

# VISIÓN | doble

REVISTA DE CRÍTICA E HISTORIA DEL ARTE

**Título:** AQUÍ: El “Queering” de Espacios Arquitectónicos a través de Afiches In-Situ

**Title:** AQUÍ: Queering Architectural Space through Site-Based Posters

**Autor / Author:** Regner Ramos

Profesor, Escuela de Arquitectura, Universidad de Puerto Rico, Recinto de Río Piedras

**Resumen:** *AQUÍ* fue un evento de diseño sobre place-making, que se llevó a cabo el 11 de junio de 2018, en la Escuela de Arquitectura de la Universidad de Puerto Rico. Este recibió a miembros y aliados de la comunidad LGBTQ, con el propósito de crear una serie de afiches in-situ que afirmaran la presencia de identidades queer en espacios físicos, y reclamaran un espacio para ellos en nuestro entorno construido. Incluye versión en inglés..

**Abstract:** *AQUÍ* was a design-based placemaking event that took place on June 11, 2018, at the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus, School of Architecture. It welcomed members and allies of the LGBTQ community to create a series of site-based posters that asserted the presence of queer identities in physical places and claimed a space for them in our built environment. Spanish version included..

**Palabras clave:** Arquitectura, Espacio queer, Place-making, Site-Writing, Urbanismo, Regner Ramos

**Keywords:** Architecture, Placemaking, Queer Space, Site-Writing, Urbanism, Regner Ramos

**Sección:** English / **Section:** English

**Publicación:** 15 de agosto de 2018

**Cita recomendada:**

Ramos, Regner. “AQUÍ: Queering Architectural Space through Site-Based Posters.” *Visión Doble: Revista de Crítica e Historia del Arte*, 15 de agosto de 2018, [humanidades.uprrp.edu/visiondoble](http://humanidades.uprrp.edu/visiondoble)

**Visión Doble: Revista de Crítica e Historia del Arte**

Programa de Historia del Arte, Facultad de Humanidades  
Universidad de Puerto Rico, Recinto de Río Piedras  
13 Ave. Universidad Ste. 1301  
San Juan, Puerto Rico 00925-2533

+1 (787) 764-0000, extensión 89596

[vision.doble@upr.edu](mailto:vision.doble@upr.edu)

<http://humanidades.uprrp.edu/visiondoble>

<https://revistas.upr.edu>



## *AQUÍ: Queering Architectural Space through Site-Based Posters*

Regner Ramos

Profesor, Escuela de Arquitectura, Universidad de Puerto Rico, Recinto de Río Piedras

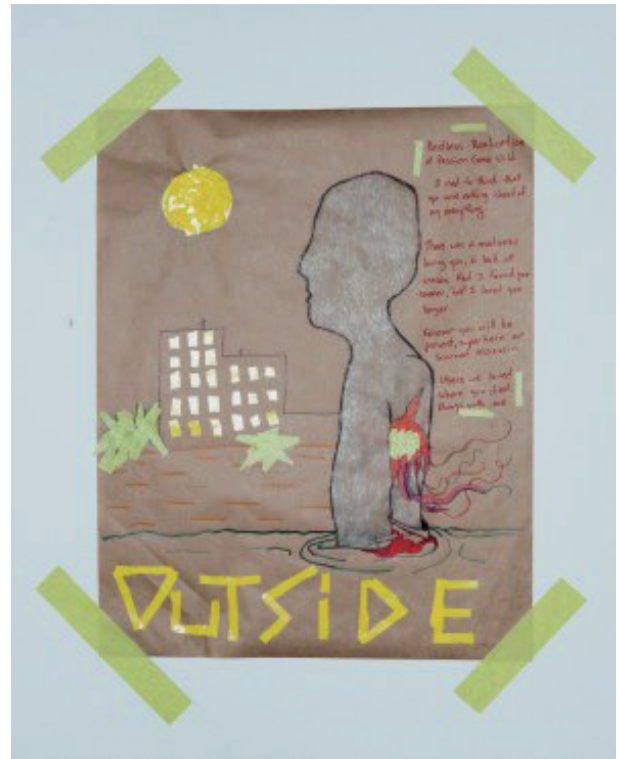


Courtyard at the University of Puerto Rico, School of Architecture.

*AQUÍ* was a design-based placemaking event that took place on June 11, 2018, at the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus, School of Architecture. It welcomed members and allies of the LGBTQ community—from within the Río Piedras Campus and outside—to create a series of site-based posters that asserted the presence of queer identities in physical places and claimed a space for them in our built environment. As part of my research project funded by FIPI, which seeks to explore queer spatial practices in Puerto Rico, *AQUÍ* queered our School of Architecture's spaces through

these crafted expressions, giving visibility to non-heteronormative stories and experiences while placing them in key locations that either resonated or challenged the building's established meanings.

The *AQUÍ* posters prompted architects and architecture students to validate queerness within architectural discourse while advocating for Puerto Rican spaces that cater to diversity and inclusion, particularly in Puerto Rico, where the architecture discipline has been unconcerned with creating an architectural record, history or theorization of LGBTQ spaces and practices.



OUTSIDE poster created by participant.

Un enorme patio interior con un estanque vacío  
en casa de mi tía Violeta: uno  
de los lugares mágicos de mi niñez  
Los pasillos alrededor del estanque eran  
igualmente hipnóticos.

ENTRE

Las mamparas que protegían las galerías del sol y  
la lluvia invitaban a mirar entre sus líneas geométricas  
fragmentos de cuerpos y movimientos

Fue entre esas líneas que observé por primera  
vez el cariño entre personas del mismo sexo.

Mi tío mayor y su compañero se besaron fugazmente  
en esa galería, sin saberse observados.

Entre líneas y espacios traslució su  
amor. [1]

Indeed, Javier E. Laureano's book *San Juan Gay: Conquista de un espacio urbano de 1948-1991* stands on its own in its creation of a general historical account of the spaces where Puerto Rican gay culture unfolded during the latter part of the twentieth century. Although *San Juan Gay* creates an impressive list of LGBTQ spaces and their locations, it only begins to scratch the surface for further concerns, questions and theorizations related to architecture and urbanism. In his book, Laureano explains that part of the difficulty in creating a comprehensive history of non-normative spaces in the capital is that Puerto Rico's gay history is dislocated, marginal and silent—partially due to the lack of homosexuality anti-criminalization and anti-discrimination laws, which were only put in place as recently as 2014—, and partially due to the migration of LGBTQ citizens, scholars and artists to the mainland United States. Laureano is careful in overemphasizing the importance of giving these individuals too much visibility when mapping out their spaces, upholding that queer invisibility is a strategy for survival and self-protection, but he also seems to rather indecisively straddle the line between vouching for a degree of invisibility and calling for researchers to preserve, rescue and discuss these silent, invisible histories.

There are problems in maintaining ambivalence in Puerto Rico's queer spatial discourse, and in the lack of its intellectual, architectural production. As environmental planner Gordon Brent Ingram, et al., mention in their book *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Spaces, Sites of Resistance*, "A major criticism is that queer theory presents a canon written largely by white and decidedly Eurocentric males and therefore excessively reflects their ideas." Puerto Rico finds itself in an advantageous academic position, in which although homophobia still exists and is kept very much alive by various cultural and political sectors, we are able to freely practice—and research—queer identities without the fear of criminal prosecution, which is still a lingering problem in 73 countries across the globe. In this way, from our Caribbean region, we can contribute to a much-needed global discussion of alternate, non-white queer practices, spaces, politics, desires, communities and aesthetics.

MIENTRAS YO IBA SOLO  
SUBIENDO LA ESCALERA  
UN PROFESOR LE LANZA  
UN SALUDO A ALGUNA  
PERSONA QUE DEBÍA

ESTAR MUY CERCA A MI  
ESPALDA SEGÚN SU  
MIRADA. AHÍ ME PERCATÉ  
DE QUE ALGUIEN ME  
SEGUÍA DISCRETAMENTE. Y  
A REVELADO ME PREGUNTÓ  
MI NOMBRE TÍMIDAMENTE.  
EN LA NOCHE RECIBÍ UN  
POKE DE ÉL POR FACEBOOK.  
DETRÁS [2]

Informed by the work of feminist theorist and architect Jane Rendell in her book *Site-Writing: The Architecture of Art Criticism*, the posters created in *AQUÍ* sought to act as starting points for this discussion on the architecture of Puerto Rican queerness by drawing on the participants' spatial experiences, memories and subject-positions. In *Site-Writing*, Rendell considers the site—i.e., the location—of a work, as well as the spatial qualities of a critic's writing as part of the meaning of the criticism itself. The process of designing the posters, as well as the final product, borrowed from and reinterpreted elements of Rendell's site-writing, focusing primarily on the importance of a subject's location—being here, aquí—and asserting themselves within spaces.

ADENTRO, PERO TAMBIÉN  
ENTRE...  
BIENVENIDA AL ESPACIO  
FAMILIAR DE UN BUEN AMIGO,  
ME ENCONTRÉ EN UNA  
SITUACIÓN INSOSTENIBLE.  
ESE DÍA FINGÍ SER LA  
NOVIA DE MI AMIGO QUE  
ANSIABA PRESENTAR A SU  
NOVIO.  
ADENTRO [3]



Processed with VSCO with I9 preset.

Participants from a variety of backgrounds, ages, and sexual orientations participated and began their design process by retelling a story in which they—whether first- or secondhand—encountered a moment of queerness. Bearing this anecdote in mind, they went on a walking tour of the building to look for a place for their poster to inhabit. To emphasize the spatiality of the exercise, each participant chose a preposition that both spoke of the site of their poster as well as embodied their queer story. Conceptualized as site-based works, the *AQUÍ* posters' political meanings were thus not independent from the surfaces on which they were posted—going against the very nature of posters, which are meant to be easily reproduced and quickly installed on any available surface—but rather created dialogues between the physical building, the story, and the reader. Because each poster depicted a unique preposition that indicated a position, the stories were told from a first-person point of view, reiterating the role of individual bodies and

subjects that inhabit Puerto Rican spaces, while reclaiming the building's built, physical surfaces as agents that announce stories of queerness, such as when Rendell writes:

These are stories about lives, yet despite the often powerful autobiographical elements, told as journeys, the narratives take spatial forms: actively referencing special places, generating situated dynamics through various voices, and inviting the reader or viewer to take up particular yet often ambiguous and changing positions [in relation to the work].

From the posters' designs, alternate discussions on aesthetics and conventions are fostered; from their stories, there are political and cultural issues that arise; and from their individual locations in the building, alternate meanings can be extrapolated. For instance, each participant had access to the same materials: brown paper, electrical tape, masking tape and Sharpies. The colored tape was intended to allow participants to create patterns, geometric figures and words without having to actually draw anything unless they wanted to—this ensured that participants who did not feel that they were good at drawing could create graphic compositions out of the material rather than based on drawing skills.



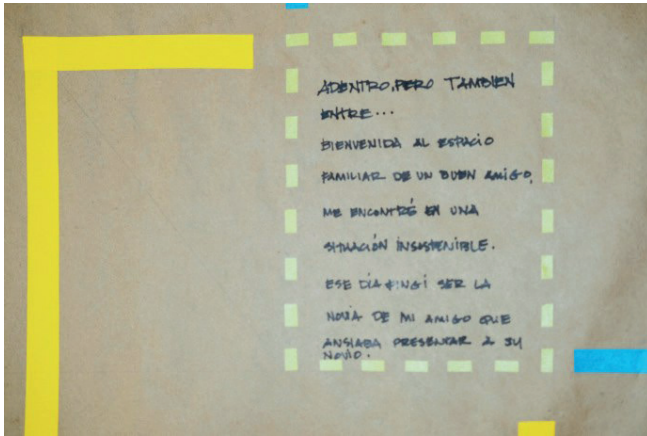
Materials at the AQUÍ workshop.



Participant in the process of creating her poster.

The creator of the ADENTRO poster—who told the story of the time her gay, closeted friend, introduced her, without any warning, as his girlfriend to his family—framed her text within two overlapping rectangles. In the points of overlap, she deconstructed the rectangles' solid lines into dashed lines. Rather fittingly, in architectural drawing conventions, dashed lines indicate something which is hidden. The location of her poster—outside the School

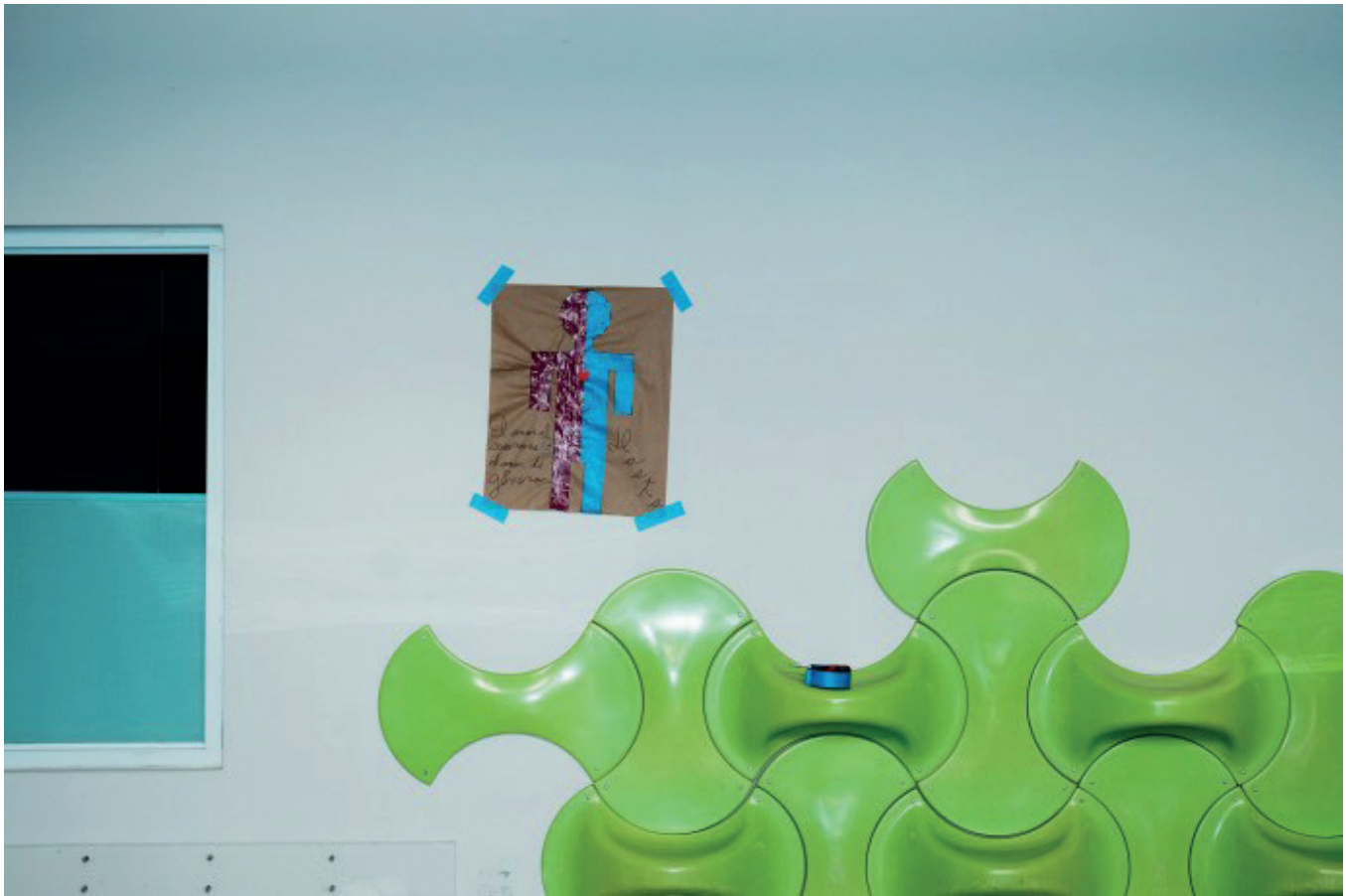
of Architecture, on the exterior wall adjacent to the entrance gate—acted as a point of contention for her selection of the preposition “adentro”—inside.



The *ADENTRO* poster's text framed within 'hidden' lines. The *ADENTRO* poster was placed on the outside entrance of the School of Architecture.

As I helped put up her poster, she further expressed how this experience filled her with discomfort, yes, but also with sadness. Her friend wanted to throw off any suspicion of his sexual orientation by using her as a decoy with his family, who living in the southern part of the island, in the more conservative city of Ponce, were not accepting of homosexuality. These family dynamics unfold within the Puerto Rican domestic sphere, where the home becomes the site of struggle for non-normative identities. In addition, the *ADENTRO* story factors in another variable having to do with the island's cultural geography, in particular, the role that machismo, tradition and religion play in the more conservative municipalities.





*HASTA* poster placed above the installation by the late architect Maruja Fuentes.

The posters were important design exercises because they broke silence, bringing to light Puerto Rican stories which could be otherwise disregarded and forgotten. Stories of LGBTQ people are often encouraged to be kept quiet, to be untold for fear of being found out. Here, the idea of “the closet” becomes a space defined not by walls but by silence, reminiscent of Haitian artist Jean-Ulrick Désert’s writing about his experiences as a gay black man:

I unwittingly walked into a large dark closet, unaware of its true size. Its architecture was not unlike what I already knew, its boundaries were fluid, sometimes only for a moment. It shared the same streets, the same people. Its only difference was silence—a silence that fostered and still fosters overwhelming complicity.

The *ADENTRO* poster told a story that—through words, lines and its site—illustrated how being inside the domestic sphere meant having to keep queerness hidden for fear of being rejected, of losing a place within the family nucleus, of being cast outside. The same readings could be done for the rest of the *AQUÍ* posters and their locations, to extrapolate information, interpretations and meanings, such as in the *DETRÁS* poster, which was placed in the exact location where its narrated event took place. In this poster, we also begin to see the role of technology in Puerto Rican culture, particularly among millennials. Here, the queering of space is extended, taking place not only in that particular location—behind the elevator, on the main staircase at the School of Architecture—but also into the digital space of Facebook. The social network’s “Poke” feature becomes an extension of spatial flirting practices. However, in the case of queer culture, the Poke also becomes a subtle hint, a digital action that discretely announces the identity of a non-straight person, in the hopes of being reciprocated.



*DETRÁS* poster by one of the participants, placed in the original location of where the narrative took place.



*ENTRE* poster by one of the participants.

In the case of the *ENTRE* poster, tropical architectural elements—such as the mampara—are depicted as permeable boundaries that help to partially conceal romantic practices between two men. The poster was placed on the wall behind a rolling metal gate that closes off access to the school of architecture during evening hours. As such, the reader’s

interaction with the poster, and the meanings they attributed to it, would vary depending on the time of day and their position in reference to the poster. Intended to be read between the metallic openings of the gate during the evening hours, the ENTRE poster's location echoed its description of the mampara as well as the ephemerality of the queer moment it narrated; when the gate opens, the poster's intention changes.



*HACIA* poster placed next to the bridge leading towards the studio spaces.

Queerness resists definition and knowability, and challenges normative structures and conventions. The *AQUÍ* posters destabilized the fixity and measurability of architecture (understood as built structure) by queering space through the multiple potential interpretations of the site-based installations. Narrated by localized, yet anonymous voices, diverse meanings can be extrapolated through the posters' open-endedness and their resistance to being fixed, definitive visual cues. Themes, topics and issues emerge in each, inviting further research and much-needed discussions which will undoubtedly

be picked up throughout the lifespan of this research project. Apart from reiterating certain concerns and highlighting others, the *AQUÍ* posters were helpful exercises that proposed alternate understandings of queer subjectivities, practices, and spaces in Puerto Rico, and in this way, they begin opening new possibilities for the discipline while advocating for the validation of individuals who have been largely ignored in Puerto Rican architectural history, theory and design.

References:

Arroyo, Jossianna. "Historias de familia: migraciones y escritura homosexual en la literatura puertorriqueña." *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos* 26.3 (2002): 361-378.

Asencio, Marysol. "'Locas,' Respect, and Masculinity: Gender Conformity in Migrant Puerto Rican Gay Masculinities." *Gender and Society*, Vol. 25.3 (2011): 335-354.

Ingram, Gordon Brent, Anne-Marie Bouthilette, and Yolanda Retter. *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Spaces, Sites of Resistance*. Bay Press, 1997.

Laureano, Javier E. *San Juan Gay: Conquista de un espacio urbano de 1948-1991*. San Juan: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 2016.

Rendell, Jane. *Site-Writing: The Architecture of Art Criticism*. London and New York: IB Taurus, 2010.

[1] An enormous interior patio with an empty fountain in my aunt Violet's house: one of the magical places of my childhood. The hallways around the fountain were equally as hypnotic.

## BETWEEN

The screens that protected the galleries from sun and rain invited to gaze between their geometric lines, fragments of bodies and movements. Between those lines I observed for the first time the affection between people of the same sex. My eldest uncle and his companion fleetingly kissed in that gallery, unknowingly observed. Between lines and

spaces their love transpired.

[2] While I, by myself, went up the stairs, a professor greeted someone who, by their gaze, must have been very close behind me. There, I realized that someone had been discretely following me. Having now seen him, he timidly asked me my name. That night I received a Facebook poke from him.

BEHIND

[3] Inside, but also between... Being welcomed into my good friend's family space, I found myself in an untenable situation. That day I feigned being the girlfriend of a friend who yearned to introduce his boyfriend.

INSIDE