

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## Tropicalizing East Harlem: Rhetorical Agency, Cultural Citizenship, and Nuyorican Cultural Production

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*By critically engaging various forms of cultural production/material culture in El Barrio/East Harlem, New York, this article challenges communication scholars to explore the relationship between agency and identity, expanding our theoretical understandings of rhetorical agency in Latina/o contexts. This article argues that everyday spaces evidence a tactical, tropicalized rhetorical agency that underwrites cultural citizenship in El Barrio. Casitas, gardens, flags, and murals “make do” with the fissures of the built environment to craft literal and figurative spaces for/of a diasporic and unofficial Nuyorican culture. The rhetorical production of culture enacts a kind of tropicalization—a troping that imbues rhetorical scenes with an indelibly Latina/o ethos—which accents everyday material forms in East Harlem and demonstrates productive forms of cultural citizenship.*

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Sly as a fox and twice as quick: there are countless ways of “making do.”

Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984)

August 2, 2007. I arrived in New York City yesterday and spent the afternoon collecting archival materials from a former Young Lord in Brooklyn.<sup>1</sup> I recorded the ephemera—the best collection I had seen in terms of quality and quantity—with my digital SLR camera, which is an investment that has proven invaluable. In the evening, I headed to East Harlem, El Barrio, where a friend and colleague resides. My friend headed to the office early in the morning and I departed shortly thereafter to begin walking in the city (Certeau, 1984, p. 110). After passing some residences and a couple of businesses at 118th Street and 2nd Avenue, I came to a tranquil garden separated off from the concrete and clay (see Gandy, 2002) by a chain link fence. Diamante Garden, part of the City of New York Parks & Recreation “GreenThumb” program, is one of many such gardens sowed and cultivated by resident volunteers to recover vacant lots throughout the city.<sup>2</sup>

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What is most interesting to me about Diamante Garden, though, is not that it is a community garden in a major metropolis. Nearly every large city I have visited, after all, has some kind of community garden project, official or unofficial, that seeks to recover and reappropriate unused land on a temporary or permanent basis. Rather, what is significant about Diamante Garden, indeed almost every such garden in East Harlem, is the way in which it functions as so much more than an attractive green space. Diamante is a site of diasporic public engagement, replete with furnishings altering the terrain (e.g., benches, tables, and lawn furniture), U.S. cultural artifacts (e.g., a miniature Statue of Liberty), and icons of Puerto Rican nationhood (e.g., the Puerto Rican flag), which altogether transform this place into a space of cultural production and resistance. Flores (2009) would agree that diaspora seems to invite such techniques of cultural production: “The combination of being ‘from elsewhere’ and being socially disadvantaged in the new setting conspire to challenge the hegemonies engendered by these asymmetries, and to devise alternative lines of communication and community as forms of conscious or unconscious resistance” (p. 19).

In one sense, however, I wonder if Flores’s point may put the cart before the horse. With an immediate focus on identity, Flores risks reproducing a tendency that Shome (2003), in another context, identifies as central to critical rhetorical and cultural scholarship, in which “identity has been the main framework through which relations of power and difference have been theorized” (p. 40). Shome suggests that critical cultural scholars have the further tendency to presuppose that “otherness” is inherently “subversive, oppositional, and productive of new forms of agency and politics. In such a framework,” she argues, “difference ends up being depoliticized precisely because difference gets used as a free-floating signifier acontextually applied to and seen as a marker of oppositionality” (Shome, 2003, p. 42).<sup>3</sup> In adapting this critique, the point is not to say that Flores is wrong about the relationship between diaspora, identity, and resistance; nor am I suggesting that identity is an unimportant category of critical engagement for communication theorists and critics. Keeping in line with Shome, I suggest “the point is that the issue of *how* identity becomes a matter of political significance is one that ironically cannot always be answered only through an acontextual framework of identity” (p. 43, emphasis added). Although Shome then turns her attention to a critical focus on the relationship between discourse and space, another productive alternative might be to address related questions of rhetorical agency prior to, and in concert with, identity.

Rhetorical agency is a complex subject to which a great deal of critical attention has recently been devoted. As Sowards (2010) notes, though, “despite recent efforts to theorize and define this term, [it] remains ambiguous and unpredictable” (p. 226). Perhaps offering the best starting point for an inquiry into rhetorical agency, Campbell (2005) proposes that agency: “(1) is communal and participatory, hence, both constituted and constrained by externals that are material and symbolic; (2) is ‘invented’ by authors who are points of articulation; (3) emerges in artistry or craft; (4) is affected through form; and (5) is perverse, that is, inherently, protean, ambiguous, open to reversal” (p. 2). Understood as such, agency is an authorizing

force—it functions in a manner best described as *a priori* in relation to discourse, including the discursive production of identity. Campbell adds, further, that agency “refers to the *capacity* to act, that is, to have the competence to speak or write in a way that will be recognized or heeded by others in one’s community” (p. 3, emphasis added). Such a capacity is radically contextual, contingent, and performative. As West (2010) argues: “Nothing is guaranteed in advance as subjects necessarily work in between the constraining and enabling conditions found in the contingent and the probable, whether they recognize it or not” (p. 160).

Bringing this concern with agency to a critical rhetorical engagement of diasporic Nuyorican<sup>4</sup> cultural production, I argue that everyday spaces like Diamente Garden evidence a kind of tactical, *tropicalized* (Aparicio & Chávez-Silverman, 1997b) agency that underwrites cultural citizenship in El Barrio/East Harlem. As one maneuvers the streets of El Barrio between First Avenue and Fifth Avenue, and 103rd Street and 125th Street, four distinct material forms emerge as tactical interventions in the neoliberal metropolis: painted murals, woven and painted flags, erected *casitas*, and planted gardens. These material forms “make do” (Certeau, 1984, p. 117) with the fissures of the built environment to craft literal and figurative spaces for/of a diasporic and unofficial Nuyorican culture. What is assembled by often-unnamed bricoleurs, however, is not wholly unproblematic—sometimes privileging liberal capitalist ideals and sometimes reinforcing unreflexively modernist nationalist sensibilities. Regardless of such pitfalls, the production of culture through what Certeau calls “the elocutionary experience of a fugitive communication” (quoted in Conquergood, 2002, p. 146) enacts a kind of tropicalization—a troping that imbues a rhetorical scene with an indelibly Latina/o ethos (Aparicio & Chávez-Silverman, 1997a, p. 8)—that accents everyday material forms in East Harlem and demonstrates a productive form of cultural citizenship (Flores & Benmayor, 1997b).

In advancing this argument rooted in communication theory, I seek to intervene in a literature about diasporic Puerto Rican cultural production in New York City, particularly the growing body of literature about murals and uses of space in East Harlem. Some of this scholarship, like Aponte-Parés’s (1995) “What’s Yellow and White and Has Land All Around It?” and Cardalda Sánchez and Tirado Avilés’s (2001) “Ambiguous Identities!,” does well to direct critical attention to the productive capacities and symbolism of Puerto Rican diasporic material culture. It remains focused, however, on how material culture produces, represents, and affirms identity rather than consider the ways in which they are productive of a particular set of social relations and capacities. To put it differently, existing scholarship functions through a representational logic (Greene, 1998a, b) that shows how Puerto Rican material culture communicates identity, but stops short of considering them as stylizations of power functioning as both (a) evidence of agency and (b) conditions of possibility for others’ agency.

This article develops over three sections in order to explore these related issues and offer a revised critical glimpse at Nuyorican cultural production through a theorization of rhetorical agency. First, I situate this study in the existing scholarly

literature and suggest how a critical perspective focused on rhetorical agency and tropicalization provides a differently productive critical heuristic for engaging the everyday material culture of El Barrio. Second, I examine four forms of everyday material culture (*casitas*, gardens, flags, and murals) to demonstrate the unfolding relationship between tactics, tropes, and agency. Finally, I conclude the article with further reflections on the implications of tropicalized agency, cultural citizenship, and everyday life on communication theory.

### **Cultural production, rhetorical agency, and tropicalization in El Barrio**

The literature on Puerto Rican cultural production in East Harlem is rich with thick description, critical interrogation, and occasionally polemical explication of the functionality of public art and uses of urban space. The greatest strength of this literature is the various authors' skill in explaining the different ways in which material cultural forms such as murals, paintings, and *casitas* all work to articulate Puerto Rican identity—or better yet, Nuyorican or Diasporican identity—to particular sociopolitical commitments, subaltern histories, and imagined communities. Scholars like Cardalda Sánchez and Tirado Avilés (2001), Aponte-Parés (1995), Wilkinson (2004), and Hernandez (2005) are at the forefront of these textual and artistic engagements.

Cardalda Sánchez and Tirado Avilés (2001) offer what is likely the most detailed and thorough engagement of recent murals in East Harlem. Through both close reads and more sweeping gestures, Cardalda Sánchez and Tirado Avilés argue that “murals are visual voices that represent an affirmation of puertorriqueñidad. Community muralism in El Barrio suggests a symbolic cultural resistance in the face of material poverty and spiritual desolation” (p. 264). As this passage makes clear, their interest is primarily in the representational and symbolic function of murals in defining a resistive Nuyorican identity. In this way, we can say that murals function as what Flores (1996) calls a “rhetoric of difference,” which “includes repudiating mainstream discourse and espousing self- and group-created discourse” (p. 145). LaWare (1998), in her analysis of Chicana murals, agrees when she argues that murals present “a different perspective on cultural identity and can ideally transform it from a marginalized, alienating identity, to one that is a source of pride and solidarity” (p. 143). It is problematic, however, that scholars like LaWare and Cardalda Sánchez and Tirado Avilés explain murals through a kind of scriptocentric lens.<sup>5</sup> That is, rather than explain and interpret murals as visual and spatial cultural materials, Cardalda Sánchez and Tirado Avilés resort to textualizing murals: “These visual *voices* convey a public *claim*, *written* in the walls; they express and articulate the imagery of a Puerto Rican cultural identity and project a determination not to be erased from history” (p. 264, emphasis added). Similarly, LaWare frames murals as visual arguments, which are epideictic but nevertheless propositional. Rewriting visual culture as propositional claim, however, risks missing some of its uniqueness; instead, we should find significance in its rhetorical form, visuality, and the fact

that its authors/artists/builders did not merely advance propositional claims (see Enck-Wanzer, 2006; Hariman & Lucaites, 2007; Mitchell, 1986).

Aponte-Parés (1995) is also concerned most with how Nuyorican cultural production, particularly *casitas*, function to articulate commitments to particular conceptions and practices of identity. As I mentioned in the introduction, Aponte-Parés argues that a *casita* “articulates and validates . . . Puerto Rican identity in space” (p. 8). More so than Cardalda Sánchez and Tirado Avilés (2001), though, Aponte-Parés is attuned to the material and constitutive functions of *casitas* themselves. “Building *casitas* is an act of reterritorialization that affirms the power of culture in space while offering resistance to further deterritorialization by appropriating place in the urban environment” (Aponte-Parés, 1995, p. 14). Deferring for a moment his implied, Certeau-esque distinction between space and place, Aponte-Parés’s focus on the embodied performance of building *casitas* is significant because it demonstrates a commitment to dealing with vernacular material culture on its own terms (Calafell & Delgado, 2004; Holling, 2008; Ono & Sloop, 1995). As Calafell (2007) reminds us, “if we are going to reach the texts produced by historically marginalized communities, we must meet these texts on their own terms methodologically. . . ; we must understand that they may not take traditional or dominant forms” (p. 7). Furthermore, Aponte-Parés eschews scriptocentrism by focusing on the symbolic implications of *casitas* rather than reducing them to argumentative propositions: “*Casitas* symbolically link the viewer to the values and meanings evoked, and ‘cross the borders of dreams and friendships’ . . . or in the words of Said, is an act that asserts ‘belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage’ affirming the home created by a community of language” (pp. 14–15). By linking *casitas* to a “community of language” but not disciplining one with the other, Aponte-Parés shows how we can theorize and critique Nuyorican cultural production and identity formation and their articulation to resistive space.<sup>6</sup>

Like Cardalda Sánchez and Tirado Avilés (2001) and Aponte-Parés (1995), Wilkinson (2004) seems most interested in Puerto Rican identity, but the difference lies in her chosen text: the Puerto Rican flag. Like Aponte-Parés, Wilkinson interrogates the constitutive implications of material culture when she argues “the placing of and playing with Puerto Rican flags constitutes a visual praxis of ‘*haciendo patria*’—a term loosely translated here to mean nation building” (p. 62). Bridging the physical with artistic appropriations of the flag, Wilkinson turns her attention to the visually complex art of Sánchez, who features the Puerto Rican flag in various contexts. Here, she argues: “Particularly for the visual artists, the act of representing Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans is a counterpoint to experiences of cartographic removal, geographic dispersal, and political invisibility” (p. 65). Like Cardalda Sánchez and Tirado Avilés, Wilkinson addresses representation, but she is keenly aware of the ways in which artistic appropriations of national symbols “reconstruct and reconstitute what has been deemed a divided, even fractured, nation” in the diaspora (p. 65). In this regard, Wilkinson also underscores the productive capacities of cultural art on its own terms; that is, she engages its symbolic (and therefore social) function *as* art intervening in competing visions of (rather than as support for or claims about) national identity.

Like Wilkinson (2004), Hernandez (2005) is interested in political art represented in paintings, but she also engages murals and sees both as part of the same new Boricua political art movement. Hernandez “focuses on the young artists working in New York and Philadelphia primarily, whose art explicitly advocates for independence” (p. 114). Unlike the scholars mentioned above, Hernandez does “not write as an observer, but as a participant who developed as a political artist within a movement of young, creative Puerto Ricans who, in light of 1998, bombarded the system with images that affirmed our nationhood” (p. 114). Like all of the scholars mentioned earlier, Hernandez focuses most broadly on the emergence of Nuyorican identity in East Harlem; and like Aponte-Parés and Wilkinson in particular, she is most concerned with the emergence and articulation of national identity through material culture. At the end of her essay, Hernandez posits that until the existent colonial structure is dismantled, artists “will continue [to] paint toward our liberation, providing consolation for our wounded political identity and inciting action” (p. 133). In a piece that is more descriptive and polemical (speaking from within a movement), Hernandez’s suggestion is that this art *works* beyond the representational frame as technology of power that positions subjects (viewers, other artists, etc.) to act or potentially act in certain ways.<sup>7</sup> Hariman and Lucaites (2007) would agree when they argue: “Public arts are prominent modes of display and sure to become things not noticed. . . . Yet even as such artworks fade from explicit view, every effort to communicate with the public creates something beyond itself. Art constitutes culture, and public arts constitute public culture” (pp. 25–26).

This point—the point at which attention begins turning to questions of agency, public culture, and, hence, citizenship—is where I seek to intervene in the discussion. For as industrious as all of these scholars’ engagements of cultural production in East Harlem are (and they *are* descriptively, critically, and theoretically inventive and compelling accounts), each aforementioned scholar’s primary concern with questions of identity stops him or her short of considering another dimension of the productive capacity of material culture. Shome (2003) urges us that “instead of treating identities as though they occur on the head of a pin, we have to recognize that identities occur not just anywhere, but *somewhere*; social agency is derived not just anywhere but *somewhere*” (p. 42). More importantly than “*somewhere*,” perhaps, is a consideration of *some way*. As I stated earlier, it is my contention that before we can fairly address the implications various identity constructions have on resistance, we ought to consider how material culture in El Barrio rhetorically reconstitutes agency in fundamental ways.

Lucaites argues that “every rhetorical performance enacts and contains a theory of its own agency—of its own possibilities—as it structures and enacts relationships between speaker and audience, self and other, action and structure” (quoted in Geisler, 2004, p. 13); thus, agency must be understood as radically contextual, contingent, related to form, and linked to performativity.<sup>8</sup> Agency is not, Rand (2008) argues, something one possesses: “neither texts nor rhetors ‘have’ agency separate from their contextual articulations” (p. 229). Gunn and Cloud (2010) would agree, writing that

the question of agency “presupposes that agency exists, but it does not necessarily isolate it in a discrete human being” (p. 73). None of this is meant to suggest, however, that people are divorced from agency; rather, it means that agency *as such* is a complex, articulatory, and recursive phenomenon. More than “the capacity to act” (Campbell, 2005, p. 3), agency is informed by and itself informs our material and symbolic world, “which is true,” argues Campbell (2005), “precisely because agency is constitutive of collectivities, whether temporary or persistent, fragile or powerful, just as collectivities are constitutive of agency, however paradoxical that may seem” (p. 5).

Taken together, Lucaites, Campbell, and others all underscore the contextual and performative character of agency. Rather than understand it as a given, or as inherently subversive (as some scholars seem to do with identity), these scholars understand agency in a sense that is more in tune with Burke’s (1969) dramatism: Agency is the means by which certain acts in certain scenes are enabled. It is neither inherently liberating nor inherently debilitating; it is, instead, an enabling mechanism that opens certain pragmatic and symbolic possibilities and closes down others. In Campbell’s (2005) words, it “emerges out of performances or actions that, when repeated, fix meaning through sedimentation. Agency equally emerges in performances that repeat with a difference, altering meaning” (p. 7). In this sense, agency leaves traces of itself on the scenes, acts, and agents involved, which means that its residue is always-already present and constantly being renewed and reformed.<sup>9</sup> As West (2008) suggests, “agency is not completely born anew in response to a rhetorical act and/or situation but is instead a psychic reservoir constantly and dialectically renewed against the accumulation of one’s experiences” (p. 247).

With his reference to such a psychic reservoir, West (2008) argues that “agency must be understood as a performative repertoire or embodied practice enabled by and negotiating the logics of recognition and domination” (p. 247). Performative repertoires are what Taylor (2003) calls enactments of “embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing—in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge” (p. 20). Although West is interested, rightly, in theorizing the ways in which one’s less-public experiences, their hidden transcripts, inform agency through the cultivation of performative repertoires (p. 256), the concept of repertoires seems to also beg us to grapple better with the element of *form* in the performative and how different forms enable different agencies.

Formally, the common thread that binds the materials I will address shortly (*casitas*, gardens, flags, and murals) is their *tactical* stance. Certeau (1984) distinguishes between strategies and tactics. “Just as in literature one differentiates ‘styles’ or ways of writing,” Certeau suggests, “one can distinguish ‘ways of operating’—ways of walking, reading, producing, speaking, etc.” (p. 30). These styles of operating rely on different “*modalities* of action,” which function primarily within a logic of strategy or a logic of tactics (p. 29). Certeau defines strategy as “the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject

with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated” (pp. 35–36). As such, Certeau aligns strategies with structures, institutions, mechanisms, and subjects that locate their agency in a known locus of power relations that authorizes particular practices and delegitimizes others. Furthermore, strategies are rooted in *place* in the sense that they become anchored to sedimented practices (symbolic or otherwise material) or hegemonic articulations (p. 36).

In contradistinction to strategies, Certeau (1984) aligns tactics with a temporal logic and spatial practice.<sup>10</sup> “[A] *tactic* is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. . . . The space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus, it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power” (pp. 36–37). As “an art of the weak,” tactics “accept the chance offerings of the moment” to “make use of the cracks,” and, if necessary, enact “a guileful ruse” (p. 37). In sum:

Tactics are procedures that gain validity in relation to the pertinence they lend to time—to the circumstances which the precise instant of an intervention transforms into a favorable situation, to the rapidity of the movements that change the organization of space, to the relations among successive moments of action, to the possible intersections of durations and heterogeneous rhythms, etc. (Certeau, 1984, p. 38)

Thus, tactics “make do” with the experience of marginalization to take advantage of weaknesses, fissures, inattention, and so on, to gain an advantage and transform a static place into a constituted space, which Certeau calls “practiced place” (p. 117). In other words, by “playing their performative repertoire,” Conquergood (1992) adds, “subordinate people can skirt patrols, elude supervisors, pilfer the privileged, and make end runs around occupying authorities” (p. 83).

As “an art of the weak,” tactics are used in particular moments to activate performative repertoires, craft spaces of resistance to the established order, and alter the capacity for others to act. More than merely “the capacity to act,” the tactical engagement of performative repertoires points to a particular character for that capacity that should be familiar to communication scholars. Burke (1969), for example, distinguishes between action and motion, suggesting that agency is different than the simple capacity to do something (p. 235). Similarly, Butler (1997) posits that agency is the enactment of “a purpose *unintended* by power, one that could not have been derived logically or historically, that operates in a relation of contingency and reversal to the power that makes it possible, to which it nevertheless belongs” (p. 15, emphasis in original). Like tactics, agency functions not outside of power relations, but from a position opposed to, unintended by, and (to a certain degree) unintelligible to those acting from strategic positions.<sup>11</sup>

The specificity of tactics in East Harlem, however, is central to the ethos of agency that is articulated and performed. In all of the examples I address shortly, the performative repertoires culminate in and through a tropicalization of East Harlem. Aparicio and Chávez-Silverman (1997a) define tropicalization “as a tool

that foregrounds the transformative cultural agency of the subaltern subject” (p. 2). Not Latinization, which is little more than a reappropriation of Latina/o culture “by the dominant sectors” (p. 3), tropicalization is, instead, a way of mapping *Latinidad* onto the rhetorical scene. “To *tropicalize*,” argue Aparicio and Chávez-Silverman, “means to trope, to imbue a particular space, geography, group, or nation with a set of traits, images, and values” (p. 8). Certainly, tropicalization can be hegemonic in the sense that it can reproduce marginalizing constructions of *Latinidad* or marginalizing social practices, like the commodification of Latina/o culture. In its more tactical, even radical, forms, though, tropicalization “emerges from the cultural productions, political struggles, and oppositional strategies deployed by some U.S. Latinos/as. The margins that bell hooks evokes as ‘sites of radical possibilities’ are the locations from which these *re-tropicalizing* tendencies are surfacing” (Aparicio & Chávez-Silverman, 1997a, p. 12). Tropicalization marks, in a sense, the attitude or critical thrust of performative repertoires evidenced in the material rhetorics engaged in this article. Tropicalization *accents* agency.<sup>12</sup>

### Tropicalizing El Barrio: *Casitas*, gardens, flags, and murals

Given the already existing literature on cultural production in East Harlem, it should go without saying that cultural forms such as *casitas*, gardens, flags, and murals all implicate identity in some significant ways. Whether we understand them to function as “visual voices,” acts of re-/deterritorialization, a “visual praxis of *haciendo patria*,” or as “consolation” and “incitement,” there seems to be little disagreement that material culture in El Barrio engages the problematic of identity/difference. I want to ask a slightly different set of questions, though: How does cultural production in El Barrio enact, key, or articulate tropical performative repertoires of/for rhetorical agency? How might it slip from tactic to strategy and thereby be differently productive? What are the social and cultural implications of these agentic engagements for identity and citizenship? With these guiding questions in mind, I offer a provisional engagement of *casitas*, gardens, flags, and murals in East Harlem in order to begin teasing out and demonstrating some agentic implications. Although it is hard to separate them in some instances (i.e., murals and flags appear within gardens and on *casitas*), I will address each cultural form relatively separately for the sake of considering how they might each function a little bit differently. I have been careful to pick examples that are representative, both for the sake of my analysis and so that readers unfamiliar with El Barrio get a sense of the material rhetorics; that said, what is important about this analysis is not the individual examples, but their general performance or stylization of tropicalized agency and its implications for cultural citizenship. Furthermore, it is important to note that the read presented here is only one possibility, limited by my own perspectives and open to revision based on others’ critical engagements. Indeed, as Valdivia (2004, 2008) and Holling and Calafell (2011a) have demonstrated, the breadth of perspectives in Latina/o communication studies would point to other compelling interpretations.



**Figure 1** *Casita* on 111th Street near Lexington Avenue in East Harlem. Photographs by the author.

This *casita* (Figure 1) stands strong in El Barrio, surrounded on all sides by much larger buildings; or it did as of my last visit to East Harlem in August 2007. I am unsure, however, if it remains, for when I was photographing it, a man greeted me at the fence separating it from the street. As we talked, he disclosed that he had appropriated this space in the 1970s, but he was unsure how much longer he would remain given the pressures of gentrification.<sup>13</sup> Regardless, for this *casita* to stand the test of time as it has is testament to its creative and powerful deterritorialization of space and articulation of a complex and inclusive Latinidad.

“In the case of the ‘casitas,’” argues Flores (1997), “entire neighborhoods across generational and many other lines are drawn together by way of sharing in the enactment of collective cultural memory” (p. 191). Although certainly illustrative of a kind of cultural memory, the space is, perhaps, better thought of as thoroughly tropicalized. Although obviously and prominently Puerto Rican (as is evident from the noticeable placement and repetition of the Puerto Rican flag and other Puerto Rican icons, like Albizu Campos), it is decidedly Nuyorican and Latina/o in its use of pan-Latina/o icons (e.g., the Virgin Mary), multinational flags (Cuban and U.S., in addition to Puerto Rican), and Afro-Caribbean imagery (the woman’s mask above the Indio sign). It tropes and accents the empty lot in a way that imbues it with a sense of historical Latina/o-ness while still cognizant of the urban environment (e.g., the flags stuck in the chain link fence).

It is undeniable that *casitas* such as this one, as Aponte-Parés (1995) suggests, impart “identity to the urban landscape by rescuing images, *rescatando imágenes*, by

alluding to the power of other places everybody recognizes, feels good about, and can identify with” (p. 14). That said, at least as much significance arises from the different tactical modalities deployed in its assembling. On one level, the reappropriation of the once empty lot (a place) into a space occupied by a *casita* (a particular stylization and practice of the place) demonstrates a tactical sensibility that models a form of action and rhetorical agency challenging the neoliberal city from within its confines. According to Flores (2000): “Casitas mark off ‘alternative spaces,’ scenes, and practices which diverge from and as such challenge prescribed arrangements and uses of social space” (p. 75).

On another level, its deterritorialization functions tactically in the ways in which it assembles (like a bricoleur) a complicated identity.<sup>14</sup> That is, in not *merely* reproducing Puerto Rican iconography, this *casita* stretches the boundaries of identity and challenges the almost tidy cultural nationalist articulations of Puerto Rican or Nuyorican identity. Although, as Ramos-Zayas (2003) notes, “nationalist narratives, projects, and iconography . . . are actually responsible for generating spaces of contention and denunciations of internal subordination” (p. 5), there is danger in their hegemonizing force; and *casitas* such as this seem to recognize those dangers and temper strong cultural nationalism with multinational inclusiveness. Such a challenge to identity, though, is itself a figuration of agency insofar as it acts (symbolically) in ways contra to hegemonic conceptions of the self and helps to redefine the spaces of citizenship. As Pineda and Sowards (2007) note in a different context, symbolic activities claiming social space are “necessitated by limited space for participation and expression and critical to locally rooted enunciations of citizenship” (p. 170). Enunciation in this instance relies on a tropicalization of space—on a (re)figuring of neoliberal exploitation found in the original empty lot and its transformation into a space for Latina/o cultural citizenship.

In contradistinction to *casitas*, many of the gardens throughout East Harlem officially function as part of a program (called GreenThumb) designed to beautify the urban landscape and make use of vacant lots. According to a sign at numerous gardens: “Founded in 1978, GreenThumb helps local residents transform vacant properties into attractive green spaces.” To be sure, the addition of green space certainly helps to break up the endless concrete and asphalt of Gotham. That said, these gardens do so much more. According to Dávila (2004), “cities are central to understanding the cultural politics of multiculturalism, the formation of new forms of participatory politics, and the potential realization of a just multicultural society” (p. 15). *Casitas*, flags, murals, and gardens contribute to this multicultural politics in El Barrio because, in every instance, they exceed their articulations as simple green space.

Like *casitas*, community gardens in El Barrio function as a deterritorialization of space. In this sense, they implicate agency similarly—by constituting a space through a particular stylization of place found in its reappropriation, recapturing, and troping of vacant lots—through tropicalizations. Their particular stylizations are different, though: Rather than romantically remember the architecture of the

homeland (regardless of how much *casitas* might challenge any simplistic reproduction of Puerto Rican identity), community gardens in El Barrio are even more uniquely Nuyorican. They are, in some ways, more referential to their geographical positionality; because they are green spaces amidst the concrete of the city, they are inherently marked/keyed/accented as artificial and constructed spaces within the urban environment. That constructedness is promising insofar as it serves as a constant reminder of the work necessitated by agency, reactivating performative repertoires that are rooted in spatial particularity and temporal contingency.

The product of these gardens (i.e., their symbolism beyond their performance as spatial intervention), however, is perhaps more ambiguous. While the *casita* addressed above challenges static articulations of (nationalist) identity, one possible read of these gardens sees them as less liberatory. For example, the garden on 118th Street and 3rd Avenue (Figure 2) may naturalize identity by articulating Puerto Rican iconology (flags, etc.) to nature (plant life in the garden). The gardens, then, risk becoming organic representations of El Barrio that reify Nuyorican identity by linking it to apparently natural and nonsocial plant life. Such a construction of identity may constrain agency insofar as it limits and naturalizes a metaphorically rooted sense of self. This sense of self can reproduce what Hall (1989) would call a conventional Western view, one that presumes a stable subject and sustains a logic of a “true self.” Hegemonic tropicalizations like this can reproduce dominant and dominating epistemologies and authorize problematic agencies like oversimplified and exclusive identity politics (e.g., recent conflicts between Puerto Ricans and Dominicans). Although they certainly exemplify what Laó-Montes (2001) calls “*latinization from below*”—processes of Latina/o “self-fashioning that arise from resistances against marginality and discrimination and as expressions of a desire for a definition of self and an affirmative search for collective memory and community” (pp. 17–18)—one ought to at least question these tropicalizations’ relationship to potential naturalizations before celebrating them as inherently “resistant” identity performances.

The gardens on 103rd Street and Park Avenue and 104th Street and Lexington Avenue (Figure 2) challenge such naturalizations, to a certain extent. For example, the garden on 103rd is set against a gigantic (three-story-tall) mural integrating, almost seamlessly, images of Puerto Rico and El Barrio. Against that painted backdrop (including a Puerto Rican flag) lies the garden and two erected flags: the U.S. flag and a rainbow flag, emblematic of the gay/lesbian/bi/trans/queer (GLBTQ) community. Here, we have Puerto Rican, Nuyorican, U.S., and GLBTQ co-articulated to the natural(ized) space. In doing so, it challenges a singular sense of identity by visually and spatially linking disparate identity positions; but I wonder if it is not still naturalizing and reifying identity through its articulation (through an active process by which it is linked) to nature.<sup>15</sup>

Then again, perhaps taken together the garden and its constituent parts disrupt an articulation of nature and identity as fixed due to the way it is accented as constructed. It could be that the icons of Puerto Rican identity featured in the gardens serve as



**Figure 2** From right to left, top to bottom: 103rd Street and Park Avenue, 104th and Lexington Avenue, and 118th Street and 3rd Avenue. The garden on Lexington is the most active garden in El Barrio. Photographs by the author.

an ironic commentary on the ways in which Puerto Ricans have been “primitivized” in official and imperial discourses (see Bourgois, 1995; Santiago-Valles, 1994). For example, the presence of “nature” within the manufactured urban space of El Barrio can act as a vital “Other” vis-à-vis the concrete and asphalt.<sup>16</sup> As such, it may function to generate an antagonism (see DeLuca, 1999; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985) that marks the limits of this articulation and resists the final suture and totalizing stability of identity, whether defined in the center or periphery. There is no easy answer, which is part of the point. Identity and agency are enmeshed in a complicated and complicating process filled with tensions, paradoxes, and polysemic enunciations, which address the various ways in which agency authorizes and undermines competing identities and politics. There is no single read of the gardens, just as there is no single performance of identity. Rather, these tropicalizations enable internally complex identities and politics that are always “emergent” (Williams, 1991, p. 416) and represent what Grossberg (1992) would call a “structured mobility. . . , the condition which makes both stability and mobility possible” (p. 108). Such complicated agencies emerge, again, once we turn attention to the presence and deployment of the Puerto Rican flag in El Barrio.

Whether worn, displayed, or painted, there is an entire symbolic economy of flags in El Barrio. In fact, in virtually every *casita*, garden, or mural—not to mention tacked outside apartment windows, flown on poles, and worn on t-shirts or pinned to lapels, jackets, or backpacks—the Puerto Rican flag is featured prominently and often repeatedly. Created in 1895 and made to be the color-inverse of the Cuban flag



**Figure 3** From left to right: flag on a woman's basketball jersey, Puerto Rican and U.S. flags on artwork in garden on Lexington Avenue, flag atop a fence outside an appropriated/reclaimed lot, and U.S. and Puerto Rican flags draped outside an apartment window—all in East Harlem. Photographs by the author.

(in a show of solidarity with their struggle of independence from Spain), the Puerto Rican flag has a century-long history of usage as a symbol of national pride and identity (Wilkinson, 2004, p. 72). *La bandera* arguably approaches a level or degree of fetishism given the frequency and intensity with which it is deployed—something on which I had to reflect carefully before getting my own tattoo featuring the icon.

Although *la bandera* on the Island, in its official capacities, is semiotically and materially below the U.S. flag, such a visual structuration of power is never displayed in El Barrio.<sup>17</sup> In the second image in Figure 3, for example, we see *la bandera's* placement and repetition on equal footing with the U.S. flag, with their miniature poles intertwined and interlocking in a piece of public artwork. Such a stylized deployment of the two flags is not uncommon in El Barrio and constitutes a rejection of the colonial hierarchy and a tropicalization of key national signifiers. In the fourth image, however, we see both flags together but hierarchically arranged. Rather than placing the flags on a level terrain, *la bandera* is placed above the U.S. flag. While it certainly *could* be the case that the resident simply flipped a coin to determine flag placement, given the existing symbolic economy, I cannot find that answer compelling. More likely is that the flag is placed above the U.S. flag in an inversion of that old colonial semiotic relationship. Similarly, the third image (featuring *la bandera* alone and set against razor wire) appears in the context of a host of miniature Puerto Rican flags—almost a symbolic rejection of U.S. American identity and reaffirmation of Puerto Rican identity. In all these instances, *la bandera* tropes El Barrio in a manner that positions agency as oppositional (to long-standing colonialisms, to the harshness of neoliberalism's protection of property), and marks the community as independent territory and a safe haven for practices of cultural citizenship.

The flag in the first image functions similarly, but with an added dimension of personalization. Literally wearing the flag in a display of pride in one's identity potentially mobilizes the symbol (literally) in a manner that marks not just social spaces but specific people as part of a particular community. In a context dominated by *la bandera*, however, the symbolic economy of the flag may become less symbolic and more literal. Bought, sold, and worn as clothing, the consumption of the flag risks depoliticizing its signifying value. Such commodification presents a problem.

“As Stuart Hall theorizes,” echoes Negrón-Muntaner (2004), “commodification also decontextualizes, supplants, and even crushes popular practices in ‘the constitutions of a new social order around capital’” (p. 29). Although, in contemporary culture, there is no cultural practice outside of the market or market interests (Jameson, 1998, p. 135), “politics is never limited to state or economic relations” (Grossberg, 1992, p. 98); but at a certain point, *la bandera* risks moving from vehicle of radical tropicalization to the instrumentality by which an oppressive consumer capitalism overtakes Nuyorican culture and politically evacuates its symbols.

Taken together, and with all of the hundreds if not thousands of other examples blanketing El Barrio year-round, I am left with ambiguous feelings about how *la bandera* is mobilized. It is unquestioningly a distinct marker of identity that evokes incredible affective attachments (on affect, see Grossberg, 1992, pp. 69–88). The ethos and complexity of that identity, though, ought to be open for question because we should not presume the mere existence of “cultural” rhetorics to be resistive (Ono & Sloop, 1995; Shome, 2003). In some instances, the flag seems to articulate romanticized longing for the homeland. In other instances, the flag is deployed in a multifarious interweaving of images and icons articulating a complex, unstable identity. In still other instances, it seems to implicate a kind of commodity fetishism. Such hegemonic tropicalization is productive of agency, but it is an agency that hardly seems tactical or resistive. When not part of a slightly larger cultural context (*casitas*, gardens, murals, canvas paintings, etc.), flags can take on an almost privatized quality; so while they are visible in public, they sometimes function as an expression of individualism and resist being tied to public oppositionality or resistance. Placed in another visual and material context, flags continue doing productive and provocative agentic work in murals around El Barrio.

In her engagement of Chicana/o communities, LaWare (1998) argues that “[v]isual images, particularly mural images, have played an important role in participating in the construction of a ‘homeland,’ in defining a cultural and communal identity . . . particularly in urban areas” (p. 141). Murals are, perhaps, the most visually and spatially complex of the examples of cultural production and tropicalization featured in this article, the implications of which exceed consideration of identity. A diverse set of material rhetorics, they range in style, placement, and form in significant ways. Sometimes they are featured as parts of *casita* spaces or gardens (Figures 1 and 2); more often than not, however, they are placed alone or along with other murals. Sometimes they are easy to decode (as in the top mural in Figure 4); other times they are so loaded with symbolism as to be almost staggeringly complex (as in the Edgar mural); and still other times they are deployed by commercial entities to tap into the “ethnic market” in East Harlem (as in the Rite Aid example). Like the Chicana murals Latorre (1999) engages, these murals construct “new cultural forms reflecting a fluid community that constantly and continuously forms and redefines itself” (p. 107).

Regardless of function, murals are probably the clearest example of tropicalization in El Barrio—of the visual troping of space to accent it with a particular ethos. Like the flags, murals unquestioningly invoke and tap into identity and identification;



**Figure 4** From top to bottom, left to right: mural of Pedro Albizu Campos and Ernesto “Che” Guevara, mural on the side of construction barriers that is signed “Edgar 07,” Rite Aid featuring muraling on its side and front. Photographs by the author.

sometimes, though, they do so in problematic ways. In her brilliant work on marketing in El Barrio, Dávila (2004) argues: “The important differences between these systems of signification, however, are the objects and treatments of culture, and the different ends to which such identity is being deployed” (p. 183). Like Shome (2003), Dávila wants to resist the tendency of presuming emancipatory politics at the simple appearance of marginal identity. In the examples in Figure 4, we see identity being deployed in vastly different ways with significant impacts on agency, transforming place (a brick wall and construction barriers) into space—a metaphorical canvas on which the possibilities of identity, political subjectivity, and action are revised.

In the first mural, the symbolic connections between the Cuban and Puerto Rican flags are further articulated to two iconic revolutionary figures (Albizu Campos and Che Guevara) in a manner that visually resists division through the intertwining of colors and images. The rich text helps to illustrate further the point that postrevolutionary Cubans and Puerto Ricans are enmeshed in the same struggle for independence from an imperialist United States. The mural, then, contextualizes people’s experiences in El Barrio within histories that authorize, even demand political sensibilities and the *vita activa*. It further binds people in the present to the history of resistance in El Barrio led by people like the Young Lords, who used similar images in their grassroots organizing and protests (Enck-Wanzer, 2006, 2010).

The Edgar mural is even more visually complex, with the bleeding/melting *bandera* blinding the vision of Lady Liberty on the backdrop of an obscured and partially erased pre-/post-9/11 New York (are those the Twin Towers on the left?); and it is all

punctuated (though not anchored) by the text, “EL Barrio/N.Y.C. . . /IN GOD/WE TRUST/ProTeCTed/from/cAPiTAL/MInds.” The use of irony (protection) and its articulation to a blinded and perhaps guilty Lady Liberty is potentially a profound critique of the U.S. connection to a project of Empire (in the Hardt and Negri sense). It is most certainly a visual reminder of Nuyoricán activism that included Puerto Rican nationalists draping the flag from the Statue of Liberty in 1977 and Vieques protesters doing the same in 2000.<sup>18</sup> Both murals, and others like them, demonstrate a certain tactical sensibility both through their *form* (including where they are painted, their temporal sensitivity, and their inventive performative repertoires) and *content* (their complex and complicating treatment of identity).

The Rite Aid mural and other commercial murals, however, perhaps are more problematic. By tapping into the visual repertoire of muralists, commercial entities contribute less to identity formation than they tap into static notions of identity and its attendant stale symbolism to advance economic self-interest through the bonds of identification. Such a deployment as marketeering invokes, Dávila (2004) argues, potentially troubling “relationships with other visual forms and modes of signification through which residents have built community and inscribed meaning into their neighborhood” (p. 183). Although tropicalizations like the Rite Aid mural and other commercial murals visually trope the space of El Barrio, they do so at the risk of turning identity into a commodity and activating consumerism as the locus of agency—much in the same way *la bandera* can function. The mere reproduction of Latina/o icons and emblems is not *necessarily* good; to the contrary, it potentially can be damaging to more engaging forms of cultural production, like the other murals, *casitas*, gardens, and flags mentioned above.

### **Conclusions: Tropicalizations, rhetorical agency, and cultural citizenship**

This brief study is one contribution to ongoing conversations among Latina/o scholars and critical communication theorists. Scholars like Cardalda Sánchez and Tirado Avilés (2001), Aponte-Parés (1995), Wilkinson (2004), and Hernandez (2005) have provided compelling engagements of Puerto Rican cultural production in East Harlem and added in one way or another to our developing understanding of identity formation, resistance, and their relationship(s) to the urban environment. Despite being the second largest Latina/o group in the United States (Dockterman & Velasco, 2010), though, Nuyoricans and Puerto Ricans are rarely the subject of rhetorical scholars’ critical engagements or theoretical advancements (Holling, 2008). In this article, I have sought to redirect temporarily our attention to theoretical questions about rhetorical agency, in part because I believe those questions may help us understand better the communicative significance of material culture in identity formation and identification.

Without first asking questions about *capacities for* and *means of* action, scholars risk unreflexively celebrating as resistive any Latina/o cultural product. The theoretical contribution this article makes, then, is to join tropicalizations, tactics, and

rhetorical agency, which enables scholars to see the implications that *forms* like *casitas*, gardens, flags, and murals have on Nuyorican political agency and rhetorical agency more broadly. The uniqueness of form “represents a distinctive stylization of power” (Enck-Wanzer, 2006, p. 191) that *is* resistive insofar as it denies formal rhetorical “complicity” (McPhail, 1994) by materializing tropicalization as a means and end of Nuyorican cultural production. Thus, *casitas*, gardens, flags, and murals (far from being transcendental forms) “exist in the differential and competing relations among the historical forces at play”; they “exist conjuncturally” (Grossberg, 1992, p. 123) to generate a set of political and identity possibilities in contradistinction to dominant (Anglo-American) society. Tropicalization’s challenge is, first, instrumental in the sense that it is a tactical modality of action (Certeau, 1984) undergirding performative repertoires (Conquergood, 1992; Taylor, 2003; West, 2008), which challenge marginalizing cultural formations. Second, tropicalization’s challenge is constitutive (Charland, 1987; Greene, 1998a); more than a means to an end (social change), I read it as transformative of the rhetorical scene itself (it challenges the social), making possible a “latinization from below” (Laó-Montes, 2001) that mobilizes residual culture into an emergent temporality (Williams, 1991). This article’s shift in critical/theoretical focus from rhetoric or Latinization writ large to tropicalizations challenges current theoretical formulations of rhetorical agency, then, by highlighting rhetorical form, underscoring its connection to identity, and enriching rhetorical approaches to agency in the context of Nuyorican and Latina/o vernacular discourses.

In rhetorically troping the space of El Barrio, tropicalizations are, in themselves, agencies that enable certain possibilities (for identity, politics, action, etc.) and preclude others. The tropes, Campbell (2005) might say, “are ‘inventors’ in the rhetorical sense, articulators who link past and present, and find means to express those strata that connect the psyche, society, and world, the forms of feeling that encapsulate moments in time” (p. 5). Inventional performative repertoires in El Barrio craft a rich Nuyorican (and sometimes pan-Latina/o) imaginary that constitutes the scene and agents within an unfolding social drama. “The imaginary articulates more than a reflexive response to negative conditions and unfavorably weighted relations which, though oppositional, is a response still ultimately mimetic and confined to extrinsically set terms,” Flores (1997) argues. “It . . . harbors the elements of an alternative ethos, an ensemble of cultural values and practices created in its own right and to its own ends” (p. 189; see also Calafell & Delgado, 2004, p. 2). Such an imaginary informing and informed by tropicalizations is, in turn, productive of cultural citizenship because it articulates modes of being in public that operate outside the “universal emancipating claims” (Mignolo, 2007, p. 454) of rule-of-law liberalism.

Cultural citizenship plays in the juxtaposition of and tensions between its terms, cautioning “us against assuming that either culture or citizenship is all-encompassing” (Flores & Benmayor, 1997a, p. 6). In the words of the term’s originator:

Cultural citizenship operates in an uneven field of structural inequalities where the dominant claims of universal citizenship assume a propertied white male

subject and usually blind themselves to their exclusions and marginalizations of people who differ in gender, race, sexuality, and age. Cultural citizenship attends, not only to dominant exclusions and marginalizations, but also to subordinate aspirations for and definitions of enfranchisement. (Rosaldo, 1997, p. 37)

As such, cultural citizenship functions as a particular manifestation of vernacular discourse, which as Calafell and Delgado (2004) demonstrate, outlines how Latina/o “communities may articulate their vernaculars to be affirming and generative of their communities, given relations within a dominant culture” (p. 6; see also Holling & Calafell, 2011b; Ono & Sloop, 1995). As a species of vernacular discourse, cultural citizenship participates in a recursive relationship with rhetorical agencies that both underwrite and result from its emergence.

At the risk of belaboring the point, the relationship between agency and cultural citizenship is important. “Agency is critical to the concept of cultural citizenship,” argue Flores and Benmayor (1997a). They continue:

[I]t reflects the active role of Latinos and other groups in claiming rights, “of claiming what is their own, of defending it, and of drawing sustenance and strength from that defense.” Thus, “a key element of cultural citizenship is the process of ‘affirmation,’ as the community itself defines its interests, its binding solidarities, its boundaries, its own space, and its membership—who is and who is not part of its ‘citizenry’.” (p. 13)

In outlining the contours and boundaries of the community, cultural citizenship can be understood as both the means and outcome of agency. The specific agencies through which cultural citizenship comes about—marked by distinctive tropicalizations of/through *casitas*, gardens, flags, and murals—demonstrates what Flores (1997) characterizes as “a unity fashioned creatively on the basis of shared memory and desire, congruent histories and meshing utopias” (p. 188).

El Barrio’s turn to cultural production and other tropicalizations as part of the available performative repertoire should, in some ways, come as no surprise given Puerto Rico’s history as colonial subject and object (Cabán, 1999; Córdova, 2008; Grosfoguel, 2003; Santiago-Valles, 1994). Negrón-Muntaner (2004) suggests, for example, “the richness of *boricua* cultural production and discourse is, to a great extent, a result of the constraints placed upon Puerto Rican economic and political agency” (p. 5). As this analysis of four elements of the Nuyorican performative repertoire shows, sometimes those constraints on agency are hard to break and the capacity to act remains limited by a colonial past and a “lite colonial” present (Flores, 2000, pp. 31–48). Other times, however, tropicalizations disrupt those constraints through a rhetorical agency marked by a “flexibility and adaptability” that Sowards (2010) argues enables “a rhetor to experiment, adapt, and resist dominant and normative rhetorical structures” (p. 240). The resulting, and in turn enabling, cultural citizenship provides a productive terrain through which to better understand and interpret the implications of Nuyorican cultural

production and tropicalization for identity and for envisioning more productive futures.

## Notes

- 1 The Young Lords were a revolutionary Nuyorican organization operating out of New York City from 1969 to 1972. For an overview of the organization, see *The Young Lords: A Reader* (Enck-Wanzer, 2010).
- 2 According to the sign, which appears on every such garden in the city: “Founded in 1978, GreenThumb helps local residents transform vacant properties into attractive green spaces.”
- 3 Obviously, this is a generalization for which one could no doubt find numerous exceptions. The point is, however, that in the broad realm of critical and cultural communication studies, this tendency exists. For two key exceptions, see Calafell and Delgado (2004) and Ono and Sloop (1995).
- 4 Nuyorican is a term used, demographically, to refer to New-York-based Puerto Ricans. Beyond demographics, Nuyorican also captures the specificity of an “imagined community” that is unique from (even if connected to) Puerto Ricans elsewhere. As such, it is my preferred term; but I use “Puerto Rican” in reference to some other scholarship when it is those authors’ term of preference, or when I refer to people/culture/history in Puerto Rico itself.
- 5 On scriptocentrism and the “hegemony of textualism,” see Conquergood (2002).
- 6 Rinaldo’s (2002) work on space in Puerto Rican Chicago is also illustrative of this kind of critical-theoretical attitude. For example, Rinaldo argues that a “colonized, marginalized group expressing collective identity, asserting a right to self-definition through cultural representation through physical space, seems to be some form of resistance to colonial domination” (p. 166).
- 7 I am thinking, here, of Foucault’s (1990) notion of power. Foucault’s “The Subject and Power” (2000), though, is a more thorough treatment of the topic, especially given his insistence that power (which is relational and processual) is conceived most accurately as action (symbolic action?) on another’s actual or potential current or future actions.
- 8 I acknowledge that Lucaites is addressing verbal (written or spoken) rhetoric, here; but even his own scholarship extends well beyond the verbal in scope. See, for example, Hariman and Lucaites (2007).
- 9 Gunn and Cloud interpret this as a dialectical process. See Gunn and Cloud (2010).
- 10 West’s (2010) recent essay on time, space, and coalitional politics is another take on how this can be worked out theoretically. Phillips’s (2006) engagement of the “rhetorical maneuver” focuses on the articulation of subjectivity and the enactment of agency from a strategic frame.
- 11 West (2008) also makes a turn to Butler, though without the focus on tactics.
- 12 On accenting, see Bakhtin (1981).
- 13 For a masterful account of the problematics and complexities of gentrification in El Barrio, see Dávila (2004). It was unclear to me how long, exactly, this *casita* had been there, but the man claimed he had been in that space for almost 30 years.
- 14 The “bricoleur” is central, in some ways, to Certeau’s (1984) discussions of the practice of everyday life.

- 15 I would have similar questions about the garden on Lexington Avenue in that it also appropriates emblems and icons of Puerto Rican, Nuyorican, and U.S. culture while simultaneously anchoring those symbols to the natural environment and other pieces of art.
- 16 I am deeply indebted to the astute observations of an anonymous reviewer for this insight.
- 17 In my experience conducting fieldwork in El Barrio, the only thing that comes close to contradicting my statement is the rare instance of a U.S. flag displayed by one neighbor in an apparent effort to challenge the placement of a Puerto Rican flag by another neighbor. From what I have heard by residents, this became more prominent post-9/11 and emerged out of increased tensions between the few remaining long-standing Italians in the neighborhood and Nuyoricans and other Latina/os. This evidence is anecdotal, but I find it compelling given the symbolic economy of *la bandera* and the history of ethnic tensions in El Barrio and in post-9/11 New York.
- 18 For images of the 1977 flag-draping, see <http://peoplesguidetonyc.blogspot.com/2009/12/statue-of-liberty.html>. For images from the 2000 protests against U.S. bombings on the island of Vieques in Puerto Rico, see <http://www.endex.com/gf/buildings/liberty/solnews/solyah110700.htm>.

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## 纽约黑人区的热带化：话语机构、文化公民和波多黎各文化生产

### 【摘要：】

本文通过批判地论述纽约厄尔巴里奥/东哈莱姆区文化生产/物质文化的各种形式，建议传播学者挑战性地研究机构和身份之间的关系，从而扩大我们对在拉丁语境中修辞机构的理论认识。本文认为日常空间使典型的厄尔巴里奥文化在战术的、热带化的话语机构中得到充分的保证

。小屋、花园、旗帜和壁饰与环境都为离散的和非官方的新波多黎各文化“勉强”打造了字面和隐喻的空间。生产成就了一种热带化和不可磨灭的拉丁民族精神中浸透的修辞场景的比喻——它们出现在东哈莱姆区日常的物质形态中，并表现文化公民的生产形式。

## **La tropicalisation d'East Harlem : agentivité rhétorique, citoyenneté culturelle et production culturelle « nuyoricaine »**

En traitant d'un point de vue critique différentes formes de production culturelle ou culture matérielle dans El Barrio/East Harlem, à New York, cet article met les chercheurs en communication au défi d'explorer le lien entre agentivité et identité, développant ainsi notre compréhension théorique de l'agentivité rhétorique en contextes latino-américains. Ce texte affirme que les espaces quotidiens attestent d'une agentivité rhétorique tactique et tropicalisée qui soutient la citoyenneté culturelle dans El Barrio. Les *casitas*, les jardins, les drapeaux et les murales « font avec » les fissures de l'environnement bâti pour produire des espaces littéraux et figuratifs de, et pour, une culture « nuyoricaine » diasporique et non officielle. La production rhétorique de la culture met en pratique une sorte de tropicalisation (un trope qui imprègne des scènes rhétoriques d'un éthos latino-américain indélébile), ce qui accentue les formes matérielles dans East Harlem et démontre des formes productives de citoyenneté culturelle.

Mots clés : agentivité rhétorique, culture nuyoricaine, études latino-américaines, tropicalisation, citoyenneté culturelle, communication urbaine

## **East Harlem wird tropisch: Rhetorische Agentschaft, kulturelle Bürgerschaft und nuyorikanische Kulturschaffung**

**Am Beispiel der Kulturschaffung/materiellen Kunst in El Barrio/East Harlem, New York, halten wir in unserem Artikel KommunikationswissenschaftlerInnen dazu an, die Beziehung zwischen Agentschaft und Identität durch die Erweiterung unseres theoretischen Verständnisses von rhetorischer Agentschaft auf den Kontext der/des Latina/o, kritisch zu untersuchen. Wir argumentieren, dass alltägliche Räume ein Beweis für eine planvolle, tropikalisierte rhetorische Agentschaft sind, welche die kulturelle Bürgerschaft in El Barrio aufzeigen. In Form von Wohnungen, Gärten, Fahnen und Wandbilder werden in den Lücken der bebauten Umwelt reale und figurative Räume für eine diasporische und inoffizielle nuyorikanische Kultur erschaffen. Diese rhetorische Kulturproduktion verkörpert eine Form der Tropikalisierung – die Färbung rhetorischer Szenen mit einem bleibenden Latina/o-Ethos – welcher die alltäglichen Dinge in East Harlem betont und produktive Formen kultureller Bürgerschaft verdeutlicht.**

**Schlüsselbegriffe: rhetorische Agentschaft, nuyorikanische Kultur, Lateinamerika-Studien, Tropikalisierung, kulturelle Bürgerschaft, urbane Kommunikation**

## 아열대화되고 있는 동부할렘: 수사적 기관, 문화적 시민 그리고 푸에르토리코계의 문화적 생산

### 요약

뉴욕의 엘 바리오와 동부 할렘지역에서의 다양한 형태의 문화적 생산과 물질적 문화에 비판적으로 연계하는것으로서, 기구와 동질성 사이의 관계를 연구하게 하는데 목적이 있는바, 이는 커뮤니케이션 학자들로 하여금 라티노 문맥에서의 수사적 기구의 이해를 확대하는 것에 의해 실행되었다. 본 에세이는 일상의 공간들이 엘 바리오에 있는 문화적 시민권을 승인하는 전략적인, 그리고 아열대화하는 수사적 기구를 증명한다고 주장하고 있다. 카시타스, 정원들, 깃발들, 그리고 벽화들이 비공식적인 푸에르토리코 문화를 위한 공간으로 역할을 하고 있다. 문화의 수사학적 생산은 일종의 아열대화로서 작용하는데, 이는 동부할렘지역에서의 일상적인 물질적 형태이며, 문화적 시민권의 생산적인 형태들을 증명하는 것이다.

## **La Tropicalización del Este de Harlem: La Agencia Retórica, la Ciudadanía Cultural, y la Neoyorquización de la Producción Cultural**

### **Resumen**

Mediante la participación crítica en varias formas de producción culturales/ materiales de cultura en El Barrio/Este de Harlem, en Nueva York, este ensayo desafía a los eruditos de la comunicación a explorar la relación entre la agencia y la identidad, y expande nuestro entendimiento teórico de la agencia retórica en los contextos Latinos. Este ensayo arguye que los espacios diarios evidencian una táctica, agencia retórica tropicalizada que asegura la ciudadanía cultural en El Barrio. Casitas, jardines, banderas, y murales “se arreglan” con las fisuras del medio ambiente construido para hacer espacios literales y figurativos para/de una cultura de diáspora no oficial Neoyorquina. La producción retórica de cultura representa un cierto tipo de tropicalización—un tropo imbuido de escenas retóricas con una ética indeleblemente Latina/o—que acentúa las formas materiales diarias del Este de Harlem y demuestra formas productivas de ciudadanía cultural.

Palabras claves: agencia retórica, cultura Neoyorquina, Estudios de Latinas/os, tropicalización, ciudadanía cultural, comunicación urbana