Salsa’s Unruly Audition

Abnormal Feelings for the 1970s Fania All-Stars

ABSTRACT This essay shows how salsa stimulates unruly audition. It responds to that stimulation by performing multi-sensorial poetic listening with the excessive, tender, and queer audio-visual sabores [tastes], gestures, and details of two live performances by the musicians and singers contracted to Fania in the 1970s, one in Yankee Stadium in the Bronx in 1973 and the other in 1974 at Zaire ’74 in Kinshasa, a music festival of Afro-Latinx, brown, and black sonic solidarity headlining the Ali-Foreman Rumble in the Jungle fight. A riot of audience ended the All-Stars’ set at the 1973 Bronx concert. Their insurgent pleasure compels us to think unruliness with salsa’s listeners, and re-imagine Latinx as a riotous movement of brown and black swirling aesthetic convergences. The essay enact a deviant and sonically oriented close reading of Héctor Lavoe’s vocals in the song “Mi Gente” [My People], in part, for their attunement precisely to audience and playful dynamics with the band. In this song, Lavoe cries out to “anormales” [abnormals], a sign re-imaged here as an off-kilter feeling for salsa and a multi-sensorial opening for more errant ruptures.

KEYWORDS: popular music, performance, race and ethnic studies

“Como Héctor el Father, hoy yo salgo por la calle con to’s mis anormales” [Like Héctor the Father, today I’m taking to the streets with all my abnormals] Bad Bunny

“¡Cuidao’ que por allí vienen los anormales! ¡Uu jaja! ¡Y con estreitjackets!” [“Look out, here come the abnormals! Uu wa ha! And in straightjackets!”] Héctor Lavoe

THE DEMENTED BUST OUT: LATINX AS RIOTOUS MOVEMENT

It is diasporic Caribbean common knowledge that Las Estrellas de Fania, The Fania All-Stars, performed a concert at Yankee Stadium in the Bronx, New York on 24 August 1973. A

1. In these verses of the track “Soy Peor” [I’m Worse] (2016), a song that incorporates affective and musical elements of Dominican dembow and merengue into Trap, and was later re-mixed with Dominican singer Omega, the Rican regaetone Bad Bunny invokes reggaetónero Héctor el Father, who was popular in the early 2000s, and his track “Vamos pa’ la calle” [Into the street] (2004). Héctor has resurfaced of late as a born-again Christian preacher, following a sinner-saint trajectory not unlike Vico C’s. But Bad Bunny knows salsa, which he signifies on various tracks, and in his Instagram stories, where he often depicts himself listening to different musical genres, including salsa. I extend Bad Bunny’s invocation of the sign of Héctor to Lavoe, who invoked anormalidad in recordings and performances before el Father. This does not mean I am calling Lavoe the OG anormal because his invocations of anormalidad are effects of brown and black feelings of rupture. Relevant to my citational play is the tense and generative relationship between salsa and reggaetón, which Petra Rivera-Rideau theorizes descriptively at the opening of Remixing Reggaeton: The Cultural Politics of Race in Puerto Rico (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

two-volume album of live recordings was released in 1975 titled, “Fania All-Stars Live At Yankee Stadium.” The documentary film, Salsa, which visually anchors itself in the performance at Yankee Stadium, was released in 1976. An absence resounds across these audio-visual recordings of this event: the memory that the All-Stars’ performance began, lasted one set, and then ended in a riot of its audience, which consisted of an estimated 35,000-45,000 people.

Dissonance emerges across narratives about that night, in YouTube comments on bootleg posts of the film Salsa, and in published media. Billboard magazine writer Jim Melanson’s 8 September 1973 summary of the concert makes no mention of the audience bringing the All-Stars’ set to heel. Raucousness gets dubbed with “success” in his title: “Fania Concert is Success As An All-Star Delight.” With purchase in Fania’s financial achievements and the narrative of tropical music’s enchantments, the writing reconstructs the night’s performances as stirring but under control. The Billboard piece’s narrative order makes it sound like the opening acts were Tipica 73 and Seguida and semantically positions El Gran Combo after the All-Stars, but El Gran Combo was one of the concert openers. It moves Cameroonian musician Manu Dibango’s set that night into closer semantic and spatial proximity to the audience’s “spill from the stands onto the field,” then the sentences quickly move to underscore that, to Fania’s credit, the concert was a “solid night of entertainment.” Like Marisol Negrón in “Fania Records and its Nuyorican Imaginary: Representing Salsa as Commodity and Cultural Sign in Our Latin Thing” (2015), I hear a semantic investment in the commodification of brown and black Latinx salsa musicians, as well as in the commodification of salsa audiences as exuberant consumers. And I also hear unruly subjects busting out.

Fania label promoter and lawyer Jerry Masucci had made a deal with the city and the Yankees that the baseball field would not be damaged, that the audience would comply with the rules of the scene, and that the photographer and friend of pianist Larry Harlow, Leon Gast, would shoot footage for a documentary film during the concert’s planned two sets. But you can’t contract responses to stimulation. That audience got up and danced. Indeed, the end of the structurally strange documentary, Salsa, Gast’s second film project for Fania, depicts the beginnings of the surge of audience onto the stage, and the closing credits (which hold

3. Will González notes in “Yankee Stadium fielded a memorable night of music in 1973,” ESPN, 22 September 2008, http://www.espn.com/espn/hispanicheritage/2008/news/story?id=3365100: “There is no consensus among salsa historians as to how many of the songs in those albums were recorded at Yankee Stadium. Harlow refused to admit that the albums contain material that was not recorded at Yankee Stadium.” I feel frustrated accord with this in my research. And from repeatedly watching video footage of the concerts and listening to sound recordings, the recording of “Mi Gente” on the Yankee Stadium albums sounds like what we see-hear Lavoe perform in video of the San Juan concert. These different audio-visual parts of the archive must be sensed together, not for a “complete” narrative, but to deviate from the exploitative one officially given. This is relevant not only for scholars interested in salsa or Latinx music, but also for minoritarian thinkers studying devaluations of the aesthetic, and the role thereof in political binds.

4. I have gleaned this range of crowd numbers from several sources (i.e., Negrón, Melanson, and González).


6. Ibid.
inconsistencies consistent with the label’s sketchiness) are not set to music, but to the audience’s ongoing roar. Will González’s story of the concert for ESPN (2008), retold as the old Yankee Stadium was shutting its doors in the Bronx, interviews the Fania-contracted pianist and composer, Harlow, who discloses how scared he became as the audience surged, and who unintentionally invokes a counter-position to that of white “success” from brown and black “entertainment”: the simultaneity of losses and affective excess that disrupt commodification from within the processes of commodification. “The concert almost sank Fania Records,” reports González.

Legendary percussionist and composer Mongo Santamaría was gigging with Fania at the time. Like Mongo Santamaría, experimental jazz drummer Billy Cobham sat in both for the concert at Yankee Stadium and what the Fania label narrates as its “reprise,” the All-Stars’ concert at Roberto Clemente Stadium in San Juan, Puerto Rico a few months later, and we see both musicians in the video footage that became Salsa. But that August night in the Bronx, Mongo battled with conguero and composer Ray Barretto (aka el hombre de la mano duro [the hard-handed man]) on “Congo Bongo,” and Héctor Lavoe sang vocals. According to Harlow, who composed the song, it was “Congo Bongo” that stimulated explosive emotion in the Yankee Stadium audience. Harlow’s piano was also filled with fireworks to be set off at the concert finale. But those fireworks didn’t go off, the audience did. So, the song and the battling performance of the song are only part of the story. There remain the audience’s abnormal feelings for salsa.

Let’s call this riot an unplanned romp of hyper-disidentification, where hyper-disidentification marks an unruly movement of brown and black, sonically oriented feeling (which has not ended). The audience’s hyper-disidentification describes a moment when Latinx signifies something not assimilated, pleasurably brown, black, and anormal. Out of Latinx’s off-kilter historical position, and with different performative iterations of anormal, I do not summon something so coherent as identity. Rather, with my deliberately multi-sensorially attentive method of poetic listening, I sense, feel, and claim anormal, queer feelings and exchanges between salsa musicians and audiences. I sense and

8. Ibid.
9. Hyper-disidentification plays on J.E. Muñoz’s strategy of “disidentification.” The surging audience’s hyped misuse of the sound equipment is not a rejection of the music or musicians. It reveals an excessive attachment to the pleasure generated by the music, by being together and sweating in a crowd. I also read an excessive refusal of the script of how to comport as good Latina/o/xs in this surge of audience. See Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).
10. I invite the reader to hear Latinx how I hear the sign said in the world, poetically, and as both/either La-teen-x and/or La-tec-neh. I do not agree with a performative standard-Spanish refusal of the term in the name of what “all” of Latin America supposedly does gender-grammatically. I first heard Latinx in Puerto Rico, not in the U.S.
11. Latinx in the U.S., including Nuyorican, are situated by the U.S. government: to aspire to an impossible whiteness and contort out of radical alignments with U.S. black people, a contortion premised on disavowing how black moves with and in brown, and as Latinx. This disavowal would also have to ignore, for example, the variety of musicians on stage together in the 1970s, musicians who also played with Parliament Funkadelic, Mahavishnu Orchestra, Stevie Wonder—and the range of audiences, plural, to whom these ensembles call.
12. I use the term claim alongside sense here in the spirit of Jennifer Doyle’s “claim” of a queer sense of speed made by the South African runner, Caster Semenya. This claim refuses “evidence” that has been and continues being used against Semenya’s body for gender segregation.
claim something excessive, decadent, and _cariñoso_ [tender] in an expansive, temporally unbound “sonic imaginary” of salsa listeners and dancers.

Establishing facts does not motivate this essay. I’m after abnormal feelings—my semantic tendencies swerve toward brown and black convergences of aesthetic pleasures. With the method of poetic listening, I approach the All-Stars’ Yankee Stadium performance, its audience’s rupture, and its varied audio-visual afterlives as scenes of unruly audition. This essay asks questions of unruly audition in relation to other All-Stars performances and recordings between 1972 and 1976, including Lavoe’s lyrical improvisations in versions of the song “Mi Gente” [My People], and video of a live performance of the song “Ponte Duro” [Get Hard] at the Zaire ’74 music festival in Kinshasa. In how this essay enacts the methodology of poetic listening to sense the queer and improvisational gestures made between brown, black, and white Latinx salsa musicians and audiences, it deviates from cis-masculinist takes on the performative and gendery masculinities and femininities of salsa. It registers the artists’ aesthetics and sounds as iterations of the abnormal feelings that ruptured the performance in the Bronx and sounded solidarity in Kinshasa. In its mixtures of Latinx theories of affects, Caribbean poetics, black U.S. American poetics, Sound Studies, and deviant close-readings, this essay’s movements extend toward a range of audiences who listen for social, sexual, and political possibilities in aesthetic disorder.

**ON METHOD: POETIC LISTENING**

In my rearrangement of the audio-visual archive of _loose joints_ that invite us to re-imagine the All-Stars’ musical performances, I conjure sonically oriented _audition_ as spatial and stimulating, and _poetic listening_ as a multi-sensorial response and an effect that can theorize with a performance’s or text’s or art work’s terms and scene of stimulation.  

I want to situate poetic listening in relation to other theories and practices of listening before I say more about Lavoe’s lyricality and the All-Stars’ Bronx and Kinshasa scenes of unruly audition.

Salsa’s lyrics most often sing of heartbreak, uprisings, lots of sex, and elements of the form itself, which are particularly good at mixing broken phenomena with its telltale _son_ beat and insistence on _tumbao_ [aass-bound rhythm]. Salsa performances and salsa listeners stimulate unruly audition; I theorize poetic listening as a way of doing something with that stimulation, and as a method that re-imagines Latinx as a riotous movement. By audition, I gather both the late sixteenth-century sense of the psychosomatic power of listening to music, as well as a contemporary sense of the term: a rehearsal, a try-out, a sounding out of what more sounding out may sound like. Audition involves more than the ear: it is bodily, potentially synesthetic, happens from the inside, and moves across the body, vibrating across containment’s porosity into connection with others. I am mixing together two meanings of audition—the psychosomatic power of listening and rehearsal—to get at listening to salsa as a repetitive and physical practice that doesn’t lead anywhere but to

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15. Listening is not an individual enterprise, even when done alone.
sensing its sonic layers, subtle elements, odd flourishes, and irreverent mixtures. Formal expectations are not all that determine how music is listened and danced to, especially when a musical form’s audiences express uncontainable, abnormal feelings.

I am not a passive listener. As a washed-up percussionist, another Latinx disidentifying “Cuban-American” raised in the U.S, with deep social and aesthetic attachments to Puerto Rico, I do not sense many salserxs as straight as macharran [solipsistically masculine] history tells me to. In part, because of rumors of bisexuality and orgies, and, in part, because I sense and listen to their performed dynamics, rituals, and sounds as anomalous and queer. I take pleasure in this, which is a pleasure in my own activeness and openness to activation as a listening body. Frances Aparicio laid ground, perhaps baso ostinato, in Listening to Salsa: Gender, Latin Popular Music, and Puerto Rican Cultures (1998), to approach this audio-visual, ludic archive thus, “To judge salsa music only from the point of view of gender politics, that is, to reject it as música machista (sexist music) is to ignore the complex semiotic directions that any musical text may travel and thus embody. It also assumes that Latinas are passive listeners or compliant consumers of music, an Adornian-constructed audience.” This essay not only listens to musicians, who trouble a label’s hold on its objects, but also listens to salsa listeners.

In ¡Salsa, sabor, y control!: sociología de la música “tropical” [Salsa, Taste, and Control!: The Sociology of “Tropical” Music] (1998), in one of the passages where Angel G. Quintero Rivera elaborates on the sabor part of his delicious book title, we read: “El ‘público’ en la música ‘tropical’es rara vez pasivo . . . demanding intensidad o ¡sabor! y, sobre todo, bailando” [the ‘public’ of ‘tropical’ music is rarely passive . . . demanding intensity, ¡sabor!, and, above all, dancing]. Intensity copulates with, or doubles as, sabor. Translating sabor into English as taste renders it starchy, bourgeois. More Caribbean-ly, sabor sounds tasty, like flavor, if not flava. In salsa lyrics, the expression “sin sabores” is sometimes cried out.

This could signify as tasteless, literally without taste, in English, but it sounds more like those who can’t get down. Salsa activates scenes of stimulated audition and presumes that listeners will do something with their feelings. What I would interpolate into this expectation of a musical form that constructs space for improvisation and feeling, for descarga [unloading], is a riff on Quintero Rivera’s title: salsa, sabor, y des-control, unruliness. I do not cruise YouTube videos of the musicians who played for Fania in the ’70s for “liberatory” or “correct” cultural interpretations, or for them to behave as proper and anxious

16. The All-Stars (with the exception of Celia Cruz) are often listened to as hyper-hetero-masculine. Hearing them only this way generates shame in the pleasures of dancing to their musical collaborations. I veer from straight expectations that alternately romanticize or moralize drug addiction; frame male same-sex desire as a pathological flare of bugarrón [perversion/pederast] behavior; won’t theorize a desire to be sexually dominated in relation to the social; and make some of us think that we must either castigate macho lyrics or keep pleasure in them secret.


18. Quintero Rivera, ¡Salsa, sabor y control!: sociología de la música “tropical” (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1998), 80, my translation.

19. Quintero Rivera cites Roberto Roena’s “Los caminos de mi gente” [My People’s Paths] among his book’s epigraph. The song interpolates certain folx as sin sabores. Sin sabores are those who can’t move/dance, as well as those who do not like salsa.

20. Aparicio, Listening to Salsa, 188.
political-musical agentic objects, or because I am bound to repeat the label’s exploitations of brown and black artists. Instead, unruly audition demands that I engage their dynamics and mis-directives for disturbances of the market expectations of their bodies—for semiotic excess, sweat, smell, and gesture, and for accidents of meaning that emerge through intimate wordplay and nonsense. We refuse the “violent epistemological enforcement” of the reproduction of heterosexuality and will not reproduce the mythic sounds of salsa’s heterosexuality as originary and consistent. On the contrary, in the musicians’ and singers’ orgiastic descargas [fugues, discharges] adorned by open-breasted blouses, all that silk, sequins, polyester, long nails, skinny thighs in crushed velvet, fleshy booties in bell bottoms, and high-heeled patent leather shoes: I claim salsa’s queer masculinity. Disco is afoot, after all—how straight is anyone on the permeable music and art scenes in 1970s New York, when musicians are also being paid in cocaine and heroin on scales hitherto unknown, and the fluorescence holds a deep darkness?

Today, we skim music almost constantly through YouTube, Spotify, iTunes, Amazon, and Pandora; so many musical strokes vibrate in us, awaiting activation. If you live in a crowded neighborhood, you hear others’ music off and on all day and night. As I write, my African diasporic neighbors are creating a sexy and voluminous track layered with Dancehall, Reggaetón, Electronic, Brazilian Funk (pronounced, fonki), and black American Trap. While I channel elements of Ralph Ellison’s essay “Living With Music” (1964), I prefer to skip the whole battle of amps and live with audio-ambience as pleasure, and, in part, because that pleasure is multisensorial. But I would make the distinction that I am not listening attentively to the music wafting in from outside because I am writing as physically as I can with another audio-visual archive. Catching wafts of sounds that converge my inside with what’s outside gestures at how I imagine the potential synesthetic stimulation of a scene of sound. Synesthesia occurs when a sense impression manifests out of place—when something visual stimulates a sensation of touch in your genitals, for example. When you hear the smell of flash-fried shishito peppers. Itinerant sensations from intermittent social listening matter, in that they become part of my orientation. How and where on my body I feel the blares of melody and break-beats that burst in and take off just as quickly through a passing car’s open window tells me something about desire, what’s up in the world, in the everyday. Relation is somewhere in that traffic and proximity. But I cannot respond to all stimulation.

Licia Fiol-Matta theorizes a mode of “wavering” listening in The Great Woman Singer: Gender and Voice in Puerto Rican Music (2017), open to feeling distracted, and making more of the music “conjointly” with what singers call out. She describes her approach as
moving “resolutely away from Latin America as paradise and Latin Americans as natural-born performers for someone else’s pleasure and profit.” And, she does “not expel the visual” from her archive. She continues, “I do not make claims for the sonorous over the visual. I place them side by side as part objects, elements of a sensorium, while centering the sounded voice. I listen ‘distractedly.’”²⁵ To listen distractedly is another way of listening for disturbance, if not as disturbance. I situate Fiol-Matta’s method that “listen[s] distractedly” alongside mine that listens multi-sensorially. This essay’s discussion of poetic listening is closer to obsessive, repetitive listening, but, like Fiol-Matta’s sense of conjunction, it writes a with-ness. Fiol-Matta’s sensorial relationship to the visual resonates here as we engage performances by musicians playing under contract with Fania in the 1970s through sound recordings, as well as DVD and YouTube audio-visual archives. The invocation of side-by-side-ness, and the translation of that to a sensorium, carries us from the visual to the spatial, and invokes how Claudia Milian, in Latining America: Black-Brown Passages and the Coloring of Latina/o Studies (2013), reads brown and black textual archives: “Side by side, brownness and blackness are continuative”; they open rather than close conversations of the variabilities and possibilities of thinking and feeling brown and with/beside/in black.²⁶ Rather than approaching a Latinx aesthetic object, text, performance, and body with a mimetic protocol that functions in service of legitimation, and projects things onto it, side-by-side-ness and beside-ness offer other positions for enacting multi-sensorial poetic listening.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick performed rehearsals with beside-ness in Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity (2002) so as to emphasize space in queer relationality. Around her reading of anthropologist Esther Newton’s Mother Camp (1972) and spaces of drag performances, Sedgwick does not discard temporality or situate it in opposition to space, but reclaims a “loss of dimension” and articulates a preference for imagining drag as “less a single kind of act than a heterogeneous system, an ecological field.”²⁷ Beside-ness needs and gives space, as in Deborah Vargas’s “Ruminations on Lo Sucio as a Latino Queer Analytic” (2014). Vargas’s ruminations carry readers alongside personal memories of the seedy spaces on and off the dance floor at the now defunct San Francisco-based, queer club Esta Noche. Vargas’s visceral analytic revels in the smells, waste, sonic and fluid gushing of queer nightlife, and queer nightlife’s capacity to hold in close proximity intimacy, bankruptcy, joy, and loss.²⁸ I share in Vargas’s ruminative “devotions,” and relay mine through a brown and black poetics of practiced thoughtfulness about spatializing bodies and desires, a practice that remains improvisational in spirit.²⁹

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²⁵. Ibid., 15.
²⁹. Ibid., 717.
Multi-sensorial poetic listening enacts a sonic variation on close reading. So, poetic listening does not eclipse the visual attachments of close reading as one way of responding to the multi-sensorial stimulation of aesthetic form. But the visual is not enough where the elements of percussion gather: fire, wood, wind, water, metal, and skins. Drums anchor salsa, hold a center for circles of movement to spin out, stretch, wander, and make a return en clave [in step, beat-bound].

These sonic sabores are excessive, and excess is a hallmark of salsa. Remixes and replays of salsa favorites pump today on radio stations like New York’s La Mega for and beyond what Dolores Inés Casillas calls “legally vulnerable listeners,” Latina/o/x listeners. While we do not listen to salsa at its “market climax,” El Gran Combo, Orquesta Macabeo, Los 33 and many other bands perform live salsa to rapt, dancey audiences. But, more often in the brown and black queer scenes I frequent to dance, salsa comes in as a layer on a track; the sonic 1970s or 1980s burst in and change the flows between Rihanna, Aventura, and Cardi B.

I write today of my abnormal, temporally non-correspondent feelings for salsa and its spatially unruly imaginaries of audition in a moment that signifies its excess to me in the form of a lighter-touched duration through samples, transitions, and re-mixes by otros anormales con sabor [other abnormalities with taste for flavor]. Not the market, but deviant flows resound salsa’s excessive absent-presence, and compel our reconsideration today of specific moments in 1970s performances of salsa.

Fania launched the All-Stars as a ‘sure thing’ financially to capitalize on the musicians’ “individual” stardom. The label’s narrative of itself is so self-serving that in fania.com’s notes to the Yankee Stadium albums, the audience’s uprising is fleetingly noted, but their insurgency, like their presence, is owned as Masucci’s success: “That night, Jerry Masucci, the ultimate gambler, was the last man laughing as his most bizarre gambit to date became a total success—his Fania All-Stars poured 40,000 fans into the Yankee Stadium for an unforgettable night of superb music.”

Claiming the other’s insurgency for the one’s entertainment is part of the assimilative drive. We can stay en clave with the music and deviate from that narrative’s correspondence of audience oozing feeling to the money man’s good gamble, and, moreover, take pleasure in detaching from it, and in attaching to the thickness of salsa’s anormalidad. In “Salsa, Bad Boys, and Brass” (2007), José Quiroga describes how salsa “is predicated on something that turns liquid—a mess, a condimented thickness—a can of Goya tomato sauce, so thick the spoon will not move on the pot. Salsear as


a verb involves at some point forgetting what you did—not in the sense of losing control but in a form of dancing that is all about mediated control . . .

But we are relishing in what exceeds “mediated control,” what has disturbed the “rule” of “the step” and the temporality of marketed relevance. This relish in disturbance and attachments to being off inflect our approach with otro sabor. To re-invoke Aparicio’s critique of the Adornian construction of the passive pop feminized listener, we turn to how Fred Moten body’s up to Adorno’s critique of popular music in Black and Blur (2017). Moten relays how Adorno’s aesthetic judgment of the taste of pop listeners was nothing more than gastronomic, and then reclaims gustatory aesthetic pleasures. We enact poetic listening with these gustatory flows and playfully translate. When Moten describes the “taste and smell,” the “anima and aroma” of resistance in black performance and music, we also hear him saying, salsa. When he writes that, “the ongoing reproduction of that which disrupts reproduction from within the very process of reproduction of the conditions of capitalist production . . . the sound of interpolative non-correspondence to time and tone,” I’d argue that this language is poetically open to various African diasporic and polyrhythmic forms, such as bomba, jazz, biguine, hip-hop, trap, and salsa. Musical forms of the plantation’s and maroonage’s modernity reveal a performative non-correspondence with tone (as in, synchrony, succession, and rhythmic equality). That performative non-correspondence is sensible, too, in salsa audiences’ excess of taste that exceeds their bodies being poured into seats, and an excessive attachment to the form even when it is not charting. Excesses of unruly audition inspire my method of poetic listening.

What pops off here involves a slow flow of sensuous attentiveness that operates through receptiveness and repeatedly hitting “play.” In the spirit of Alexandra Vazquez’s Listening in Detail: Performances of Cuban Music (2013), I offer an “experience with rather than an account of” listening to unruly pluralities. Alongside how Vazquez writes how she listens to the sonically gestured invitations made by black Cuban pianist and singer Bola de Nieve’s details of “supple directives,” and how her listening gives over to explosive, playful syntax around Pérez Prado’s “itinerant outbursts,” his grunts, noises that cannot go by one name for they “intervene[e] in his own commodification and circulation,” I am additionally attentive to elusively performed mis-directives, as well as the range of what audiences bring to a soundscape, video recording, dance floor, or live performance. Sensuously, improvisationally, and with an ear for bilingual play, poetic listening adjusts our sensoria to feel for brown and black audio-visual shapes of insurrection that critique and oppose the promise of freedom, the American dream as the other’s, discourses of upward

34. Body-up is slang, often used in basketball, where to play you have to put your body on/against/with those of others.
35. Moten, Black and Blur, 33.
38. Ibid., 38, 133, 139.
mobility, legibility, the seeming straightforwardness of complicity, and stylistic conformity, but critique and oppose normativities is not all they do. Poetic listening also attunes us to how raucous audio-visual shapes aggravate the progressive, linear idea of a historical leap from the insurrectionist to the revolutionary, from escape to arrival, from the small-scale to large. Poetic listening senses how unruliness can take on various racially performative shapes and scales. It responds to a different scene of audition than that which Roshanak Khesti theorizes in Modernity’s Ear: Listening to Race and Gender in World Music (2015), one which variously seeks to appropriate or incorporate the racialized other’s “aurality” into a stable (and white female) “listening self.” In contrast, I describe a listening-with-done by bodies that are the racialized other for white womanhood. But we do not signify and perform that, amidst our abundant differences, with each other, or toward others.

Poetic listening moves with what José Esteban Muñoz calls “[b]rown feelings,” which “are not individualized affective particularity.” “Feeling brown” is connected to the racial performativity possible from the historical position of Latina, argues Muñoz, which he senses as a collective position. But he does so by approximating brown feelings’ racially performative attentiveness to the “emancipatory potential” in Hortense Spillers’ writings on psychoanalysis, blackness, and race. He situates “brown feelings” as “akin to what Spillers describes as the ‘making of one’s subjectness the object of a disciplined and potentially displacable attentiveness.” This is a mode of situating brown beside black that is driven by a poetics of potentiality, friendship, care, and, I add, multi-sensorial attunement, not comparison or analogy. This is another kind of intramural dynamic, another kind of party.

**LOS ANORMALES—“MI GENTE” [THE ABNORMALS—“MY PEOPLE”]**

Salsa demands specific steps that must be danced with confident style and variation; it is not like dancing to any other musical form, hence Quiroga’s invocation of both losing it and maintaining “mediated control” that reproduces more adventures in “mediated control.” As Juana María Rodríguez theorizes and narrates lusciously in the chapter “Memory in Mambo Time” in Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings (2014), there is sensual and sexual pleasure in this small-scale, improvised arrangement of control, self-authorization, and performed power dynamics between gendery dancing bodies. But is that control not also pleasurable because you risk losing it? Going too high? Falling out? I would also say that salsa’s prescriptions of movement are precisely open to deviation. It must be noted that much 1970s salsa verged on jazz, bending time, stretching

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42. Ibid., 679.
43. The writer prefers to use *x* and *e* when pluralizing certain nouns and, certainly, aggregative pronouns in Spanish. The *–o* as a masculine gendering catchall is being enacted here as a convention of the journal.
arrangements for eight, ten, fourteen minutes. This veering temporality pushes dancers from salsa steps to trance to descarga to disorder, or to the wall—or to the bar.  

That late-summer Friday night in the Bronx in 1973, dancers surged and the audience became a crowd. Unable, or unwilling, to contain their joy in step, the audience’s onrush precipitated a different ending than the lucrative one the hype men imagined. As the crowd grew, the musicians fled. Gente took the stage and started pounding the piano and making the mic pop with exuberant misuse. Investments were lost; the mid-season baseball field was damaged; and the sound equipment was busted. This information exceeds Gast’s Salsa documentary, which ends where the plot twist of rupture begins. The film’s editing is odd: it consists of footage from the performance at Roberto Clemente Stadium in San Juan months later because there was not enough footage for a film from the Yankee Stadium concert of insurgent audience—but it does not narrate that jump. The hulking, shoulder-bound cameras used on stage keep most frames tight, such that were it not for the band members’ different outfits, a viewer could watch the film and miss that they’re watching two concerts spliced together. The splicing of Roberto Clemente Stadium into Yankee Stadium stretches out the Bronx concert and shrinks the San Juan concert, enacting a collapse of Puerto Rico into the Bronx that serves Fania’s official narrative desires of situating the musicians’ authenticity of sound in New York’s mean streets. 

We see this impulse elsewhere: Gast also directed the documentary film Nuestra Cosa/Our Latin Thing (1972), made from footage of the Fania All-Stars’ famous performance at the Cheetah Nightclub in New York City in 1971, from which another live recording, two-volume album set was also produced. This concert marked a breakthrough for the All-Stars as a group in New York and Latin America. From its first frames of brown and black children running in the Lower East Side, the film grounds that breakthrough in the “barrio,” which Marisol Negrón and José Quiroga argue was crucial to the narrative of the All-Stars’ sound being rooted in an authentic projection of the streets, as well as in a constricted notion of hetero-masculinity. In Nuestra Cosa, we see a white U.S. projection of “Our Latin Thing” onto brown and black Latinx musicians—it is their hands and desire on the studio dials. And it is precisely this projection and its control that we can work to break with. 

In Salsa, quasi-ethnomusical sequences crop the concert footage, with a young Geraldo Rivera didactically droning about African roots, a sonic African past in salsa. Manu Dibango is turned to by Rivera to comment on salsa’s drum rhythms in relation to African drum rhythms, and a long sequence of Dibango performing “Soul Makossa” (1972) in San Juan becomes the middle of the documentary film. While it feels forced in the editing, we sense that the musicians were taking a position against Hollywood’s whitened Latin stereotypes, and with a blacker brown and brown-with-black alignment with African musical forms, in and of the historical present. Salsa echoes Our Latin Thing’s fetishistic Fania construction of a singular urban “bad boy” trope, in which the
musicians also participated, particularly Willie Colón and Héctor Lavoe. But the film’s final pans reveal people’s fists raised in Black Power salute alongside hands waving Puerto Rican flags. The Young Lords, the F.A.L.N., the Macheteros, the Black Panthers, the American Indian Movement were all organizing at that moment in time. I refuse the roar of mi gente [my people] as a record label’s success. I sense their politicized physical gestures in riotous, sonically pleased solidarity.

While Fania contends that “Congo Bongo” ignited the concert-ending riot, I want to linger with the audience’s taste for outrage and on the song named for audience, “Mi Gente.” I want to listen bilingually with the translatable and inexplicable elements of “Mi Gente” for how it dubs any identitarian, nationalist, or cultural group name (be that Nuyorican, Puerto Rican, Latino, Latinoamericano, Caribeño) with the term anormal.46

On Lavoe’s 1975 studio recording of “Mi Gente,” for his debut solo album “La Voz” [The Voice], something strange and pleasurable happens before the break into verses. Before the proper vocals, and well before the tongue twisters that bubble out of the extended play of the song’s climax and ending, there is an excessive utterance, a cry: “¡Cuidao’ que por allí vienen los anormales! ¡Uu jaja! ¡Y con estraitjackets!” [“Look out, here come the abnormals! Uu wa ha! And in straightjackets!”] Transcription and translation are funky here: they emphasize syllabic approximation of what I hear rather than definitive containment of meaning, a syntax that matches the bodies it holds, ones breaking out of constraint. They re-signify the hysteria projected onto them by the U.S.’s warring developments of straightening and whitening, and turn projected pathologies into musical, intra-communal play.47 In both the recorded and live versions, Lavoe’s calling out los anormales is meant for his band mates, who are so good they’re bad. Their skills reconstitute them as paranormal life, out of this motherfucking’ world. But that is far from anormal’s signifying limit.48 Anormal holds love by another name—queer, something else. This something else isn’t only cried out that one time, before Lavoe begins “Mi Gente” in 1975. Rather, it’s an interpolation that he tucks in between moments of improvisation on stage, that he screams out in between verses: the utterance-cry-address-description of los anormales is itself unbound as it is repeated, repeatable, and ready for movement.

The cry of los anormales is not a capella, it erupts with music: the congas, bongos, and piano initiate the ritual, and within three seconds, already bend it with flourishes. Five seconds into the opening passages, the signature Fania horn section blares, shooting holes through the drums’ line, with the clutch trombones spreading their thick thighs of brassy weight around the arrangement. Riding in on the drums and horns that set off the

48. In “Timbalero” [“The Timbales Player”], Lavoe—high on santería’s Afro-futurism—sings out that he’s taking off to the moon, in a choo choo train. Unboundedness, the desire to break out of the limits of this world, is more than a motif: it is a mark of the pleasure of imaginative survival.
arrangement is Lavoe’s incandescent voice. He shines out a sequence of lyrical acts: instructive invitation; possession; the briefest touching description; and then a declaration of feeling.

¡Oigan mi gente!
Lo más grande de este mundo
Siempre me hacen sentir
Un orgullo profundo.
Listen, my people!
The best in this world,
You/They* always make me feel
Deep pride.
Los llamé,
No me preguntaron donde.
Orgullo tengo de ustedes.
Mi gente siempre responde.
I called them,
And they didn’t ask, Where to?
What pride I have in y’all.
My people always respond.49

The vocals’ opening cry is literally for the imagined bodies of mi gente to listen: “Oigan” [“You all, listen”]. I feel myself among those called to listen, and I get hung up in the fragment, “Siempre me hacen sentir”: y’all always make me feel—or is it they always make me feel. The address gives over to a grammar that could be second person plural or third person plural, an utterance directed toward a group of people or redirected and said about them, a gesture of representation. I interrupt the coming of the predicate filled with pride to suspend us in a grammatical ambiguity and break of feeling. Hearing “me hacen sentir” as “y’all make me feel” moves on a valence of direct and intimate address from “el poeta” [the poet] to “mi gente.” Hearing “me hacen sentir” as “they make me feel,” however, slides onto another valence where the singer’s relay to “mi gente” arrives by way of an apostrophic, third other in this discursive space—perhaps not only “mi gente” are listening, or, perhaps “mi gente” are not all here yet. If we hang with the translation of they, then we can hear Lavoe, “el poeta del barrio” [the barrio’s poet], boasting to the world of mi gente, of how well they listen, and how fucking good this makes the singer feel. “Los llamé, no me preguntaron dónde/Orgullo tengo de ustedes/Mi gente siempre responde./Vinieron todos para oírme y guarachar/Pero como soy (de) ustedes/y o le invitaré a cantar.” [“I called them, and they didn’t ask, Where to?/That my people always respond./Everyone showed up to hear me and enjoy themselves./But since I am (of) y’all/ I invite you to sing.”] Whether positioned as directly receptive object or as a delayed, possible, and loved object that eventually hears the cry to listen, the lyrics vocalize an attachment to mi gente, listening, and feeling that is cariñoso.

49. To clarify, this is not a transcription of already transcribed lyrics. I am recording here what I can sense from the vocals as a repeated, close-listener, including outbursts, ad libs, and vocals that have not been recorded (in a logocentric sense) anywhere that I have seen.
Significantly, both pronominal translations of “me hacen sentir” gesture toward a we, a nosotros that never arrives, grammatically and nominally. The lyrics don’t give another noun for “Mi Gente.” Not Nuyorican, Latino, or Latinoamericano, which would not have been unusual, given the prevalence of ‘roll-calling’ in this form, invoking the places of the displaced who gather as a salsa audience. Instead, I offer an alternative: a notion of “Mi Gente” primarily through affect and sabor’s orientation, which can include cultural senses of connection, but does not presume those are coherent, singular in one moment, much less the same over time.

There’s a wordplay in various versions of the lyrics of “Mi Gente” that says: “Se soltaron los dementes” [The demented busted out.]. This lyrical improvisation summons unruliness in the metaphor of los dementes and their movement, se soltarón, which can be heard as both busted out as well as rose up. Below, I will translate a verse that emerges early in the song and a sequence of improvisations that comes later and includes the dementes lines in a long crescendo. Lavoe’s improvisations in “Mi Gente” vary from live performance to recording, and so on. Note: I am translating what I can hear, not from an already written recording of lyrics, another effect of unruly audition. This iteration is close to how Lavoe sang “Mi Gente” in the massive three-day music festival in Kinshasa in 1974 in anticipation of the Ali-Foreman, Rumble in the Jungle fight. But there’s more improvisation and ad-libbing in this 1975 studio recorded version than in the one we hear recorded on stage in Kinshasa and (likely) at Roberto Clemente Stadium in 1973 (though packaged as Lavoe’s and the All-Stars’ performance at Yankee Stadium).

Conmigo sí, van a bailar
Yo le invitaré a cantar
Conmigo síííí eeeepaaaaa . . .

[With me, yes, you’re going to dance
And I will invite you to sing
With me, yes, eeeepaaaaa . . .]
¡Se soltaron los caballos!
A la la la la la la
Se soltaron los dementes. ¿Pa’onde van!?
A la la la la la la
No se oye nada
Pero qué más duro, ¿qué pasa?
La la la la la la
¡Que se oiga!
La la la la la la
‘Ñooooo’

[The horses broke loose!
A la la la la la la
The demented busted out/rose up. Where they goin’?

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50. “Ño is an abbreviation of coño, which literally means cunt, but in Caribbean Spanish, it is an expletive that can be said to indicate exuberance. Something like, Wow or Damn, when registering being overwhelmed by just how rad something is. These and all other translations in the essay are mine, though they were made in relation to others. Thanks to artists and friends, Pablo Guardiola, Omar Obdulio, Tony Cruz Pabón, Manuel Sánchez, and Sofía Gallisá Muriente for salsa consultations.
“Se soltaron los caballos” is an ad-lib in various Fania performances; Cheo Feliciano can be heard singing it elsewhere. But “Se soltaron los dementes. ¿Pa’onde van!!?” is not sung on the Roberto Clemente/Yankee Stadium iteration(s). This metaphor imagines a demented body of folks breaking out of an asylum and running loose. Meanwhile, “the Yankee Stadium” performance of “Mi Gente” is positioned as an ontological cry summoning specifically Nuyorican into affirmative existence in New York, as a body in relation to but apart from Puerto Rico, and as metonym for Latinas/os in that moment. The breakdown between the story told of the Yankee stadium concert, both as ‘identity affirmation’ and the label’s success, and the audience’s eruption, not out of displeasure but out of an excess of sabor, brings us to imagine Latinx as a rioting movement—as surplus of representative categorization. Arguably, that scene of unruly audition between performers and audience remarks on both what salsa stimulates and what may always exceed the music: the enactment of an audience’s feelings. Where the wave of feeling goes—what bodies do with how they listen—cannot be controlled.

We can hear these lines in the 1975 recording of “Mi Gente” as echoing the audience’s overtaking the Bronx stage in 1973. I don’t care to imply a cause-effect relationship, but Lavoe’s metaphor contains some effect of rupture. For however we also sense the sign of anormal moving between the band members and exceeding them, vitally oozing over to audience, I also sense the invocation of dementes busting out in relation to the audience’s excess of feeling that ended the band’s live performance and became another live performance.

How we listen to and position ourselves in relation to 1970s salsa’s genre-mixing imaginary continues to hold unruly, swerving possibilities. And anormales as a sign continues to move in other “sonic imaginar[ies].” Today, the Puerto Rican rapper Residente, of the internationally popular rap group Calle 13, invokes anormalidad as an affective, queer, disability, and racialized sign. Residente’s recent song, “Somos Anormales” [We are Abnormals] (2017), argues for ugliness, blemishes, irregularities, and deformity as erotic, desirable, and crucial to off-kilter cariño. The Rican trapero Bad Bunny invokes anormales in various lyrics, including the one in the epigraph from the track “Soy Peor” [I’m Worse] (2016). “Soy Peor” is both an exemplary rendering of the affective darkness of Latinx and black American Trap as a genre, which refuses the false promises of getting better on the terms offered by the state and normative sexuality; and a track that has studied the darker ballads of salsa’s archives, such as “Triste y vacío” [Sad and Empty], “Que Lío” [What a

52. Indeed, there would be more rioting in the Bronx in 1976 during the blackout across the city.
Mess], and “Periódico de Ayer” [Yesterday’s Paper]. These corta venas [vein-slit] songs call to the irredeemably dark dembow and Trap aesthetic of “Soy Peor.”53 Bad Bunny’s post-Drake masculinity is all about feeling loss concurrently with explicit, unabashed sexual desire, and listening to brown and black femmes. A sonic and affective off-kilter-ness, in which I hear queerness, floats freely among anormales.54

“GET HARD!”—BLISS IN KINSHASA

Unruly audition can take other forms than riot; it also expands affective, sonic solidarity in a moment of imagined postcolonial possibility. Let us move now to Kinshasa, Congo, in 1974 (then Zaire), where, before an audience of 80,000 people, the All-Stars performed their sabores. Over three days in September, the musicians played in relation to Celia Cruz, Miriam Makeba, James Brown, Bill Withers, Big Black, The Spinners, B.B. King, and other African and Afro-diasporic, mixed-genre, brown and black artists in Zaire ’74, a concert headlining the October Rumble in the Jungle fight between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman (an estimated 1 billion people watched the fight). This event invokes pan-African, Afro-Latinx, postcolonial, diasporic, and aesthetic solidarity. Of course, the Fania label narrated this event as a transnational business success between Don King, Massuci, and the dictator Mobutu Sese Seko. But we swerve from this success narrative and listen instead for the imagined phonic substance made between musicians and another salsa, black and brown audience.

Our audio-visual, multi-sensorial aesthetic attunement returns us to sensing the musicians’ interactions on video. Gast, alongside cinema verité filmmaker and cinematographer Albert Maysles, shot footage for film of the performances, which was released in 1986 under the title Fania in Africa.55 From repeatedly watching the YouTube iteration of Fania in Africa, I sense how the musicians’ dynamics inflect queer relation.56 In particular,

53. The difference between Bad Bunny’s rendering of heartbeat and Lavoc’s in the aforementioned songs is that Bad Bunny doesn’t blame female figures for reminding him that he is also an injured subject who has feelings, which these and other salsa lyrics do, lugubriously.
54. The Puerto Rican traperos Fuete Billete also invoke anornales on the 2013 track “Bien Guillao” (2013). Bad Bunny invokes it, again, on the track “Tu no me ves cabra saramambiche” (2017).
55. Albert Maysles shot footage of one of Yoko Ono’s performances of Cut Piece in 1966 at Carnegie Hall, and, with his brother David, made the 1970 music documentary Gimme Shelter, and the 1975 documentary Gray Gardens. I contend that the detail of Maysles’ involvement in shooting footage of the 1974 concert in Kinshasa is a reminder that the musicians who played with Fania were also in relation to avant-garde, camp, and queer aesthetic and living practices. It is important to me that we see that these signifiers party together in the same Zeitgeist, even as the “sonic color line” was vigilantly invested in. See Stoever, The Sonic Colorline: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening (New York: New York University Press, 2016). I care about how we—Latinx Studies, Performance Studies, Caribbean Studies, and Sound Studies scholars in particular—feel compelled to listen to what salsa and salsa listeners stimulate, and how we socialize them, let’s say, in our writing.
in their near-10-minute performance of the song, “Ponte Duro.” “Ponte Duro” can be translated as “Harden Up,” “Man Up,” or “Get Hard.” The performance of this song is positioned late in the set, as a climax. The timbalero [timbal player/drummer], Nicky Marrero, and conguero [conga drum player], Ray Barreto, play out battles of improvisation. Roberto Roena, percussionist and bongo player, precedes the battle, comes forward on the proscenium in a shiny, white and blue silk jumpsuit that sports his initials across the back, spins circles, and dances steps that break the floor. Roena is puro flow, lifting and locking his shoulders in a karate, tough guy move. From the waist up, his moves pose as pumped-up and butch. From the waist down, he gives us more to work with.

A line from Muñoz’s reading with the legendary dancer and pose artist, Kevin Aviance, cuts across how I sense Roena’s movements: “But imagine how hard it must be to try to look and act so butch all the time.” Muñoz describes how Aviance’s performance of gendery gestures in queer, downtown New York nightclubs reveals, rather than hides, the masc-enforcing conditions that compel muscle-queens to pump their bodies into a hypermasculine ideal. The ideal must hide the conditions of becoming, in this case, from swishy to hard-cut. Muñoz’s writing with Aviance’s poses detours from the doom of the singularized ideal. The theorist performs his consideration of his “approach to” Aviance through a diction emphasizing gesture, queer feeling, and looking at performance in relation to how other gays physically do it, in a crowd, as audience. In the narrative of this chapter of Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity (2009), Muñoz also positions his childhood self as “a spy in the house of gender normativity.” He learned practices of “butching-up,” into and out of which he would slip, his body aware that this had something to do with surviving not only the street’s masculine hails, but also the normative constraints of familial spaces. And the slipping in and out, he tells readers, had “serious effects.” Both the “serious effects” and the play of slipping in and out of gendery gestures, and in relation to others in the world, move in Muñoz’s approach to Aviance, and to queer as a horizon. I, another spy in houses of Caribbean gender normativity, sense the break in Roena’s movements, the buff thrusts as well as the curvy undulations, the legs making turns smoother than breakdancing on ice. To my senses, Roena’s movements do things feminine and masculine. This simultaneity does things for the audience, of which listening viewers of the video are a fragmented part, and for the stage flanked by an all-male band. Roena dances for himself, he dances for the men around him, and he dances for us, and our approach finds abnormal pleasure in his moves. From behind, Marrero makes the timbales talk, loudly—they can only exclaim. Marrero is so slick about it, and at a couple points lifts the stick in his right hand over his beautiful coif of black hair as though it were a comb, sliding it back over his crown, holding the beat with the stick in his left hand as he air-grooms himself. Marrero’s leopard-patterned, button-down shirt with a gold collar is tied up at the waist over his pant line, revealing some belly skin and the beautiful descent of black pubic hair.

58. Ibid., 77–79.
59. Ibid., 68.
60. Ibid., 69.
From beyond the visual frame, if we listen for the ad libs of unruliness, we once again hear the eruption: “¡Anormal!” We sense the singers, off to the side of the stage of the drummers. Lavoe is among them. Though he is not visible, we hear his distinctive cry swerve across the stage, “¡Ataca, demente!” [Attack, demented one!]. The camera fixates on Barretto, seated in the middle of the stage, behind his arrangement of red congas, and dressed in all red—red silk jacket and red bell-bottomed pants open over white patent-leather shoes. His jacket is undone all the way, revealing his bare chest. As he begins his flow, we hear Lavoe’s cries, doing a form of listening that is not silent but approaching the other, egging on Barretto, and those within audible reach of his calls, for his pleasure. Barretto is a tall, thick guy, long arms, yet the way he works the heads and wood doesn’t dwarf the drums, but makes them seem even bigger than they are. He beats and strokes out rhythms with his palms, works himself into a euphoric state that nearly rivals the energy of Johnny Pacheco’s—Pacheco, the band leader, stays hype, and he also is time. Toward what becomes the end of Barretto’s improvisation, his hunky form rises and he lifts one of the red congas between his two hands and throws down the whole drum onto the stage. Its base thunders, wood on wood. The drum becomes a mallet: the entire stage is Barretto’s cuero [drumhead], and everyone on it vibrates to his body’s ganas [desires]. Barretto and Pacheco face each other with the conga between them, jumping con gusto and their mouths wide open. Pacheco lifts his left right leg up, wide, in a move that I associate with rumba, and opens himself to Barretto.

Barretto thrusts his body in that opening. With his arm gestures, as he lifts and slams the conga, and dances with it, circles around it, he treats it like a body he wants to fuck, or a fire that holds a secret portal to the underworld, into which he would dive. These movements conjure to anormal, decadence, even a dementia. Pacheco’s thighs open his body to Barretto’s assertion. They both bounce up and down, blissfully. The look of ecstasy on Barretto’s face finds some remnant of control as he returns to his seat and the arrangement’s imagined end. They’re not necessarily doing it, doing sex per se. But they’re not not doing it.

The blissed gesticulations between Barretto and Pacheco, the descargas shuffling between “mediated control” and “losing it,” and the vibrations sounded out in the cries from Lavoe to Barretto that exceed them and touch us, set off pleasure in the human’s animality, and a sense of extra-terrestriality—as in, our super-boundedness to this terre. These super bounds erupt in brown, black, and queer desires to take off from the here and now, which may also manifest as unruliness, losing it, and being beside ourselves. That feeling is underscored by Lavoe’s cry of “¡Anormal!” as a hyper-disidentifying taste for more that could be too much, or could be what losses’ ruptures need to make more life.

**EL SABOR DEL DES-CONTROL [THE TASTE OF UNRULINESS]**

Listen to salsa for queer gestures. Listen to trabalenguas (tongue twisters) as a culturally specific bounty of syllables that offer more than translatable meaning. If we imagine Lavoe’s trabalenguas as sound sense, and sin sabores as those who don’t know how to taste the sound, then the embodiment that vibies most with trabalenguas’s sound sense may be a riot of anormales con sabor that sends the very musicians who make the music running off stage, running out of
the contract made of their time and skills for another’s profit and entertainment. Descriptive, multi-sensorial poetic listening and sonically oriented close readings by anormales break the expectations of listeners as passive objects who comport with the civilizing and market demands of an art form, and release riotous sensorial errance (errantry).

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