Ernesto Quiñonez’s *Bodega Dreams* concludes with Chino dreaming that the people of Spanish Harlem shake off their mourning clothes after Bodega’s funeral to come alive, “jumping, shaking, and jamming,” celebrating the present and hopeful for a better future.¹ “It seemed like a good place to start,” Quiñonez ironically writes, figuratively starting the next chapter of Spanish Harlem’s life by *ending* the novel itself (207). Yet throughout the narrative of *Bodega Dreams*, one character persists in “jamming,” performing, and communicating to and through music that seemingly does not correspond to his present, but nonetheless prefigures Chino’s version of Spanish Harlem’s future: Nene, first introduced by Sapo as “this retard,” Bodega’s cousin, who “talks in songs” (22). What kind of socio-political model does Nene offer us as an augur of Chino’s dreams of and for Spanish Harlem? How does *Bodega Dreams* theorize performance as a means of survival and place-making for minoritarian communities in the midst of and despite a narrative rife with murder, betrayal, and the life-and-death stakes of neoliberal capitalism? Drawing from queer, crip, and performance theory, I argue that Nene’s investment in radio and communication through music refuses a citizenship that individuates and bestows rights onto a subject through normative valuation and exclusion. Instead, as evidenced by the kinds of songs that Nene invokes as well as by the performances of those songs to those

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around him throughout *Bodega Dreams*, Nene cultivates a mode of communication that foregrounds alternative networks of ideologies, affects, and epistemologies that sustain him in a world that doesn’t make sense. Taking Nene as an interpretive model and analytic, by investing otherwise singular, linear, and unitary discourses with performance, I will ultimately argue the study of performance in literature offers queer and crip approaches to literary sense-making and aesthetics.

This argument is indebted to the interdisciplinary scholarship rehearsed by queers, crips, and women of color and their “promiscuous” archives.² Following performance studies scholar Juana María Rodríguez

Rather than ethnographic or linguistic work that attempts to code and then decode a series of performative acts through observation and analysis, [I seek] to cast the ephemeral residue of gestures into language through the subjective and flawed lens of memory and longing.³

Taking up the gestural residue of memory and of longing is necessary to understand Nene’s intervention within *Bodega Dreams*. Nene’s backstory embodies this ephemeral approach to transmitting alternative archives: Chino writes that “Word had it [Nene] started to talk in songs years ago, when AM radio broke his heart by going all talk” (23). Extradietically, AM radio transitioned to a talk-show format to mitigate the losses of ratings and audiences switching over to higher quality sound on FM radio frequencies; to recoup the financial implications of the loss of listeners and ratings, New York City’s top 40’s music AM radio station WBAC announced it would transition to a more lucrative all-talk format in 1982.⁴ Within the logic of the novel, then,

Nene’s affective heartbreak at the loss of his musical archive originates out of capitalism’s changing relationship to profit, sound, technology, and cultural production. His memory of and longing for a musically based AM radio format radically alters his mode of communication, suggesting that Nene’s seeming meaninglessness and even his apparent idiocy, according to the characters who “read” him like Chino or Sapo, are born out of his own affective-aesthetic resistance to the changing market. As Bodega Dreams’ readers, too, the way that we can or choose to make sense of Nene’s character space within the narrative is dependent on our own willingness to attend to his affective-aesthetic commitments as a meaningful act and not to his failure to linguistically code and decode a certain way or within easily contained disciplinary boundaries.

Compared to the large-scale kinds of dreams, versions of multicultural citizenship, and negotiations within capitalism “loudly” and explicitly articulated in the narrative by central characters such as Bodega and Chino, Nene’s political praxis is quiet and embedded within his everyday musical practice of singing songs from the radio. For black studies scholar Tina M. Campt, this counterintuitive quietness and everydayness she articulates through what she terms, “listening to images,”

is a method that reckons with the fissures, gaps, and interstices that emerge when we refuse to accept the “truth” of images and archives the state seeks to proffer through its production of subjects posed to produce particular “types” of regulated and regulatable subjects. […] [L]istening to images is constituted as a practice of looking beyond what we see and attuning our senses to the other affective frequencies through which photographs register.⁵

This paper is not interested in defining Nene’s character based on his identities as male, working-class, Puerto Rican, queer, or crip as a kind of regulated or regulatable subject from within Bodega Dreams’ archive, a stabilized “image” of Nene’s minor place within the novel. Instead,

what this project seeks to do is look beyond his seemingly singular presence within the narrative as a means to “attune our senses to the other affective frequencies” of Bodega Dreams at large, to register Nene’s speaking through songs as a kind of process, a processing of and resistance to Ango-American culture that atmospherically resonates throughout this story. Nene’s queerness, crippness, or Puerto Ricanness, is most queer, crip, and Puerto Rican not in being any of his identities explicitly, implicitly, or otherwise. Instead, in the words of performance theorist José Muñoz, “not simply a being but a doing for and toward the future,” this political process, as I will argue below, deploys a queer aesthetic of music that “maps future social relations.”6 By following Nene’s musical map to what he envisions as his own queer, crip, and Puerto Rican horizons within Spanish Harlem, we too, can cruise utopia and reimagining new relationalities and ways of being.

Again, this quiet logic of process, of performative doing, is contained within Bodega Dreams: Nene theorizes this possibility the first time he speaks for himself in the novel, sing-speaking “Oye como va. Bueno pa gozar” (23). On the surface level, this common greeting coupled with an ambiguous reference to enjoyment or having fun introduces both Chino and the reader into Nene’s sing-speak logic as a polite and positive character. Listening more closely to the archive of AM radio top 40 hits from which Nene draws, we can hear that Nene is gesturing towards “Oye Como Va,” evoking either Spanish Harlem Puerto Rican Tito Puente’s Latin jazz hit recorded in 1963 or Mexican American Santana’s rock and electric adaptation of this same song in 1970. Citationally, Nene creates a quiet tension between the localized music of Puente’s Spanish Harlem as a Spanish Harlem resident and the more widely consumed Latinx adaptation of this song that a radio aficionado such as Nene would have been sure to have heard before.

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Ultimately, we can’t decide for certain which version is the more “authentically” cited by Nene; nonetheless, this ambiguity performs the tensions of both a local Puerto Rican and a collectivized Latinx aesthetics by calling to question their respective consumption by listeners within and without these communities at large.

What primarily interests me in Nene’s introduction is Nene’s quiet omission of the other lines from “Oye Como Va” – “Oye como va/ mi ritmo/ bueno pa gozar/ mulata.” Listening, along with Nene to the musical archive of “Oye Como Va,” the significance of Nene’s entire introduction changes. Instead of merely hailing us, Nene performatively invites us to read between the lines of what he is singing, to hear how his rhythms are good to enjoy in the interstices of what he actually cites. Nene opens up for us the possibility of a queer contrapuntal logic of both song and speech by performing a song-speak introduction that leaves out the lyrics of the song that call our attention his utterances as song. To perceive how Nene’s sing-speaking is working on multiple, simultaneous levels – to listen alongside him to how Nene’s rhythms are good to listen to – we must tune in as much to what he isn’t speak-singing as to what he is, to the localized context of how his sing-speaking works within the narrative as much as to the “quiet” thematic, affective, and signifying registers his music theorizes outside of it. Notably, Nene marks this communication, his sing-speaking as process and performance, a specific kind of doing, by only sing-speaking the lines of this song that include verbs. Even from the very first word uttered by him in Bodega Dreams, “oye,” conjugated in the second-person imperative, Nene emphasizes that his attention and ours, as his audience, must mark what it is that his sing-speaking actually does.

Nene’s omission of the lyric “mulata” in introduction to the reader and to Chino further

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7 I am deeply grateful to Jekarra Noelle Govan from U.C. Riverside for bringing up this point.
demonstrates that his discourse is subtended by racialized, gendered, and sexualized structures of feeling; for just as Nene submerges the pleasurable rhythms of the performative logics he sing-speaks, so too does the song that he selects as his performative greeting insist upon a specific, gendered, raced, and sexualized audience. For one, Nene’s decision to not sing the parts of this song that call attention to performance, race, gender, and sexuality represents his adaptation of sing-speaking as mode of everyday communication. Addressing Chino as “mulata,” for example, would misgender and likely offend him. Nene’s omission of certain lyrics illustrates, therefore, his strategic passing of sing-speaking as speech. Following Campt, by listening beyond the static image of text-on-page speech, sing-speaking’s everyday “passing,” we see that his musical choices nevertheless resonate across specific affective registers of gender, race and sexuality. For Marxist theorist Raymond Williams, “although [these registers] are emergent or pre-emergent, they do not have to await definition, classification, or rationalization before they exert palpable pressures and set effective limits on experience and on action;” as emergent, the affect that Nene produces through his deployment of certain lyrics from certain songs determines how the other characters and, in fact, we, as the readers, can read him within the contexts of race, gender, and sexuality in Spanish Harlem whether or not he or Quiñonez renders them explicit or readily classifiable. Moreover, Williams continues, as a social experience still in process, this structure of feeling is

not yet recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating, but which in analysis (though rarely otherwise) has its emergent, connecting, and dominant characteristics, indeed its specific hierarchies […] Methodologically, then, a “structure of feeling is a cultural hypothesis, actually derived from attempts to understand such elements and their connections in a generation or period.”

We must take Nene seriously as a seemingly queer and idiosyncratic minor character because the

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9 Idem.
apparently nonsensical behavior that marks Nene as a queer, crip character (his sing-speaking) demonstrates a larger way of being in the world arising out of and only contextualizable within the “emergent, connecting, and dominant characteristics” of Spanish Harlem. By attending to Nene’s sing-speech as a structure of feeling, we examine it as a cultural hypothesis not just about Nene, but about Quiñonez’s representation of Spanish Harlem; it is a way of theorizing race, gender, sexuality, as well as other aspects of subject formation that both shapes and is shaped by this specific time and place. The performative incursion of Nene’s musical archive within Quiñonez’s literary work thus foregrounds Bodega Dreams as a work of literature that relies on the intertextuality of not only other literary forms, but also affect evoked in the performance of music, presenting a localized theorization of race, gender, and sexuality arising out of the highly nuanced structure of feeling in Spanish Harlem. All that remains for us to do is to listen to it.

“(What a) Wonderful World”: Nene’s Musical Archive in Bodega Dreams’ Deep Map

Don’t know much about history, Don’t know much about geography,
 […]
But I do know that I love you, But I do know that one and one is two
And I know that if you love me, too, And if this one could be with you,
What a wonderful world this would be What a wonderful world this would be
– Sam Cooke, “(What a) Wonderful World”

While Nene avows he does not “know much” about history or geography (73), by analyzing the range of songs he sing-speaks throughout Bodega Dreams as a set of geospatial data points, this section attends to what Nene does know about time and space by listening to and through his musical archive. In fact, through his own position contextualized within Spanish Harlem, Nene’s sing-speaking superimposes this place’s utopic memories of the past onto the narrative’s present, which, in Bodega Dreams, structurally contributes to what spatial humanists David Bodenhamer, John Corrigan, and Trevor Harris have termed a “deep map.” This section
argues that Nene’s musical archive acts as a conceptual and affective schema produced from his contextualized position in Spanish Harlem that utilizes Bodega Dreams’ invocations of time and space as a means of queer and Puerto Rican place-making.

Each song, each data point on this deep map, across the entirety of Bodega Dreams contains its own unique spatiotemporal markers (the geographical location at which Nene sings as well as the specific time his performance occurs in both the narrative’s plot and its text). Taken together, these individual songs comprise the formal organization of musical information distributed across and subtending the larger narrative, the musical archive of Bodega Dreams.

The form itself of Nene’s musical archive, borrowing from Caroline Levine, acts as “an arrangement of elements – an ordering, patterning, or shaping” that represents and fleshes out Nene’s affective-aesthetic model of ordering the world. The form these disparate points take, then, produces Nene’s archive itself, which in turn illustrates the way he gives shapes to, makes sense of, the world around him, indeed, to how we must understand his place within the rest of the text. Nene cites seventeen different songs originally recorded in a range of seventeen years from 1960-1977 (Figure 1). Despite this range, looking at the statistical measures of center for this temporal data set, a significant trend emerges: the average year of his archive is 1968, its mode is 1968, and its median is 1968. Cross-referenced with a map of narrated place-names in Bodega Dreams (Figure 2), we can see that Nene performs these songs between East 110th and 124th Street between Park and Second Avenue. Using New York City’s street system as a grid, the spatial midpoint of all of these instances of Nene singing in Bodega Dreams lies on East 117th Street between Lexington and Third Avenue. Coordinating time and space around the year 1968 on this stretch of East 117th street, Quiñonez focalizes the form of Nene’s musical archive

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Artist/Group</th>
<th>Page Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Oye Como Va”</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Tito Puente/Santana</td>
<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td>“All Along the Watchtower”</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Bob Dylan</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Like a Rolling Stone”</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>Bob Dylan</td>
<td>39</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Just the Way You Are”</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Billy Joel</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Don’t Let Me Be Misunderstood”</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>The Animals</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Black Magic Woman”</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Fleetwood Mack</td>
<td>52</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Summer in the City”</td>
<td>1966</td>
<td>The Lovin Spoonful</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Spirit in the Sky”</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>Norman Greenbaum</td>
<td>54</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Higher”</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Sly and the Family Stone</td>
<td>70</td>
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<tr>
<td>“For What It’s Worth”</td>
<td>1966</td>
<td>Buffalo Springfield</td>
<td>70</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Wonderful World”</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Sam Cooke</td>
<td>73</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Kung Fu Fighting”</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Carl Douglas</td>
<td>73</td>
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<td>“He Ain’t Heavy, He’s My Brother”</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>The Hollies</td>
<td>73</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Takin It To the Streets”</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>The Doobie Brothers</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Melody for You”*</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>The Grass Roots</td>
<td>95/96</td>
</tr>
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<td>“Get Together”</td>
<td>1967</td>
<td>The Youngbloods</td>
<td>169</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Me &amp; Julio Down by the School Yard”</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>Me First and the Gimme Gimmes</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Bohemian Rhapsody”</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Queen</td>
<td>170</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mode</th>
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<td>1968(.885)</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>1968</td>
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* Unlike the other songs directly cited throughout Bodega Dreams, in this instance, Nene guesses a song by The Grass Roots based on Chino’s telephone response to his musical greeting. Recognizing Nene from the song lyrics, Chino responds, “I have the notes for you. Yeah, yeah, tell your cousin I have the notes for him” (95 and 96), calculated to be ambiguous enough so as to not raise Blanca’s suspicions to Chino’s dealings with Bodega and musical enough to communicate a message to Nene. Examining The Grass Roots lyrics across many different songs, the only song that specifically references “notes” is “Melody for You:” “And if I were a poet/ then my words would be revealing/ all I’m feeling for you tonight./ But if my thoughts could be played just like notes,/ then I’d play you a melody./ I’d play you a melody.” Though “Melody for You” never quite made the top 40 charts on the radio, it is helpful to hypothesize this song as Nene’s allusion because it was produced in 1968, the statistical average of Nene’s musical archive (mean, median, and mode), and because it performatively thematizes Bodega Dreams’ preoccupation with poetry, thought, and music (exemplified, for example, by the titular intertext to Miguel Piñero’s “La Bodega Sold Dreams” cited at the beginning of Book III: “dreamt i was this poeta/ words glitterin’ brite & bold/ in las bodegas/ where our poets’ words & songs are sung” (203). Nene’s sing-speaking incarnates the poetics of structures of feeling and communication desired respectively by both The Grass Roots and Piñero, singing and “revealing” feelings between the lines of his speech and blurring the lines between notes as a written record of linguistic, poetic, and musical information.
at this place, thus begging the question, what material and affective histories does it evoke and express in *Bodega Dreams*?

Not coincidentally, out of the scores of place-names cited in *Bodega Dreams* across Spanish Harlem and beyond, Nene’s musical archive’s heart coincides within the same block and historical time as the *only* exact street address stated in the narrative: 202 East 117th street, the Young Lords headquarters (102). Globally, it should not surprise us that this place and its organization are central to *Bodega Dreams*’ logic. As literary scholars Raphael Dalleo and Elena Machado Sáez argue, Bodega himself, as an ex-member of the Young Lords and as a self-identified “throwback” (31), metonymically embodies a nostalgic return to 1960’s movement ideology as a cultural and political model considered in this text. Moreover, they convincingly illustrate that Quiñonez renders this connection, Bodega’s “symbolic legacy” as an ex-member of the Young Lords, geospatially explicit by having Bodega’s funereal services revisit important sites to and of the activist group. Yet, Bodega’s connection with the Young Lords does not necessarily explain why Quiñonez also layers the heart of Nene’s musical archive in this same time and space; how can we connect Nene, specifically, to this organization?

One way to understand this implicit connection made by Nene’s musical archive is to

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11 While the Young Lords was originally founded in 1968 in Chicago, its Spanish Harlem chapter was not founded until 1969 – neither Nene’s temporal nor spatial measures of center exactly map onto the precise time and space of the Young Lords origins. I nonetheless find it suggestive that the spatial discrepancy between Nene’s musical archive and Spanish Harlem’s Young Lords headquarters lies to the East (towards Chicago), and that the temporal discrepancy between these two years may still be reflected by the musical archive’s mathematical average (to three decimal places) of 1968.885, which I have rounded down for the sake of argument.
13 Ibid. 67. Figure 2 visualizes a similar claim regarding the connection of the Young Lords and *Bodega Dreams*, in general, with one of the two most narrated streets, East 116th street, coinciding exactly with the narrated location of the East Harlem garbage riots of 1969.
turn to what Alex Woloch has described as this “minor” character’s “character-space,” the “particular and charged encounter between an individual personality and a determined space and position within the narrative as a whole.” As opposed to separately looking at Nene’s character as his implied personhood or as his structural role in the novel, Woloch’s theorization of

Figure 2:

![NARRATED PLACE-RENAMES IN BODEGA DREAMS](image)

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character-space allows us to consider both of these important aspects to Nene in tandem, to Nene’s individuality as a character as well as his place within the relational “distributed field of attention” Quiñonez shapes for each of the characters in the service of creating a cohesive narrative.\textsuperscript{15} Much scholarship on \textit{Bodega Dreams} already relies on an analysis of character-space, most often comparing the individual characters of Bodega and Chino, their relationship to each other, as well as their structural positions in the narrative to theorize the text’s different representations of multicultural citizenship.\textsuperscript{16} It is this relational model of character analysis that will help to illuminate Nene’s relationship to the Young Lords via his closest relationship in the text, Bodega.

Nene’s character-space with respect to Bodega and his commitment to the affective and utopic impulses of civil rights era activism’s original time and place indicate that Nene, too, presents his own 1960’s movement inspired praxis formed by and representative of his relationship to the Young Lords. As someone Bodega “[keeps] … to watch his back or at least to watch the door,” Nene literally acts as a mediator between Chino and Bodega, appearing solely in places in the text where Bodega is present or needs to be communicated with (23). As Ylce Irizarry argues, Nene’s structural position within the text “functions as a Greek Chorus often revealing information to the reader that Chino cannot determine on his own.”\textsuperscript{17} Not only does Nene mediate Bodega and those trying to access him (such as Chino and the reader), but his sing-speaking provides key context and information to understanding Bodega’s dealings. Thus,

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid. 17.
\textsuperscript{17} Irizarry 181.
when the kingpin dies, Nene, too, must be structurally removed from the discourse of *Bodega Dreams*, still crying for his cousin as he is taken away by the police (209). For Woloch, the disappearance of a minor character from the discourse of a text is key to understanding their “strange significance” within it.18 If Bodega’s death and its aftermath, signals for Dalleo and Machado Sáez the tragic “death of a way of seeing the world as well as the end of an historical moment,” to totally effect this break with this time and way of being in the world, Quiñonez must also disappear Nene from the text as a character whose discourse persistently and nearly exclusively refers back to the past and, considering the form of this musical archive, *this* past in particular.19 In other words, Nene’s structural significance in *Bodega Dreams*, illustrated by his abrupt departure from it at the same time as Bodega, is to offer a complementary, alternative re/membering of the Young Lords’ historical movement through the terrain of music and affect.

While Bodega’s relationship to the past foregrounds his ethics and politics as an economic and material struggle, Nene’s relationship to the Young Lords unfolds as a struggle that takes place across the terrain of culture. Nene’s affective and musical commitments prove him to represent yet another version of the Young Lords’ utopic cultural project, seizing control of the means of representation through music as a kind of minoritarian “revolutionary culture.”

Point six of the Young Lords’ manifesto, “We want a true education of our creole culture and Spanish language,” states “we must learn our history of fighting against cultural, as well as economic genocide by the yanqui. Revolutionary culture, culture of all our people is the only true teaching.”20 Akin to Bodega’s dreams, Nene’s looking back to 1968 via his musical archive functions as another kind of “throwback” to a historical moment with “clear political role[s] and

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18 Woloch 38.
19 Dalleo and Machado Sáez 67.
privileged voice in the public sphere.\footnote{21} Unlike Bodega’s explicit referencing of his experience of his past with the Young Lords, Nene articulates his own remembrance of history through songs as a medium of popular culture, or what Dalleo and Machado Sáez theorize as a contemporary impulse “to speak directly to the community” with musical forms.\footnote{22} As I will argue in the next section, taking a page from the Young Lords cultural ideology and like Samson in Ricardo Bracho’s play The Sweetest Hangover – yet another Latinx character in a cultural production that takes a “vow of sonics,” communicating solely through music – Nene “draft[s] an affective schematic particular to the emotional emergence and becoming of a citizen-subject who will not ‘feel’ American in the way in which the protocols of official affective citizenship demand.”\footnote{23} Nene’s decision to communicate through sing-speaking, then, re/cites the Young Lords’ program and platform to contextualize himself and his actions within a more expansive, politically engaged, and utopic movement that disidentifies with the affective citizenship of the United States by using his musical talents to imagine a “wonderful world” where language and music express a different way of being in the world.

While Nene’s cultural vision is indeed a utopic one, as with all of the dreams in Bodega Dreams, the necessity of living in the violence of the present means that Nene’s cultural project is not without its own casualties. On Bodega’s orders, Nene murders the journalist Alberto Salazar, sing-speaking his confession within Chino’s earshot “Mama, I just killed a man” (170). While the murder seemingly contradicts his utopic musical discourse, it further demonstrates his commitment to a utopia imagined by the Young Lords – point 7 of their “13 Point Program and Platform” is:

\footnote{21} Dalleo and Machado Sáez 21.
\footnote{22} Idem.
\footnote{23} Muñoz, José Esteban. “Feeling Brown: Ethnicity and Affect in Ricardo Brancho’s The Sweetest Hangover (and Other STDs).” Theatre Journal 52:2, March 200. 78.
We oppose capitalists and alliances with traitors […] they are paid by the system to lead our people down blind alleys, just like the thousands of poverty pimps who keep our communities peaceful for business, or the street workers who keep gangs divided and blowing each other away.  

Pointing out the violent contradictions of capitalism itself, the Young Lords argue that collaborating with a capitalist government betrays their own vision of socialist utopia, and later suggest in their twelfth platform statement, “armed self-defense and armed struggle are the only means to liberation.” Explaining why he needed Salazar to be killed, Bodega rehearses a version of these ideologies, claiming “Salazar was a worthless piece of shit who didn’t even make a deal with his own people. He got what was comin’” (115). Refusing solidarity with “his own people” by making a deal with Fischman, Salazar allegedly was both a crooked journalist by taking Fischman’s bribe and a race “traitor” to Bodega’s dreams for Spanish Harlem’s community, thereby meriting his death, at least according to Bodega. The fact, then, that it is Nene who kills the journalist signifies the ideologically justified cultural struggle between a Latinx utopia and a traitorous misinformation scheme that tries to sell out to an Anglo-American capitalist imaginary. It is not my purpose to ask whether or not Nene or Bodega were “actually” justified in killing Salazar, and without any kind of substantiating details, much of Salazar’s story is hearsay told to Chino only by the men who have plotted to (and succeeded in) killing the journalist. Instead, like Chino concludes with Bodega, with Nene “all [we can] hope for is that the good would outweigh the bad” (114); Salazar’s murder nonetheless further demonstrates Nene’s adherence to mapping out a present-day approach to imagining Latinx utopia.

This mapping out of different ways of being in the present and experiencing history is Nene’s contribution to a deep map of Spanish Harlem. Tuning the reader in to the issues of space

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24 Young Lords Organization. 19
25 Idem.
and time through the form of Nene’s musical archive, Quiñonez illustrates the mapping potentialities of narratives. In *Deep Maps and Spatial Narratives*, Bodenhamer et al. explain

Deep maps are not confined to the tangible or material, but include the discursive and ideological dimensions of place, the dreams, hopes, and fears of residents – they are, in short, positioned between matter and meaning. They are also topological and relational, revealing the ties that places have with each other and tracing their embeddedness in networks that span scales and range from the local to the global [...] What is added by these deep maps is a reflexivity that acknowledges how engaged human agents build spatially framed identities and aspirations out of imagination and memory and how the multiple perspectives constitute a spatial narrative that complements the prose narrative.26

Though Quiñonez’s title, and in fact much existing scholarship on this text tend to focus on the political and ideological struggles, the dreams, of its primary characters, *Bodega Dreams* is an intensely spatial narrative shaped by all of its various characters who each weave material and immaterial information into the larger narrative, places and their memories, to produce a deep map of Spanish Harlem. Nene’s spatiotemporal perspective, his musical archive sonically complements and ideologically subtends Bodega’s material and political “throwback” status, reanimating musical affects produced out of a specific moment in the past to reorient his listeners towards future potentialities and social formations.

Nene’s sing-speaking thus offers a glimpse at queer and Puerto Rican place-making through affect that underlies the entirety of *Bodega Dreams* as a deep map. As a narrative, the plot of *Bodega Dreams* drives relentlessly forward towards its climax, reading more or less like a true-crime series: Will Sapo evade arrest for his part in killing Salazar? Will Bodega and Vera reconnect (or Blanca and Chino, for that matter)? What version of multicultural citizenship will win-out in the end? Narrative, as a form, Bodenhamer explains, “carries with it a teleological imperative to explain events as a consequence of past actions or causes and to derive some

meaning from the story, lessons that we can use in some way to understand who we are.”

The telos of *Bodega Dreams*, as Dallego and Machado Sáez have shown above, does end with the killing off of Bodega and Nene’s arrest, potentially ending these men’s utopic dreams, representationally book-ending the historical moment they evoke, and foreclosing a romanticization of the past in favor of a more pragmatic and materially-minded approach in the present. And yet, even as the police are taking Nene away, Chino “promise[s]himself to visit [Nene] in jail and take him a ghetto blaster and oldies CDs” (209), leaving the reader with the queer sense that Nene’s musical archive will survive. For Muñoz, queer world-making “hinges on the possibility to map a world where one is allowed to cast pictures of utopia and to include such pictures in any map of the social.”

Through his sing-speaking, Nene’s characteristic and structural function within the text, Nene curates a critical playlist of affect which resonates throughout the narrative and well after its plot finds its narrative end; his persistence in singing his musical archive as its own kind of utopia grounded in the affect of the Young Lords’ own program and platform, then, gestures towards a queer and Puerto Rican aesthetic undercurrent latent even within the narrative’s drive towards resolution that maps out other potentialities, other horizons of being beyond those charted by the narrative. The plot of *Bodega Dreams*’ deep map does not visualize a utopia in the present, and yet, it allows Nene to cast out his own utopic musical archive from within it, the “wonderful world/where this one could be with you,” thereby offering the reader a means to envision a queer, Puerto Rican life-world in the near future.

“You Ain’t Heavy, You’re My Brother:” Disability, Relationality, Alternative Citizenships

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28 Muñoz *Cruising Utopia* 40.
The road is long
That leads us to who knows where
But I’m strong
Strong enough to carry him
He ain’t heavy, he’s my brother

So on we go
His welfare is of my concern
No burden is he to bear
We’ll get there

– The Hollies, “He Ain’t Heavy, He’s My Brother”

Fading out from last section’s formal analysis of Nene’s musical archive, which illustrated Nene’s utopic spatiotemporal contextualization from within Spanish Harlem through affect, the last two musical tracks in this essay close-read specific instances of Nene’s discursive remixes to consider how, at the level of a single song, Nene’s sing-speaking helps us imagine a queer, crip, Puerto Rican utopia. Nene’s remix in this section transpires over the issue of citizenship – which subjectivities merit societal recognition and protections, and which do not – an issue which, as Asian Americanist Lisa Lowe reminds us, brought many civil rights movements together in the 1960s to confront the contradictions of the “promise of political emancipation and the conditions of economic exploitation” surrounding American citizenship and racialization in the United States. Unlike these movements, however, Nene’s musical archive conceives of a strategy that foregrounds his continued affective disidentification with this idealization of American citizenship as a model that defines a subjectivity as valuable through the exclusion of disposable subjectivites. Simultaneously harkening back to the affective frequencies of the civil rights era, but disidentifying with its end goal of a normative American citizenship for all, in the words of Muñoz, Nene’s disidentification “refuses to follow the texts’

grain insofar” as these political strategies of inclusion through citizenship remains unavailable to him.31 For Puerto Rican Americans, United States citizenship denies both total assimilation into Anglo-American culture as well as any sense of Puerto Rican sovereignty, and the rights of citizenship that groups such as the Young Lords fought hard to attain did not and do not assuage the rampant racism experienced by Puerto Ricans in the United States or abroad.32 Nevertheless, as Muñoz writes, by shaping Nene’s musical archive around the time and place of the Young Lords and conveying this history through Nene, specifically, Quiñonez turns the “the disidentificatory optic […] to the shadows and fissures within the text, where racialized presences can be liberated from the protective custody of the white literary [and, correlative, juridical] imagination.”33 In citing this history of citizenship struggles as central to his musical archive, but re/citing it through different structures of feeling, Nene sing-speaks directly to the community, and advances a political model that reengages minoritarian issues through different affective registers than those of the normative American citizen; through his sing-speaking Nene strategically disidentifies with a limited version of American citizenship and maps out queer, crip, and Puerto Rican versions of relationality for the community.

After opening up to Chino about other people not understanding the way that he communicates and showing off his radio knowledge to the novel’s narrator, Nene signs-off to The Hollies’ “He Ain’t Heavy, He’s My Brother:” “Chino, you’re all right, bro, you ain’t heavy, you’re my brother” (73). Listening to the song’s lyrics that animates Nene’s allusion, “He Ain’t Heavy, He’s My Brother,” we find that this song broadly follows a protagonist and an individual

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32 See Jones for an excellent analysis of the double bind of American citizenship for Puerto Ricans as it relates to *Bodega Dreams*.
33 Muñoz, *Disidentifications* 29.
she/he calls her/his brother on a long journey, metaphorically the journey of life. Though it is never explicitly mentioned, the protagonist’s brother suffers from some sort of debility, needing to be carried along by the first character who assures us throughout the song that despite the “load,” “he ain’t heavy, he’s my brother.” Following feminist, queer, and crip scholar Alison Kafer, what makes this song salient as a song theorizing disability is not the presence of a disabled character; instead, we can claim the song crip because of the protagonist’s recognition of the “ethical, epistemic, and political responsibilities behind” the claims of the respective abilities/debilities of these two characters. Refusing to draw comparisons between her/his own strength and what might be seen as his “brother’s” lack of ability, the protagonist foregrounds her/his own responsibility to the brother and her/his commitment to bringing him along on the journey: “his welfare is my concern/ No burden is he to bear,” “For I know/ he would not encumber me.” In this way, “He Ain’t Heavy, He’s My Brother” theorizes what Kafer terms “crip futurity,” a politics “for thinking through how to get ‘elsewhere,’ to other ways of being that might be more just and sustainable” for all people regardless of ability. As opposed to imagining a future, an elsewhere, without disability or trying to “fix” the brother’s debility to get there, the protagonist accepts her/his responsibility to the brother, commits to carrying him along the journey, and reminds us of their relationship throughout; in fact, as the lyrics note, “If I’m laden at all/ I’m laden with sadness/ That everyone’s heart/ Isn’t filled with the gladness/ Of love for one another,” arguing that it is not the (debilitated) individual causing any sense of physical, emotional burden, but instead the system that would see the protagonist’s debilitated brother as a burden that is the heaviest weight to bear in this song. The song’s protagonist, then, demonstrates a “political/relational model” of disability, demonstrating that “the problem of disability no

35 Ibid. 3.
longer resides in the minds or the bodies of individuals but in built environments and social 
patterns that exclude or stigmatize particular kinds of bodies, minds, and ways of being.”36 In 
other words, behind Nene’s fleeting reference lies an entire structure of feeling that uses a 
politics of disability to theorize alternate ways of being in the world.

Nene’s own remix to this theorization substitutes “he” and “he’s” to “you” and “you’re,” 
directly implicating both Chino and attentive readers/listeners within this relational model of 
disability and thereby creating a potentiality for new affective communities. While Nene 
recognizes his own cognitive difference – “No one listens to me, you know, but I function 
anyway. And sometimes I say dumb things, you know b’cause I’m Nene. Things that you know 
people don’t get” (72) – he reverses our expectations of ability/debility made explicit in the song 
by changing its lyrics. Swapping “he” and “he’s” to “you” and “you’re,” Nene assumes the role 
of the song’s protagonist, as well as the protagonist’s strength and commitment to bringing “us” 
along despite our own debilities in the role of the brother. For our part, to accept playing the role 
of the brother in the song is to recognize our own debilities as the basis for forming new 
relationalities both in the sense of our extradiegetic identities, whatever they may be, as well as 
our debilitated musical or relational abilities with respect to Nene in the role of this song’s 
protagonist. As Avril Minich writes, “within [our] potential to forge a new collectivity in the 
wake of [our] shared exclusion exists a latent utopian possibility.”37 The relational model of 
disability performed by this song and by the roles that Nene, Chino, and the reader play in it 
thereby represent “the site of a potentially disabled and queer future,” wherein Nene’s 
performative desire to bring us along to a crip future opens up towards other ways of being in the

36 Ibid. 6.
Queerly refusing to base his own self-worth off of the norms of citizenship or ability (which both only signify out of what they exclude), Nene recognizes his difference and sees his own potential in the world in relation to others; in so doing, Nene highlights a mode of what Jina Kim terms crip-of-color critique, “affirming, organizing, and supporting racialized life in which self-sufficiency [and its norms of being able-bodied/-minded] no longer registers as an ideal.”

Listening, jiving, and feeling along with Nene to his musical archive in the midst of the narrative of *Bodega Dreams*, then, attunes attentive readers toward this relational politics of disability; in Muñoz’s words, “the sounds of popular culture and [Nene’s] citational practice tell a story about the way in which the resources of popular culture are deployed to tell an affective story that is different and decidedly dissident in relation to structuring codes of US national affect.”

The extent to which we attend to this affective story, then, determines the potential of Nene’s queer and crip affective community in apposition and dissonance to the kinds of affects that the futures Bodega or Chino theorize. Mobilizing this crip theorization through the realms of queer and performance studies rehearses an entirely different kind of relationality and futurity than Bodega or Chino envision and that the last book of *Bodega Dreams* only just begins to make out.

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38 Idem.
40 Muñoz “Feeling Brown” 78.
“Taking It to the Streets:” Mobilizing the Horizon, Envisioning Queer Elsewheres and Whens

You don’t know me but I’m your brother
I was raised here in this living hell
You don’t know my kind in your world
Fairly soon, the time will tell

[Pre-Chorus]
You, telling me the things
You’re gonna do for me
I ain’t blind and I don’t like
What I think I see

[Chorus]
(Taking it to the streets)
Taking it to the streets
(Taking it to the streets)
No more need for running
(Taking it to the streets)

– The Doobie Brothers “Takin’ It to the Streets

In “He Ain’t Heavy, He’s My Brother,” we jammed out alongside Nene to a desire for a
different sort of disability politics, one in which contains the possibility for new crip kinds of
relationality. For listeners who can hear and feel alongside Nene’s structure of feeling, this desire
prefigures Bodega Dreams’ queer, crip utopia in the final paragraphs. According to Muñoz, this
queer utopia “could and should be about a desire for another way of being in both the world and
time, a desire that resists mandates to accept that which is not enough.”41 Drawing from, but
ultimately resisting, a history of assimilation and inclusion into American juridical citizenship
(implying that this kind of citizenship is not enough), Nene redeploy his musical archive at the
turn of the 21st century to foment a different oppositional consciousness and a different kind of
citizenship, a musical citizenship. Turning now to Horacio Roque Ramírez’s incisive work in the
studies of queer music and dance space in Raphael Negrón’s Pan Dulce in San Francisco from
1996-1997, Roque Ramírez identifies that “queer Latino-caribeño musical citizenship”

41 Muñoz, Cruising Utopia, 96.
is intimately related 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 critical mix-tape of this essay, Nene’s sing-speaking is nothing less than a queer struggle to survive, a claim to a cultural and political sovereignty of Puerto Ricans staked upon queer and crip futuro utopia mobilized through music. This queer, crip utopia is the kind of future that Chino, at last, begins to dream at the end of *Bodega Dreams*, literally “taking it to the streets” in performance and community:

> The neighborhood had turned into a maraca, with the men and women transformed into seeds, shaking with love and desire for one another. Children had opened fire hydrants, and danced, laughing and splashing water on themselves. Old men were sitting on milk crates and playing dominoes. Young men left their car doors wide open, stereos playing at full blast. Young girls strutted their stuff, shaking it like Jell-O […] Old women gossiped and laughed […] where they once played as children with no backyards […] in my dream the people were jumping, shaking, and jamming as if the rent weren’t due for six months. Like Iris Chacón inside a washing machine during an earthquake, Richter scale 8.9 […] They had been bounced all over the place but they were still jamming. 212 and 213.

Unlike most other percussion instruments, the rhythm that comes from a maraca is dependent on the innumerable, random collisions within its structure. By transforming the neighborhood into the larger maraca, and all of its denizens into the seeds within it, Quiñonez imagines a community where music only emanates from an interworking relationality of its members, as opposed to a music generated by a singular or self-possessed subjectivity. Envisioning all of its members moving in some way, from the young to the old, regardless of sex, ability, or gender, the relationships between each community member and their various collisions come together to form the music of the neighborhood. Importantly, Quiñonez leaves the qualitative valences of

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this shaking ambiguous – being “bounced all over the place” can be read as violent just as it can be read as musical. Despite the connotative ambivalence of these collision, the end result for the community remains a part of the neighborhood’s jam, necessary to the kind of music that the it can produce.

This queer, crip future where everyone contributes and everyone belongs in musical solidarity through good times and the bad is the kind of community that Nene constantly sing-speaks about, typically re/citing songs throughout the entirety of Bodega Dreams that emphasize love, kinship, and community in order to foster a different kind of affective, musical citizenship; this is the musical “message” Nene takes to his “brother,” finding him “everywhere/ wherever people live together/ tied in poverty’s despair.” Nene’s sing-speaking throughout Bodega Dreams acts as a kind of queer, crip proselytization of musical citizenship as his own kind of resistance towards capitalist, neoliberal multiculturalism. Nene rehearses a queer, crip musical politics that animates affects other than those generated by a normalized American citizenship by envisioning a more just, inclusive way of being, a musical being-together in the world. Citing Muñoz’s Disidentifications, performance studies scholar Joshua Chambers-Letson writes,

under such circumstances, minoritarian performance isn’t just a part of the revolution; it is the revolution […] As minoritarian subjects mobilize performance to produce a common sense, they speak as a “we” capable of “envision[ing] and activat[ing] new social relations. These new social relations would be the blueprint for minoritarian counterpublic spheres.”

The performance of Nene’s musical citizenship, thus, instantiates Bodega Dreams’s queer, crip future throughout the present in the book, offering us a conceptual model that disidentifies with the juridical and market individualism of American citizenship by mapping out and grooving to a communal crip relationality. Nene’s musical archive curates a structure of feeling that sustains

queer and crip life in the present (as it does Nene’s own presence throughout the book) by persistently performing a blueprint for queer and crip futurity for which Chino can only dream.

In the midst of *Bodega Dreams*, then, performance, and specifically Nene’s performance, offers a political model towards new worlds of being, re/structuring the narrative and literary affect of this novel through musical citizenship. Outside of the logics of this novel, taking Nene as a model for queer and crip analytics, what new worlds of feeling could we begin to envision if we were to decide to, as Kyla Wazana Tompkins argues, “reject the Oedipal dramas of performance versus text” and instead performatively engage in these registers simultaneously, even within the discipline of literary studies? For just as Nene interrupts the narrative trajectory and “loud” versions of multicultural citizenship offered in *Bodega Dreams* with his own quiet revolution, so too can we mobilize our own discourses and reading practices with performance and in so doing blur the distinctions between speech and song, argument and performativity, text and embodiment. As Nene illustrates through his aesthetic version of citizenship, folding in the performative within analyses of the literary, as this essay has sought to do, reimagines new structures of feeling and relationalities, different means of reading literature as always already a part of a larger network of circulating cultural productions and relationships between authors, characters, and readers. These structures of feeling necessarily draw from a wide range of archives as well as different material and historical contexts; to be able to engage in and with this quiet, aesthetic politics, we need to continue to develop supple, interdisciplinary methods to be able to negotiate “between theory and practice, performance and performativity,” in order to be

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44 Tompkins 55.
able to reconceptualize, as E. Patrick Johnson urges, “‘play’ (performance) as ‘work.’”

For, circling back to Pedro Pietri’s “Puerto Rican Obituary” and this essay’s title, getting to this queer, crip utopia where the beautiful people sing and dance and work together necessarily means considering singing and dancing an essential kind of cultural work. Mobilizing this utopia means listening more attentively to quiet, crip, and queer figures like Nene as they performatively map out new ways of being in literature.

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