Title

Public Space Praxis: Cultural Capacity and Political Efficacy in Latina/o Placemaking

Permalink

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/68w6n7n1

Author

Rios, Michael

Peer reviewed

Public Space

Public Space Praxis: Cultural Capacity and Political Efficacy in Latina/o Placemaking[1]

By Michael Rios

Abstract
Public space has increasingly become a critical issue in American urbanism. This article examines how the act of Latina/o identity formation in public spaces of American metropolises contain the possibility of new democratic formations. The evidence of Latino/a heritage and culture in spatial interventions, appropriations and practices are a type of place-making activity. This identity-based spatial practice harnesses public participation and carves out spaces for democratic interventions in the city. By focusing on the value of culture as a political capacity, Rios exposes a set of case studies centered around three types of spaces– *adaptive, assertive,* and *negotiative* – along a continuum to discuss different ways Latina/os make group claims in the city and whereupon cultural identity becomes a usable resource for community development practice and local urban policy.

The use, access to, and control of public space is, and always has been, political. In recent years, struggles over public space have become a battleground for issues related to terrorism, anti-immigration, and xenophobia, among other conflicts. With respect to the regulation of urban space, manifestations of these antagonisms include gang injunctions, curfew laws, the criminalization of undocumented renters, and government designated "free speech" zones. This is in addition to less obvious forms of exclusion defined by privatization, class and cultural markers of who can claim public space. The topic of public space (as a domain, realm, or sphere) has been extensively discussed and includes, among others, the effects of global capitalism and the privatization of space, consumption, and cultural identity (Harvey 1989; Low 2000; Sennett 2000; Sorkin 1992; Zukin 1995). More recently, there has been a growing focus on democracy, public space, and geographies of citizenship (Barnett and Low 2004; Isin 2002; Low and Smith 2006). However, little attention has been given to praxis and how social groups produce public spaces as a means to encourage, facilitate, and organize themselves toward common understandings and collective action. From this perspective, 'public' is the arena where groups make claims for

recognition, inclusion, and rights (Young 2000), and 'space' is in flux, a state of becoming rather than being (Tajbakhsh 2000), embedded with different cultural values and associations. Related, 'praxis' is drawn from the struggles people face in society, and is the mutually reinforcing relationship between reflection and action to change the world (Freire 1970, 1973). As informed action, public space praxis can be measured through cultural and political identity formation, and is constituted by the collective action of social groups, and alliances between these groups and others, including institutions.

Planners and urban designers are situated in a strategic position—to engage insurgent forms of the social while also targeting resources of the state toward more inclusive and expansive rights (Holston 1997). However, to take this stance requires greater reflexivity in considering how public space reflects contemporary antagonisms, while contradictorily, also opening up the possibilities for identity construction through placemaking. This leads to a further location, one that instigates greater consciousness about the ethico-political dimensions of planning practice and, in particular, how public space praxis can facilitate the formation of polities. This interrogation focuses attention on how relationships between different social groups and institutional actors are constituted in public process. Here, a polity can be viewed as an ensemble of individuals that seek to organize and order their coexistence. This encompasses individuals and groups applying their different capacities toward reaching mutual goals, while at the same time forging strategic alliances across social and cultural differences despite the mixed-motives of diverse actors. As such, public space praxis is inclusive of cultural, social, and associational aspects to make explicit the connection between the formation of polities and the production of public space.

In the following, I argue that public space praxis expands the possibilities for democratic projects. Examples of Latina/o[2] placemaking in the United States are used to illustrate how public space praxis supports cultural capacity building leading to political efficacy. Cultural capacity can be defined as the cultural resources utilized to build community and are inclusive of institutions, customs, inventions, and knowledge. One example includes hometown associations, or *clubes de oriundos*, which promote the well-being of communities in sending and receiving regions through fundraising to implement public works and social projects (Orozco 2003, Orozco et al. 2005). Another example is the *casita*, discussed

---

[2]   For the purpose of this paper, I use the term Latina/o, commonly referred to as "Latinos" and "Hispanics", to describe a pan-ethnic group that identifies with Latin American countries. This also includes regional differences with respect to origin and destination, race, socio-economic status, gender and age. The predominance of the term Latina/o does not to suggest universal acceptance or explicate the limits to the term (For example, see Gimenez 1999).

later, which re-invents a vernacular house type found in the Caribbean into a hybrid architectural and landscape space that serves the purposes of cultural survival and resiliency for Puerto Rican diaspora communities living in the United States (Aponte-Pares 1997, 1998, 2000). The use of the term 'cultural capacity building' is derived from an assets-based model of community development conceptualized by Kretzman and McKnight (1988). This model assumes the existence of latent human capital, i.e. transferable skills gained through education and personal experience to aid local community development, and that an explicit focus on these assets provide a foundation from which to develop community-based strategies. Moreover, assets provide a resource base that builds on a community's strengths rather than its deficits, its capacities rather than its problems. However, while resource mobilization offers a rational basis for the instrumentality of collective action, it lacks engagement with political and economic power relations that exert force on, and within, communities.

By expanding on this assets-based model of community development through a concentration on the role of cultural resources in collective action, public space praxis provides a more explicit focus on how reconstituted social relations can bring about political change. Given that spatial contradictions reflect contemporary antagonisms, the claiming of public space makes social relations operative in a real, material sense. From this perspective, culture can serve as a creative force to instigate a shift in the use and production of space by groups with little or no political power. Conceptualizing cultural capacity vis-à-vis spatial production encompasses a self-awareness of group identity through attachment to spatial environments that can lead to empowerment, and ultimately, political power. Thus, the relationship between placemaking and spatial production is not arbitrary, but rather necessary in attributing the political in public space praxis.

As a heuristic to analyze the possibilities for cultural and political identity formation in spatial production, three types of spaces are described – *adaptive, assertive, and negotiative* – along a continuum to discuss different ways Latina/os make group claims in the city. The first category, adaptive spaces, consists of those environments that are appropriated for everyday use including vacant properties, streets, and parking lots, among others. These environments are vital in understanding the appropriation of space and the specificity of use by social groups. In contrast to adaptive spaces, assertive spaces reflect the conscious construction of culture, a system of meaning that empowers from within a bounded terrain of insurgent identity and cultural affiliation, especially when minority group claims are not represented. This second type emerges when space is politicized

to challenge dominant symbols and codes. Lastly, negotiative spaces represent the leading edge of cultural interchange in the public realm. These spaces move beyond symbolic representation of a particular group toward the formation of polyvalent communities and the recognition of plural understandings. Collectively, the three types of spaces have implications for the analysis, planning and design of urban space and how spatial production can contribute to affirming cultural identity and raising political consciousness as a result of collective action.

Latina/o Placemaking: Citizenship, Space, and the Production of Identities

For marginalized communities, the use of urban space defines much of their economic, cultural, and political well-being. In the case of the diaspora communities, these spaces provide a common sense of territorial identity for members that identify with, either through birth, ancestry, or social imagination, a homeland other than the one they currently inhabit. Paradoxically, the diaspora experience is often about settling down, but having roots elsewhere (Brah 1996; Blunt and Dowling 2006; Kalra, Kaur, and Hutnyk 2005). The diaspora experience also raises the specter of contested boundaries—of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, where 'us' and 'them' are contested. Because of this, and due to discrimination toward marginalized groups, there has been a focus on citizenship and rights to the city (Harvey 2003; Mitchell 2003; Holston and Appudarai 1999; Wastl-Walter, Staeheli, and Dowler 2005).[3] Much of this academic work aims to re-frame the issues of rights from that of individual citizens toward the idea that all citizens have rights to the spaces of the city. If the city is, as was the polis in ancient Greece, the territorially bounded space for a political community, then all urban inhabitants should (in theory) have access to the full range of benefits that the city provides.[4] This does not only include positive rights such as the ability to protest, mobility, access to open space, and so on, but also negative rights, for example the right against displacement, discrimination in zoning, or dependency on the automobile.

---

[3]   Several international and national coalitions have been organized to support right to the city principles and objectives. For example, a World Charter for the Right to the City was adopted at the Social Forum of the Americas in 2004 (http://www.hic-net.org/document.asp?PID=62.html). In the U.S., the Right to the City Alliance was formed in 2007 (http://www.righttothecity.org/our-history.html).

[4]   This is not to suggest that the polis in ancient Greece was democratic in a contemporary sense as it was the sole domain of men, excluding women and slaves (For example, see Arendt 1998).

Many of these developments draw from Henri Lefebvre's seminal works on 'the right to the city' (1991, 1996) to argue for new citizenship claims at the scale of the city and beyond (Brenner 2000; McCann 2002; Purcell 2003). New conceptions of citizenship and the city as a space for group claims draw attention to the possibilities for praxis in spatial production against forces that aim to undermine and curtail the use and access to public space. Urban spaces materialize social relations reflecting the entanglements of existing systems of bureaucratic control as well as open and inclusive forms of dialogue and exchange between different social groups and institutions. Public space praxis enables the (re)appropriation of use value while providing symbolic meaning to social groups in their spatial environment (Logan and Molotch 1987). This is not to suggest the valorization of symbols as spatial fetish or the normalizing of exclusive ideologies, but rather the contribution of symbolic environments as physical artifacts and markers of spatiotemporal change.

Given the heightened attention to citizenship issues at national, regional, and local levels, Latina/o communities are at the center of many place-based struggles regarding rights to the city. However, this phenomenon is not new as Latina/os have participated in struggles over space since the Mexican-American war (Diaz 2005; Irazabal and Farhat 2008). In the last half of the twentieth century, resistance to government policies such as urban renewal gave rise to Latina/o social movements from New York to California (Castells 1983; Torres and Katsiaficas 1999). In more recent history, the interrelated forces of neoliberalism and transnational migration have contributed to the restructuring of regions and cities resulting in contests over Latina/o space (Dávila 2004; Davis 2000; Valle and Torres 2000). As growth continues throughout the century, the presence of Latina/os communities will continue to affect the spatial character of urban, suburban, and rural spaces. One concern is the backlash against undocumented families and xenophobic fears about the growing presence of Latina/os, as this population is both the largest, and most rapidly growing minority group in the United States according to the US Census (2000). For example, between 1980 and 2000, the Latina/o population more than doubled in size, an increase of 20.7 million people, now totaling 12.5% of the total population of the United States. Current demographic projections show the Latina/o presence in the United States will account for 46% of total population growth in the next two decades (as compared to 24% for the white population) (Suro 2005). Yet, Latina/os are a diverse pan-ethnic group with multiple class positions. The *mestizaje* or "mixing" of cultures, races and traditions inherent in Latina/o identity formation is at once akin to the American notion of a "melting pot," while simultaneously challenging some long held American cultural and political mores of racial identity and separation. Though European constructs of race and racism are certainly deployed in

Latin American cultural and political life, the term Latina/o as qualified inside of the United States does not point to a unified racial group (as "white" might purport to in the census) but to a group linked loosely by linguistic and cultural ties to Latin America. As an over-determined identity, "Latinidad" includes multiple and competing representations and influences—from the radical influences of early Latina/o social movements, to the current commodification of identity by the Hispanic marketing industry (Dávila 2001; Torres and Katsiaficas 1999). Moreover, Latina/os lay claim to different histories brought to the U.S., while also constructing distinctive narratives defined by geographical and temporal variation. Regardless of these complexities, a collective identity is emerging focused on group solidarity and a growing consciousness of Latina/os larger political influence as this group is projected to reach close to 25% of the U.S. population by the year 2050. However, sovereign citizenship and increasing civic participation at the national level is not the focus of this discussion. Rather, the following draws from the possibilities inherent in cultural forms of citizenship, or "cultural citizenship", referring to "the ways people organize their values, their beliefs about their rights, and their practices based on their sense of cultural belonging rather than on their formal status as citizens of a nation" (Silvistrini 1998, 44).[5] By contrast, cultural citizenship can also be viewed as the way the state and civil society groups, i.e., redevelopment authorities, planning agencies, community development corporations, etc., produce distinctions of particular ethnic groups for marketing and consumption purposes while glossing over structural inequalities defined by race and class (Ong 1999). For the purposes here, I focus on 'cultural capacity building' as localized expressions of cultural citizenship to emphasize placemaking processes by which Latina/os claim space as they struggle to build community, and gain social and political standing. Thus, studying Latina/o placemaking provides a strategic vantage point from which to analyze and understand conflicts, tensions, and struggles over public space, as well as the possibilities for social and political transformation. Counterintuitive to logic, a focus on Latina/o placemaking does not suggest an essentialist view, but rather draws attention to the plurality of social and cultural norms manifesting in spatial practices that derive from particular histories, times and places. In the following, I describe three types of spaces along a continuum—from spaces of appropriation and adaptation to spaces that are brokered between different social groups—to demonstrate how cultural capacity operates in and through the spatial production by Latina/o communities. This is not to suggest the primacy of space over social relations, but rather to draw attention to the role that space serves in contesting and mediating social relations (Gottdiener 1994; Soja 1996). The intent is to offer contrasting examples

---

[5]   See also Bobbio 1989.

that identify public space praxis as a vehicle for cultural survival and resiliency. Related, I argue that creative agents and the material spaces they create are vital to the formation of political communities.

Adaptive Spaces of Everyday Urbanism

Much has been written about "everyday urbanism" drawing on the work of Michel de Certau (1984) and others (Crawford 1995) to valorize human participation in urban spaces. One emphasis has been spatial praxis that either negates or transgresses the dominant logic of capitalism and related processes of globalization that strip the city of meaning (Jameson 1991). The everyday landscapes and enacted environments of local communities and identities are emphasized as opposed to the official public realm produced by the professional disciplines (Chase, Crawford, and Kaliski 1999). Critics of everyday urbanism argue that it is overly populist and romantic (Kelbau 2001; Speaks 2005). Still, the strength of discourses of everyday urbanism is that they stress temporal processes over urban form, and use value over exchange value in the experience, perception, and meaning of public space. As a material expression of everyday urbanism, adaptive spaces are unclaimed environments that are appropriated for localized economic and social purposes. This includes vacant properties, streets, parking lots, and other 'terrain vague'. Such indeterminate zones in the landscape are often perceived as indicators of decay and abandonment. However, these sites are also appropriated for spontaneous, improvisational, and creative uses. Some examples include sites where day laborers congregate or parking lots that transform into informal swap meets and vending sites (Easton 2007; Valenzuela et al. 2006). There are also 'in-between' spaces that delineate a threshold between the public and the private realms of individual households and residential streets, restaurants and sidewalks (Arreola 1988; Rojas 1993). Other instances of adaptive spaces include vernacular landscapes and the use of streets, open spaces, and buildings for social purposes such as plazas, markets, and community gardens (Apontes-Pares 2000; Arreola 1992; Forsyth, Lu, and McGirr 2001; Sciorra 1996). One example is the Puerto Rican vernacular house, or *casita*, which serves as a social hub in many New York City neighborhoods that lack such spaces (Aponte-Pares 1997, 1998; Sciorra and Cooper 1990). Here, vacant lots are converted into culturally specific community gardens as the setting for playing dominos, pig roasts, and salsa dancing, among other activities (Figure 1). The *casita* provides an identifiable space to share a 'common sense' of territorial identity with a homeland other than the one that is currently being inhabited. The social processes that drive the use and making of these spaces are many, and emerge out of the particular histories of (im) migrant and diaspora groups. In comparison to other forms of praxis, the

Figure 1. Casitas provide a social space for Puerto Rican diaspora communities. (Source: Daniel Winterbottom)

use of adaptive spaces is the least political inasmuch as the occupation of abandoned land in the city does not directly challenge dominant groups nor engage the institutional process to make new claims for spatial use. This is not to suggest a static conception of spatial praxis as adaptive spaces often become politicized over time. For example, when the Giuliani administration tried to seize and sell over 650 community gardens (many of which included casitas) in New York City, the state attorney blocked the attempt through a lawsuit supported by activists and organizations (Raver 2001).

Assertive Spaces of Insurgent Citizenship

Among urban scholars, some have theorized the possibilities for "insurgent citizenship" and the promotion of "insurgent practice" that aim to support new citizenship claims (Douglass and Friedmann 1998; Friedmann 2002; Holston 2008; Holston and Appadurai 1999). What can be drawn from this work is that rights and claims are a defining characteristic of citizenship and that citizenship serves a constitutive role in shaping the political and physical spaces of the city. From a cultural perspective, insurgent citizenship in the public realm can be understood as assertive space that anchors group solidarity and expresses explicit counter-identities in the urban landscape. Common examples in the U.S. include public festivals and rituals such as Dia de Los Muertos in parts

of Northern and Southern California or the Puerto Rican Day parade in New York City (Brandes 1998; Duany 2003). Politically, assertive spaces produce new symbols and codes resulting in changing meanings of public space such as Los Angeles' Old Plaza and Olvera Street or Paseo Boriqua in Chicago's Humboldt Park neighborhood (Estrada 1999; Flores-Gonzales 2001; Ramos-Zayas 1997). A historical example of a more politicized space is Chicano Park in the neighborhood of Barrio Logan in San Diego, California (Ford and Griffin 1981). Chicano Park emerged out of protest when California Department of Transportation planners decided to build the Coronado Bridge through the heart of the community, but failed to provide a park promised to Barrio Logan. Residents occupied the construction site under the bridge and chained themselves to bulldozers. The act of protest forced the city to provide the space under the bridge for a park. Inspired by these protest activities and the growing Chicano movement, community artists painted murals as a way to claim the space as theirs (Figure 2). The example of Chicano
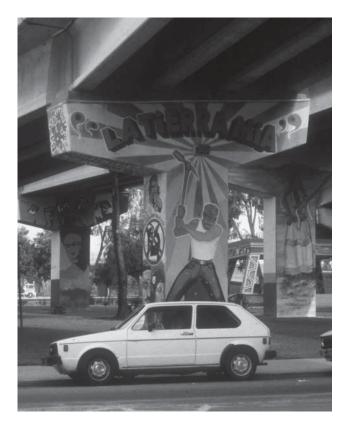

Figure 2. Chicano Park played an important role in the early history and art of the Chicano Movement. (Source: Michael Rios).

Park is relevant inasmuch as it demonstrates that conflicts over space can spark collective awareness when identity is threatened and, thereafter, imbue space with meaning through specific place attachments (Low 1992). Today, Chicano Park still serves as a protest site and staging ground for pro-immigration rallies and parades for San Diego's Chicano community.

Negotiative Spaces of Transcultural Polities

Given the increasing diversity of groups that live in U.S. metropolitan regions, plural forms of political affiliation are also emerging. One type of political community is a "transcultural polity" defined by the participation of different social groups, but with a shared commitment toward a collective project or action. They are also polyvalent, producing common sites that have multiple identities and meanings. The term transcultural suggests that cultures are assemblages of imaginings and meanings and are constructed to communicate and create community (Lewis 2002).6 As one aim of transcultural polities is to forge alliances across cultural differences, these polities create the potential for transformative relationships (Guss 2000). The outcome of such processes are made manifest in the urban landscape as negotiative spaces characterized by transcultural iconographies, hybrid aesthetics, and recombinant cultural forms. Within cities this includes multiethnic neighborhoods where Latina/os are one of many different groups living side-by-side that are achieving stable racial and ethnic integration. These neighborhoods can be viewed as microcosms of larger demographic and social changes (Ellen 1998) and, as such, are today's experiments shaping tomorrow's reality. Empirical research has shown that multiethnic neighborhoods differ from "ethnic enclaves" or "urban villages" inasmuch as their success relies on place-based grassroots action, greater cooperation and negotiation among local organizations to challenge institutionalized practices and government policies, the vital role that the neighborhood plays in both maintaining and producing identities that are continuously being shaped and reshaped by perceptions, and the explicit use of community development strategies to foster and build multiethnic coalitions and create multicultural spaces (May 2005, 216-221).

The North Mission in San Francisco is one case of a predominately Latina/o neighborhood comprised mostly of Mexicans, Salvadorians, Guatemalans, and Nicaraguans, but which also includes a growing number of non-Latina/o Whites, African Americans and Asian ethnic groups, such as Chinese and Vietnamese. During the mid-1990s the North Mission was being gentrified as a wave of young urban

---

6 Transculturalism is consistent with polyculturalism, the interchange of cultural forms (For example, see Prashad 2001).

professionals were moving into the neighborhood. For a variety of cultural and economic reasons, the Mission had become a desirable location for residence and nightlife, attracting a young and diverse population with no historical ties to the neighborhood. Proximity to downtown, accessibility to transportation, a pleasant micro-climate, and an abundance of warehouse spaces attracted outside investment from individual builders and real estate agents alike. Between 1990 and 1999, over nine hundred households were evicted, the highest rate among city neighborhoods during this period. In addition, owner move-in evictions tripled to 350 between 1997 and 1999 as compared to the six prior years total (Alejandro 2000).

Much of the Mission's political history has been described in Manuel Castells' seminal book, *City and the Grassroots* (1983), in which he chronicles the rise and fall of a Latino-based neighborhood coalition that organized in opposition to urban renewal policies of the 1960s. One highly contested project concerned the construction of several Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) stations along Mission Street, the central commercial corridor. At the time, urban designers hired by BART envisioned the stations as part of a large-scale redevelopment proposal that would require wholesale clearance of the urban fabric in and around the proposed stations. While successful in their opposition to the project, the community was left with the physical remnants of the political struggle, several institutionally designed plazas whose primary purpose was to provide access to underground transit stations at 16th and 24th Streets.

During the 1990s, the transit plaza at 16th and Mission Streets became a highly contested space, with numerous arguments being made for its use and identity. Many of the newcomers were less empathetic to the acute social problems of the Mission, including homelessness, drugs, and gang violence (Solnit 2000). It is against this backdrop that a group of non-profit organizations and neighborhood residents began a discussion about recent transformations of the Mission District, its past and future identity, and community-wide concern about the transit plaza. A main goal of the planners facilitating the process was to diffuse antagonism among many of the participants to develop a strategy that would recognize different group perspectives concerning the plaza design. This was enabled through a range of methods including focus group meetings, ethnographic interviews, surveys, and participatory gaming exercises, among other techniques (Urban Ecology 1999). Some of the groups involved in the process were new and established immigrant groups, advocates for universal accessibility, the homeless, youth, older adults, artists, neighborhood residents, and transit users.

After years of participatory planning with community members and a community advisory group, the renovated16th Street BART plaza was

dedicated in 2003, transforming the plaza into a heterogeneous space that validated the claims and aspirations of individuals, organizations, and agencies alike (Figure 3). Artists helped to re-imagine the space and used hummingbirds, or *colibrís*, which migrate among Mexico, the United States, and Canada as a transcultural symbol throughout the plaza. *Colibrís* also symbolize migrant workers, which spoke to the history of the Mission District as the home to many Irish, Latina/o, and, more recently, Asian immigrants (Martí 2003). To emphasize the multi-purpose and temporal qualities of the plaza, sitting steps serve as a platform for public 'speak outs' and spaces were also created for a rotating art exhibit and vendor kiosks. This prompted further discussions between the transit agency and local arts organizations, resulting in the formation of Plaza 16, a staffed project of the Mission Community Council formed in 2000 that coordinates rotating art exhibits and works with transit agencies, local galleries, and arts organizations to promote events and vending on the plaza. Plaza 16 is a signature project of the Community Council, which promotes the Mission District as a multicultural working class neighborhood comprised of a collaborative network of local institutions.[7]

Figure 3. Plaza del Colibrí in the Mission District of San Francisco serves a variety of social groups and uses. (Source: Michael Rios)

Illustrative of public space praxis, the renovated plaza is a result of new channels of communication and dialogue not only at the scale of the local community, but also policy, planning, and urban design interests at the regional level (Rios 2008). Changes to transportation policy and

_____
[7]   (http://www.micocosf.org)

institutional capacity-building concerning station area planning and design were some of the outcomes. As a recipient of pilot funds from a newly funded transit enhancement program of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), the project helped to serve as a demonstration of a successful community participation process and was used as a model for subsequent projects funded under the program. Overcoming cultural and institutional politics at 16th Street was an encouraging sign for others, including constituents from the nearby 24th Street station, who subsequently received a grant from MTC. The 16th Street BART Plaza was also the first completed project under the MTC program and served a larger advocacy role for transportation sales tax re-authorization in the region. Funding for MTC's transportation program, which started at less than $12 million in 1998, increased to over $50 million in 2004, for a total of $83.7 million between 1998 and 2006 (Metropolitan Transportation Commission 2004, 2006). The project also served to change many policies and procedures of the participating agencies. The issues raised provided important lessons for agencies such as BART, which prior to the project did not coordinate station area planning and design. The project also instigated BART to develop its institutional capacity in this area by forming a planning division to coordinate the redesign of existing stations. Due to subsequent efforts of this division within BART, community-based plans have been adopted for four other transit stations in San Francisco.

Implications for Public Space Praxis

In describing examples of Latina/o placemaking, the aim is to put forth a dynamic, not essentialist, conception of culture vis-à-vis the production of public space. Different types of spaces (adaptive, assertive, negotiative) were presented as a heuristic to consider the possibilities for public space praxis that, while in response to spatial contradictions, can also be operative in terms of defending and expanding the use value of place. Public space provides a platform for political engagement and empowerment where material, social, and institutional relations are mutually constituted, participants form a public in which people work out solutions to conflicts and collective problems across their different positions, and people can hold one another accountable. The examples discussed also illustrate multiple ways that capacity building is made possible through spatial praxis. Within each of the three types of space described—adaptive, assertive, and negotiative—each involves and enables a variety of actors with or without professional involvement (or interference). Key to this understanding is the equal treatment of indigenous and non-indigenous, expert and non-expert forms of knowledge. Regardless of social position or status, a central focus is the

engagement in dialogical processes that bridge understandings across group differences that can result in an empowered citizenry. In addition, public space praxis also reveals syncretic and creative dimensions of cultural production that can be translated into material spaces that combine and recombine cultural forms and practices with the territorial specificity of inhabitation. Creative possibilities abound and can be drawn from a multiplicity of sources that circulate between and among local, regional, national, and transnational spaces.

The heuristic framework of adaptive, assertive, and negotiative spaces also has implications for practice. These different types of spaces reveal improvisational and culturally creative uses that can inform approaches to planning and urban design as well as the incorporation of flexible and culturally specific uses into future plans and projects. However, one of the tensions for adaptive spaces is the valorization of the temporary and the ephemeral, without revealing structural contradictions that produce inequality in the first place. There is also a danger in normalizing inequality through aesthetics and spatial fetishes of the Other. Related, while spatial valorization may be important for supporting group solidarity, it also runs the risk of essentializing identity when, in fact, identities are over-determined. Another concern is the commodification of identity whether romanticizing a neo-traditional social imaginary of the past, promoting a pastiche postmodern aesthetic, or glorifying the ever-present postcolonial condition. This poses a challenge, that despite the best intentions, practitioners are often complicit in reinforcing dominant power relations through public space projects. Lastly, a key challenge in planning for these spaces is keeping public processes open to allow for conflict and contingency, without devolving into conventional methods that plague citizen participation today. Another issue is the recognition that outcomes achieved at one scale, i.e., the neighborhood, do not necessarily imply the same for other scales of decision-making. A focus on the local scale needs to be complemented by interventions at other, larger, scales of planning.

Despite these challenges, public space should be a critical focus for planning as it remains as the primary "place" for the (re)distribution of social goods and where citizens deliberate about issues that concern the quality of life in cities. New social and institutional arrangements challenge planners to consider novel ways to incorporate urban identities, institutional politics, dialogue, and decision-making in public process. An essential skill that enables individuals to navigate between these elements is cultural brokering. This is the ability to identify the space between differences to arrive at more democratic solutions, and includes not only bridging between racial, ethnic, and gender differences, but also

mediating conflicts between those with and without power, and between communities and institutions. The ability of planners to produce a more inclusive and egalitarian community is in large part contingent on their ability to provide leverage for social groups with government agencies, non-profit organizations, and private interests. By positioning planning as both a professional and political endeavor, this cultural due diligence serves as a practical means toward more democratic ends. Public space praxis is one vehicle that can lead to a greater dialogue, one that broadens the prospects of both citizens and cities. Cities, and the public spaces within them, are the physical manifestation of urban processes and reflect emergent forms of political association. Planning needs to be more facile in incorporating this dynamic into practice.

References

Alejandro, S. V. 2000. *Gentrification in San Francisco's Mission District: Indicators and policy recommendations.* Berkeley: Department of City and Regional Planning, University of California.

Aponte-Pares, L. 1997. Casitas, place and culture: Appropriating place in Puerto Rican barrios [elements of sociability]. *Places* 11 (1): 54–61.

Aponte-Pares, L. 1998. What's yellow and white and has land all around It? Appropriating place in Puerto Rican barrios. In *The Latino studies reader: Culture, economy and society*, edited by A. Darder and R. D. Torres, 271–280. Malden, Mass and Oxford: Blackwell.

Aponte-Pares, L. 2000. Appropriating place in Puerto Rican barrios, preserving contemporary urban landscapes. In *Preserving cultural landscapes in America*, edited by A. R. Alanen and R. Melnick, 94-111. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Arendt, H. 1998. *The human condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Arreola, D. D. 1988. Mexican American housescapes. *Geographical Review* 78 (17): 299–315.

Arreola, D. D. 1992. Plaza towns of south Texas. *Geographical Review* 82 (1), 56–73.

Barnett, C., and M. Low. 2004. *Spaces of democracy: Geographical perspectives on citizenship, participation, and representation*. London: Sage Publications.

Blunt, A., and R. Dowling. 2006. *Home*. London and New York: Routledge.

Bobbio, N. 1989. *Democracy and dictatorship: The nature and limits of state power*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Brandes, S. 1998. The Day of the Dead, Halloween, and the quest for Mexican national identity. *The Journal of American Folklore* 111(442): 359–380.

Brah, A. 1996. *Cartographies of diaspora*. London and New York: Routledge.

Brenner, N. 2000. The urban question as a scale question: Reflections on Henri Lefebvre, urban theory and the politics of scale. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 24 (2): 361–378.

Castells, Manuel. 1983.*The city and the grassroots*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Chase, J., Crawford, M., and J. Kaliski, eds. 1999. *Everyday urbanism*. New York: Monacelli Press.

Crawford, M. 1995. Contesting the public realm: Struggles over public space in Los Angeles. *Journal of Architectural Education* 49 (1): 4–9.

Dávila, A. 2001. *Latinos, Inc.: The marketing and making of a people*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press.

Dávila, A. 2004. *Barrio dreams: Puerto Ricans, Latinos, and the neoliberal city*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press.

Davis, M. 2000. *Magical urbanism: Latinos reinvent the U.S. city*. London and New York: Verso.

DeCerteau, Michel. 1984. *The practice of everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Diaz, D. 2005. *Barrio urbanism: Chicanos, planning, and American cities*. New York: Routledge.

Douglass, M., and J. Friedmann, eds. 1998. *Cities for citizens: Planning and the rise of civil society in a global age*. Chichester, England and New York: J. Wiley.

Duany, J. 2003. Nation, migration, identity: The case of Puerto Ricans. *Latino Studies* 1 (3): 424–444.

Easton, T. 2007. Geographies of hope and despair: Atlanta's African American, Latino, and White day Laborers. *Southern Spaces*. http://www.southernspaces.org/contents/2007/easton/1a.htm.

Ellen, I. 1998. Stable racial integration in the contemporary U.S.: An empirical overview. *Journal of Urban Affairs* 20 (1): 27–42.

Estrada, W. D. 1999. Los Angeles' Old Plaza and Olvera Street: Imagined and contested space. *Western Folklore* 58 (2): 107–129.

Flores-Gonzales, N. 2001. Paseo Boricua: Claiming a Puerto Rican space in Chicago. C*entro Journal* 13 (2): 6–23.

Ford, L. R., and E. Griffin. 1981. Chicano Park: Personalizing an institutional landscape. *Landscape* 25 (2): 42–48.

Forsyth, A., Lu, H., and P. McGirr. 2001. Plazas, streets, and markets: What Puerto Ricans bring to urban spaces in northern climates. *Landscape Journal* 20 (1): 62–76.

Freire, P. 1970. *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company.

Freire, P. 1973. *Education for critical consciousness*. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company.

Friedmann, J. 2002. *The prospect of cities*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minneapolis Press.

Gimenez, M. E. 1999. Latino politics—Class struggles: Reflections on the future of Latino politics. In *Latino social movements: Historical and theoretical perspectives*, edited by R. D. Torres and G. Katsiaficas, 165–180. New York and London: Routledge.

Gottdiener, M. 1994. *The social production of urban space*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Guss, D. M. 2000. *The festive state: Race, ethnicity, and nationalism as cultural performance*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Guzman, B. 2001. *The Hispanic population: Census 2000 brief*. Washington DC: US Census Bureau.

Harvey, D. 1989. *The condition of postmodernity*. London: Basil Blackwell.

Harvey, D. 2003. The right to the city. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27 (4): 939–941.

Holston, J. 1996. Spaces of insurgent citizenship. *Architectural Design: Architecture and Anthropology*, no. 124: 54–59.

Holston, J. 2008. *Insurgent citizenship: Disjunctions of democracy and modernity in Brazil.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Holston, J., & A. Appadurai. 1999. Cities and citizenship. In *Cities and citizenship*, edited by J. Holston, pp. 1–18. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Irazabal, C., and R. Farhat. 2008. Latino communities in the United States: Place-making in the pre-World War II, postwar, and contemporary city. *Journal of Planning Literature* 22 (3): 207–228.

Isin, E. F. 2002. *Being political: geneologies of citizenship*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Jameson, F. 1991. *Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Kalra, V., Kaur, R., and J. Hutnyk, J. 2005. *Diaspora and hybridity*. London, Thousand Oaks, and New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Kelbaugh, D. 2001. Three urbanisms and the public realm. Paper presented at the 3rd International Space Syntax Symposium, Atlanta, GA.

Lefebvre, H. 1991. *The production of space*. Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell.

Lefebvre, H. 1996. *Writings on cities*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Lewis, J. 2002. From culturalism to transculturalism. *Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies* 1. http://www.uiowa.edu/~ijcs/issueone/lewis.htm.

Logan, J., and H. Molotch. 1987. *Urban fortunes: The political economy of place*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press.

Low, S. 1992. Symbolic ties that bind. In *Cultural place attachment*, edited by E. Altman and S. Low, 165–185. New York: Plenum Press.

Low, S. 2000. *On the plaza: The politics of public space and culture*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Low, S., and N. Smith, editors. 2006. *The politics of public space*. New York: Routledge.

Marshall, T. H. 1977. *Class, citizenship and social development.* Chicago and London: Chicago University Press.

Martí, F. 2003. *16th Street BART Plaza dedication and community celebration*. San Francisco:

Urban Ecology.

May, M. 2005. *Beyond segregation: Multiracial and multiethnic neighborhoods in the United States*.

Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

McCann, E. J. 2002. Space, citizenship, and the right to the city: A brief overview. *GeoJournal* 58: 77–79.

McKnight, J. L., & J. P. Kretzmann. 1988. *Mapping community capacity*. Evanston, Ill.: Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research.

Metropolitan Transportation Commission. 2004. *Transportation for Livable Communities.* http://www.mtc.ca.gov/projects/livable_ communities.htm

Metropolitan Transportation Commission. 2006. *Cycles 1-6 TLC capital projects*. Oakland, CA: Metropolitan Transportation Commission.

Mitchell, D. 2003. *The right to the city: Social justice and the fight for public space*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Ong, A. 1999. Cultural citizenship as subject making: Immigrants negotiate racial and cultural boundaries in the United States. In *Race, identity, and citizenship*, edited by R. Torres, L. Miron, and J. India, 737–762. New York: Blackwell.

Orozco, M. 2003. *Hometown associations and their present and future partnerships: New development opportunities?* Washington, D.C.: US Agency for International Development.

Orozco, M., Lowell, B., Bump, M., and R. Fedewa. 2005. *Transnational engagement, remittances and their relationship to development in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Washington, D.C.: Institute for the Study of International Migration, Georgetown University.

Prashad, V. 2001. *Everybody was Kung Fu fighting: Afro-Asian connections and the myth of cultural purity*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Purcell, M. 2003. Citizenship and the right to the global city: Re-imagining the capitalist world order. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27 (3): 564–590.

Ramos-Zayas, A. Y. 2007. Becoming American, becoming Black? Urban competency, racialized spaces, and the politics of citizenship among Brazilian and Puerto Rican youth in Newark. *Identities* 14 (1): 85–109.

Raver, A. "Human nature: new hope for community gardeners." *New York Times*, March, 29, 2001. http://www.nytimes.com

Rios, M. 2008. Envisioning citizenship: Toward a polity approach in urban design. *Journal of Urban Design* 13 (2): 213–229.

Rojas, J. T. 1993. The enacted environment of East Los Angeles. *Places* 8 (3): 42–53.

Sciorra, J. 1996. Return to the future: Puerto Rican vernacular architecture in New York City. In *Representing the city: Ethnicity, capital and culture in the 21st century metropolis*, edited by A. King, 60–92. London: Macmillan Press.

Sciorra, J., and M. Cooper. 1990. "I feel like I'm in my country": Puerto Rican casitas in New York City. *The Drama Review* 34(4): 156–168.

Sennett, R. 2000. Reflections on the public realm. In *A companion to the city*, edited by G. Bridge and S. Watson, 380–387. Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishers.

Silvistrini, B. 1998. The world we enter when claiming rights. In *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming identity, rights, and space*, edited by W. Flores and R. Benmayor, 39–56. Boston: Beacon Press.

Soja, E. W. 1996. *Thirdspace*. Cambridge and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Solnit, R. 2000. Skid marks on the social contract. In *Hollow city: The siege of San Francisco and the crisis of American urbanism*, edited by R. Solnit and S. Schwartzenberg, 118–135. London and New York: Verso.

Sorkin, M., editor. 1992. *Variations on a theme park: The new American city and the end of public space*. New York: Hill and Wang.

Speaks, M. 2005. Every day is not enough. In *Everyday urbanism: Michigan debates on urbanism: Volume I*, edited by R. Mehrota, 34–45. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan.

State of California, Department of Finance. 2005. *Population projections for California and its counties 2000-2050, by age, gender and race/ethnicity.* Sacramento, California: State of California.

Suro, Roberto. 2005. *Hispanics: A people in motion*. Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center.

Tajbakhsh, K. 2000. *The promise of the city: Space, identity, and politics in contemporary social thought.* Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press.

Torres, R., and G. Katsiaficas. 1999. *Latino social movements: Historical and theoretical perspectives.* New York and London: Routledge.

Urban Ecology. 1999. *16th street BART community design plan*. Oakland: Urban Ecology, Inc.

Valenzuela, A., Theodore, N., Meléndez, E., and A.L. Gonzalez. 2006. *On the corner: Day labor in the United States*. Los Angeles: Center for the Study of Urban Poverty, UCLA.

Valle, V., and R. Torres. 2000. *Latino metropolis*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.

Wastl-Walter, D., Staeheli, L. A., and L. Dowler, editors. 2005. *Rights to the city.* Rome: Societa Geografica Italiana.

Young, I. 2000. *Inclusion and democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Zukin, S. 1995. The cultures of cities. Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell.

Michael Rios, Ph.D., is an assistant professor in the Department of Environmental Design at the University of California, Davis. Previously, he taught at Penn State where he was inaugural director of the Hamer Center for Community Design from 1999 to 2007. His research focuses on public policy, professional practice, and citizen participation in community planning and urban design. He has published in the Journal of Architectural Education, Journal of Urban Design, *and book chapters in* Good Deeds, Good Design: Community Service through Architecture *(Princeton Architectural Press),* From the Studio to the Streets: Service Learning in Architecture and Planning *(Stylus), and* Expanding Architecture: Design as Activism *(Metropolis).*