

Construyendo nuestro pedacito de patria:

Space and Dis(place)ment in Puerto Rican Chicago

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of PhD
of Philosophy in the Department of
Romance Studies in the Graduate School
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the relationship between identity and place in the imagination, performance and production of post-World War II Puerto Rican urban space in Chicago. Specifically, I contend that the articulation of Puerto Rican spatiality in the city has emerged primarily as a response to the threat of local displacement as a byproduct of urban renewal and gentrification. I further argue the experience of displacement, manifested through territorial attachment, works to deepen the desire for community and belonging. Through a performance and cultural studies approach, this project works to track this recent history of Puerto Rican geographic and psychic displacement within Chicago as it is evidenced by various performative spatial interventions and manifested within the community's expressive culture.

My topics of study include the 1966 Division Street Riots, the Young Lords Organization (YLO), Humboldt Park's *Paseo Boricua* and spoken-word poet David Hernández. Through these interventions and forms of expression, I argue that physical, political, discursive, and affective claims are made to local territory, articulating a Puerto Rican cultural identity inextricably connected to urban space. In so doing, I aim to endorse the theoretical utility of concepts of "space" by highlighting the enduring material and metaphoric significance of place for Puerto Ricans, arguing against a tendency in contemporary Puerto Rican studies to equate circular migratory movement

with transnationalism by virtue of its opposition to territorially grounded definitions of identity.

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*Come and show me another city with lifted head singing so proud
to be alive and coarse and strong and cunning.
Flinging magnetic curses amid the toil of piling job upon job, here
is a tall bold slugger set vivid against the little soft cities;
Fierce as a dog with tongue lapping for action, cunning as a savage
pitted against the wilderness,*

*Bareheaded,
Shoveling,
Wrecking,
Planning,
Building, breaking, rebuilding....*

Carl Sandburg, Chicago

*I promised to show you a map but you say this is a
mural*

*then yes let it be these are small distinctions
where do we see it from is the question*

Adrienne Rich, An Atlas of the Difficult World

Introduction

Outrage erupted from Chicago's Latino communities in early 2005 when the American Girl Company released its newest doll—the Mexican-American "Marisol Luna."¹ Her storybook, written by Fresno-based writer and novelist Gary Soto, revolves around the girl and her family's decision to move away from Pilsen, Chicago's largest Mexican community:

¹ The doll and storybook were priced at a hefty \$84, or buyers could purchase "Marisol's Dance Collection" for \$150.

“Dad and I think it’s time we get out of this neighborhood,” Mom said. She explained that it was no place for me to grow up. It was dangerous, and there was no place for me to play.

“I can play in the street,” I argued, not too brightly.

“Yeah, and get run over,” Mom predicted.

“You’ll be safer there,” Dad added...At that moment, two men outside began yelling at each other. A car door slammed, and we heard the sound of screeching cars echo between the apartment buildings. Then silence.

“See,” Mom said, pointing outside. (17-18)

Despite Marisol’s protests, her family ends up moving to suburban Des Plaines, far away from the dangers of Chicago’s “mean streets.”

Pilsen residents were offended by the story, arguing that this characterization of their neighborhood was both insulting and inaccurate. They also feared that negative publicity could deter potential Mexican-American residents from relocating to the area. In response, the community’s congressional representative, Luis Gutiérrez, sent a letter to the American Girl Company, accusing it of making degrading and offensive misstatements about his community. But *Chicago Sun-Times* columnist Mary Mitchell countered that Congressman Gutiérrez was ignoring the real issue of gang violence:

It’s a wonder the maker of American Girl dolls hasn’t accused Hispanic politicians of doll abuse. Over the last three years, real children from real families have died in Pilsen because of gang violence, and we didn’t hear a peep from these elected officials...It would be nice if Gutierrez could stop beating up on a doll and beat up on some gang-bangers. (14)

Meanwhile, American Girl and its parent company, toymaker Mattel, said that the doll had been misunderstood. They claimed that the book’s author only wanted to convey the fictional girl’s love for her community, which she calls “the best place in the world.”

American Girl spokeswoman Stephanie Spanos added that the “dangerous” comment was a reference to *traffic* in the city (Hermann 4). The company has no plans to change Marisol's story.

I begin by referencing the very public debate that surrounded the Marisol doll in 2005 in order to point to the parameters of our culture's mediation on themes of race, ethnicity, space and representation. Although American Girl has yet to produce a Puerto Rican version that hails from Humboldt Park, I would suggest that the themes that emerge from Marisol's narrative offer a perfect springboard from which to launch into an exploration of the relationship between identity and place in the imagination, performance and production of post-World War II Puerto Rican urban space. First, and above all else, Marisol reminds us that place and its representations *matter*, especially at a time when it has become common for cultural critics either to nostalgically mourn its disappearance or to celebrate our “liberation” from enduring ties to local circumstances. In *Place and Placelessness* (1976), for example, humanistic geographer Edward Relph takes up the issue of the erosion of place as a central theme. Placelessness, Relph suggests, is marked by an “inauthentic attitude” which “involves no awareness of the deep and symbolic significances of places and no appreciation of their identities” (82). In the modern world, Relph continues, we are surrounded by a general condition of placelessness, or a “weakening of the identity of places to the point where they not only look alike and feel alike and offer the same bland possibilities for experience” (90). The

causes of this “existential outsidersness” are numerous and include mass communication and culture, multi-national corporations, central authority, tourism, and various forms of transportation like roads, railways and airports, which are “imposed on the landscape rather than developing with it” (90).

More recent scholarship has taken up where Relph left off, understanding placelessness to be a negative consequence of globalization—the phenomenon of “time-space compression”—and its attendant insistence upon values such as mobility, centralization and economic rationalization.² According to this argument, the forces of globalization have radically reconfigured time and space. As capital becomes more mobile and mass communication more ubiquitous, global spaces are homogenized while local cultures are eroded. Consequently, people have become citizens of a “dramatically delocalized world” (Appadurai 178) in which mobility and displacement have become the primary modes of human existence, resulting in what Edward Said calls a “generalized condition of homelessness” (18).

Conversely, postmodern and critical geographers like Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault, Edward Soja and Doreen Massey, among others, have contended that this “unbudgingly hegemonic” privileging of time over space and, by extension, of capital over local specificity has created “a critical silence, an implicit subordination of space to

² See, for example, historian William Leach’s *Country of Exiles: The Destruction of Place in American Life* (1999).

time that obscures geographical interpretations of the changeability of the social world” (Soja 15). Or, as Massey puts it, “there is a lot more determining how we experience space than what ‘capital’ gets up to” (60). In tandem with this line of inquiry is a (re)assertion of the importance of geography, space and its production in social analysis made possible, according to Soja, in large part by a transdisciplinary “spatial turn” (“Thirdspace” 264). By claiming that space is “produced,” these scholars challenge both the tendency to take space for granted and the assumption that space represents nothing more than a passive setting upon which social processes are played out.

The treatment of space as a social product is indebted to *The Production of Space* (1991), in which Lefebvre argues that space acquires significance through a triad of spatial practice (our perceptions and appropriations of space), representations of space (our conceptions of spaces and spatial environments), and representational spaces (actual lived spaces). Taking his cue from Lefebvre’s “lived space,” Soja’s concept of the “trialectics of spatiality” aims to merge a long-standing divide between material geographies and representational spaces, positing that a geographical imagination—

...continues to be confined by an encompassing dualism, or binary logic, that has tended to polarize spatial thinking around such fundamental oppositions as objectivity v. subjectivity, material v. mental, real v. imagined, things in space v. thoughts about space. (“Thirdspace” 264)

As an alternative, Soja proposes *Thirdspace*, which is practiced and lived rather than material (*Firstspace*) or mental (*Secondspace*).

Also relevant to the issue of practice in relation to space and place is Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). In contrast to the working definitions of most geographers, who consider space to be a more abstract concept than place (following humanist geographer Yi-Fu Tuan's now classic *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*), de Certeau stands this distinction on its head. Instead, place is the empty grid over which practice occurs while space is what is created by practice. Consistent with Lefebvre and Soja, however, is de Certeau's split between the "concept" of the city (the orderly, rational, pre-structured image advanced by urban planners, maps, etc.) and the "fact" of the city as lived and experienced (94-95). Yet the Concept-city's "visual, panoptic or theoretical constructions" do not function independently of practice: "A *migrational*, or metaphorical, city thus slips into the clear text of the planned and readable city" (93). What is at the heart of Lefebvre, Soja, and de Certeau's understandings of spatiality is a rationale for the necessary connection between place and practice guided by an interdisciplinary understanding of space and place-making.

Lefebvre's "lived space," Soja's Thirdspace and de Certeau's "fact" of the city also point to the significance of the experience of place as central to its theorization. If we return to the premise that opened this section—that place has indeed become irrelevant in modern times—then how can we explain the vehemence of Pilsen residents' responses to Marisol? Indeed, it follows that Latinos/as in the city have established a relationship to this place and its history that have allowed them to create a sense of

belonging, alternately characterized by humanistic geographer Tuan as *topophilia*, that “affective bond between people and place” (4) or by Relph as a “field of care”:

[T]o care for a place involves more than having a concern for it that is based on certain past experiences and future expectations—there is also a real responsibility and respect for that place both for itself and for what it is to yourself and to others. There is in fact a complete commitment to that place, a commitment that is as profound as any that a person can make. (38)

Even the fictional Marisol’s attachment to her neighborhood is intense, underscoring the interactive and social nature of spatial production. Moreover, the production of space is a process that has an effect on the formation of subjectivity, identity, sociality, and physicality in myriad ways. Here, I subscribe to the notion of “double articulation” that Massey evokes in *Space, Place, and Gender*, a strategy that acknowledges the mutually constitutive nature of the relationship between identities and place.

Notably, Chicana/o scholars have emerged at the forefront of identity studies that underscore space through recourse to the “border” as both a specific geographical site and a powerful trope. In particular, Gloria Anzaldúa’s canonical *Borderlands/La Frontera* employs an historical, spatial and metaphorical vision of the U.S.-Mexican border in order to conceptualize the multiplicity of subject positions embodied by the “new mestiza.” Although Anzaldúa specifies in her preface that the physical border at issue in her work is specifically the “Texas-U.S. Southwest/Mexican border,” she also encourages her theory to be applied to a much broader context: “The Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of

different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy" ("Preface").

Indisputably, the explanatory power of the borderland concept has been immense and far-reaching; it has been taken up by postmodernist and poststructuralist scholars, among others, in order to privilege translocal connections, hybrid states of being, and the margins or spaces "in-between" over assumptions of purity, authenticity and fixed subjectivity. In texts like *The Location of Culture*, for example, Homi Bhabha recuperates marginal locations as opportune sites from which to challenge hegemonic narratives of race and nation. Furthermore, Bhabha asserts, it is these subjects—located "in-between" nations or subject positions—that are best positioned to mount this resistance.

This notion of "in-betweenness" lies at the core of research on transnational populations, generally defined as the development of "networks, activities, patterns of living, and ideologies that span their home and the host society" (Basch, et al. 4), emerging out of long-standing patterns of migration and settlement. Given the translocal nature of their colonial condition, much of the contemporary scholarship on Puerto Ricans in the diaspora has followed suit, contending that since their post-World War II Great Migration to the United States, the "prolonged exodus, together with a large influx of returnees and foreigners, makes Puerto Rico a test case of transnationalism" (Duany, "Nation" 51). Described as "one of the greatest exoduses of

population recorded by history” (Maldonado-Denis 160), this migration was propelled both by Operation Bootstrap’s displacement of newly unemployed agricultural workers and by the introduction of affordable and regular flights between Puerto Rico and the United States.

In his short story “La guagua aérea,” Luis Rafael Sánchez chronicles one of these flights between San Juan and New York, “entre el eliseo desacreditado que ha pasado a ser Nueva York y el edén inhabitable que se ha vuelto Puerto Rico” (15). Humorous events and overheard conversations are juxtaposed with more profound meditations on a Puerto Rican identity in flux:

Puertorriqueños del corazón estrujado por las interrogaciones que suscitan los adverbios *allá y acá*. Puertorriqueños que, de tanto ir y venir, informalizan el viaje en la guagua aérea y lo reducen a una trillita sencillona sobre el móvil océano. Que lo importa es llegar, pronto, a Nueva York. Que lo que importa es regresar, pronto, a Puerto Rico. (20)

For Jorge Duany in *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move*, Sánchez’s text serves as a “powerful allegory for circular migration” (33), a phenomenon that characterizes contemporary back-and-forth movement between the island and the mainland. Duany further argues that this “constant displacement of people...blurs the territorial, linguistic, and juridical boundaries of the Puerto Rican nation” (211), challenging scholars to reconsider the nation in nonterritorial terms. As a result, “territorially grounded definitions of national identity become less relevant” (2), and “multiple attachments to various localities” (211) are formed. Thus, Duany ultimately

conceptualizes Puerto Rico as a nation that extends beyond the geographic boundaries of the island and across cultural borders—between the *acá* of the U.S. mainland and *allá* of the Island and vice versa.

Undoubtedly, there are deep political, economic and sociocultural ties that bind migrants from the island to communities in the U.S. Moreover, by connecting people and practices on the Island to those in diasporic communities, Duany usefully challenges notions of a fixed or immutable national Puerto Rican identity. In the process, however, I contend that his treatment of transnational cultures, hybrid subject positions, and unimpeded movement across porous borders neglects to adequately account for what happens when *real* people move through *real* spaces, or what Massey calls “power-geometry”:

This point concerns not merely the issue of who moves and who doesn't although that is an important element of it; it is also about power in relation to the flows and the movement. Different social groups have distinct relationships to this anyway-differentiated mobility: some are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movement, others don't; some are more on the receiving end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it. (61)

In addition, I contend that Duany's consideration of the transnationalism that purportedly permeates Puerto Rican culture, coupled with a decontextualized theorization of its attendant hybridity, effectively conflates “travel” with “diaspora” and in so doing obscures the significance of local places. As James Clifford affirms:

[D]iaspora is different from travel (though it works through travel practices) in that it is not temporary. It involves dwelling, maintaining communities, having collective homes away from home...Thus the term diaspora is a signifier, not

simply of transnationality and movement, but of political struggles to define the local, as distinctive community, in historical contexts of displacement. (307-308)

Indeed, Puerto Rican identity has been shaped as much by the local histories of the particular spaces where they have been concentrated as it has been affected by the transformations produced by globalization. The community attached to this space in Chicago, for example, has an important history of formation and struggle that has been considerably influenced by “power-geometry.” For Chicago’s Puerto Rican population, movement has neither been fluid nor has the community been “mobile” in any sort of voluntary sense of the word. On the contrary, mobility has been limited by material and economic constraints, while movement across space has been carefully controlled and patrolled through forced migration and the threat of displacement. The displacement that I refer to is not from a mythical *Borinquen* or “lost” homeland, as is the case of the Chicanos’ *Aztlán*, nor even from the very real island of Puerto Rico. Rather, as a result of a more recent displacement within the city primarily as a byproduct of urban renewal and gentrification, I assert that Puerto Rican territorial boundaries are, in fact, *emphasized* and attachments *locally* focused.

At the same time that I track post-World War II Puerto Rican displacement within Chicago, I argue for a mainland-focused historical and geographical specificity that has been at times detached from contemporary Puerto Rican Studies scholarship. This detachment is both understandable and surprising. It is understandable because unlike the concrete border that divides Mexico and America, the United States and

Puerto Rico have no such common ground. However, it is also surprising given the fact that one of the primary concerns of Puerto Rican Studies has been an attempt to assert the enduring colonial relationship that has characterized the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico. It is possible (indeed, productive) to comprehend this history as one based almost entirely upon the geography and the colonization of space through conquest and exploitation, beginning with the U.S. invasion of the Island in 1898 and continuing with the granting of U.S. citizenship to Puerto Ricans in 1917 by the Jones Act, Operation Bootstrap, and the subsequent declaration of Puerto Rico as a commonwealth in 1952.

With respect to the specificity of the U.S.-Puerto Rican territorial divide, I aim to explore constructions of space—not only on a theoretical level, but also “on the ground”—in the cultural production of Latinos/as in the United States. This cultural expression, according to Frances Aparicio, should be understood “as more than simply artistic creation or entertainment”:

Given the history of migration, displacement, and marginalization that many Latinos have faced in the United States, forms of expressive culture...have served as important sites for exploring bicultural identity, debates on representation, and the cultural agency and role in U.S. history of people of Latin American descent. (“U.S. Latino” 355)

As Aparicio contends, Latino/a cultural studies must consider the historical and socio-geographical circumstances that have characterized Latino/a experiences in the United States. These circumstances become especially complicated with respect to the cultural

construction of U.S. Puerto Rican identities, deftly illustrated by Juan Flores in *From Bomba to Hip-Hop* (2000). It is the “unfinished business” of Puerto Rico’s continuing colonial relationship to the United States that “goes on to condition every aspect of Puerto Rican life, including the migration process itself as well as the social experience of the emigrant community” (9). Again, I take my cue from Flores by honoring the complexities that shape the U.S. Puerto Rican colonial experience in a supposedly postcolonial world.

The massive emigration rates from Puerto Rico to the mainland in the two decades following World War II are similarly inextricable from U.S.-based interventions and policies. The causes of the Great Migration can be traced back to 1917, when the nominal citizenship granted by the Jones Act allowed for legal movement to and from the mainland. After the implementation of Operation Bootstrap in the 1950s, Puerto Ricans were encouraged to migrate to the U.S., and many settled in New York and elsewhere in the northeast. However, the rapid growth of New York City’s Puerto Rican population—to be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter—soon became a “problem” and migration was subsequently redirected to the Midwest.

Although Chicago currently boasts the third-largest Latino population of all U.S. cities, it has, until recently, been egregiously understudied as a Latino/a metropolis. Instead, scholarly interest has focused upon Chicanos in the Southwest or the West, or upon Puerto Ricans (or Nuyoricans) in New York. For that reason, “*Construyendo nuestro*

pedacito de patria: Space and Dis(placement) in Puerto Rican Chicago,” breaks new ground on a number of levels, as there are still significant areas that remain to be explored and valuable contributions to be made in the field of Latino/a studies. Specifically, my topics of study, which include the Division Street Riots, the Young Lords Organization (YLO), Humboldt Park’s *Paseo Boricua* and spoken-word poet David Hernández have been, until now, incidental—if not invisible—in Latino/a Studies research, regardless of discipline.

Although the structure of this dissertation follows a loose chronology, the central focus of each chapter is geography—as articulated through the physical, imaginary, and political concerns of Chicago’s Puerto Ricans. Chapter I focuses on the 1966 Division Street Riots, a three-day uprising in Humboldt Park that followed the city’s first annual Puerto Rican Day Parade. In addition to providing an account of what took place before, during, and after the event, I conduct a dramaturgical and spatial analysis of the rioting guided by the theoretical work of Michel de Certeau and Judith Butler. My analysis finds that the riots exposed the competing practices at work in the production of Humboldt Park social space: on one hand, they made explicit an enduring spatialized and racialized discourse of difference propagated by the police, media, and city officials that linked neighborhood space to violence, criminality and pathology. On the other, the riots represented a pivotal moment in the history of the community’s self-representation while promoting a repositioning of spatial consciousness from a first-generation longing

for a nostalgized Puerto Rico to a second-generation focus on the plight of Chicago's Puerto Rican barrios.

In contrast to most contemporary assessments of the development of U.S. Puerto Rican radicalism that assume Puerto Rico to be its defining spatial frame of reference, Chapter II recognizes a commitment to Chicago neighborhood space as the primary force in the late 1960s politicization of the gang-turned-militant Young Lords Organization (YLO). In order to investigate the relationship between protest and performativity, this chapter explores significant moments in the group's history, characterized by dramatic attempts to claim space in order to mobilize activism against urban renewal in Chicago's Lincoln Park. Here, I draw upon DePaul University's rich yet neglected Young Lords collection, which includes oral histories, photographs, newspaper articles, fliers, and artwork. I demonstrate that the YLO's protests not only revealed the sheer intensity of its members' allegiance to their neighborhood, but also represented an opportunity for the Lords to reinvent their own version of U.S. Puerto Rican social and territorial self-determination.

Chapter III maps both the physical and symbolic landscape of the present-day *Paseo Boricua*, a seven-block stretch located in Humboldt Park's commercial district. Of particular interest here is the way in which the materialization of culture takes on multiple and strategic forms: from collective performances of belonging in rituals like the annual parade, to transforming physical buildings and spaces into cultural objects, to

the recent production of a specifically Humboldt Park brand of hip hop. I discover, based primarily upon periodical analysis, that the contemporary production of the meaning of neighborhood space continues to be contested by a diverse group of interested parties, often pitting the “gentrification industry” against Puerto Rican residents. I conclude that all vested stakeholders actively participate in the control and manipulation of space, often by juxtaposing narratives of exclusion and obfuscation with discourses of belonging and entitlement in order to close off alternative readings.

In Chapter IV, I conduct close readings of the Chicago-based Puerto Rican spoken-word poet David Hernández’s work, highlighting the productive tension that results from the dual articulation of movement and attachment that emerges in response to the poet’s experience of temporal, spatial, and linguistic displacement in the city. The chapter again problematizes celebrations of Puerto Rican mobility, instead suggesting that Hernández’s poetry challenges postmodernist narratives of displacement by exposing the very real limitations placed upon urban U.S. Puerto Rican movement. Next, I explore the trope of attachment as evidenced by the city’s thematic primacy in Hernández’s work. I determine that the poet’s search for “home” and connection points to the contradictory and multiple subjectivities that constitute the U.S. Puerto Rican, who is at once deterritorialized and reterritorialized.

A whole new history remains to be written of spaces—which would at the same time be the history of powers (both of these terms in the plural)—from the great strategies of geopolitics to the little tactics of the habitat.

Michel Foucault, “The Eye of Power”

1. [Race]ing Spaces: Chicago’s Division Street Riots

I sit on the patio of Nellie’s Restaurant on a warm day in mid-June, waiting for the annual Puerto Rican parade to pass by. As my third annual trip to this event, the crowd’s energy, the thumping beat of reggaetón music, and the blare of car horns all feel familiar. For today, traffic is rerouted and people seem giddy in their very public declarations of control over the meaning of neighborhood space. Meanwhile, there is another familiar—and somewhat wary—presence here. Police on motorcycles, cars, and horses direct the parade’s scenography, keeping the crowds confined along the length of Division Street while the floats and participants proceed toward the culmination of the festivities at Humboldt Park. The ubiquity of police surveillance recognizes that, as performance studies scholar Richard Schechner notes in *The Future of Ritual*, “to allow people to assemble in the streets is always to flirt with the possibility of improvisation—that the unexpected might happen” (47). And it was after the first annual Puerto Rican Parade in 1966 that the unexpected *did* happen—riots erupted and continued for three days in response to the shooting of a young Puerto Rican man by a Chicago police officer.

I take the Division Street Riots as the starting point for this chapter not only because they are generally considered to be the first Puerto Rican uprising in the United States, but also because they represent a pivotal moment in the history of Chicago's Puerto Rican community. In fact, in 2006, the parade celebrated the riots' fortieth anniversary and concluded with the premiere performance of "Spark," a play based on the riots (written collectively by community youth and the renowned Nuyorican author, poet and playwright Tato Laviera). Clearly, in the collective spatial imagination of Chicago's Puerto Rican community, the significance of the riots cannot be overstated as they provide both the content and terrain for the construction of a powerful and foundational U.S.-based Puerto Rican resistance narrative. By taking control of the Humboldt Park landscape and using the streets as a means for collective expression on a warm day in mid-June, rioters enacted a violent performative intervention.

While memories of the rioting are celebrated within the community, the protests also produced a persistent and insidious media discourse that deemed the presence of collective Puerto Rican bodies in Chicago's public spaces to be "threatening," thereby linking Humboldt Park space to violence and criminality. The present-day police regulation of the parade therefore becomes especially significant because it suggests that the city continues to "remember" and respond to Puerto Ricans as a population that needs to be contained and controlled. As a result, these dominant "racialized imaginative geographies" (Radcliffe and Westwood) are constantly at interpretive odds

with continued community efforts to physically and symbolically mark Humboldt Park space as Puerto Rican.

At the intersection of collective memory and the contested relationship between subjects and space is the field of performance studies, which provides much of the theoretical foundation for this chapter. According to Baz Kershaw in “Fighting in the Streets,” any analysis of protest must understand that “the performative becomes a major element of the daily struggle for power and against authority” (257). In fact, as he notes, most forms of contemporary protest are shaped by a performative dimension:

Though they often involve a good deal of spontaneity, they also follow scripts or scenarios. Moreover, contemporary protest almost always assumes an audience, onlookers for whom events are “played out.” It is almost always other-directed, and therefore often reflexively aware of the symbolic potential of its own sometimes all too real action. (260)

Taking a cue from Kershaw, in the chapter that follows I carry out what he calls “a dramaturgy of protest” (262) by conducting close readings—primarily based upon newspaper articles published at the time—of what took place before, during, and after the 1966 Division Street Riots. However, this chapter’s purpose is not to provide the reader with a comprehensive or dispassionate historical account of the period. Instead, a performative lens makes it possible to consider the “messy complexity” (Kershaw 260) of the Division Street Riots, which seems particularly appropriate for an analysis of events whose outcome, as they occurred, was marked by uncertainty. In addition, although this media-centric analysis emerged out of necessity (there are few existing

accounts of the riots), it is unlikely to be a disadvantage because “the media tend to pick out the performative precisely because the performative stages the dramas that the media consider to be the ‘news’” (Kershaw 260). Finally, this investigation privileges the spatial dimensions of protest, as Division Street has not just become the stake for which different groups compete, but also the stage on which this contest is displayed. This struggle, according to James Holston and Arjun Appadurai in their introduction to *Cities and Citizenship*, often becomes violent as “people use violence to make claims on the city and use the city to make violent claims. They appropriate a space to which they then declare that they belong; they violate a space that others claim” (16). Indeed, as will become apparent with respect to the case of the Division Street Riots, the escalation of the antagonism between police and rioters was a direct result of conflicting claims to neighborhood space.

It all began on the evening of June 12, 1966. Two policemen were sent to the Near Northwest Side of Chicago to break up a fight. According to Patrolman Thomas Munyon, he and his partner Raymond Howard were “cruising” the neighborhood when they stopped to investigate: “I turned around and saw [a man] reach into his belt. I shot him in the left leg and he started to run. I fired two more times. I caught him at Damen avenue and Crystal street and saw him throw his gun away” (qtd. in Ross, “Riots Reinforce” 3). The suspect was later identified as 20-year-old Puerto Rican Arcelis Cruz. Meanwhile, Munyon claimed that he went back and picked up a gun from the ground,

where he said it had been dropped by Cruz during the chase. Other witnesses, however, insisted that Cruz was *not* armed, and that the gun found did *not* belong to him (“Official” 10).

What these conflicting stories overlooked, however, was a significant detail in their accounts of the shooting. Whether or not Cruz was armed, ordered to stop when he turned to flee, or whether Munyon’s four shots were, as the *New York Times* reported, “all aimed low” (“Rioters in Chicago” 43), the fact remained that some of these shots were fired *at Cruz’s back, while he was running away*. Regardless of his intentions, it follows that Cruz’s fleeing Latino male body was interpreted as an imminent threat to the police, apart from any action that it “appeared” ready to carry out (Butler 18). Drawing upon Judith Butler’s analysis of the 1992 beating of Rodney King in Los Angeles, according to this racist imaginary Cruz was shot in exchange for bullets he never fired, but which he was, by virtue of his “Puerto Ricanness,” always about to fire.

As if to offer proof of his inherently violent nature, in the days following the shooting the media documented Cruz’s extensive criminal record, which included multiple arrests for possession of marijuana, shoplifting, trespassing, battery, and disorderly conduct (“Wilson Orders” 9). Thus, the reading of Cruz that the police performed and that the media reconstructed was of a *potentially* violent man, a threatening body that *could* have used a gun that he *could* have possessed, with a

criminal record that not only foreshadowed his imminent aggression, but also justified both past and future police brutality.

In fact, a year earlier the community had been outraged by reports of rough treatment by police when two Puerto Ricans were arrested after officers broke into their Division Street home and then repeatedly beat them while in police custody. Likewise, in a recent interview with labor activist Roberto Medina—in his teens at the time of the riots—he recalled:

If the police saw you in a car, they would pull you out and ask if you were a “wet back” because at that time everybody was a “wet back.” They would just pull you out of your cars, totally violate your civil rights, search your car, hit you with their sticks, and just harass you...we were not welcome in the city. (qtd. in Méndez)

Renowned Chicago newspaper columnist Mike Royko also vigorously documented the regular police mistreatment of Puerto Ricans in *Boss: Richard J Daley of Chicago*:

Because they were undemanding and docile, they were cuffed around regularly by the police. The traffic policemen used the Puerto Rican neighborhood to dump their quota of tickets. Few of the policemen assigned to the district spoke Spanish. The Police Department didn't hire many Puerto Ricans because of the minimum height requirements. (148)

In truth, at the time of the riots, there were only eleven Spanish-speaking policemen in the Chicago Police Department, and none of them worked the Division Street beat. Moreover, Royko observed that the police operated “under the impression that because a man is short, dark, speaks little or no English and lives in the low-rent district, he is to

be treated with swaggering contempt” (“Mysterious” 3), exposing an sinister racism that permeated the Department.

Others, however, countered that these claims of police brutality were unfounded. “It is not ‘brutality’ when the police meet force with force,” an article in the *Chicago Tribune* retorted. “The police are representatives of the law. As such they are entitled to respect” (“Controlling Mobs” 20). Similarly, another article stated that “the common denominator” of the rioting “seem[ed] to be a revolt against authority, and specifically the authority vested in the police force to preserve law and order” (“Wake” 14). Here, along with other comparable analyses, the rioting was held up as an attack against the fundamentally American principles of “law and order.” As Mayor Richard J. Daley declared, “no one has the right in a free society—whether in our city or any other city—to take the law into his own hands and observe the laws they want to and ignore the laws they want to” (Culhane 12). From this perspective, the actions of the rioters, as enemies of civil society, were indefensible, and any and all attempts to stop them were justified. Furthermore, issues of race were underlying factors, never far from the surface of erupting tensions.

Clearly, Munyon and Howard arrived at the scene that evening with certain racialized expectations. If “race,” as Michael Keith and Malcolm Cross write in “Racism and the Postmodern City,” is “a privileged metaphor through which the confused text of the city is rendered comprehensible” (9), then it follows that many readings of this

metaphor during and after the Division Street Riots were visual. While analyses of the causes of the rioting may have differed, most commentators seemed to agree that what the Puerto Ricans fundamentally lacked was power—in the form of both political and social capital. Power, as de Certeau recognizes, “is bound by its visibility” (37). Here, de Certeau points to the link between power and vision that is manifested, yet often obscured, throughout many aspects of urban life (including the policing and surveillance of specific urban populations and neighborhoods and the designation of certain bodies as threatening or dangerous). In considering the legibility of the Puerto Rican population within Chicago’s urban space in the 1960s, it is therefore necessary to focus on the meanings of both visibility and invisibility.

The reading performed by the police of Cruz’ body, moreover, refuses to be extricated from the physical setting at which the shooting occurred. Place, as I reiterate at various points throughout this project, provides not only provide a background for action, but also structures both the action itself and its public reception. If understandings of place can influence how the nature and motivation of action is interpreted, then, for police officers, situations are read and responses are mounted based upon their socially constructed understandings of the location where the action occurs (Herbert 21). Cruz’s “criminality” was, then, reflective of the marginal spaces that supposedly produced it: “Excluded from the universe of the proper, they are symbolically constituted as spaces of crime, spaces of anomalous, polluting, and

dangerous qualities” (Caldeira 79). Consequently, I maintain that Munyon and Howard’s actions were not only based upon a specific understanding of Cruz’s body, but also upon an insertion of this body within a context of “difference” as potential pathology on Division Street. Specifically, this pathologization of the Division Street neighborhood and its people that was made explicit during the 1966 riots drew upon a racialization of the neighborhood that stemmed from then-recent demographic changes, including the “exodus” of white ethnics out of Chicago proper to the suburbs in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The Polish population of Humboldt Park followed suit, and many Puerto Ricans followed them in what was known as the “Polish Triangle” at the beginning of the 1960s. However, by the time the Puerto Ricans arrived in what was known as the “Polish Triangle” at the beginning of the 1960s, “the neighborhood was well worn” (Royko, *Boss* 148), and the city’s reception was definitively hostile.

The cool welcome that Puerto Ricans received after moving to the Near Northwest Side can be explained in part by the fact that Mayor Daley’s “machine,” often supported by the media, was fueled primarily by a coalition of white ethnic voters (Kemp and Lineberry 2). Thus, the new residents of the neighborhood posed a real threat to the machine’s survival and elicited nostalgia for the solid base of electoral support that the Polish community had represented. Besides, although both populations clearly deviated from understandings of the “normative” (middle-class and English-speaking) American, the Polish community’s “difference” posed less of a threat to

Chicago's general population than that of Puerto Ricans. The Polish were socially constructed as white—and for that reason framed in cultural terms—or by what Bonnie Urciuoli calls an “ethnicizing discourse” in *Exposing Prejudice*. In contrast, despite their mixed racial composition and protests reported by the *Chicago Daily News* that “we’re just a little darker” (qtd. in “Fervent” 10), Puerto Ricans were marked in natural terms by “racializing discourses.” These discourses “make defining connections among a group’s location, circumstances, ascribed traits, and language,” thereby constructing “cultural difference as problematic, often as parasitic” (Urciuoli 51; 16). For example, although seemingly innocuous, an article published in the *New York Times* during the riots pointed to the illegible visual manifestations of Humboldt Park’s Puerto Rican “difference”: “The Biltmore Theatre, once a popular place for European immigrants, is now the San Juan Theatre. Signs announcing *bodegas* and *barberias*—grocery stores and barber shops—line the street” (Janson, “Chicago Violence” 27).

Nostalgia for the “old neighborhood” also took on more overt forms. One letter to the editor of the *Chicago Tribune* complained that “when these were Polish and German communities they weren’t riot breeders. They were simply neighborhoods where these people felt at home while they and their children were becoming a real part of America” (qtd. in “Why Different” 10). With this, the fear and frustration borne from the riots plainly yielded inevitable and reductive comparisons between the Puerto Ricans and their residential predecessors. As discussed in the introduction to this

project, the circumstances under which Puerto Ricans came to the United States—characterized by colonization, racialization, political domination and economic exploitation—were fundamentally unlike those experienced by Europeans. Unfortunately, comparisons between Puerto Ricans and European immigrants to Chicago usually serve to obscure (rather than expose) the very *real* dissimilarities between the groups.

Differences (both real and imagined) aside, and despite conflicting versions of what preceded Munyon's shooting of Cruz, city officials, the media, and rioters all tended to agree that "things really started rolling when the shot was fired" (qtd. in "Wilson Orders" 6). This convergence of opinion suggests that the shooting became, in the words of Michael Keith in *Race, Riots and Policing*, a "triggering event," which is "not epiphenomenal or incidental to the development of violence," but rather signifies "a key element in the signification of action, the meaning of the riot set against its spatial and social context" (167). While a *Chicago Daily News* article downplayed the significance of the shooting, claiming that "thousands of such incidents occur in a big city without affecting any but the few individuals directly involved," it did acknowledge that this *specific* confrontation "acted as a trigger for a larger explosion," testifying "to the hostilities lying barely beneath the surface in big-city neighborhoods, needing only a spark to ignite them" ("Wake" 14).

Undoubtedly, the police and media's views of Division Street were not the only circulating meanings attached to the neighborhood. Thus, we must treat Cruz's shooting as *more* than simply an isolated incident of overly aggressive police behavior from the rioters' perspective. Rather, it was connected to a longer and more contentious history characterized by (perceived) harsh and generally discriminatory treatment of Puerto Ricans by the police. As Keith contends, "places may act as signs, but the messages they communicate will not be the same for everyone who reads them" (164). This is further evidenced by conflicting accounts of the events surrounding the shooting—rioters must have read police treatment of Cruz against their *own* perceptions of police violence in the neighborhood.

It wasn't until after the shooting of Cruz, however, that rumors began to spread and residents and police were drawn to the scene. Tensions rose. One police car was overturned, and another was pelted with rocks and set on fire when gasoline was poured on its trunk and ignited. Policemen attempted to force the crowds west on Division while, according to the *Chicago Daily News*, "dodging rocks and bottles thrown from apartment windows and building rooftops" ("Wilson Orders" 6). After the first wave of policemen was turned back, blue-helmeted, club-swinging Task Force officers arrived. These reinforcements, recently trained in mob control, waded into the crowds while firing blank cartridges to scare rock-throwers off rooftops, as others "chased

troublemakers up and down alleys, through backyards, over fences and into alleyways” (Rooney, “Some Help” 12).

While the police pursued their suspects through the literal and metaphorical margins of Division Street, Puerto Rican rioters drew upon the aforementioned power/vision connection by capitalizing upon their very *invisibility* and intimate knowledge of the streets’ peripheral spaces in order to map disparate routes throughout the neighborhood. For that reason, in the words of de Certeau, the rioters represented “city residents who live ‘down below,’ below the thresholds at which visibility begins” (93). Hence, the people who were chased by the police—much like de Certeau’s pedestrian—engaged in a “spatial acting-out” of place, in *tactics* that took advantage of the gaps within Division Street territory. What’s more, as we extend de Certeau’s concept of “walking” to our running rioters, it is in the very *incomprehensibility* and *invisibility* of their movements that their subversion existed. Each frantic footstep became a tactic that undermined the power of police efforts to control the spaces of the city.

Meanwhile, the city’s heavy-handed tactics became a rallying cry for residents after policemen in canine-unit vehicles drove with barking police dogs in full view throughout the area. Significantly, while the majority of the media maintained that it was the shooting of Cruz that initially provoked the rioters, many community members believed that it was actually the introduction of these dogs that escalated the violence. After the arrest of Cruz was made, one resident felt that the situation seemed to be

under control: “There was still a crowd, of course, and people were talking back and forth, but traffic was moving, and it looked like it was breaking up.” Then the police brought in the dogs. “This guy a Puerto Rican) was leaning against a post and the big policeman came on with a dog. He said, ‘Get ‘im.’ The dog bit this guy on the leg—and then the people went haywire” (qtd. in Gruenberg 4). It was then that policemen charged into the crowd, wielding their billy clubs.

In response, rioters carried the man who had been bitten up and down the streets, displaying his wound in a symbolic and spectacular attempt to denounce police brutality (“Rioters” 43). As Daniel Goldstein shows in *The Spectacular City*, “spectacles are often intensely visual, and it is in part through the manipulation of symbolic objects that spectacle performers create meaning, offer critiques, or suggest alternative readings of social reality, often through mimetic reference to other objects or events” (16). Accordingly, the display of the man’s body also represents a form of cultural performance, a means for people ordinarily excluded from the political, economic, and social mainstreams of society to achieve agency by forcing themselves (sometimes violently) into the public eye.

And it is with violence that the body often acquires an irrepressible agency, as evidenced by the repeated and frustrated attempts by the police to disperse the crowds. According to Lt. William Mooney, protestors kept “coming back on the rooftops or out of the alleys and firing pistols, tossing rocks, stones, cans, and Molotov cocktails at us.”

“Keep ‘em moving...drive ‘em out of here,” shouted Lt. James Grender to his men while Sgt. Joseph Healy warned the crowd, “If you don’t get off the street, you’re going to jail” (qtd. in Rooney, “Some Help” 12). When all was said and done, more than 150 policemen had been called to the scene in an attempt to control a crowd that was estimated at over one thousand. Marching four abreast, police eventually managed to force most of the protestors behind barricades. Hours after its outbreak, the area near Damen and Division “reached a tense calm” (“Burn” 1) at around 3 a.m. in the morning. By the end of the night, three people had been shot, 13 others injured by rocks and bottles, and 49 were arrested on various charges including disorderly conduct, interference with police action and criminal damage to property (“Wilson Orders” 9).

With this, it is clear that both the means and desired outcome of police attempts to “subdue” the rioters represented spatial strategies that served “to affect, influence, or control resources and people, by controlling area” (Sack 19). The movement of canine units in the neighborhood, for example, not only posed a visual and aural threat to potential “troublemakers,” but also represented an effort by the police to enact and reinforce boundaries, to confine people’s activity by restricting their movements in space. Furthermore, from the perspective of the police, the violence perpetrated by the rioters and the territory upon which it was acted out were inextricably linked. By this logic, order could be restored to the neighborhood by clearing the streets and “erasing” the rioters—rendering them invisible and inaudible both to law enforcement and to each

other. This police action must have felt oddly familiar to those on Division Street, emerging as yet another attempt to relocate—both physically and symbolically—the Puerto Rican community by compulsory means.

In retrospect, perhaps this was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back—the protesters had been “herded” one last time and therefore refused to be appeased by the city's lukewarm efforts. On June 13, one day after the riots, the policeman who shot Cruz Thomas Munyon asked to be moved out of the district while his partner at the time was reassigned to another neighborhood in an “unusual move” (“Wilson Orders” 1) by Police Superintendent Orlando Wilson.¹ When asked why Howard had been transferred, Wilson replied: “Because he seems to be unlucky. So if he's going to be unlucky, let him be unlucky in a district where we haven't racial tensions” (qtd. in “Wilson Orders” 6).² In addition, a first-ever Spanish editorial entitled “Amigos de Puerto Rico” was published on the front page of the *Chicago Daily News*, begging for “una cooperación y entendimiento entre la policía y puertorriqueños” (3). Deputy Superintendent James Conlisk also stressed that “our men who are working up

¹ Scandal over police involvement in a burglary ring prompted Mayor Richard J. Daley to appoint Orlando W. Wilson as superintendent of police in 1960. As the nation's foremost expert on police administration, Wilson implemented an ambitious program of reorganization, emphasizing efficiency rather than ward politics. Wilson moved the superintendent's office from City Hall to Police Headquarters, closed police districts and redrew their boundaries (Thale 628).

² Howard, who had only recently been transferred from the East Chicago Avenue District to Wood Street, had been involved in a number of incidents which had “drawn fire for the department” (“Wilson Orders” 1). The previous year, according to the *Chicago Tribune*, he had been involved in a controversial case involving two “Latin-Americans.” The judge freed the suspects after ruling that Howard and his partner had used excessive force in arresting them (Janson, “7 Shot” 1).

there now have been informally instructed by us to convey the impression that we are not oppressors but really their friends” (qtd. in Rooney, “Cops Close” 24).

Despite these attempts to pacify area residents and the assurance that the “incident” on Division Street was simply a “one-night outburst” (“Wilson Orders” 6), violence erupted again on Monday during a peace rally in Humboldt Park. Although officials had promised neighborhood leaders that they would keep uniformed patrols to a minimum, the rally was broken up when police began to move into the crowd estimated at around 2,000 (“7 Shot” 4). Bricks, bottles, and stones started flying as police cars arrived. An article in the *Chicago Daily News* reported that “shots were fired between the ravaged storefronts and screams and curses were yelled at policemen,” while the “women in the crowd screamed encouragement to the men, who seemed to respond to the police with increasing violence” (“Police Move” 10). The front page of the *New York Times* also stated that “rock-tossing youths ran through the community on the Northwest Side, smashing car and store windows and traffic lights, tipping over mailboxes, stealing merchandise and harassing police cars” (Janson, “7 Shot” 1). At one point, rioters estimated at up to ten thousand blocked Division Street entirely by pushing trailers into an intersection Janson, “7 Shot” 1). Pointing to a gash on a man’s head, an angry protestor declared: “That’s the way they want to stop a riot” (qtd. in Janson, “7 Shot” 18). Another man grabbed a loudspeaker that was being used to calm the crowd and shouted: “Police, we are not supposed to be beat up like animals. Till you

show us you are going to do something to stop this, this thing can't stop, because we are human beings" (qtd. in Janson, "7 Shot" 18).

Squads patrolled almost every corner along Division into the early hours of the morning. By dawn, hardly a window was left undamaged or a store unlooted. Seven had been shot, and 37 were arrested (Janson, "7 Shot" 1) on what Royko called Division Street's "worst, saddest, most tragic night":

I don't know how many times I've walked down Division St. It was part of my childhood and I knew it better than I know the street I live on now. But I never saw the street the way it was last night—with windows caved in, guns trained on windows and rooftops, firebombs smashing on the pavement. And when you know and love a street, you feel all the more sick. ("Division Street" 3)

As Royko mourned Division Street's devastation, he found himself situated within a strange and alien scene. What he remembered of the street of his youth and what he saw on the night of the rioting were completely incongruous, as he wrote in and about a literal and metaphoric space between an old neighborhood order and a new landscape dominated by the Puerto Rican barrio.

By Tuesday, many of the more diplomatic efforts to placate the protesters were bypassed in favor of a "get-tough policy" announced by James Holzman, the newly appointed deputy chief of patrol. Holzman warned the rioters: "There will be a few hundred policemen in the area tonight. No rowdyism will be tolerated. There will be law and order" (qtd. in "Police Move" 1). He turned back to his men and instructed them: "We are going to clear the street. We'll lock up anyone we have to in order to clear

the streets” (qtd. in “500 Police” 1). Similarly, a *Chicago Daily News* op-ed piece cautioned: “When bystanders take the side of a lawbreaker rather than the police, they too must be dealt with, at whatever cost and with whatever methods suit the occasion” (“Wake” 14). Local judges threatened harsh repercussions for those involved, over 100 bars throughout the area were closed by Superintendent Wilson, police helicopters flew over Division Street to spot “trouble in the making,” and police “cluster-busters” broke up small gatherings. Later that night, the police clamped a “security vise” on the area—two miles long and three blocks wide—by stationing armed patrolmen in riot helmets at close intervals throughout the neighborhood (“Chicago Area” 29). Traffic was rerouted, and Mayor Daley appealed to parents to keep their children “off the streets, where unthinking and irresponsible individuals and gangs are seeking a climate of violence and uncertainty that threatens lives and property” (qtd. in “Daley Urges” 2).

It was this change to tougher police tactics which was credited with bringing a “tentative peace” to the neighborhood by Wednesday morning, bolstered by an “enforced quiet” (Rooney, “Cops Close” 1) in the area bounded by Ashland, California, North and Chicago. Squad cars with armed Task Force policemen drove slowly through the area. According to Superintendent Conlisk, it was the “show of force and a no-nonsense but friendly policy [that] did it out there for us Tuesday night” (qtd. in Rooney, “Cops Close” 1). By this time, it was officially acknowledged that eight people

had been shot, 16 others injured, 116 arrested, over 50 buildings destroyed, and millions of dollars accrued in damages (“Chicago Area” 29).

In the wake of the rioting on Division Street, the city attempted to recover from the shock that the summer’s first racial uprising had taken place *not* in Chicago’s predominantly African-American South and West Side neighborhoods as originally forecasted, but rather in the Near Northwest Side’s Puerto Rican neighborhood. Indeed, in 1961, the authors of *Black Metropolis* had warned their readers that if “*the masses* are driven too far they are likely to fight back, despite their seemingly indifferent reactions to discrimination and segregation. *A potential for future violence within Black Metropolis* exists that should not and cannot be ignored” (Drake and Cayton 806).

The rioting of “the masses” in Harlem, Rochester, Philadelphia and Watts, together with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s protests demanding fair housing in Chicago in 1966 had all suggested that it was the African American ghetto—not the newer Puerto Rican barrio—that was potentially unstable. According to the *Chicago Daily News*, “the violence stunned human relations experts and police who had earmarked other areas of the city as possible trouble spots” (“Wilson Orders” 6). On Monday, June 13, after the first night of rioting, Superintendent Wilson ordered a full-scale investigation into the Puerto Rican disturbance, despite the fact that another report had been ordered less than a week before. Wilson claimed that the previous report had concluded that there *were* no serious racial tensions in the Humboldt Park area. As Ed Brooks of the Chicago

Commission on Human Relations added, “there has been no indication that something of this type could happen there. To say that we were surprised would be a big understatement” (qtd. in “Wilson Orders” 6).

The unanticipated nature of the Puerto Rican rioting can be explained, in part, by an understanding of the discourse surrounding the escalating “urban crisis” in the American inner city. The mid-1960s witnessed a growing sense of a rapidly degenerating urban order that was often reduced to black and white terms, despite the fact that Latino and Asian migration had begun to complicate this basic understanding of American urbanism’s ethnic dimensions. African Americans became the nation’s scapegoat for urban decline, which, according to Robert Beauregard, “eventually became fused to the Negro ghetto” (172). In fact, by the summer of 1967, conversation about the inner city revolved around what sociologist Nathan Glazer called “The Negro Problem,” which was the “most decisive of the social problems that we think of when we consider the urban crisis” (24). In addition, the Kerner Report concluded in 1968 that the nation was “moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal”³ (1).

³ In 1967, President Lyndon Johnson formed an 11-member National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, informally known as the Kerner Report, to investigate recent urban rioting. It concluded in its 426-page report that persisting “white racism” was essentially responsible for the rioting and warned that riots would become a regular feature of urban life unless the federal government launched massive programs to ensure black progress. President Johnson ultimately rejected the recommendations proposed by the Commission.

Thus, for better or for worse, by the time of the Division Street Riots, African Americans had achieved an exposure through city discourse that the Puerto Ricans lacked. They were, as Norman Ross wrote in the *Chicago Daily News*, “The Neighbors who Still Are Strangers”:

We see their signs: *Supermercado*, *Salón de Belleza*, *Iglesia de Dios*. But if we meet them at all, it is usually as busboys or taxi drivers or little girls selling homemade artificial flowers in the street. In many ways we know them less well than we do the Negroes, whose problems they share. For the Negro has been highly publicized. There is, as yet, no Puerto Rican Bill Cosby or Martin Luther King. (14)

Similarly, Royko commented that until the riots, “except for their music, the Puerto Ricans had been quiet and unobtrusive. Unless one drove through their neighborhood, there was no evidence that they were part of Chicago” (Boss 148). The life of the Chicago Puerto Rican, as a *Chicago Tribune* article described, was:

Confined behind a dishwashing sink or a factory bench and his tiny apartment, where the door is always locked and the conversation is whispered in Spanish. No one knows how many thousands of Puerto Ricans are living in such a manner in Chicago’s dark corners. They are people seldom seen, never heard, who have withdrawn beyond everyone’s reach, even that of their countrymen. (T. Hall, “Life” B10)

Indeed, it was the community’s anonymity that for many lay at the core of the impetus for the riots. In “Behind the Rioting,” William Brueckner (a settlement-house worker in the neighborhood) concluded that the brief recognition that the community had attained during the previous week’s Puerto Rican parade was replaced by the frustration of anonymity when the celebration ended. “Came the shooting, and the

elation switched to equally bitter disappointment. The somebodies became nobody again" (qtd. in Newman, "Behind" 3). To be sure, as Schechner notes in *The Future of Ritual*, the "carnival" cannot last forever—"the liminal period ends and individuals are inserted or reinserted into their (sometimes new, sometimes old, but always defined) places in society" (47).

The party was over for the city as well, as its government could no longer rely upon an invisible or complacent Puerto Rican population. Surprise was soon replaced by conjecture as to *why* the rioting occurred. However, few analyses entertained the notion that legitimate factors could have led to the riots. Instead, most pointed to another important distinction that set the Puerto Ricans apart from white Chicagoans—the fact that they spoke Spanish. For instance, a *Chicago Daily News* editorial pointed out that "this was not race rioting in the usual sense, though the element of 'difference' was there. The neighborhood is heavily Puerto Rican and Spanish is the common language" ("Wake" 14). Although the use of *all* non-English languages is viewed as "dangerous and out of order" by mainstream white society, Spanish, in particular, is often regarded as a "barrier to class mobility" (Urciuoli 38) because it possesses the potential to challenge the hegemonic status of English. What's more, languages other than English become especially dangerous when used in public and in ways that are "not tightly scripted" (Urciuoli 38). In unscripted settings monolingual Americans tend to be threatened by the ambiguity of other languages, which can be "a lightning rod for

racialized judgment” (Urciuoli 35), functioning as another racial marker in addition to skin color, demeanor, and accent.

Because the program was unscripted and because the station managers admittedly “did not understand Spanish and had no idea what their Spanish announcers were saying most of the time” (O’Connor 3), some early media reports placed the responsibility for the escalation of the protests on a local Spanish radio broadcast made by announcer Carlitos Agrello, alleging that he had urged Puerto Ricans to take part in the rioting. Others understood Agrello’s influence to be more subtle: “He wasn’t asking people to go out and fight the police, [but] the tone of his words was such that they may have excited [the rioters]” (qtd. in O’Connor 3), commented a listener. It wasn’t just the announcer’s tone, the article continued, but the fact this *specific* population of rioters was prone to agitation, as “Spanish-speaking people are hot-blooded” by nature (O’Connor 3). Similarly, in “Riots Reinforce a Moral,” Puerto Ricans were described as “volatile people” who were “more likely than many other Americans to argue heatedly and volubly with policemen they think are acting unjustly. They do it in San Juan, so don’t feel it is wrong to act the same way in Chicago” (qtd. in Ross 3).

These essentialist equations between language and disorder served to divert analyses of the rioting away from the real and substantive language issues that existed between police and Puerto Rican community members. Many area residents did indeed believe that much of the tension between the police and the Puerto Rican community

existed because the two camps didn't speak each other's language. Humboldt Park resident Victor Pasquale stated that "[the police] treat us bad because we don't know English—we cannot speak with them" (qtd. in Gruenberg 3). Many thought that this lack of communication was exacerbated by the Puerto Ricans' inability to understand and follow police orders. On the other hand, police claimed that they ran into feigned ignorance on the part of Puerto Ricans, who answered their questions with "no comprendo," or used two last names when identifying themselves in order to confuse the authorities.

It wasn't just the police, but also co-workers, potential employers, landlords and teachers, another article noted, that found it "difficult to communicate meaningfully with them. And thousands of them are not much better off. For they were poorly grounded in English in Puerto Rico and still speak Spanish among themselves" (Ross, "Neighbors" 14). But this poor grounding in English was also either false or self-imposed, as Charles Cuprill alleged in a letter to the editor of the *Chicago Daily News*:

I recall when I was a young fellow in Puerto Rico, there were a lot of boys and girls in school with me who resented having to learn the [English] language. Perhaps they now regret this and are paying for their past narrow-mindedness. What the Puerto Rican colony here needs to do is what has been done back home: Pull themselves up by their bootstraps and stop blaming outsiders for their problems. (14)

Furthermore, the language barrier, according to another letter, "does not give them the right to cause riots. There are people that came from Europe before and after World War II, and they are coming every day, but they don't cause any riots" (AD 14). Again, the

Puerto Ricans came up short in recurring attempts to compare themselves with Chicago's European immigrants. Josephine Shumaker of Oak Park was even less sympathetic: "There is no excuse for the Puerto Rican rioting. If they have neither the time nor the inclination to learn our language and customs, then I suggest they return to their native land" (14).⁴

But reports circulated by Chicago's media from "the native land" suggested that island Puerto Ricans would hardly have welcomed the return of their mainland counterparts. As a "native working man" in San Juan put it in a "typical comment": "Puerto Ricans here do not behave this way. The problem is that many of the people who migrate come from the countryside, and they don't know how to behave themselves in the big city" (qtd. in Geyer 3). Interestingly, this man was not alone in his belief that there was a fundamental spatial mismatch between Puerto Ricans from poor, rural towns and urban life in Chicago. Another *Chicago Daily News* article characterized the riot as an "angry lash of Latin against Yankee, the culture of the soft, warm Puerto Rican island against the teeming close-living factory-filled city" (Gruenberg 3). Again, place is pitted against place in a battle between rural and urban settings. A *Chicago*

⁴Despite widespread complaints regarding Puerto Ricans' inability to speak English, few attempts were made to remedy the problem among its youth. In fact, until the beginning of 1966 Chicago public schools made no attempt to teach English to its Spanish-speaking students. After receiving funding from a federal school aid program, Spanish-speaking children were given daily 35-minute lessons by instructors who had received ten hours of Spanish training (Wille 1).

Tribune article published in 1968, almost two years after the rioting, painted a similar picture of the typical Puerto Rican migrant:

He comes to Chicago with scant preparation for it, bringing little more than his industriousness and his innocence. His background almost always is a simple, agrarian one, restricted in scope to a patch of fertile soil on the side of a Puerto Rican foothill...He probably has made a few visits to San Juan or Ponce, the island's principal cities, but quite possibly he never has known a community larger than the durable cluster of hovels a dozen miles from his home. (T. Hall B2)

As the only city life he knew was "a durable cluster of hovels," the Puerto Rican was astonishingly ignorant with respect to city etiquette. "Often, they do not know much about city living," the *Chicago Daily News* reported. "They tend to be from the back-country hills of Puerto Rico, where people dumped garbage out of the window. Sometimes they do the same thing here" (Newman, "Behind" 3). Here, portrayals of the typical Puerto Rican described an ill-bred, backwards "savage" who seemingly had no chance of survival in Chicago's refined environs. As a result, "discipline" in the form of police brutality could be justified, similar to the exculpatory function of colonialist texts:

If such literature can demonstrate that the barbarism of the native is irrevocable, or at least very deeply ingrained, then the European's attempt to civilize him can continue indefinitely, the exploitation of his resources without hindrance, and the European can persist in enjoying a position of moral superiority. (JanMohamed 81)

Notably, many initial assessments held *these* poor and working-class Puerto Rican newcomers responsible for the rioting. It was *these* immigrants that came from poor rural towns with no skills, job training, or ability to speak and read English that

acted out against police discrimination, low-paying jobs, and inadequate housing. They had been abused by the system and were impossibly naïve, representing “easy prey for credit swindlers, unscrupulous landlords, and others who stalk the Puerto Rican newcomers” (Moore 41). In contrast, Puerto Rican professionals had few difficulties in adjusting to Chicago life, according to the *Chicago Daily News*’ “Fervent Plea for Equal Treatment,” as they were “easily assimilated into the city’s better neighborhoods. For them, the transition from the island to the big city is painless and smooth” (10).

At the same time, other evaluations of the rioting conducted by city officials and the press insisted—in a subtly insidious defense of the community—that the basic source of the trouble was *not* to be found among the residents of the Near Northwest Side, but instead could be tied to lawless “outsiders.” Captain Holzman determined that the rioters were “a bunch of hooligans” who were not representative of the general community (qtd. in “Quiet” 14). Similarly, in this plea to parents to keep their children off of the streets, Mayor Daley targeted “unthinking and irresponsible individuals and gangs” (qtd. in “Daley Urges” 2). The disregard for “law and order” by the Puerto Rican rioters was also frequently linked by the media to the broader context of the civil rights movement. The *Chicago Tribune*’s “Cause of Riots,” for example, dismissed concerns regarding police brutality, Puerto Rican unemployment, and inadequate housing as both apologist rhetoric and “sentimental drivel” (20). Instead, the article asserted that “the only explanation left for the rioting is that the participants have been encouraged to

decide for themselves what laws to obey. The only way to get ‘justice,’ they have been taught, is to perform acts of violence” (20).⁵

In addition to his aberrant and criminal character, the typical rioter, according to Chicago’s media, exhibited the same hyper-masculine traits portrayed by Hollywood in films like *The Young Savages* and *West Side Story* (1961).⁶ In fact, it was the Puerto Rican man’s inherent *machismo*, suggested Reverend Gilbert Carroll, the chairman of the Cardinal’s Committee for the Spanish Speaking, that led him to interpret “the attitude of the police, their habit of looking down on him” as a “threat to his manhood” (Moore 38). By all means, according to Mike Moore’s “Puerto Rican Chicago,” it was “the need to be a man, to be thought a man by others,” that was “a universal imperative in Latin societies.” In his pursuit of this ideal, Moore continued, there was “no surer way for an individual to measure his manhood than to measure his relations with the police” (38).

This article was not alone in its opinion that Puerto Rican charges of police brutality had less to do with genuine police violence and more to do with the nature of

⁵ The rioters had been influenced, according to the same article, by statements made by the late President Kennedy, Senator Robert Kennedy, and President Johnson, who had all “excused” previous demonstrations of civil disobedience. Here, the civil rights movement *itself* came to represent the urban crisis, signaling a breakdown in American social order. Hence, the riots became a means through which the media could condemn *all* forms of civil disobedience, including the leaders of the civil rights, student, and anti-war movements.

⁶ In *The Young Savages*, after being killed by members of the Italian-American gang known as the “Thunderbirds,” a fifteen-year-old blind Puerto Rican is revealed in the murder investigation to have been the “top warlord” for the rival Puerto Rican gang known as the “Horsemen,” as well as a “pickup man” for his sixteen-year-old sister, a prostitute since age 14. The classic film *West Side Story* pitted the Italian-Irish-Polish Jets against the Puerto Rican “Sharks,” a gang whose members “keep coming like cockroaches.” Both gangs were ready to rumble for their Manhattan turf with “skin,” “zip guns,” or “blades.”

the Puerto Rican man's highly charged bravado. "In the Puerto Rican family," a *Chicago Daily News* article found:

The man is the king, or at least he thinks he ought to be. After dinner, he puts on sharp clothes and hangs around on the sidewalk with his cronies, singing noisily or playing cards. This offends many Chicagoans and leads to many run-ins with the police, but to a Puerto Rican it's simply an island custom with a Spanish flavor. He's a strong family man—so strong that he may have two families and many children, none legitimate by "Anglo" standards. (Newman, "Behind" 3)

This view suggested the rioting to be a misdirected *machista* attempt to counter the threat of emasculation posed by American migration. "No longer do you have to get mad at your wife or children," Moore wrote. "Rather than disrupting the family, these tensions now disrupt a bigger family—the neighborhood, the city" (37).

This move to place the blame for the rioting upon the culturally deficient Puerto Rican man and his dysfunctional family was both corroborated and advanced by the findings published in anthropologist Oscar Lewis' *La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty, San Juan and New York* (1966). According to Lewis, many poor Puerto Rican families on the island and the mainland had developed a "culture of poverty" that was "both an adaptation and reaction...to their marginal position in a class-stratified, highly individuated, capitalistic society" (xliv). He further described this "culture" as a set of behaviors, attitudes and practices, handed down from generation to generation, and defined by the following characteristics:

A high incidence of maternal deprivation, orality, weak ego structure, confusion of sexual identification, a lack of impulse control, a strong present-time orientation with little ability to defer gratification and to plan for the future, a

sense of resignation and fatalism, a wide-spread belief in male superiority, and a high tolerance for psychological pathology of all sorts. (xlvii)

Not only was the “culture of poverty” generational, but it was also spatial, as migrants traveled with it and, as a result, “many of the problems of Puerto Ricans in New York have their origin in the slums of Puerto Rico” (xi). Furthermore, they arrived with a heavy load of cultural baggage that they were both unlikely and unwilling to unpack [read: assimilate], as they tended to physically and socially isolate themselves from their more “American” neighbors. “They know only their own troubles, their own local conditions, their own neighborhood, their own way of life,” commented Lewis, adding that “there was little important change in customs and language among lower-income Puerto Ricans in New York. They formed small islands in the city and perpetuated their culture....The process of adjustment and assimilation to North American culture was slow and often difficult” (xlviii). Following this line of thought, because New York Puerto Ricans were spatially concentrated in the form of “small islands in the city,” they had “failed” to assimilate into their host society.

Although *La Vida* did not specifically discuss Chicago’s Puerto Ricans, it undoubtedly had an impact upon post-riot analyses of this newly “unmanageable” community—a population that suddenly seemed to have a lot more in common with New York’s Puerto Rican residents than originally thought. Until the time of the riots, in fact, Chicago had prided itself on its avoidance of New York’s widely publicized “Puerto Rican problem” by encouraging the “integration” of Puerto Rican newcomers

into scattered Chicago neighborhoods (De Genova and Ramos-Zayas 43). Without warning, however, the riots challenged the formerly reassuring distinction drawn between the passive, compliant, and geographically dispersed Chicago Puerto Rican and his unruly New York counterpart.

The dramatic differentiation drawn between the two groups had been cemented almost twenty years earlier by Elena Padilla's 1947 comparative study of Puerto Rican assimilation in New York and Chicago. Because New York's Puerto Rican migrants lived together in "consolidated neighborhoods," she believed that their ultimate assimilation into American society was unlikely. "The colony resists contacts," Padilla explained, "by providing a cell of relationships among the ethnics, in many occasions exclusive of other non-ethnic individuals" (54). On the other hand, she predicted that because Puerto Ricans in Chicago were geographically dispersed throughout the city, "lacking the facilities of direct and continuous and almost exclusive contacts with other ethnics of a common traditional background," they would assimilate more quickly than New York's Puerto Ricans. "Assimilation," Padilla concluded, "does not occur in the organized immigrant colonies," but rather "usually happens to members of the second or third generation of immigrants...when the colony starts a process of breaking down, and social solidarity increases with the larger society" (6). After the riots, however, it seemed that a revision of Padilla's 1947 thesis was long overdue. Despite the city's attempts to discourage "clustering," a long-deferred Puerto Rican colony on the Near

Northwest Side *had* emerged. Consequently, Padilla's welcome prediction of ultimate spatial and cultural assimilation had been derailed, and the city was forced to take a closer look at Chicago's Puerto Rican population.

1.1 After the Riots: Recognition and Consciousness

On June 28, 1966, less than two weeks after the rioting, 200 Puerto Rican residents of the Division Street area marched over five miles from Humboldt Park to City Hall and presented a three-page list of demands to city officials. The list included requests for rent controls, jobs in City Hall for Puerto Ricans, and an end to police brutality. Not surprisingly, Mayor Daley was out of town on a "personal appointment" at the time (Power A2). Critics of the march believed that it was unnecessary and risked inciting more violence in the community. Although it was ultimately peaceful, the media dismissed the march as excessively theatrical, claiming that Chicago's Puerto Rican community *already* had the attention of the city. According to an editorial in the *Chicago Daily News*:

If it had been a bona fide effort to open lines of communication, the Puerto Rican spokesmen would have sought an appointment with Mayor Daley, which they did not, and they would not have left "demands," which they did...Obviously the Puerto Rican community has much homework to do in terms of determining its problems, defining its needs, discovering its resources and identifying its leadership. ("March" 10)

Perhaps to the dismay of the city's administration, "homework" is exactly what the Puerto Rican community did in the months following the riots. Chicago's policy makers

and social service agencies were finally forced to address the city's Puerto Rican population. As a result, Chicago directed federal money from the government's War on Poverty program to the Community Action Programs (CAP) in the Division Street area.

In addition, the Chicago Commission on Human Relations held open public hearings in July of 1966, providing a forum for Puerto Rican residents to discuss the problems facing their community such as discrimination in housing, hiring practices by the police and fire departments, and poor educational opportunities. Because of these meetings, specific policy recommendations were proposed and implemented within the Puerto Rican community. The city also encouraged the police department to implement policy changes regarding the use of police dogs, minimum height requirements for policemen, and expanding the department's training program to include classes on Spanish language and culture.

Thus, the riots effectively opened up Chicago's eyes to a growing and dissatisfied Puerto Rican population. Post-riot newspaper articles took a collective gasp upon discovering that the population of Puerto Ricans living in Chicago had "exploded" from 35,000 to over 65,000 in the five years leading up to the rioting. In 1965 alone, the *Chicago Daily News* reported, "nearly 16,000 poured into the city" ("Fervent" 10). "I must admit I was surprised and shocked myself," said Brueckner. "With all my knowledge of the area, I had no idea there were that many people living there" (qtd. in Newman, "Behind" 3). At the same time, the riots also represented an important moment of

recognition of an incipient Puerto Rican collectivity. As Brueckner reflected, “The people themselves didn’t know how many of them there were—didn’t know their own strength—until they began piling into the streets. Suddenly, for the first time, they saw themselves as an entity. They were somebody” (qtd. in Newman, “Behind” 3). For that reason, the space of the Division Street Riots became a setting upon which Puerto Ricans could, quite literally, *see each other* and “establish themselves as a public, to define themselves as part of the public or as a special kind of public in a particular society” (Goldstein 19). Historian Mervin Méndez similarly connected the riots to a developing sense of community solidarity:

We recognized that we weren’t here alone, that we were many in number...We just looked around and we saw this ocean of Puerto Rican faces, fighting the police and said to ourselves, “Wow, we’re here. We’ve arrived. We’re not a minority group. We’re not a small group; we’re a powerful block.” And this small notion that yes—we can fight back and live—is important.

To be sure, the riots fueled an insurgent consciousness; a desire to “fight back” that was nurtured and sustained in the years that followed. Specifically, there was a transfer in leadership from the assimilation-oriented first generation to a politicized—and often militant—second generation. As is demonstrated in the next chapter, groups like the Young Lords Organization (YLO) were animated by the energy of the moment and therefore motivated to bring about faster and more substantive change through direct action and protest. These changes in leadership were accompanied by a dramatic shift in

spatial consciousness—from a first-generation longing for a nostalgized Puerto Rico to a second-generation focus on a very real Chicago.

Today in the United States there are internal and external exiles, voluntary and involuntary, conscious and unconscious. The complexity of their experience has led to the notion of “deterritorialization.”...This applies not only to those who have been voluntarily or involuntarily uprooted, but also to those who remain in their geographical home, only to find the ground moving beneath their feet.

Lucy Lippard, *Mixed Blessings*

2. Performing Revolution: The Militant Drama of the Young Lords Organization

It was May 14, 1969. The scene opened a few minutes before midnight outside Lincoln Park’s Presbyterian McCormick Theological Seminary. Led by a fledgling gang-turned-militant organization that called itself the Young Lords Organization (YLO), 40 members of “dissident community groups” forcibly entered the W. Clement Stone Academic Administration building, ordered studying seminarians out, and barricaded the doors behind them (“Seminary” 3).¹ A large sign was draped near the front entrance that read “Manuel Ramos Memorial Building” in honor of a Lord that had been shot and killed by an off-duty Chicago policeman the week prior.

¹The groups that seized the campus called themselves the “Poor People’s Coalition,” or the PPC. In addition to representatives of the YLO, the Coalition included members of the Young Patriots (an Uptown street gang), the Concerned Citizens of the Survival Front, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the Latin American Defense Organization (LADO) (“Leave” B4).

By morning, the media had learned of the sit-in at the Seminary and reporters rushed to the scene. There, they found purple-beret-clad YLO guards maintaining a sentry post at the front door, monitoring security with walkie-talkies, and searching even their own members before allowing them entry into the building. A press conference was held at which a spokesman for the Young Lords charged that the Seminary's program to "rehabilitate" Lincoln Park was forcing working-class families out of the neighborhood. A list of ten demands was issued to McCormick officials, including that \$601,000 in endowment funds be put toward the development of low-income housing in the community.² The Seminary's president, Arthur McKay, threatened to call the police to remove the squatters. But as the YLO chairman José "Cha Cha" Jiménez recalls, "we made it clear that no warrant to leave, no piece of paper was going to evict us anymore" (qtd. in Browning 20). True to his word, the protestors' takeover of the Seminary ended five days later, only after classes had been suspended and a preliminary agreement had been negotiated.³

² The Young Lords also demanded that the Seminary fund a children's center and a Latino cultural center (Koziol 17).

³ According to Jiménez:

"McKay talked to the Board and dropped the charge, and we got a call from Texas saying we had got \$600,000 for low-income housing in Lincoln Park. The Board agreed to meet our demands for housing, that their financial records be open, that McCormick join to help community groups, that it publicly oppose the racist policies of Urban Renewal, and that it open its facilities to the use of the community." (qtd. in Browning 20)

Although the YLO's political conversion had taken place almost two years earlier, it was not until the McCormick sit-in that the group finally became known as more than "just another street gang." Indeed, the Young Lords that stepped into the spotlight in the spring of 1969 had thoroughly reinvented themselves. These Lords were acutely aware of the power of the press, demonstrating a media savvy that understood that radicalism was just as much about performance as it was about politics. Often, this radicalism was initiated through provocative community-based actions that worked to critically interrogate Chicago's contested social spaces. The geographic and social space of the city consequently became more than the site of production; it became the very *material* for the Young Lords' protest. It is therefore from here—from the convergence between performance, politics and space—that this chapter departs.

It is at this point where this analysis differs from most contemporary assessments of U.S. Puerto Rican radicalism in the late 1960s (at least with respect to Chicago). Scholars like Suzanne Oboler and J. Jorge Klor de Alva insist that that it was the *island's* contested status that provided the primary foundation for this new generation's activism:

Although it soon began to represent a practically impossible goal for the near future, the pro-independence movement continued to be in the 1960s and 1970s an important *symbol* for uniting the nationalist elements in the US. And it was a superb tool for political organization on behalf of local barrio concerns. (Klor de Alva 76)

Instead, I contend that such a protest was a response to a more *recent* and *local* displacement (and threat of displacement) that mobilized the Young Lords in Chicago. In contrast to their parents, who had emigrated from Puerto Rico during the 1950s, many members of the Young Lords had never even *been* to the island. As Jiménez explained, “the gang was our world, this was our new country,” adding that “we knew nothing about Puerto Rico, where we came from or where our roots came from” (Interview). Nor did they exhibit the supposedly characteristic second-generation “need to return” which, as Klor de Alva argues, “became a part of the personal and collective search for a cultural shield with which to protect their identity” (75). On the contrary, their lives were based in Chicago, and as member Omar López put it, Lincoln Park was their “geography of action” (Interview).

The Lords’ attachment to their neighborhood emerges in contrast to what Manuel Castells describes as a recent “crisis of place” in *The City and the Grassroots*, resulting in “the spatial and cultural separation of people from their product and from their history” (314). On the contrary, the Lords repeatedly mobilized activism by literally “taking place” throughout the course of their relatively brief existence. Here, I draw upon the distinction that Raúl Homero Villa makes in *Barrio-Logos* between *barrioization*, which is “understood as a complex of dominating social processes originating *outside* of the barrios,” and *barriology* or “community-sustaining” and “culturally affirming subaltern tactics of sociospatial resistance” (17). The relationship between *barrioizing* and

barriological forces, Villa argues, shapes the barrio's meaning. With this in mind, the sit-in at McCormick represents more than the Young Lords' opposition to the Seminary's complicity in the city's development plans for Lincoln Park; it also becomes an inversion of the hierarchy between *barrioizing* and *barriological* spatial practices, between the forces that drive urban renewal and those that are left behind in its destructive wake.

Furthermore, when the events at McCormick are analyzed in performance terms, certain aspects of the sit-in take on new meaning. Indeed, within the overall dramaturgy of the building's seizure there were, in the words of Richard Schechner, "particular molecules of theater" ("Invasions" 466). In fact, according to Baz Kershaw in "Fighting in the Streets: Dramaturgies of Popular Protest," most forms of contemporary protest are shaped by a performative dimension:

Though they often involve a good deal of spontaneity, they also follow scripts or scenarios. Moreover, contemporary protest almost always assumes an audience, onlookers for whom events are 'played out'. It is almost always other-directed, and therefore often reflexively aware of the symbolic potential of its own sometimes all too real action. (260)

This approach also makes it possible to move beyond often unproductive debates regarding the political efficacy of social movements in order to consider the deliberately performative manner in which the Young Lords conducted their dramatic campaigns.

In addition to dodging dead-end binaries, a focused performance analysis allows me to highlight the specifically cultural dimensions of the Lords' actions. As maintained by T.V. Reed in *The Art of Protest*, "scholars of social movements have had too little to

say about culture, and cultural studies scholars have had too little to say about movements” (xvi). By extension, this absence is also endemic to Latino/a cultural studies, as Latino social movements and their more quantifiable elements tend to be addressed primarily by social scientists. Perhaps some of this avoidance stems from the fact that “culture is a messy business” (Reed xvi). Alternatively, as Davarian Baldwin suggests with respect to the utility of a cultural studies analysis of the Black Panther Party (BPP):

Protests that “it wasn’t performance, it was real”...suggest that we have too much culture and not enough politics in our current cultural politics. But, part of the problem was a generational difference in language where performance seems to suggest the term “fake”. (292)

By understanding politics as “performance,” I recognize the self-conscious, constructed, and contested nature of ideologies and identities, but by no means aim to diminish the very real material conditions that the Young Lords responded to in Chicago in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Instead, I acknowledge this socio-political reality and hope to understand it with respect to the YLO’s symbolic actions.

Surprisingly, a comprehensive historical account of the Chicago Young Lords is nonexistent; within Latino social movement literature the Lords are often relegated to a footnote or eclipsed by their New York successors. Even the editors of *The Puerto Rican Movement* somewhat sheepishly acknowledge that “a large metropolis like Chicago certainly deserves more attention than it gets in this book” (xii). I was equally shocked to discover that what little information which does exist on the YLO is patchy at best,

revealing a disconcerting number of gaps, inconsistencies, and inaccuracies. Although a comprehensive history of the Chicago YLO remains to be written, this chapter's goals are more modest. In what follows, I highlight significant moments in the group's history that are characterized by attempts to physically and discursively appropriate urban space while simultaneously tracking their politicization as they evolved from a street gang into an activist group.⁴

Initially, the Young Lords banded together in 1959 as a group of seven young, primarily second-generation Puerto Ricans in order to protect themselves from other gangs in the Lincoln Park neighborhood. At first, for member Cha Cha Jiménez, belonging to a gang "was a matter of controlling my life, of not having to worry about being chased, a sense of pride...pride that I did not have before, that subtle prejudice that I did not know, being put down or having low self-esteem or being ashamed of my family, like many other Latinos at that time" (Interview). However, for Jiménez and many other young Puerto Ricans, the 1966 Division Street Riots served to offset this shame, signaling both a rejection of their parents' passivity and the emergence of a new era of struggle for civil and social rights.

Yet it was not until 1967—after Jiménez had been released from one of his many stints in prison—that he returned to his neighborhood, changed the name of the gang

⁴Here, I focus upon a branch of social movement that is often referred to as the "direct action" tradition. These movements have relied upon such direct action forms as civil disobedience, sit-ins, strikes, boycotts, building or land takeovers, and other dramatic confrontations (Reed xviii-xix).

from the Young Lords to the Young Lords Organization (YLO), and organized its members against the city's urban renewal plans for Lincoln Park. While in jail, Jiménez had spent time reading the works of Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, the Brown Berets, and the Black Panther Party. He also met and formed a relationship with fellow inmate and Chicago Black Panther leader Fred Hampton (Morales 212). "That was when I decided I was going to get myself together," he explained. "I read everything I could get my hands on in jail—mostly hard political stuff. I kicked the drug habit and decided to channel my energy into worthwhile projects for my people" (qtd. in Mason 4).

Meanwhile, throughout the United States, protests against the Vietnam War, urban rioting, the Black Power Movement, the Chicano Movement and the rise of feminism all provided the backdrop for Young Lords' political conversion. In Chicago, the same summer that saw the outbreak of the Division Street Riots also witnessed African American led civil rights marches against racial segregation in housing. In 1968, the brutal police treatment of protestors and reporters at the Democratic National Convention became the focus of national media attention, followed by the notorious "Chicago Eight" courtroom drama. What these movements and moments had in common—and what the Young Lords garnered from these commonalities—were their

commitment to pressure through presence by means of strategically located performance.⁵ As Harry Elam notes in *Taking it to the Streets*:

The atmosphere of urgency in the 1960s and 1970s fueled and in turn was fueled by the performativity of the entire social environment. Dramatic social events such as protest demonstrations, draft card burnings, and acts of civil disobedience on the Delano picket lines were notable not only for their subversive political intent but also for their performative quality. In these turbulent times social activists became protagonists in their own real-life dramas. (25)

It is not surprising, then, given the performative nature of politics at the time that the Chicago YLO began to develop and modify some of these forms of protest and mobilization to serve its own needs. In fact, as Elizabeth Martínez suggests, “the ‘60s was an era of constant interconnection across both time and space” (183) between white radicals, Asians, African Americans, Native Americans, Chicanos, and Puerto Ricans.

According to Jiménez, the Young Lords were especially inspired by the Black Panther Party (BPP), asserting that “we see and we recognize the Black Panther Party as a revolutionary vanguard. And we feel that as revolutionaries we should follow the vanguard party” (qtd. in Ogbar 156). Accordingly, they adopted the Panthers’ language and style—two key elements of the Panther persona—as a political statement that underlined their espousal of BPP politics. The Lords wore purple berets and armbands at rallies, called the police “pigs” and used slogans like “All Power to the People” and

⁵Similarly theatrical tactics continue to be effective, as David Román has shown in *Acts of Intervention: Performance, Gay Culture, and AIDS* (1998).

“Fuck the Pigs.” Also, like the Panthers, the YLO was organized into militaristic ministerial divisions—defense, information, culture, etc.—with varying levels of responsibility and a central committee that included field marshals. They devised a 13-Point Program modeled after the Panthers’ 10-Point Platform, calling for self-determination for all Puerto Ricans and Latinos, decent housing, education in Puerto Rican/Latino history, and the release of all people of color from military service and prisons. Finally, both groups printed newspapers that included their platforms, speeches and programs from party leadership, news and information about protests and rallies from around the country, and inspirational slogans intended to attract recruits and inspire activism. Both organizations used these newspapers to publicize the police brutality experienced by members of their respective communities, demonstrating an understanding that only certain kinds of press releases and headlines would successfully lure the mainstream media’s attention.

The two groups also came together along with the Young Patriots in the spring of 1969 in order to form an alliance against police brutality in the city. Ultimately, they became known as the Rainbow Coalition, with a rallying cry of “Black Power, Brown Power and White Power.” Recruitment, according to a November 1969 article in the *New York Times*, would take place “in the streets of the slums and the shacks of Appalachian squalor” in order to “start with the most oppressed elements in society—the hungry, the badly housed and badly dressed” (M. Kaufman 83). The Coalition considered itself to be

a “vanguard of the dispossessed” that would act as a “revolutionary spearhead” (M. Kaufman 83) by supporting each other on issues such as housing, healthcare, community service programs, fundraising, and political rallies.

As a result of significant contact and influence, the YLO’s style, language, and politics clearly reflected those of the Black Panther Party. The interconnections between the two suggest the power of mimesis to produce new subjectivities and identifications across ideological boundaries. Their relationship also reflected an incipient form of what Chantal Mouffe—building upon the work of Antonio Gramsci—defined as a “radical chain of democratic equivalences” (100). She asserts that such radical chains are critical to contemporary politics and the “extension of the democratic revolution into more and more spheres of public life” (95). Furthermore, this “chain of equivalences” between the Panthers and the Lords was founded, in part, upon Mouffe’s concept of “contradictory interpolation,” or “a situation in which subjects constructed in subordination by a set of discourses are, at the same time, interpolated as equal by other discourses” (89). For African Americans at this time, the idea that “all men are created equal” was at odds with the policies of racial segregation (Elam 22). Correspondingly, as maintained by controversial conservative Linda Chávez, the conferral of citizenship in 1917 “*should* have enhanced Puerto Rican achievement” (159, my emphasis). Indeed, the American Dream must have seemed perplexingly inaccessible to Chicago’s Puerto Ricans at the time.

Similarly, on the West Coast, the Chicano Brown Berets were agitating for social and political change by promoting a militant version of racial solidarity. The centerpiece of this new Chicano nationalism was Aztlán, the spiritual homeland of the Mexican people located in the southwestern United States. Although a largely mythical and ahistorical concept, the return to Aztlán, as Klor de Alva has shown, “was associated with the issues of poverty, land, sovereignty, and political organization” (71). In the 1969 *Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*, the manifesto states:

In the spirit of a new people that is conscious not only of its proud historical heritage, but also of the brutal “gringo” invasion of our territories, we, the Chicano inhabitants and civilizers of the northern land of Aztlán, from whence came our forefathers, reclaiming the land of their birth and consecrating the determination of our pope of the sun, *declare* that the call of our blood is our power, our responsibility, and our inevitable destiny. (Valdez and Steiner 402-3)

Basing their entitlement upon pre-Cortesian history, the writers of this plan claimed ownership of lands that they considered to be rightfully theirs. Likewise, many mainland Puerto Ricans endowed the island—renamed *Borinquen* in an effort to return it to its pre-Columbian indigenous Taíno roots—with a mythologized status. However, for Puerto Ricans, the reality of the existence of their country was never in question. But displacement from the island was very real.

Although the plight of Chicago’s Puerto Rican population was by no means “transparently connected to the political fate of Puerto Rico” (74) as Klor de Alva claims, the Island did strategically emerge in both the rhetoric and iconography of the Young Lords. For example, their slogan—*Tengo Puerto Rico en mi corazón*—was accompanied by

a logo that featured a clenched fist—à la Black Panthers—holding a rifle over an image of the map of Puerto Rico. But as José “Cha Cha” clarifies: “[w]hat got us involved was *not* the independence of Puerto Rico, but that they were taking our neighborhood from us” (qtd. in “Young Lords Founder”). If anything, then, questions regarding the Island’s status were reframed with respect to the specificity of their circumstances, as indicated by Jiménez: “[because] they [were] taking our land in Chicago...at the same time we kind of connected it to what was going on in terms of self-determination for Puerto Rico. It was the same thing; we could see it more clearly, because we could see they were stealing our homes” (Interview).

Although attachments to Lincoln Park were strong, the Lords’ ties to the neighborhood were relatively recent. Many of their families had already been forced to move out of “La Madison” (from Ashland to Kedzie) and “La Clark” (from Ohio to North Avenue) in the late 1950s (F. Padilla 120). “They shoved us northward, three blocks at a time, to make room for a new class of people,” Jiménez explained. “And all the time, we were thinking they intended to move us back in after the buildings were renovated. Instead, they built Old Town and [Carl] Sandburg Village—with pieces of Puerto Rican soul” (qtd. in Mason 4). So, when the gas lamps began appearing in front yards and three-flats boasted newly tuck-pointed façades in Lincoln Park in the late 1960s, the situation undoubtedly felt oddly familiar to many Puerto Ricans residents. This time, however, they put up a fight. What many residents did not know, however,

was that it was already too late. Lincoln Park's social and spatial restructuring had already been set in motion almost a decade earlier.

The formal beginnings of Lincoln Park's transformation can be traced back to 1956, when the Lincoln Park Conservation Association (LPCA) requested that the Chicago Community Conservation Board designate the area for urban renewal.⁶ The request was approved, and plans for a General Neighborhood Renewal Plan (GNRP) for the Lincoln Park community were initiated, to be carried out over a fifteen-year period (F. Padilla 119-120). By 1962, Project I—implemented by the Department of Urban Renewal (DUR) with the LPCA's backing—was in full swing. This rehabilitation was accompanied by a marked shift in the media's characterization of Lincoln Park; namely, what was once a deteriorated ghetto was now described as an inviting urban enclave. According to a 1969 *Chicago Tribune* article entitled "Big Noise from Lincoln Park," "crumbling structures now have 'potential,' and buildings that might have cost \$20,000 or less at the beginning of the decade have in many cases doubled in price" (Cross 30). With this, the author points to the oftentimes transparent attempts to target a preferred middle-class market by making over Lincoln Park. Next, the sketch of the neighborhood continues with an enticing appeal:

For the young and successful, Lincoln Park holds out the prospect of city living as an alternative to the suburbs: picturesque townhouses, a big park with a zoo,

⁶ Alexander J. Reichl defines urban renewal in *Reconstructing Times Square* as "a massive effort to restructure land-use patterns in American cities around an emerging postindustrial economy" (11).

quaint and chic stores, a location only minutes from the downtown office, bohemian and artistic elements, a rich mixture of national backgrounds and ways of life...(Cross 30)

Here, similar to Christopher Mele's observations of renewal on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, developers spatialized "fictive assumptions" (20-21) and idealized versions of a middle-class who would have otherwise been drawn to the suburbs.

In addition to repackaging its landscape for middle-class consumption, a celebratory narrative was formulated that portrayed the neighborhood's current state as problematic and urban restructuring as necessary. From the LPCA's perspective, its members became Lincoln Park's "saviors" by rebuilding a community "once considered a near-slum, into an area rich in economic and cultural opportunities for all social classes" (Link and Krokav 1). Hence, development was applauded and its social costs were either discounted or defended, demonstrating why, as Soja warns in *Postmodern Geographies*, "we must be insistently aware of how space can be made to hide consequences from us, how relations of power and discipline are inscribed in the apparent innocent spatiality of social life, how human geographies become filled with politics and ideology" (6). Similarly, Lefebvre states that "space has been shaped and molded from historical and natural elements, but this has been a political process. Space is political and ideological. It is a product literally filled with ideologies" ("Reflections" 31). But no matter how the story is told, and even when urban renewal takes the form of restoration rather than massive slum clearance, rents inevitably go up and many of the

neighborhood's poorer residents are forced to leave. In the case of Lincoln Park in the mid- to late 1960s, when land was cleared along Lincoln Avenue, Larrabee Street, North Avenue, Halsted, and other sites, an estimated 2,000 individuals, families, and businesses were displaced (Cross 33).

In response to the housing shortage and displacement of the working-class from Lincoln Park, militant organizations like the Young Lords performed the occupation of McCormick Seminary that was described at the beginning of this chapter. Significantly, the media exposure around this event helped the Lords' recruiting efforts. Bolstered by a rise in membership, one month after the sit-in at McCormick the Lords engaged in yet another "turf war"—this time with the governing board of Lincoln Park's Armitage Avenue Methodist Church. "The issues were urban renewal and police brutality and we felt that the church wasn't meeting the needs of the people," Jiménez explained. "[They] wouldn't support our demands for low-cost housing in the Lincoln Park area, they wouldn't lease us any office space, and they refused to let us convert the basement into a free community daycare center" (qtd. in Mason 4). Although the Lords asked church officials for permission to run the center, the congregation rejected the proposal. In return, they took over the site after a four-day sit-in, renamed it Armitage People's Church, and made it their national headquarters.

Here, the YLO's impromptu occupation of the church became a *tactic* in its challenge of authority. According to de Certeau,

The space of the tactic is the space of the other. It operates in isolated actions, blow by blow...It must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. It poaches in them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected. (37)

For de Certeau, then, tactics consist of momentary, creative disruptions that contain their own logic. What's more, as Susan Leigh Foster observes in "Walking and Other Choreographic Tactics," "while tactical destabilizations of the status quo observe no predictable pattern, they sometimes share certain moves" (130). This shared logic is illustrated by certain similarities between the sit-ins at McCormick and Armitage Church. For one, both protests were profoundly corporeal in their resistance. Correspondingly, de Certeau understands that "the act of speaking (with all the enunciative strategies that implies) is not reducible to a knowledge of language" (xiii). Drawing upon Austin's notion of the speech-act, he extends the same capacity to enunciate to all bodily articulation. Thus, by *physically* occupying these sites, the Lords countered invisibility with presence, using their bodies to instill spatial intervention with political meaning.

Furthermore, the act of renaming the Seminary as the "Manuel Ramos Memorial Building" and the church as "People's Church" represents a discursive parallel to their physical annexations. De Certeau explains that as the original signification of a name is worn away and inscribed with another, "they become liberated spaces that can be occupied. A rich indetermination gives them, by means of a semantic rarefaction, the function of articulating a second, poetic geography on top of the geography of the literal,

forbidden, or permitted meaning” (105). Thus, like de Certeau’s pedestrian, the Young Lords dismiss the original “meaning” of the church and replace it with one of its own, thereby appropriating the “ability to signify” (104) for their own purposes. Indeed, by August of 1969, after an exodus of about 15 percent of the church’s membership and countless building inspections, the Young Lords had “transformed the church’s basement from a drab, cobwebbed thing into a rectangular spectrum of color” (Mason 4). The overall program included, among other services, a breakfast program—the first of its kind in the community.

By July of 1969, the Lords had tackled another site—a vacant lot on the corner of Armitage and Halsted. The land, which belonged to the Department of Urban Renewal (DUR), had been designated for some type of commercial recreational enterprise in 1965. When the DUR called for bids on the parcel, it received five proposals—all for private tennis clubs with \$1000-\$1500 annual membership fees. At the end of July, an estimated 500 members of the Poor People’s Coalition—led by the Young Lords—broke up a meeting of the Lincoln Park Conservation Community Council. Headlines referred to the Poor People’s Coalition (PPC) as a “gang” and to their disruption as an “hour-long melee,” which included “fist-swinging and chair-throwing incidents between the street gangs and some members of the audience” (Shojai B12). Council members “restored order” by agreeing to consider a PPC proposal to appoint an “advisory committee of poor persons and Negroes” (Shojai B12). However, after the motion was voted down by

the council, “the shouting and jeering resumed” (Shojai B12). As the *Tribune* reports, the council quickly adjourned without conducting any further business, but not before a PPC spokesman announced that the proposed tennis club site would be used as a “People’s Park” (Shojai B12). PPC members subsequently staged a “round-the-clock camp-in” on the lot in order to foil the DUR’s tennis club plans. Protestors were permitted to use the property until a final decision was made, but as a council member admitted, “we’re all afraid to hold another public meeting to vote on anything after what we’ve been thru [sic] in the last one.” In the meantime, the community groups were there each day, “clearing rubble and preparing to set up play equipment” (“Stage” N_A6).

The DUR continued to defend these bids, claiming that they “could have been for a bowling alley, trampoline, or a miniature golf course. It just happened that they were all for tennis clubs” (qtd. in “Stage” N_A6). The Intown Tennis Club also complained that they unjustly became “the whipping boy for a lack of low-income housing in the area,” and observed that:

The attack appears to be a political wedge and an emotional appeal to motivate Urban Renewal to provide more such housing facilities. But does the concept of tennis in the community have to be destroyed to accomplish these results? The controversy is being waged on the false issue of “tennis or low income housing.” The more honest question, we feel, is “why not both?” (Wead 2)

Here, the DUR and The Intown Tennis Club failed to recognize that the multiple proposals for tennis facilities were by no means arbitrary and that tennis and low-

income housing were, in fact, mutually exclusive. As the *Chicago Tribune* attested, “it was easy to conjure up the image of genteel sportsmen playing while the Puerto Rican and black neighborhoods all around them seethed and the poor continued to lose their homes” (Cross 38). A local Lincoln Park business owner also commented that the proposals proved that the LPCA’s goal of preserving the diversity of the community was mere rhetoric, because “[d]iversity for upper-class people means cobblestone streets and a tennis club on Armitage and Halsted. Do you think a man coming home from a factory after working ten hours will go play tennis? Come on!” (qtd. in Bollwahn 8). The renaming of the site as “People’s Park” therefore became a *chronotope* for neighborhood conflict over space, defined by Bakhtin as “points in the geography of a community where time and space intersect and fuse...Chronotopes thus stand as monuments to the community itself, as symbols of it, as forces operating to shape its members' images of themselves (qtd. in Basso 44-45). Thus, decisions with respect to public recreation in Lincoln Park became both politically and socially significant as they indexed broader issues regarding the meaning of “public” urban space.

In reality, however, the opening of the daycare center and the delay of tennis court construction were isolated victories for the Young Lords. For example, in mid-1969, counting on the Seminary’s financial commitment, the Lords began to plan to establish a “poor people’s” housing project on an urban renewal site on the west side of Lincoln Park. They hired a young architect named Howard Alan, commissioning him to

draw up a housing plan to submit to the DUR on a land bid⁷ (“Poor People” 15). Community Urban Renewal Director George Stone led them to believe that if the Coalition submitted technically adequate plans, they would get the job (Browning 21). Alan’s building design contained three stories, each set back so that the roof of the floor below formed a play terrace—or “community streets”—for the apartment above. These streets would allow mothers to watch their children while they worked, and at nights they would function as a place for residents to meet and talk. “The terraces were designed,” commented Alan, “for poor people’s interaction in response to an existing way of life whereby poor people could rely on each other” (qtd. in Browning 21). The building plans also turned the classical distinction between private life and public space on its head, understanding, as Logan and Molotch argue in *Urban Fortunes*, “that the material use of place cannot be separated from psychological use; the daily round that makes physical survival possible takes on emotional meanings through that very capacity to fulfill life’s crucial goals” (20).

Similar to their struggles at the church and People’s Park, the PPC’s blueprints represented an attempt to physically reconstitute Lincoln Park space by articulating their own needs within an “other” urban social geography (Villa 166-167). Although these efforts were pushed through both legitimate and government-sanctioned channels,

⁷The \$47,170 bid sought to build 70 units on 2.5 acres of slum-cleared land on North Larrabee Street between Eugenie Street and Armitage Avenue (“O.K Hartford” N9).

significant opposition remained. One Lincoln Park resident found the concept to be “sociologically and architecturally appalling,” as it “completely neglects the aspect of greenery and instead, has created what appears to be in the presentation, a 490-foot long, three-story concrete mass” (qtd. in Price 3). An architect that opposed the PPC’s plan described the proposal as a “dehumanizing structure, little more than glorified cattle pens, where all units open out on a common area and deprive all residents of any privacy” (qtd. in Price 2). “As a property owner,” another resident said, “I ask you not to turn this area into another low income slum” (qtd. in “O.K. Hartford” N9). Patrick Feely, president of the Lincoln Park Conservation Association (LPCA) commented: “Experiments in new construction are fine, but not at the expense of the civility of the community. Townhouses which are in the Hartford bid are in harmony with Lincoln Park” (qtd. in “O.K. Hartford” N9). Clearly, behind this resistance was the thinly veiled racism that lay at the core of the debate over Lincoln Park’s future.

In response to the PPC’s plan, the Lincoln Park Conservation Community Council (LPCCC), a group of community residents named by Mayor Daley to oversee and approve government urban renewal in the community, submitted a bid of their own designed by the Hartford Construction Company. The LPCCC’s pitch primarily targeted middle-income families, requesting that the Federal Housing Authority set aside only a minimum of 15 percent low-income family units (in contrast to the PPC’s call for at least 40 percent). After the announcement of the LPCCC’s proposal in July of 1969, the Young

Lords began to disrupt meetings by storming the stage of meeting halls and refusing to allow the agenda items to be discussed.

On February 11, 1970, after the DUR rejected the PPC's plan in favor of the LPCCC/Hartford bid, the *Chicago Tribune* reported that:

One leader of the coalition was subdued by five policemen after he leaped over a spectator's barricade and jumped from one row of empty aldermanic desks to another in an apparent attempt to reach the area where the board members were sitting. Policemen also moved in quickly to hold back a dozen members of the Young Lords, a Latin American street gang, who also jumped from the spectators' area in an attempt to reach the arrested coalition leader. (T. Buck 1)

Reasons for the DUR's rejection of the plan remained vague in their report. They cited a lack of privacy with respect to the "community streets" and expressed doubts regarding the PPC's proposed budget ("Poor People" 15). Lewis Hill, commissioner of the department that had advocated the LPCCC/Hartford bid, told the committee that while it was "highly desirable to favor indigenous development groups...they must have enough technical back-up to meet the responsibility, and I don't think they could have done it" (qtd. in "O.K. Hartford" N9). However, the *Tribune* also learned that an underlying factor behind the board's decision was a fear by the city administration that "an award to the Poor People's Coalition, with its history of disruptive tactics, would possibly set a precedent for similar tactics in other neighborhoods for forcing demands upon the city" (T. Buck 1). Ultimately, by May of 1970, the City Council had shelved the land bid, effectively burying it.

The failure of the PPC housing bid drives home a prevalent theme that characterized the Young Lords' opposition to urban renewal. As Lefebvre has argued in *The Production of Space*, "in spatial practice, the representation of social relations is predominant" (50). For that reason, one of the most powerful ways to limit the economic and political rights of groups has been to limit social reproduction by controlling access to space (Hayden 22). Although YLO Minister of Information Omar López later referred to the Coalition's defeat as only a skirmish in what was really a war against urban renewal, in the end, the war was lost as well (Browning 21). Lincoln Park's land values continued to increase dramatically, making it difficult for many people and institutions to remain there. In 1973, the struggling McCormick Seminary sold its land to DePaul University and relocated to Hyde Park. Single professionals and childless couples moved into new high-rises and rehabilitated old houses. By the end of the twentieth century, the combination of public and private urban renewal efforts had transformed Lincoln Park into one of the highest-status neighborhoods in the city.

The early 1970s also witnessed a break between the Chicago and New York chapters of the Young Lords. Many identified inherent socio-economic differences between the members of the branches as the divisive force behind the rift, as the Chicago group was composed largely of former gang members and high school dropouts while the New York faction was primarily a college-educated offshoot of a political organization. Other Chicago Lords like Omar López felt that the New Yorkers were

overly preoccupied with ideology: “If we talk of being the vanguard, we need to be up ahead and still have something behind us too. We’re better able to analyze when we’re out on the streets talking with the people. Ideas must come after actions, not just from reading Marx, Lenin or Mao” (qtd. in Browning 25). The New York Lords, in contrast, did not consider its concerns to be overly abstract. Instead, they felt that the Chicago YLO were not capable of leading a sustained, closely-knit organization. Tensions came to a head in May of 1970 when the New Yorkers proposed that the Chicago leadership come east for an extended period. The Chicagoans refused because, in the end, they were unwilling to leave their local work.

Also on the local front—after almost twenty court indictments ranging from charges of mob violence to petty theft, in late 1970 Cha Cha Jiménez jumped bail and disappeared for a few years. When he resurfaced, he pled guilty in a dramatic ceremony at the 19th precinct to a charge of theft for \$23 worth of lumber from a construction site (Bridges 1). Upon his release after nine months in jail, he found that, much like the working-class neighborhood that he had so vehemently defended, the Young Lords had faded into virtual oblivion—many had been pushed north, settling in an area just south of Uptown. Some neighborhood residents said it was because the Young Lords could no longer function without their leader. Others contended that the times were changing and the YLO, like practically every other militant organization in America, was more interested in “turning inward” than carrying on an often futile battle for social change.

While a more in-depth analysis of the causes behind this split and the subsequent demise of the Young Lords Organization are beyond the scope of this chapter, one important question remains to be answered: Why *was* Lincoln Park so important to the Young Lords? Why *did* Chicago-centric work take precedence over the establishment of a national Lords program? As David Harvey suggests, paradoxically, “the elaboration of place-bound identities has become more rather than less important in a world of diminishing spatial barriers to exchange, movement and communication” (4). Tuan adds that “[e]motions begin to tinge the whole neighborhood—drawing on, and extrapolating from, the direct experience of its particular parts—when the neighborhood is perceived to have rivals and to be threatened in some way, real or imagined” (171). Although I acknowledge the fear of displacement as significant in understanding the Young Lords’ passionate protection of their “turf,” I also contend that their attachment to place went beyond basic animalistic responses to outside threats.

What neither of these scholars manages to adequately convey is the one constant characteristic of the group’s spotty historical archive—the sheer intensity of their commitment to their neighborhood. At a recent conference, Jiménez put it simply: “Lincoln Park was our Puerto Rico.” Here, I subscribe to Frances Negrón-Muntaner’s contention in *Boricua Pop* that “modern Puerto Rican ethno-national identity has been constituted in shame as a result of a transnational history of colonial domination” (5-6) coupled with an ambiguous political relationship to the island (with varying claims to

independent sovereignty. For the Young Lords, efforts to diminish this shame were redirected through the appropriation of Chicago space. It was in Lincoln Park that the Lords could re-define social and territorial self-determination—it was a “clean” slate upon which they could attempt to rewrite a new version of U.S. Puerto Rican spatial action. However, as the next chapter shows, the unrelenting threat of displacement continues to bar Chicago’s Puerto Ricans from full and equitable access to substantive citizenship without the assurance of a path to inclusion that does not demand assimilation. For that reason, residents have been forced to articulate alternative and autonomous definitions of community, political organization, space, and belonging in present-day Humboldt Park.

Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas and forms, about images and imaginings.

Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*

We pack. We pack.

To move out as our

Shouts

Fall on ears that

Sympathize

That sympathize

That sympathize

But offer to help us

Pack.

And we pack, we

Pack, we pack

To move again

Where no-one will

Hear

Feel

Taste or smell us

David Hernández, "New Town"

3. Grounding Puerto Ricanness in Humboldt Park

As the Puerto Rican Day Parade participants continue to make their way west on the Paseo Boricua, they pass beneath one of the two massive steel sculptures of Puerto Rican flags that spans the intersection at Division and Western. They are followed by the Latin American Motorcycle Association riders, eliciting cheers from the thousands of people that throng the sidewalks as they repeatedly rev their engines down the street.

Next is the Batey Urbano float, leading the crowd in the chant “Boricua Sí, Yuppie No!” I am struck by the contrast between the previous verse in poet David Hernández’s 1971 characterization of the now-gentrified Lakeview neighborhood and contemporary Humboldt Park, as there is little evidence of the silent and invisible community that he forecasted over thirty years ago. In fact, the symbolic landscape has been saturated by markers of Puerto Ricanness—everywhere I turn, I see bodegas, panaderías, peluquerías, botánicas, murals, and vendors hawking Puerto Rican flag jewelry and bumper stickers. The sheer spectacle of the parade suggests that it symbolizes *more* than just a celebration of the Puerto Rican presence in Chicago. If, as Susan G. Davis notes in *Parades and Power*, parades are both “dramatic representations” and “political actions” (5), then this parade represents a spatial and dramaturgical strategy through which participants can perform their community belonging as they make an explicitly Puerto Rican claim to Humboldt Park.

Notably, in his analysis of the relationship between Latinos and the U.S. city in *Magical Urbanism*, Mike Davis found that “only in Chicago, where Daley Jr. awarded Latino supporters with key appointments and \$200 million in new school investment, has any obvious material advantage accrued to Latinos or Puerto Ricans” (138). With such high stakes, disputes over the “meaning” of Humboldt Park have become especially heated throughout the past decade, testifying to the importance of place representations, or “historically particular sets of images, rhetoric, and symbols that

circulate and signify a particular neighborhood identity” (Mele 5). As David Harvey confirms, “struggles over representation...are as fiercely fought and as fundamental to the activities of place construction as brick and mortar,” because it is through these representational tools that a community produces cultural meaning for itself and to outsiders (23). Additionally, as Albert Hunter shows in *Symbolic Communities*, community organization and “meaningful social action” (7) are predicated upon a shared or collective spatial imaginary.

Because places are socially constructed, however, their meanings are also inherently unstable and multiple. “The dominant image of any place,” Doreen Massey maintains, “will be a matter of contestation and will change over time” (121). An understanding of landscape production should therefore begin with Sharon Zukin’s definition of landscape as a “contentious, compromised, product of society” (16). To be sure, the “contested terrain” of place is nowhere better exemplified than in recent—and often contradictory—representations of Humboldt Park. For that reason, in the pages that follow, I examine contemporary portrayals of the neighborhood produced by a diverse group of stakeholders—including residents, the real estate sector, city developers and the media—all with a vested interest in their own version of its future. I begin with the media, which alternately portrays a crime-ridden neighborhood plagued by neglect to an up-and-coming community with significant potential for ambitious investors. Then I turn to the community-driven development of the Paseo Boricua, the

seven-block business corridor on Division Street located between the two steel flags. I argue that the Paseo ultimately represents the result of a carefully and consciously constructed site-specific discourse with both material implications and a concrete political and ideological agenda: to mobilize the area's residents against gentrification by legitimizing, rooting and defining the Puerto Rican presence in Humboldt Park.

Here, I highlight the intersections between the goals of this chapter and Raúl Homero Villa's analysis of Chicano space and place in *Barrio-Logos*. Specifically, we both work to identify the dynamic tension between the internal and external influences that shape the contemporary barrio, and we both hope to avoid, in Villa's words, "shining a singularly idealizing light upon barrio culture" (5). Despite his best intentions, however, I would suggest that the critical terms around which Villa's project is centered—*barriology* and *barrioization*—often become reductive and essentialist in their inherent opposition. I wonder if the tactics that emerge from the barrio are *always* "community-sustaining" and "culturally affirming" and if forces outside the barrio are *always* "dominating" and "socially deforming" (8). What's more, this moralizing insider/outsider dichotomy is substantiated both by anti-gentrification community rhetoric and by many Latino Studies scholars. While the former imagines Humboldt Park as the stage for the playing-out of the battle of good (Puerto Rican residents) versus evil (the "gentrification industry"—realtors, mortgage lenders, construction companies,

and non-Puerto Rican homebuyers), the latter tends to over-valorize local knowledge, subaltern identities and place-making projects.

Whether seen as positive or negative, it is important to stress that any depiction of Humboldt Park represents, like Kay Anderson's Chinatown, "an arbitrary classification of space" (1987: 583) that serves to reaffirm a... "moral order of 'us' and 'them'" (1988: 145). Accordingly, Villa's statement that "many of the cultural practices produced and exercised in the barrios have tended toward positive articulations of community consciousness" (5) is equally arbitrary and subjective. To be sure, there is nothing inherently pure or innocent about the local; in fact, this assumption effectively obscures important connections between localities and global processes (Escobar 157). It is for these reasons that I strive to offer a more nuanced account of the range of claims to space that have framed the recent development of the Paseo Boricua by juxtaposing, contextualizing and troubling Puerto Rican narratives of exclusion and obfuscation with respect to discourses of belonging and entitlement.

While Puerto Rican efforts to assert control over the meaning of Chicago neighborhood space have represented a recurring theme throughout this project, it is in this chapter that their story reaches its most dramatic denouement. Indeed, beginning in the early 1990s once again, the threat of displacement and the ensuing loss of community began to loom large in the minds of Humboldt Park residents. Due to a rapidly westward-moving real estate market, the election of pro-gentrification Richard

M. Daley as mayor in 1989, as well as an initiative to attract affluent whites back into the city, many were concerned by the rising property values, increases in taxes and widespread condominium conversions—along with a diminishing supply of affordable housing for long-time residents.

But over twenty years of “white flight,” commercial disinvestment, municipal neglect and bank redlining had also taken their toll on Humboldt Park while the media continued to sow the seed of the unstable, violence-prone Puerto Rican community that had been planted by the Division Street Riots. Even though Humboldt Park was not “a neighborhood of all-out urban chaos, stripped cars and burned-out tenements,” a *Chicago Tribune* article conceded, “looks can be deceptive.” That is, the “neighborhood of classic Chicago three-flats with grand stoops in stone” represented a literal and metaphorical façade behind which lay a more insidious danger (Holt and Recktenwald 1). That danger, according to “Hispanic Gang Warfare in a Deadly Spiral,” was primarily gang-related:

It started on Halloween, when one teenager threw an egg at another young man who happened to belong to a rival gang. It ended nine days, 25 shootings and two funerals later. What might be considered to be a prank somewhere else provoked a bloody gang war in Chicago’s Humboldt Park area, according to police and gang mediators. (Kiernan and Recktenwald 1)

Here, the article details a site-specific recipe for gang aggression: take one innocuous practical joke, mix in a serving of Humboldt Park, and a “bloody gang war” results. Even worse, with gang roots in the area that could be traced back to the early 1970s,

“Gangs a Fact of Life” determined that the local community’s wounds were primarily self-inflicted for, “[u]nlike areas where gang members terrorize somebody else’s neighborhood, the mayhem around Humboldt Park is largely homegrown” (Holt and Recktenwald 1).

After the wrong man was charged with the murder of 12-year-old Miguel DeLaRosa in July of 2000, Mayor Daley accused the Humboldt Park community of intentionally withholding the identity of the real killer from the police:

Everybody should have come forward. There’s a dead child on the street. He’s right on the curb. He’s right there next to the grocery store. People should have flocked to the station and said, “I have information. I’ve been a gang-banger. I know who shot that person.” (Spielman and Mendieta 1)

Daley and his administration claimed that it was only *after* the arrest of 18-year-old Joseph López that people began to reveal information that resulted in the release of López and the subsequent arrest of 27-year-old Miguel Figueroa. When asked why it took the arrest of the wrong man to convince people to talk, the mayor responded: “Code of silence. Gang-bangers. Their sons, their daughters, their husbands. Fear. ‘(A conscious decision that) we’re going to keep it quiet.’ (Next time), it’s going to be their sons or daughters” (Spielman and Mendieta 1). In response, in a letter printed in the *Chicago Sun-Times* a few days later, Norma Polanco demanded an apology “for these offensive comments and [Daley’s] role in propagating the myth that our community is uncaring, dangerous, and apathetic” (“In Humboldt” 26).

Not only is violence indigenous to this urban space, but it also derives much of its potency from racial (Latino) anxieties. "Gang Warfare," for example, compared higher rates of more lethal violence in the "Hispanic" neighborhoods on the West and Northwest Sides of Chicago to the decrease in shootings and homicides in a number of gang-dominated black neighborhoods on the South and West Sides. According to the article's sources, black gangs commonly commit more "instrumental" violence, with money or property as the impetus. In contrast, Hispanic gangs commit more "expressive" violence, where violence *itself* is the motive (Kiernan and Recktenwald 1). This depiction of Latino aggression shows, as Stephen Haymes writes in *Race, Culture and the City*, that "[c]ertain 'unruly' populations such as African-Americans and Latinos are discursively constructed through the racialization of their spaces of habitat" (xiii). While white racial superiority designates white places as "civilized, rational and orderly," African American and Latino/a places are constructed as "uncivilized, irrational and disorderly" (Haymes 21). These descriptions of the neighborhood's drug and crime issues were therefore presented as blighting influences on city livability, effectively devaluing the community in order to pave the way for its redevelopment.

Violence committed by the stereotypically "quick-tempered," incomprehensible and irrational Latino in Humboldt Park was further aggravated, according to "Gang Warfare," by the area's demographics. "The gang problem is a young adolescent problem," commented "gang expert" Irving Spergel. "The black community is aging,

while there are more Hispanic young people and more Hispanic people overall” (qtd. in Kiernan and Recktenwald 1), due to the “steady, disquieting rise” in births to Hispanic teens in Illinois and Chicago (Christian and Puente 1). These statements expose, as George Lipsitz explains in *Dangerous Crossroads*, the tendency of mainstream culture to demonize “inner-city minority youths, making them the scapegoats for the chaos created in national life by deindustrialization and economic restructuring” (19). In Chicago’s case, however, the demographic becomes even more specific. It is not just “minority youths,” but *Latino* youths, and it is not just young people from the “inner city” that are targeted, but instead, those *specifically* from Humboldt Park. Clearly, in the eyes of the media and the city, gang violence has been exacerbated by Humboldt Park residents and intensified upon Humboldt Park terrain. However, what Chicago’s press has repeatedly failed to investigate—and what I examine below—is the growing and vocal youth-led offensive *against* gang-related violence in the community.

Over the course of a weekend, 25 shootings in the area left 5 people dead. Although this community was certainly no stranger to drug- and gang-related violence and crime, something about the events of this particular weekend struck a chord among young people in the neighborhood. As a result, a newly formed collective of eight Latino college-area students took immediate action, deciding that the violence was unacceptable and that a timely and decisive response on their part was crucial. One of the group’s founding members, Michael Rodríguez, explains that their reaction was, in

part, an attempt to fill a void in the community, addressing the fact that "there was no organization to address gang violence and the drug trade in this community from the perspective of young people" (qtd. in Mumm).

Utilizing the collective's storefront space as their home base, area youth gathered at the Batey Urbano on 2620 West Division Street. The "Batey,"¹ as it is affectionately known, had been opened a few months earlier in March, with the mission of "providing Chicago's Puerto Rican/Latino youth with an outlet for expression and community action" (Batey). Participants created fliers, art, and poetry in response to the incident. Local newspapers, radio and TV stations were notified. On August 3, 2002, community youths marched on the streets of Division, in the first-ever Chicago neighborhood march against violence planned and performed solely by young people. Rodríguez recalls: "This was to be a youth-led process. We brought this to the Alderman. The layout, the props, the route, every aspect of it was chosen by the youth. Let's say they would have rejected it. It still would have taken place. The idea was simple: as a community the conditions that exist...breed violence" (qtd. in Mumm).

When the Batey Urbano first opened its doors in 2002, it was armed with one month's rent donated by the Puerto Rican Cultural Center (PRCC) and a vision of a grassroots space that would draw Latino college students back to the community,

¹ The word "batey" comes from the indigenous Taíno expression for "meeting area," used as ceremonial grounds for the performance of sacred rites, collective decisions, celebrations, and community action. "Urbano" refers to the urban space in which the contemporary barrio is set ("About Us").

bringing their intellectual and institutional resources to Humboldt Park. “From the beginning,” as a *Chicago Sun-Times* article states, “the idea was to create a space for arts, activism, and technology” (Guy 76). It soon became clear to the volunteer members of the collective, however, that the real need in the community was among its youth. Drawing upon the success of the PRCC-sponsored Vida/SIDA’s² peer-to-peer educational program, the collective quickly shifted its direction, gearing its programming toward local high-school students.

The Batey began with a Thursday night spoken word open-mike, called “Poetry with Purpose.” As interest and attendance rose, the venue expanded its events to both Friday and Saturday nights, with the “Four Elements of Hip-Hop Expression”³ (m.c.ing, breakdancing, d.j.ing and graffiti writing) on Fridays, and “Cultural Engagement” (art exhibits, movie screenings, musical performances of *bomba y plena* and discussions) on Saturdays. From these events and follow-up meetings, the collective developed a mission with the following objectives:

To provide a space for meaningful and purposeful presentation of young Latinos’ cultural experiences; 2) To promote the skilled development of young Latino artists and cultural workers through forums, workshops, video presentations, etc.; 3) To build a bridge between the Latino youth at the

²Vida/SIDA is a community-based outreach project dedicated to providing HIV/AIDS and STD prevention education programming.

³ The incorporation of rap into the Batey’s expressive repertoire also speaks to the significance that hip-hop culture has with respect to Humboldt Park’s youth. Part of this significance has to do with the often-overlooked Puerto Rican influence on and contribution to the development of hip hop.

universities and in the community through the enhancement and/or development of campus newsletters; 4) To support the organizing efforts of our community through a cultural and youth activist dimension. (“About Us”)

As the mission and objectives of the Batey have taken shape, so have the collective’s responsibilities, which include maintenance of the space, financial management, and scheduling of visiting performers and artists. The collective meets weekly to discuss these types of logistical issues, as well as to make any more general decisions regarding the overall direction of the Batey. The site is financially sustained by donations at its events (\$3 suggested for high school students and \$5 for people over 18). One of its original founders, Mike Reyes, is employed by Americorps as the Batey’s sole staff member. Reyes has also worked in conjunction with the Near Northwest Neighborhood Network (NNNN)⁴ to develop the Barrio Arts, Culture and Communication Academy (BACCA), an after-school program hosted by the Batey that creates a space for youth to get homework help and computer access. BACCA consists of three individual programs: *La Voz*: Journalism and Newspaper Layout Design Academy; *Radio Batey*: Online Radio Broadcasting Academy; and *Batey Theater*: Production and Performance Academy.

Of significance to this project is that many of the Batey’s spoken word and hip-hop performances reveal a pronounced emphasis on place and locality, which, according to Murray Forman in *The ‘Hood Comes First*, “is one of the key factors

⁴ The NNNN addresses community issues through employment, housing, and economic development.

distinguishing rap music and hip-hop from the many other cultural and subcultural youth formations currently vying for popular attention” (3). For example, “Put Down the Guns,” a rap compiled by students from Pedro Albizu Campos High School (PACHS) and the Batey Urbano, deals with the violence that continues to have an impact upon the Humboldt Park community. As the first M.C. documents, the neighborhood is difficult to navigate:

Hey yo, life is fucked up,
Especially in Humboldt Park
Can’t walk to the store without seeing the guns spark

Gotta dodge stray bullets every time you walk
Gotta look over your shoulder
Cuz some niggaz⁵ might stalk

Trying to creep up
So they can take your life
And feel no remorse
Like when a stray dog bites
Disaster strikes
Every day in Humboldt
From the moment you wake up, you better be ready to rumble. (PRCC)

Here, the rap depicts a limited spatial mobility through and to a seemingly innocuous space. As the media suggests, violence seems to permeate every aspect of life in the community, from mundane considerations ranging from what route to take home to how to best to dodge gunfire. The space of the barrio has indeed become, in Yi-Fu

⁵ The use of the term “nigga” is inherited from a gangsta rap tradition. According to Robin D.G. Kelley, “nigga” is not just another word for Black, but rather; “speaks to a collective identity shaped by class consciousness, the character of inner-city space, police repression, poverty, and the constant threat of intraracial violence” (210).

Tuan's words, a "landscape of fear," a war zone where danger is omnipresent and the speaker is forced to position himself defensively.

The next verse, delivered by a different M.C., addresses the issue of drugs in the neighborhood:

Hey yo—drugs are invading the world like Nazis
Blocks bleed with fiends
As crack crosses the scenes
Youth are selling on the street
Gangs is causing them more heat
Prostitutes is in my 'hood,
But I stay rocking the beats (*PRCC*)

This disorienting urban setting depicted by the previous M.C. is now populated by and tied to a somewhat menacing cast of characters, including fiends, gangs and prostitutes. The speaker is simultaneously positioned within and outside this space—he identifies it as his 'hood, but attempts to maintain a sense of self by "rocking the beats."

Disengagement from this space is not always an option, however, as some of the rap's characters are imprisoned, both literally and metaphorically:

I seen a mother stuck on welfare
She walks the streets with five kids and everybody stares
And you ain't even there, stuck in a cell, but don't seem to care
Now she feels that life is running out of air. (*PRCC*)

Here, a spatial parallel is drawn between the listener and the mother—although the woman is free to "walk the streets," she has been abandoned and trapped by the conditions of her poverty. The rap ends with a plea for community disarmament and organization:

The government already got us
All on the run
We need to get together
And start putting down the guns. (PRCC)

Fears that they would be “on the run” were more than just poetic rhetoric, however, as threats of a new displacement resonated around the community at the beginning of the 1990s. Ironically, the same newspapers that featured above-the-fold articles that exposed the violence and crime “endemic” to Humboldt Park also chronicled a growing interest in the neighborhood’s real estate. Leonard Koenig, sales and marketing director for Dubin Residential, marveled at the foresight of those “willing to make the investment to profit from an area. They are not going to look at crime statistics now. They know that as the area gentrifies, crime statistics will hopefully go down” (qtd. in Mendieta 6). Here, we see how the same language that characterized the neighborhood’s decline was simultaneously used to justify its redevelopment (Reichl 2).

At the core of these articles was a pro-gentrification theme that chronicled the exploits of gentrifiers who attempted to transform physically decayed neighborhoods. A *Chicago Sun-Times* piece even hailed these investors as “urban pioneers” who moved when “few other brave young professionals would venture west of the Chicago River to the Northwest Side neighborhood” (G. Buck 1). According to Neil Smith, the media’s deployment of “frontier rhetoric” (64) to describe gentrification is common practice: “[n]ewspapers habitually extol the courage of urban homesteaders, the adventurous spirit and rugged individualism of the new settlers, brave pioneers, presumably going

where no (white) man has ever gone before” (69). Similarly, “Hot in Humboldt Park” praises mortgage banker-turned-cowboy Kevin Rocio, who, when asked “Why so far west?,” proudly responded “Why? The diversity, the mix of old and new, urban but new territory” (qtd. in G. Buck 1). This rhetoric also translated into effective politics, as it “offered a problem (deteriorating neighborhoods), a victim (civil community), and the cure (courageous pioneers)” (Wilson and Grammenos 299) in one fell swoop.

Those who lacked the courage to invest in a crime-ridden neighborhood, however, could be mollified by newspaper real-estate sections that peddled a revived, safer Humboldt Park. In a 1992 *Sun-Times* article, resident Magdalena Martinez claimed that although “[f]our years ago, you wouldn’t even want to come through here,” today “drug dealers have been chased off the block [and] a vacant lot is blooming with a well-tended garden” (qtd. in Siewers 5). “Planting Roots in Humboldt Park” also assured its readers that the neighborhood was beginning to shake off its recent past of poverty and gang violence. Andre Cooper, a ten-year resident, admitted that “Humboldt Park used to be bad. Before, it was torn out, with gutted porches and gang signs.” But today, he affirms, “[t]he safety of the neighborhood has come back...The park is even cleaner” (qtd. in Bronstien 3). Another tenant, Daniel Ayala, agreed that Humboldt Park’s reputation of crime was outdated. “When you say Humboldt Park, people draw a picture in their minds, and it’s a picture that was true 10 years ago. It’s changed. It’s just a myth that it’s a dangerous place to be” (qtd. in Bronstien 3). Again, we see how the

marginal landscape of the neighborhood has been cleansed and revamped in preparation for its intended middle-class occupant.

Even the park itself, as “The Haven of Humboldt Park” attested in 2004, has been cleaned up—both aesthetically and in terms of its more “unsavory” elements. Although, at one point, “spending an evening in Humboldt Park meant you were either: (A) a member of a Chicago gang” or “(B) unconcerned about your safety,” the park was now a big selling point for realtors (Eng 1). Alderman Billy Ocasio (26th Ward) largely attributed this “revitalization” in 2004 to a heightened police presence in the park. Now, he commented, “it has been taken over by families and not by drug dealers and gangbangers.” Today, the article continues, “[t]he old polluted lagoon is now a thriving fishing pond. A vandalized boathouse is now a restaurant...Once littered and abandoned, the baseball diamonds are spiffed up and full of young players” (qtd. in Eng 1). Although community residents welcomed these park upgrades, they also aroused their suspicions, as city infrastructure improvements can often represent indicators of pro-gentrification policies in neighborhoods targeted for redevelopment.⁶

⁶ In “Cuando nosotros vivíamos...: Stories of Displacement and Settlement in Puerto Rican Chicago,” Marixsa Alicea documents a similar experience in the gentrification and her subsequent displacement from West Town:

Previously the city cleaned the streets only once or twice a summer, but now it seemed they were cleaning them every three weeks or so. Once the new young white residents moved in, sidewalks that had been cracked and dangerous to walk on were repaired free of charge to homeowners. A dog area was built in Wicker Park at the request of new neighborhood residents. In addition, a local grammar school got a facelift. The ease with which new residents could get politicians to make neighborhood improvements and even beautification projects happen was in sharp contrast to the difficulties long-term poor

With Humboldt Park's landscape beautified and wiped relatively free of crime, the media could then expound upon the virtues of the neighborhood. Much of the area's housing, especially along Humboldt Boulevard, had been built by turn-of-the-century industrialists with mansion-like proportions, featuring elaborate woodwork, stained glass and several large, elegant rooms. These homes offered potential buyers more space along with the opportunity to restore architecturally interesting buildings, thereby constructing new symbols of status and distinction. What's more, the area was in close proximity to the Loop, and the housing was also surprisingly affordable. "I'm getting a pretty good deal," commented Daniel Ayala, who was considering buying his home. "If I took the same exact house in Lincoln Park, I'd probably pay \$2,000 a month. I pay a lot less than that" (Bronstien 3).

The enticement of a prospective middle- or upper-class investor to Humboldt Park was achieved not only by the appeal of the physical renovation of living space, but also by the symbolic reinvention of place. "Real-estate agents can sell pricier houses and landlords can charge higher rents," observed a recent *Tribune* article, "if a name sounds less ethnic or distances itself from an established neighborhood that has been perceived as crime-ridden or low-class" (Thompson 1). For that reason, developers began to refer to eastern Humboldt Park as "West Bucktown," borrowing its next-door neighbor's

residents had faced as they lobbied for badly needed services and improvements to our infrastructure. (190)

name and shifting the traditional Western Avenue boundary line “in the constant quest for cachet, in the eagerness to latch on to the pluses of an ‘in’ neighborhood” (G. Buck 4). Here, the renaming of Humboldt Park confirms Massey’s argument that boundaries are neither natural nor fixed. In fact, if places have boundaries at all, they have been created by people (64). This is precisely what “enterprising business types” did when they “smudged out a boundary line—in this case Western Avenue—in their attempt to drag a little Bucktown aura into their own backyards” (G. Buck 4). Even more recently, Humboldt Park has also been referred to as “West Wicker Park” in connection with its other, more-gentrified neighbor. Shockingly, as “Neighborhood Name Game” reported in 2006, “at least two newcomers to Chicago [mistakenly] moved to Humboldt Park because apartments listed on craigslist.org said they were in West Wicker Park or Wicker Park/Bucktown” (Thompson 1).

These efforts to attract more “desirable” investors to the neighborhood reflect an attempt to disassociate Humboldt Park from its Latino population. Although the area was “ethnic,” “Humboldt Park Makes Comeback” confessed, it was also diversifying. “It’s not uncommon to see a yuppie jogging in the park at 7 a.m.,” commented apartment rehabber Rick Moses (qtd. in DeBat 7). Here, the image of jogging yuppies challenges spatial assumptions regarding the area’s working-class and minority demographic. Newer residents, Moses added, formed “a Bohemian artist crowd—young photographers, musicians, medical students and nurses—people who are priced out of

Bucktown and Wicker Park” (qtd. in DeBat 7). This trend was exactly what longtime Humboldt Park residents began to fear in the 1990s, and what many viewed as the inevitable outcome of the area’s gentrification: the dislocation of Puerto Ricans by an “invading” population of young white artists, to be followed by middle-class whites and developers.

This time, however, the community was armed with more than berets and militant tactics, as their opposition was bolstered by an acute sense of urgency and support from elected political officials in city, county and state government.⁷ For example, Humboldt Park neighborhood activists began to circulate petitions calling for a freeze on property taxes for lower-income residents, as well as flyers encouraging Puerto Ricans to buy property in the area or to sell exclusively to other Puerto Ricans. The Humboldt Park Empowerment Partnership (HPEP), a coalition of over 110 community organization and business leaders, was also formed. The HPEP sought to develop various commercial strips around the community by attracting Puerto Rican investors, increasing available affordable housing, and maintaining the Puerto Rican “flavor” of the community through the development of cultural landmarks.

The creation of a Paseo Boricua represented a large part of this redevelopment plan, modeled after Chicago’s other ethnic enclaves such as Chinatown, Greektown,

⁷ Here, I am primarily referring to Congressman Luis Gutiérrez and Alderman Billy Ocasio. Gutiérrez was the former Alderman who won his US congressional seat in a newly drawn Hispanic majority district in 1992. At that point, his protégé Ocasio was appointed by agreement between Gutiérrez and Mayor Richard M. Daley.

Little Italy, and the Mexicans' La Villita. Initially, a total of \$1.2 million was designated by the city's transportation and planning departments for Division Street upgrades, which included repaving the sidewalks and the construction of 16 *plazitas*—tables, benches, and tree planters where people can socialize or play dominoes—each painted with a different flag from one of Puerto Rico's 78 towns. Also installed along the street were a Paseo Boricua "Walk of Fame" and fifty Spanish-style *faroles* (lampposts), complete with wrought-iron banners that featured cutout images of Puerto Rican symbols.⁸ In a further effort to create a unified streetscape design, financial incentives were offered to area businesses to rehabilitate their façades in the Spanish colonial style of the buildings on the streets of Old San Juan. This was indeed a "traditional" neighborhood vision which, according to M. Christine Boyer in "Cities for Sale," is characterized by "intimate streets, lined with small-scale façades and shopping arcades, ornamented with signs, punctuated by open space, trees, lampposts, and benches" (184).

In some respects, these "traditional" improvements represented just the kind of anti-modernist human-scale planning that Jane Jacobs advocated in her influential *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961).⁹ Certainly, the Paseo bore little evidence of the architectural "marvels of dullness and regimentation" that constituted, according to

⁸ Examples of the cutout images include Old San Juan *garitas* (Spanish fortresses), Taíno Indian hieroglyphics, and Afro-Caribbean *vejigantes* (festival masks and costumes) (Ramos-Zayas 212).

⁹ In contrast to the modernist "clean-sweep" urban renewal projects of the 1960s, by the early 1990s, the federal government and cities throughout the United States had shifted their policies in order to promote a more politically palatable preservation-based form of redevelopment.

Jacobs, the modernist “sacking of cities” (4). Instead of decontextualizing architecture and defamiliarizing geography as do many modernist sites, the Paseo’s development projects engaged in the distinctively postmodern practice of what Charles Jencks calls “sensitive urban place-making” (82) by promoting nostalgia and community interaction through the expansion, aestheticization and personalization of pedestrian public space. Important to note is that the aim here, as Boyer points out, is primarily theatrical: “to represent certain visual images of the city, to create perspectival views shown through imaginary prosceniums” (184). After all, both architecture and theater strive to entertain through their respective set designs.

If the objective of the Paseo Boricua’s design was, in part, dramatic, then it achieved its most spectacular feat of postmodern scenography with the unveiling of the two 59-foot high, 45-ton Puerto Rican flags in January of 1995. The media marveled at the fluid steelwork of their form, developed primarily through cutting-edge computer modeling technology. In particular, one *Chicago Tribune* article commented on the city’s “newest feats of design, engineering and freestyle popular culture, spanning 56 feet across Division about half a mile apart” (Newman, “Urban Gateway” 1). Despite the sheer mass of the flags, the author noted that “they are beguilingly airy: buoyant fancies of the highway, high-tech crocheting in welded metal, civic art, ethnic imagery and proud gateways to a neighborhood hungering for its place in the sun” (Newman, “Urban Gateway” 1). Among Puerto Ricans, however, the flags were more than just

“ethnic imagery.” Instead, they represented a symbolic site that yielded multiple historical, cultural and political interpretations. For one, the location of the flags—at California and Western—has been understood by many residents to mark their *own* neighborhood boundaries, in contrast to those imposed by the real estate sector. Furthermore, both the day (January 6—the Three Kings holiday) and the year of their unveiling (1995—the centennial of the adoption of the Puerto Rican flag in New York) were significant, making historical reference to Puerto Rican cultural traditions.¹⁰ Finally, the materials chosen for their construction—steel and welded pipeline—were meant to honor the first and second wave of Puerto Rican migrants to the city. Alderman Ocasio confirmed that Chicago’s Puerto Ricans have “a feeling for steel. When they first came here, many worked in the steel mills. My father did” (qtd. in Newman 1).

Thus, the flags-as-monuments construct—on multiple levels—an alternative historical narrative that privileges the contributions made by Puerto Ricans to the production of the city’s physical landscape while it works to legitimate their presence in Chicago. Accordingly, as a representational strategy, the flags are at the heart of the community’s opposition to gentrification. As both psychic settlement and fortress, Puerto Rican residents believe that the sculptures serve to justify and defend their right

¹⁰ Even the Puerto Rican flag itself has a long and contested history since, at various stages throughout the past century, it has signified patriotic pride, political repression, anti-colonial ideology, and claims to a distinct ethnicity (Negrón-Muntaner 168).

to control the use of this space against encroaching developers by communicating hostility to “outside” development.

Clearly, however, there is nothing *inherently* Puerto Rican about this space; but rather “the identity of places is very much bound up with the histories which are told of them, how those histories are told, and which history turns out to be dominant” (Massey 188). It follows, then, that the flags work to shape public memory and assert spatial dominance by relying both upon the “power to narrate” and the ability to “block other narratives from forming and emerging” (Said xiii). In fact, even a cursory look at Chicago’s history reminds us that the city’s early Puerto Rican migrants were *not* concentrated in Humboldt Park, but were actually dispersed throughout the city’s various neighborhoods including Woodlawn, the Near North Side, Lake View, Lincoln Park, Uptown, West Garfield Park, East Garfield Park, and the Near West Side. Moreover, Humboldt Park’s history is *not* exclusively Puerto Rican, but rather has undergone dramatic waves of ethnic residential succession beginning with its annexation into the City of Chicago in 1869.¹¹

These shifts in the neighborhood’s ethnic makeup point to the socially constructed and profoundly spatial nature of memory, “compressing and displacing the co-ordinates of time measured as history, compromising the temporal structure of

¹¹ Specifically, in the 1880s and 1890s, it was Germans and Scandinavians who resided in the neighborhood. By the 1920s, the area’s ethnic composition had shifted as large groups of Italians looking for affordable housing moved from neighborhoods in the east along with Polish and Russian Jewish immigrants (Badillo 617).

duration with the spatial dismemberment of condensation" (Kennedy 50-51). Moreover, there is nothing accidental about the Paseo Boricua's landscape; in fact, it has been predicated upon the obfuscation of the many layers of Humboldt Park's racially and ethnically diverse history. Steve Pile describes this process as making space incontestable "by closing off alternative readings and by drawing people into the presumption that the values they represent are shared" (213). Here, the dark underbelly of postmodern architecture is exposed—revealing, in the best case, a "softening" of the hard edges of history and, in the worst, what Ada Louise Huxtable calls "do-it-yourself history" in which "everything has to be seen as a set of signs and symbols or metaphors for something else in art or society" (4-5).

In the same way that the Paseo's historical narrative reveals significant omissions, the construction of the neighborhood's Puerto Ricanness relies upon the establishment of an imprecise yet evocative correspondence between Humboldt Park and Puerto Rico. For example, in addition to the San Juan-esque façades and other Puerto Rican architectural elements that mark Division Street, PRCC and Batey parade posters reference the island by juxtaposing images of the Puerto Rican flag with text that speaks to this affective and spatial equivalence, reading, "Where You Feel Like You're in Puerto Rico," or "100 X 35 en Chicago." While the former attempts to replicate the "feeling" of Puerto Rican spatiality in the diasporic context, the latter relocates the physical borders of the island to the mainland in order to (re)inscribe urban identity.

From another perspective, however, there is no amount of Puerto Rican imagery that can make Humboldt Park approximate San Juan, nor do the two places—with the exception of their Puerto Rican populations—necessarily have all that much in common. As Iain Chambers explains in *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* with respect to London and Lagos, “they may share certain goods, habits, styles and languages, but for each thing in common there is also a corresponding local twist, inflection, idiolect. They are not merely physically distinct, but also remain sharply differentiated in economic, historic, and cultural terms” (2). In fact, in some respects the Paseo’s built environment shares more with Zukin and Sorkin’s assessments of postmodern sites like Disney World. This insertion of Puerto Rican iconography into Chicago’s urban space “abstracts both the technical and architectural elements of a place” (53), representing a dramatic “simulation” that works through exclusion and by “playing the game of grafted signification” (xiv). In other words, both sites have designed their landscapes according to a common visual and symbolic theme, in part through their manipulation of history.

While the Division Street flags-as-boundaries do not *explicitly* exclude non-Puerto Ricans, most barrio activists make no secret of the fact that it is developers who are to blame for the impending destruction of their community. This narrative tells a story of greed-driven entrepreneurs who aim to wipe out existing neighborhood landscapes in order to build condos for their soulless white pawns—“los yuppies.” Hence, anxieties about neighborhood change are projected onto white bodies, evidenced

by various “No Yuppies” signs in area storefronts and the prevalence of anti-yuppie iconography and rhetoric at local parades and community events. As David Sibley put it in “Creating Geographies of Difference,” “the power to control space...seems to combine with a *feeling* of powerlessness, so that some outsider group constitutes a real threat to the integrity of the rejecting community” (120). Indeed, if for realtors yuppies are emblematic of all that will draw investors to the area, for many residents they also definitively represent the neighborhood’s destruction.

A sixteen-year-old PACHS student named Amid Tirado reinforces this “us” vs. “them” dichotomy with his performance of “Lost, But Not Forgotten” at the Batey Urbano’s poetry night. The poem begins with a recollection:

I can still remember that smell as a shorty
That smell of freshly baked *pan de agua*
That smell of cream coconut cake,
Not to mention my all time favorite
Biscocho de guayaba. (Performance)

This description of the scents redolent of youth evokes nostalgia for physical and symbolic nourishment. The speaker continues: “It was hard in the hood to find a bakery that was around/Especially one that was Puerto Rican proud.” Here, the search for a specifically Puerto Rican bakery alludes to an already threatened space that sets us up for its subsequent destruction in the next verse:

But sadly it was taken down
By the yuppies' greed
To them it was a money-making spot
I’m sure in their minds they really didn’t give a fuck

About what that place meant. (Performance)

Here, we see greed conflated with gentrification, as the physical erasure of the bakery from the neighborhood signifies a loss for the speaker as well as pointing to the vulnerability of this community's spaces. Furthermore, the yuppies in the narrative understand the bakery solely as space, whereas the speaker and the community by extension have transformed this space into place by investing it with meaning.

Departing from the specifics of this site, the poem then launches into a brief narrative of the history of Puerto Rican displacement in Chicago:

Puerto Ricans were pushed to the west
More yuppies started to invest
Like a giant powder bomb
More homes were now gone
And they replace it with a tanning salon. (Performance)

This "giant powder bomb" refers to a literal "explosion" of white occupancy that accompanies the speaker's perception of gentrification.

The whiteys have overrun,
All the Latinos were now shunned.
Even though gentrification is still spreading
And all this crap still seems rotten—
That area that once was home may be lost
But surely not forgotten. (Performance)

In this verse, the speaker depicts an extreme landscape characterized by an "outbreak" of whiteness. Consequently, resistance can *only* be discursive, emerging through the evocation of memory.

Existing sites are also threatened in this battle of wills between gentrifiers and residents, as evidenced by 16-year-old Jessica Hernández's "Yuppies" poem:

What yuppies make me feel is anger inside
breaking down our murals which are our pride
they want to just move in and move us out
they think we're gonna give up
but that's not how it's going down
all my life I was raised in Humboldt Park
if they need my help to keep it the same
I'll do my part
from Western to California is where I belong
and can't no yuppie tell me I'm wrong. (*Batey*)

Here, Hernández tenaciously defends and redirects her neighborhood's fate by pledging "that's not how it's going down." This desire to protect her turf is understandable, as young blacks and Latinos in urban ghettos and barrios are "positioned defensively on a daily basis, knowing that they are the objects of socially inscribed fear, mistrust, and blame for many of the problems that comprise a widely perceived sense of social disorder" (Forman 52). According to Batey founder Michael Rodríguez, a resentment directed towards yuppies is also logical, because many of the community's problems stem from white supremacy, colonialism, and a lack of access to resources. He explains that "young people have no options. And this becomes a vicious cycle...The colonized person innately has to be angry: drugs, alcoholism, AIDS, homelessness...It all comes from this, when you dehumanize people" (qtd. in Mumm).

The yuppie, then, as expressed by Batey Tech student Damien Nuñez's "My Community" rap, becomes the paradigmatic white gentrifier, colonizer, and villain:

People of color all around till the day we rest in peace
Then you got the yuppies trying to put us to our sleep
Because they see we got an organized community
They just come in and fuck up our precious memories

By taking and knocking down our family's homes
Better yet, all they do is take everything we call our own
But then they hate it when their window gets broken from my stone
The stone with the Puerto Rican flag saying "Boricua sí, yuppie no"

Because all they know how to do is gentrify everything
But if they do we'll strike back twice as hard as a bee sting
We'll take 'em out and never let them back in
But we all must work together, if not it won't happen

Enough with the yuppies, because soon their time will come,
They'll be out of our community and feel real dumb
Because we're too organized to let them take what's ours
Just like rain we'll fall on them like a shower. (*Batey*)

Despite the yuppies' attempts to ethnically cleanse, gentrify, and destroy this community, this speaker promises physical retaliation in defense of his turf—"we'll strike back"; "we'll take 'em out"; and "we'll fall on them." This warlike rhetoric is reiterated by Batey founder Michael Rodríguez: "If we can fortify spaces, it makes it a lot more difficult for gentrification to take place" (qtd. in Mumm). In addition, Rodríguez astutely echoes Lefebvre's theorization of space as a social construct when he asserts that his "understanding is that to counter gentrification we must control space, because it's the usurping of space that belongs to others." Without that control, he explains, "in the end what you have is a diluted community. Then it's easy for people to be displaced" (qtd. in Mumm).

The data, however, do not necessarily support the venom that fuels this anti-yuppie sentiment. While it is true that the Puerto Rican population in Humboldt Park had decreased to 37% by the year 2000, it was actually Mexicans (at 52%) and African Americans whose numbers were on the rise (De Genova and Ramos-Zayas 52). According to Ana Ramos-Zayas in *National Performances*, the “threat” posed by white yuppies is “more related to prejudice against African American barrio residents and struggles over U.S. citizenship among Latino groups of various nationalities than about a Latino recognition of systemic discrimination and white privilege” (89). In truth, if *anyone* was encroaching upon Puerto Rican space in Humboldt Park, Ramos-Zayas argues, it was incoming African Americans and Mexican migrants. But this data means little to Humboldt Park’s Puerto Rican residents as they look just a few blocks further east to the Wicker Park strip of Division between Ashland and Western Avenue, now a “hot” restaurant row populated by white students, professionals and condominium developments.

Regardless of the level of the threat that gentrification poses, in the years since the installation of the flags the community has worked toward its goal of turning Paseo Boricua into a stronghold of Puerto Rican economic, political, and cultural space. In addition to Puerto Rican restaurants and offices for congressmen and state legislators, the street is now home to the Division Street Business Development Association (DSBDA), the Batey Urbano, and the pro-independence Puerto Rican Cultural Center

(PRCC). Founded in 1973 with the motto “live and help to live,” the PRCC was instrumental in both the creation of the Paseo’s business district and in encouraging the city to subsidize the flag sculptures. At the proverbial helm of the organization is José López, Executive Director, longtime resident, community activist and public intellectual. According to López, the work of the PRCC is about—in the words of Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Nahn—building a “community of resistance.” Of particular interest to this chapter is the extent to which López and other barrio leaders hold the ideological reins of this community, revealing what David Ley calls a “post-modern strategy of careful place-making” (45), or a self-consciously constructed site designed to provide both the literal and figurative grounds for political organization in Humboldt Park. The concept of colonialism, for example, provides a major framework through which PRCC-based activists understand the socio-economic status of mainland Puerto Ricans. Additionally, gentrification is understood as both a form of urban colonialism and a parallel system of oppression. Thus, in the same way that the Young Lords made use of Puerto Rican iconography in order to mobilize resistance to Lincoln Park development, these terms provide leaders with the theoretical traction to claim the Paseo and thereby oppose development in Humboldt Park.

This rhetoric of community therefore works to reactivate in residents a positive territorial identity linked to a history of neighborhood activism. Moreover, it is through what the PRCC calls “participatory democracy” that self-determination—both on the

mainland and the island—can be achieved. The ultimate goal, according to Rodríguez, is a “ground-up and grassroots construction of an autonomous and self-sufficient community. No longer are solutions to be found outside of the community; instead, they are created and acquired through the hard, day-to-day work of struggling for change” (“Exercises”). Significant here is the stress upon the notion of autonomy in the articulation of local identity which emerges in tandem with narratives of exclusion. Notably, this exclusion is experienced by Puerto Ricans *within* the community—left out from full participation in dominant culture—while it is also it is other-directed. Likewise, the geographical terms upon which belonging in and to Puerto Rican Humboldt Park are predicated serve to simultaneously mirror and contest dominant culture’s construction of nation (as a bounded community) and citizenship.

These themes are reinforced by the examination of spoken-word poet David Hernández’s work that follows. Because the Armitage Street depicted by the poem that opens the next chapter no longer exists, Hernández work becomes especially important as a discursive reconstruction of the collective history of the Puerto Rican community in Chicago. His poetry demonstrates, as Iain Chambers puts it, “the powers and potential of a specific cultural place where the inscription of memory and the prescriptions of the past come to be recited and resited” (29). Moreover, these efforts to reactivate memory through expressive culture become particularly significant when read against the

“constant symbolic and material attacks” (Aparicio, “U.S. Latino” 356) that characterize the racialized process of cultural colonization.

Below is shadow where any blasé thing takes place: clarinets and love-making, fists and the voices of sorrowful women. A city like this makes me dream tall and feel in on things. Hep.

Toni Morrison, *Jazz*

Lucy carried in her mind a very individual map of Chicago: a blur of smoke and wind and noise, with flashes of blue water, and certain clear outlines rising from the confusion... This city of feeling rose out of the city of fact like a definite composition—beautiful because the rest was blotted out.

Willa Cather, *Lucy Gayheart*

4. “Roscoe’s a Different Trip, Man”: Performing Space in the Chicago Barrio

David Hernández, a small, bearded man in his early sixties, stands on the stage. He is dressed simply in a flowered Hawaiian shirt, shorts and sandals. His *Street Sounds* band surrounds him—a guitarist, a *cuatro* player,¹ a bassist and percussionist. He begins to speak, unaccompanied by the musicians:

Waiting for the elevated train during a pale afternoon
I looked down on Armitage street full of quaint old buildings,
up-scale stores and fashionable mothers pushing white-walled
baby carriages on well-heeled sidewalks.
And to think. It seems like just yesterday on Armitage street. (Performance)

¹The *cuatro*, unique to Puerto Rico, is a guitar-like instrument which developed from the six-string Spanish classical version. It is played with a flatpick and sounds like a cross between a 12-string guitar and a mandolin. As William Cumpiano of the *Puerto Rican Cuatro Project* described it, “the cuatro holds a central place in Puerto Rico’s cultural iconography, like the bagpipe for the Scot or the harp for the Irish. For many Puerto Ricans, the cuatro represents Puerto Rico. It has inspired its secular and religious festivities, and has provided an anchor for its cultural identity” (Cumpiano).

With these last words, spoken in a rich, slightly raspy tenor, Hernández is joined by the congas, which build to a rapid crescendo as the guitar and *cuatro* begin to play. The melody has a familiar bluesy feel to it, but with a twist—the rhythm of the drums has an unmistakably Afro-Latin beat.

It is this accompaniment and the speaker's peripheral position that frame the poet's discursive move from the now-gentrified present-day Armitage Street back to the Lincoln Park of the late 1960s. Although images of "upscale stores," "fashionable mothers," and "white-walled baby carriages" contain no visual trace of the neighborhood's working-class Puerto Rican history, the poet uses his aerial view of the neighborhood in order to reference a past relationship to the neighborhood and to access his memories of *another* Armitage Street. Perhaps it is the *absence* of any visual signs of the neighborhood's past, the disparity between the poet's memory of the street and the reality that he encounters, and the fact that Hernández's Armitage Street is accessible *only* through memory that fuels the intensity of the poem's nostalgia as well as his continued performance of it over the past 15 years.

In fact, throughout the three-decade span of his career as a spoken-word poet, performer, and front man for *Street Sounds*, Hernández's output has focused almost exclusively upon his relationship to the city and its neighborhoods while highlighting themes of past relocation and impending dislocation. Important to note here is that in contrast to this project's previous three chapters, Hernández does not concentrate on just

one neighborhood; rather, attachments are multiplied and the poet seems to find some version of “home” everywhere he turns—everywhere, that is, but Puerto Rico. For, as de Certeau asserts, while the walker actualizes one set of possibilities he is also abandoning another. “He thus creates a discreteness, whether by making choices among the signifiers of the spatial ‘language’ or by displacing them through the use he makes of them.” As a result, “he condemns certain places to inertia or disappearance” (98-99). Here, the poet’s physical alienation from Puerto Rico becomes the *unspeakable*, the site of an originary displacement that precludes its reclamation. In response to this primary experience of trauma, the poet attempts to rewrite his history and reterritorialize.

Significantly, it is *Chicago*—not some idealized *Borinquen*—that becomes the poet’s nostalgized origin, contradicting J. Jorge Klor de Alva’s assertion that the literary and cultural production of Puerto Rican cultural nationalists was “reflected in a romantic, idealized vision of the island [as] the repository of all cherished values, the wellspring of resistance, and the object of nostalgic remembrances” (75). In *Divided Borders*, Puerto Rican studies scholar Juan Flores makes a similar oppositional claim with respect to María Teresa Babín’s privileging of island-based literature in the introduction to her anthology:

They [U.S. Puerto Ricans] have drawn their energy and resources from their own experience, and from other rebellious currents in North American culture—especially the cultural expression of U.S. Blacks—rather than from any spiritualized mythology rooted in the Puerto Rican “Mother Culture.” (134)

This move illustrates Stuart Hall's notion of the recuperative mode of producing cultural identity—a process that offers “a way of imposing an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation, which is the history of all enforced diasporas” (224). In the end, it is Hall's vector of “difference and rupture [that] reminds us that what we share is precisely the experience of a profound discontinuity.” Furthermore, he continues, “it is only from this second position that we can properly understand the traumatic character of ‘the colonial experience’” (394). That being said, Hernández's ability to (re)locate himself makes him no less relevant to this study of Puerto Rican spatiality in Chicago; if anything, his work testifies in important ways to the experience of continual displacement within the city while it points to the contradictory and multiple subjectivities that constitute the U.S. Puerto Rican, simultaneously expressing connection/disconnection, location/dislocation, and fixity/dispersal.

This chapter also distinguishes itself from the others in that much of its “evidence” is based upon close readings of Hernández's spoken-word performances. As Dwight Conquergood explains in “Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research,” instead of privileging print-based knowledge, I attempt to bear out “other ways of knowing that are rooted in embodied experience, orality, and local contingencies” (312). Michel Foucault coined the term “subjugated knowledges” to describe these other knowledge paths, “erased because they are illegible; they exist, by

and large, as active bodies of meaning, outside of books, eluding the forces of inscription that would make them legible, and thereby legitimate" (Conquergood 312). To be sure, there are valuable insights to be gained outside and beyond the realm of the written word, which include an appreciation of gesture, tone, and sound. While the silent reader recreates the poem and its soundscape in his or her mind, in a performative context it is the poet's *voice* that dictates what the audience hears. As Charles Bernstein notes in *Close Listening*, "sound is language's flesh, its opacity as meaning marks its material embeddedness in the world of things. Sound brings writing back from its metaphysical and symbolic functions to where it is at home, in performance" (21). Put simply, in performance poetry, sound *matters* and creates meanings that cannot be fully communicated to the reader of a written poem. Part of this meaning is derived from the poet's use of acoustic techniques, including cacophony and euphony, rhyme and repetition, rhythm and meter, tone and pitch, volume and pause.²

Another aspect of a spoken poem's meaning is related to potential exchanges between poet and audience. In *Listening to Salsa*, Frances Aparicio argues that reception is an active process that negotiates between the many conflicting voices and "multisensorial" (91) experiences in salsa music. It is her emphasis upon "listeners" as people who actively produce meaning through their participation that is relevant here.

² While spoken poetry differs from music in that they are "rooted in two different ways we have of making and shaping vocal sounds," it does make use of pitch patterns combined with rhythm, and "draws from a contradictory mix of these features typical of actual vocal performances" (Burrows 61-62).

As a result of these interactions, a performance can draw an audience into a social and cultural experience, described by Simon Frith as “the immediate experience of collective identity” (121), or what Lawrence Grossberg calls “affective alliances”³ (104). The experience of collective identity is also shaped, according to Martin Stokes, by the powerful evocation and organization of “collective memories and present experiences of place” (3). Here, Stokes alludes to the close relationship between performance and place that provides the theoretical underpinning for this chapter.

With this in mind in the pages that follow, I continue my discussion of “Armitage Street” and then discuss three more of Hernández’s and *Street Sounds*’ performance poems, all of which focus upon and respond to urban Puerto Ricans’ relationship to place, whether it be through the frame of nostalgia and memory in “Armitage Street,” displacement and cultural production in “Roscoe Street,” movement and mobility in “Satin City Serenade,” or racial inequity and identity in “Chi-town Brown.” Before turning to his poetry, however, I provide a brief introduction to Hernández’s thirty-year career as a community poet and performer.

David Hernández was born in Cidra, Puerto Rico in 1946 and migrated to Chicago with his family in 1955 at the height of the Puerto Rican migration to the U.S. mainland. He grew up on Chicago’s Near North Side, although his family moved

³ Although both Frith and Grossberg are referring to the musical event here, I extend their theorizations to a more general notion of performance.

numerous times within the area throughout his childhood due to rapidly rising rent costs. In the late 1960s, while the Young Lords were mobilizing in and around Lincoln Park, Hernández began to write and perform his poetry on playgrounds, street corners, and at block parties while working as a community activist and as Minister of Information for *La Gente* in Chicago.⁴ In 1971, Hernández founded and became the front man for the poetry/music group *Street Sounds* as an outlet to express his politics and to "reach a bigger audience, do more festivals and make poetry more accessible to people " (qtd. in Lauerman 17).⁵

Throughout the past three decades, Hernández and *Street Sounds* have performed at diverse venues throughout the city—including neighborhood bars, cafes, public schools, libraries, community centers, street festivals, and political rallies.⁶ The ensemble's repertoire is equally varied, drawing from a wide array of musical genres, including jazz, blues, salsa, rock, and Afro-Latin rhythms. In addition, the fusion of the poetry reading with musical accompaniment takes its cue from 1920s Harlem

⁴ *La Gente* grew out of a street gang known as the Latin Eagles. Although the organization was similar to the Young Lords with respect to both origins and philosophies, it did not expand outside of Chicago nor did it achieve the same longevity.

⁵ 1971 also marked the publication of Hernández's first book of poetry entitled *Despertando/Waking Up*, followed in 1973 by *Collected Words for a Dusty Shelf*. In the past two decades he has published four books, including *Satin City Lullaby* (1987), *Rooftop Piper* (1991), *Elvis Is Dead but at Least He Isn't Gaining Any Weight* (1995) and *The Urban Poems* (2004). His work has also been anthologized in *Stray Bullets* (1991) and *Unsettling America* (1994). He recorded and produced a CD, *Satin City Serenade*, in 2001.

⁶ Hernández and *Street Sounds* has also performed at small clubs and bars throughout the city, including *Get Me High*, the jazz club where early slam poets such as Marc Smith, Michael Brown, Patricia Smith, and Jean Howard began their careers (Schmid, "Performance").

Renaissance poetry performances, the Beat Generation, the Black Arts Movement, and the Last Poets and Gil-Scott Heron. Hernández himself cites a broad range of influences—including Emily Dickinson, Dylan Thomas, his mother, music, and a Puerto Rican poetic and oral tradition (Schmid 150).⁷

Naturally, this inventory of influences would be incomplete without briefly crediting Chicago and its unique musical and literary cultures. The city is not only recognized as a “sweet home” for the blues, but has also played a leading role in the performance, recording, and artistic evolution of jazz. Also relevant is the mid-twentieth century outpouring of Chicago literary realism, characterized by celebrated writers such as James T. Farrell, Richard Wright and Nelson Algren. Known as “neighborhood novelists,” they explored the social and literary consequences of the city’s maturation as an industrial metropolis (Rotella 486). Jumping ahead thirty years to 1986, Chicago became the birthplace of the Uptown Poetry Slam, staged by Marc Smith at the Green Mill Lounge. “From that point onward,” as poet Alan Kaufman pointed out: “the people’s poetry in Chicago—and then the world—had two distinct paths, one toward the stage and the other toward the page” (235). Thus, for Hernández and *Street Sounds*, the sum of this *bricolage* is a particularly postmodern form of cultural expression as well

⁷ As Juan Flores notes in *Divided Borders*, Puerto Rico is also the birthplace of musical and poetic forms like *la bomba*, *la plena*, *la décima*, and *el seis* (171).

as “a complicated cultural strategy designed to preserve the resources of the past by adapting them to the needs of the present” (Lipsitz 352).

Past and present also converge on Hernández’s Armitage Street as the poet observes the scene beneath him. Notable here is that his position mirrors that of Michel de Certeau in his introduction to “Walking in the City.” From the 110th floor of the World Trade Center, one “leaves behind the mass that carries off and mixes up in itself any identity of authors or spectators...His elevation transfigures him into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance” (92). This distance, de Certeau continues, produces a “fiction” that “makes the complexity of the city readable, and immobilizes its opaque mobility in a transparent text” (92). At the same time, the speaker’s location is liminal both in spatial and temporal terms—he is above the street, outside the scene, and between “El” stops—he no longer belongs here. With the next line: “It seems like just yesterday on Armitage street,” the poet’s nostalgic poetic response to this space emerges as he simultaneously remembers the neighborhood of his past and experiences the present, superimposing one upon the other. This line also signals what de Certeau calls “an Icarian fall,” back into the dark space “‘down below,’ below the thresholds at which visibility begins” (93). The juxtaposition of these two perspectives also sets up a dichotomy between different domains of knowledge—one objective and abstract; the other immediate and embodied. It is here, in “this promiscuous traffic between different ways of knowing,”

Conquergood contends, that “carries the most radical promise of performance studies research” (311).

The poet’s view from ground level continues: “And to think. It seems just like yesterday on Armitage Street / that Alfredo and Cha-Cha played hide & seek with Quinto the cop / while Cosmo and Aidita made love in the gangway.” In contrast to the modern alienation, insularity, evasion and sterility conveyed by images like “white-walled baby carriages,” the Armitage Street of the poet’s past prioritized communication, connection and community. It was a place where people knew each other by name, where love-making was more public than private, and where even a notoriously contentious post-Division Street relationship to Chicago police becomes playful through the affective filter of the poet’s memory:

When radios blared out open windows dressed in five & dime laced curtains.
When staccato spanish bounced between buildings high above the rolling traffic
because telephones were insultingly impersonal, and it was no secret that the
eyes expressed the heart. (Performance)

Here, the poet continues to tap into his memory by performing his former neighborhood’s soundscape, both lyrically and acoustically. The heavy sibilance effected by “staccato spanish” is amplified by the plosive sounds evoked by “bounced between buildings,” both working in tandem in order to emphasize the primacy of face-to-face contact and a common language over aural autonomy and emotional inertia.

Other senses such as smell also trigger the speaker’s nostalgia: “When rice & beans smells roamed the hallways covering up the tracks / of other ethnics who had

since faded into the American Dream." This stanza gestures towards the neighborhood's constantly changing character—the aroma of "rice and beans" is just one in a series of traces left by different ethnic groups that have passed through this place. In so doing, the poem resists what Norman Klein calls a "history of forgetting," in which urban development and demographic displacement create "social imaginaries" of erasure and absence, or "a built environment that also contains an evacuation" (10). However, by alluding to the neighborhood's specifically Puerto Rican past, the poet offers a historical corrective to Puerto Rican invisibility in U.S. society, attempting to insert his version of Armitage Street into collective memory:

When 25 cent haircuts at Don Benjamín's non-licensed barbershop doused you in Brylcream hair tonic. And Nereida, the beautiful cousin that you secretly loved, was the official translator for school teacher notes pinned to lapels on our coats because the mothers were all englishless. (Performance)

The use of "you" in this stanza marks an important shift in the poet's perspective from first to second person. On one level, the "you" presented here is so personal that it *must* be attributed to the narrator. However, even this "you" carries with it the possibility of address to the listener, inviting the audience into a deeper understanding of the speaker's complicated relationship with language—torn between his parents' private Spanish and the English spoken at school. Significantly, the internal rhyme achieved by "notes" and "coats" demonstrates the speaker's command of the very language that challenged his parents. The extent of this command is dramatized through the poet's use of the neologism "englishless," turning the conventional wisdom of

assimilation and the implicit inviolability of English on its head by challenging and reinventing it to serve his own poetic needs.

“When the last summer days were spent under firehydrant showers. / And that night you overheard your parents talk about moving out again because the rent was going up.” “The last summer days” signals not only the conclusion of the season, but also intensifies the nostalgia of the poem as it prepares the audience for what is to come in the next line—the ultimate displacement of the speaker and his family. Note that the act of moving is qualified by the adverb “again”—suggesting to the audience that this is not the first time that the poet has been forced to move, nor will it be the last.

But you didn’t care. No, you didn’t care because last year during school Ms. Greenspan said you were a great writer, Renee kissed you during recess, and that was enough for a whole lifetime. And to think. It seems like just yesterday on Armitage Street. (Performance)

The weight of the speaker’s longing is almost palpable in this stanza. If nostalgia can be seen as “an attempt at a connivance of a recovery of a lost childhood, a return to the m(other)land” (Sant Cassia 299) then Hernández’s poetic and performative return to Armitage Street rewrites the notion of origin, relocating identity and home in *Chicago* space.⁸ Not only does the poet yearn for another place, but also for a different time—for a time when such seemingly simple joys held such great emotional currency. The next

⁸Nuyorican poet Miguel Piñero makes a similar move in “A Lower East Side Poem.” Upon his death, he requests that his ashes be scattered throughout the neighborhood, because “There’s no other place for me to be / there’s no other place that I can see” (20-21).

line quickly brings the speaker and audience out of their shared reveries and back to the present. In addition to framing the speaker's reminiscence, the repetition of these words has a sort of tragic irony—although “it seems like just yesterday”—in reality, the speaker can only return to this home through memory.

The poem does not end here, however, as the guitarist takes center stage with a Carlos Santana-esque solo. The fluid lines of the instrument set against the constant rhythm of the drums continue the performance, investing Hernández's last words with affective force. Although the memories of Hernández's youth are marred by their inaccessibility, the music remains upbeat. Perhaps, in another sense, the repetition of the last line coupled with the melody of the guitar works to cushion the blow of the speaker's displacement. Maybe this is also the real essence of nostalgia, an emotion that is in one moment sweet, and in another bitter—fluctuating between what once was and then coping with its loss.

Also important here nostalgia's dual nature. As I have already mentioned in the introduction to this project, one of the principal axes around which Puerto Rican Studies revolves is the notion of a doubled relationship between “here”—the U.S. mainland and “there”—the Puerto Rican island. For Hernández, however, his poetic subject matter tracks the discordant trajectory of his residential biography while his loyalty is divided in other, multiple ways—first, between the “here” of Armitage Street's present and “there” of its past, and then between Roscoe Street's present and past. After spending

much of his youth on and around Armitage Street in the Lincoln Park neighborhood, Hernández and family moved to Lakeview, another now-gentrified neighborhood that was briefly home to a Puerto Rican population. Just as the heart of Lincoln Park was on Armitage in the 1960s and early 1970s, the core of this North Side community was Roscoe Street, which was located about six miles north of the “Loop.” Hernández’s poetic portrait of the neighborhood, written in 1973, begins with a guitar riff that introduces the poet:

You walk down Roscoe Street between Halsted and Broadway and it’s a world by itself, man. I mean early in the morning when the summer sun is waking up to the yawns of trees and Jim Johnston is dreaming that he turned into a basketball. (Performance)

In this verse, the poem produces “home” and “community” through its embeddedness in a specific geography. Recall that Yi-Fu Tuan considers “space” to be more abstract than “place”: “What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value” (6). For Tuan, who draws his findings largely from phenomenology, space is transformed into place through the subjective human experience and perception that occurs as a result of interaction with the physical and social environment. In addition, as Doreen Massey asserts in “Double Articulation”:

[I]f social space is conceived of as constructed out of the vast, intricate complexity of social processes and social interactions at all scales from the local to the global, “a place” is best thought of as a particular part of, a particular moment in, the global network of those social relations and understandings. (115)

Thus, Roscoe Street becomes a significant and material reality for the poet, in part, by locating himself in space. Next, he reduces the abstract *space* of Chicago to a smaller scale—to the *place* of Roscoe—and then defines it as a spatially bound area—between Halsted and Broadway. This description of such boundaries seems to facilitate the speaker’s affective relationship to his neighborhood.

Also noteworthy here is that in contrast to the speaker’s stationary and peripheral role in “Armitage Street,” this poem opens with “you walk,” effectively casting both speaker and audience within the Roscoe Street scene. De Certeau suggests that there is a parallel between linguistic and pedestrian enunciation, as both are processes of *appropriation*—the pedestrian exploits the topographical system while the speaker makes use of language (97-98). This appropriation also becomes *performative* for both walker and speaker; “it is a spatial acting-out of the place (just as the speech act is an acoustic acting-out of language)” (98). It follows, then that our Roscoe poet walks—and repeatedly performs the act of walking—in an attempt to actualize and then discursively appropriate neighborhood territory.

Accompanied by the music, the poet continues, describing the unique blend of scents that characterizes the street:

There’s a concrete smell to Roscoe Street. It’s all rice and beans, wine and reefer, dog-drops, Roscoe Play-lot, Del-Mar Apartments, courtway lawns and Steve’s pickled herring that keeps him awake at night so he can write and hear the city sounds. Roscoe’s a different trip, man. (Performance)

Various odors converge into a resonant sensory memory that serves to evoke a gritty and distinctly urban landscape. The immediacy conveyed undoubtedly stems, in part, from the poet's own experiences—he grew up on these streets and knows them, as he states in the Preface to *Rooftop Piper*, “like the back of a passenger’s head on the subway train.” Instead of alienating the speaker, however, Roscoe’s “realness” seems to facilitate an even more intimate relationship between the poet and the street as he recreates not only its smells, but also its soundscape:

You walk to the Del-Mar Apartments, stand underneath the second-floor window, look up and yell /Americo! Americo!/ and a head will pop out with an Afro ten feet high. /What the hell do you want?/ he asks as he throws the key to the main door downstairs. Americo’s been doing a thing with his binoculars again. He calls it getting to know the community. But a lot of people would blush if they knew what he saw...but that’s Americo, jack. (Performance)

Again, we see that relationships are familiar on Roscoe Street—keys are tossed, neighbors are spied upon, and communication takes place through open windows. This familiarity is intensified through the continued use of “you,” placing the audience directly in dialogue with Americo. By referencing social relations in the barrio, the poet emphasizes the value of this neighborhood and the people that built community within it. As a result, these images of support, nurture, and community work to oppose the aforementioned media images and discourses of violence and poverty that have been commonly used to characterize Puerto Rican barrio life in Chicago.

As the band continues playing, morning becomes afternoon within the poem:

Now you feel the wine and summer heat mixed with reefer, listen to radio-music, chump-change, and the voices of Roscoe street people: Bobby, Marcia, Molly, Eddie, Jackie, Devie, Steve, Judy, Tommy, Sally, Tony, Jesse, Fletcher, Casey, Alex, Damaris, Clarence, Americo, Mac, Marie, Melvin all freaking out the slow-moving cop car with their knowing smiles. Roscoe's a new world, man. (Performance)

In this verse, Hernández replicates musical form through poetic rhythm. Specifically, his cadenced and deliberate pronunciation of each two- and three-syllable unit name reproduces the syncopated rhythmic organization of the *clave*,⁹ while the variation¹⁰ of the list from performance to performance brings to mind the improvisational nature of salsa,¹¹ emphasizing fluid understandings of community belonging. In “‘Qué assimilated, brother, yo soy asimilao,’” Juan Flores also reflects on the nature of improvisation with respect to Nuyorican cultural expression, asserting that “the reliance on improvisation and performance, and the abiding conception of expressive resources as tools, help counteract the pressure toward standardization and the estrangement of

⁹ All musical and dance components in salsa performance are guided by the two-measure pattern of the *clave* rhythm.

¹⁰ Although versions of “Roscoe Street” were published in both *Rooftop Piper* and *Elvis Is Dead*, Hernández continues to revise and rewrite its performance version—cutting and adding lines and stanzas and/or improvising new endings. This composition and revision process disputes Maria Damon’s claim in “Was That ‘Different,’ ‘Dissident’ or ‘Dissonant?’” that for oral poets, “their work ends when something is definitively cast in print; and there’s a reasonable desire to forestall closure on the creative process: invention and reinvention, improvisation, performance, competition, and other interactive modes” (336).

¹¹ Salsa began in the Puerto Rican colonial diaspora during the first part of the twentieth century, and developed in migrant communities from Puerto Rico, Cuba and other parts of the Caribbean – with significant African American influence—in and around New York. Salsa flourished in the wake of the Depression. In the post-war years, especially the 1960s, it again emerged as a distinctively New York-Puerto Rican style, with the “rise of a new class of Puerto Rican musicians” who deliberately sought to produce a style more in touch “with the Puerto Rican barrio reality” (qtd. in Connell and Gibson 169-170).

culture from its personal and social origins" (189). Additionally, the reference to the "slow-moving cop car" alludes to the constant police surveillance of the neighborhood, while "their knowing smiles" intimate the community's subtle performance of resistance to authority:

Time fades lazily with the day and the houses change colors as evening sets in. You're feeling so good now that you swear you saw a line of cucarachas on the sidewalk with their belongings. All mumbling and grumbling. All moving out because their apartments got renovated and they can't stand that health food those new tenants eat. Roscoe is beautiful, man. (Performance)

Here, the "line of *cucarachas* on the sidewalk" depicts the neglected condition of the Roscoe neighborhood.¹² Furthermore, this presumably alcohol and drug-induced hallucination is significant in that the evicted cockroaches bear an uncanny resemblance to Lakeview's 1970s Puerto Rican population. At this time, similar to Lincoln Park, many Puerto Ricans were being "priced out" of the neighborhood [read: exterminated] — forced to move once again as an incoming class of urban artists and professionals moved in and began to gentrify the area.

Interestingly, although the poem's content indicts the inexorable displacement of Roscoe Street's working-class residents, the poem's tone, like the speaker, resists sobriety. The conclusion of the stanza with "Roscoe is beautiful, man" points to an utopian view that finds hope under the bleak living conditions of uncertainty, racism

¹² Nuyorican poets also often used cockroaches as a symbol of neighborhood deterioration and a marker of urban neglect. See, for example, Pedro Pietri's "Suicide Note from a Cockroach in a Low Income Housing Project" (1973) or Martín Espada's "My Cockroach Lover" (1996).

and economic neglect. With this, Hernández challenges the assertions made by authors Logan and Molotch in *Urban Fortunes* when they claim that a neighborhood “provides a sense of physical and psychic security that comes with a familiar and dependable environment.” What’s more, the authors continue, “neighborhood provides the benefit of membership in a social space that is viewed as orderly, predictable, and protective” (105). In contrast to the safe refuge that Logan and Molotch describe, it seems that it is the very diversity and *unpredictability* of this place that feed the poet’s psyche and bolster his creativity.

The many realities that characterize life on this street converge in the next stanza:

Roscoe is tar and buildings, pimps and prostitutes, a welfare station, junkies and dopers, winos, gang-bangers and freaks, old people and children, conga drums and poets, painters and readers, workers and those who think about it, cats and dogs and old newspapers, brooms and garbage cans, walls with /Power to the People! / signs. (Performance)

On these streets, borders blur and seemingly contradictory elements coexist. Here, poet and place resist any singular or essentialist characterization. As a result, Roscoe defies neat conclusions and cannot be defined simply or reduced to one thing—instead, it is *all* things and *all* people. This narrative resolution and reconciliation is reinforced by the sibilant calm that comes with night on Roscoe at the end of the poem:

While in the darkness when the
silhouettes dress the rustling trees and the noises have changed into quiet
murmurs
with an occasional drag of reefer or a swallow of wine you realize
why Roscoe street is.
Roscoe street

is everything
you want it to be
or dream about. (Performance)

The musicians continue playing after Hernández is finished speaking, while the audience processes the reiteration of “Roscoe street is...” throughout the poem and at its conclusion. This repetition works to promote affective alliances between poet and audience¹³ as well as emphasizing that Roscoe space has been—and continues to be—a generative source for the speaker. Furthermore, as “everything you want it to be,” Roscoe is linked to the poet’s imagination, which “is intrinsic to the very process of representation. It seizes upon an inchoate experience from life, and forms it, through association, condensation, and aesthetic creation, into some specific shape” (Alexander 9). The almost mythical neighborhood that emerges from this process becomes the speaker’s geographical and psychic “home.”

It is not just its neighborhoods, but the city itself that serves as Hernández’s inspiration for another of his performance poems, as well as the title of his 2001 album *Satin City Serenade*. The piece begins with the heavy, low tones of the bass, followed by the congas and guitar. The *cuatro* joins in, riffing a playful counterpoint to the bass for a few measures. Then Hernández speaks, pausing to allow each word to draw the audience into his poetic landscape: “It’s a nice day in the city. Kind of a day when the

¹³ According to Burrows in *Sound, Speech, and Music*, “Repetition helps the participants collaborate with the progress of the piece, sometimes so deeply they may feel that they and the piece are two aspects of one process” (77).

music strolls down the old boulevard of remembrances” (Performance). While the previous poem characterized walking as a spatial practice, in “Satin City” it is *music* that adopts the role of the pedestrian, thereby linking it to spatiality: “When the Goldblatt brothers’ storefront windows reflect bits and pieces of union-made blue jeans and the glory of the working-class hero before the factories shut down.” Here, “bits and pieces” allude to the inherently fragmented nature of impressions, memory, and perhaps the poet’s own psyche, while “before the factories shut down” references the postwar boom that sustained Chicago’s economy until the late 1960s and early 1970s.¹⁴

In the next verse, the poet moves away from his nostalgia, transported by the same music that drives the narrative of the poem:

And you know that somewhere else, on the
other side of town,
Someone is cooking up a good-time melody
Connected to the breeze, travelling at a speed
Compatible to the beat of a blushing note
Because it’s all about hope, man.
Yeah, it’s all about hope. (Performance)

Here, the speaker emphasizes the mobile nature of music, literally traveling from one place to another as sound waves through air. Moreover, the poem utilizes cacophonous alliteration (“connected”/ “compatible”; “breeze”/ “beat”/ “blushing”) against assonants (“breeze”/“speed”/“beat”) in order to alternately break or set lyrical lines into motion.

¹⁴ At this time, manufacturing jobs were diminishing as economic restructuring and deindustrialization replaced blue-collar work with service work, spurring the movement of jobs and heavy investment away from once-vibrant downtown manufacturing centers. (Abu-Lughod, “New York” 323)

What is the significance of this play between rupture and fluidity? On one level, the poem celebrates the hope that rides along with music's mobility, as flows of music accompany the circulation of people and ideas, encouraging relationships, connection, and collaboration.¹⁵ However, as the poet tracks music's spatial trajectory throughout the city, I would also argue that this notion of boundless movement emerges as a dissonant counterpoint to Puerto Rican experiences of displacement and forced migration within Chicago.¹⁶ In *Questions of Travel*, Caren Kaplan critiques the "aestheticized tendencies of poststructuralist nomadologies and theories of displacement in Euro-American modernist and postmodern thought" (130), demonstrating how these tropes are "produced through the matrix of colonial discourse" (61). As I have already shown in the introduction to this project, many contemporary Puerto Rican scholars also fall victim to postmodern rhetoric's tendency to celebrate fluidity and impermanence. As American citizens, they argue, Puerto Rican identity has been shaped by a relative ease of travel between the Island and the U.S. mainland.

¹⁵Similarly, Miguel Algarín's "4th St." illustrates the transformative power that music has upon Nuyorican spaces.

¹⁶In his essay on migration and history, Charles Tilly distinguishes between the terms "mobility" and "migration." "Mobility" represents the ordinary movements of everyday life, while "migration" involves a move of distance that is "definitive," involving some degree of displacement or social rupture.

Although these observations are valid, I believe that they only tell *part* of the story. Tuan alludes to the ambivalent nature of movement in the following passage:

From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place. (6)

In truth, for the poet and his community, movement has not been random; rather it has been constricted by social and economic patterns. “What really matters,” as Kaplan puts it, is “whether or not it is possible for me to *choose* deterritorialization or whether deterritorialization has chosen me” (“Deterritorializations” 191). What, then, can we make of these contradictory understandings of U.S. Puerto Rican mobility? If, as Iain Chambers writes, “our sense of being, of identity and language, is experienced and extrapolated from movement,” then I would submit that Hernández articulates and reproduces notions of space and place both *as a result of* and *against* movement (24).

This complex relationship to mobility is paralleled by a dichotomy between noise and silence in the next stanza:

It’s about hope and quiet Sundays
Full of last night’s fading nonsense
And nothing’s open yet—but for churches and Dunkin’ Donuts shops.
(Performance)

The hope that was previously linked to music as movement is now connected to a hushed Sunday morning. But the poet does not stray thematically for long, as movement re-emerges in the following:

Bus stops are dressed in Sunday worshippers' latest fashion
Clarissa is opening up a newsstand under the El train station
Winos are heading over to the Pacific Garden Mission for breakfast
Paco experiments with microwaveable rice and beans
Yesterday's sunset was a big hit with the poets. (Performance)

Here, the anthropomorphized bus stops, the El station, and the walking winos point to urban patterns of circulation and mobility. Coupled with the specific reference to the Pacific Garden Mission, these images make claims to Chicago space, while Paco's rice and beans "experiment" speaks to technology's consequences.

In the final stanza, set in motion by the fricative sounds of "sunset" and "satin city serenade," is the city that occupies the principal role:

And the city keeps on dancing
In a satin city serenade
Yeah, the city—
She keeps right on dancing. (Performance)

Here, the gendering of the city as a "she" in the last line of the poem is significant in that, like an enigmatic but disinterested lover, the city remains unfazed by the actions of its inhabitants. The "pause" that place could offer, like the woman, remains out of reach. At every turn the city frustrates, confounds and resists—but continues to captivate the poet.

There are times, in fact, as feminist geographer Gillian Rose suggests, "the meanings given to a place may be so strong that they become a central part of the identity of the people experiencing them" (88). Clearly, as both poetic muse and reterritorialized motherland, Chicago and its neighborhoods occupy a central role in

Hernández's work. But it is not until "Chi-Town Brown" that the scope of this relationship is revealed; primarily because it engages the issues of race, class and cultural identity more directly and critically than the poems described above.¹⁷

Similar to Hernández's performance of "Armitage Street," he begins speaking without musical backup:

Chi-Town Brown.
I am Chi-Town Brown.
I am parent dreams of *maletas*/cardboard suitcases
the tropical faces United Airlines brings
to hope-dealer Chi-Town, to factory-life Chi-Town
and winterized and unrealized pain.
I wear survival on my shoulders like a mad dog.
I am Chi-Town Brown. (Performance)

With this last sentence, *Street Sounds* joins in, launching into a traditional-sounding salsa with an Afro-Latin *clave* beat performed in a minor key. The tonality of the accompaniment parallels the bittersweet contrast between migrants' hopes and dreams prior to migration and the poverty and despair that they face upon arrival in the city. Additionally, the use of internal rhyme in the "I am Chi-Town Brown"¹⁸ refrain effectively binds geographical location to ethnicity as the foundation for the speaker's identity:

¹⁷ Unlike "Armitage Street," "Roscoe Street," and "Satin City Serenade," "Chi-Town Brown" has not been published and therefore exists only as a performance piece.

¹⁸ References to Hernández's poetic personae "Chi-Town Brown" or "Brown Baggitt" appear throughout Hernández's work. His 1991 collection *Rooftop Piper* included a poem entitled "Words by Chi-Town Brown," and from 1995 to 1996 he published a series of "Brown Baggitt" columns in Mary Kuntz Press's *U-Direct* arts and poetry 'zine. "My column is called Brown Baggitt," he explains, "because I come out of my Puerto Rican brown bag when things either delight or confound me" (*U-Direct* 2: 4).

I am black, I am white, I am red, the rainbow
underground found in utopia speeches
the political leeches talk about
while my tears and shouts melt in their lies
while *Mami y Papi* beg to survive, while this anger
and hate has no limit and knows no bound
I am Chi-Town Brown. (Performance)

Above, the “speeches”/ “leeches” rhyme works to emphasize and challenge the seemingly arbitrary division of people into racial and ethnic groups along with politicians’ propensity to pay lip service to them.¹⁹ The last line is then followed by an extended and electronically reverberated violin solo that emphasizes the desperation evoked by the poem’s lyrics.

Next, the speaker channels his anger into didacticism:

Stay alive *coño!*
Don't let him pluck at your nerves!
Be hard! Be bad! Have no pity for a man-city
where children's games is to name their addictions
while their veins become a golf course for the needle's
conviction that it is a god! That it is a god! (Performance)

¹⁹ Puerto Ricans, in particular, are difficult to “classify” because, according Clara Rodríguez, Puerto Ricans are *both* white and black and *neither* white nor black. This uncomfortable and contradictory construction positions them “between two polarities and at a dialectical distance from both” (25). As testimony to this statement, Hernández wrote the following in one of his sardonic “Brown Baggit” columns:

Bein Puerto Rican ain’t all that it’s cut out to be. It used to be downright confusing. When I arrived in Chicago in 1955, the white boys would chase me because I was too dark and the black boys would chase me because I was too light and ‘til this day nobody knows how to deal with multi-racial people in America. I step out of the house and everybody yells “get that pendejo, he’s all!” (“Uh Oh” 4)

The reference to the torment of drug addiction serves to portray a harsh urban reality as individual and city wills are pitted against each other. With this, the “man-city” inserts itself into the poem, bearing witness to its inhabitants’ suffering:

Listen to me! Listen to me!
Can't you see
so long ago so long ago so long ago so long ago
I could laugh with rice and beans
As my words *en español!* As my being *era boricua!*
As my being was unmachined! And my feelings *eran* healthy
and my thoughts *eran* wealthy! Dedicated to the love
The small town that gave me birth.
I am Chi-Town Brown! (Performance)

With his exhortation of “listen to me!”²⁰ the speaker counters his feelings of anonymity and invisibility, literally making his existence audible while rapidly picking up tempo through the “speech-effusive”²¹ lines that alternate between Spanish and English.²² This code-switching occurs primarily with the use of the imperfect form of the verb *ser* (to

²⁰ Burrows points out that “the sound of the voice, its timbre and volume, can be read as an index of the vocalizer’s state of mind” (12).

²¹ The rhythmic style that characterizes the bilingual portion of this stanza represents what Adam Krims calls the “speech-effusive” in *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity* (2000), referring to a tendency to “spill over the rhythmic boundaries of meter.” These styles, he explains, “tend to feature enunciation and delivery closer to those of spoken language with little sense often projected of any underlying metric pulse. The rhythms outlined are complex and irregular, weaving unpredictable polyrhythms” (51).

²² In an interview published in 2000, Hernández commented:

“In terms of using Spanish and English, one time, a long time ago, I said that I was out to destroy the English language. And people freaked when I said that. But there is no such thing poetically. All you can do is enhance the language, whether it’s Spanish or English. For me, using both ... the concept of Spanglish is what I really like to work with because it’s a challenge craft-wise. Take a word like ‘roof.’ In Spanish it’s ‘el techo’ but in Spanglish, you say ‘el roofo.’ That communicates both to the Spanish speaking audience and to the English speaking audience ... ‘Roofo, roofo, o.k.’ They get that. So I use that as a way to communicate and bridge the two languages. And also because it’s a challenge to explore the words.” (qtd. in Schmid 160)

be)—and there is no translation provided. Instead, as Juan Flores observes in *Divided Borders*, “switching occurs only where the structures of Spanish and English are congruent,” consequently representing “neither the lack of language nor structural convergence.” Thus, after the depiction of such brutal Chicago realities, this deliberate, intra-sentential fusion of Spanish and English emphasizes a creative linguistic resistance to the forces of acculturation as well as “an expansion of communicative and expressive potential” (165).

By the conclusion of the poem, the frenzied climax that leads into the poet’s last repetition of the refrain represents a dramatic contrast with the slowly-paced rhythmic style of the performance’s opening line. In fact, although the final statement invokes the same phrase at the end of every verse, each time it is spoken it is recontextualized and layered with new meaning. Specifically, “Chi-Town Brown” begins as an object of desperation and then anger—performing his community’s experiences with temporal, spatial, and linguistic displacement. Finally, however, the poetic voice seems to achieve resolution with the speaker’s pronounced stress on “am” in “I *am* Chi-Town Brown.” Note that this resolution is preceded by his ultimate expression of devotion to “the small town that gave me birth”—not Cidra, Puerto Rico, but Chicago.

Conclusion: Vulnerable Geographies

It was the summer of 2005, and progress on my dissertation seemed as sluggish as Chicago's humid climate. As I plodded through tome after tome of theory on space and place, I began to lose sight of the connection between my project and its real-world implications. But then Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans and I wondered why, despite the numerous warnings to do so, such a significant number of residents *refused* to evacuate, choosing instead to stay in their homes and ride out the storm. Why, when so many others had fled, did so many remain in their familiar surroundings?

On Sunday, August 28, 2005, the National Weather Service in Slidell, Louisiana issued a statement forecasting the devastation that Hurricane Katrina was likely to cause in the region. The agency warned area residents that the storm would make southeast Louisiana "uninhabitable for weeks, perhaps longer," and that extended power outages and a lack of clean water could "make human suffering incredible by modern standards" ("Urgent"). Yet, it was only *after* the hurricane had been upgraded to "Category 5" that New Orleans mayor Ray Nagin ordered the first-ever mandatory evacuation of the city, calling Katrina "a storm that most of us have long feared" ("Katrina"). By the time the first levee—as predicted—had given way on Monday morning, the majority of the city's population had been evacuated. Still, thousands of others were left behind, stranded or unable to get help.

Although many consider the hurricane to be the largest natural disaster ever to occur in the continental United States, post-storm images of an abandoned and primarily African-American population waiting on rooftops to be evacuated with “Help, come get me” signs soon made it clear that there was nothing “natural” about the spatial and racial concentration of those who were hardest hit by Katrina. For one, it was largely the *white* neighborhoods that were situated on higher, drier ground while the lower, predominantly poor and black Ninth Ward bore the brunt of the storm.¹ As a *Washington Post* article aptly put it, “the people who live here do not need a demographer to tell them that much of the deepest flooding wrought by Katrina rose in places where black people live” (Roig-Franzia). Moreover, it was these *same* residents that were also less likely to have the means to safely leave the city. In “There’s No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster,” Neil Smith confirms that in New Orleans “topographic gradients doubled as class and race gradients.” This was, after all, “a private-sector evacuation, open only to those with the economic means to participate” (Bekken).

Much of the media’s coverage of the hurricane’s aftermath was similarly racialized, as demonstrated by a well-publicized set of photos and their accompanying captions posted on the Internet by the Associated Press the day after the storm struck. The first image was of a young black man who, according to the caption, “walks through

¹ According to Dyson, “80 percent of New Orleans’ minority households lived in the flooded area, while the same was true for only 54 percent of the city’s white population. The average household income of those in the flooded area trailed those who lived on New Orleans’s higher ground by \$17,000” (31-32).

chest deep flood water after looting a grocery store." In a similar shot, a white couple was shown wading "through chest-deep water after finding bread and soda from a local grocery store" (qtd. in Dyson 251). Here, as Michael Eric Dyson observes in *Come Hell or*

High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster:

The identical character of their experience is shattered by the language, which casts their actions in contrasting lights: the white youth have been favored by serendipity and thus "naturally" exploit their luck in "finding" food, a gesture that relieves them of culpability; the black youth, by comparison, has interrupted the natural order of things to seize what didn't belong to him and thus remains responsible for his behavior. (164-165)

While it is indeed language that makes the construction of black criminality explicit here, the captions and their corresponding photographs also provide a visual and textual representation of the consequences of spatial and racial transgression. Specifically, while the presence of white bodies in public space poses no threat to civic order, blackness provokes anxiety and is equated with lawlessness and moral degeneration.

Likewise, the post-Katrina media discourse surrounding the reconstruction of New Orleans has been framed in racial terms. According to many conservatives, the destruction of thousands of homes and businesses, coupled with the displacement of over one million New Orleans and Gulf area residents, represents a golden opportunity to create a "different" kind of city. The slums have already been cleared, they argue, so why rebuild them? When and if New Orleans is rebuilt, *New York Times* editorialist David Brooks asserts in the fittingly titled "Katrina's Silver Lining," people who lack

“marketable social” and “middle-class skills” should be “culturally integrated” with “people who possess these skills and who insist on certain standards of behavior.” Otherwise, he warns, “if we just put up new buildings and allow the same people to move back into their old neighborhoods, then urban New Orleans will become just as run down as before.” Here, if nothing else, both the contrasting Associated Press captions and Brooks’ op-ed momentarily bring to the surface the deep ways in which race and its pathologization are literally and figuratively submerged in spatial perceptions of the city. Granted, Katrina did not *create* these systems of racism, privilege and exclusion that characterize contemporary urban human geographies in the United States, but it worked to both expose and dramatize them. As then-rookie Illinois Senator Barack Obama observed, “the people of New Orleans weren’t just abandoned during the hurricane,” but were “abandoned long ago.”

Although the connection between Hurricane Katrina and Puerto Rican spatial practices in Chicago may not be immediately apparent, I contend that striking parallels nonetheless exist. Both testify to the often startling primacy of geography in everyday life while they also bear out the very theories that challenge its innocence. Furthermore, both residents of New Orleans and Humboldt Park have come up against colonialism, structural inequities, and persistent racializing assumptions of community pathology. Most significant, however, are the shared desires for community and belonging—deepened by the experience of displacement—that are manifested through territorial

attachment. According to New Orleans local Simone Lewis, for example, moving away was never an option: "This is our home. This is what we know; we know no other way but New Orleans. We love New Orleans—our heart, our walk, our talk, everything is in New Orleans" (Burnett). Thus, in New Orleans and Chicago, location and place serve as affective nuclei while movement continues to inform how dislocations and relocations shape identity. In the case of Puerto Rican Chicago, as I have argued throughout this project, not only has displacement intensified desire, but it has also heightened the exigency of memory, making cultural production an essential tool for curbing additional loss.

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Biography

Karen Serwer Secrist was born in Chicago, Illinois in 1975. She graduated with a B.A. from Stanford University in 1997 with honors and distinction in Latin American Studies. Her thesis, "*Despierta mi cuerpo: La negociación entre transgresión y silencio en la poesía de cuatro poetas ecuatorianas,*" was awarded the Honorable Mention for the Francisco Lopes Prize in Feminist Studies. At Duke University, she completed Graduate Certificates in both Latin American Cultural Studies and Women's Studies. She moved to Chicago in 2003 and then to St. Louis in 2004, where she worked as a Spanish Lecturer in the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures at Washington University. She currently holds a position as a Visiting Lecturer in Latino/a Studies at Saint Louis University in the Department of Modern and Classical Languages.