

Memory in Motion: UrbanTheater Company's *Back in the Day* and the Chicago Latinx Dance Crews of the 1980s

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The rain on Division Street is coming down in sheets. It's 7:30 on a Saturday night, October 26, 2019, and I'm waiting for my friend, George, in the vestibule of the UrbanTheater Company's (UTC) performance space in Chicago. We're here for a performance of the UTC's original immersive play, *Back in the Day: An 80s House Music Danceical (BitD)*, a nostalgic look at the 1980s dance scene in Humboldt Park, based on the two-volume memoir, *The Real Dance Fever*, by José "Gringo" Echevarría.¹ The last time George and I hung out on this stretch of Division Street was back in the early 80s when we were attending Roberto Clemente High School. Now known as Paseo Boricua between Western Avenue on the east side and California to the west, the historic district is marked by the fifty-nine-foot tall Puerto Rican flag sculptures that serve as steel archways under which pedestrians and automobile traffic pass in either direction in this area of the Humboldt Park neighborhood. Back in the day, before Paseo Boricua, neither George nor I spent more time than we had to on Division Street, mostly in passing on our way to and from school. The turf wars between the Disciples and the Latin Kings often got hot in that area, and even during the day while walking toward Division along Western, there were times my cousin Cindy and I had to duck behind parked cars to avoid bottles and bricks flying across from the Disciples' turf on the west side to the King's neighborhood on the east. Police also regularly stopped and frisked Black and Latinx youth in this neighborhood, something I experienced first-hand. I was always careful to avoid mistakenly wearing something that signaled gang affiliation, although the color of my skin and economic background were usually enough for me to become a target for police harassment. It was also in this neighborhood where George and I used to watch The Culitos dance crew practice their routines

in the Clemente courtyard, and at least once we had to scatter because the gangs were targeting someone there for a beat down, and another time because someone yelled out, “La hara, La hara!” (The cops, the cops!) when a police squad car was spotted nearby. Hanging out on Division Street was always risky. Since then, many changes have taken place, including Paseo Boricua and the establishment of new Puerto Rican restaurants, cultural centers, and performance spaces.

This essay looks at that era and those dance cultures through an analysis of the play *BitD* and some of the narrative elements of José “Gringo” Echevarría’s self-published memoirs on which the play is based, as well as some of my own recollections about what it meant for queer and questioning Puerto Ricans and Blacks to turn to these forms of embodied expression as modes of empowerment and attempts to create alternative kinship networks. I follow Patricia Ybarra’s call for “[...] a mode of reading Latinx plays that always links content to aesthetics and political critique to form” and that emphasizes “movement and spatiality within the stage space because of the deep histories of migration, diasporic movement, and displacement within many Latinx cultures that find residence there” (49). The choreography in the play and the narrative descriptions of the dance crews in Echevarría’s memoirs convey a kinesthetic empathy that engages readers and audience members in what media artist and literary scholar Svetlana Boym calls a “reflective nostalgia” of an era and a community that has up until now been absent from the Latinx artistic and performance archive. By contrasting stillness with movement—the way a House Music track transitions from a break to a powerful crescendo—and by creating an immersive theatrical experience, the dance musical production and Echevarría’s memoirs position the nostalgic audience in a critical space where memory is set in motion as an embodied phenomenology and where an unwritten history is articulated through rhythm and dance as well as staged and improvised movement.

The UTC and Latinx Theater in Chicago

The UrbanTheater Company’s multi-purpose space is located on Division Street between Rockwell and Washtenaw. Founded in 2005 as Teatro Urbano by Marilyn Camacho (one of the founding members of the Latina group Teatro Luna), Madrid St. Angelo, Ivan Vega, Ramses Jiménez, Blas Ortiz, and Remy O’Brien, the UTC began producing canonical Nuyorican plays like Miguel Piñero’s *Short Eyes* (1974), *The Sun Always Shines for the Cool* (1976), and *Eulogy for a Small Time Thief* (1977). On their website’s “About Us” page, their mission states:

UrbanTheater Company is committed to centralizing the power and talents that are innate in every person to tell their communities [sic] stories. We serve as a pipeline for a diverse and culturally specific collective of Chicago actors, designers, and producers who embrace the responsibility to create an environment full of honesty, integrity, representation, and acceptance. We create innovative and accessible theater that challenges Eurocentric styles and training.

In 2013 the UTC made its location on Paseo Boricua its permanent home and entered into collaborations with local restaurants, such as Papa's Cache Sabroso and the iconic Nellie's Restaurant, to offer Teatro Thursdays and Sunday Brunch 'N Play. Along with Teatro Vista, a theater company in the Lakeview neighborhood founded by Edward Torres and Henry Godínez, the UTC is a member of the Chicago Latino Theater Alliance (CLATA). They performed *BitD* as part of their 3rd Annual International Latino Festival in 2019. In its sixteen seasons, the UTC has produced plays by other well-known Latinx playwrights, such as Carmen Rivera, Migdalia Cruz, and Nilo Cruz, but more recently has focused on producing works by Chicago-based artists such as Miranda González, Gwen La Roka, and Guadalís del Carmen.

On March 19, 2020, I interviewed UTC's current artistic director and in-house playwright, Miranda González, also one of the founding members of Teatro Luna, who joined UTC in 2016 to direct Carmen Rivera's play *La Gringa*.² She first met UTC co-founder Ivan Vega when they appeared in a production of *Bodas de sangre* with the Aguijón Theater Company. Miranda says that members of the Latinx theater scene, both locally and nationally, are "always intertwined": "If you're an artistic leader in Latinx theater, you know the other leaders across the nation." Invited by Vega to join UTC as artistic director, Miranda met with the other members of the production crew "to see if they were aligned about what they wanted to do with UTC." For Miranda, it was important not only to produce plays by Puerto Rican writers about the Puerto Rican experience, but also to

make sure we are living up to our tagline: From the streets to the stage, but I asked from what streets are these? The history of work we have done was not from our streets. I knew the impact of what it is to really reach your community. Yes, producing Puerto Rican playwrights is important and that does speak to our community in Humboldt Park, but what if they saw themselves, really saw themselves in the work. So that's where we started and that's where we began with our first commission of *Not for Sale* [by Chicago native Guadalís del Carmen].

The UTC performance space is located near other cultural and community centers such as the Juan Antonio Corretjer Puerto Rican Cultural Center, La Casita de don Pedro y doña Lolita, and the Vida/SIDA Center, which provides HIV prevention services to the Latinx LGBTQ+ community. The area boasts numerous murals from artists such as Gamaliel Ramírez, Cristian Roldán, and Sam Kirk, all of which contributes to efforts that have characterized the Puerto Rican community's economic and cultural transformation of Humboldt Park while engaging in an ongoing anti-gentrification campaign that aims to preserve the Puerto Rican history of this neighborhood through art, architecture, and performance (Flores-González 9).

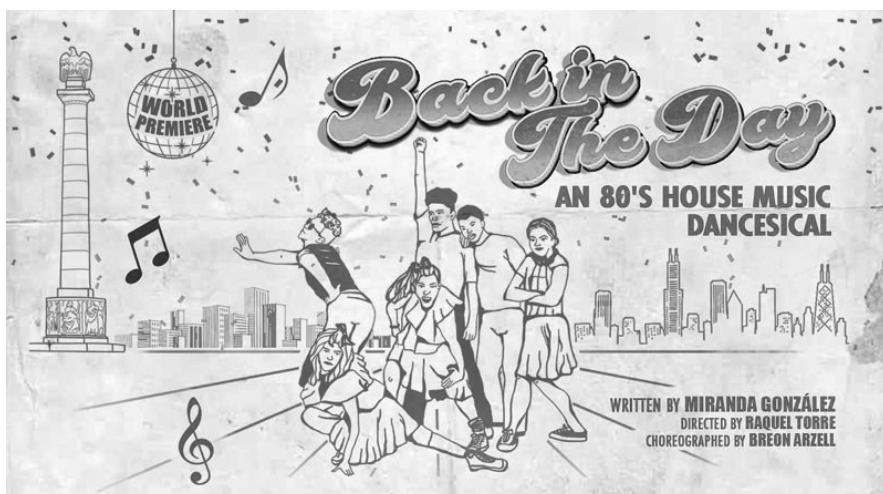
Although UTC is currently the only Latinx theater company based in Humboldt Park, it was preceded by the groundbreaking Latino Chicago Theater Company, which started in 1979 and eventually took ownership of an abandoned firehouse in Wicker Park and converted it into a performance space and community center until a fire destroyed the building in 1997 (Page 80). (I not only remember Latino Chicago's commedia dell'arte and Mexican *carpa*-inspired "cartooning" performances, but I also played a small role in their production of Bruce Jay Friedman's *Steambath* in the late 80s.) Priscilla Page writes: "UrbanTheater Company and Latino Chicago Theater Company are a part of an intricate constellation of Latina/o/x theater artists who have been making important theater in Chicago for the past four decades. This work has gone underrepresented as a part of Chicago's theater history and our nation's theater and cultural history" (3). In the broader Latinx theater scene in Chicago, UTC's mission and production history reflect what José Castro Urioste calls a "double volition: on the one hand, the desire to build a location within the new space—Chicago—and contribute to its transformations; and on the other hand, the need to establish a 'mark'—a Latino thing—that is not homogeneous, but rather expresses different meanings according to the origin of the group and its relationship with the new space" (199). Performances at the UTC not only offer the audience theatrical depictions of the Puerto Rican experience in the diaspora, but also compel the spectators to immerse themselves in site-specific, embodied knowledge about the history of this community and its attempts to preserve its heritage in the city.

Scholarship on the Puerto Rican community in Humboldt Park and the Near Northwest Side of Chicago includes foundational texts in LatinX studies, such as Felix Padilla's *Latino Ethnic Consciousness: The Case of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans in Chicago* (1985) and *Puerto Rican Chicago* (1987). Scholars such as Ana Ramos-Zayas, Frances Aparicio, Lawrence La

Fountain-Stokes, Lourdes Torres, Gina Pérez, Mérida Rúa, Jacqueline Lazú, and Jonathan Rosa have contributed a significant body of work that examines migration, diaspora, race, ethnic identity, sexuality, labor, political activism, education, bilingualism, and forms of cultural expression in Chicago's Puerto Rican community. Marc Zimmerman has had a long-standing commitment to publishing literature and promoting art written and produced by Chicago's Puerto Rican writers and artists, particularly in his book, *Defending Their Own in the Cold: The Cultural Turns of U.S. Puerto Ricans* (2011). The *Centro Journal*, published by Hunter College's Center for Puerto Rican Studies, has devoted two special issues to Chicago's Puerto Rican neighborhoods—one in 2001 and another in 2016—with articles on the history of Paseo Boricua, the social and labor movements of women and community activists, gentrification, and demographic displacement. Ramón Rivera-Servera and Richard T. Rodríguez have also contributed recent scholarship on Chicago's queer Latinx and Puerto Rican performance and nightlife cultures. By focusing on UTC's production of *BitD*, my contribution to this body of scholarship explores how an immersive performance archives a particular chapter in the history of Chicago's Puerto Rican community by mobilizing embodied knowledge from multiple perspectives and positionalities.

The 80s Dance Crew Scene

On that rainy October night when George and I returned to Division Street after many years, we braved the pouring rain and cold temperatures to see the UrbanTheater Company's production of *BitD*, a play that depicts the LGBTQ+ dance scene of the early 80s, when groups like The Culitos, The All Stars Dancers, and Imported Taste, among others, ruled the area high schools as taste makers and the party crowd.³ The early 80s were ushered in by the so-called Disco Demolition orchestrated by rock DJ Steve Dahl in 1979 at Chicago's Comiskey Park, at which hundreds of disco records were detonated on the field, sparking a riot of mostly straight, white fans. Nevertheless, dance music was far from dead and the 80s also saw the emergence of the Chicago House Music scene at clubs like The Warehouse and The Music Box, venues that attracted queer Black and Latinx dancers and partiers. House Music and the Hot Mix sound that was broadcast on radio stations like WBMX and WGCI were also part of the club scene and youth culture in the Puerto Rican and Latinx neighborhoods on the Near Northwest Side: Wicker Park, West Town, Humboldt Park, and Logan Square. The early 80s were a transitional moment for both the Chicago dance music scene and LGBTQ+ youth of color, whose



Playbill captures the look of the old school flyers and posters. Image reproduced with permission.
Designed by Elena Magdalena.

creative energies and experiments in fashion and style have not received a significant amount of critical or scholarly attention.

The Near Northwest Side dance crews of the 80s and early 90s in Chicago included cisgender and Trans Puerto Rican, Latinx, and Black members, some of whom were queer and others heterosexual. Although the play includes a Trans cast member, the awareness and acceptance of Trans people were still at a formative stage in 1980s Chicago. A memorable chapter of Echevarría's memoir, for example, recounts his early childhood experience of meeting a troupe of Trans and drag performers at his uncle's theater, the now defunct San Juan Theater on Division Street. Although this early encounter serves as one of the catalysts that inspires Gringo to pursue dance and performance as a form of artistic expression, the performances in this case reflected Latin American sensibilities of gender identity, which were still very much based on binary and essentialist categories.

For the most part, during their performances, the dancers in these crews like The Culitos and the All Stars Dancers assumed either cisgender or androgynous forms of embodiments through their clothes and hair, but there was more gender fluidity in their kinesthetic repertoires. The crews formed around a central leader and a core group of founding members who recruited new dancers at the various eighteen-and-over "juice bars," high school dances, and house and block parties, where the racially diverse, working-class youth could be seen jacking and freestyling to House, Eurodisco, Latin Freestyle,

New Wave, and underground dance music. For example, some of the artists on regular rotation at these different venues included Shannon, Loleatta Holloway, Yaz, Lime, and Liquid Liquid, whose tracks appear on the *BitD* playlist. Micha E. Salkind chronicles the Chicago House Music scene of this era, although his focus is on the Black clubs on the South Side, like The Warehouse, the birthplace of the House Music sound that eventually took the city and the globe by storm (Salkind 51-68). The Near Northwest Side scene integrated Puerto Rican, Latinx, and Black dancers and partiers, and the dance crew style resembled choreographies like those in Michael Jackson's *Thriller* video. There was also a constantly changing repertoire of steps and dance moves that were popular among all the dancers at clubs and parties, and the crews often included these steps into their elaborate, high-energy routines.

While being a member of one of the crews established alternative kinship networks and provided a more accepting space for queer and questioning youth, the competitiveness and cliquishness of the crews often led to tensions and fights, which were mostly resolved in one-on-one battles on the dance floor. It also led, however, to an exclusionary culture that privileged certain crew members at the clubs, and members often congregated on the dance floor and claimed a section as their own turf, preventing other non-crew dancers from entering these protected zones.



New members of The Culitos were initiated by paddling. Image reproduced with permission. Photo by Kenny Cordero.

Very similar to the New York drag ball houses chronicled in the documentary film, *Paris Is Burning*, and depicted in the FX television series, *Pose*, the Chicago dance crews of the 80s gave voice to and provided a space for queer and questioning youth of color through performance, music, and fashion. Yet like those NYC houses, the Chicago dance crews often reproduced the hierarchical social relations characteristic of street gangs. In fact, as the UrbanTheater Company production of *BitD* depicts, some of the dance crews had direct contact with the street gangs, and drug trafficking, sex work, and petty larceny were part of the scene as well. The growing and diverse body of scholarship cited above provides key insights into how Chicago's Puerto Rican community intersects and sometimes enters into tensions with other ethnic and cultural groups in the city, as well as with the broader Puerto Rican diaspora and the culture and politics of the Puerto Rican archipelago.

Echevarría's two-volume memoir and Miranda González's script frame the nostalgic portrayal of the 80s dance crew scene from Gringo's adult perspective. Both works use structuring devices to articulate the way present-day circumstances shape how and why the characters remember the past as a collective memory. Collective memory, as it has been theorized by sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, emerges from the discursive articulation of the relational self, and that individual memory "is not completely sealed off" (Halbwachs 51). Echevarría's memoir clearly calls on the voices of his family and dance crew members to sustain his own as he fights not only for a place in history but also for his very life after a serious illness and hospitalization. Likewise, the play written by Miranda González, directed by Raquel Torre and choreographed by Breon Arzell, summons the embodied experience of dance as a repertoire of movement that also contributes to the formation of collective memory and the relational self.

Performing Nostalgia through Dance

Unlike the memoir, the play does not begin with Gringo's health crisis, but with a different prologue of sorts in the vestibule when the manager takes our tickets and explains the "house" rules. He instructs the audience that the play will encourage us to stand and move around to follow the action. He also provides a trigger warning that some scenes will depict violence and suicide, and that the special effects include a simulated gun shot and flashing lights. This prepares the audience to immediately engage with the performance space as active participants. The manager welcomes the audience as if we were entering Jenals, the dance club featured in the production. Posters and

flyers hang in the vestibule and reproduce the look of the era, announcing the performance as if it were a dance battle at the club.

The performance space provides limited seating to encourage the audience to move about and participate in the action. The stage is set up to look like a dance floor/club. The audience sits in a few folding chairs arranged on a riser situated adjacent to the entrance. The chairs face and look down on the dance floor. The walls and floor of this seating area are painted black. The riser leaves an open space near the front, which serves as a dance and performance stage for some of the scenes. There is also seating available on a long bench along the righthand side of the dance floor, as well as on an old sofa upstage left. There is a narrow doorway upstage center that leads to a backstage area. There is a small table with a bowl of red punch placed downstage near the main entrance. In the upper corner of the wall, adjacent to and on the left-hand side of the doorway to the backstage, a square opening represents a loft space that is used for intimate scenes between the characters. The wall stage left has four mirrored panels and a large whiteboard that includes graffiti. Some of the actors come out before the start of the show and encourage audience members to write anything they want on the wall with dry erase markers that are placed on the floor near the whiteboard. Because George and I attended a performance late in the production run of *BitD*, the white walls were covered with all kinds of graffiti, some reproducing the 80s-style tagging with which gangs and the dance groups claimed a space in their neighborhoods, others bringing us to the present with denunciations of Trump and defenses of Black Lives Matter and the Dreamers movements.

The house DJ, sitting on a raised platform and working the turntables, welcomes the dancers and the crowd and announces the reminder for audience members to turn off their cellphones: "If it's not from this era, it's not in this area!" He starts cranking *Let the Music Play* by Shannon, while the actors perform a staggered entrance onto the stage/dance floor and directly engage with the audience, some of whom have already started dancing on their own in pairs or small groups. Two female actors come up to where George and I are sitting on the long bench stage right. They encourage us to hit the dance floor, saying, "Who comes to a club to sit down?" Once we get up and start dancing along with other actors and audience members, the music suddenly stops and the actors begin their scripted dialogue with each other. The audience members either sit back down or move off to the edges of the stage/dance floor to watch the action. As with other transitions between scenes, the music serves to distinguish not only a change in location but also



Dancers hit the floor. Image reproduced with permission. Photo by Kenny Cordero.

a shift from memories of the past to staged encounters in the present. In this case, the audience members who briefly participate in the opening dance sequence are immersed in an embodied, reflective nostalgia and then are quickly repositioned as spectators of a staged interaction that takes place in the present.

The opening, immersive dance scene shifts to a dialogue between Gringo and Carlos, one of the former All Stars Dancers who later starts his own crew in the Mexican neighborhood on Chicago's South Side. Now adults, the characters encounter each other after an extended time apart pursuing their own lives and building

their own families. Neither the dialogue nor the stage directions reveal much about the circumstances of their reencounter.⁴ Near the end of this scene, Carlos says, "Looks like they are almost finished in there. You need a ride." It isn't until the very end of the play that it is made clear the adult characters reunite in a series of short scenes like this one because they are at the hospital to visit Troy, Gringo's best friend and leader of one of the rival dance crews, Imported Taste. The play does not reveal why Troy is in the hospital as an adult, but in the memoir, where this character appears under the name of Ty, the reader learns that he is in the hospital because of pain and shortness of breath, but he also reveals to Gringo that he has contracted HIV/AIDS, or as he calls it, the "bird flu" (Echevarría, *The Real Dance Fever, Book Two* n.p.). The play, then, frames reflective nostalgia as "a memory walk. When the past comes up and kisses the present" (González 5). According to Svetlana Boym in her book, *The Future of Nostalgia*, a "reflective nostalgia cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporalizes space" (49). Unlike "restorative nostalgia," which imagines the past as an incorruptible truth that must be restored in the present, Boym characterizes "reflective nostalgia" as ironic and humorous and "reveals that longing and critical thinking are not opposed to one another, as affective memories do not absolve one from compassion, judgment or critical reflection" (49). Boym also associates reflective nostalgia

with collective memory, which is often invoked through “imaginary dialogues with dispersed fellow citizens, expatriates, and exiles” (Boym 52).

Both Echevarría’s memoir and González’s play use their narrative and theatrical devices to cast the reflective eye of the present toward the memories of the past. Although it is revealed later in the play that Gringo has also been in the hospital, it is not made clear why, nor is it depicted in such detail as it is in Echevarría’s opening and closing memoir chapters. While the memoir utilizes a first-person, omniscient narrator to convey the collective memory of the 80s dance crew scene, the play uses choreography and dialogue to spatialize the reflective nostalgia that the characters share through the staged rencounters in the present. The play also calls on the audience members to participate in the invocation and performance of this collective memory, whether they actually shared in those experiences during the early 80s or are encountering this dance scene for the first time. From its very title, *BitD*, the play puts out a call to those members of the community who have first-hand experience with the dance scene of the 80s, as when old friends reunite to reminisce about their past exploits. The titular phrase also enters into dialogue with a younger generation, as when an older sibling recalls how things used to be “back in the day.” This multivocal invitation to put memory in motion articulates both the pleasurable affect and critical scrutiny of reflective nostalgia. Patricia Herrera describes a similar engagement with embodied repertoires in her analysis of the Culture Clash’s *Nuyorican Stories*; she writes, “[...] the body in motion is a metaphor of the polyvalence inherent in Latinx identity that allows members in the audience to belong to a community despite their national, ethnic, or racial differences” (76). In *BitD*, the multiple perspectives and diverse repertoires of kinesthetic engagement reflect the unstable and often unreproducible contingencies that reshape the past to give it meaning in our present-day circumstances and contemporary queer, Latinx identity formations.

Creating Empathy through Embodiment

Even in a traditional dance performance, spectators use different interpretive strategies that reflect the expectations and motivations that emerge from their cultural capital, habitus, and experiences. In “Kinesthesia, Empathy, and Other Pleasures,” Matthew Reason and Dee Reynolds argue: “The concept of interpretive strategies suggests that when engaging with dance, individuals are motivated by the hopes, rewards, and pleasures they want to find within a work” (66). Through oral interviews with spectators from different

cultural and class backgrounds, the authors inquire about their reactions to various dance performance styles and traditions, from classical European ballet to Indian Bharatanatyam, to modern and experimental dance. They analyze their findings through contemporary dance theory, which examines the relationship between the performance and the experience of the spectator as a kind of “inner mimicry” or “kinesthetic empathy.” That is, not only does the spectator engage with the dancers’ movements through an awareness of their own bodies, but also as a projection of their experiences that precede the performance, which allows for diverse and sometimes contradictory affective interpretations of the dance: “This embodied anticipation can involve changes in the postural condition of the muscles without actual movement taking place” (Reason and Reynolds 66).

When considering the performance of *BitD*, the audience experiences this anticipation from different temporal and spatial vantage points. On the one hand, as young spectators who encounter this 1980s dance culture for the first time, the audience participates bodily as part of a contemporary entertainment event. On the other hand, as nostalgic participant observers, whose own memories are projected on the immersive experience, the older audience’s aging bodies are spatialized in a kinesthetic recreation of the 1980s club scene. The different interpretive strategies are activated and deployed through the combined movements of the dancers and audience members, and their bodies open the performance space to an intersectional kinesthetic experience. As Reason and Reynolds conclude in their own study:

The consideration of pleasure alongside that of kinesthesia allows us to recognize that for one spectator the empathetic response might be to allow themselves to be bodily carried away by an escapist flow of movement, while for another it is to feel viscerally involved in an awareness of effort, muscle, and sinew. (72)

The diversity in empathetic responses also appears in the critical reception of the play. An early review by Marissa de la Cerda of a work-in-progress performance in June 2019 criticized how the dance sequences undermined the serious issues such as gang violence and HIV/AIDS, yet Janaya Greene writing in *The Chicago Reader* and Lauren Emily Whalen in *The Windy City Times* offer enthusiastic reviews of the October 2019 performances. In her interview with me, Miranda González disclosed that the October performances brought in close to 90% new material in comparison to the June performances, which could account for the difference in critical reception. She noted that the most active audience participants were the local area high school students,

who learned the dance steps on the spot and connected with the performance as if they were members of the dance crews. However, she also commented on how the play was not “Jeff Recommended,” which makes a production eligible for Chicago’s prestigious Jeff Awards.⁵ González commented that the Jeff committee attendees—whom she described as “old white people”—did not participate in the immersive experience and chose to remain seated for the entire performance. “That was not their thing,” González recounted, “and I had to be okay with that”.⁶ Unlike with more traditional, proscenium staging, *BitD*’s performance demands from its audience an embodied engagement with the voices, visions, and movements of those Puerto Rican, Latinx, and Black youth whose stories have, up until now, been missing in the archive of Chicago’s history and remain unacknowledged by the city’s dominant cultural institutions.

The audience at the performance George and I attended was diverse in race, gender, and age, yet none of these demographic identities necessarily determined how much the audience members actively participated in the show. Among the many Latinx and Black audience members, a dark-skinned gentleman in his fifties who walked with a cane sat for the entire performance, obviously because of his mobility issues. Could he have belonged to one of the dance crews back in the day? He seemed to know quite a few of the other members of the audience and theater production. Meanwhile, a white couple in their late twenties started dancing before anyone else, and the young man showed off some hip-hop moves and high kicks throughout the performance. They could easily be part of the recent wave of the newer residents in the gentrifying Humboldt Park/West Town area, which has included artists, young entrepreneurs, and urban professionals in the tech industry (Mumm 110-11). George and I met a white woman around our age who grew up in the suburbs but was now involved with another local theater company in nearby Wicker Park. We danced together at the beginning and end of the performance and reminisced about the club scene in the Eighties. While George and I remembered Jenals, Northwest Hall, and the neighborhood block parties, she recalled Medusa’s, Neos, and the Smart Bar, which were part of the concurrent punk and alternative scenes. The performance generated a layering and elision of temporalities and spatialized embodiments, in which the kinesthetic empathy of dance was both experienced and performed by the audience. The site specificity of the performance space produced new, embodied knowledge about the history of Paseo Boricua/Division Street and the contributions of the LGBTQ+ community to Chicago Boricua culture,

but that new knowledge emerged most compellingly when the audience members embraced the opportunity to use their whole bodies as part of their immersion in the play.

González's script for *BitD* loosely follows the episodes in Echevarría's memoir. The action is divided into several vignettes set in the 1980s, with flashforwards to the characters' present-day adulthood in which they reunite after many years. One scene simultaneously stages several mini-dramas between two or more characters on different parts of the dance floor. The lights dim and the actors perform make-out scenes, changing from one partner to the other and moving across the stage to engage in their next hookup. Sometimes these smaller groups also engage with the audience. The cast encourages the audience to judge the dance battles with their applause, as if they were at Jenals. The cast also moves the audience from one side of the stage to the other when the actors transition to a different scene. This obligates the audience to stand and move around to see what is happening. This is especially true for the dance battle scenes, wherein the circle of audience members crowded around the actors reproduces the effect of trying to see the dance crews challenge each other spontaneously on the dance floor.

This element of competition and conflict resolution in the 80s dance crew scene is consistent with, but also distinct from, the queer utopian em-



Rival dancers battle it out. Image reproduced with permission. Photo by Kenny Cordero.

bodiments and kinesthetic resources that Ramón Rivera-Servera describes in his performance studies analysis of Latinx dance clubs in the mid to late 90s. Based on his participant observations of queer Latinx dance clubs in New York and Texas, Rivera-Servera theorizes the utopian possibilities of improvisation on the dance floor. Dancers perform and improvise in these spaces as a bodily quest for liberation, not only from the day-to-day routines of the work week, but also as a way to inhabit and share a safe space from homophobia and racism. However, like most commercialized social spaces, Rivera-Servera argues that LGBTQ+ dance clubs “must still address the structures of dominance that still seep into this ‘safe haven.’ In doing so, they rehearse strategies by which to survive collectively” (*Performing Queer Latinidad* 150). In both Echevarría’s memoir and Miranda’s play, the 80s juice bar Jenals—an eighteen and over dance club that was once located on Fullerton and Pulaski Avenues in Chicago—is portrayed as a safe space for the members of the dance crews not only because of the gender, sexual, and racial diversity that finds its intersectional articulation on the dance floor, but also because it was a place where young, working-class Latinxs and Blacks could find a respite from the gang conflicts and violence that created hostile and sometimes deadly conditions for gender non-conforming teenagers in the neighborhood. The play engages with this aspect of life in Humboldt Park during this era mainly through the character of Carlos, a straight, Mexican American member of Gringo’s All Stars who also tags graffiti throughout the city, thus making him the target of gang bangers who use graffiti as a visual boundary marker and declaration of dominance in a particular neighborhood. The play also portrays a moment when shots ring outside the club and everyone scatters to find safety, demonstrating, as Rivera-Servera argues, that this safe space is “temporarily limited” and not an impenetrable sanctuary from conflict and violence.

Rivera-Servera’s thick descriptions and analyses of “kinesthetic resources” also shed light on how the dance club offers opportunities for creating communities through dance: “The exchange of ‘kinesthetic resources’ is one of the many behaviors that dancers negotiate within the realm of the club. Through this exchange, dancers also negotiate their identities and desires” (*Performing Queer Latinidad* 155). González’s *BitD* recreates this community of exchange through its immersive staging, so that the audience participates in the sharing of kinesthetic resources. However, both the memoir and the play foreground the economic and exploitative aspect of the dance club, which exists as a profit-driven enterprise that capitalizes on the lack of viable,

queer friendly spaces for working-class Latinx and Black youth during the early 80s in Chicago. In the play, and especially in the memoir, the owner of Jenals is portrayed as a cold, calculating businessman who favors The Culitos over the other crews and supposedly rigs the dance battles so that they always win first place. The memoir further explores this form of economic exploitation in Book Two, when Gringo organizes a reunion performance for all the crews, but the former owner of Jenals returns from Miami to undermine the event and organize his own dance crew reunion, taking advantage of the renewed interest in Chicago House Music and the dance cultures of the early 80s. Furthermore, Echevarría describes his early experiences with his uncle and older brother, both of whom were entrepreneurs in the local Latinx entertainment industry. He is aware very early on of the commercial and professional aspects of dance clubs and the performing arts. Although the memoir and play convey the kinds of utopian communitarianism that Rivera-Servera theorizes, these depictions of the 80s dance crew scene also reveal the way these safe spaces are made possible through the pursuit of profit as much as the search for “strategies of survival and performing queer *latinidad* as an alternative mode of being” (*Performing* 165).

Furthermore, the narrative devices in Echevarría’s memoir and the performance of *BitD* reflect on and engage in the kinesthetic resources of the 80s dance crews from the perspective of loss, illness, and death. These works depict and embody the characters’ youthful exuberance and search for belonging with an urgency to archive a collective memory that is at risk of erasure. Both works also address HIV/AIDS and include the eventual suicide of Shane, one of the dance crew members. The scenes that depict Shane’s battle with AIDS symptoms and the aftermath of his suicide demonstrate how the musical creates different temporalized spaces through stillness and movement. These consecutive scenes are choreographed to two versions of Loleatta Holloway’s *Love Sensation*, first the full track and then an acapella version. The song accompanies Shane in his desperate struggle with the disease—“[d]rowning,” as Miranda González’s stage directions describe—but also wanting to snatch at a piece of life from those depths, just as the memoir and play attempt to recover this community and its collective memory from historical and archival death (*BitD* 47).

A Loving Sensation

We discover Shane has AIDS and is suffering not only from the debilitating symptoms of the disease, but also from his family’s homophobia

and ignorance. As previously mentioned, the set design, by Harrison Ornelas, includes a small loft space on the upper level, upstage left. The small square opening in this upper corner allows the audience to see intimate moments between the characters. In one early scene, we see Shane and another dancer sharing a sexual encounter in the loft space, while the other actors are staging simultaneous scenes below—dancing, partying, and flirting—on the main stage/dance floor. The exposition of Shane's illness also occurs in this loft space. We see him talking about his symptoms to two of the other dance crew members, Leach and Alma. The action takes place in the early to mid 1980s, when HIV/AIDS was just starting to impact the Black and Latinx LGBTQ communities in Chicago. There were many myths and misconceptions about its causes and how it was spread. We see Shane and his friends exchange their thoughts, fears, and even gallows humor about the disease. Shane also describes how his conservative, religious family has shunned him and restricted him to live in the attic, which the loft space comes to represent in this scene. Suddenly, we hear a voice-over of Shane's mother shouting loudly from off stage, "Shane. Dinner." Shane's mother, fearing infection, has avoided all contact with him and only places his plate of food at the bottom of the attic steps. Alma produces a plate of what looks like rice and beans from behind the loft space and places it in front of Shane, who cannot eat it due to his loss of appetite but also because of the loveless and dehumanizing way in which it is served, as if he were a prisoner in solitary confinement rather than a member of his biological family.

As in the proleptic scenes that flash forward to the present, the scenes in which Shane shares intimate moments in the loft space convey a range of affect through stillness and physical proximity. In the proleptic scenes staged throughout various key moments in the plot, the use of the spot light focused on the one or two actors in dialogue with each other, as well as their close physical proximity, enhances the affective registers conveyed by the pauses in the action, from playful reminiscences of youthful experiences to cold recriminations for past slights. Likewise, the scenes with Shane in the loft space depict erotic pleasure and sexual exploration, as well as a quarantining of his queer body and a rejection by his biological family.

It is only through Shane's chosen family in the dance crew that he breaks free from that physically and socially marginalizing space. The musical uses a series of choreographed sequences to convey his acceptance and freedom through hyper-kinetic movement. Following the scene in Shane's attic room, the actors emerge from backstage, which is really positioned center stage

in the theater space, and they whoop and holler as they dance to Loleatta Holloway's *Love Sensation*. Perhaps one of the most sampled songs in modern dance music, *Love Sensation* is a classic of the late disco era for its pounding beats, soulful and soaring vocals by Holloway, and the spiritual uplift of the lyrics. The song also serves as a touchstone in the debates and controversies over music artists' rights to their own voice or musical virtuosity. Holloway won a lawsuit against the Italian producer of the dance music group Black Box for sampling her voice without attribution, even producing videos and live performances in which a young model lip synced to Holloway's original vocals. "At the time, I thought Loleatta Holloway was dead," claimed Black Box producer Daniele Davoli when the vocal trickery was uncovered (Perrone n.p.). Its use to stage Shane's emergence from confinement and his eventual death also follows the patterns of movement and stillness that the musical stages to establish kinesthetic empathy with the audience at multiple levels.

First, the song generates high energy and conveys the optimism, joyousness, and freedom the audience sees as Shane and the other actors emerge from backstage dancing raucously to the beat. The group meets and merges with a second group of actors who move to center stage, also dancing and laughing loudly. As the two groups converge, the audience assumes the role of fellow partiers and patrons of Jenals, the club space where this action is being staged. Just as back in the day, when the members of the dance groups would congregate on the floor to declare their arrival and presence, shouting out their group's name—Culitos! All Stars! Imported Taste!—as well as showcase their best moves, the other club patrons would circle around to see the dance battles and improvised choreographies. During these impromptu gatherings, in which the members of the dance crews would take over a section of the floor, the other patrons became spectators who had to crane their necks or move to a better spot to see the action. The musical performance in this play stages this recreation of the club scene to simultaneously integrate the audience into the action but also to underscore the audience's spectatorship. This simultaneous intimacy and critical distance help to set up the ethical challenge with which the musical grapples as it stages the transition from joyous freedom to illness and death.

As the dancers emerge from opposite sides of the theater space, with Shane, Leach, and Alma dancing together from backstage and the other group of actors coming from the section near the front entrance, "Love Sensation" plays loudly over the sound system and the audience assumes the role of club goers and participant observers. The now united group of dancers whoop

and throw their hands up to celebrate Shane's appearance on the dance floor. Some of the dancers surround Shane as he lays down some dance moves to the Holloway song, whose lyrics cry out:

Love sensation
You got me burning up with your
Love sensation

Love sensation
Oh it's got me in its spell
It's such a good vibration
A feeling that I know so well

Holloway's gospel vocalizations have become legendary, not only for their continued sampling in a multitude of dance music genres, but also because their high-energy crescendos convey the spiritual transcendence that is the Holy Grail for dance enthusiasts and club goers. The song never fails to create the kinesthetic collectivity that connects through music and dance, and the audience in this performance briefly shares that euphoria and pleasurable release that, if it had been a church service rather than a club scene, would be a communal moment of praise and worship, as if a congregation were making a joyful noise upon the return of a wayward member of their flock.

The euphoria and sense of triumph over illness is short lived. Suddenly, Shane lurches sideways, missing a step. Others around him giggle at first, thinking he is just clumsy or out of practice. Shane falls to the ground, the other dancers circle around him and come to his aid. They try to stand him upright, but the momentum of their gestures pushes him in different directions. He is caught on one side by the outstretched arms of his friends, but then propelled in the opposite direction by the sheer force of their attempts to support him. All the while, the insistent rhythm of Loleatta Holloway's "Love Sensation" continues to pulse over the sound system, but the action on the dance floor becomes a choreography of pain and desperation. The spotlight focuses on Shane as he reaches forward, his hands grasping at the air as his body is jostled in multiple directions. He appears to float above the dance floor, held up by the other dancers who also keep time to the music, but in a more slow-motion sway. This choreography shifts the scene from a realist exposition of a past experience to a dreamlike, surrealist invocation of the accumulated affect that this experience represents for the characters. Through the immersive

staging, the audience also follows the choreography and transitions in its role as participant observers to spectators of a nightmare sequence. The actions of Shane and the dancers convey the sense of powerlessness and futility that the victims of AIDS and their communities have faced. The desperate, grasping gestures are also a kinesthetic portrayal of the audience's attempts to understand the enormity of a young life cut short by this deadly disease and the ignorance and homophobia that inflicted further pain on Latinx AIDS victims. We can only watch as death carries away another young, brown body, even as the raucous, joyous music plays on.

With this choreography, the lyrics to "Love Sensation" take on another meaning:

Love sensation
You got me burning up with your
Love sensation

Sweet sensation
I can't find the words to explain
You're such a hot temptation
You just walk right in and
Take me away

The song evolves from a euphoric declaration and an outpouring of communal love to an anguished metaphor for the way AIDS is consuming Shane's body, as well as our inability to make sense of his death. Although he is being held up by his friends and chosen family, the gestures and facial expressions that Shane performs in this scene also convey his sense of solitude and fear as he, alone, faces death in the midst of youthful exuberance. Shane at last goes still and appears to sink below the waves created by the push and pull motion of the other dancers' arms. Their embrace at one and the same time cradles him and brings him down. Finally, the rest of the cast members lift up his now inert body as if they were pallbearers carrying his remains at a funeral procession. As the cortège of dancers slowly proceeds backstage, a humble memorial of flowers around a picture of Shane on an easel appears. The dancers regroup at center stage—what would be the middle of the dance floor in the previous scene—and the music now transitions to an acapella version of "Love Sensation." This vocal track enhances Holloway's gospel-style articulations, but as it accompanies the dancers who now slowly but rhythmically approach

Shane's memorial, some with flowers, some individually and others in pairs or small groups supporting each other in their grief, "Love Sensation" becomes a song of mourning over a tragic loss:

And all I wanna say is Thank you, baby
Cause you're right on time!
Can't you see that I love nobody else?
I love nobody else!
And time won't take my love away!

What began as a song of euphoria, triumph, and collective joy is now a lament and a promise: that time won't take away what this young life meant or erase the memories of our departed brother, whose life was cut short due to fear, discrimination, and rejection for an illness that makes a mockery of erotic expression and love. We later learn from an apoplectic Leach that Shane called his mother insistently until she finally opened the attic door, at which point Shane says, "This is for you. Remember me." Then he shoots himself in the head. Leach's retelling of this suicide—which he did not witness—underscores the drastic measures someone as powerless as Shane will take to demand acknowledgment and recognition from family and community members who otherwise turn away and try to forget their obligations to those who resist the dominant norms of gender and sexual identities. Shane's violent act forces his mother to remember him not through an idealized image but as he is at that moment: a young man who has lost almost everything except the power over his own death.

As the music and choreography in this sequence of scenes shift from euphoria to mourning, so too does the role of the audience transition from participant observer to spectator, which facilitates the kinesthetic empathy between the play and the audience. As spectators, the audience is less involved in the staged action, which coincides with the powerlessness that the characters endure in the face of Shane's death. We watch the actors pay their last respects in silence while Loleatta Holloway's acapella version of "Love Sensation" emits a cry of lamentation. We can only watch but, perhaps, also remember those loved ones of our own who have passed on, either from AIDS or other causes. The musical brings forth our mourning through Shane, and the collective grief this scene invokes emerges from each audience member's own losses and memories of the past, memories that time won't take away.

In *Acts of Intervention: Performance, Gay Culture, and AIDS*, David

Román describes three main modalities that have characterized theater and performance about AIDS: “first, as an educational means to challenge the misconceptions about AIDS; second, to build and sustain a communal response to the epidemic; and third, to pay tribute to those who have died” (xxiv). The empathy the play establishes with the audience fulfils all three of these purposes and serves to trigger a reflective nostalgia, one that situates individual affect within a broader social context. It allows us to engage with a semi-fictional portrayal of the past through the embodied knowledge and practices that were part of the collective experience of this queer Latinx subculture from the early 80s in Chicago. This engagement is further mobilized on this site-specific staging and performance so that Shane’s story and the audience’s own memories intersect on Division Street/Paseo Boricua, where the UrbanTheater Company is located. This memory in motion recalls the words of Latinx theater scholar Alberto Sandoval-Sánchez, who writes from his own experience as a gay Puerto Rican man living with AIDS. He says:

Wherever I go I carry mis *muertos conmigo, en mis recuerdos*, a generation of Latino gay men that in a self-imposed s/exile migrated to the US from the Caribbean and Latin America in search of independence and sex, satisfaction and love. (542)

While other forms of cultural production and community centers document and retell the stories of Puerto Rican riots and resistance in Humboldt Park, UrbanTheater Company’s portrayal of the early 80s dance scene fills a gap in the archive, as artistic director Miranda González claims in one of the promotional videos for the play. Not only does the play take the audience back to the day of the dance battles, shoulder pads, and parachute pants, it situates us front and center before the lives lost too soon to a disease that abjected and obliterated the bodies of gay Latino men.

As the audience watches from the position of spectatorship, the distance between the performance and the audience’s memories is filled in with the layers of history that have accumulated and overlapped since the 1980s. The actors carry Shane’s body offstage to depict the losses our community has suffered due to AIDS, but the death scene in the nightclub conjures up the untold stories of violence against LGBTQ+ people that has and continues to lead to gay bashing and the homicide of queer and Trans youth of color. It also brings to mind the mass shooting that took place in the Orlando, FL nightclub, Pulse, on June 12, 2016. Mural artist Cristian Roldán Aponte has commemorated this mass murder on Paseo Boricua with a mural that conveys both the dancing Latinx bodies as well as the panic and melee that ensued

when the shots were fired. Shane's body takes on a messianic dimension as his death invokes the histories of violence inflicted on the Latinx queer and Trans communities in Chicago and beyond. *BitD* performs this reflective nostalgia as a way to visualize and embody the past through contemporary perspectives and material and bodily practices. The dance groups of 1980s Chicago are not only inscribed in the archive of Paseo Boricua's history, but also reimagined and brought into dialogue with our present-day understanding of queer and Trans subjectivities and experiences.

Finally, the song "Love Sensation" connects this scene to one of the central plots of the play: the love story between Gringo and Troy. These characters share a sometimes contentious but always loyal friendship. Although neither the play nor the memoir on which it is based portray this friendship as a sexual relationship, the enduring bond between Gringo and Troy is constantly invoked with Alicia Myers' 1981 song, "I Want to Thank You," which was always the last-dance song at Jenals. The characters are sometimes more like "frenemies" than lovers, particularly since they are leaders of competing dance groups. They are also characterized as opposites who attract, with Gringo as the emotionally stable and deeply dedicated leader of his group and Troy as the flighty and boisterous jokester, sometimes drag performer, and stand-up comedian. Troy lets his own crew down by abusing alcohol and performing sloppily without any concern for his dancers' frustrations.

Throughout the play, several scenes position the audience as spectators in the development of the love/friendship story between Gringo and Troy. While all of these scenes are expositional, some are set in the 80s and others are set in the characters' adulthood. One of the former depicts Gringo and Troy partying on the late-night streets. The scene is staged in the center of the performance space, where most of the standing members of the audience form a wide semicircle around the actors. This scene is also one of the few set in the past that focuses on the interactions between two characters, as opposed to the ensemble scenes set in the 80s or the proleptic scenes set in the present. Troy shows signs that he is heavily inebriated and/or high, while Gringo manages to look like he has been partying yet more in control of himself. Troy is loud and boisterous, swerving and swinging across the stage. He points offstage to where there is supposedly a line of cars driving around the block—johns trying to pick up some trade for sex. Troy tells Gringo, "Don't be scared. Watch this," as he goes into the audience and pretends to talk to one of the johns cruising by. This scene shows the stark difference between the two characters, with Troy repeatedly engaging in risky

and self-destructive behaviors and Gringo either holding back or trying to save Troy from himself.

Additionally, there are scenes set in the characters' adulthood that continue to develop the love/friendship story between Gringo and Troy. In one particular scene toward the end of the play, Gringo visits Troy in the hospital. In preparation of the scene, the actors clear the audience from the performance space and position a chair near the old sofa at stage left. Gringo ends a dialogue with one of his most loyal dancers, Chalie, both now adults, and enters what is supposed to be Troy's hospital room from one end of the stage and moves toward the lone chair, with spotlights illuminating his way through the darkened stage. Troy is lying on the sofa/hospital bed, wearing a hospital gown and hooked up to an IV. It is not revealed why Troy is in the hospital, but at one point, Gringo says that only 13% of Troy's heart is working. Echevarría's memoir, on the other hand, reveals that the character "Ty" is in the hospital because of congestive heart failure. Troy tries to keep the conversation jovial and superficial, but Gringo sternly scolds him about his bad habits and the need to start taking care of himself. Rather than take Gringo seriously, Troy laughs him off and says, "I can still do those dance moves." He gets up from the chair and starts disconnecting the IV tubes from his arm, all while feebly trying to perform one of his old dance routines. Once again, Gringo rushes over to rescue Troy from his impulsive behaviors. The hospital scene ends with Gringo helping Troy back to his bed, comforting him as they both acknowledge that their dancing days are behind them. Their aging bodies cannot relive the euphoric moments of their dance battles. Like the audience members who recall that era from the perspectives of their own lived experiences in Humboldt Park in the 80s, Gringo and Troy adopt a reflective nostalgia that invokes these memories as a way to understand their present and the forms of embodied knowledge they are still capable of producing.

The play does not, however, end on this sad note. Instead, all the actors come out on stage and invite the audience to join them on the floor for a revival of the popular line-dance, the Bus Stop, choreographed to Alicia Myers' song, "I Want to Thank You":

I want to thank you
Heavenly father for shining your light on me
You sent me someone who really loves me
And not just my body

As much as we try to follow the steps, neither George nor I can keep up with the young dancers, whose choreographies and staged dramas had just taken us back to the days when we used to dance at Jenals, at local house parties, or even in the Clemente High School gym during homecoming. As upper middle-class professionals who have moved away from the Humboldt Park area, the play has offered us an opportunity to see how a new generation portrays an era that we experienced firsthand. It also gives us a moment of reflective nostalgia to consider how much Humboldt Park and Division Street have changed since the early 80s. Although we no longer live there, our visit to Paseo Boricua and the UTC performance space makes us aware not only of how the neighborhood community has deployed visual culture and performance as a bulwark against gentrification and ethnic erasure, but also of how we, too, try to stave off gentrifying our perspectives to the point we no longer visualize or situate ourselves in the present-day urban geographies that were part of our past. At the end of “Love Sensation,” when Loleatta Holloway sings, “Time won’t take it / Time won’t take it / Time don’t take it away,” she sings not only about erotic passion and romantic love, but also about the promise of reflective nostalgia and embodied knowledge, which is as much a declaration of undying love as it is a plea to the implacable forces of time with which our memories and bodies must always come to terms. The reflective nostalgia we experience bodily and affectively through this



The Culitos win another dance battle. Image reproduced with permission. Photo by Kenny Cordero.

immersive and site-specific performance keeps us from living in a past that has no future.

The After Party

Since the rainy October night when George and I attended the performance of *BitD*, so much has happened—from earthquakes in Puerto Rico, to COVID-19, to the murder of George Floyd and the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement. I look back at that evening as if it had happened a lifetime ago. In addition to those world events, Troy Winston, who was the inspiration for the characters “Ty” in Echevarría’s memoir and “Troy” in Miranda’s play, died of congestive heart failure on December 26, 2019. In an obituary that appears in the *Windy City Times*, his longtime friend and former dance crew member Melanie “Angel” Rolon describes his activism and contributions to the queer of color community of Chicago: “[...] Troy was a huge advocate for helping people experiencing homelessness. He would dress up like Madea and go to Lower Wacker Drive with donated cooked food and feed as many homeless people that he could. Troy—with the help of his former employer, Yohel’s Barbershop—did haircuts for the homeless along with feeding and clothing them while they waited for their turn. Troy had a huge heart and was a person that befriended anyone who graced him with their presence. He will be deeply missed.”⁷ On their Instagram account, the UTC has a short video and several pictures of Troy doing the Bus Stop to Alicia Myers’ “I Want to Thank You” with the cast of *BitD*. The post includes the following dedication: “We will continue to share your story and preserve your legacy.”⁸ Although I did not know Troy personally, I wish this “after party” postscript to serve as a gesture of “critical generosity,” as David Román describes: “Critical Generosity understands that criticism can be much more than simply a procedure of critique or means for qualitative analysis. Criticism can also be a cooperative endeavor and collaborative engagement with a larger social mission.”⁹ I was never a member of the main dance crews back in the day, although my cousins and I started our own little group—The Rascals—in our basement and even competed once at Northwest Hall against another group called The Generics (we lost by one point!). My reflective nostalgia of that early 80s scene reminds me that, even under the most hostile and dehumanizing conditions, queer bodies of color can create spaces of joyful empowerment through dance and performance.

Notes

¹ The show ran from October 10 to November 2, 2019. Although there were plans to revive the production in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic put a hold on any subsequent performances that year.

² Teatro Luna was founded in 2000 by Tanya Saracho and Coya Paz. Joanna L. Mitchell writes, “Teatro Luna was born of Saracho and Paz’s shared frustration over the lack of opportunities for Latinas to write, produce, and direct theater in Chicago, or to find roles for themselves that went beyond the stereotypes of the prostitute, the maid, and the undocumented immigrant” (115).

³ The script for *Back in the Day* was written by Miranda González, and the performance I attended was directed by Raquel Torre and choreographed by Breon Arzell. The production team included: Ivan Vega (executive director/producer); Jenna Meyers (production manager); Michelle Housh (stage manager); Harrison Omelas (scenic designer); Levi Wilkins (lighting designer); Antonio Bruno (company manager/co-producer); Liviu Pasare (projection designer); Mara Ishihara Zinky (properties designer); Steve Labeledz (sound designer); Elena Magdalena (graphic designer); Adelina Feldman-Schultz (casting director) and Sarah Albrecht (costume design).

⁴ The play’s author and director, Miranda González, kindly sent me a working draft of the script of this version of the performance.

⁵ See the description and history of the Jeff Awards at <https://www.jeffawards.org/about>.

⁶ The Jeff Awards has acknowledged and recommended other Latinx theater productions in Chicago. For example, at around the same time that UTC was staging its October 2019 performances of *BitD*, the Jeff Awards included among its list of recommended equity shows the Teatro Vista production of *Hope: Part II of a Mexican Trilogy*. See <https://www.jeffawards.org/jeffplays/hope-part-ii-mexican-trilogy-2020>. Previous UTC productions have also received Jeff recommendations and award nominations. See <https://urbantheaterchicago.org/awards/>.

⁷ Carrie Maxwell, “Chicago LGBTQ icon/dance group co-founder Troy Winston dies,” *Windy City Times*, January 22, 2020. <http://www.windycitymediagroup.com/lgbt/Chicago-LGBTQ-icon-dance-group-co-founder-Troy-Winston-dies/67762.html>

⁸ Urban Theater Company, Instagram post, December 26, 2019. https://www.instagram.com/p/B6jK-q5JyWj/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

⁹ Román, *Acts of Intervention*, xxvi-xxvii.

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Cast of *Los habladores*, 2021, Programa IV. Cast: Enrique Arreola, Mariana Villegas, Diego Jáuregui ,
Sofía Gabriel Luna, Mauricio Pimentel. Photo by Jacqueline Bixler.