

Pulsating Architecture:: Spheres of Possession :: 8 Fragments

by Félix Jiménez

The concept of Chinese writing thus functioned as a sort of European hallucination... And the hallucination translated less an ignorance than a misunderstanding. It was not disturbed by the knowledge of Chinese script, limited but real, which was then available. At the same time as the 'Chinese prejudice,' a 'hieroglyphist prejudice' had produced the same effect of interested blindness. The occultation, far from proceeding, as it would seem, from ethnocentric scorn, takes the form of an hyperbolic admiration. We have not finished verifying the necessity of this pattern. Our century is not free from it; each time that ethnocentrism is precipitately and ostentatiously reversed, some effort silently hides behind all the spectacular effects to consolidate an inside and to draw from it some domestic benefit. - Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*

Alpha 60: Once we know the number one, we believe that we know the number two, because one plus one equals two. We forget that first we must know the meaning of plus. -Alphaville

There is a need in all of us to have a place to hide or store certain memories, thoughts, impulses, hopes and dreams. These are the parts of our lives that we can't resolve or act upon, but at the time, we are afraid to jettison them. For some, this is a physical place; for others, it is a mental space, and for a few it is neither. - Wong Kar-wai

I Virtual Speed to a Concrete Nowhere

Architecture deflates: Its goal is to foreclose any other possibilities for a site. That's why it must be doubted. It is the neither. It is the meaning of plus. It is the consolidation of an inside. Thus, it lies.

Any sensate/sensorial history of architecture should - must, rather - submit itself to the intricate fallacy that underlies it: the oversimplification of the visual as hierarchical king of the hill. That the wonders, the textures, the smells and the creases of a constructed place may be obscured in favor of a packaged deal should, no doubt, be taken as another reason to doubt the hierarchical predominance of the visual that stands in front of our eyes. Tasting architecture should be a public art, an art of the sensate, an unyielding appetite: Pulsating architecture to the beat of a street party, outside.

Yet it is not. The "visible but unverifiable" Bentham/Foucauldian recipe of power strives to consolidate a theoretical inside. The concept serves us well when approaching a city, any city, a microcity, an inside-job city dreamt and materialized by sequestial "visions" - a city by and for architects that joyously (and perversely) negates the whims and appetites of the other who contemplates from outside the bubble; of the other who does not participate in its visual and sensory alterations. Who speaks for the ones who see?

Those who see are in need of a new foray into the theoretical city. We must take architecture outside: outside of itself and perhaps against its creators, who have strived to forego the pulsating mechanisms that make architecture a habit of the other senses, perhaps forgetting the meaning of plus. The concept of Puerto Rican architecture functions as a sort of Caribbean hallucination. The ghosts of decades past (Kumb et al, well, not even et al) hover as a regurgitating dysfunctional retro machine, so settled, so organic, so in its place. The real spatial urges are mostly found elsewhere. In literature, film and music, space is an unsettled issue that engages military bases, call girl houses, carnival sites, the Internet, and in which the the so-called Caribbean body is a body-at-large, unconfined, a Body Against its Organs in all its intercultural, surface-only transit.

2 Queer, as in Queer

The production of Caribbean queer spaces has been historically contained, socially curtailed and politically marginalized. The concreteness of buildings, structures and sites primarily designated as queer oftentimes is erased by the historical oscillations and omissions that have rendered them as mere footnotes in medical, clinical, nationalist or antinationalist discourses. Their emotional debris scatters

endlessly, for they are structures that, because of their (open or silenced) queer identifications, have been reduced or limited to markers of hygiene, pleasure or abjection, or lost in the recycling of their architecture for other socially or politically consensual purposes.

As Judith Butler reminds us, "the persistence of certain unavailability... haunts the present." Tracing Walter Benjamin, Butler suggests that the loss of materiality generates a constant gendered presence: "places are lost - destroyed, vacated, buried - but then there is some new place, and it is not the first, never can be the first. And so there is an impossibility housed at the site of the new place. What is new, newness itself, is founded upon the loss of the original place, and so it is a newness that has within it a sense of belatedness, of coming after, and of being thus fundamentally determined by a past that continues to inform it."

3 The Speed of Possession

Where - or in what form - is the past domiciled? Where are the senses domiciled? The past that continues to inform the present is not senseless; it has a certain deformative quality. It is at once the fiction and the friction that stults identities and nationalities and gender. How are these characteristics - and hence how are appetites - architecturally withheld? How

fast did they travel out of sight, or out of frame, in the quest for the perfect building that could make an architect a star?

The monochrome, monotone of the architects' self-consideration and self-aggrandizement most always secures the "consolidation of an inside circle" in architecture that deflates desire. The painful reality is that this is done so with certain ceremoniousness and aplomb. We need to be unsettled, to be offered doses of disquietude that may begin to awaken new ways of screening our peripheries.

In the Caribbean, the speed of possession (of structures, systems, bodies, theory) has not overtaken the speed of loss. The purely visual examines the notion of Caribbean space as vicissitude, and the deployment of that notion in recent literature, film and music. For example, the concept of the "urban" is a misnomer in the Caribbean, for the urban is not naturally laced with race or class considerations. The Caribbean's gridless cities, its hybrid urban spaces provoke what Silvio Torres Saillant terms "artificial citizenship" - the knowledge that an ejection from an island - any island - is always forthcoming, that an ejection unknowingly is in place. How to build and regard theoretical and actual space in the face of such fate? How is space a function of desire when there's the unsettlement of pre-ordained loss and mourning?

4 Unsettlements

The pulse, in its pulsating, affects its bodily architecture. Consider Antonio Benítez-Rojo's notion of the "originating" (rather than the "original") structures of the Caribbean, spaces that are always in contention precisely because they are located in what he termed the "decentered center of the paradoxical" and possess "a certain way" of ordering and reordering that permeates their existence.

Thus the cycles of their evanescent immateriality and the frailty and fracture of their "unsettlements", of a certain way of italicizing spatial experiences.

5 Italicized Space: Elsewhere

Unsettlement occurs in italicized space: the body and its sequential constructions collide in a composite that has been structured as a communal illusion - an elsewhere built in literature and music that negotiates and transforms architecture's

eyes and music's flesh-and-bone.

At the Tulán Motel, in Mayra Santos Febres' *Cualquier miércoles soy tuya*, pious churchgoers get nightshift jobs at the motel, so they stop worshipping, or rather, trade the architecture of compassion for the pulse of passion, and thus are able to take "a close look at the internal mechanism that keeps the city moving." The shift is italicized.

The Royal Palace in Pedro Antonio Valdez's *Carnaval de Sodoma* is a warehouse that stands tall, right in front of the Cathedral: a tender spatial duplicity that connects and opposes the umbilical twins of God and Mammon. Friction is italicized

El Cementerio, the prostitution house, located one block from Santo Domingo's real cemetery in Rey Andujar's *El hombre triángulo*. One can find Rotunda there, a woman who looks like a man. The spaces of queerness are italicized

In Rita Indiana Hernández's *Papi*, the space is domestic, but also a post-procreational space of infamy. It is the one of the most desirous Caribbean novels, and its relational space is the outside of the body. The daughter pines for her missing Papi, who is outside her per-view but within her as he is nowhere near. She dreams of seducing her father's lovers while imagining she is showered by toys, gifts, clothes and bibelots by her father. The domestic desire of household and its accoutrements pervade the things that fill up space so as to be able to identify it as place. A TV set in the middle of the living room - the site for her mother and mom's boyfriend to unwind at night - provides justification for the denial of her dreams, for her father's unsolicitousness. Through the spatial relations of that living room life's lessons seep in: Technology in color as domestic revenge. The living room as italicized emotional battlefield.

She has turn to the outside, The street is the frame and she is alone. She is alone in a house that was built for many. The street twists and turns, italicized.

6 Reggaeton's Street

Cities are made by an extraordinary mixture of do-gooders and bloody-minded obsessives, of cynical political operators and speculators. They are shaped by the unintended consequences of the greedy and the self-interested, the dedicated and the occasional visionary. The cities that work best are those that keep their options open,

that allow the possibility of change... The ones that are stuck, overwhelmed by rigid, state-owned social housing, or by economic systems that offer the poor no way out of the slums are in trouble. A successful city is one that makes room for surprises. A city that has been trapped by too much gentrification, or too many shopping malls, will have trouble generating the spark that is essential to making a city that works. - Deyan Sudjic, director of the Design Museum

We reach the space in which the streets have a name: Calle 13's pavement reverberates to the sound of Virilio's speed. Space as vicissitude once again. The speed of possession, and the speed in which we (are) possess(ed) overlap in street-smart space. Space in music is a sign of property value. It generates spark - and revenue. Unsettlement lives in that spaced-out street.

Consider how many of the wildly successful, platinum-record winning reggaetoneros would have self-destructed without an initial barrio-bound, non-blanquito description that was concocted to give them an early sympathy factor at the start of their careers. The fact that their streets' property values (and other financial and educational opportunities that might have been offered by their parents) are concealed from the equation reggaetonero = del pueblo = genuino = real = de la calle is a function of the everpresent "reggaetonero template" which eases the way for many a genuine hopeful to enter the musical world. As Cuba Gooding's character in *Jerry McGuire*, the template shouts "Show me the money!"

The myth of the street is a vital factor in reggaeton's "identity litmus test." It is an item on the essential check-list. How real and genuine can you be - in reggaeton's "identity litmus test" - if you have lived in a five-bathroom, gold-fixture house in a gated community? The conflation of "genuine" and "real" with perceived barrio roots (and, thus, non-blanquito origins) is the ideal PR/PR (Puerto Rican/Public Relations) ploy for nascent musical careers. With it they avoid questions and ceaseless interrogations about "Why not rock?" or "Why not ballads, or salsa?" or "What made you choose reggaeton?" Public relation machines here dictate that reggaeton is not a choice, or should not be perceived as one - it must be a natural outgrowth of a performer's "background." So performers act accordingly, even if reggaeton is a choice for them over other musical rhythms. As

longas reggaeton seems to be an inevitability (meaning said reggaetonero had to go that route because it fits with his socioeconomic and cultural non-blancito, barrio-caserío background) less questions are asked, and the reggaetonero acquires a more natural stance, a patina of "inevitability," of being "the real thing," "the genuine item."

Daddy Yankee's Villa Kennedy-to-riches story, for example, includes the tid-bit that he did finish his associate degree. But his geographical milieu to a certain extent dictated his natural selection of reggaeton. It was not choice. This "white", handsome poor boy has said so himself: *Era la música que oía en mi calle. Yo adoraba a Vico C.* Ivy Queen recounts how she had to ask for money in stop lights to help feed her family when she was living in Anasco. Her story gives texture to her present. How many reggaetoneros (and there are many) have been barbers or stylists? That does not necessarily correlate with the educational/financial opportunities they might have had (and discarded or missed or blatantly ignored) when they were growing up. It means that - again, in the realm of the "perceived" - that they are somewhat wayward. Thuggish. Not conventional. The "thugginess" factor - cosmetic as it might be in some cases - pays off.

By the same token, Residente Calle 13's perceived intelligence is a function of his cashing in on the educational/financial opportunities that his lawyer father and actress mother lavished on him. Not that he was silver-spooned, but he acted upon the possibilities that were there, afforded by whatever metal the spoon was made of. He is and was intelligent. Not thuggish enough. That is why people have such a difficult time pinning him down on his kind of music. And he hasn't labeled himself a full-blown reggaetonero either. From the outside perspective, and also from Calle 13's perspective, that would be an impossibility. He is cashing in on that impossibility. He knows the rules.

The discarded opportunities that Tego, Voltio, Mexicano, and the like had are part of what they sell. Example: the public discussion about Puerto Rico Gov. Anibal Acevedo Vilá's invitation to Don Omar to serve as a spokesperson for the Department of Education's stay in school program. At the end of the big brouhaha, when he was "disinvited," the question was, "So who can inspire the kids to stay in school, the one who did stay and graduated or the drop-out who feels he made the wrong decision and

wants to warn would-be drop-outs"? The answer seemed obvious to 12 reggaetoneros who discussed the topic in a TV program: Drop-outs do it better because - all of them said - they have the experience of having dropped out to back them up.

The entitlement of the street trumps the entitlement of education. Choosing to be *de la calle* classifies you as non-blancito. The real blancitos will never stand up, space-wise.

7 Choreographed Sites

What if the street is not real at all? And how can "the street" be more real or genuine than, say, Main Street, Wall Street, Bleecker Street or any of the two streets in Pleasantville? Actually, it can be posited that La Calle is the only street in a mythical Reggaetonville. A one-way-street. The street is a myth that dies hard because its market-niche (which now has nothing to do with anything urban but with everything global) falls outside the purview of those in the (governmental/financial/educational) know. "The street" is exotic because, as *bon sauvage* territory, it can be mined to produce rawness and passion at the market's needed speed - supersonic speed. The street is the speed of reggaeton's sounds. It is bought, staged, lighted and choreographed with record company money. Thus, it is a site of fantasy. It is the perfect mirage. Where else can the Horatio Alger rags-to-riches story be staged and consumed in loop fashion? Reggaeton videos mostly are staged with a "street" in mind that could be the same backdrop for all. What makes that street and its (artificial) traits more genuine and real than, say, any Silicon Valley alleyway? For the sake of comparison, let's examine the dot-com companies and their rise and fall. The characteristics and attendant mystique of the people that lived that short-and-profitable era (from executives to employees) were engulfed by a public perception that made the imagined the perceptual norm. Was it real? Sure it was! Was it a controlled fantasy? Sure it was. But the latter trumped the former. When it became uncontrollable it lost its fantasy and its reality. Reggaeton as a controlled fantasy needs, as was discussed before, a template. The street is an acquired set of traits, a reggaeton finishing school, so to speak - a theoretical fantasy.

Reggaeton is an imagined community, a la Benedict Anderson. No more, no less. Its claims to possessing the

essence of lo genuino and lo real are negated by reggaetoneros' constant need to reiterate that they want to *mantenerse genuinos, mantenerlo real* - keep it genuine, keep it real. No such need would exist if Reggaeton Street had been built on solid ground. Blancitos learn the ropes and are able to perform as well as non-blancitos because non-blancitos have to learn the ropes too. As in Pleasantville, they leave their black-and-white existence and learn to exist in living color. The notion of color is learned; so is the notion of the theoretical construct of *la calle*. A convenient grid is fabricated. Music's geography is an architectural imperative.

8 Regimes of Turbulence

What about the space in front of our faces, the grid of all grids, the grid that broadcasts hallucinations? Derrida again: "the hallucination translated less an ignorance than a misunderstanding." The unfolding of a TV news broadcast is structured around iconology and its attendant narrative iterations, but it is still more storyboard than storytelling. It elicits a different kind of critical response, not to the acts (news are mostly silent acts) but to the worded images that are supposed to enhance them (the noise journalists and producers are supposed to build around the acts.). In journalism, the frames hide the acts. So journalism, especially broadcast news, desperately needs academic silence, and should be constructed from that silence, not with the noise of a presumably newsworthy, voice-overed Big Bang. In Subtitles, Atom Egoyan says that "Every film is a foreign film," so every newscast should be considered a foreign newscast, subtitled, to feature the constant oscillation between the lure of that constructed not-yet-known and the emotional attachment to the known. In that oscillation, many spaces are created and shattered.

Every building is a foreign building. Thus, there: a theoretical space. ■■■■■■■■■■

Urban

20/05/08

La medición del desarrollo urbano 6:30_{pm}
Dr. Mario Marazzi Santiago Lillian Torres Aguirre Prof. José M. Auger Marchand
Prof. Carlos J. Guilbe

12/06/08

Legislación y desarrollo urbano 6:30_{pm}
Hon. Kenneth McClintock Hernández Hon. Antonio J. Fas Alzamora
Lcda. Margarita E. García Cárdenas Arq. Rafael Pumarada Sánchez
Lcdo. Alberto O. Jiménez Santiago

19/06/08

Experiencias y Retos de la Ordenación Territorial 6:30_{pm}
Arq. Juan C. Santiago Plan. Leslie Rosado Plan. Sandra Velázquez Plan. Eileen Poueymirou
Plan. Luis García Petati

17/07/08

La burbuja del mercado de vivienda 6:30_{pm}
Ing. Rafael Rojo Steven Véliz Marisol Aja Hon. Jorge Rivera Jiménez Lcdo. Carlos Rivas Quiñones
Jose J. Villamil

13/08/08

Desarrollo Urbano e Infraestructura: Plataforma del Partido Puertorriqueños por Puerto Rico 6:30_{pm}
Ing. Rogelio Figueroa

27/08/08

Desarrollo Urbano e Infraestructura: Plataforma del Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño 6:30_{pm}
Prof. Edwin Irizarry Mora

10/09/08

Desarrollo Urbano e Infraestructura: Plataforma del Partido Nuevo Progresista 6:30_{pm}
Hon. Luis A. Fortuna (sujeto a confirmación)

24/09/08

Desarrollo Urbano e Infraestructura: Plataforma del Partido Popular Democrático 6:30_{pm}
Hon. Anibal Acevedo Vila (sujeto a confirmación)

08/10/08

Los recintos del ocio urbano 6:30_{pm}
Alfredo Torres Lisa Vigoreaux Héctor Marciano Dr. José Luis Vega
Arq. Miguel Rodríguez Casellas

20/11/08

"De la casa al Parking" 6:30_{pm}
Dr. Juan G. Galpi Dr. Dorlan Lugo Dra. Lilliana Ramos Collado
Dr. Rubén Ríos Avila

04/12/08

Ciudad y Prensa 6:30_{pm}
Héscar Robles Larissa Vázquez Zacata Omaya Sosa Pascual
Félix Jiménez

