
Book Review: *A Kiss Across the Ocean: Transatlantic Intimacies of British Post-Punk and US Latinidad*

Richard T. Rodríguez. *A Kiss Across the Ocean: Transatlantic Intimacies of British Post-Punk and US Latinidad*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2022. 264 pages.

A viral scene from the Netflix series, *Wednesday*, shows Jenna Ortega's titular daughter of Gomez and Morticia Addams busting out in a creepy-kooky dance at a school event. Ortega, a Latina actor in her early twenties from the Coachella Valley in Southern California, first thanked 1980s-era UK post-punk singer and icon Siouxsie Sioux among others on social media for the "help" and inspiration for her wacky self-choreographed solo performance. In Hulu's *This Fool*, 30-year-old Maggie, a Latina from South L.A., wears a red streak in her black hair and a Siouxsie Sioux graphic T-shirt that emphasizes the singer's famous eye makeup. Maggie's boyfriend, Julio, hates when people in the neighborhood assume he's a Morrissey fan because he wears a "gentlemen's haircut" that mimics the pompadour and fade popular with the ex-Smiths singer from Manchester and his many Latino fans. These recent pop culture moments demonstrate not only the ubiquity of certain UK musical acts in US Latina/o/x culture but also the ongoing traffic in touch between those groups that transcends time, space, generation, and geography—a touch rooted in a shared sense of recognition between members of marginalized communities.

University of California Riverside professor Richard T. Rodríguez theorizes this inter-generational, subcultural "touch" in *A Kiss Across the Ocean: Transatlantic Intimacies of British Post-Punk and US Latinidad*. The book explores the mutually informative relationships between US Latina/o/x fans of British post-punk bands from the 1980s onward. Rodríguez "document[s] the allure of US Latinidad for British post-punk artists to underscore the interplay of reciprocal intimacy" that plays out in multiple and often contradictory ways through music's touch (9). Rodríguez, however, does more than simply tally the seemingly one-directional phenomenon of Latina/o/x fandom of UK post-punk artists like Siouxsie Sioux, Morrissey, and others. Rather, he illustrates the kaleidoscopic ways in which the "kiss across the ocean" is shared by parties, an act of mutual bonding and intimacy that represents the transatlantic "multidirectional influences" and cultural impacts of US Latinidad on many UK post-punk singers, bands, and musical groups.

Rodríguez takes the book's title from a 1983 Culture Club concert film of the same name that aired in the United States on HBO. The London-based band and its gender-bending singer Boy George captivated twelve-year-old Rodríguez when he first

encountered the music video for their song “Karma Chameleon” at his aunt’s home. The event was a life-changing moment that sparked in Rodríguez a lifelong attachment to a “long line of British pop songs and music videos that would touch [him] in affective and thought-provoking ways” (2). The formative impressions that these songs and videos from across the ocean made on the author as a queer Chicano kid from Orange County, California, as well as his continued fandom through adulthood, animate *A Kiss Across the Ocean’s* study of the many “transatlantic intimacies” expressed in and through UK post-punk music and US Latina/o/x cultures. Rodríguez dedicates chapters to Siouxsie and the Banshees, Adam Ant, Bauhaus, Marc Almond and Soft Cell, Blue Rondo à la Turk, Frankie Goes to Hollywood singer Holly Johnson, and the Pet Shop Boys, demonstrating how each of these particular artists, singularly and collectively, traffic in the “transatlantic touch” of US Latinidad.

His choice to put Siouxsie Sioux on the book’s cover demonstrates the singer’s significance for her “formidable” touch and the “rousing, outsider connection” she shares with “many women, queers, Latinas/os, and Latinx queers,” illustrated by the television scenes mentioned above (29). For Rodríguez, Siouxsie’s “outsider connection” to these groups manifests in several ways, from her early-80s friendship with the Cramps’ gay Chicano guitarist Kid Congo Powers to artistic renderings of Siouxsie fandom in Chicana-Latina art and literature. For the other artists, “the mutual touching” between them and “Latinas and Latinos” in the US takes many other forms. Rodríguez analyzes examples that include El Paso-born gay Chicano Scottish writer John Rechy’s influence on lyrics and writing by Soft Cell’s Marc Almond; Frankie Goes to Hollywood singer Holly Johnson’s taking his stage name from Holly Woodlawn, a trans* Puerto Rican actress made famous by Andy Warhol; and the Pet Shop Boys’ queer, Miami-based Latin freestyle inspiration for their 1988 song, “Domino Dancing.”

Rodríguez personalizes “the touch” by framing each chapter with vivid memoir vignettes that lead to a productive fan-scholar analysis of the particular British post-punk artist in focus. Chapters open with stories from Rodríguez’s Orange County school days or college years in Berkeley where he describes his first encounters with bands such as Bauhaus and Adam Ant, who awakened new ways of seeing and recognizing himself as a desiring queer Chicano. They close with critical reflections based on his continued fandom into adulthood that leave room for ambiguity and confusion alongside the pleasure and joy that can come from a deeply intimate connection to music that the dominant culture otherwise denies. By effectively weaving memoir with cultural analysis, Rodríguez finds a compelling way to challenge predictable debates that want to flatten or dismiss the complexity of cultural exchange and appreciation. *A Kiss Across the Ocean’s* best moments remind us that even when mutual, “multidirectional touching never takes shape unsullied,” there are still important distinctions between cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation as citational practice (100). This intervention is best illustrated in the chapters about Blue Rondo à la Turk and the Pet Shop Boys.

But Rodríguez does not excuse some of the more “eyebrow-raising” instances of cultural appropriation, “discordant representations,” and other faux pas where Latinas/os/x and other racialized groups such as Native Americans are concerned. Songs like

Adam Ant's "Puerto Rican" and "Juanito the Bandito" represent the "knotty politics of representation and negotiation entailed in embracing expressive cultural forms that are and are not about (and for and not for) the receiver of these forms" (51). But Rodríguez is "not ready to write off" Ant and other potentially offensive examples due to the incredibly personal affirmation and "deep cultural intimacy" that Ant's music continues to provide him and others.

A Kiss Across the Ocean makes an important contribution to US Latina/o/x transnational cultural studies and pushes the boundaries of domesticated US Chicana/o/x studies by recognizing the "routes" and one's "self-location" that may exceed traditional boundaries of demarcation—such as across the Atlantic to Britain, Ireland, and other parts of Europe (5). Rodríguez also shows the power of US pop culture to influence so many of the UK artists highlighted here. Television, movies, books, and music from the United States indelibly shaped these British post-punk artists' perceptions of racialized subcultures and their practices, which in turn influenced the music, style, and image of artists like the ones Rodríguez profiles. Finally, Rodríguez documents how Latinas and Latinos in the US have "been there" as witnesses, fans, facilitators, participants, producers, and facilitators within these British post-punk music scenes. Suzan Colón's influential writing in *Star Hits* magazine (14–15) and music booker turned record executive Michael Anthony Alago (12–13) are two notable examples.

In the book's conclusion, Rodríguez says he "imagined *A Kiss Across the Ocean* as written for music fans of my generation who grew up listening to the same music and now regularly attend Totally 80s Live concerts (headlined by Boy George and Adam Ant) at the Honda Center in Anaheim and Totally 80s Bar and Grille in Fullerton" (172). I am his target audience. I went to a high school in Orange County about 15 miles north of where Rodríguez first encountered Bauhaus in his typing class. I, too, was a bookish, not-yet-queer proto-Chicana who wore Doc Marten boots, discovered the Smiths from another Latina student in English class, and ditched school in 1991 to meet Siouxsie Sioux and two of her Banshees at the Tower Records in Woodland Hills, all the way in the San Fernando Valley. I know the 80s bar in Fullerton and attended my share of 80s tribute band shows. I'm sure I've crossed paths with Rodríguez, and I share his complex relationships with this music that shaped our lives. The book, in the end, is about making these messy but necessary connections between such seemingly disparate groups that have so much to say to each other. These connections rely on a touch—a kiss, a sound, an affect—that bonds us in musical intimacy.

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