while the displacements that substitute manner or "methods," the displaced subject subverts and "create for himself a space in which he can find *ways of using* the constraining order of the place or of the language" (30). In other words, these subjects "metaphorized the dominant order: they made it function in another register" (32). As a result, De Certeau explains how "the imposed knowledge and symbolisms become objects manipulated by practitioners who have not produced them" (32). The manipulations of these cultural consumers are not only of the imposed social structures but also of the imposed leftist ideologies that have defined them as a social performativity. The manipulation of these imposed social structures and ideologies are

precisely the survival techniques employed by some of these cultural groups in order to transform or resist the social environment in new ways. In order for this social resistance to take place, the manipulated subject needs to be *displaced*, or othered. That is why I'm interested in the displaced sector of these resistance groups like the subaltern, oppressed, "feminine," or Other, which I believe can find more ways to put the reconfigured identity to subversive use.

Traditionally, the leftist ideologies have been represented and portrayed the same way, usually using the same elements of the imaginary of Puerto Rican identity, as well as their solutions. But these leftist resistance groups, as well as the manifestations that represent them, play a critical role in the development of social alternatives and the proposal of new social structures different from what has been imposed in Río Piedras. I believe that in order to propose alternative social change, the common ideologies of the Left must be constantly challenged and transformed into a new structure that responds to the actual global neoliberal systems. The inclusion of subaltern subjects in these cultural groups is necessary to dismantle the usual approaches of past common ideologies. I'm particularly interested in the work of Deborah Hunt and Teatro Estudio Yerbabruja because they represent one of the few cultural groups of resistance that is constantly challenging their imposed ideologies and constructing new knowledge through their social performances and activist interventions. Most of the members of the latter group are women who, even when they identify themselves with the Left and its ideologies, seem to believe in a multicultural space for resistance, and they usually resist the reproduction of the normative ideologies of Puerto Rican resistance. They end up

working twice as hard because not only do they try to produce social alternatives and change, they constantly struggle with prejudices that come from not following the traditional forms of resistance of the Left.

Geographer Doreen Massey studies the geographical signification of cities, focusing particularly on spatial differences and identities. Massey explains how identities produce space, and how space reinforces social power relations, including our perceptions of spatial identities. As an answer to what is implied in the hegemonic male body and a heterosexual male experience as a cartography of power, Massey proposes a spatial methodology that inquires "the ways in which space and place are currently being conceptualized" by purposely "challenging the current dominant form of gender definitions and gender relations" in space (*Space* 2). Instead of focusing, like Lefebvre, on the relationship between the city's oppressed subjects and its political and economic powers, Massey suggests paying attention to the multiplicity of powers that exist in the city, and how these powers produce new spaces for social change. Marginal subjects like Hunt and Kayak, whose performances, like other political theatre groups in Puerto Rico, denounce social inequalities, repressive government policies and the injustices of the free market, further resignify space through their different oppressed identities, as a naturalized immigrant/female artist and non-scholar electrician, respectively.

Caren Kaplan, who studies women and gender, also suggests "a politics of location that investigates the productive tension between temporal and spatial theories of subjectivity that can help us delineate the conditions of transnational feminist practices in postmodernity" (*Scattered Hegemonies* 138). Kaplan's approach to feminist identities as

a counter-hegemonic strategy can also be applied to other identities of resistance in the island: those unrepresented voices whose histories also demand complex reviews and narratives. As Kaplan describes, "in identifying marginal space as both a site of repression and resistance, location becomes historicized and theoretically viable – a space of future possibilities as well as the nuanced articulation of the past" (143-144). Hunt and Kayak's cultural/political performances, because of their spatial difference, at the borders of traditional discourses of resistance, manage to produce a destabilization of the totalizing social spaces of the city.

**The Feminine Performance**

Deborah Hunt, an internationally recognized puppeteer and mask artist, arrived in Puerto Rico from New Zealand in 1990 and rooted herself as a local resident and artist. Since then, she has suffered from artistic prejudice, what could be considered cultural persecution by the defenders of traditional Puerto Rican identity. Considered "foreign," even after living and working in the island for thirty-five years, she is forced to negotiate her identity in performance. Consequently, Hunt's work celebrates a legitimate ideology of a global Left while simultaneously disconnecting from the sanctioned identities of the local Left. Hunt's work, artistically and economically, escapes from those traditional social roles. Her performance usually denies the national identity discourse historically embedded in the cultural production of other political theatre groups. She challenges the Left from within the Left itself through her different identities---precisely producing new spaces for resistance and social change. Her ideological performance dismantles the social structures within her community. It is important to highlight the feminine subject

or “difference” in these leftist cultural groups. Following Massey’s concept of multiplicity in spatial identities, Hunt’s feminine subject works in the rebirthing processes of the district of Santurce and Río Piedras by proposing alternative positionings within the ongoing dynamics of social power in space.

After performing in streets and public plazas throughout Latin America for several years, Hunt arrived in Puerto Rico eager to present her work. She encountered many obstacles to present her work in the plazas of Old San Juan and discovered that “in Puerto Rico the streets do not belong to the people, they belong to the state” (Hunt interview). But there was a loophole. She realized that if the performance itself was not stationary, she was technically not breaking the law. In addition, a performance in movement and constant re-location would make it more difficult for police to locate and detain her for performing on the street. She decided to perform in Santurce along the Ponce de Leon Avenue where police monitoring of cultural activity was less common. This strategy of eluding the police also contributed in eluding the artistic community. Much of Hunt’s work passed unnoticed by local artists. One of her first performances consisted of traveling on foot along the entire length of the Ponce León Avenue, from Rio Piedras to Santurce, a distance of approximately six miles.

> Yo no espero cambiar el mundo. Tampoco espero que venga mucha gente a mis trabajos. Yo creo que apostamos en el universo. Estamos ayudando a cambiar el universo. De una manera futíl. Para mí, la Ponce de León es un camino. Intenté caminarla tratando de recordar esa

> memoria de cuando se construyó. Fue exaustivo. Tratando de recordar a los taínos.
>
> I'm not expecting to change the world. Neither do I expect lots of people to come see my work. I think we're betting on the universe. We're helping in transforming the universe, in a futile way. To me, the Ponce de León Avenue is a path. I tried walking it to remember that memory of when it was constructed. It was exhausting, trying to remember the Taíno tribes. (Deborah Hunt interview)

Hunt relates this first performance to the memory of the disappeared indigenous community of Puerto Rico, the Taínos. For her, the route traveled by her body in performance recalls the imagined presence of indigenous bodies traveling that space in a time before the city. In this sense, the performance rescues and embodies the memory of the contribution of indigenous bodies in the production of the space itself, of a space that is now the city of San Juan.

Another spatial strategy employed by Hunt to elude the law, was performing through a shop window. In the store window of an arts supply store in Santurce, Hunt presented *Las mirillas*, a chronological narrative of the history of Santurce from the Taínos, to the Spanish invasion, and the life of African slaves in the slums of the city. In this piece we see three separate spaces: two shop windows each adjacent the space at the center that locates the shop entrance. It is nighttime. The three spaces are illuminated. A masked character appears in each window acting out several physical actions to a voice-over narrative in the background. In the shop entrance space, a constant greenish figure

appears with a small hut-like community of houses not big enough to fit him/her. She crawls on the floor. Among her actions, she fishes precariously, and makes a small bonfire. In one of the windows a soldier fearfully opens a box, and in another a male cook cuts fish. In the background we see video footage of another masked figure walking near a beach. This figure later appears in one of the windows. Each character's appearance and actions happen simultaneously, meaning we always see three characters, but the constant character is the middle one, the green one. The green character reacts to sounds from the street as she warms her hands on the small fire. The colors in each space point to certain ideas, for example, the green character seems to be connected to nature; the brown characters to war, and opulence; the red character moves threateningly.

This performance was the product of an ethnographic investigation of the city, its history, and its community. By performing through a shop window Hunt was technically performing in a private space, but her performance was visible to the public from the road and sidewalk. She was making street performance without being *on* the street. *Las mirillas* managed to grab the attention of passers by, and people from the community that would approach the performance and contribute to that collective memory. In this way, Hunt was able to create an alternate experience, a new signification of this space that she shared with the community.

Hunt's performances propose, from her own experience, a new Left that defines new levels of resistance to the economic and social impositions experienced by her cultural group and her community by global and neoliberal social practices. Just a few blocks from Hunt's Teatro Estudio Yerbabruja space where she worked from 2000 to

2011, stands the New Victoria, an old theatre abandoned for more than 20 years that could end up, just like many other buildings in this district, demolished so it can be used for parking space or a new shopping center. After many years walking and living around empty unused buildings, different cultural groups, theatre companies and scholars from Río Piedras decided to perform a symbolic invasion and appropriation of the New Victoria space in 2008. This building has been a target of invasion and appropriation before. For many years, it has housed drug addicts and homeless. But on one particular morning, a collective of artists, students and scholars illegally occupied it, claiming the need for common spaces for the development of culture in the Río Piedras community. Among the many ways they intervened with the space, they were able to get inside the building, paint it, and put up a big sign that read: "New Victoria: Colectivo Casa Teatro" (Collective Theatre House). The act of this symbolic appropriation has its performativity in many sectors of the community; the ones that actively participated in the performance as well as the members of the community that were able to witness it. After seeing it closed for so many years (a building that was closed even before they were born), for many of the young students and artists involved in the performance it was the first time they were able to see the inside of the space. Many of the witnesses, members of the community of Río Piedras, were also transformed by this performance and many even entered the space. According to Hunt's accounts of the event, a passer-by noticed the theatre door open, decided to enter and recall the times when the theatre was up and running. She told Deborah Hunt that it was precisely inside that theatre that her husband asked her to marry him. As soon as she entered the space, she started crying while

remembering all the memories she lived there. A policeman arrived at the scene, not to stop the performance, but because he was curious; he wanted to see what the theatre looked like inside. Hunt and the other cultural groups created, at least for a couple of hours, a utopic public space, free and open to anyone. They were able to escape, on some level, to the reproduction of the "national fantasy" that is usually performed in traditional cultural events in the island. Even the space owner, as Hunt explained to me in an interview, called her a few weeks later and suggested a meeting with the community in order to negotiate the possibility of letting the community use the space for cultural purposes. For a couple of hours, members from many sectors of the district of Río Piedras, artists, students, workers, and its business community, were able to experience a cultural performance that enabled them to live and visualize a social alternative that on a larger scale could potentially help transform the economic and social environment of Río Piedras. I believe these cultural groups managed to escape from the particular interests or agenda usually related to the Left, and they were able to create a discourse far from a totalized one that threatens the Other and its different identities. Most of the citizens that experienced the performance were able to perceive culture as a resource that can benefit many different voices and interests. Most of all, I believe it is precisely the subaltern subject of the Left, the "feminine", or the Otherness of these oppressed cultural groups, that can open spaces for social and urban re-birth, something that politicians alone have never been able to accomplish. These "feminine" cultural groups are constantly exposed to the cultural industry that dominates the island and are expected and coerced to recreate the ideologies of the Left. Their reality and experience is so different from the established

norm. They constantly negotiate their ideologies in order to learn how to survive, not only from the social injustices of neoliberalism and globalization, but also from the ideological impositions of their own group. Massey proposes a conceptual mapping of space that focuses on understanding how the multiplicity of identities works in transforming social space.

> Space is the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity; it is the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist; it is the sphere of the possibility of the existence of more than one voice. Without space, no multiplicity; without multiplicity, no space. If space is indeed the product of interrelations, then it must be predicated upon the existence of plurality. Multiplicity and space are co-constitutive. Finally, and precisely because space is the product of relation-between, relations which are necessarily embedded material practices which have to be carried out, it is always in a process of becoming; it is always being. (*Philosophy* 2)

Massey suggests space, as a product of power relations, produced, through a multiplicity of identities, "a constant process of becoming", of different political subjectivities (*Philosophy* 3). In other words, not presuming that the identities constantly produced by space are ontological or essential.

Many cultural groups in Puerto Rico that defend imaginary Puerto Rican identities are actually reproducing hegemonic discourses. As Puerto Rican historian Silvia Álvarez stated, the Left in Puerto Rico proposes "new utopias and counter culture

articulated from their frustration and their desire of new symbolic worlds and challenging ideologies" but at the same time, she also believes that this Left "creates symbolic economies, plan the construction of national/state fictions as well as govern processes of legitimization and authorization of powerful narrations while intervening in the political order of citizens" (*País del porvenir* 214). As Alvarez-Curbelo suggests, the traditional Left fails to create social change when it tries to change Río Piedras from within their traditional standpoint; they are imposing social, economic and political structures on the community's subaltern subjects. Even more, it is possible that what seems to be a revolutionary idea of the Puerto Rican Left, could simply be created by some intellectuals as strategies for their own benefit in order to insert themselves within those neoliberal structures.

Historian Carlos Pabón explains how some sectors of Puerto Rican society, among these, artists and intellectuals, knowing how nationalism is commonly accepted and could be marketable, are performing Leftist ideologies, not for social change but simply to "recognize and give authority to symbolic and material capital" (110). This capital, as Pabón explains, "perpetuates the knowledge that guarantees power to both: the state and the producer" (110). Pabón criticizes the Left stating, "because of the failure of their independence or socialist projects, these intellectuals have transformed themselves into intellectuals of the state and its capital" (110). What makes this intervention/invasion performance interesting is that it doesn't really feed the national fantasy of the culture war, Left vs. conservative. On the contrary, this feminine performance imagines a multicultural space that enables social justice.

One of her most recognized performances, *Arquearse*, a masked thriller about piracy, Hunt explores the idea of a city in constant transformation whose spaces are shared by multiple identities. This piece presents the story of an indigenous group through two characters, Mujer Joven Azul (Blue Young Woman) y Vieja Azul (Blue Old Woman), who are being followed by a scientist called Geneticist, who tries to make money from the antibodies from these women's blood. Vieja Azul calls on detective Gerome Croma and his helper Gene Soma to save them. The detective travels to the indigenous world and there he experiences a physical transformation in which his head is transferred to a blue body. This physical transformation makes him understand the Blues' world. His assistant, Gene Soma, upon seeing the detective's blue body believes he is dead and places him in a paper bag. Gerome wakes up inside the paper bag in which the "genetic mapping" of the blue body becomes illuminated. Gerome contemplates his travel within this blue body:

> GEROME: Es un día como ningún otro. Sueño con gentes con recortes exóticos. Voces susurrando en torno al robo de cromosomas. Gente que dice: "somos más que nuestros cuerpos". En estos días, duermo en la piel azul de gente que ignora los muros en la tierra y los viajes turísticos a la luna. Tierra robada, selvas deforestadas, lenguas prohibidas. …controlarán todo menos nuestras mentes que corren como ríos, sobrepasando a los turistas que viajan a la luna.

> GEROME: This isn't a day like any other. I dream of people with exotic haircuts. Voices whispering about the chromosome thief. People that say: "we are more than bodies." These days, I sleep in the blue skin of people that ignore the walls on the earth, and tourist travels to the moon. Stolen land, deforested jungles, forbidden languages. …they control everything but our minds which run like rivers, faster than the tourists traveling to the moon. (Deborah Hunt, *Arquearse*)

This world's city is intentionally presented as confusing. Each of the characters represents the multiplicity implicit in the space. The indigenous blue tribe does not recognize the spatial limits that have been established. They live on their own terms, their own spatial codes. In the case of detective Gerome, he comes from a working class already submitted to oppressive, neoliberal forms of space. He works for many hours at a time in a small cramped office space, making little money, and living a routine that makes him feel isolated. At the beginning of the story, detective Gerome does not see or recognize these even more oppressed groups like the Blue women. His approach to this indigenous community is at the beginning purely financial, purely business. Gerome must experience the same space inhabited by the Blue women through dreams and literal embodiment. In this case, the piece emphasizes the diversity of powers that exist within the same space, and how these powers manage to transform.

**Performance from the Margins**

Tito Kayak's performance is a good example of an embodied cultural production from a marginal leftist standpoint. But what makes this performance interesting is that it uses the media as a tool to resist neoliberalism and globalization. Through all local TV channels, the country was able to watch activist Alberto de Jesús, better know as Tito Kayak's, performance. This electrician was captivating his audience once again. He became popular in 2000 when he installed himself at the shooting range of the US military base located in the Puerto Rican town of Vieques. That time, he was able to mobilize himself with other members from different political and religious groups demanding the stopping of bombing and military practices that were taking place in the small town for the past 50 years, something that was eventually conceded. Those days, Tito Kayak got his name and popularity because he almost died of dehydration trying to go around the island of Vieques on a kayak. After that event, the reception of Tito Kayak among his Puerto Rican audience became diverse; some of them admire him, and others just laugh at him. That same year, he climbed the Statue of Liberty to put a Puerto Rican flag on top, asking for the US Navy to leave Vieques. He was eventually arrested. In 2005, he was also arrested in front of the United Nations' building trying to switch the building's flag for the Puerto Rican flag while the Special Committee for Decolonization was inside discussing the Puerto Rican colonial situation. That same year, he travelled to Palestine and climbed on top of a watch tower with a Palestinian flag showing his support for this country and protesting the building of the wall by the Israeli government to

separate the Palestinians' land from the Israeli's. He was there for five hours until he was arrested.

In November of 2007, inside the construction site of the expensive building complex Paseo Caribe in the city of San Juan and next to the iconic Caribe Hilton hotel, Tito Kayak again climbed on top of a construction crane and stayed there for a week. He was demanding the return of the construction site's land to the "Puerto Rican people." As part of a bigger collective demand, protesters were asking for the construction to stop and asked the government to give the "citizens of the island" their right to access this public area, specially the area where colonial structure San Geronimo Fort is located. As they argued, this structure, which for many years has been owned by the Puerto Rican Institute of Culture and managed by the Hilton hotel administrators, represented to the "Puerto Rican people" an important national "cultural patrimony" that needed to be restored and opened once again to the local public.

As soon as the police got the order to arrest Tito Kayak (it took them a week to do so), Puerto Rican police offered a public show of force with their special weapons and tactics unit, police cars, motorcycles, boats, jet skis and helicopters. All media sectors, as well as many civilians and protesters, were capturing the arrest on their cameras. After a week of news coverage of the event, the spectators at home were glued to their televisions expectant of the moment the arrest was about to happen. On a megaphone, the police asked Tito Kayak to come down from the crane and surrender but not only did Tito not oblige, he was able to move the crane so that it was now hovering over the sea. Dressed in camouflage, his face covered with a black t-shirt (Zapatista Subcomandante

Marcos-style), in front of everyone, he started climbing down the crane, rappelling into the sea. While he was going down, spectators and protesters, in an emotional moment, started clapping and screaming support messages to Tito while the police waited to arrest him. Some of the protesters jumped into the water next to Tito, making it very confusing for police to spot which one he was. On the water, there was a Kayak waiting for Tito, which he started rowing on to a miraculous escape. A day later, through emails and different WebPages like indymedia.com, there were pictures of Tito Kayak hidden somewhere in the shanty town of La Perla, still wet, drinking from a bottle of wine and eating a piece of bread. These emails -- I received one -- were sent in order to let people know that Tito Kayak was able to escape and was doing fine. That same day, after recommendations from lawyers, intellectuals, priests and other members of the Left in Puerto Rico, Tito Kayak decided to give himself up to the police at the Ateneo Puertorriqueño, a cultural institution that was going to protect him from possible police brutality. In order for him to give himself up, he asked the police to let him be next to his "spiritual leader" at all times, a Catholic priest who followed him through the process. That's how Tito Kayak, escorted by the police and the media, ended his public performance.

**The Nation**

By experiencing the performance through the media, I felt there was no doubt, Tito Kayak was playing the part of a national hero who was not afraid of facing the tyrant and his power in order to accomplish his objectives. What might be seen as obvious is far from being a representation of the voices of the Left, and especially not of the rest of the

country. Not all citizens consider Tito Kayak a national hero. In fact, probably the majority of the island's population, regardless of the social sector they come from, do not respect his right to protest, and most laugh at his activism and think he must be stopped, arrested and charged for interrupting the development and work of the amazing commercial project Paseo Caribe. Through the media, his performance is able to create a space of dialogue that reaches a variety of popular audiences in a socially contradictory environment. To the working class construction workers who wake at dawn to work in the Paseo Caribe complex, Tito Kayak is an obstacle. The longer Tito's activist performance lasts, the less they can work and get paid. Ironically, even when Tito commits his politics to the causes of the country's working class, these workers do not agree with how Tito represents them. However, intellectuals, academics, students, priests and leftist lawyers usually support these kinds of performances. These elite groups have been criticizing these construction workers for not supporting Tito Kayak's struggle. These intellectuals don't seem to care about the opinion of these workers, and intend to quiet the subaltern voices, usually through the media, in order to promote their personal agendas. Puerto Rican playwright Roberto Ramos Perea, director of the Ateneo Puertorriqueño, the institution that helped protect Tito Kayak during his arrest, has been one of the most critical against the workers' position. Perea wrote this note on his personal online blog:

> Why do the workers of Paseo Caribe bitch so much about Tito Kayak not letting them work during his protest on the construction crane against the corruption in that building project? Don't they have their right to strike

> and protest when their salaries are not what they expect? It's so easy to complain from a space of power! It should also be as easy for us, the ones who believe, like Tito Kayak, in social and environmental policy changes! Don't tell me that stupid argument that the workers have the right to work and that Tito is just an obstacle! …those workers that earn their living at Paseo Caribe don't seem to understand what the working class struggle is all about. I want to think that they do, that those workers know their duties and that the first thing a worker should do is to respect the rights of the other. What kind of workers' solidarity is that one that only cares about personal interest? (http://intermediopr.blogspot.com/).

These kinds of aggressions and accusations that come from Tito Kayak fans mark the difference between the Puerto Rican social groups and its ideologies. It proposes a discourse with no tolerance to the cultural diversity of the island. To me, this seems to be an hermetic discourse that only protects the interests of a small sector of society, in this case, one that has much more economic and political power than the group it criticizes. About the particular case of Puerto Rico, historian Carlos Pabón argues that the actual national discourse has been constructed from a global capital structure and, instead of being one of resistance, it's a totalizing one that intends to maintain unity among the different cultural identities in the country (397). This discourse promotes our national spirit and self-esteem, as I mentioned before, not as an instrument of resistance to a foreign or imposed power, but on the contrary, in order to reaffirm our capacities as a

country to relate with other countries in global terms. In other words, this discourse looks to integrate us as a nation/state in a more effective way, into the free market processes and the global capitalism. But also, as Pabón explains: the "sovereignty" that they look for, means to exclusively benefit the state. Puerto Rican self-determination belongs to the intellectual and political elites, not to the common will of the people (402). At first glance, it looks like these cultural group's manifestations and the traditional discourse tries to protect the rights of all the nation's oppressed subjects, but those subjects aren't actually being considered. Pabón adds that the leftist construction of a discourse of unity is a political fantasy; an agenda that looks for sovereignty reproduces "the mechanism of some sector from the intellectual and political Puerto Rican elite negotiating their positions and power relations with the US elites" (402). The social transformations that occurred as a consequence of Tito Kayak's performance differs from the representation of the leftist ideology traditionally performed. A few weeks after Tito Kayak's performance, in what I believe is a consequence of it, the governor of Puerto Rico Anibal Acevedo Vilá ordered a halt to the construction of Paseo Caribe for 60 days in order to start an investigation about the permissions and the legality of its construction. Eventually, after a long legal process, a judge decided in favor of the developer and Paseo Caribe complex is still being built, while protesters keep demanding its demolition. But the performativity of Tito Kayak's activism is impossible to demolish. The building is still there at the entrance of San Juan. Many Puerto Rican citizens pass by the building daily and it seems impossible not to think about that image of Tito Kayak standing on the crane and then relate it to the social conditions in which this building has been

constructed. I believe Tito Kayak's performance becomes a social response to the actual global circumstances in a form that should be considered and reproduced by future cultural groups, regardless the sector they come from, because it opened a space for dialogue; a place where the different voices of Puerto Rican society, the workers, the intellectuals, the police, the developers, the students, the business sector and even the media reporters were able to speak. Following Yudice's concept, "culture must be understood not as property but as an interaction, …more compatible with the necessary understanding of how to perform citizenship in the times of neoliberalism…" (*Redes* 9). He further explains that "these initiatives must not be organized as a whole; a vertical political integration gives no results; the decentralization prevents the adoption of a counterproductive global project, supposedly common for everyone." (*Redes* 9). Yudice suggests that,

> The creation of new imaginary collectives, in part as a response to the transnational gentrifying process, makes possible the identification and negotiation of the dichotomies hidden by those same processes. The challenge, for example, of urban movements to the increasingly spatial segregation, a hierarchization and segregation of culture as well, demonstrates that the cultural action is also political when it prevents the disarticulation of the struggle for urban public spaces with the processes of valorization of identity. (*Redes* 9)

On some level, Tito Kayak and his performance, as well as the media, were used by different sectors in many different ways to promote different agendas. They were all able, on some level, to participate in a dialogue and to express their political ideas and particular subjectivities in a global environment. Because this spectacular life-threatening escape and persecution performance called the attention of the "Puerto Rican people," different voices were heard. This opened the space for various voices to register and present their political subjectivities through personal and collective emails, the creation of *Facebook* and *Myspace* groups, individual and corporate webpages, as well as newspapers, television, radio and Youtube postings. This political act of resistance, instead of being an intellectual imposition, became a stunning performance that called the attention of its audience, the consumers of culture, making them part of the dialogue, and creating a space for most of them to negotiate and reproduce their ideologies.

**Cultural Policies Reconsidered**

The Institute of Culture is the state institution that administers the San Gerónimo Fort. It has the "responsibility to establish the cultural policy of Puerto Rican commonwealth government" (Acerca del ICP). Events like Tito Kayak's performance, makes us rethink the utility of these types of government institutions. Founded more that 50 years ago, the Institute of Culture doesn't seem as effective in a time when the structures to promote culture are now open to globalization and the market. As García Canclini argues, in Latin America, the state usually preserves what is traditional, the cultural patrimonies, while the private sector modernizes culture and art. In the process of

the modernization of culture, these private companies are able to succeed in capturing the attention of the masses as well as the elites of society.

> While governments understand their policies in terms of protection and preservation of the historical patrimony, innovative initiatives remain in the hands of civil society, especially of those with the economic power to finance risk. Both seek two types of symbolic yield in art: states seek legitimacy and consensus in appearing as representatives of national history; corporations seek to obtain money and, through high, renovating culture to construct a "disinterested" image of their economic expansion. (*Hybrid Cultures* 59)

Although Tito Kayak's performance recreates a traditional Left ideology that considers and promotes the state's responsibility with the national culture and patrimony, it was able to capture the attention of many social consumers from different sectors of the island, similar to the performance of the private companies and their global perspectives. In order to create social change, Tito Kayak needed to perform a different ideology and succeeded by publicly exposing his body to a life-threatening act. Ideologically, Tito Kayak fears the loss of his "cultural values" into the hands of foreign companies. He got involved in cultural activism because it goes against his ideology to let this global company install itself in the "sacred" space of the motherland, as if the motherland could end up being erased through the appropriations of these "our" lands. But the Caribe Hilton hotel is located in the same space, and for more than 50 years in has also been preventing the public access to the San Geronimo Fort. As part of the state's

contradictory modernizing plan during the 1940's, the construction of the Caribe Hilton hotel was proposed to represent the elements of a modern Puerto Rico. Curiously, by now the Caribe Hilton Hotel, almost 70 years after being built, is considered an icon of our culture, a national patrimony. What this means is that the building complex that is now being constructed next to it, Paseo Caribe, a symbol that threatens the imagined Puerto Rican identity, if its not destroyed, in 50 or 70 years could easily become an additional symbol to "our" island essence; another element of identity in this already multicultural city space. John Beverley sees multiculturalism as an answer to the struggles of the Left in globalizations. He sees multiculturalism as a "demand for equality of opportunity" and believes "it conforms to liberal pluralism because the identities in play in multiculturalism find in themselves the principle of the validity and rationality rather than in a transcendental social principle or goal" (227). Following these ideas, the city of San Juan becomes the material and symbolic space in which the identity negotiations take place, and it seems that only through the performance of these negotiations in the city, a new knowledge is produce. Usually, the constant fear of the Left prevents (albeit unsuccessfully, ultimately) the possibility of a pluralist space or the material construction of new identities. But Tito Kayak's performance, by integrating the whole community as spectators and actors through his eye-catching performance and the media, proposes the understanding and coexistence of all identities together; the San Gerónimo Fort, the Caribe Hilton Hotel and the Paseo Caribe all together in the same block. That block in the city of San Juan represents the multiculturalism of the island inserted in a global era; a copy or a recreation of the material and symbolic space of the capitalist markets and

structures that always looks so unfair to the Left. What I propose is to understand how these types of buildings and identities that are being constructed one next to the other in the island constitute the Puerto Rican subject. It is the responsibility of cultural groups to promote, through their performance, the need to create spaces of dialogue based on the acceptance of the difference in a global multicultural world.

**Reimagining Space**

Urbanist Armando Silva describes Latin American cities as "Trans-Cities" where "human bodies live daily with the sense of being squeezed and stretched" (164). He describes the human body in the southern continent as "amalgamated, tumultuous, assaulted, tired, surrounded by all sorts of sounds and shouts, street sellers, the noise of cars, and every imaginable kind of obstacle and inconvenience" (164). But he also notices how the subaltern subject like mothers or students or the working classes in those cities, through their public rituals, they were able to "induce other citizens to witness a certain rebirth of popular opinion in which to debut the next millennium" (159). Silva describes the cities of Latin America as the place where those rituals take place; performances that present visions of the future or "an imaginary projection which tends to embrace itself" (171). The performance of Tito Kayak, as well as the one of Deborah Hunt's cultural group's appropriation/invasion space in Río Piedras enables the community of the city, from all its sectors and interests, to envision an imaginary society, or what Silva calls a "new urban utopia" (171). The members of these cultural groups, the ones that are being constantly displaced, are able to negotiate their ideological formations in order to manipulate the social and material structures of the city so they can

produce new spaces for an open dialogue to all sectors; a starting point for the creation of new visions of more democratic economical and political structures.



Figure 2. Deborah Hunt, standing fourth from the left holding the bird mask, next to some of the performers at the New Victoria Theatre. (Photo by Jasmin Contreras.)



Figure 3. Deborah Hunt and theatre company Y no había luz in front of the New Victoria. (Photo by Jasmin Contreras.)

# CHAPTER 5

# CONCLUSION

> "If gentrification means that more artists are going to move here and make it a better place, then sign me up."
> Alexis Busquet,
> Founder of Urban Art Festival Santurce es Ley

When I arrived back to Puerto Rico with my family in 2010 to begin my investigation regarding performance in the city, I began to see a different kind of city. It had new meaning. Among other things, and maybe because of a generalized urban boom, I began to ride my bicycle throughout the city. In my bike travels I have witnessed and experienced some of these transformations of collective signification happening to and about the city in the past years. What interests me most is the resurgence of new local businesses dedicated to creative and cultural production. Many of these small businesses are led by the younger generation who seem to be reactivating the local economy within Santurce while creating new business models in the city.

It seems important to me that the study of the city within cultural studies continues with a theoretical focus on space, taking into account the social effects of these new creative businesses within a city that normalizes gentrification and unlimited development of multinational companies with foreign interests. The current economic order and logic of these types of enterprise should be questioned and investigated because they serve a neoliberal global structure. Projects in Santurce like Librería A.C., a bookstore on the main avenue Juan Ponce de León, which promotes local literature, cultural presentations, and a café/restaurant and meeting place; Abracadabra Counter

Café, an urban restaurant concept, also on Ponce de León Avenue, that features a small stage on which probably the most pertinent and significant theatre projects have been presented in recent years. The Teatro Shorty Castro, home of Teatro Breve, located on Calle del Parque, intersecting Ponce de León Ave., in recent years has begun to produce the work of young theatre makers and comedians. Another late night space, La Respuesta on Fernández Juncos Avenue, occupies an important space as art gallery featuring young artists, and as a performance space for new music and performance groups. In addition to this, other art galleries like C787 Studios, Galería 20/20, and La Productora all located on Calle Cerra, have joined in the development of new artistic communities in Santurce. These spaces have brought about the resurgence of new collective significations regarding the city, like for example, interest in gastronomic variety and innovation, the development of sustainable and ecological urban projects, and the organization of communities within deteriorating areas that have been overlooked by the government. An example of this type of community organization are the Fiestas de la Calle Loíza, a cultural street celebration begun in the past two years by the people of the one of the oldest and most disadvantaged communities in Santurce. The Fiesta is possibly the event that comes most closely to integrating the already existing street community with the incoming one. It features local businesses and street vendors, artists, and regular people who have lived and worked on that street for decades. Other urban arts festivals like Santurce es Ley and Los muros hablan, organize and gather young people to carry out cultural events with the specific purpose of using art for the appropriation of urban spaces including a proliferation of murals and graffiti on the walls of abandoned buildings

throughout the city.

All of these projects around Santurce that have sprung up in the past ten years, demonstrate new interest in alternate forms of appropriating a deteriorating city and resignifying it, facilitating new ways of using and living it. Even so, there is a necessity for more investigation that generates cultural maps that facilitate an understanding of the protagonists of these projects and their social effects on the city's cultural geography. It would seem that although these projects seem to be committed to quality of life and the betterment of the citizens, many of the organizers come from the more advantaged sectors of the country, and lack an understanding of the repercussions of new business on previous small businesses, and residents. Many even participate, purposefully or not, in the same gentrification they seem to be against. These new projects and businesses move in, taking advantage of the new economic boom readily available to them, and eventually end up displacing the previous communities.

During the years of this study, the country lived through two governments of different political parties; two city mayors, and two governors with opposing policies. The first governing term by Luis Fortuño of the Partido Nuevo Progresista began in 2010 with the mayor of the capital city of San Juan, Jorge Santini. They aimed to mobilize and stimulate only the cultural production that would prove to be economically lucrative. The only types of cultural production that would benefit from government subsidy were those seen as good business for the government and would stimulate the economy. The second and current governor, Alejandro García Padilla of the Partido Popular Democrático, with the new city mayor Carmen Yulín, proposed policies that promoted small, creative and

culturally driven businesses, projects that seem to promote diversity, equality, and visibility of disadvantaged communities. However, these projects continue to come from the more powerful business sectors with more private than common interests or little if any interest in the benefit of the community. In 2013 the government created the Comisión para el desarrollo cultural de Puerto Rico, "with the purpose of initiating an ample participative process aimed at examining ways of stimulating cultural production" ("con el fin de poner en marcha un proceso amplio y participativo dirigido a examinar formas de estímulo a la producción cultural") (Comisión para el desarrollo cultural de Puerto Rico). The government webpage explains that this commission should take into account, among other things, current and long-standing cultural traditions. It is also explained that it should consider options that develop businesses and self-sustaining/management projects that work within new business trends emerging in the city (Comisión para el desarrollo cultural de Puerto Rico). This commission project, which is carried out by recognized academics, artists, and cultural entrepreneurs, does not appear to consider the geography of the city. Their proposal fails to recognize the ways the spatial logic of the city affects cultural production; therefore it also fails to encourage any significant social change that promotes fairness, or equality. These proposals are based on the idea of promoting small, self-sustaining businesses, but as mentioned earlier, the cultural politics that fuels neoliberal economic development keeps marginalized cultural producers from participating in these economic processes because of their spatial signification and location within the city. The process of defining and delimiting so called "long-standing or historical" cultural traditions as well as current or

trending cultural practices are another way of marginalizing these groups. Although the emphasis of this proposal is on rescuing the economy of a city from the depths of social crisis, rooted behind this agenda is the notion of preserving a historically exclusive national identity. Economy and business professor, Javier Hernández, a collaborator in this commission and director of a project titled Inversión Cultural (Cultural Investment) which promotes creative industry in Puerto Rico, explains the how's and why's of promoting creative industry in the island in his personal webpage. Hernandez is in favor of "culture as the engine of [economic] development" ("la cultura como el motor del desarrollo"):

> La cultura como motor de desarrollo – El segundo aspecto importante es dejar de mirar la cultura como un elemento estático y como un obstáculo al desarrollo [económico]. Los retos de la política cultural a mediados de los años 50 requería proteger manifestaciones tradicionales que estaban desatendidas. Esta política tuvo mucho éxito. Ahora nos toca reconocer el carácter híbrido, dinámico y rápido de la actividad creativa. La cultura y el patrimonio se construyen cada día. Por eso necesitamos comenzar a pensar en una "cultura emprendedora", donde los artistas y gestores culturales se vean como agentes de cambio social, económico y cultural. Esto requiere repensar el rol de la academia, que produce artistas sin las herramientas para desenvolverse en el complejo entorno económico. Nuevamente, tenemos que pensar la cultura como motor.

> Culture as the engine of progress – The second important aspect is to stop looking at culture as static or as an obstacle for [economic] development. The challenges to cultural policies throughout the mid '50s required the protection of traditional manifestations of culture that no one was preserving. This policy was very successful. It is now time to recognize the hybrid, dynamic, and fast-paced character of creative activities. Culture and heritage are built each day. That's why we need to start thinking about an "entrepreneurial culture," where artists and entrepreneurs could see themselves as agents for social, economic and cultural change. This requires thinking about the role of academia, which still produces artists without the tools to navigate the challenging economic environment. Again, we need to think of culture as the engine. (Inversión Cultural)

Hernandez proposes a look at culture within a frame of dynamic hybridity and constant flux, similar to the multiple voices of the city. He also understands the difficulties of the current economy and the importance of educating cultural producers to effectively understand and participate in it. His intention is to educate citizens to accept and assume the only possible economy within the cultural cartographies of the city. It would be interesting to redirect this state commission so that the local economy instead of culture becomes the engine. In other words, that the hybrid and dynamic character of the economies of the city be recognized and integrated within the scope of the project. To

open the possibility for the legitimate inclusion of alternative forms of economic development, those currently located at the borders of the law, the unwanted, illegal, or underground economies that occupy marginal spaces. In this way, the rubric to assess successful creative industries would no longer be according to their economic impact, but their social impact, the impact on its community, and their capacity to create new knowledges of how to live the city in a more democratic way.

Within the context of contemporary cultural geography, the city and Puerto Rican theatre continue to reinvent themselves, maybe motivated by a necessity of survival within a global economic crisis that has left possible social and cultural projects without private or public financing. The administration of the CBA, for example, now appears to demonstrate some sort of aperture towards less privileged voices, not only with projects or urban intervention, but with a new program for resident artists that aims to offer a performance space to alternative artists committed to investigating social causes in their work. The Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, another state institution in charge or funding and promoting culture, has also tried to change its cultural policies to more democratic ones. However, such a politicized administration, which professes to encompass so many cultural forms all the while having to maintain and benefit the image of the state, has not been able to establish alternative projects that really account for diversity, or the more marginal artistic sectors.

In order to better understand the dynamics that manifest within this historical/cultural context in the contemporary city of San Juan, it is useful to employ what Lefebvre suggests, which is to analyze the spaces of the city, focusing on the

relationship between modes of production and the production of space. In other words, to pay particular attention to those spaces of the city in which significant changes in the modes of production appear to occur; in the relationship and tensions that happen within those spaces. Currently the state establishes its strategies through the creation of an "abstract space," characterized by social fragmentation, homogenization, and hierarchy. Those new spaces that produce great transformation are what Lefebvre calls “differential space.” These come from areas that produce effective resistance to the homogenizing forces of capitalism. For Lefebvre, an effective methodology of analysis would be to take into account all the components of social space. He explains, “The form of social space is encounter, assembly, simultaneity. But what assembles, or what is assembled? The answer is: everything that there is in space, everything that is produced either by nature or by society, either through their co-operation or through their conflicts. Everything: living beings, things, objects, works, signs and symbols” (*Production* 101). It would be pertinent that more investigative study be aimed at these kinds of spaces, and to recognize the importance of “thinking spatially” regarding the social conditions of the city, and how the forces of “encounter, assembly, and simultaneity” determine new cultural production and the resignification of new spaces for social justice.

Before finalizing this study, I had the opportunity of getting to know the work of Puerto Rican dancer and performer Noemí Segarra, founder of the Piso Proyecto (Floor Project) collective and the Piso Móvil (Mobile Floor) initiative. This dance project, created in collaboration with dance and architecture students from the University of Puerto Rico as well as other academics, consists of the construction of a portable floor to

be able to dance on that can be moved and placed in specific places throughout the city. The performance began with the construction of the floor by the architecture students with recyclable materials. The floor is then transported to a space in Santurce where the old community of San Mateo de Cangrejos used to be. Currently the only thing left of the expropriated community are what looks like gravel on the ground, but are actually crushed pieces of the houses that used to be there, and the last, single, standing house – inhabited by an elderly family who has painstakingly resisted expropriation for the past ten years.

After the expropriation in 2005, the nineteenth and mid-twentieth century buildings and houses that were left were destroyed. The empty lot was used as parking space for several years. Car tires were unknowingly rolled over tiny pieces of windows, walls, and personal items belonging to this forgotten community. A cyclone fence now gates the space, awaiting the permits for the development of what has not yet been disclosed. Some say possibly a Walgreens or some equivalent may be in the works. The development companies involved have kept the future plans for the space under hermetic secret. It is certainly a central and privileged economic location any business entrepreneur would salivate over. Some have speculated over the possibility of a public park, something that could benefit the community. Others have mentioned the possibility of luxury apartment buildings.

On that pedregal (rocky ground) of the barrio San Mateo de Cangrejos, among the ruins, near the only standing wall of a two-storied house, the Piso Proyecto collective installed their portable floor as a working space for the dancers. The space is used as a

physical laboratory for training, devising, and performing works that examine the relationship of the body with the city. Due to the specific working and training conditions, and the corporeal investigation leading the dance project, this particular group is completely informed and invested in exposing the problems the community of Santurce face. Their work embodies the appropriation and resignification of the displaced community of San Mateo de Cangrejos.

Projects like Piso Móvil, due to their rigorous academic/theoretical characteristic, could seem too elitist or inaccessible to the actual community they aim to represent, but this is not the case. This project, like some other dance projects around the island, derives from the borders of cultural creation and traditional dance in the island. The dance community in Puerto Rico that identifies with an ideology of resistance and the political Left, usually produces works that demonstrate ample theoretical knowledge about the effects of art and culture on communities. This is possibly because they come from more educated fields. Even so, they identify as marginalized artists within their field of study because most are women of color, queer, or they work outside the boundaries of what is recognized as traditional or beautiful dance. For these dancers their body is their main investigative instrument. That their performances center on the movement of the body is probably what incites so much theoretical and practical rigor concerning the body and space--something less common in other types of cultural manifestations.

I met Segarra, the director of Piso Proyecto, at a café in Santurce. I thought the interview should be in Santurce since our conversation would be about the city and the body. I seldom try to explain my research study to someone not already familiar with it in

order not to bore or dominate the conversation, or sometimes because the topic may seem too distant or unrelated to some people. In this case, however, Segarra knew exactly where I was coming from because of the similarity with her artistic project. When I began to explain my own analysis of Piso Projecto, she stopped me and said, "Tú no me vas a decir lo que yo estoy haciendo porque este cuerpo es mío." "You're not telling me what am I doing because this is my body" (Segarra, personal interview). That comment demonstrated a political consciousness about the condition of the body, and her interest in not boxing herself in an academic interpretation of her work. Segarra explained that although her formation is in classical ballet and flamenco, she seeks to distance herself from those genres as a form of resistance and escape from the colonizing force of those strict dance rules, like the ones required in classical ballet, exert on the body. For this reason her work is difficult to categorize, even within the already structured form of experimental or modern dance. Her dance work, according to Segarra is, "como dar a luz un nuevo movimiento;" "to give birth to a new movement" (Segarra, personal interview). She refers to it more as a process of investigation than the intention to perfect an already established physical movement. For Segarra, it is ok not to know what one is doing. "A mí me interesa lo que aun no tiene forma. Por eso es que yo trabajo con la improvisación. Trabajamos en una ambigüedad." "I'm interested in what still has no shape. That is why I work with improvisation. We work with ambiguity" (Segarra, personal interview). Her body improvises, and her work depends and responds to the place and space it is being performed in, her emotional state in regards to that space, her interpretation of that space, and her social commitment to the space.

Segarra's performance on the portable floor on the gravel of barrio San Mateo de Cangrejos explains how she perceives the city; it is a map on which to draw a different idea of the city, a different optic, a different memory, and experience. Her movements aren't simply improvisations; there is also meditation involved as in a religious or mystical act. In her personal blog she explains the relationship her work has to the space.

> …la intención ha sido de formar sin palabras un escrito, una comunicación. alguna manera de transferir o crear una experiencia a través de la interacción de mi cuerpo mismo en contacto con la presencia que pueda tener el espacio. en mi experiencia, desde siempre, el espacio es/tiene su presencia o carácter, por tanto sus reglas o leyes - límites o con textos. por tanto antes de moverme hago espacio para sintonizarme, escuchar la presencia o propuesta del espacio mismo. entonces, aunque mi cuerpo esté solo en el espacio, mi experiencia es que no estoy sola pues el espacio al tener su presencia me acompaña o dirige a la acción y sus decisiones. me muevo, propongo, colaboro o no con esta presencia. también, como si no fuera suficiente, en mi espacio interior hay muchas imágenes u otras presencias llevándome a la acción - colaborando. así que adentro o afuera - de mi misma, en un espacio- estoy siempre en compañía.
>
> …the intention has been to create a writing without words, a communication. a way of transferring or creating an experience through the interaction of my body in contact with the presence that the space

> may have. always, in my experience, space is/has a presence or character, and so its laws or rules--limits or con-texts. and so, before moving, I make space to tune in, listen to the presence or proposal of the space itself. then, although my body is alone in the space, my experience is that I am not alone because the space with its own presence accompanies me and directs me to action and its decisions. i move, I propose, I collaborate, or I don't, with this presence. also, as if it weren't enough, in my own interior space there are other images or presences taking me to action – collaborating. so that outside or inside - of myself, in a space – I am always accompanied. (De lo posible a lo imposible).

When Segarra begins to dance, she transforms the space she inhabits; resignifies the space through bodily movement, improvising from the reaction of her body to the space. She maps a story of the space through her body, and makes us feel the collective experience of the community. Her body moves within established dance techniques but also outside of them. On occasion it would seem she has no formal dance training. Those moments are important because they seem to be liberating her and us from the oppressions imposed on the body. Through her movements her body seems to submit to the space, other times the movement seems to be freeing itself from the space. It is a constant dialogue between the city and the body. Segarra stretches her hands, moves the joints on her feet, changes velocity of movement, or at times does not move at all. She crouches, lifts, jumps, and reacts to what she sees and touches. Her body complements

the images in the space, and becomes part of the set that is the street. In this case her stage is the gravel, the remains of the destroyed houses. One can see the tile, and pieces of old windows in the gravel, pieces of kitchen utensils, and other valuable objects that carry memories in them that could not be completely erased and that tries to communicate with us and tell us its story, its experience. The Piso Proyecto collective moves in this space with different functions and conceptualizations, with intentions that go beyond spectacle. Entertainment is not a priority. Many times the performance becomes tedious, and long, even boring. Sometimes nothing happens. There is almost always tension. There is always the possibility that someone arrives to stop everything, or of someone to fall and cut themselves, or have an accident. There is always the possibility of the police arresting them or of a junkie, a drunken person, a student, or a worker interrupting the performance. The performance is constantly intervened by the city, the sounds of the street, the car engines, and air condition motors, the machines of the city. For this performance to be able to integrate itself to the space it must dodge passersby and vehicle transit. As Segarra describes: "el espacio es un factor determinante" "lo vamos creando. Procreando." "The space is a determining factor. We create and pro-create it." (Segarra, personal interview.) Everything is part of each of its participants' own experience of the space—the actors over the portable floor and the actors in its audience in the rest of the city.

When I began interviewing Segarra, I did not know much about the displaced community in barrio San Mateo de Cangrejos. My memory of the 2005 expropriation is vague, mainly because I wasn't living in the island. It seems interesting though that I

have lived in San Juan for many years; since I was a child I passed by that area and I still had no memory of the community that lived there. I have no recollection of the houses, or people of the area. In this sense Segarra's work functions to connect to and transmit a memory of that community through the body. It is a memory of the trauma cause by this event, and that is still being experienced there. Segarra manages this by placing her body precisely in the space in which the events occurred and continue to occur. In a symbolic way her body lives what these communities lived. Her movements remind us, like a picture, of what and who was on that ground and how the place was occupied and lived in before the expropriation.

After the interview Segarra and I walked towards the area to the last house remaining. I was lucky enough to meet and speak with the owner of the house, Ms. Laura Lasanta Rivera, whom Segarra introduced me to. In my conversation with Ms. Lasanta, she told me she lived in constant fear, of not knowing when and how they will take her out of there, and that it has affected her physical and emotional health. Lasanta recounted the many instances the government and other private developers have tried to pull her out of the house. She says they have offered a lot of money, but that her community is her life, and that those developers and the government don't seem to understand that no amount of money can buy her life.

Several days later I was able to contact and interview Carlos Castillo, an architect and colleague, who serves as the current Secretary of Strategic Planning in Puerto Rico. In his younger years he helped build the set for one of my theatre plays in 1998. I spoke to him about Ms. Lasanta. He was familiar with her because his office has been managing

the case. Castillo explained how they have tried in every way possible, but that Lasanta was not willing to cooperate with the public's well being and the city's. He explained how they offered to move her to other houses, even one near that community, but that her family refuses to accept any sort of agreement. Clearly, to the state, Lasanta does not comprehend the need to contribute to common interests, or the economic development of a city that is trying to make neoliberal progress. Lasanta's arguments as well as Castillo's demonstrate the complexity and multiplicity of visions for the city. These social encounters show how each individual approaches the city with her own purpose, to fulfill the function of the space how each has conceptualized it on their own or collectively. What is left of barrio San Mateo de Cangrejos, that fenced gravel and its surroundings, is what Soja would call "Thirdspace." The space is composed of houses in ruin right next to luxury living apartments, an expensive grocery store, a private gym, a public school, restaurants, offices, a hospital and roads. During the day, the space comprises construction workers, students, people who come to work out at the gym, others who come to buy their groceries, those who come to have their morning coffee, to meet for work, or leisure, and to consume. As one studies this space as a Thirdspace, one can observe, in geographic terms, how the space is materially transformed, and how each individual conceptualizes the space differently. These dynamics reveal an ample view of the current spatial logic in Santurce, its conditions and its specific social problems. In this case, Segarra's performance on the portable floor over the gravel functions as a spatial tactic so that the citizens of the city recognize themselves in it. Literally, the spectators of Piso Móvil, the ones participating directly or indirectly, reconstruct this place. The

realization of this performance within this particular social space is composed of two important angles regarding the study of space and the body; the analysis of its geography and its conceptualization. For Soja, thinking of a Thirdspace helps us to imagine beyond geography and conceptualization, the current material and mental collective experience of the meeting space, and the cultural, social, political, and economic conditions that facilitate multiple resignifications of the space.

Ms. Lasanta narrates that since the fence has been installed near her house sometimes, when the wind is blowing, she hears it hitting the street signs. To her it is the sound that the fence of one of her neighbors' house made when he arrived from work. Her neighbor or the house is no longer there. There are no other houses near Lasanta's house, but the sound of the wind on the fence generates a memory, a cartography of the barrio, of its past, of how they lived, of how their lives were before they were pulled out. Segarra's performance, her improvisation within the space, the relationship of her body with the significations of the current space and its imaginary is much like the sound of the wind on that fence; it is a way of transmitting that memory to us, that past that should not be forgotten in order to understand, among other things, the abuse and mistreatment this community has faced and continues to face.

**Final Thoughts**

In October of 2014, the Tourism, Culture, Recreation, and Sports Commission of Puerto Rico began the consideration of a proposed law called Ley de las Artes Representativas en Espacios Públicos Abiertos de Puerto Rico. This project proposes to regulate performance in public spaces. It attracted my attention that the law begins by

describing the importance of art and culture in the production of social spaces. The law reads,

> Históricamente, los artistas fueron los diseñadores primarios del espacio público, sin embargo, con el transcurso del tiempo la segmentación de las clases profesionales, la utilización del arte y la contribución de los artistas para definir el entorno de las ciudades trastocó la ejecución artística en los espacios públicos del País.
>
> Historically, artists have been the primary designers of public space, however, with time, segmentation of the professional classes, the use of art, and the contribution of artists to define the city's environment upset artistic endeavors in the country's public spaces. (LexJuris)

This explanation reveals the state's knowledge of the relationship between culture and the production of space. The state precisely uses the economic crisis as a strategic pretext to promote and regulate the representation of art in public spaces, so that artists comply with the requirements of law and order, which ironically would limit or even eliminate the possibility of many performance works, like Segarra's for example, to develop new cultural forms. This reveals the urgency with which the cultural and political groups of the island should continue to appropriate the discourses regarding the production of space in the city an integrate it into their performances as a tactic of resistance; a form of revolution and of creation of new spaces for justice.



Figure 4. The remains of an expropriated sector in Barrio San Mateo de Cangrejos. On bottom right, remains of the tile floor from the home. (Photo by Jorge González.)

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