"'Mira, Yo Soy Boricua y Estoy Aquí': Rafa Negrón's Pan Dulce and the Queer Sonic Latinaje of San Francisco"

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Figure 8. MTF transgender performer Alejandra. Unless otherwise noted all images are "Untitled" from the series Yo Soy Lo Prohibido, 1996 (originals Tyvek color prints). Copyright Patrick "Pato" Hebert. Reprinted by permission from Patrick "Pato" Hebert.
‘Mira, yo soy boricua y estoy aquí’: Rafa Negrón’s Pan Dulce and the queer sonic latinaje of San Francisco

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Abstract

For a little more than eight months in 1996–1997, Calirican Rafa Negrón promoted his queer Latino nightclub “Pan Dulce” in San Francisco. A concoction of multiple genders, sexualities, and aesthetic styles, Pan Dulce created an opportunity for making urban space and claiming visibilities and identities among queer Latinas and Latinos through music, performance, and dance. Building on the region’s decades-old LGBT/queer history, and specifically diasporic queer Puerto Rican and Caribbean cultures, Pan Dulce became a powerful site for latinaje: the multilayered hybrid process of creating Latina and Latino worlds and cultures from below. In the context of HIV and AIDS, gentrification, and the Bay Area’s hegemonic white queerness, Pan Dulce created a queer pan-Latino, caribeño world for building multigender community space and history. As a Calirican’s experiment in cultural expressions, musical styles, and queer erotic desires, Pan Dulce was a heterogeneous site simultaneously for opening instances of Puerto Rican-inflected latinidad and differently gendered queer lives. [Keywords: Calirican; queer; gay; multigender; San Francisco; Latinidad]
You have just entered a queer space of Latino desires in San Francisco. It is the summer of 1996, and you are in Pan Dulce on a Sunday night, boricua Rafael “Rafa” Negrón’s cultural mix and multigendered dance experiment. Here are the bodies and motions of transgender, bisexual, lesbian, and gay women and men (and a few heterosexuals as well) sweating out and drinking away another weekend in the foggy City by the Bay. The queer complexity of the bodies, genders, and desires present at Pan Dulce fit well into the city’s larger history of “alternative” sexualities and cultures, including the generally freer way in which queer and non-queer Latinas and Latinos share social and cultural spaces. Geographically, you are in the South of Market District (SOMA), walking distance from the historically Latino barrio; the Mission District. SOMA is an area of the city historically identified since the early 1960s most easily in relation to leather communities (especially before AIDS), not the place generally for (queer) Latinas and Latinos (Rubin 1998). Still, we Latinas and Latinos, excited with this new non-white queer space, got on the bus, walked, drove, rode our bike, or went on a quick taxi ride to the corner of 11th and Folsom streets for the promise of pleasures Pan Dulce signified. When you know you don’t have a permanent social space, when you realize that you don’t have musical and dancing choices every night of the week, or even once a week, as queer Latinas have experienced as far back as queer Latino anything in San Francisco goes, being in the house of dance matters. Dancing and music are hardly frivolous, escapist moments from the everyday politics of survival. Dancing and performance can be and have been moments for survival in the racialized late-capitalist queer geography of San Francisco. Pan Dulce was precisely an opportunity to build a momentary queer Latino home.
Tonight, if you are one of those in the “in-crowd,” meaning that you know the promoter of the club, the door girl or door boy checking IDs, or one of the queer boys and girls affiliated with the production of this Sunday night of seduction and dance, you will not even have to pay the nominal fee to go in and create a world of your own. I was one of the lucky ones who had a pass, my very own Pan Dulce “Social Security Card,” a Bay Area queer Latino green card of sorts back then. It gave me entry to this world once a week, a membership I now recall with pride and historical implications because I understand the challenges in making queer Latino spaces where we control the sounds and rhythms. While I write in this essay about a relatively recent historical period, I do so with a larger understanding of queer Latina and Latino community formations and destructions in the San Francisco Bay Area at least since the 1950s (Viva 16; 1994; Roque Ramírez 2001, Forthcoming; Rodríguez 2003). Thus I write with a strong historical sense of the relationship among cultures, identities, and survival for queer Latinos and Latinas, centering the life of the short-lived Pan Dulce and what it meant in 1990s Bay Area queer Latino history! I also write with appreciation of the tensions among notions of latinidad, specifically Puerto Rican and Caribbean cultures as manifested through Pan Dulce’s music and performances on the dance floor and on stage. In particular, the essay illustrates the centrality of Calirican Rafa Negrón’s shaping Pan Dulce and, as such, of those spaces queer Latinas and Latinos have sought to build and sustain. Indeed, this is a generation-, West Coast-, and San Francisco-specific pan-Latino configuration of queer latinidad, illustrating the centrality of some Latino cultures at the relative exclusion of others.

Specifically, in this essay I discuss pieces of the music and dance club scene in relation to the idea of cultural citizenship for queer Latinos in San Francisco. I foreground queer Latino-caribeño musical citizenship because it is intimately connected to history, identity making, and community survival. If we agree that music and dance are forms of identity, history, and politics, then explicit attempts to create space and community around these forms are struggles for history and survival. Indeed, not trying to make space through such forms would entail partial acquiescence to historical erasure and the Anglo sonic mainstream. In the local context of queer and Latino urban realities, Pan Dulce achieved what Ricardo A. Bracho and José Mineros refer to as latinaje: the always already plural process of making Latino worlds from below (Bracho 2003). Thus I begin with a discussion of this collective process of latinaje and its relation to cultural citizenship, tropicalization, and latinidad. I then narrate, primarily through an oral history with Rafa, the making of Pan Dulce, immediately followed by an analysis of its topographies. I continue with a discussion of Pan Dulce’s importance in relation to Raymond Williams’s notion of structures of feeling. I conclude with comments about the meanings and possibilities of Rafa’s Pan Dulce for larger discussions of Puerto Rican diasporic cultures, nation-driven ethnic identities, and queer Latino expression and world-making. In the process, I hope my discussion becomes yet another piece in the still mostly undocumented histories of queer Latinas and Latinos, and queer Puerto Ricans in particular, in the Bay Area region.

Dance, cultural citizenship, and queer latinaje
Anthropologist Renato Rosaldo first proposed the idea of cultural citizenship as a way to describe Latinos’ claims for space, visibility, identity, and rights (Rosaldo 1994). These claims, he and others have argued, emerge from people’s struggles for
inclusion in a society that actively marginalizes them (Flores and Benmayor 1997). Whether through voters’ initiatives, such as California’s Propositions 187 and 209 in the 1990s, respectively targeting undocumented Latino immigrants and affirmative action, or the dismantling of bilingual HIV prevention programming, Latinos remain embattled members of the body politic. As blue-collar workers (nannies, maids, gardeners, day laborers, cooks, janitors), Latinas and Latinos fit well in the national body: they work hard while serving others, generally middle-class whites. But when they claim rights and visibility as Latinas and Latinos with a history and a sense of entitlement—through language rights, for curricular democratization, for effective, non-homophobic HIV services—their “differences” become problematic, even “subversive” for the status quo. When they step off the commodified, exoticised “Latin” space—where and when Latino and Latina identities and subjectivities are meant to add “flavor” and “spice” to otherwise bland consumer cultures—and create their own cultures for inclusion and belonging, Latina and Latino bodies achieve cultural citizenship.5 The making of the musical space of Pan Dulce was such a space for queer Latino presence in San Francisco in the mid-1990s.

Despite its conceptual breadth, the notion of cultural citizenship has yet to respond to sexual differences, to non-heterosexual Latino communities. All of us do not have access to the same spaces based on our genders and sexualities, real or perceived.5 While presumably sexually “unmarked” Latinos (but read straight) can lay claim to urban cultural space through festivals and dances, often by invoking strong heteronormative notions of familia, queer Latinas and Latinos outside specifically prescribed spaces and events (gay pride, for example) have other issues with which to contend.6

Safety from sexual violence in the streets, access to clubs or bars catering to queers of color, or the ability to remain “invisible” as a paying customer in a queer space where racial fetishization is commonplace—there are relative risks in the search for space where racialized queer genders and sexualities are involved. The question of space and safety for queer Latinas and Latinos cannot be taken for granted.7

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However useful the notion of cultural citizenship may ultimately be to understand queer sexual community formations, its emphasis on identity and visibility is fitting for conceptualizing a larger queer historical frame. In my research on San Francisco queer Latino/a history, identity and visibility have been central notions in narrators’ memories of how they have created cultural and political space. In their narratives, music emerges as a critical tool for community building. The nighttime world of music and dance has afforded opportunities for suspending at least momentarily rigid gender and sexual codes. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, for example, also on Folsom Street but more in the heart of the Mission District, the late Ruben Salazar’s nightclub El Intimo housed the performances of the gay Mexican woman-impersonator and dancer Manuel Castillo. As the mesmerizing “ookie la Tigresa,” Castillo entertained local and regional crowds to the Caribbean rhythms of the mambo that the Cuban Perez Prado popularized, while mimicking the fast-paced pelvic movements of the San Francisco/Oakland-raised Latin American sex symbol of the period, la Tongolele, of Spanish-Swedish
and French-Tahitian parentage (Castillo 2000). Also in El Intimo, Los Angeles-born *mexicana ranchera* MTF transgender singer Alberta Nevaeres, better known as Teresita la Campesina, queered this section of the Latino barrio with her live renditions of the classics of Lola Beltrán, often broadcast live in the region in Spanish-language radio. El Intimo was one of the first spaces queer Latinos and fewer queer Latinas could go to in the Bay Area with relative safety, and it was a place where music and dance were the tools for coming together, for making community. The musical space El Intimo created was one of hybrid cultures—sexual and ethnic, gay and straight, among various Latin(o) American communities—but it was also one of claiming visibility for Latinos in their context of marginalization in the city (Roque Ramírez 2001; Sandoval Jr. 2002; Ferreira 2003). El Intimo, its bodies, and its cultures were all part of larger multinational geography in the local tropics of the Mission District: literary tropics, musical tropics, and sexual tropics shaping culture, social change, and desire (Herrera 1998; Murguía 2002).

The historical relationship between oppositional politics and music and dance is quite a long one. In the histories of African slave hymns in the Americas, of Mexican guitarist Santana holding benefits for the Black Panther’s breakfast projects in Oakland in the 1960s, or of the contemporary uses of Hip-Hop and Rap by urban youth of color—in these examples, music, dance, and oppositional politics from below share actors and spaces. Indeed, cultural expression has had a direct relationship to individual and collective transformative politics. But to discuss the politics and the meanings of music and dance theoretically requires faith and careful considerations. Celeste Fraser Delgado and José Esteban Muñoz make an argument for considering history as choreograph. “History as choreography,” they believe, “eludes academic analysis on two accounts: the dancing body speaks a language irreducible to words and the dancing body enacts an opposition unassimilable to rational understandings of resistance as productive work” (1997: 18). In terms of dancing bodies, how do we write or talk about social life that is not easily described—much less experienced—in written language? As Delgado and Muñoz suggest, we need to take music and dance seriously because like many other cultural forms, and specifically like a great deal of cultural manifestations in disempowered communities, they represent alternatives to written forms of communication and history-making. Simply put, we experience much more than the written record will ever attest. Thus, despite the challenges dance and music pose for theorizing their political and historical significance, the exercise is necessary.

The yet unwritten queer sonic Latino histories of El Intimo more than three decades ago and that of Pan Dulce in the 1990s speak to what Frances R. Aparicio and Susana Chávez-Silverman call *tropicalizations.* “To tropicalize,” Aparicio and Chávez-Silverman offer, “means to trope, to imbue a particular space, geography, group, or nation with a set of traits, images and values” (1997: 8). The authors differentiate between two forms of tropicalization. “Hegemonic tropicalizations,” they specify, “[a]re instances in a long history of Western representations of the exotic, primitive Other. . . . deployed through particular discursive strategies” (1997: 8—emphasis in original). But, they continue, “A different, more radical sort of tropicalization emerges from the cultural productions, political struggles, and oppositional strategies deployed by some U.S. Latinos/as” (1997: 12). It is this latter form of tropicalization that interests me for analyzing the story of Pan Dulce, for the queer Latino club represented a multilayered process for simultaneously creating queerness and Caribbean-inflected latinidades in San Francisco. In doing so, it created a new geography on the border of two
predominant ones, what could be differentiated between the gay and predominantly white leather South of Market district and the more straight Latino-dominant Mission. Pan Dulce tropicalized this border zone with multiple bodies and ingredients that offered new possibilities for multigendered queer Latino urban life, and certainly for disrupting this differentiation between bordering communities in this city of neighborhoods. In this momentary, weekly tropicalization from below of the Mission and the city, it was to be a Calirican-inflected version of latinidad in a culturally Mexican-dominant pan-Latino barrio.

Latinidad or Latinization, Aparicio and Chávez-Silverman argue, does not speak to a magical unidirectional, monolithic project for Latino cultural liberation. While queer Latinizations can publicly disrupt heteronormativity and whiteness (often simultaneously), the tools, discourses, and symbols for both queerness and latinidad lend themselves easily for consumer capitalism and its profitable projects through commodification (Chasin 2000; Hennessy 2000; Dávila 2001a). Far from occupying antagonistic positions, projects on behalf of Latino/queer cultural resistance or affirmation in white/straight-majority conditions, and consumer capitalism based precisely on these collective goals for visibility can coexist well. A most (dis)pleasurable example is beer companies’ sponsorship of queer, Latino, and queer Latino celebrations. In these effervescent partnerships between capitalist consumption and cultures of marginalized identity and visibility, the most easily recognizable and reductive icons take center stage. Two discourses predominate: that of “la familia” (via a Latino picture of brown/dark mamá, papa, hija e hijo huddled in happiness, or a “queer family” version of young queers together with smiles, often holding filled beer cups), or that of “culturas” invoked again through predictable iconography (for “Latinos,” perhaps the sun over a colorful rural vista, or nationally specific icons such as flags, clothing, or musical instruments, and for “queers,” the ever popular rainbow flag or pink triangle). In these visual and narrative discourses, Latinizations and tropicalizations can come and go, for they are multidimensional processes that can simultaneously function as exercises in cultural affirmation (in making the space and financial resources available for a festival or a dance) and the means for corporate profits (for the companies successfully selling their goods).

Given the precarious positions most terms for cultural identity and visibility occupy in cultures of consumption, it is worth considering what tropicalizations or Latinizations from below can accomplish for those in the margins. Agustín Laó-Montes points to the divergent spaces and discourses Latinization can take us. He argues that Latinization is first and foremost a power process of social differentiation and cultural production. Latinization signifies the emergence of a space for discursive formations. Latinization is a process of both subjection and subjectivation. It is a process of subject formation by hailing and labeling but also by means of self-affirmation and self-constitution. Here, latinization also signifies a mode of production and appropriation of urban space. Latinization is the production of latinidad by both the dominant powers and the subordinate social sectors. Thus, latinization can be produced around different axes of identification: at one end, in relationship to markers or identity/difference such as language, race, culture,
or immigration resulting in self-identification by Latinos and, at the other end, as a result of practices of othering (classification and homogenization) racialized and ethnicized populations by governmental, corporative, and intellectual discourses (2001: 17—author’s emphasis).

Emphasizing the centrality of power prevents the flattening out of all Latinizations to “cultural” moments outside systems of domination. Accordingly, Laó-Montes differentiates between two forms of Latinization in relation to these power differentials in the racialized political economy: “[L]atinization from above,” he argues, “refers to a process by which discourses of latinidad are produced as part of the organization of hegemony by dominant institutions. In contrast,” he continues, “‘Latinization from below’ refers to the processes of Latino self-fashioning that arise from resistances against marginality and discrimination and as expressions of a desire for a definition of self and an affirmative search for collective memory and community” (2001: 17–8—emphasis in original).

Laó-Montes’s “Latinization from below” comes close to what gay Chicano playwright Ricardo A. Bracho and gay Los Angeles native and San Francisco-based Honduran club promoter José Mineros refer to as latinaje.9 In large urban centers with significant Latin American and Caribbean populations, they argue, latinaje speaks to that which we Latinos make and create, not quite that which we “are” in a culturally predestined, formulaic way. What is useful about latinaje as well, Bracho explains further, is the term’s distancing from the dangerously essentializing and rigidly identitarian notion of latinidad, one primarily functioning on literary, often elite realms. What is particularly useful about latinaje in understanding the lives and meanings in Pan Dulce is its collectivist character in the creation of public cultures, as opposed to a more individual and exclusive latinidad. In the context of the queer Latino club Pan Dulce, latinaje was very much that taking place in the collective experience of the dance floor, the refashioning of queer and Latino space through performance, the (re)interpretation of sound and movement, and the fluidity of genders, sexualities, and identities. Pan Dulce as a structured venue/space allowed for latinaje to create multiple queer latinidades. Yet, as I detail below, it was a queer pan-latinidad emerging from specific aesthetic and historical experiences of the Calirican Rafa Negrón.

Making Puerto Rican and Caribbean topographies: Rafa Negrón’s queer latinaje

All the minorities are Black, all Latinos are Chicanos, all the Puerto Ricans live in New York, and few of us are historians (Glasser 1994/1995).24

One decade ago, paraphrasing the title of a foundational African-American feminist women’s text, Ruth Glasser pointed out several reductive essentialisms plaguing the state of Puerto Rican historical studies outside the island.10 While Glasser critiqued the still-dominant Black-white paradigm of race relations in the U.S., she also commented on the dearth of work on Latinos of non-Mexican descent, as well as the conceptual limitation of looking to New York as the only site for Puerto Rican landing in the U.S. As she pointed out, the 1990 census found that more than 50 per cent of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. lived outside of the city. With few historians on the horizon then able or willing to tackle these methodological and theoretical
limitations, the work was certainly cut out for those looking to draw a fuller map of Puerto Rican histories in the U.S. Additionally, although by 1995 there were already several works beginning to outline diasporic queer Puerto Rican history, Glasser could have included yet a fifth historiographical dictum: “And all the Puerto Ricans are heterosexual.” Certainly, the life of Rafa Negrón and his family’s migration history complicate all of these dictums about Puerto Ricans in the diaspora.

Rafael “Rafa” Negrón is at the center of the history of Pan Dulce. Born in Germany to his nuyorican mother while his Puerto Rican-born father was in military service, Rafa became a traveler and cultural border crosser from a young age, learning the intricacies of identity (re)formation, of intersecting sexual and racial memberships, and of cultural crossings. Settling in New York when Rafa was still a baby, the Negróns made their way to California when young Rafa was seven years old, in part because, as he remembers, his parents wanted a backyard; he was the second oldest and first son, with his three sisters and one brother completing their family unit. Once in California, Rafa learned that while clearly he was not white, neither was he mexicano or Chicano, the dominant Latino minority group he saw facing daily discrimination. The most prominent markers of mexicanidad he recalls from his youth in the Los Angeles region were poverty and youth violence, along with those of the United Farm Workers (UFW) and its popular grape boycotts, part of the burgeoning Chicano Movement. His politically active mother, engaged in struggles for welfare, educational, and workers’ rights, brought the activist energy home and, with it, Chicanos and mexicanos from the community with whom Rafa negotiated learning Spanish. Feeling “special” as a Puerto Rican in California, somewhere between white and Chicano cultures, Rafa recalls strong codes of respect, sacrifice, and honesty from his mother. She herself came out as a lesbian to her children when he was a young teen, which Rafa interpreted as a sign of her honesty with them, opening yet another window for him and his siblings into the possibilities of political and sexual expression. As a gifted student, Rafa functioned in this context of family life around politics, social protest, and sexual difference, combined with his own early covert explorations of gay public sex as a junior high school student in Long Beach. This multicultured, multiracial, and multigendered/sexual background shaped Rafa’s persona. Troubling the categories of Whiteness and Latino/Chicano/mexicano in California, but also heterosexuality in both constructs, Rafa straddled these aspects of his experience and identity precisely because of his diasporic Puerto Rican roots. While his Puerto Rican family history was central in shaping his consciousness, so was the racial, cultural, and sexual maneuvering he did as a young gay Calirican.

Music played a central role in the Negrón family household, and it was a space Rafa, as the oldest son, shared closely with his mother. As he explains, Disco was the first sonic medium through which family and neighborhood came together, with home performances becoming a bridge between the two and making economic challenges in the family more bearable:

We were always moving or getting evicted. My mom was going to school, and working as a paralegal, and raising five kids with very little support from my dad. So she was a miracle worker. Needless to say, our childhood was unstable. But I was the second oldest of five and we were best friends. There was always music in the house. My mom was always the first to buy fabulous records. And so we had music. I was the oldest male,
so I was the “oldest.” There was music and we would put together skits and do routines. It was Disco when I was growing up—the Silver Convention, and the Ojay’s. And we put together routines to “Car Wash.” We were not shy! My mom always had company, so the company always got to have shows by the Negróns. And we would act out the songs and do routines and it was great! And I had ideas—trust me! Our towels were our costumes, all colorful. . . . We were very much encouraged to pursue that. And so that was my specialty: music, music, music! Music and reading (Negrón 2001).

The experience of blood and gay/queer kinship within the Negrón household, then, revolved around a great deal of the experiences shaping the Puerto Rican diaspora: racialized and gendered poverty, resulting economic family dislocation and instability, and a hybrid cultural blending of mainstream forms (Disco) with Latin American, Caribbean diasporic forms, like the boleros which Rafa recalls also being part of the repertoire at the Negrón’s. He distinctly remembers Noel Estrada’s “En mi Viejo San Juan” as one of the classics heard at home. There and in his surrounding community, musical cultures, languages, sexualities, and racial ethnic political struggles shaped the multifaceted L.A. world through which Rafa made his way as a young gay Calirican.

By age 16 and already out to his family, Rafa began to see the dance floor as a place for acceptance, the space where cues and performances created groups and communities. Eventually moving to Santa Cruz with his mother to attend high school, he then moved yet again with a friend to nearby San José. Once there, he began to explore near-by San Francisco’s gay, black, white, and Latino nightlife and styles in the early 1980s. He appreciated the alternative and sexually mixed punk rock scene. But he also saw the gay, mostly white cultural presence, one he found slow, a style he recalls just being “wrong.” The gay Latino world he saw also seemed slow, lacking the energy and not reflective of what he considered his Puerto Rican cultural roots. HIV and AIDS, he remembers, were nowhere in his consciousness at the time; they were terms he associated with older gay white men with moustaches.

It was not until his brief return to New York for two years between 1985–1987 to explore his Puerto Rican identity when Rafa found peers, he explains, Black/Puerto Rican “sissy gays with a vengeance” to dance and create their own styles in clubs. While he felt they were “too femme” for his own growing style, they were nevertheless creating in the 1980s the most dynamic dance cultures he had ever witnessed. It was in New York also that Rafa found a Puerto Rican community, and gay Puerto Rican community in particular, which accepted him. Yet, he still did not feel he fit in completely, particularly as he had not being raised in Puerto Rican Spanish, but with English as his first language. In addition, being a Calirican in New York was “nothing special,” not like being the only Puerto Rican in school in California. Missing the Bay Area as the place that felt most like home, Rafa returned after his brief stay, but with an acquaintance of queer dance cultures of color and their power to create space.

Finding himself again with other queer Latinos in the San Francisco Bay Area, Rafa navigated a rich geography of social, cultural, and sexual opportunities,
often criss-crossing cities, racial groups, nationalities, and genders. It was not unusual for him to seek several spots for nighttime fun and pleasure the same evening. The stops in a nightly itinerary with friends could include the mostly Latino gay ambiente of the famed gay Latino strip of 16th Street in the Mission District, or la dieciséis. There, he specifically recalls visiting the famed Esta Noche, the first openly gay Latino bar in the city, opening in 1979. Esta Noche’s competition, La India Bonita, felt too Mexican ranchero for Rafa. Although Esta Noche did not bring together what Rafa had already experienced in New York and knew could be created, the Latino bar had a regular English-speaking and more racially mixed crowd than La India Bonita, which placed it on the map of gay life in the city. Still, Rafa and his friends complained to each other that they could not go to a single place to get what they felt they needed as young gay urban Latinos in San Francisco: a racially and nationally mixed Latino cultural style, with the energy of the mostly-white house music scene they could experience in clubs like Universe, and the Black urban male-female energy feel of the Hip-Hop at The Box. These literal sonic movements across the city brought together the categories of Latino, Puerto Rican, Black, and “of color” for Rafa and his friends, and supported what he himself was about to bring together in a single space. The idea was not to collapse these markers, so that they became interchangeable, but to appreciate how opening questions of latinidad and queerness allowed for these borrowings while recognizing the specific contributions from each category.

Several key experiences in Rafa’s life coalesced just before giving birth to Pan Dulce. As Rafa ventured musically and sexually in multiple geographies in the early 1990s, he was also becoming a well-known maître d’ in the city’s restaurant industry. He had also become part of the HIV agency El Ambiente, an English-dominant HIV prevention and education project targeting gay and bisexual Latinos in the city. Rafa had additionally found his way into the Círculo Familiar, a Bay Area group of queer women and men with varying degrees of Puerto Rican identities. Throughout all these associations, Rafa remained a consistent consumer of queer Latino nightlife, a regular “club child” at clubs like the End Up, where he had met promoter and D.J. Joseph Solis. These four corners—El Ambiente, his well-profiled job as Maître D’ of the popular restaurant LuLu, the Círculo Familiar, and the city’s gay club world—brought Rafa closer to many queer and Latino communities that were becoming more and more visible, and that were recreating the terms for simultaneous racial and sexual identification in the region. At this intersection, placed between communities of color and white communities, between straight and queer, and between several cultural and political settings, Rafa was not then a banner-carrying activist, but a Puerto Rican member at large of the city’s queer Latino community who, through sociocultural organizing, was contributing back to his community.

Pan Dulce took form out of these interconnecting queer communities. When the new owners of a club at the corner of 11th Street and Folsom called the respected club promoter and D.J. Joseph Solis to have a Latino night, Solis referred them to Rafa. Hearing the message in his answering machine after returning from a trip to Los Angeles, where he had just met someone who would eventually become a role model and boyfriend, Rafa knew he would need a partner to get a club night going. Thinking of what he and his club friends had wanted for years, he considered seriously the proposition for a club. But Rafa had his own conditions for taking on the challenge:
The first thing I said was, “I don’t want do a Tuesday Latino night. Why are you always giving us the off nights? There’s enough faggots—and Latino faggots—in this town that we could support a Friday, or at least a Sunday. Let me have that.” Okay, now if I’m gonna do this, I need a partner. And the most important thing is the D.J. And I’d known enough by going out and dancing that the D.J. is either gonna make or break it. I could do everything—I could have the fiercest flyer, the cutest kids—and it would still be about the D.J. (Negrón 2001).

The D.J. Rafa would meet was to help create a queer version of the multisexual and multinational Latino tropics the Mission District had already experienced in a more straight-dominant form. Unbeknown to Rafa, this simultaneity between pan-national and multisexual Latina and Latino nightlife had a tradition in the Bay Area in clubs like El Intimo in the late 1960s and 1970s, the dances and other social gatherings of organizations like the Gay Latino Alliance in the 1970s, the women’s monthly club COLORS since the mid-1980s, and the multigendered but woman-dominant El Río since the 1980s.

Though invested in creating a multiracial, Puerto Rican-inflected Latino queer spot in the city, Rafa recognizes the foundational role the “straight boy” Tim Martinez had for creating Pan Dulce:

Through Joseph I met this kid Tim Martinez: straight boy, nicaragüense y cubano, straight boy from Daly City, queer friendly, one of the kids. I used to watch him dance. He and his straight friends would dance and I would just copy their moves. Now, I was already grown up, so it was a big thing for me to wanna copy your moves. He knew what I wanted [musically] (Negrón 2001).

Queer and straight club social networks intersected in the creation of Pan Dulce through Rafa’s and Tim’s collaboration, but so did the pan-Latino histories of migration into the region: Central Americans (Nicaraguans and Salvadorans) and Caribbean peoples (Cubans and Puerto Ricans) were moving into a city where Chicano/mexicano culture was still dominant. As Rafa explains further, the queer Latino club sensation that Pan Dulce became in 1996 and its queer and straight roots had a mix that had everything to do with the feel and flavor for a cultural space that could not be “explained” but experienced:

Tim Martinez—a straight boy—and I created Pan Dulce. We created the name together. Tim knew. I can’t express or emphasize enough how important it was to have someone who knew, that I didn’t have to explain—like we were tasting the same thing. And it’s important that I say “tasting.” That’s why we really liked the name “Pan Dulce,” ‘cause it was always on the tip of our tongue. It was something that was so Latino; it was about food. It is a f-l-a-v-o-r that you had to know, that you couldn’t tell people. You can tell someone about tamarindo, but you can’t explain tamarindo (Negrón 2001).
The fact that Rafa uses the popular Mexican fruit flavor tamarindo to suggest the experiential quality of what he describes Tim and he—as diasporic caribeños—just “knew” again suggests the mixing of latinidades in the Mission. His use of “flava” additionally suggests his Puerto Rican-Black intersection through this Hip-hop term, itself a product of diasporic cultures between Jamaica and New York City.17 Despite this tamarindo reference, the recipe for the musical taste for Pan Dulce was jointly created between Rafa and Tim to reflect a Caribbean and house music intersection. In the words of Rafa, it was to be “30 to 45 minutes of salsa and merengue, and . . . a little cumbia—if we have to—and then 30 to 45 minutes of good house” (Negrón 2001). The drag shows were not going to be too long either, in contrast to the drag practice at Esta Noche and La India Bonita. Hiring the Cuban MTF transgender performer and health worker Adela Vásquez, who collaborated with Proyecto, to direct the shows, Rafa specified his wish for only three top-notch “drag” performances.18 This way, Rafa called on his network of friends to bring dance, music, and performance to the club opening on Sunday night, March 10, 1996.

The backside of the multicolored flyer announcing Pan Dulce’s opening night promised “San Francisco’s Premiere Gay Nightclub,” with a “Rhythm you can taste” at the hands and vision of DJ Tim Martinez serving “the Sweetest Salsa, Merengue & Latino House.” The front-side featured the club’s name, the name of “SPICNIC PRODUCTIONS,” Rafa’s production company responsible for the event, and the colorful image by musician and visual artist Dennis Mario of a multiracial musical group depicting Afro-Caribbean cultures. Hosted by Rafa and sponsored (as the commercial logo clarified) by a new citrus-flavored tequila, opening night marked a new mix and option for those wanting to close the weekend among queer familia (figures 1 and 2). The term “SPICNIC” was a queer ethnic play on the historically derogatory term for Hispanics or Latin/o Americans, including Puerto Ricans and Mexicans, “spic,” and “picnic.” As Rafa explains,
Since I relate so much to food—"Pan Dulce," "Rhythm you can taste," etc.—I liked the melding of spic and picnic, a Puerto Rican picnic. It actually came about when I was discussing the Puerto Rican Day Parade in New York and how at the end everybody would be in Central Park with their blasters and blankets, congas y comida. I of course was focusing too on all the tasty Boricuas, thus lips smacking I coined the term, "Spicnic" (Negrón 2005).

Invoking the consumption of food, culture, and homoeroticism at the same time, Rafa connects again a distinctly diasporic Puerto Rican tradition with his queer Calirican project of Pan Dulce. In part a response to the relative absence of queer Caribbean Latino cultures in San Francisco, Pan Dulce was not outside circuits of capital accumulation; the club’s success, like any other, depended largely on alcohol sales and an overall profit margin for the building owners. Rafa, however, not dependent on the club for personal economic subsistence, followed a more artisan-entrepreneurship model, not focusing on profits but on a creative queer-Latino-centered space for consuming and producing queer Caribbean cultures, that is, a queer Latino production from below, a queer latinaje.

From the beginning Pan Dulce was a relatively young crowd of mostly 20-something queer and Latino, but actually multiracial, folk. The crowd included professionals and non-professionals, women and men, students, artists and health workers, (im)migrant and native, white and blue collar, and the working poor. A great many there were connected to the work of the sex-positive HIV agency Proyecto.19 This link between the HIV agency and the club was no coincidence. Although by the mid-1990s the crisis of AIDS in (gay) Latino communities that began in the mid-1980s had become less extreme than in previous years, HIV and AIDS were still present, for some literally in their bodies as they danced. The few Latino HIV agencies like Proyecto and clubs like Pan Dulce came at a historical juncture in the city: not only was HIV still present, but the gentrification of many of the neighborhoods in the Mission District was a reminder of the precariousness of life for these residents in the city. AIDS and gentrification, in the larger context of poverty, political, and educational disempowerment, literally have been removing Latino bodies from the city for decades. Like the collective experiences of Black queer men in the city, queer Latinos have been overrepresented in the HIV-infection and AIDS-related body count in San Francisco. In addition, the overwhelming context and reminder of the city’s cultural and political queer whiteness set yet more markers for our disappearance and marginality.

To speak of Pan Dulce’s queer Latina and Latino bodies in motion involves the literal and the figurative. Again, accounting for who was there literally entails the two interrelated histories of AIDS and gentrification in San Francisco. Rafa had been a long-term volunteer with El Ambiente. Well known in the gay Latino community through that work, Rafa was also a friend of poet and activist Ricardo A. Bracho, former underground house club promoter himself and then-coordinator of Proyecto’s Colegio ContraSIDA. Many of the bodies that eventually made their way to Pan Dulce were staff, clients, volunteers, or friends and supporters of these agencies, especially of Proyecto. The social networks facilitated through these two well-known gay Latinos and these two queer HIV agencies, in addition to the cadre of club promoters both Rafa and Ricardo knew, made Pan Dulce possible.
The connection to Proyecto in particular made the club’s multi-gender character more apparent. Because Proyecto emphasized cogender (women and men) and generally multigender educational programming (an even wider opening for gender expressions that included transgenders), the networks that were facilitated through the agency and that led individuals to Pan Dulce were also more than just gay and male, an audience which would be expected from an HIV agency, and which was true for El Ambiente. Like the space that Proyecto had made in its offices and through its workshops, Pan Dulce had queer women and men: transgender, bisexual, gay, and lesbian, including some in transition from one sex or gender to another. Thus, while gentrification continued in high gear in 1995 in the Mission District, with the rise of the dot-coms in the city, and a young, white professional class displacing many Latino families, and as agencies like El Ambiente and Proyecto continued to carry out preventive AIDS education especially with younger, 20-something queer populations, Pan Dulce became a queer Latino space for respite. The gender, sexual, and racial playfulness that one of the most well-known Pan Dulce flyers suggested through its multicolored image by artist Tom Sierra spoke to this need for an open queer space to celebrate and break from life outside this sonic creation (figure 3).

Inside the club on the first floor, several rooms, two bars, and the center dancing floor in front of the performing stage gave ample opportunities for flirting, catching up with friends, and gossiping. Upstairs, on the outside patio, we could smoke, drink, and continue the dialogue and the bodily play with a sense of freedom under the night sky, the fog rolling by above our heads. On the dance floor, with house music and salsa marking the steps, and a few contraband cumbias occasionally snuck in by long-standing, butch Chicana DJ “Chili D” (Diane Felix), and which, ironically, typically drew the largest crowds to the dance floor, the musical space was one for exciting possibilities. As performance scholar Fiona Buckland explains, “queer world-making” takes specific dimensions in dance clubs. In her case, New York’s queer clubs in the 1990s were sites for understanding the relationship between physical space and sexual meanings:

Figure 3. Tom Sierra’s image for Pan Dulce’s flyer for its move from Saturday to Friday nights beginning August 30, 1996. Copyright © Rafael “Rafa” Negrón. Reprinted, by permission, from Rafael “Rafa” Negrón.
Orientation had a double meaning in a queer club. Participants not only had to exert some kind of comprehensible map over the space with nodes they could locate and orient themselves around so they knew where they were and where they wanted to be, but they also had to orient themselves in a queer club, within a matrix of sexuality different from on the street or on the workplace (Buckland 2002: 56–7).

Those attending Pan Dulce also had to orient themselves in these two ways: locating/placing their bodies in the different physical sites of the club space—the bars, the outside patio, on the dance floor, in one of the smaller break out rooms, and/or on the sidelines—but also in relation to their own queer genders and sexualities also in relation to other bodies around them. In the Caribbean-inflected hybrid Pan Dulce, music was a critical “space” for navigating these orientations as well. I, for example, was especially attuned to cumbias when they appeared because it is the musical form that most affectively connects me to El Salvador; I knew they were not Rafa’s predilection, and thus their entry into this musical world was suspect. A rather humorous but poignant dynamic sticks in my memory, that of Rafa often firmly walking across the dance floor to the exposed DJ’s booth to limit this musical “trespassing” involving “too many” cumbias. That the dancing crowd was usually at its largest while the playing of cumbias signaled a contestation for sonic space with the club promoter himself. Like in any other club, those not necessarily liking a musical predilection could
“protest” by walking off the dance floor. These selective exclusions within the fluidity and multiplicity of the nightclub meant that we did not all consume the space similarly. Regardless, many of us went to Pan Dulce religiously, even when our national histories were not equally represented through the music (figure 4).

The cultural geographies I navigated as a gay salvadoreño in the house- and salsa-dominant Pan Dulce had different meanings for other regulars as well. For the mixed-race, bisexually identified panameño and photographer-in-residence Patrick “Pato” Hebert, who was part of Proyecto’s network and cadre of cultural workers and art instructors, Pan Dulce represented a new Latino formation straddling musical, geographic, and national boundaries:

I was always clear that Pan Dulce was a pan-Latino, highly caribeño space. One, because of the music—‘cause it was salsa. Two, because I always experienced house as being at the very least African diasporic, and only a certain kind of fluid mexicano, centroamericano appreciated house in my experience in the Bay Area. So, the best house D.J.s I knew were Salvadoran. I mean, it was truly very different than [the club] Futura, and the house music that was spun in Pan Dulce was not the electronica stuff you would hear at Esta Noche or wherever. So, caribeño to me basically means—one of the key components to me is connection to Africa, and so house and salsa both felt caribeño. And because of Rafa, and Adela in particular, who were sort of the aesthetic makers, it felt like it was sort of the first Latino social space in San Francisco that felt caribeño. The Mission Cultural Center has felt Latin American, which was one of the first times I’ve felt the sense of a Latin intelligentsia, and it was what one of the first pan-Latino spaces. But Pan Dulce felt caribeño (Hebert 2002).

In the mixed sonic geography of Pan Dulce that Pato recalls, several identity vectors and national aesthetics take central place: the popular cubana transgender health worker and performer Adela Vázquez; Salvadoran D.J.s and their talents spinning house music; and, most centrally in the sonic space, salsa. Through all of these musical forms, (im)migrant bodies, and gendered styles, a local queer Caribe took form through diasporic black and brown cultures. While distinctly queer and Latino/a, Pan Dulce engendered a Caribbean-Latino perspective/feel, not a “generic, unqualified” Latino subject which, as Juan Flores warns, is too often used to homogenize distinctly historically and culturally defined populations assumed to be “progressing toward acceptance and self-advancement from the same starting line, and the same pace” (2000: 8). Given that it was a nightclub, it was through the medium of the music that this particular Caribbean Latino feel emerged. Using the apt phrasing of Mayra Santos-Febres regarding the international emergence of salsa, the sonic space of Pan Dulce could be described as a distinctly queer Caribbean Latino site of “translocation,” in the larger process of a globalized musical community emerging through different sites of production and reception (Santos-Febres 1997).

While hundreds of bodies made their way through Pan Dulce, several of them were especially recognizable. Rafa Negrón’s persona as the promoter of the club
Figure 5: Rafa (right) and Greg dancing salsa at Pan Dulce.
also extended to the dance floor. One of the most enduring and memorable bodily manifestations was his dancing salsa with his Puerto Rican colleague Greg Cardona. Rafa and Greg’s fast but smooth, partnered dancing was an exercise between them as gay Latinos, but it was also a performance for the rest of us in the sidelines. Because there were no other dancing couples present able or willing to move to the salsa rhythms the way Rafa and Greg did, their movements were especially memorable and historically significant: two gay Latinos mimicking but also altering the heterosexuality generally constructed in salsa. That this was Rafa’s club made his own dancing that more poignant: he had made the space possible for his own familial Puerto Rican rhythms, for the music he wanted and he chose to dance, and for us to share (figure 5).

Rafa’s and Greg’s recasting salsa through their homoerotic dancing speaks, from a queer male vantage point, to what John Fiske refers to as “productive pleasure,” “pleasure which results from a mix of productivity, relevance, and functionality” with meaning relating directly to the everyday life of the consumer of the cultural product “in a practical, direct way.” Employing Fiske’s concept, Frances R. Aparicio has noted how Latinas recast the overly hetero-masculinist messages popularized transnationally through salsa:

Latinas who are active listeners and consumers of salsa music continuously rewrite patriarchal and misogynist salsa texts. They engage in “productive pleasure,” which allows them as culturally bound receptors the opportunity to produce meanings and significations that are relevant to their everyday lives. . . . A cultural text . . . does not embody semantic closure, nor is it limited to its gendered genesis. Rather, it becomes, by means of its circulation across plural contexts, a cultural text that triggers diverse and even contradictory and conflicting meanings in and among its receptors (1998: 188).

At Pan Dulce, despite salsa songs’ assumed and actually structured heteronormativity (literally, the sung narrative of heterosexual coupling), same-sex couples, most notably Rafa and Greg, performed productive pleasure by enacting public homoerotic cultures. We could argue further these same-sex couples’ productive pleasures required productive gender play: gay boys, “fags,” and/or queer men along a broad feminine-masculine spectrum danced together, as did women vesting themselves gender-wise along a related though differently embodied continuum: fem(me), butch, and all other gender points in between and outside. Additionally, while there were queer Latinos in the process of transitioning to a female gender-sex (MTF transgender), so were there queer women transitioning to a man/masculine gender-sex (FTM transgender).

In the stigmatized, queer sexual cultures of the last two decades, when queer desire has been in crisis and suspect given its potential for contagion with respect to AIDS, experiencing the pleasures of bodies, especially those of queer men, can take on powerfully charged meanings. One of the gay male Chicano bodies also marking his presence at Pan Dulce was that of Ruben Carrillo. Ruben was well known as a staff member of Proyecto, responsible for the programming for young queer men through his discussion series, “Brown Boyz.” As one of the regular male dancers in Pan Dulce,
moving to the music while on a small platform, his body above the rest of ours and at good eye level for us to see, Ruben was in full view for glancing at occasionally. Similarly, one of Proyecto’s women clients and consistent supporters, the Argentine Trilce Santana, go-go danced at the club, her movements marking a different erotic presence as a queer Latina at the club. In their distinct gendered ways, their bodies added energy and modeled a pace to the larger collective dancing taking place below them on the dance floor, but without a rigid separation between “them and us” since many club goers knew who they were off the stand. There was indeed an exciting tension in the simultaneous familiarity and erotic desire vested in these performing bodies: they were part of the community many knew very well, the broader queer Latino family strengthened through Pan Dulce, El Ambiente, and Proyecto, but they were also objects of public desire in these nightly hours of dance, music, and pleasures.

As a gay Latino with erotic desires for other men, I have memories of the club that take me back most easily to their bodies. But as Trilce’s dancing and the photographic record attests, women were also quite present in Pan Dulce, often making up to one third of the clientele. Seeing these queer women, and especially many of those I knew through Proyecto, made for another kind of familiarity and of collective belonging (figures 6 and 7). While admiring and desiring bodies like Ruben’s, I was also dancing next to women, friends, and strangers. Strangers seen regularly, of course, often also become familiar, leading to what activist Diane Felix describes as the collective, community-building public experience of passion in queer nightlife.22

Sharing an erotic space with queer men alongside these women made for a multigender queer Latino space challenging the sexual segregation typical of queer spaces historically, but especially among whites.23 Pan Dulce allowed for women to flirt with one another while being next to men, and for men to do the same with each other while in the proximity of women. This mixing of genders and sexes among women and men represented not only the possibility but also the reality of queer Latino community making among them. It also made for the real possibility of bisexual expressions and desires. As bisexual Latina activist Laura Pérez explains, such spatial mixing of sexes and genders has at least the potential for disrupting not only segregated same-sex erotic life, but also for

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Figure 6: (top) Women posing at Pan Dulce. From left to right: Joy, Vero, Wura, and Jesse. Bottom: Figure 7: Pan Dulce regular Trilce, go-go dancing at Pan Dulce.
considering joint political work among queer women and queer men. Discussing the need for more joint women and men programming in agencies like Proyecto around the time of Pan Dulce, especially the inclusion of openly identified bisexual women and men, she explained:

there's a way that our familia, la jotería—we're a very sexual bunch . . . So what do we do when we're together? The chisme, and the cruising y todo, and trying to see like who's going out with who and who's fucked who and who wants to fuck who else. When you add bisexuality into that, things get really uncertain. Because mujeres, when they're together, they know that they can cruise each other or whatever because they're gay and they can do that; and the same with men. But if you open it up to bisexuals, then all of a sudden there's this fear of nobody's safe, like anybody can get cruised. And maybe those people that are closeted bis or whatever, or who may have relationships or sex with both genders but don't openly talk about it, or may be gay-identified or lesbian-identified and still have those relationships, and not take a bi identity, that would totally get more put out there because the sexual energy would not dissipate. Our sexuality and who makes us up is not gonna go away if we come together in the same room, and I think that there's a way that people are really tripped out about what bisexuals bring to that (Pérez 1995).

Largely unspoken or unaccounted, Latina and Latino bisexual subjectivities in Pan Dulce were nevertheless present, but not foregrounded to any significant degree. As Pérez argues, acknowledging them would, ironically, queer/subvert to some degree the same-sex normativity structured through woman-woman and man-man public cultures. Bisexual or not, queer women and queer men sharing the social and cultural space of Pan Dulce created a co-gender queer world that did allow for this fluidity. As Clare Hemmings points out, considering how queer or lesbian-, gay-identified spaces like Pan Dulce are also already (though now acknowledged) bisexual allows us to theorize bisexualities “in terms of connection rather than separation from other sexual identities” (Hemmings 1997:161). While this mixing of sexualities, genders, and bodies did not always nor necessarily extend into other social, sexual, or political life, for some it did continue through house parties, electronic communication, research collaborations, and community-based projects. Pan Dulce's multigender and multisexual queer Latino community was part of a larger history of broader gender mixing and organizing.

The multigender body at Pan Dulce had queer political relevance. Although the AIDS epidemic in San Francisco has manifested itself cumulatively and most violently in the bodies of queer men and transgender women, in the larger history of community survival women and men alike have been part of the struggle against the disease. When the first wave of death in the mid-1980s hit queer Latinos, and the first gay professional and paraprofessional health workers began to die, women (queer and straight) responded by becoming part of the battlefront in community-based agencies. These collaborations between women and men were not always smooth or “natural” ones, but they nevertheless represented the multigendered
response of a community. They also foregrounded part of the reality of queer Latina and Latino history in the Bay Area, and of queer communities of color generally: although same-sex socializing has taken place among queer women and among queer men, queer women and queer men of color have also shaped their history together. Pan Dulce was a brief example and useful reminder of this history.

The queer latina/o performative and Pan Dulce’s structures of feeling

Returning to Delgado’s and Muñoz’s argument for history as choreography, I want to address now the second dimension of their analysis, that of “the dancing body enact[ing] an opposition unassimilable to rational understandings of resistance as productive work.” Here it is useful to consider two theorists’ ideas around social experience, art forms, and feelings. Edward Said and Raymond Williams have offered useful points for assessing the place of music and dance in claims for citizenship. In his discussion of Western classical music, Edward W. Said compared music to literature, pointing out how both artistic forms are socially experienced. “Music, like literature,” he argued, “is practiced in a social and cultural setting, but it is also an art whose existence is premised undeniably on individual performance, reception, or production” (Said 1991: xiv). Pan Dulce’s production and its reception involved the individual efforts and ideas of Rafa Negrón and all of those he brought together. Individually as well, club goers experienced a part of history that we did not want to take for granted. Having a queer Latino club to go to at least once a week, and that we knew was managed by a fellow queer Latino with a distinct latinaje in mind, mattered. This experience mattered precisely in relation to the sense of history and/or community we wanted to maintain in the larger context of the city, and the few other existing alternatives for us. It was a collective social process similar to that which Wilson A. Valentin Escobar has discussed in relation to the sonic memorializing of the late Héctor Lavoe. For Puerto Ricans in the diaspora, to articulate and affirm their identities and nationness upon his death, they utilized key cultural products such as Lavoe’s music to trespass transnational geographical boundaries (Valentín Escobar 2002: 162–3). Through song and dance and the collective rituals that came through Pan Dulce, we enacted transnational and translocal narratives of history and identity via Rafa’s Diasporic Calirican sensibilities for a multivalent queer Latinidad.

As Rafa himself explained, the making of Pan Dulce was in part a response to not experiencing and feeling what he and his friends desired in several existing gay and Latino spaces. By 1996, the famed 16th Street gay Latino strip in San Francisco’s Mission District showed the effects of AIDS and gentrification. By the mid-1980s up to five bars catered to an overwhelmingly gay male and MTF transgender clientele on la dieciséis, immigrant and Spanish dominant. But by the mid-1990s, only two bars remained, following the death of hundreds of regular patrons; many others stayed away from a strip associated with the disease. While queer Latinas had occasionally been a significant presence in bars like La India Bonita on the strip, gentrification had also pushed queer women of color out from the nearby Valencia Street strip, where women’s public literary, political, and artistic cultures had gone strong since the mid-1970s. That by 1997 the one remaining gay Latino bar on 16th Street, Esta Noche, maintained an embattled relationship with the community made it even more challenging to make of the strip a kind of home, especially for younger Latino queers wanting other options.
Although Pan Dulce was a multigender, multiracial alternative for a younger, urban crowd compared to la dieciséis, as a queer Latino performing space it had some of the significance that this gay Latino strip, El Intimo, and other queer Latino spaces have had historically. The music, dance, and drag performance shows have taken patrons on emotional rides, helping them cross physical and temporal geographies in their lives (see figure 8 on page 274). The dance and the music have created for and with the clientele a collective performative space, what several scholars have identified as the affective cultures and transnational politics in queer Latino performance and dance (Guzmán 1997; Muñoz 1999, 2000).

These crossings of physical, temporal, and affective dimensions on stage and the dance floor approach that which Jill Dolan refers to as the “utopian performative.” In the social exchanges between performers and audience, she argues there exist “the politically progressive possibilities of romanticism in performance... in the performer’s grace, in the audience’s generosity, in the lucid power of intersubjective understanding, however fleeting” (Dolan 2001: 479). Building on this utopian possibility, Ramón H. Rivera-Servera argues further that the dance floor may be “one of the most vivid examples of the material conditions from which queer Latinidad emerges” (2004: 274). Based on his own ethnographic work on gay and lesbian clubs in New York and Texas, including his own discoveries of community in these sites of intersecting expressions (language, nation, race and culture, gender and sexuality, among others), he deems these moves “choreographies of resistance.” It is precisely in this tradition of queer Latino utopic possibility that I understand the importance of Manuel Guzmán’s discussion of the “contested terrains of nation and sexual orientation” in the context of queer Latino nightlife. In his (auto-)ethnographic delineation of the famed “La Escuelita” gay Latino club in New York in the first half of the 1990s, Guzmán paints a narrative of queer or non-heteronormative desires that had as much to do with the multigender queerness of lo/el puertorriqueño in the club and the city as with the survival of lo/el puertorriqueño in the context of hegemonic whiteness in the U.S.

Dolan’s, Rivera-Servera’s, and Guzmán’s discussions of the utopic, the performative, and the affective dimensions of collective and public queer desire are in conversation with that of other scholars of queer Latino performance taking on the work of English critic Raymond Williams. Through his influential essay “Structures of Feeling,” Williams addressed the relationship between culture and society in order to encapsulate the idea of culture not in the past tense and as a complete project, but as a lived human experience. Williams argued that

In most description and analysis, culture and society are experienced in an habitual past tense. The greatest barrier to the recognition of human cultural activity is this immediate and regular conversion of experience into finished products... Analysis is then centered on relations between these produced institutions, formations, and experiences, so that now, as in that produced past, only the fixed explicit forms exist, and living presence is always, by definition, receding (1977: 128).
Rather than placing human cultural activity in this completed, receding past, Williams makes a case for understanding social experience as what he terms “structures of feeling,” less formalistic than “world-view” or “ideology,” emphasizing instead meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt. When we are dealing with these structures of feeling, he continues,

We are talking about characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity. We are then defining these elements as a “structure”: as a set, with specific internal relations, and once interlocking and in tension (1977: 132).

The cultures in Pan Dulce engendered structures of feeling through the social experiences of the nightlife: through music, friendships with others, and the different exchanges with and attractions for differently gendered bodies. It is an experience of pleasure in public with others, but with individual feelings/thoughts, manifested, for example, in patrons’ requests for a song or dance, or in their decision to leave the floor once a song is over, or to rush back once they recognize the song being mixed in from the previous one. That DJs deftly move through temporal, geographic, and cultural and political distances in a matter of seconds through the mixing of songs and tempos makes the structures of feeling that more complicated and creative. The many salsas, merengues, and fewer cumbias that entered the space of Pan Dulce in Spanish took us (back) to Puerto Rico, to New York, to Colombia, to Mexico, to Cuba, and/or to El Salvador—and to the diasporas and borderlands in between—across several historical periods, depending on our individual, family, and historical (im)migrations. A great deal of the house music, mostly in English but also in Spanglish, likewise took us to local, regional, and national contexts: Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Miami, and other places in between these focal points for urban queer Latino cultures. What all of these countries, periods, and styles meant for each one of us either dancing or just listening while at the club is beyond possible discussion here, but they surely included lovers, family and relatives, forced migrations and political dislocation, and longings to return to places or bodies.

Despite the excitement of these collective queer performative moments of the everynight life, of the utopic possibilities and multiple choreographies of resistance, these sonic pieces of the night too come to an end. As house music brought Pan Dulce to a close in the early morning hours, and the crowd grew smaller, the previous collective celebration turned to a slowly receding loss. Captured visually through some of his photography, Pato Hebert explains, this loss involved the potentially literal disappearance of some of our bodies through AIDS, but also the knowledge of our multiple generations of dislocations, queer and not:
There’s a way that like that 1:30 in the morning moment in clubs is so beautiful and so tragic to me—poignant is probably a better word. We’re there in our loneliness. . . For me, I felt like, there’s one image in particular that feels like a kind of AIDS eulogy. There’s a way that the bodies, whether or not they were [HIV] positive, felt pulverized to me, which makes the movement even more beautiful. I was really clear about all the kind of social gravities that were in effect on the dance floor. And there was a way that I felt like I was seeing the spirits in us, literally, as a kind of energy and the spirit of the space. But the kind of spirit of our ancestors and the ghosts of all of us being numbed the fuck out just to survive. Just to have the courage to be there—whatever. It’s a kind of a trite visual device, but there was something about the blurring that could suggest all of that (Hebert 2002).
Hebert’s references to the “ghosts,” the blurring, and all the social gravities suggested visually in the photograph, sonically in the music, and physically through the dance recall the power of haunting and its connection to Williams’s notion of structures of feeling. As Avery Gordon explains, the appearance of “ghostly things” in social analysis is a powerful method for appreciating the multivalence of the reality we are presumed to observe only empirically and objectively. “The way of the ghosts is haunting,” Avery argues, and haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening. Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but a transformative recognition (Gordon 1997:8).

Essential to this knowledge production and knowledge appreciation, Williams and Gordon argue, emotional involvement becomes a critical phenomenology that for Hebert includes the courage, energy, spirit, and magic and beauty experienced in Pan Dulce, in particular at the moment of “temporary death” of the club when the night ends. Again, it was through Rafa’s Calirican project of latinaje of mid-1990s San Francisco that these transformative recognitions were made possible.

Williams’ delineation of “affective elements of consciousness and relationships” suggests the memory embedded in music and song. We experience songs socially at the level of memory: they take us back to historically specific situations, periods, or individuals in our lives in the past or perhaps an immediate present, as we think/feel the multiple relationships between this temporal site (the now, or in this discussion, Pan Dulce in 1996/7) with a “then”—before coming to the U.S., before moving to the San Francisco Bay Area, before coming out, before becoming HIV+, or before a romantic break-up. As Williams argues, thought as felt and feeling as thought are dynamically intersected in the experience of the structure of feeling. We enter meanings, feelings, and histories through the lyrics and the music in the songs. Excitement, pain, love, and a great deal of memory are present in the lyrics and the sounds of clubs, but these elements in turn allow us, the audience, to take them to our own memories and recollections. That most of us on the dance floor, or as observant sideline witnesses, had plenty of history and memory about loved ones, nation, and dislocation made us perfect participants in the club’s sonic structures of feeling. When some of us in the audience at some point or another may have wanted to be the performers/dancers themselves suggests (in part) the power, the effectiveness and, thus, the splendor of the performance.

The structures of feeling in Pan Dulce depended to a large degree on the sonic cultures at the hands of the DJs: the carefully chosen and dominant Puerto Rican salsas Rafa and Greg and other queer couples danced together; the cumbias and merengues that invited a looser, less couples-based performative moment; and the Hip-Hop and House rhythms that blended in yet more multiracial and queer origins. Several esthetic makers had their hands in this queer creation, yet Rafa highlights the straight Tim Martinez for making this queer location possible and expanding the notion of what this multilingual latinidad was about sonically:
[Tim] knew the classics. He would pop out some of the Old School that was not the same old tired Old School. Tim was Pan Dulce as much as I was, and as much as Adela was, and as much as Ricardo was, and Leslie my sister. Together we were just amazing. Tim also showed me the real beauty behind the music—doesn’t matter what color we are, or where we put our pingas, or how we dance, as long as we’re dancing. And if that track, the first three notes of the song can make all of us from all these different backgrounds blow out a collective “Ooohhh!” you knew we were doing something right! You knew that there was a history there that wasn’t even spoken. You knew there were so many different memories associated with the first three notes of this song, that everyone had a memory associated with it. And we can revel in it. Tim helped show me that (Negrón 2001).

To recognize the multigender, multisexual, and multinational hybridities in Pan Dulce opens up both notions of queerness and latinidad: the straight mixed-caribeño DJ Tim; the Mexico City-born gay Chicano Ricardo; the Cuban FTM sexiliada Adela; and Rafa’s own blood family through his sister Leslie. For Rafa as the West Coast Calirican club promoter, it meant reworking his own sense of what Puerto Rican Diasporic cultures could shape in a non-Puerto Rican, Mexican-dominant Latino translocation. For a queer Puerto Rican, the undertaking also meant negotiating the sonic, racial, ethnic, and sexual possibilities of who could help shape the contours of this nightlife. It was an open invitation to the related collective process, which Deborah P. Amory refers to as “dancing with (a) difference,” commenting on the San Francisco lesbian nightclub of late the 1980s, Club Q, where women of color comprised a significant part of the clientele, and where Black popular culture, through the centrality of funk music, influenced this mainstream (white) lesbian cultural space (Amory 1996: 149). Similarly, Rafa recognized the importance of a sonic mix where the queer and non-queer, Puerto Rican, Caribbean, and broadly “Latino” could not only coexist but also reshape one another.

Feeling brown and queer: Pan Dulce’s “caribeño tip”

Pan Dulce was a unique space mixing culturas, genders and musical genres while serving up Latin night life on the caribeño tip. I was excited to chill and create in a space that gente de ambiente could call our own. I’m interested in the drama and performance at clubs. The power of the music and the dancing. The fierceness of the fashion. The drugs, bochinche, sadness, passion and compassion. The beauty of the people (Hebert 1997: 1).

When Hebert introduced his Pan Dulce photograph series in 1997 during the opening night of Ricardo A. Bracho’s play “The Sweetest Hangover (and other STDs),” which itself recreated and took place in “the recent past” in South of Market and the Mission District, the club had already gone through its exciting though brief heyday. Bracho’s own play was a staged celebration of the lives of queer young adults.
of color in San Francisco in the 1990s, and a memorial to the losses and challenges it represented amidst AIDS, ongoing HIV infections, and the queer whiteness of the city. Both of these performative histories—Rafa’s club in 1996/1997 and Ricardo’s play in 1997 about queer club goers of color in this decade—were about “feeling brown,” what José Esteban Muñoz (2000) argues as the importance of ethnic affect in the making of (queer) Latina/o citizen-subjects. This “feeling brown” and queer came also in the ideal positioning of images and representations, the subjects of Hebert’s photographs of Pan Dulce in public at the theatre where/when the play was staged. There, theatre goers, club goers, and Mission neighborhood community members—many one in the same—could have simultaneous conversations as consumers of the play; as subjects in the play; and as viewers experiencing the still shots of the spaces they created together in Pan Dulce. In this “caribeño tip” straddling the Mission District and South of Market, Hebert found much to reminisce and celebrate of this significant collective moment for local queer latinidad.

The multiple visual representations of Pan Dulce during the nights of the play in April 1997 spoke to Rafa’s own recollection years later of what the club meant to him. In his club the Calirican had created a latinidad that included the unmistakable Caribbean salsas and merengues; the periodic Mexican folklorico dancing drag performances for Cinco de Mayo; the live ranchera performances of the late MTF transgender singer Teresita la Campesina; and the space for pan-Latina/o HIV-prevention community agencies to conduct outreach. While these cultural and ethnic mixings could be selectively consumed by participants’ self-predilection towards her/his own singular racial ethnic identification, they were also part of a Latino flexibility appreciated by those in cultural positionings like those Mérida Rúa (2001) describes as “colao subjectivities.” Speaking to the everyday constructions of latinidad by individuals of both Puerto Rican and Mexican descent in Chicago, Rúa offers this concept as a metaphor for suggesting the fluidity of cultural and ethnic identification for those located in two (or more) anchors. For those “mixed-Latinas/os” at Pan Dulce, the club’s hybrid cultural representations spoke yet more intimately to their own “inter-Latino encounters” in their own blood family and national roots (Rúa 2001: 117). A highly visible member of the queer latinidad who lived as a queer Calirican in the presumed gay Mecca of San Francisco, Rafa interpreted his club more as a community space than an entrepreneurship, describing it as an entry to enjoy, experiment, and create. “Pan Dulce,” he remembers, was a number of things. I think it was, “Mira, yo soy Boricua, y estoy aquí. I am still here, and this is my version of what a Boricua is, and this is how I wanna show it to you all. You wanna come play? You wanna come party? These are my cracks, and this is my act, and this is my clubhouse. And yeah, you do great—we can have so much fun.” That was kind of my contribution. It was my invitation to people, “Mira, I have no qualms about making a fool of myself on the dance floor—do you wanna come make a fool of yourself with me? Do you wanna smoke a joint? Do you wanna sit in the corner? Do you wanna dress up? Do you wanna be the life of the party, or do you wanna lurk in the background? You can do it all. You can do it here, and you’re welcome to do it” (Negrón 2001).
With his distinctly Puerto Rican “mira,” Rafa retraces his memory of what he intended his club to be: an open door to invent queer space freely, from the invitation of a Calirican. While establishing that this was indeed his version of “what a Boricua is,” Pan Dulce remained a fluid enough clubhouse to allow experimentation. Once again, as the catalyst for this queer sonic latinaje, Rafa and his persona embodied a complexity through his presence in several social, cultural, and economic sectors of the city (El Ambiente, Proyecto, Círculo Familiar, and his restaurant employment). Not having found earlier in the city all the pieces and feelings he and his friends had hoped for, he went out and brought them together himself.

The pleasures of the cultural, racial, and gender fluidities in Pan Dulce were part of its success and strength, what drew many to the space. But this club night’s financial success, after all, depended on an actual paying public. In practice, as the club became more successful while still open to all these subjectivities, Rafa explains he inadvertently created more and more expenses that cut into the potential for substantive profits. Despite its success and neighborhood-based familial feel on the original Sunday nights, Pan Dulce moved to Friday nights to help offset the other, least successful nights for the nightclub owners. While the crowds at Pan Dulce increased after this rescheduling, the feel became relatively more anonymous, with the crowd becoming whiter and less Mission based. Pan Dulce’s own financial success for its own night was not enough to offset the site’s non-profitable nights. These financial challenges signaled for Rafa the need to end Pan Dulce at this particular location, trying to prevent the club’s popularity (and his) from suffering. At the same time, Rafa’s own perfectionism prevented him from making an attempt to move Pan Dulce to another venue successfully, one where he felt he could continue to deliver what he had already achieved on Folsom and 11th Street; friends’ pressuring him to continue the club in any way possible stressed him further. Lastly, as he alludes in the quote above, “play” at the club could involve drug use. Unfortunately, his own growing drug use then and inability to address his sexual compulsion prevented him from maintaining his personal networks of support and his ability to practice safer sex consistently.

In a city whose queer historical representations remain largely white, safety and visibility for queer people of color were important for Rafa. He also did not want this queer-of-color presence to resort to essentialist requirements and embodiments around hegemonic gender and sexuality, specifically the hypermasculinist ethos of most gay male clubs. As he continues, Rafa sought visibility, safety, and acceptance within the multigender space:

It was about who are you and what were you bringing. . . .
To be accepting. . . . It was about visibility. It was a place to be visible that’s safe, that’s pretty warm, that there’s a room for a margin of error. . . .
It was about here we are, and here’s a part of us that we never show. . . .
There’s an old house track that says, “I could be he, I could she, I could be him, I could be her—I could be anything.” And that’s what Pan Dulce was—you could be anything, all in one night (Negrón 2001).
This queer gender opening for multiple expressions intersected with the opening of Latinidades from his Calirican-centeredness. Queer masculinities, femininities, and other creative in-between manifestations of gender could all be “a part of us.” Thus, while he consistently danced salsa with his Nuyorican friend Greg, as did other woman-woman and man-man couples, their (queer) couplings did not prevent non-binary dancing and other forms of performances by all others in the club.

Rafa’s invitation to play in his clubhouse involved a musical style deeply responsible for the making of queer communities of color in the U.S. in the 1980s and 1990s. Emerging in Chicago’s queer black and Latino nightlife in the 1980s, house music hit the West Coast around 1990 and has never let go since then. This style of music is suggestive of the idea of house as home, the place we are supposed to go for safety and nurture. “Home,” however, is never a given for queer Latinas and Latinos, “even” in San Francisco. Whether kicked out or slowly pushed out, we do not take home for granted. For those of us who have been lucky enough to be able to travel between homes openly as queer Latinos, whatever it is we consider these homes to be, Pan Dulce made the travel less painful and more fruitful.

Forms of social documentation for creating and securing a record of queer Latina and Latino historical spaces, including the queer Puerto Rican diaspora, find multiple challenges. Bodily and psychic pleasures and their political significance offer challenges to the archivist, the artist, and the writer. How do we document an experience that has little if anything to do with written materials? How do we document images and narratives that do not reduce individual and collective experiences to single, essentialist meanings of identity or culture? Certainly, multiple colorful flyers, ads, and photographs are part of these social records. Memories too are central in getting at these histories, especially since they often are histories of the displaced, of the diseased, and of the removed. The body-memories that took form and meaning in the history of Pan Dulce have a place in the larger archive of queer Latina and Latino history of the Bay Area, of Puerto Rican and Caribbean cultural, hybrid formations around nationality, identity, and space.

The contributions from the Calirican Rafa Negrón to this pan-Latino queer historical presence in the region, as a translocal performative intervention, cannot be underestimated. As more recent recuperative work is making evident, there are larger, deeper queer Puerto Rican histories in the island and in the diaspora than current documents attest. There have been many “páginas omitidas” from this history, as Luis Aponte-Parés and Jorge B. Merced (1998) have argued while they track the historical record of lesbian and gay Puerto Ricans’ struggles to be visible and present in the larger Puerto Rican movement. There are also the historically contradictory (trans)national queer Puerto Rican positionings discussed by Frances Negrón-Muntaner (1999), where “brincando el charco” between the island and the U.S. is a longstanding, uneven process of negotiated blood family relations, often homophobic and sexist/patriarchal expulsion from the home/nation, and entering and surviving multiracial queer urban U.S. cultures within hegemonic whiteness. There is also indeed much evidence to claim “a queer Puerto Rican Century,” as Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes (1999) has stated in regards to the yet
undocumented but much suggested records of homosexual practices and subjectivities before and after 1898. This growing body on all these diverse transnational histories of queer Puerto Rican bodies is slowly but surely hacking away at the heteronormativity of Puerto Rican studies, and the Anglo-centrism and whiteness of queer history and studies, laying out a more multiracial, multinational, and multilingual record of queer desires. These diverse gendered, erotic, and racial histories also make evident the various reasons and needs for queer Latina and Latino bodies to move across borders and diasporas. The bodies making these queer border crossings, Eithne Luibhéid (2005: 15) shows, make evident the multiple systems of exclusion through heteronormative immigration policies, reactionary stands against HIV+ (im)migrants, and what she deems the “anxious production of hetero-patriarchal families” through the segregation of lesbian, transgender, and gay bodies in transit. Living within an ever more globalizing capital, Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé and Martin F. Manalansan, IV, point out that there is the hope that these queer itineraries are capable of yielding “counterhegemonic routes that can redeploy and redirect global capital’s mass dispersions, and pain, toward global cross-cultural engagements and coalitions that are more respectful of queer cultures and queer lives” (2002: 4).

My analysis of this historical piece of queer Puerto Rican and Latino history is not an argument that this is the only place for our politics of resistance. But neither should we reduce “the political” only to the formal electoral realm, the grassroots organizing in the community, the rioting in queer-of-color places like the Stonewall Inn, or the publications we put out in all our languages and genders. There is no question that all that labor constitutes resistance and queer Latino agency. Cultural citizenship too, queer or not, is certainly not a political panacea. As Arlene Dávila has pointed out, “expanding claims for entitlement may leave untouched the structures of subordination, thereby simultaneously rendering the attained rights into venues of containment and subordination…” (2001b: 161). What I have argued here, though, like others before, is that we can enter that broad field of political resistance also through queer Latina/o performances of music and dance.

To understand contemporary queer Latina and Latino history specifically in the ongoing public health, capitalist, sexual, and gendered and racialized crises that AIDS, gentrification, and incarceration represent in most urban centers, we need to remember that the steps to our resistance are multiple. Not only have these been painful and often short-lived, but they have also carried historical beats we can listen to and where we have found pleasure. The queer sonic latinaje that the Calirican Rafa Negrón’s Pan Dulce became was precisely one form of such resistance to these forms of domination. A tropicalizing Latinization from below, Pan Dulce produced cultural affirmations and resistance to both heteronormative and whitening practices in the City by the Bay. As a queer site for productive Latino pleasures, this site resulted in a deployment of latinidad that, as Frances R. Aparicio has proposed, “allows us to explore moments of convergences and divergences in the formation of Latino (post)colonial subjectivities and in hybrid cultural expressions among various Latino national groups” (2003: 93). As a queer sonic latinaje, that historically and politically significant space at the junctures of sexual, racial, and ethnic (im)migrant communities momentarily disrupted dominant heteronormative notions of communal legitimacy and entitlement, pushing instead for a hybrid queer Latino cultural citizenship.
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NOTES

1 While the acronym “LGBT” (“lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender”) has become dominant (even globalizing) in describing non-heteronormative lives and cultures, I privilege here the more politically charged “queer.” This term reflects the spirit of several cultural and political currents in San Francisco and other U.S. urban cities from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s, and less accommodationist stances usually associated with the in-your-face tactics of the political action group, Queer Nation. But the term also became an ideological and political stance of other less known regional organizations and HIV service agencies, including San Francisco’s queer-identified HIV Latina/o agency, Proyecto ContraSIDA Por Vida (or simply “Proyecto,” discussed later in this essay). In that historically specific political spirit, I use “queer” just as I remain conscious of its Anglo-centric roots and its problematic conflation of distinct sexual and gender experiences—butch, fem(me), bisexual, lesbian, gay, and MTF (male-to-female) and FTM (female-to-male) transgenders, for example)—especially outside Anglo-centric histories and cultures. Throughout the essay I also use other, more specific terms (lesbian, gay, etc.) as necessary and more appropriate.

2 In recent years, as an effect of the “yuppification” of several of San Francisco’s neighborhoods (including the Mission District and SOMA), in part the result of the booming Silicon Valley to the South of the city and the entry of venture capital in the 1990s, the most visible public cultures of Folsom Street shifted to include more heterosexual young whites. These demographic and economic shifts, facilitated by then city Mayor Willie Brown and his allies, in turn created a less diverse (sexual and racial) urban geography, and more economically bifurcated city, most visible in the growingly gendered (more women) and racialized (more of color, specifically African American) homeless population. To note the geographic separation between “leather” and “Latino” communities should not suggest that there has never been an overlap: there are and have been Latinas in Latinos in the Bay Area’s leather communities (queer and straight), and leather-identified community members have lived in predominant Latino communities.

3 The essay focuses on Pan Dulce’s first nine months in 1996–1997, when Rafa Negrón owned it and was its promoter in San Francisco, and not in later years after Negrón sold the rights to Jamie Awad, and when the club often traveled outside the city as a “Latino-themed” party. Under Awad’s ownership, the club’s name remains to this day.
To my knowledge, besides brief published oral histories and reports, there is no sustained documentation of queer Puerto Rican history in the Bay Area to date. These oral histories include those of musical artist and poet Avotcja and several others in Ramos (1994); the ethnographic work of Cora (2000); passing references to and images of Puerto Rican lesbians and gays in De la Garza and Roque Ramírez (2001); and similar brief references and oral histories about (not from) Puerto Ricans in Roque Ramírez (2003). While conducting my doctoral research upon which that essay is based, I was not able to identify a significant number of queer Puerto Rican narrators (in comparison to Chicanas and Chicanos), especially the Puerto Rican women and men active in the 1970s Gay Latino Alliance, the Third World Gay Caucus, and other political, social, and cultural organizations. Many of those gay and bisexual Puerto Rican activist men and transgender women died of AIDS beginning in the 1980s. I was able to begin an extended oral history of the MTF transsexual Puerto Rican performing artist Vicki Starr, the first topless transsexual performer in San Francisco beginning in the late 1970s. Starr discusses her relationship to her blood family left behind in the island with respect to her gender/sex in Gould (1966). Starr’s ailing health prevented us from completing that oral history project, although I am in the process of organizing and addressing her surviving archives, which document her migrations from the island via New York, across the United States, and into Los Angeles to settle in the Bay Area. The extensive photographic and narrative book by Sahl (2002), *From Closet to Community*, about lesbian and gay liberation movements in the San José and Santa Clara region since the mid-1970s, includes many Latinas and Latinos. Although he does not specify their national background, it is very likely some of these were Puerto Ricans. Lastly, queer Puerto Rican social, political, and cultural history has been taking place at the Mission District bar and nightclub, El Río, since the late 1970s. Many live salsa bands have made their way through El Río (to this day), including all-women bands such as Orquesta Sabrosita and Chévere. I thank María Cora for pointing out the centrality of El Río in queer Latina Bay Area history. These bands have facilitated a great deal of queer women and men socializing in this multiracial, pan-Latino, and multisexual space, and community fundraising projects as well. Rafa would often dance at El Río and recruit specifically Latina couples dancing salsa there to go to Pan Dulce.

Several scholars have explored the multileveled processes of commodifying things “Latin” (including things “queer and Latin”) in U.S. consumer culture. These discussions focus on how symbols of Latino identity, culture, and history easily fit into consumer capitalism. See Quiroga’s (2000) essay “Latin Dolls,” Dávila (2001a) and Negrón-Muntaner (2004). Having (queer) visibility through consumer cultures should not suggest that it is always a process fraught with complete defeat for exploited and marginalized racial ethnic communities in the U.S. Two useful works that explore the relationships between identity and public culture in consumer capitalism are Kelly’s (1994) essay on African-American rap and Muñoz’s (1999) essay on the late gay Cuban-American Pedro Zamora’s “Real World” role on MTV.

In 2001, for example, next door in Oakland, California, the owners of the nightclub Bench and Bar, frequented overwhelmingly by queer Latinos on Monday and Wednesday nights at that time, and queer Latinos and Latinas on Friday night, had to respond to some neighbors’ allegations of “improper” conduct by the club’s clientele. Part of the neighbors’ allegations cited kissing among men in public. See Fraser (2001).

Victims of hate crimes and homophobic violence against queer Latinas and Latinos include women and men, lesbian, gay, bisexual, but most often male-to-female (MTF) transgenders. The much publicized murder of 17-year old MTF transgender Gwen Araujo...
on 3 October 2002, right across the San Francisco Bay in the city of Newark, was a clear reminder of the precariousness of queer but specifically transgender Latina lives. According to San Francisco’s CUAV (Community United Against Violence), there was a 14 percent increase in reported hate crimes (357) against LGBT peoples in 2002 compared to 2001 (317). See National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (2003: 56).

8 *Rancheras* is a distinctly Mexican style of music emerging in the post-revolutionary period, especially in the state of Jalisco, based on rural, traditional forms that include *mariachi* musical groups. The late Lola Beltrán (1934–1996), known as the “queen of rancheras” with her unmistakably strong voice, was Teresita’s artistic idol. I examine Teresita’s life and death, and her significance in Bay Area queer, Latino, and queer Latino cultural history since the late 1950s in Roque Ramírez (2005 and Forthcoming). A useful discussion of the intersecting gendered performative aspects of rancheras and Mexican and Native border-crossing oral traditions in the life of the *tejana* artist Lydia Mendoza is Broyles-González (2003).

9 According to Bracho, the term emerged in a conversation with José Mineros as they discussed in 2002 what they liked and did not like about Miami. Their conversation took place right after Mineros’s return from Miami’s Winter Music Conference, the annual festival and conference for those in the house music scene (Bracho 2003).

10 The text Glasser paraphrased is the canonical edited volume Hull, Bell Scott, and Smith (1992).


12 A useful discussion of the racial and gendered dynamics of poverty among Puerto Ricans in the U.S., and the related historical construction of “the welfare queen” is Briggs (2002). For a discussion on the negotiation between economic (im)migrant class, Mexican blood family membership, and gay identity formation, see Cantú, Jr., (2001).

13 Lack of space prevents me from addressing more closely this useful narrative in Rafa’s oral history, in which the stereotypical (but accurate in his memory) representation of AIDS remains white, gay, and male. In San Francisco, efforts to address AIDS in Latino and gay Latino communities began only in the second half of the 1980s, usually through grassroots work. Useful literary, video and/or theoretical responses to the (mis)representations of HIV and AIDS in the Puerto Rican diaspora are Negrón-Muntaner (1994), *AIDS in El Barrio* (1988), Rodríguez-Matos et al., (1994), and Sandoval-Sánchez’s (1999) essay on the theatrical staging of AIDS.

14 The Spanish “*ambiente*” or “*de ambiente*” generally refers to a gay/queer, homosocial, or homosexual sensibility, not necessarily a distinct cultural or political identity, but a tacitly understood and experienced non-heteronormative space or subjectivity.

15 El Ambiente has been the HIV prevention project of the gay Latino men’s non-profit organization AGUILAS, Inc. (Asociación Gay Unida Impulsando Latinos a Superarse, “united gay association uplifting Latinos to improve themselves”), and has generally consisted of coordinating bi-weekly discussions among gay Latinos, moderated by one of more (para) professionals. Discussions usually take place in English, with the moderator at times translating back and forth between English and Spanish when there has been a need.

16 I thank the anonymous reader responsible for providing this apt phrasing of “four corners” regarding Rafa’s positioning.
A provocative examination of the shared ethnoracial histories of Latinos in Latin soul, Hip-Hop, Freestyle, and Rap musical cultures in relation to/with Blacks/African Americans, including the heterocentric hypersexualization of women's bodies, is Rivera (2001).

A powerful rendition of Vásquez's life based on an oral history is the bilingual graphic novel by Jaime Cortez (2004), Sexilio/Sexile.

In addition to its multigender and neighborhood-based foci, being “sex-positive” was a central idea to Proyecto's vision, as its popular manifesto/mission statement written in Spanglish indicated: “Sex-positive quiere decir positivamente sexual and shameless, profoundly perverse and proud. Queremos romper el silencio y represión among our pueblos who for 500 years have been colonized/catholicized/de-eroticized. . . .,” as quoted in Rodríguez (2003: 51).

Hundreds of photographs of Pan Dulce and its patrons make up the collection by Hebert, Yo Soy lo Prohibido, named after the song performer Adela Vázquez (under the stage name Adela Holyday) popularized through her shows at the club.

For a discussion of shared space among Black lesbian women and Black gay men, see Thorpe (1996).

"Jotería" is a politically appropriating take on the historically derogatory and distinctly Mexican and Chicano term “joto” used to refer to “fags/queers.” Queer mexicanas, Chicanas, and often other Latinas have also done a gendered take on the term, some times referring to themselves as “jotas,” “jotería,” “familia,” and “queer familia” are often used interchangeably.

To assert that queer men and MTF transgender women have been most disproportionately hit by HIV and AIDS in the San Francisco Bay Area should not obfuscate the fact that, increasingly since the mid-1980s, heterosexual women, particularly Blacks and Latinas—including immigrants—have become disproportionately infected through heterosexual sex and/or intravenous drug use. Still, by 2004, queer youth of color across do remain one of the most impacted sectors, “as HIV seroprevalence is estimated to be between 20 percent and 32 percent for some gay and bisexual men of color,” in Ayala, Husted, and Spieldenner (2004: viii).

Rafa has been clean since 2002. In a telling related dynamic regarding Club Q, Amory discusses how for that club’s promoter and DJ, Page Hodel, “getting clean and sober also involved the realization that music makes you high, and it’s an even better high than the one that comes from drugs and alcohol. Thus Club Q could be a place where music and dancing provided that necessary sense of escape and release from a sometimes overwhelming world” (Amory 1996: 151).

This opening for queer genders and sexual expressions in the relative safety of the queer club should not suggest that there were no tactical deployments of hegemonic genders taking place at Pan Dulce, for both women and men, including for those transitioning from one sex to the other (transgenders) literally as their aesthetic representations (sex-typed clothing, make-up, bodily movements on the floor) shifted from one night to another, or more gradually from one month to the next. On the negotiation of dominant masculinities and gender stereotypes of gay Puerto Ricans and Cubans, see Kurtz, “Butterflies Under Cover.” For a provocative oral history of and dialogue between butch Chicanas and Latinas and Latino female-to-male (FTM) transgender men, see Mind If I Call You Sir? (2004).

More recent discussions on this slowly growing historical body include Aponte-Parés’s
examination of the simultaneous “Latinization” of queer life and queering of the Latino community by queer Latinos in New York, in “Outside/In”; and several accounts in Spanish from parents of their lesbian and gay Puerto Rican children in Romo-Carmona (2001). Following her death in 2002, there has been more discussion of the foundational role that the late MTF transgender Sylvia Rivera, of mixed Venezuelan and Puerto Rican origins, had in the famed Stonewall Inn Riots of June 27–29, 1969. See Duberman (1993). While the role of Rivera and other “queens,” gays, and lesbians of color, including Latinas and Latinos, in this historical episode has been acknowledged more in recent years, there has yet to be a critical analysis of the intersecting racial, gender, and sexual politics leading to these riots, examining, for example, to what degree Stonewall could (also) be considered a “race riot” for some of its queer participants.

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