

DIASPORIC TACTICS

by Alia Farid Abdal
B.F.A., Image and Design (2006)
Escuela de Artes Plásticas de Puerto Rico

Submitted to the Department of Architecture
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master in Science in Visual Studies

at the
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September 2008

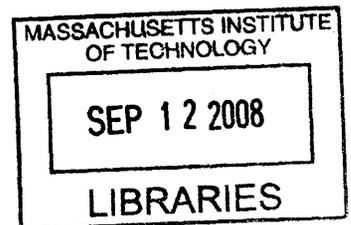
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Signature of Author
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0_ABSTRACT

*The changing body is
always the same.*
Lucy Lippard

This document acts as the written form of an art practice that can be described by making an analogy between the artist and the itinerant migrant worker. This thesis is an elaboration on certain viewpoints, encounters, and case studies that have led me to do my actual [art] work. In it I attempt to describe the intricate human processes involved with immigration, adaptation, and transformation, specifically in the case of Villa Victoria: a community of incredible social capital that established itself when urban renewal planners threatened two thousand Puerto Ricans out of their homes in Parcel 19 of Boston's South End during the late 1960s. Personally, I like to accredit the success of Villa Victoria to a form of behavior called "hustling" which most displaced people quickly turn to in order to fulfill their very basic needs. Lately "hustling" has become a strong performative aspect of my work, as in the end, what I am really interested in is discovering forms of power for the oppressed rather than dwelling on the power of the oppressor.

Key terms: the neoliberal city, the informal economy, (im)migration, assimilation, hybridity, distinction, rupture, subculture, commemoration, (mis)representation, lyric and sound.

Thesis Supervisor: Krzysztof Wodiczko
Title: Professor of Visual Arts

DIASPORIC TACTICS

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Dealing with the Informal Economy

8_A message to the younger cohort: Villa, remember your Victory



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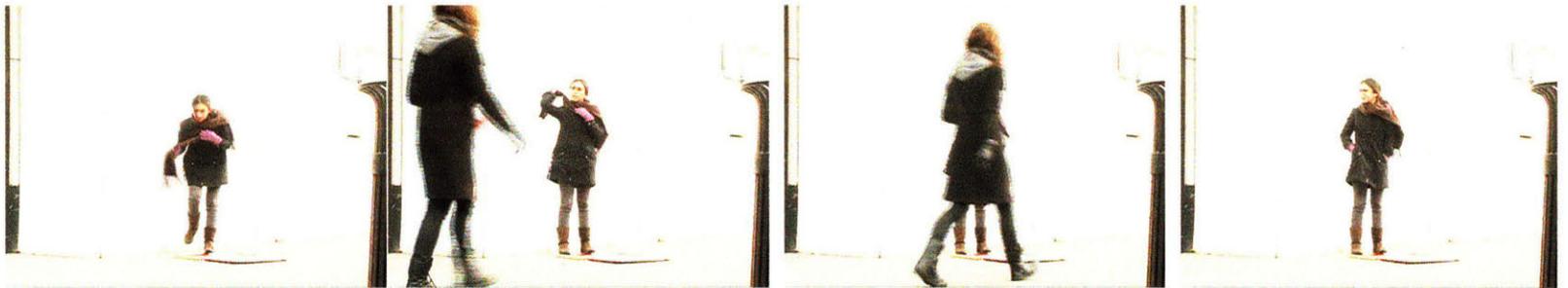
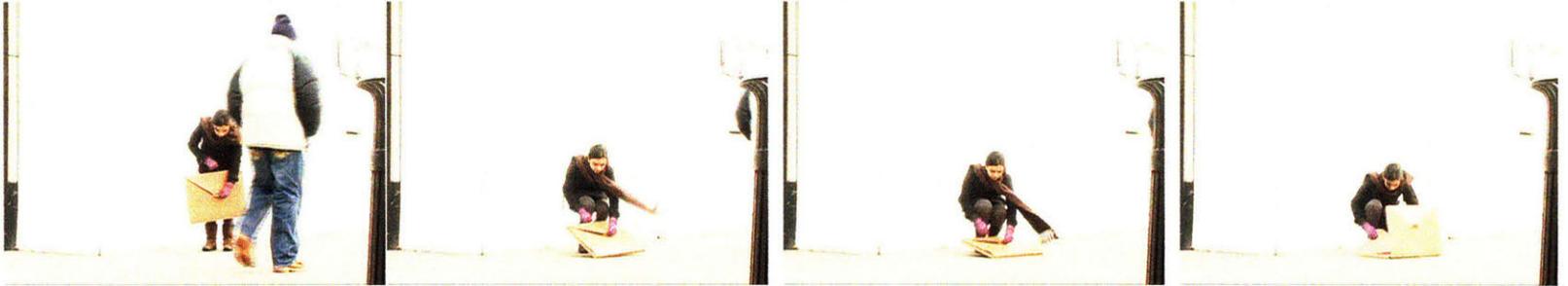
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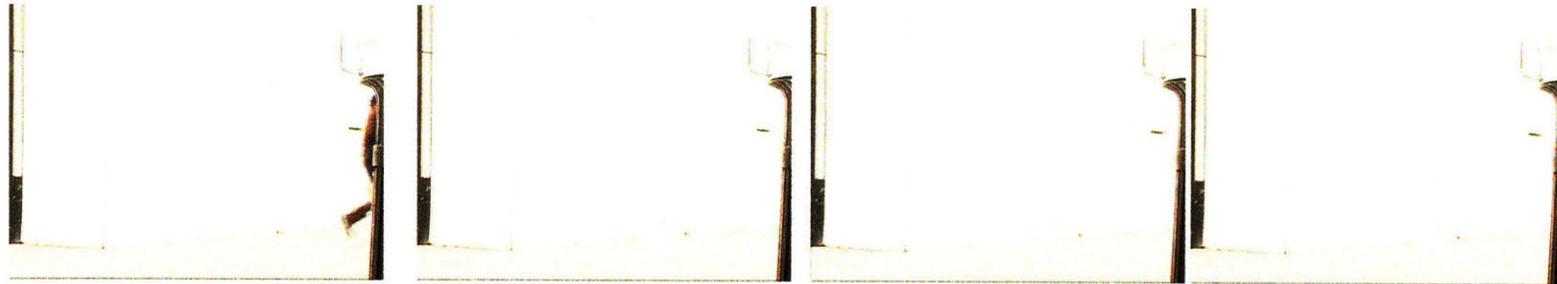
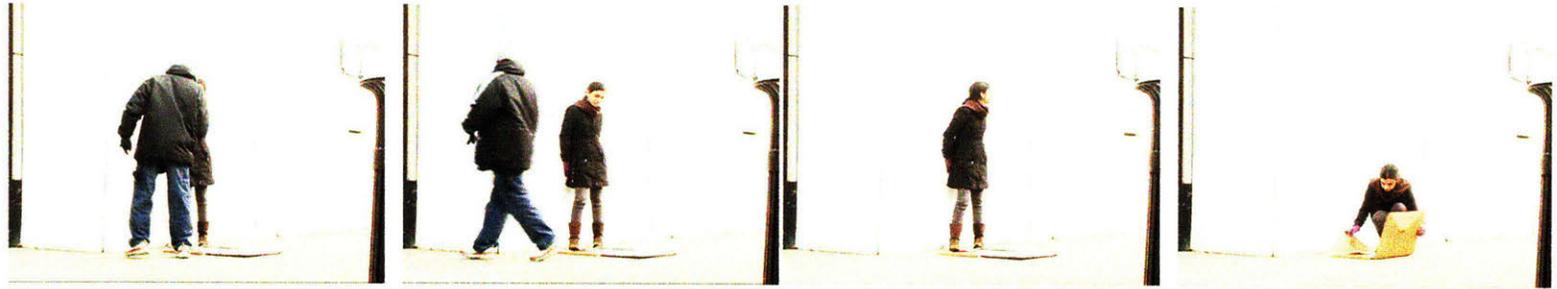
friendship,
compassion,
growing pains,
reality checks,
education,
and miseducation.

For my good friend

Chico.







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1_INTRODUCTION: THE ARTIST ON THE MOVE

*Movement
modifies
perception.*

Julieta V. Muñoz Alvarado

It was on my way to an exhibition during my second semester at MIT, that I accidentally came across what has since been the subject of my investigation at the Institute. Villa Victoria is a community in the South End of Boston known for its incredible ability to foment organizational change. The neighborhood was established when two thousand Puerto Rican immigrants¹ came together to work against urban renewal planners who threatened them out of their homes in what was known as Parcel 19 during the late 1960s. The history of this place is truly an exceptional example of how poverty can be transformed into high social capital. Located in the middle of Boston's historical district, the neighborhood now forms an intersection between very different surroundings – between differences in class, culture, and commerce. Even though its discrete architectural integration makes it hardly noticeable at first, even from up front, I can assure you that if you were to step into the area you would certainly perceive it.

¹ Unlike other incomers, Puerto Ricans are already U.S. citizens. However, since they are often denied the full advantage of such status, I will refer to them as immigrants from time to time as a way of signaling the situations in which they are treated as such.

The “block”, as it is often referred to by the youth who live there, can be squared off between Tremont and Shawmut, and West Dedham and West Newton Street (see Figure 1 on the following pages). Although there are no borders that physically separate the people on either side of this “block”, there are indeed some social borders just as effective. My intention in writing this thesis is to analyze these [invisible] borders that separate urban dwellers from each other. What exactly determines an outsider from an insider in a global city like Boston? Is it realistic to plea that there be no distinction? If not, then how can we learn to be both? *Why* should we learn to be both?

We tend to forget that the United States is a nation of immigrants, and that even English history –as Jude Bloomfield and Franco Bianchini have pointed out– is shaped by hybridity and intercultural exchange (9). So why instead of living in a space that is evocative of this, do we choose to live in isolation? Instead of acknowledging a rich past of cultural quid pro quo, we’ve [more recently] become denizens of urbanizations which aggressively marginalize and are consequently marginalized by others. At length, we’re all left perpetuating a state of personal panic –alone– dodging and dipping in a defensive society.

My interest for this research lies exactly in this type of disconnect, within the sort of gaps that keep us apart, or, within the uncertainty that begs us to delineate our surroundings: the individual, the cohort, the city, even experience itself. There has been plenty of literature written about displacement, diasporic communities and defensive neighborhoods, and yet I am interested in apprehending something else. How is it that one’s [current] affinity to space be [infinitely] affected by the past? In which way is it threatened by the future?

By using Villa Victoria as a paradigm for this investigation, I am attempting to itemize some of the issues involved in negotiating culture under urban development. While there are many factors that indeed attribute to this, I have decided to pay special attention to understanding the role of second and third generation immigrants in the evolution of culture. I am especially intrigued by the children of working class immigrants, who have never actually undergone a process of resettlement, and yet are occupied by feelings of non-belonging. Is there a term for such a thing as displacement within the home? It seems like a lot of the youth that I have come across while working in Villa Victoria feel unsettled in their own neighborhood, they are always talking as if they need to be somewhere else. Many of them resent the immigration experiences their elders had to go through, as if it were impoverishing, degrading and impure, even for themselves.

In a conversation with Mark Wigley², my esteemed professor Antoni Muntadas stated, "Culture is always well in advance of territory". By way of reiterating this, I have put together the following document which shows how the youth in Villa Victoria continuously contest the boundaries of culture and space. At large this thesis is an exploration of strategic responses to the hegemonic pressure of modern day society. For me as a student, it is a critical evaluation of the relationship between "institution" and "movement". By making an analogy between the artist and the itinerant (im)migrant worker, I hope to encourage audiences alike to discover their own set of counter-hegemonic tactics.

² Mark Wigley has been the Dean of Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation since 2004.

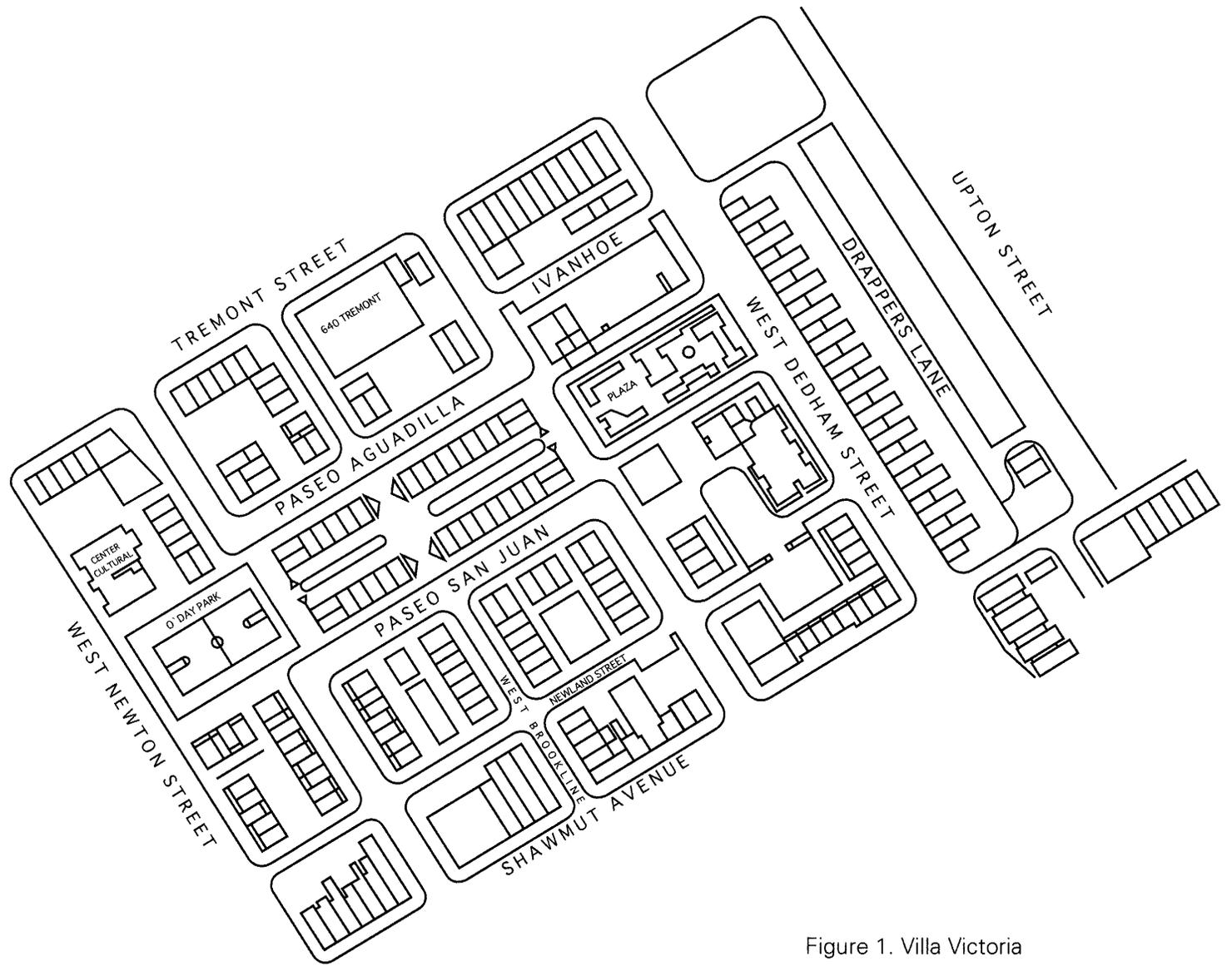


Figure 1. Villa Victoria

2_VILLA VICTORIA: A SPATIAL EXPRESSION OF MIGRATION

Se Habla Español.

Association Pro Constitutional Rights
of the Spanish-Speaking (APCROSS)

In the time I spent doing Visual Studies under the School of Architecture and Planning at MIT, I picked up on the dialogues of my neighboring disciplines. I have often heard the city been called a “collective apparatus of subjectification”, which likely suggests that we as urban subjects are conditioned under the constraints of city culture by the domiciles we inhabit, or by the venues through which we become socially engaged. Because I do not disagree, I can only emphasize how an astounding testament of citizen autonomy I think Villa Victoria is.

Before it had to prove itself to be a victory (which is where the name comes from) Villa Victoria was *not even* known as Parcel 19. During the 1960s the snazzy South End we know today was barely more than a skid road. The area was home to the largest Puerto Rican population in Boston, with relative groups living in Dorchester, Roxbury, Mission Hill, Jamaica Plain, Egleston, and Roslindale³. The reason for the wave of migration from the Island was part of an obtrusive economic development plan called *Manos a la Obra*, or *Operation Bootstrap* (which is not the proper translation, but likewise the English name for it).

³ According to an estimate in James Jennings’ “Puerto Rican politics in Two Cities: New York and Boston” there were about 37,000 Puerto Ricans living in the region by 1984.

The plan, undertaken in the 1950s, was designed to secure economic stability in Puerto Rico through U.S. aid. In exchange for its protection, the Island offered the United States generous tax-free earnings, government subsidies, and a cheap abundant work force that quickly fled to work.

By 1965, there were two distinct Puerto Rican Communities: the inner community, in the island itself, close to the core of the historic, cultural nationality; and the outer community which, with the Hispanic minority in the United States, struggled painfully for social betterment and identity. Morales Carrion, Arturo (242)

The outer [working class] community found itself diffused all over the United States mostly living in the inner city, but forced repeatedly to move because of changes in economy and planning policies as it was common for such residents to become targeted by city and state officials whenever the inner city became an attractive site for reinvestment. When this happened in Boston, a portion of the population fortunately managed to mobilize into a defensive grassroots organization in efforts to secure themselves a space in the South End. When asked to relocate to Columbia Point by the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA), who had already made plans to gentrify Parcel 19, they quickly formed the Emergency Tenants Council (ETC) and for five consecutive years they retaliated. With the much appreciated help of all those willing to partake in their cause (students, artists, religious leaders, anarchists, and architects alike), the ETC was able to produce a successful counterproposal for the city. It was their very own [very sophisticated] housing development plan that was celebrated by naming Villa Victoria – or *Victory Village* in English (see figure 2 on the following page).



Figure 2. Villa Victoria in front of the Boston cityscape

In 1974 the ETC evolved into Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción (IBA), which is the organization that still manages Villa Victoria today. This picture overlooking the community was taken on March 7th 2008 from a window inside of their office building on 405 Shawmut Avenue. Notice the architecture of the houses; a combination of the most emblematic features of both Boston's redbrick structures and Old San Juan's colorful buildings.

In its early establishment Villa Victoria was admired as a sustainable community; the neighborhood was so well thought out that it even worked to prevent violence from within. By having big windows installed in the front of their houses, residents were able to keep their eyes on the street. Surprisingly when they looked out, not only did they see the people they knew, but also architecture students with sketchpads at hand, who had made their way over to analyze the site! Villa Victoria –with all of its social capital– was *the* standard of living for Hispanics in the region; for larger Boston, it became a model for mixed income districts, and for the ETC it was an amazing success story to share. Years later IBA continuously shows for the sense of heritage Villa Victoria has granted the diasporic community with. The self-managed organization has established a lengthy agenda that, until this day, provides it's people a cultural center with an art gallery, music and dance lessons, talent shows and recitals, and of course, the much anticipated yearly festival known as *Betances* (see figure 3 on the following page). Latinos alike, from all over Boston look up to Villa Victoria, even though its twenty acres and four housing units⁴ are not enough to accommodate everyone this does not stop them from visiting.

NOTE: Before I continue I feel it is important to clarify that this is not a history dissertation, therefore my telling of Villa Victoria is an *oversimplified* version of a truly complicated account. If you are interested in understanding the full history of Villa Victoria I advise you to refer to the archives at Northeastern University.

⁴ Villa Victoria is made up of four distinct housing models: Casas Borinquen Apartments, Victoria Apartments, Viviendas Apartments, and South End Apartments (see Figure 4).



Figure 3. A picture I took of an improvised "bembé" during the Betances festival in 2008.

VILLA VICTORIA COMMUNITY
 440 Tremont Street, Boston, MA 02118
 Phone 617.927.3700 • Fax 617.869.8333

Dear Applicant:

Thank you for your interest in Casas Borinquen Apartments. Attached please find the application package that you requested. It is extremely important that you fully understand the application as well as all documents enclosed, therefore, if you would need assistance understanding anything being anything out, please contact the management office and we will be happy to assist you. Casas Borinquen Apartments is subsidized by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Listed below you will find a brief description of all forms that are required by HUD for its subsidized properties. Please be aware that if the application is incomplete at submission, it will be rejected, returned to you, and will not be evaluated and all required information has been re-submitted.

The following is included with this package. Please complete and return with your application as specified below:

Notice of Non-Discrimination and a Right to Reasonable Accommodation for Persons with Disabilities and Reasonable Accommodations Request Form: Casas Borinquen Apartments is committed to complying with applicable Fair Housing laws, and making reasonable changes in rules, policies and procedures, and physical modifications to enable applicants and tenants with disabilities to have an equal opportunity to apply to and enjoy their housing. Such changes are called reasonable accommodations. Please review this important notice, and follow the applicable procedures if you would like to request a reasonable accommodation.

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CASAS BORINQUEN APARTMENTS

VICTORIA APARTMENTS

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Dear Applicant:

Thank you for your interest in Victoria Apartments. Attached please find the application package that you requested. It is extremely important that you fully understand the application as well as all documents enclosed, therefore, if you would need assistance understanding anything being anything out, please contact the management office and we will be happy to assist you. Victoria Apartments is subsidized by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and governed by the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program. Listed below you will find a brief description of all forms that are required by HUD for its subsidized properties. Please be aware that if the application is incomplete at submission, it will be rejected, returned to you, and will not be evaluated until all required information has been re-submitted.

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VILLA VICTORIA COMMUNITY
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Dear Applicant:

Thank you for your interest in Vivendas Apartments. Attached please find the application package that you requested. It is extremely important that you fully understand the application as well as all documents enclosed, therefore, if you would need assistance understanding anything being anything out, please contact the management office and we will be happy to assist you. Vivendas Apartments is subsidized by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and governed by the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program. Listed below you will find a brief description of all forms that are required by HUD for its subsidized properties. Please be aware that if the application is incomplete at submission, it will be rejected, returned to you, and will not be evaluated until all required information has been re-submitted.

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VIVENDAS APARTMENTS

VILLA VICTORIA COMMUNITY
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 Phone 617.927.3700 • Fax 617.869.8333

Dear Applicant:

Thank you for your interest in South End Apartments. Attached please find the application package that you requested. It is extremely important that you fully understand the application as well as all documents enclosed, therefore, if you would need assistance understanding anything being anything out, please contact the management office and we will be happy to assist you. South End Apartments is subsidized by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and governed by the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program. Listed below you will find a brief description of all forms that are required by HUD for its subsidized properties. Please be aware that if the application is incomplete at submission, it will be rejected, returned to you, and will not be evaluated until all required information has been re-submitted.

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SOUTH END APARTMENTS

Figure 4. A scan of each of Villa Victoria's housing application forms.

3_LANGUAGE BARRIERS AND SOCIAL BORDERS: THE HISPANIC PANIC

No-way-Jo-se!

Unknown, but likely to have originated by U.S. border patrol officers between Mexico and Texas.

The latter part of the title for this section of my thesis was borrowed from a news headline that Antoni Muntadas chose to use in his recent show at Kent Gallery⁵ called *The Construction of Fear (2008)*. Almost as soon as I walked into the space for it's opening, this caption struck my attention: *The Hispanic Panic*. Its' simplicity and fine rhythmic quality only emphasized a complexly subtle situation next to the bold dominating headlines on Arab terrorism. For the entire drive back to Boston that evening I sat thinking about the U.S. [crisis] mentality of fear in relation to ethnicity – specifically towards these two cultural groups. Never had I noticed the unwantedness commensurably. I was aware of the resistance most Arabs and Hispanics are confronted by when immigrating to the United States, but only now did I paused to compare the two situations side-by-side. It is obvious that different groups of people are repudiated for different reasons. In any case the underlining statement is that fear towards the “outsider” is no longer a feeling, as it has been propagandized to a level which has made it the condition.

⁵ Kent Gallery, located at 541 W 25th St in New York City, hosted *The Construction of Fear (2008)* between May 1, 2008 and June 14, 2008.

The statement, “Fear is not a feeling, it’s a condition” is actually something the Brazilian architect Angelo Bucci announced in a lecture he gave during Muntadas’ public art class on *Fear and the End of Public Space*. He was speaking to the context of São Paulo, preparing us, as we were just about to travel there in order to conduct a case study regarding the different notions of public space. Apparently the dynamics between people in global cities⁶ even as far apart as Boston and São Paulo, are not as different as one might think. There is actually an incredibly apparent sense of [social] segregation that exists between inhabitants of such places, which is substantiated in the topology of the built environment. With regards to Villa Victoria in the South End -I will no longer restrain from the main objective of this section- such similar observations can easily be made out. After Villa Victoria’s management was taken over by Maloney Properties⁷ in 2005, it officially became a public, equal opportunity housing complex that accepted applications from anyone in need of shelter, regardless of ethnicity. Like the rest of South Boston, which is known for having some of the oldest housing projects in the United States, the area changed drastically from housing a very specific [ethnic] population to more mixed populations, especially in the last thirty years. It’s become increasingly popular among young professionals and families attracted to the sense of community, or

⁶ The *global city* is a term that was coined in 1991 by the sociologist Saskia Sassen in reference to strategic [city] locations, which facilitate the operation of a global system of finance and trade.

⁷ Malony Properties is a full service property management firm that provides for more than 8,000 residential housing units in Massachusetts, Vermont, Rhode Island and New Hampshire.

who need quick access to downtown and public transportation. But just by looking outside of the parameters of Villa Victoria, you will notice how evident the gentrification really is (see Figure 4). Instead of the local stores that used to be run by the Hispanic population living down the street, there now are fancy flower shops, posh pizza parlors, and nifty industrial design stores – all of which are unaffordable to the area’s original inhabitants who mostly still struggle to live one day at a time. Income segregation has long been a visible aspect of American urbanism; even within mixed income neighborhoods these boundaries are eventually marked. The sociologist Mario Luis Small refers to the inevitable human tendency of distinguishing groups of ourselves from one another as “boundary work”. From the ethnographic investigation he conducted in Villa Victoria not to long ago he states:

The differences, resulting only partly from racial and class composition, become group identifiers through a process of boundary work. With roots in the study of ethnic relations (Barth 1969) and the sociology of science (Gieryn 1995), the term “boundary work” refers to the process by which collectives of individuals create symbolic lines between themselves and others for the purpose of either accentuating their own identity or concretizing a new institution (also Small 1999). For Bourdieu (1984), cultural boundary work was the principal mechanism by which individuals distinguished themselves from others in society—and their very tastes and consumption practices exemplified this distinction. Studying American upper-middleclass males, Lamont (1992) uncovered that Americans drew boundaries differently from Bourdieu’s French. The Americans drew looser cultural boundaries than did their French counterparts, but they drew sharper moral and economic ones.
(103)

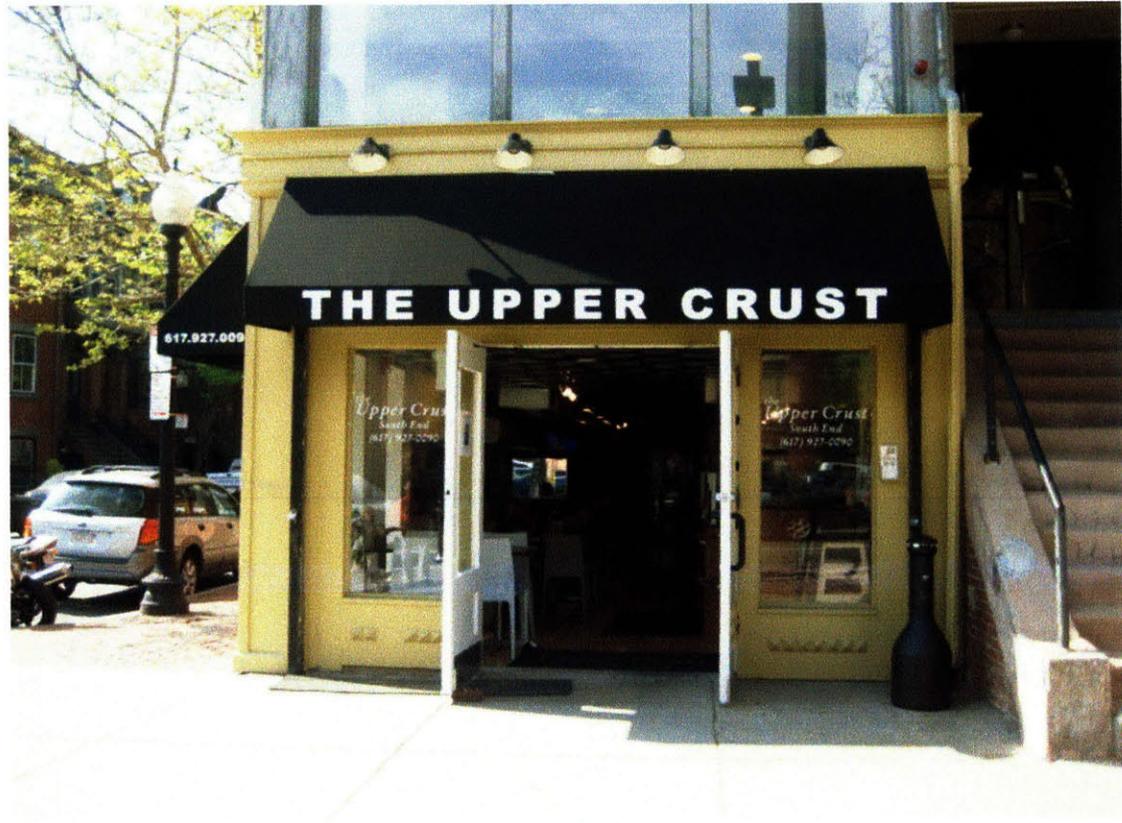


Figure 4. This pizza parlor, "The Upper Crust" is an attestation of the high social class taking over the South End district.



Figure 5. Further down Tremont Street, this small business formerly known as *Sierra's Hair Salon* is bought over.

Since discussing some of these changes with the residents of Villa Victoria, I've doubted the so-called "affordability" of this neighborhood. How livable is an affordable housing space without affordable commerce? Or worse, how livable is it when there are no jobs? In a conversation with one tenant, he recalls when Tremont Street used to be full of stores run by people of familiar faces. *"My mother always used to send me a la bodega..."* he remembers, *"...it was just like being in Puerto Rico."*

Puerto Ricans in the United States have long fought against discrimination and economic exploitation. Since the population began growing in the 1950s, they have been portrayed more and more as unwilling to work, welfare leeches, drug addicts, and juvenile delinquents. And as a consequence of this public view, business and government leaders have been able to get away with policies and practices that exploit and demean Puerto Ricans in jobs, housing, and education. Many of the youth I've come across in working with Villa Victoria admit to not caring anymore. Four out of five I've come to know dropped out of high school just semesters before finishing because there was *"too much beef"* (too much fighting) between them and the different [ethnic] groups of students in the school setting. Left without a degree, and therefore without a job, has forced many of them to invent an independent basis for economic existence. Most of the guys I know have resorted to hustling different things on the streets, mainly CDs and promotion for events, which are their own musical productions, if not their *"homeboy's"*.

4_THE REVENGE OF THE COLONIZED: MISPRONUNCIATION AND REGGAETON

*Porqueeeee blood is
Thicker than Coca-Cola!*

Pedro Pietri

As [expressionistic] human beings we are always addressing someone else, for whatever reason, through every aspect of communication, no matter how natural or neutral we appear to be. We do this on an individual level as much as we do it on a collective level between cohort, community, and social class. The deliberate choices we make in representing ourselves, in impressing ourselves upon one another, forms the basis of [empirical] human understanding and relationship. As the critical designer Enzo Mari once said, “we need to project in order to avoid being projected on”.

Between emission and reception of every human interaction exists a crucial moment of elucidation, so insightful that we can only attempt to reinstate it through spoken word. Because language is such a homogeneous form of communication, to try and articulate such a thing means doing so at the expense of the richness of open interpretation. With this said, I feel it is important to add to Mari’s point that the way we *misrepresent* ourselves is equally significant. Essentially language and representation are defense mechanisms through which we argue our existence, our positions, and even our discomforts. Thus it is only by altering these things that we are able to question the establishment through which we are conditioned.

The source of the following quotation is unknown, but I once remember hearing someone say that, “to criticize language is to criticize authority”. By virtue of exploring the extreme relationship between academia and the changing world outside, in conducting this investigation, I have become hyperaware of the limitations in established languages. The strong accordance I feel with the second and third generation immigrants of Villa Victoria is based on an inventive use language, an integral part of these youngsters everydayness. The imagination with which the young Villa Victorians communicate is reminiscent of a long colonized, creolized history of survival. By use of lingo and lyrics, Puerto Ricans and Puerto Rican diasporas alike, have continuously been able to infiltrate their amorphous identities through sound into mainstream. In his book *From Bomba to Hip-Hop* the author and scholar Juan Flores attests to this longevity of musical proclamation of the Caribbean people by making the following [modern] assertion:

To speak of Puerto Ricans in rap means to defy the sense of instant amnesia that engulfs popular cultural expression once it is caught up in the logic of commercial representation. It involves sketching in historical contexts and sequences, tracing traditions and antecedents, and recognizing hip-hop to be more and different than the simulated images, poses, and formulas the public discourse of media entertainment tends to reduce it to. (117)

There are very few academic writers who treat hip-hop as a legitimate culture, or with the same kind of historical keenness as Juan Flores or Raquel Z. Rivera (the author of *New York Ricans from from the Hip-Hop Zone*) do. Often is the case where hip-hop is

portrayed as a craze; as having no relevant history, and an even lesser future. If the common understanding of hip-hop is diminished to a whim, then what is to be said about its many divergent genres? One of the most popular forms of urban music, which takes influence from hip-hop is Reggaeton. The genre, which became popular amongst Latin Americans during the 1990s, and has spread vastly to North America, Europe, Asia, and Australia within the next years, has given the Hispanic youth a musical genre they consider their own. Even though it takes influence from hip-hop and Jamaican dancehall, it is wrong to define reggaeton as a Latino version of these genres. Even though its lyrics can be directly associated with hip-hop, and its rhythm with dancehall, the genre is more a hybrid of sorts. Ultimately Reggaeton is characterized by a very specific beat called "Dem Bow"⁸, a pulsating and repetitive combination of snare sounds. As part of its widespread Reggaeton has had its polemics. Some believe that the explicit and violent use of words in a high percentage of its lyrics has encouraged the exploitation of women. But if we analyze other genres of popular music, the same "controversy" seems to be a reoccurring theme. My view is that inserting verbal debauchery into music, listening to it, and especially signing along to it, is for most people the most accessible form of obtaining a sense of freedom, as it is these types of unacceptable things that when uttered and acknowledged give us a sense of rebellious autonomy (see Figure 6. on the following page).

⁸ The name of the beat *Dem Bow* is a direct reference to the title of a dancehall song by Shabba Ranks, which first popularized the beat in 1991.



Figure 6. This image of Daddy Yankee holding up a Harvard University sweater on the cover of *El Planeta*, a newspaper for the Spanish speaking population in Boston, accredits him with being the most influential figure in Latin culture. On April 26th 2008 Ramon “Daddy Yankee” Ayala was awarded the prestigious *Latino of the Year Award* by Harvard University for having revolutionized Latin culture by taking it to an international level. He was also acknowledged for his engagement with public service and community building through philanthropic work, and for supporting young people through his foundation called Corazón Guerrero. Coincidentally Daddy Yankee’s producers, Luney Tunes, who are also extremely successful in Reggaeton, used to be Harvard University cafeteria workers, but it was only when they reached high fame that this was actually acknowledged.

5_DE PISTAS, PUTAS, Y PUJILATOS:
ON BEATS, BITCHES, AND BEEF.

No hay ley.

Maicol y Manuel

Because the lyrical content of reggaeton (mostly about beats, bitches, and beef) is polemic enough a subject matter to be entitled it's own dissertation, I need to forewarn you of the briefness with which I'll treat it. Let me begin by justifying my liking of the genre by stating something the performance artist Sarah Jones once said in talking about the similar relationship she has with hip-hop that is, *"for me [as a woman] loving hip hop is like being in a situation of domestic violence; hip hop being the home, and rappers being the men that beats us down."* After hearing her say this, which she did in Byron Hurts' groundbreaking documentary film about hip hop and masculinity called "Hip hop: beyond Beats and Rhymes", I was struck by the analogy. Unable to grapple with the whole overwhelmingness of the film at the time, I made a quick note of it in my journal. As I sat there for the rest of the screening, which was being held as part of the "Sexual Assault Awareness Week" conducted by the Center for Health Promotion and Wellness at MIT Medical, I grew more and more occupied with mixed feelings. When the time finally came to engage in discussion, I was relieved to hear the criticality with which the audience, a mixed group of graduate and undergraduate students from different fields of study at MIT, addressed the moderators.

After watching the documentary, none of us in the audience were left with doubts as to the elegance and care that went into making this film. Instead of playing up the typical discourse, which is quick to blame this type of music for instigating sexual violence, we were able to address more subtle issues. The critical distance with which Hurts addressed each of his interviewees allowed us to understand something beyond the obvious. Instead of questioning the content of explicit lyrics, we became more curious about the moderator's choice to screen this film as part of a sexual assault and awareness week, as clearly Hurt had made a point in demonstrating that the lyrical content of genres such as hip hop and reggaeton are not as mindlessly written as one might think. In fact, a majority of the things stated in these lyrics are *specifically* solicited by music and entertainment industry. After analyzing what Jones had said several times, it's become clear to me that the popularity of this music, astonishing so amongst women, is only as ingrained in us as the common gender power dynamics which are fomented in our codependent society.



Figure 7. My colleagues and I dancing to a reggaeton video I projected on a wall at the Visual Arts Program in MIT during Independent Studio in 2006.

6_HUSTLING: THE CIRCULATION OF OBJECTS IN UNDEFINED TERRITORY.

*It's not conscious.
It's business.*

Angelo Bucci

Up until now, the subjects mentioned in this thesis have been included as a way of contextualizing the work I've been developing during my enrollment at the Visual Arts Program in MIT; [art] work that I consider to be the more elaborate part of this investigation, which I will finally present in the remainder of this text. This work, which entails a much more physical engagement with Villa Victoria, has evolved into three design modules, each based on behavioral observations of the community's youth, mainly while experimenting different [economic] systems of survival within the neoliberal city. As I mentioned earlier, my primary interest in Villa Victoria involved understanding the way youth conduct themselves within the enclave, as it was only later that I became interested in the ways they mobilize. In either case, in order to find out how things really worked, [whether successful or not] I felt it crucial to be directly involved with the subject matter; to go directly to the city, the site, the streets, and to be amongst the youngsters themselves.

The outward expansion of Villa Victoria onto the streets and into undefined territory poses some interesting questions about the city and its terrain. Streets in the city cannot be thought of as just carrying traffic, as they in fact perform many other services. So how do streets really work? How do the combinations of uses around living space (actions, interactions, and transactions) characterize the overall environment? How are they an extension of territory? How are these things to be defined? Do such enclaves represent the same set of values across generations? Or does the worth of a settlement decline from cohort to cohort? What do people want out of secured space? And finally, how can the treatment of space inform us about a relationship to it?

It's become evident to me that the second and third generations of residents in Villa Victoria *do* acknowledge what a community is worth, only in a different way. It's actually very complicated. Because the city at large is an agglomeration of secured spaces –mainly of corporations, multinational companies, firms, businesses, and to a lesser extent, hem in next to hem in of classist living space– territorial possession is what determines validation. As an extension of the body, the built environment (and consequently its ownership) is one of the most sought after things in western civilization. On page 4 of Krzysztof Wodiczko's book *Critical Vehicles*, he states:

The history of the victors, the official presence of the official past, constitutes the official city. This official city is a lived tradition that celebrates, in everyday life, the triumph of the strongest and the disappearance of the weakest. (4)

It's always been curious to me as to how the Puerto Rican population in Boston, clearly being a part of the later "nameless" social class Wodiczko so often refers to in his book, succeeded at securing their place in the fierce city. What's more inspiring is that they explicitly named it Villa Victoria. Ironically the name is an enunciation of the triumph of the "weakest", it's testament to the power of diminutive determination. But how is the second generation to live up to such standards? To surpass the efforts of their parents and grandparents and their inherited struggle, while in the same time dealing with the modern psychosocial conflicts of their own time must not be easy. In a thesis meeting with my advisor Krzysztof Wodiczko he exclaimed, "It is these children of immigrants who in fact have to do all of the work!" And indeed it is, as it is they who are left with the heaviest of burdens, of carrying on a legacy they know no relation to. How is one expected to cope? Most adolescents have no choice but to continue to hustle.

When I first began talking about hustling as a performative aspect in the visual arts, it brought about a lot of polemic issues to the in-class [studio] discussions I shared with my peers at the program in MIT. These debates, which were mostly about a variety of art practices, all diplomatically engaged in the international [art] dialogue, do not necessarily coincide with the modules I've been developing. As I believe that while it's important to be engaged in an international dialogue, it is also important that an argument to be rooted in an inherited [conflicted] space. The parallel that I've drawn between the itinerant artist and the (im)migrant worker is a play on acclimatization, the negotiation of territory, mobility, and discovering ways between worlds.



Figure 8. This wearable is the first of the three design modules I developed in exploring the nature of hustling through performance. It is a trench coat from which herbs are sold. The costume was designed in the same syncretic fashion as Santería, an Afro-Caribbean spiritual practice based on traditional beliefs manifested through everydayness. Its purpose is to provide economic shelter for Santería practitioners by selling their goods and services on the streets; different things such as botanical remedies, ointments, soaps, beads, potions, pendants and prophecies. The hybrid dress form, which combines several concepts of "shelter" into one protective gear, is an attempt to rescue the endangered economy of alternative medicine and healthy superstition. (see Figure 8.)



Figure 9.

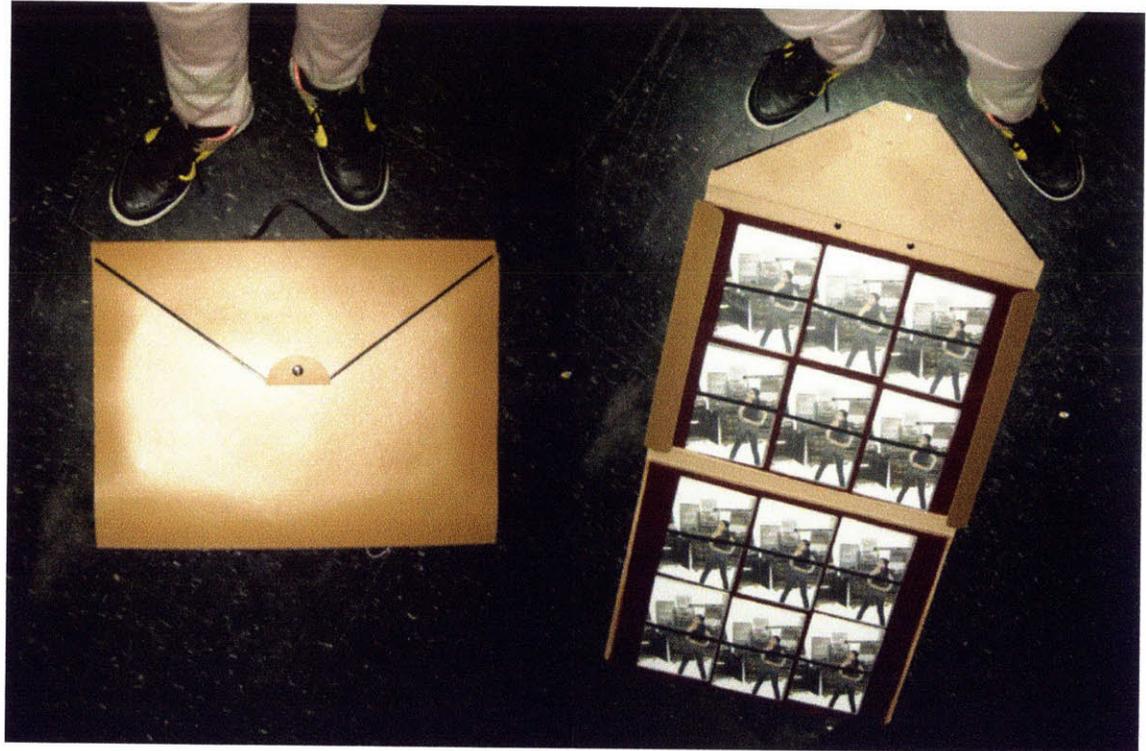


Figure 10. This is an image of the second module I developed (the one being used in the opening pages of this text). It is a portfolio bag that opens up into a display of DVDs for sale. The DVDs being sold here are a compilation of projects - a sort of "DVD portfolio", you might say.

7_ART, THE REJECTION OF PREVAILING STANDARDS,
AND ITS CONSEQUENCES: DEALING WITH THE
INFORMAL ECONOMY

*You are very creative people,
and that is why you have
very creative problems.*

Ute Meta Bauer

In every exhibition there are always two dialogues happening at the same time: that of the art world, and that of the rest of the world. I must say that for me, the more relevant one is the second. Nevertheless, I think it is important to be equally active in the [often narrow] art world, as it is only through participation that the general [canonic] perceptions of art are to be continuously tested. The following images are video stills of an experiment I asked my colleagues to help me perform three blocks down from our studios, in Central Square, as a sort of prelude to my third and final project. The action, which involved having the group demonstrate our studio work, provided us a chance to experience a number of new ways in which the work could be perceived; by audiences in different age groups, with different characters, from different levels of education, and across cultures. Besides being about showing our work to an audience outside of our faculty, this experiment was about performing the rituals that generally revolve around cities regarding the indispensability of economic life (see stills on the following pages).



Figure 11.



Figure 12.

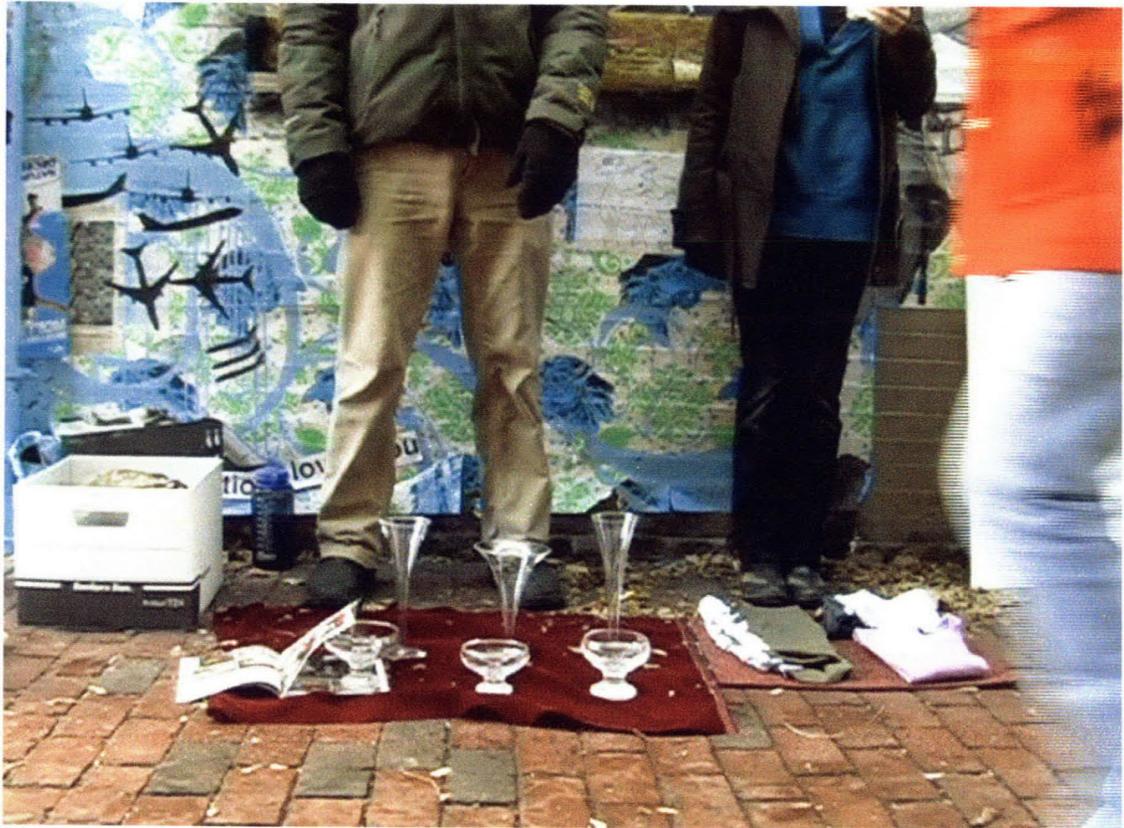


Figure 13.



Figure 14.



Figure 15.



Figure 16.



Figure 17.



Figure 18.

8_A MESSAGE TO THE YOUNGER COHORT:
VILLA, REMEMBER YOUR VICTORY.

*Repetition exaggerates.
If something is important,
it's more important
said ten times.*

Lucy Lippard

In a transcription I found of the urbanist Jane Jacobs being interviewed, she insinuates something about the relationship of gender to city development that I find particularly relevant to my work:

" ...women are probably the most natural traders, and the most natural developers of economy, especially at first ... In traditional occupations, almost all the actual work, a great variety of it is done by women: the garment making, the food processing, any comfort provided in the home, of course, the care of infants, cleaning, medical treatments, and so on, all things that women do ... The men have less variety, and in the modern world, even in undeveloped economies, they're losing much of what they once did do. They don't hunt much anymore. They still herd animals but that does not occupy very many men; ruling of course, but that's limited too ... An economy cannot prosper if its men are largely idle. In that case, the problem is to get them to become productive, domesticate them, you might say..."

The role that women play in starting activities is one I assumed soon after I realized that my original idea (to collaborate with the young men I was working with in Villa Victoria) was going nowhere. The systems I developed for “hustling” during my last year at MIT are essentially models made to foment awareness towards local sustainable urban development in a globalized world. They have been tested in the different locations in Boston and Cambridge amongst very diverse crowds. The main model, *the monument to local production*, is a structure that commemorates the informal economy through the mobilization of creative commerce [hidden] in an obelisk form. This structure, which houses two extremes, monumentality and informality, is a combination of typical structures in the public space; the monument and the kiosk, which in different ways are a negotiation of territory.

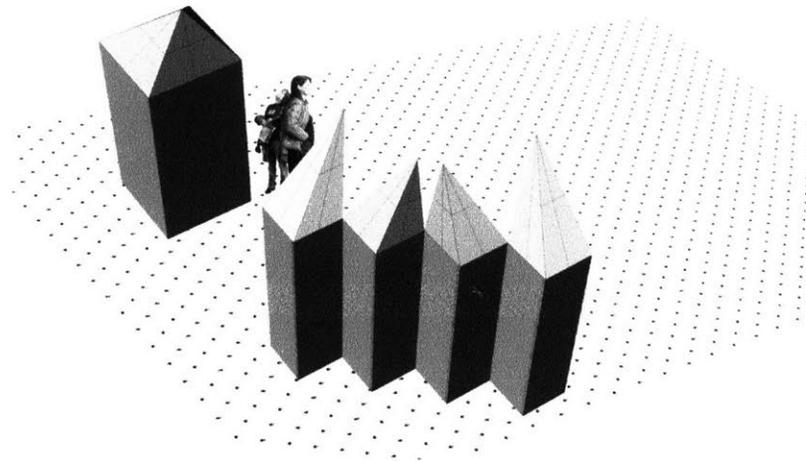
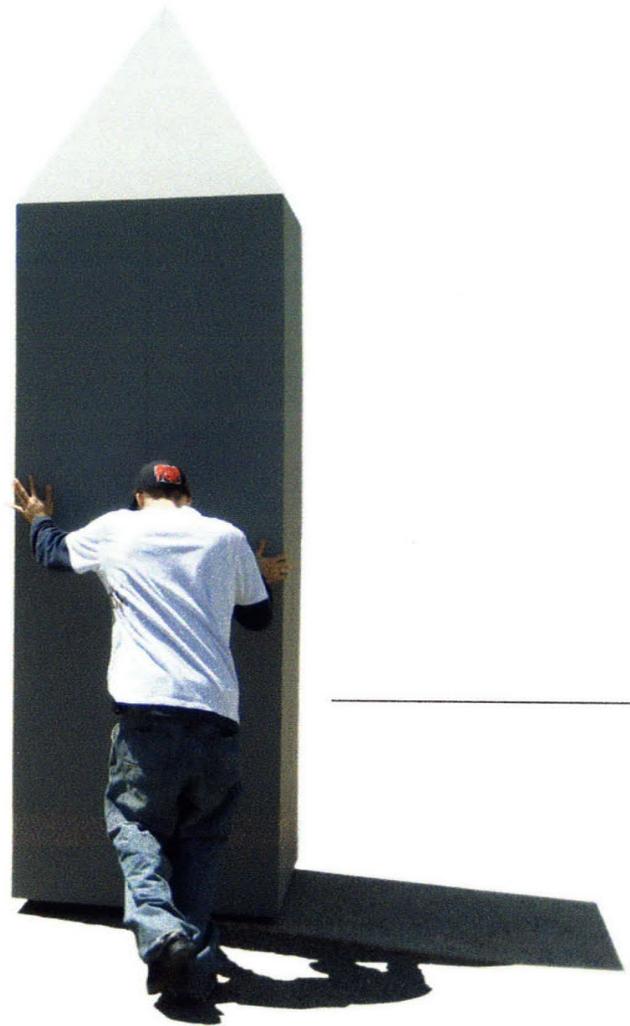


Figure 19. A rendering of the transformable [monument/kiosk] structure.

Figure 20. An image of Pedro "Chico" Cruz pushing the monument through Cambridge.



Monumento a la producción local (monument to local production) is a **micro economic unit** designed for the creative, local, informal economy. Essentially the structure is a monument that can be inverted into a kiosk, and vice versa. It was designed as a module for small businesses to be able to camouflage themselves within the urban landscape, as a way of coexisting in the neoliberal city, amongst larger threatening businesses or corporations.

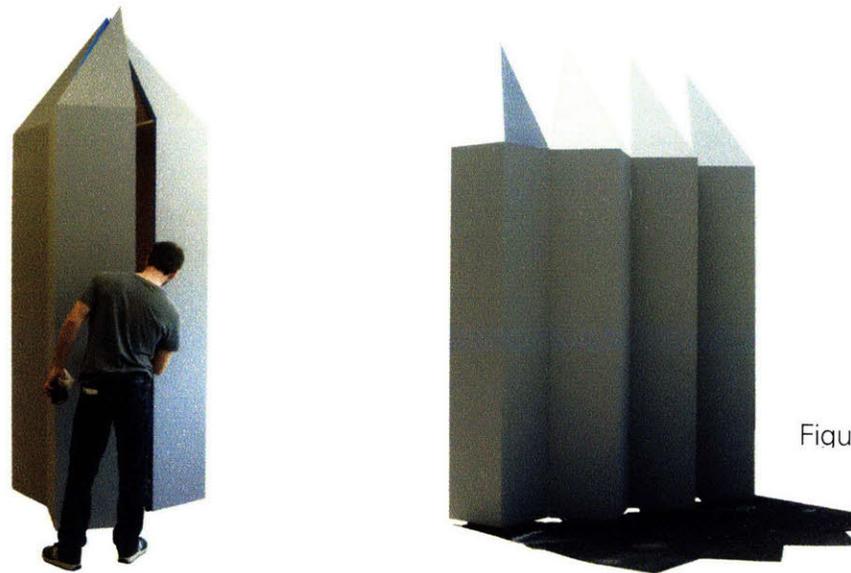


Figure 21.

The project was conceived of bearing Villa Victoria in mind (a community of incredible social capital that established itself when urban renewal planners threatened two thousand Puerto Ricans out of their homes in Parcel 19 of Boston's South End during the late 1960s). Despite the success, gentrification in the area is still a main issue. What was originally admired as a **/sustainable/** community is again finding itself competing for validity.

Spiffy industrial design stores, flower shops, and overpriced pizza parlors have replaced a lot of the local bodegas. And while there is not a proper venue to show for it, most residents have come up with very creative ways of living day to day. The youth make and sell their own mix tapes, many women show off their cooking skills, while others sew, knit, and “will do your hair” for a lesser amount than the posh salon on Tremont Street.

Monumento a la producción local is reminiscent of this type of behavior. The mobile device can be moved around from place to place quite easily, blending into whichever landscape. Each of its four stations is filled with merchandise made by people who either promote or have small creative enterprises in and around Villa Victoria – people who work by selling beats and tracks or whatever goods and services they have invented. Some of the vendors are people from Puerto Rico who have agreed to participate in the project. Ultimately the structure is a vehicle for exchange between the two Puerto Ricos (between the Islanders and the Diasporic community), and of course, the larger city itself. It is a tactical device made for infiltrating modest creativity through a tightly controlled system.

Any individual who takes interest in the project is most welcome to participate, whether it is through buying or selling, **SOLICITING IS MOST WELCOME**. So far the monument has had the following things to offer:

Cds for sale by Lone Wolf, Amín Farí, Team Holiday, South End Soundz, and (for promotion only) Brujo and D-Voiz. Handbags by CONCALMA (Matilsha Marxuach) and *changa* by Alia. So-so-Organic Soaps by Norma Isa Figueroa. Hairdos, “dubies” and do-rags. Publications and more. Cds by the Philadelphia based artist group *freenevsprojects*. Videos (for promotion only) of Bobbito Garcia, a.k.a. Cool Bob Love, and of Pedro Cruz, El Chico, El Flaco, El Flacoveli. Meet Carlitos “Crazy” Caserio. Manicures, pedicures, cuticles, eyebrows, hair straightening, stringing and waxing. And cornrows by Elida Lebrón. **SE HABLA ESPAÑOL.**



Figure 22.



Figure 23. The monument/kiosk in Cambridge.



Figure 23. In Cambridge.



Figure 23. In Cambridge.



Figure 23. The monument/kiosk in Jamaica Plain, on Green Street.



Figure 24. In Jamaica Plain.

I would like to conclude this thesis by making no conclusions, as this investigation has been an opportunity to depict merely a fragment of ongoing work. The only way I actually feel comfortable ending text is by urging the youth in Villa Victoria to remember their trajectory while moving forward. As an offering I would like to dedicate my final project, *the monument to local production*, to my readers (and especially Pedro "Chico" Cruz whose recognition I cherish). I can only hope that these model can encourage people to pursue their most instinctive, creative drives throughout the hustle called *life*.



Figure 24. In Jamaica Plain.

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