

Powerful Spaces: Tracing the Out-of-School Literacy Spaces of Latino/a Youth

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You should write a book, and you should call your book, *On the Streets of [the City]*...no, *Underneath the Streets of [the City]*. You should write about what we, what the people who live here, think of the city, not the police or the high society, but the people who really live here.

(Ramiro, informal interview, 2003)

What's in a space? For that matter, what *is* a space? Is it constituted by material conditions? Or is a space what it is because of the people who occupy the space? Ramiro, the 14-year-old young man quoted at the beginning of this chapter, suggests that how a space is seen, experienced, and understood depends on the positionality of people relative to the space. Ramiro's words further suggest that he expects different perceptions of a given space depending on people's identities, their cultural backgrounds, and their positioning in society:

When people go to Hale Plaza for the Mexican festival or to Cinco de Mayo, the tourists only come and see the parade or go to the food booths, but they don't see the real meanings underneath it, they don't understand it. (Ramiro, interview, 2003)

In this chapter, I want to take up Ramiro's charge to me, to reveal the different ways that youth see the spaces of their everyday lives, all spaces within a major urban area in the United States. I intend for my representation of seven youth's experiences with and perspectives on their everyday space to illustrate how these material spaces and places shaped and reflected the social, ethnic, identity, and literate practices of the youth who moved

through them. I demonstrate that these spaces are defined by simultaneous experiences of danger and comfort, familiarity and excitement, othering and being othered, and hybridity and Mexicanness, and that these experiences mediate youth's literacy and language practices and their uses of text.

Theoretical Perspectives: Bringing Literacy Spatiality to Youth Literacy Studies

My research with young people (ages 12–16) over the last eight years has pushed me toward a study of the spaces youth have access to and the ways they use literacy to claim, reclaim, or construct new spaces and particular identities. Specifically, the youth with whom I worked in multiple urban spaces have led me to examine space and time as an aspect of how they use literacy and of how they identify and are identified. The different youth's comments about space, and their unique tactics and practices in particular spaces, have compelled me to confront the common assumption that youth literacy and identity practices can be abstracted from particular spaces. In fact, the words "literacy spaces" in the title of the chapter represent something of a misnomer, in the sense that all spaces are in some sense "literate" spaces. As part of their everyday practices, people use a variety of written texts and other forms of representation (i.e., oral language, dress, gestures and movements, icons, etc.) to navigate within and across physical spaces. In the same sense, all spaces are spaces of identity enactment, and these enactments shape and are shaped by literate practices (McCarthy & Moje, 2002).

Identity can be considered an enactment of self made within particular activities and relationships that occur within particular spaces (geographic, social, electronic, mental, cultural) at particular points in time (see Anzaldúa, 1999 and Moje et al., 2002). To enact these versions of self, people draw upon "histories of participation" (Rogers, 2002) in other activities, relationships, and spaces; and they use different kinds of texts, languages, and literacies, all of which are shaped by various Discourses—or ways of knowing, doing, believing, and acting (Gee, 1996)—to position themselves in particular ways. Simultaneously, people are positioned by others within these activities, spaces, times, and relations. These relationships and positionings occur within relations of power (which are produced within particular spaces), and the Discourses people draw on in positioning self and others are situated in and mediated by institutions. Consequently, our enactments of self via language and literacy always produce power and are always produced in relations of power (see Foucault, 1980).

Following this definition, I draw to some extent on James Gee's (2000/2001) analytic categories for thinking about identity. Gee's notion

suggests that we examine any enactment of self from four perspectives: nature identities (e.g., physical markers), institutional identities (the identities assigned to people or “recognized” by institutions of power), discursive identities (identities constructed in relationships), and affinity group identities (ways of knowing and doing we engage in to build relationships around a particular interest or goal). According to Gee, these categories represent aspects of identities that get performed and recognized in various ways.

To Gee’s four categories, I add “spatial and temporal identities,” or versions of self that are enacted according to understanding of and relations in different spaces and time periods. While Gee might argue that space and time are captured in institutions, discourses, and affinity groups, theorists such as Lefebvre (1996) would suggest that reducing space and time only to the social or contextual diminishes one’s ability to examine how actual physical spaces and material conditions can, at particular points in time, call up or constrain various enactments of self.

An example of the impact of time and space is reflected in my own identity enactments and discourse practices in professional meetings, all held within the same institution and discourse groups. In large-group meetings I tend to sit silently, listening to the conversation swirl about me. At most, I might whisper—or mutter, as a colleague recently stated—*sotto voce* comments to someone sitting nearby. In small-group meetings, however, I am typically a vocal participant, and at times have to restrain myself from dominating the conversation. Time factors into these different institutional and discursive identities as well; even my small-group practices were muted when I first arrived at my current institution. As I came to know my colleagues better, was tenured and promoted, and served in a leadership role (changes in time, relationships, and activities), I became more dominant and vocal in my participation, but only in small-group settings. I continue to sit quietly in large-group meetings, a practice that suggests that space—actual physical arrangements—works together powerfully *with* institutional, discursive, affinity, and nature relations and identities to shape how people use language and literacy in practice.

I bring these theoretical and personal musings about space, time, and identity to my work with youth, especially as I move with them throughout the multiple spaces of their lives. In addition to forcing me to think about space and place as important to their everyday practices, the youth with whom I have worked have also pushed me to think beyond singular notions of ethnicity, gender, race, and class. That is not to say that these constructs do not matter in the lives, literacies, and identities of these youth. However, their lives take them through multiple spaces and their identities are conse-

quently articulated at borderlands (Anzaldúa, 1999) or in multiple spaces that make their identities a complex hybrid of many different qualities of difference (Bhabha, 1994). Thus, rather than identifying youth as having a strong Latino/a identity simply because they are a particular generation of Mexican immigrants, for example, my research team colleagues and I trace how different ethnic identities can be tied to the ways that spatial positionings allow youth to develop relationships that support or contest those identifications. One participant, Pilar, for example, has claimed,

At my old school, it was mostly black people, and I didn't speak Spanish much or talk about being Hispanic. I would never deny my heritage, but I just didn't talk about it very much.... At the [current school] it's, like, all Mexicans, so I speak Spanish more and, it's just more Mexicans and Chicanos.

To recognize that Pilar's comment is about *space* and not just about the difference between predominantly Latino/a and predominantly African-Americans' *contexts* requires that one know, for example, that these youth live in a city in which groups of people were, in the city's history, assigned—or “distributed,” in Foucault's (1980) terminology—to live in certain physical spaces, certain geographies (Vargas, 1993). These distributions were not neutral—they were articulated to and reproductive of gendered, classed, raced, and religious positionings within the larger community. Foucault (1980) argues that certain strategies and tactics are employed to distribute different kinds of bodies to different kinds of spaces and that it is no coincidence that those who are marginalized are distributed to spaces with minimal or problematic resources.

These distributions of certain bodies into certain spaces, furthermore, help us understand why other Latino/a youth, 3,000 miles away or 30 miles away, living in different material and social spaces, read and write different texts and identify differently, despite the ethnic roots, social class, generational status, and gendered positions they share with the youth represented in the study described here. In other words, my examination of the relationship between urban space and youth's practices assumes that social, racial, gender, and other differences are articulated in particular ways in particular material and social settings, places, and spaces (Foucault, 1980, 1993; Lefebvre, 1996; Soja, 1993, 1996).

Just as interesting as how youth are positioned and read in different spaces is an analysis of how youth read and position themselves (enact identities) in different spaces. Theories of spatiality are not merely concerned with how larger structures act on people to assign them to spaces or to deny them resources within spaces, but with how people make sense of and act in spaces.

De Certeau's (1993) essay, "Walking in the City," provides an example of an analysis—or more aptly, an experience—of being in and in touch with a city space. De Certeau's interest in his walk was in how he and other people engage with space as they move through. What strategies do people use to control spaces and the other people in them? What tactics do people engage, unconsciously, as they experience a city (or any space)? Orellana and Hernandez's (1999) study of young children walking in and reading the city provides a particularly useful example of the importance of the relationship between literacy practices and space in all its material and physical glory. Their walk with first graders through an urban space yielded few signs of the children reading and engaging with the print of the city until they happened past an area where the print was written at just three to four feet off the ground. Orellana and Hernandez realized, with a jolt, that the children's physical size shaped their access to space and to literate interactions within the space.

My data suggest that the youth with whom I work have many resources from which to choose as they walk, drive, or just live in various urban spaces. The data also demonstrate that regardless of their construction of space and of the ways their bodies are positioned in spaces, different urban spaces offer both possibilities and problems to youth as they try to navigate and make spaces of power for themselves. In the chapter, I illustrate some of the ways that this one small group of youth accessed a variety of spaces—national, discursive, local, and virtual—via a variety of literate, textual, and technological practices that afforded them resources for constructing hybrid identities, while also maintaining ethnic, community, and family affiliations.

About the Larger Study

This paper draws from data collected as part of a seven-year community ethnography and school study (currently in its fourth year) of an urban, predominantly Latino/a community nestled within a large Midwestern city. We draw from theoretical perspectives offered by work in critical cultural studies (Bhabha, 1994; Fiske, 1994), sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), and symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969). We start by defining *community* as a geographic area, but we also ask our participants to define what they count as their communities. Thus, our notion of community includes the intersection of physical, geographic space with qualities of difference such as ethnicity, age, and social class, as well as the young people's cross-national, transnational, popular cultural, youth cultural, and cyberspace relationships.

For the purposes of this chapter, I propose that a *space* can be constituted by an ethnic community; by the city surrounding the community; by a set of

streets, stores, and homes where one lives; by a school building, park, or some other landmark important to the youth; by a country, a home, or a room. Each of these constitutes a space, but each may also be redefined as a *place* within a space. Places may be considered spaces to which people—in this case, the youth of the study—scribe particular meanings and importance. But places are also spaces.

Spaces exist in both hierarchical and dialogical relations with other spaces. For example, a home can be considered a space within a set of other spaces (imagine a set of concentric circles), such as a neighborhood, ethnic community, city, metropolitan area (a city, together with its surrounding suburbs), a country, and so on. But a home can also be a space unto itself, a space that produces or constrains, opens into or shuts out other spaces. A home can double as an ethnic community space, for example, even within a neighborhood that is physically constituted by people of differing ethnic backgrounds. A virtual space can likewise constitute a national space or an affinity group (Gee, 2000/2001) space.

Most relevant to this study are the labels of national space, city space, community space, neighborhood space, home space, bedroom space, suburban space, and virtual space. In the chapter, the *national space* refers to the United States and Mexico (although youth in the larger study claimed affiliation with other Spanish-speaking countries as well). My references to the *city space* include the city limits of a large Midwestern city in which these youth lived. The *community space* in this study is both a geographic and social (ethnic) designation. The community is described as being on particular “side” of the city and is typically referred to as Mexican Town. The community is home to the largest cluster of people of Latino/a origins in the entire urban area (city and surrounding suburbs). The *neighborhood spaces* of the chapter vary depending on the youth and our travels throughout the community space. Typically, however, youth refer to one section of the community as the ethnic center of the community. This area includes their former middle school and two of their current high schools; a third high school is in a nearby neighborhood, but not in what is commonly regarded as the center of their Mexican Town community. *Home spaces* are important because the youth spend a great deal of time in such spaces. The *suburban spaces* are particularly important to this study and include areas outside of the city limits. These suburban spaces are typically racially and ethnically defined as well. And the *virtual space* of this study is, predominantly, the telephone and the Internet. Each provides access to other people, languages, and practices throughout the city and in other countries. Virtual space is, thus, connected in important ways to national and/or ethnic spaces and to affinity group spaces.

Participants

Primary participants in the larger study are seven youth drawn from a larger sample of thirty youth (twenty females and ten males), ages 12–14, who live in different neighborhoods within the community. Their self-identified pseudonyms in the study are Ramiro, Pilar, Viviana, Alexandra, Yolanda, Mario, and James. The youth all live in low-income or working-class homes. I use the words and experiences of these seven youth because I have worked directly with them throughout the study.

Although all thirty youth from the larger sample could identify as Latino/a, they claim different countries as their countries of origin, and they identify in more complex ways than a single term could represent. All but three in the full sample claim some aspect of Mexican ancestry; the others are Puerto Rican and Dominican (the representation in the community is more diverse, however). Among those whose ancestry is Mexican, the youth identify variably as Mexican, Chicano/a, Tejano/a, Mexicano/a, and Mexican American, depending on when and where they were born, and when and where I ask them about their ethnic identities.

Each of the seven youth represented in this chapter identifies as being of Mexican ancestry. Ramiro and Yolanda were born in Mexico and identify as Mexican. Ramiro, however, often comments as he did in a recent interview, “I was born in [a state of Mexico], but then I lived in Mexico City, so I can’t say that I’m from [state of Mexico], and now I’ve lived half of my life in America, so it’s hard to say what I am.” In fact, on one outing at a Mexican restaurant, Ramiro admired a baseball cap worn by a member of the wait staff. The cap sported the city’s baseball team logo (the first letter of the city name), embroidered in the colors of the Mexican flag. “It’s cool,” said Ramiro, “because it’s [city name], but it’s Mexico, too,” thus revealing that space and the texts that represent different spaces mattered, at least in Ramiro’s identity representations.

Three other youth, Pilar, Alexandra, and Viviana were born in the United States to parents who were born in Mexico. Pilar and Alexandra represent themselves most frequently as Chicanas or Tejanas (residents of Texas of Mexican ancestry), citing their origins in Texas whenever they name themselves as Chicanas. They also call themselves Mexican, Latina, and Hispanic. Viviana describes herself simply as Mexican, perhaps because she has lived in her current community for most of her life.

Mario and James, who were both born in the United States to second-generation Mexican immigrants, typically speak of themselves as Mexican Americans, Hispanic, or Latino. Thus, the sample is representative in terms of generational status and identity enactments of the larger sample of youth

who identify as being of Mexican ancestry in this urban area. Latino/as from other Spanish-speaking countries are not represented in this small sample.

As assessed by language of media representations and storefronts, the community identifies using the words *Hispanic*, *Latino*, *Mexican*, and *Spanish* (with the last word used primarily in reference to language). In individual conversations, however, community members (including the youth) are careful to specify their particular Latino/a roots (e.g., Ecuadoran, Mexican, Dominican, Tejano/a). When I write and speak about the community, I most often use the term *Latino/a*, but I also make every attempt to be true to the language of the participants. In this chapter, although I focus on only the participants of Mexican ancestry, readers may see that use different ethnic identifiers as I attempt to be true to the language of the participants.

Participants in the larger study include teachers, parents, and community members. Data drawn from the larger study inform this work in important ways because it is through the entire team's participant observation of the community space and the surrounding city spaces that I have come to understand how people make sense of and are recognized in different spaces. These data include participant observation and interviews at festivals and community events, at an after-school program sponsored by a Latino organization in the community, with prominent Latinas in the community; and at other middle and high schools throughout the community.

All youth participants are bilingual in Spanish and English, although some of the researchers, teachers, and parents are not bilingual in those two languages. Most community leaders are also bilingual in Spanish and English. The research team represents a mix of ethnicities, but only one gender: female. Three Latinas and five European-American women (including me) have routinely collected data across the four-and-a-half-year period. A Latina, a European-American, and an African-American researcher also participate in data analysis. All of the researchers have some facility with more than one language; however, only the five of the researchers are fluent in Spanish and English. I am not fluent in Spanish, although I can follow general streams of conversations and can read the gist of relatively simple texts. The seven young people represented in this paper are patient with my fumbling attempts to speak Spanish and are helping me learn new aspects of Spanish with every interaction.

All participants and place names, except the names of research team members, are represented with pseudonyms.

Data Sources

Data collection methods include (a) participant observation of community and school-classroom interactions recorded in field notes; (b) surveys; (c)

interviews (informal and formal semi-structured, individual and focus group) conducted in various settings around the community and school; (d) the collection of documents, artifacts, and photographs; and (e) walking and driving the city, sometimes to construct maps, other times just to feel or experience the space. Although I have to drive a fair distance to the community from my home and office, I often park a significant distance from my designated target space and walk the space as much as possible. And whenever I can, I (and the other researchers on the team) walk the space with the youth of the study.

Six different researchers observed classrooms for a total of two to three times per week each year, for four years (year four is in progress). We have interviewed all primary participants at least once (interviews are ongoing over the entire course of the study), and seven of the youth have been formally interviewed five or more times each. Ten other youth have been interviewed at least three times outside of the classroom. These interviews and accompanying participant observations are the primary source of data for the chapter.

I typically engage in formal interviews with the youth in settings outside of school (restaurants, shopping malls, movie theaters, homes) and spend between 90 and 150 minutes in each interview. Interview protocols include questions about what the youth do in their free time, how they prepare for and interact in school, and their goals for the future (e.g., “What kind of music do you listen to?” “What kinds of after-school activities do you engage in?” “What do you want to do when you graduate from high school?”). The interviews generally provide occasions for participant observation as well as formal interviewing, and I write field notes to accompany verbatim transcription. I have also asked youth to describe themselves in writing to someone who has never met them. For example, I have asked youth to create identification (ID) necklaces, bumper stickers, and notebook sticker logos that they feel would represent them to others. Finally, the team has surveyed—in a structured response format—the focus participants on their language practices and on how they identify ethnically. We gave the surveys in a focus group interview format, however, so that we could record youth’s interactions as they completed the survey. These data sources provide contextual data for the analyses I present in this chapter.

Data Analysis

The research team uses a variety of analytic methods to interpret the data, including constant comparative, narrative, semiotic, and discourse analyses. In this spatial analysis, I relied most heavily on constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and narrative analysis (Patton, 1990; van Manen,

1990). I read and reread observations, interview transcripts, interview field notes, and artifacts, searching for codes that related to the youth's language, literacy, and identity practices in particular spaces. To examine the interview data more deeply, I drew on discourse analytic methods (e.g., Fairclough, 1992) to look closely at what youth said about themselves and the material spaces they inhabit. I was especially interested in the level of *modality*—that is, how they claimed spaces through “I” statements about themselves and others—in their talk and writing and in whether their modality changed from space to space. I also examined what the youth *foregrounded* and *backgrounded* in their talk and writing, and I looked for evidence of how their embodied practices changed from one space to another.

I also reviewed the narrative analyses (Patton, 1990) that several team members and I had constructed of the youth's interactions, looking for aspects of their identities that were linked to particular space. Then, following van Manen (1990), I constructed narratives of both my individual experiences with walking and driving in the community and my experiences with a small group of youth as we maneuvered various spaces together. I then searched the narratives, which were constructed from field note and interview data, for themes, ultimately turning the themes of the narratives back on the data, searching for further evidence of the themes or for new themes. The themes I analyzed as evident in the narratives of our experiences in the community, city, and neighborhood spaces include (a) othering and being othered, (b) novelty and familiarity, (c) danger and comfort, (d) hybridity and Mexicanness. In my analysis, I fought the temptation to ascribe these seeming binaries to one or another space. Instead, as I generated each theme in my analysis of data and my writing of narratives, I tried to find evidence of these themes in both of the kinds of spaces I examined. I also tried to see how these oppositional experiences lived side by side within each enactment of space. To provide a sense of the larger urban space, I begin with a description of the city and community constructed primarily from the youth's words.

This city, community, and neighborhood is a space on an edge and with an edge. The community is a space that is literally on the edge of river (a major waterway used by heavy industry), an edge of a state, and edge of a country. It is edged by an extensive and predominantly African-American population throughout the rest of the city limits, all which are edged by affluent suburbs inhabited predominantly by people of European-American heritage. One suburb that boasts a significant Arab-American population sits to the immediate west of the youth's community.

The city is a space that is on the edge of transition, with the city's (within city limits) population declining from 1,027,974 in 1990 to approximately

950,000 in the 2000 census (<http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/>, January 2003). If considered as an urban area (metropolitan area, including surrounding suburbs), however, the population remains relatively stable at approximately 4,000,000, suggesting that the city proper continues to diminish as dwellers within the city limits move “out” into surrounding suburbs.

The city also has an edge for the youth who live there. In interviews with all the youth of the larger sample about the concept of community, we heard responses similar to Pilar’s and Mario’s in the following interview exemplar (P = Pilar; M = Mario; E = Elizabeth):

E: If I said what community do you live in, what would you say?

P: ...[the city name] community?

E: Is that what you say, too, Mario?

M: Yeah, it’s true—

P: [The city], where you live....

M: Or Latin community or something

P: Yeah, Latin community. On my street it’s like all kinds of Hispanic people.

There’s only one house with white people.

In the same interview, Pilar later went on to talk about her view of [the city] as a particular kind of space, with Mario challenging her view:

P: I know, we live in [the city].... I like [the city], it’s just like, *ghetto*. But ghetto in a good way.... I don’t mean that.... I don’t know—I like [the city]; it’s cool. It’s one of the worst cities...in the United States.

E: Really?

P: They mention [the city] a lot.

E: In what way would you hear the mention of [the city]?

P: A lot of people dying.

M: The ---- city that doesn’t sleep... [---- represents a descriptive term that would identify the city and therefore cannot be used]

E: When you say “they,” what do you mean?

P: I don’t know, like the news—they say a lot of people died in [the city].... On the Spanish channel.... It’s in Miami... but they mention [the city], like there’s a big fire or house burned down or somebody died.... And I don’t know.

Pilar and Mario’s conversation, which was actually more extensive than this excerpt illustrates, was filled with tensions around the label of their community as “good,” “bad,” or “Latino,” supporting the notion of a city and community on the edge and with an edge.

In contrast to the image offered by Pilar of the city as a “good ghetto” because it offered excitement and notoriety, other youth talked about the city and their surrounding neighborhoods in disparaging terms, citing the same qualities that Pilar cited, but expressing their disgust with or fear of those

qualities of the city and community space. Some of the young women in the larger study, for example, mentioned the abundance of large—and seemingly vicious—dogs that would bark at them from behind chain-link fences as they walked in their neighborhoods. Some noted that men seemed to hang out on street corners. Others mentioned the burned-out houses they would pass on their walks. Similarly, Jaime discussed the community space in less-than-glowing terms when discussing the national census that had recently been conducted (J = Jaime; I = Interviewer):

I: Are there other things that you could see, Jaime, that money, if there was money that came into the community, that it could be used for?

J: Uh-huh, like cleaning up [the city] because you know, you go to [the neighboring suburb], you know you go to other places that are all clean and stuff, but over here it's like, I don't know, more crappy and stuff.

Jaime's comment about the city and its relation to a nearby suburb, which he named specifically, makes visible another edge of the city and community, an edge on the opposite side from the river and nearby nation. The suburbs that edged their community space were ever-present in the talk of these youth, as demonstrated by another comment Ramiro made during a classroom discussion of school funding. Like Jaime, Ramiro indicated his sense of the community and of the city's positioning vis-à-vis the rest of the state, when he raised questions about local school district policies in regard to state budget cuts.

"How come," Ramiro asked in a classroom discussion about teacher layoffs, "There's no problems in the suburbs? Why is it only happening in the public schools? Why is it only happening in [the city]?"

Ramiro's question about the city, posed in contrast to the suburbs, illustrates his awareness of the geopolitical nature of the space in which he lived. He recognized that the suburbs were somehow privileged in relation to his community, his city. In each case, the youth in the study demonstrated their awareness of the space, their sense of it as a Latino/a or Hispanic community space, their varying judgments about the spaces, and their sense of place within the different spaces to which they had access.

Analyzing Spaces, Literacies, and Identities

To document the youth's sense of the various spaces of the city and the places that they constructed for themselves within those spaces, I spent a great deal of time walking and driving with youth. In this next section, I use

some of those interactions in a variety of spaces to analyze how spaces, identity enactments, and literacy practices co-construct one another.

Other than Viviana, who seemed to be engaged on a regular basis in work-related activity, library trips, or special learning experiences (she took drama, art, and dancing classes at the local Hispanic Catholic church program), many of the other youth I worked with directly spent time in different spaces with less structured and adult-mediated activity. On our outings, we typically went to restaurants or to the mall to “mess around,” and on some occasions, we went to movies. On one trip to a movie with Pilar and Mario, I had the opportunity to observe how the youth thought about areas outside of their immediate communities and neighborhoods, which they defined both geographically and ethnically (see their earlier comments).

Neighborhood and Suburban Spaces

We drove from their neighborhood, which does not support any kind of mainstream shopping mall or movie theater, to a neighboring suburb wherein a major shopping mall and multiplex theater can be found. As we moved across what appeared to be invisible boundaries, the two youth talked about the people they saw on the streets, the stores and restaurants they encountered, and the changes in the neighborhoods. On our trips to the mall, when asked about where their community stopped and started, the different youth always marked the two spaces in ethnic terms, usually naming Mexicans in their community and the “Arabs” who lived in the neighboring suburb.

Note this conversation, for example, which occurred while we were moving from their neighborhood to a neighboring suburb:

P: Over by here is like Rainbow, you go into like.... Yeah right there—

M: No.

P: Yeah, it's in the back, it's like on the other side.

E: What are you talking about?

P: A Rainbow store, Rainbow junior, Rainbow kids—

M: And Radio Shack, a dollar store, I think—

P: Radio Shack. There's a good Chinese store where you can buy a whole lot of nice Chinese stuff—

M: And isn't there a Kroger's—

P: No....

M: I thought there was.

E: You guys come down here a lot?

M: No, I just memorized it.

P: That's where I shop.... I used to come here and go to Montgomery Wards. They were cheaper and really nice clothes. It closed down.

E: I know....

P: That's bad—I like Montgomery Wards.

E: I used to go there when I was little. So even though you would, would you count this as part of your community?

P: I don't think so. Are we in [suburb name] yet? Yeah, 'cuz there's like [suburb name] City Hall.

E: Right—

P: I know, we live in [city name].

Pilar's and Mario's familiarity with the retail stores (and restaurants) of this neighboring suburban space underscores an important point about their own neighborhood space. Although they had access to Mexican music, fashion, and groceries in their neighborhood, they did not have access to mainstream fashions (such as were available at Rainbow) and technology and telecommunication supplies (Radio Shack). Nor did they have access to the mainstream music or movies they enjoyed; hence, our trip to another community space.

These youth also talked about their immediate neighborhoods and community spaces in ethnic and racial terms. In this exchange, Pilar, Mario, and I talked about her immediate neighborhood (which was about three miles from the ethnic center as marked by Virnot Street and Mexican Town):

P: My neighbor used to ask me do you know if I can come over there and buy some cigarettes. She smokes and would like call me to tell me to go buy some more cigarettes. I'm like OK. But I don't come no more to [store name].

E: You don't.

P: No, I don't.

E: Why?

P: I don't know, I don't like that store. Too many Arabs....

M: Arabs always own party stores or dollar stores.

P: I know right. Now the Arabic guys are, like you are like, really cute. Brianna used to hang around with Arabs, and she started like going out with white guys, and then Mexican guys, and I was like, what, changing race every year or something? Say yeah.

M: I don't know any Arab guys....

P: You don't—you sure? On this street, oh my god, here, if I could name all the Arab guys, there'd be like at least hundred.

This marking of neighborhoods in ethnic and racial terms was a regular occurrence among the youth. However, what is particularly notable about Pilar's comment is how her access to resources and to relationships in her neighborhood space was constrained by her identification and positioning of non-Mexicans as others. Prior to this comment, Pilar had noted that her neighborhood school was not one at which many Hispanics attended. When in company of other Latino/as, however, Pilar was among the most vocal

youth in terms of self-identification as Mexican and Chicana. She was also most often quoted as stating an explicit preference for Mexican boys. Thus, Pilar's experience of othering and being othered in her home space was strong; her home space put her at the margins of Mexican identity, and she seemed to seek out opportunities to spend time in spaces she defined as Mexican, Latin, or Hispanic.

Suburban Spaces (Malls and Movie Theaters)

On three other occasions, which included Pilar, Alexandra, Yolanda, Mario, Ramiro, and James (all of whom identified as Mexican, Mexican American, and/or Chicano), we went to a large shopping mall in the same neighboring suburb. On these outings, we would shop (or just walk around), take in a movie, or eat at a mall restaurant, depending on how much time we had on each outing. On one occasion, we headed first to buy batteries and bandages (I needed the batteries, and James needed a bandage for a chin wound he had suffered while riding his bicycle around his neighborhood). Our mission completed, we engaged in a more aimless wandering, stopping to look at the Guess clothing store, at a shop that sold Tommy Hilfiger and other popular brands, at a music shop where the youth looked for CDs by the rapper Tupac, and we skittered by a woman's lingerie shop with much snickering, whispering, and shoving.

As we wandered, I could not help but notice the responses of other mall patrons. Several people gave us a wide berth, often looking back over their shoulders as we passed by. Others—usually middle-aged women—would catch my eye and shake their heads with amused smiles, as if to express sympathy for my plight of having to shepherd four teens around the mall. Others looked at us curiously, wondering, perhaps, what a white woman was doing with four dark-skinned youth, all about the same age, some of them dressed in the popular baggy pants and oversized shirts often associated with street gangs and skaters (skateboarders). It is worth noting that I did not observe similar responses from passersby when I was walking the city (or mall) with just one youth. Viviana and I, for example, made two different trips to the same shopping mall, and I did not observe people looking askance at us as we roamed, rather aimlessly, from store to store. In other words, the number of young people in the group appeared to make a difference in how others positioned the youth and me in the mall space (in contrast to walks with the same number of youth on a Mexican Town street). Perhaps the number suggested a “pack”; perhaps our leisurely pace (a stroll) throughout the particular space (a mall) suggested idle—and therefore suspect—behavior. The youth, meanwhile, were making their own judgments about passersby, commenting on people's clothing and physical appearance.

On one of our visits, Ramiro, James, Mario, Pilar, and I had lunch at an Italian restaurant in the mall. The youth were dismayed (and disgusted?) at my willingness to slather bread with the roasted garlic the restaurant served, and they each opted for a “normal” meal of pizza. Most noteworthy, however, was the waitress’s reward to us at the end of the lunch. Commenting that the youth were “the nicest kids she had waited on in a long time,” she brought them each a complimentary dish of ice cream. I found myself wondering what was the behavior of other youth who frequented the restaurant, as well as wondering what she had been thinking when we had initially been seated in her section.

The mall thus seemed to be a space for othering and being othered, a space in which identities and behaviors were subject to scrutiny, but also a place in which multiple performances of identity were possible, and “nice” ones were rewarded. The mall’s selection of goods and services, however, constrained the enactment of Mexicanness and seemed to promote the youth’s attention to broader popular cultural texts, such as the Tupac albums they sought in the mall, compared to the Intocables (a Mexican music group) albums they sought whenever we went walking in their local community. At the risk of seeming to reduce the youth’s ethnic identity enactments to particular spaces, I will argue that the mainstream space of the mall evoked more hybrid and sometimes mainstream identity enactments; I heard less Spanish spoken while we were in the mall, and I saw less attention to Mexican or Latino/a texts (i.e., music, books, T-shirts with Mexican slogans), although they often wore such texts on their bodies (Atzlán [borderlands], Brown Pride, and lowrider T-shirts, for example).

It might be argued that it is not surprising that the youth did not look for items such as Mexican T-shirts or music when they knew none would be available. That seemingly obvious conclusion is, however, one that is often overlooked: The access the youth had to particular kinds of space—most often to their ethnic community space—shaped the texts they consumed and produced, which in turn shaped the ways they chose to identify and were identified. The multiple spaces of their lives conjured up or enabled multiple ways of being, multiple tools—identity kits, in Gee’s (1996) parlance—for enacting those ways of being, and, ultimately, multiple identities to be enacted. Whereas mall walking gave lessons in how to be mainstream, walking Virnot Street—one of the central neighborhood streets—provided the youths with ways of being Latino/a, and Mexican, in particular.

Neighborhood Spaces

On one such stroll down Virnot Street, Alexandra, Pilar, and I shopped at a series of stores that sold everything from blankets to clothing to tapes and

CDs. As we stood outside one shop window, I asked the young women about several T-shirts on display, all of which represented Mexican or Chicano/a themes.

E: Why do I always see the eagle with the snake in its talons?

P: Oh, that's a Mexican symbol, a story about an eagle.... I don't know really, but it means it's Mexican.

E: It's like a legend, or something?

P: Yeah.

E: What's the car for on this one?

A: Oh, that's a lowrider, you know, those are cars that Mexicans really like.

Pilar and Alexandra spoke often of their desire to spend time in public spaces at the center of their community. The young women's sense of these spaces is illustrated in the following conversation, initiated as we were headed out of school after a half day, on our way to meet Yolanda at her aunt's restaurant in a neighborhood different from their own. We were just pulling out of the parking lot when Pilar started the conversation:

P: The bad thing about kind of like going to Yolanda's aunt's restaurant is like, is that like, we don't get to go on Virnot—

A: Yeah, because it would kind of be better to like go on Virnot Street.

E: Why would it be better to go here?

P: Because it's like Friday afternoon and everyone's there—

A: All the guys... But Pablo works at Yolanda's restaurant—

P: I don't even know if he was in there last time, but there wasn't very much guys there.

E: Ah, right—

P: It's just like we're like at a family place [at Yolanda's].

E: Well, you know—

P: I mean, it's cool....

E: Maybe we can go to Virnot next time.

As Pilar and Alexandra demonstrate in their talk about different spaces of their everyday lives, space matters, not just for the physical environment it provides (although that is part of the excitement and possibility of Virnot Street), but also in terms of the meanings, relationships, and identities to be made in these spaces. What is particularly important about the sense of the "Virnot Street space" experienced by these young people is not only their interest in seeing and perhaps meeting other people, but also the knowledge that these spaces provide them with opportunities to build, maintain, or reconstruct ethnic identities. Virnot Street, for example, runs through the center of the community which the youth in our study have identified as "the Latin community" (among other labels). The ethnic relations available in the

space of Virnot Street are important because the space could give these young women access to the kind of men—Mexican men—with whom they want to build relationships, a desire expressed countless times by several of these Latina youth in interviews (e.g., “I only like Mexican boys, Elizabeth.” Pilar, interview, 2003).

Although Yolanda’s family’s restaurant (to which we were headed on the occasion of the interview) is a Mexican restaurant, it is situated in a mixed ethnic community and located on a busy, divided highway. Virnot Street is also a busy street, but it is a two-lane street with sidewalks on which the young women could walk, could perform, and could connect with other Mexicans. The speed limit on Virnot Street is lower than it is on the other restaurant’s street. The shops and stores that line Virnot Street are typically owned and patronized by Latino/as, and the items displayed in the windows have particular meaning and appeal for these young Latinas. What’s more, on every occasion that we have walked Virnot Street, we have seen someone we know. On one occasion with Alexandra and Pilar, occupants of a car that passed us by turned around to come back to talk with us:

A: Hey, Ramiro! That was Ramiro!

E: It was? Where? [I turn in all directions, confused.]

P: Oh, great. [Ramiro and Pilar had recently experienced some difficulties in their friendship.]

A: Miss Elizabeth, they’re coming back!

E: Oh, my gosh, they are.

The driver of the car has made a U-turn in the middle of Virnot Street, and I can see the car headed back toward us. We wait for the car to pull to the side, Pilar hanging back, reticent to engage in conversation with Ramiro. As I look—admittedly with some apprehension—into the front seat, I see, to my surprise (and relief), Mario’s mother driving the car. She pulls to the side of the street, and she and I chat as Alexandra talks to Mario and Ramiro. Pilar hangs back on the sidewalk. Mrs. C. tells me that they are coming from school, where Mario has joined the school band. I talk briefly to Mario and Ramiro; Pilar says nothing. Mario and I, at his mother’s urging, exchange cell phone numbers, and they drive off, making another U-turn to return to their original destination.

It was clear from this interaction, as well as from a number of other walks and drives down Virnot Street, that Virnot was a space of comfort and familiarity. On our walks and drives, the youth often recognized people passing by, including their own parents and other relatives. And, as illustrated in the above exemplar, Virnot Street was a space where people met and stopped to talk, even changing direction to interact with one another. At

the same time, Virnot was an exciting space for these young women, a space to see and be seen by young men. Despite Pilar's discomfort with seeing Ramiro, both Pilar and Alexandra engaged with the space of Virnot Street with excitement and familiarity, risk and comfort, all occurring simultaneously. It was also a space to be Mexican, Chicano/a, or Latino/a.

When asked to describe herself in writing, Pilar produced a text that underscores the relationship between identity and physical and social space (spelling, punctuation, capitalization intact; emphasis mine):

I'm Mexican, well acutualy CHICANA I was born in Dallas Texas. I'm dark skined have long straight hair that's dark brown. To me I think I'm an intelligente person I love to go out to partys The thing I most look forward to is my quinciniñera.. I'm funny very outgoing and express my opinions to me that importants another thing is that I would like to go pimpin down virnot.

In this identity artifact, Pilar explicitly linked her ethnic identity to what she labeled (through the use of the word "pimpin") a playful and potentially sexualized space of Virnot Street. Thus, Virnot Street, like the Mexican festival at Hale Plaza or the Cinco de Mayo festival in Clare Park, is a physical and social space wherein Pilar's Chicana-ness (both a gendered and politicized identity, one that is rendered visible in this writing through her reference to another space, her Texas birthplace) is read as valuable and desirable, as are the color of her skin, the shape of her body, and the language she speaks. In these physical spaces in which identities are made, reproduced, and enacted from the physical and social resources provided in the space.

It is important to note, however, that these spaces (from Virnot to the suburban mall, from homes in the city to homes in Mexico or the suburbs) were never discrete or isolated from one another, and thus, the youth's identities are not constructed or enacted as wholly separate identities. The youth is not one person in one space and a completely different person in a different space. As mentioned above, even in the mainstream mall space, where Mexicanness was not highlighted, the youth wore clothing such as Atzlán T-shirts that signaled their borderlands identities, and they brought physical markers (or nature identities [Gee, 2000/2001]) that required an integration of Mexicanness with mainstream identities. Each space was, then, a space in which hybridity was built, a space that offered a variety of texts (including conventional written texts such as magazines, menus, and newspapers, the texts of T-shirts and hats, and the texts of CDs, posters, and movies) in which the youth engaged with comfort and risk, familiarity and novelty, and became simultaneously more Mexican, more mainstream, and more hybrid.

These physical neighborhood and community spaces within the city space provided resources for the development of both rich ethnic identities (see Moje et al., 2002; Young, Dillon, & Moje, 2002) and strategic and hybrid identities (Moje et al., 2002). Strong ethnic identities were enhanced by the youth's everyday interactions with many other Mexicans, with written and oral texts produced in Spanish, and with Mexican and other Latino/a customs, traditions, and practices. Hybrid identities were simultaneously constructed as youth accessed texts in a variety of languages, as they crossed community spaces and encountered people of ethnic groups other than their own, as they purchased mainstream "American" texts and clothing, and as they engaged with television, radio, and other media that presented a variety of customs, traditions, and cultural practices. Virtual spaces enabled the development of both ethnic and hybrid identities.

Virtual (Internet) Spaces

One virtual space site, for example, titled "[city name]raza.com," (*raza* is the Spanish word for *race*) is dedicated to providing community resources to Latino/as (bringing Latino/as who were physically distributed across the city space together into a virtual Latino/a community) and to maintaining an awareness of and pride in their Mexican *race* (despite the fact that "race" is not a term used to define Mexicans or Latino/as, in general, on the U.S. census or in other mainstream texts). Other uses of the Internet involved connecting to chat rooms to practice Spanish or searching for sites that illustrated Aztec art and drawing techniques (see Moje et al., 2002) and searching the Internet for information about Latino/a street gangs, as Alexandra described during one interview:

A: Oh, I went to... member directory, right?

E: Of what, what member directory?

A: AOL. And I typed in where it said key word, I typed in "Sureño." It gave me every email of every Sureño on there.

E: Oh my gosh.

Y: How do you do the "ñ"?

A: Alt, Alt 164.

In what may seem to be a trivial observation and interpretation, I was immediately fascinated by Alexandra's knowledge of how to produce an "ñ," which was, for me, a laborious learning process, for which I still struggle to remember the shortcut keys. That Alexandra had learned the keyboard shortcuts signals her facility with the literacy skills necessary to navigate the electronic medium (as does her navigation of the member directory and other tools), as well as her motivation to learn those skills in order to connect

with a broader space occupied by both Latino/as and street gang members worldwide.

In addition, Pilar and Alexandra developed a joint unique name that identified them as lovers of Latin men and music, a way of signaling to other Latino/as (they actually wanted Chicana in their unique name, but the combination they proposed was already taken) their identities and a way of building relationships across spaces. The fact that the unique name they desired was already taken was also an important aspect of building that space: Others who shared their interests and their ethnicities existed in virtual space.

While the young women in this sample were searching the Internet for information and conversations about music and gangs, the young men were reading texts on cars, lowriders especially. The website www.lowrider.com is a popular virtual space that reflects and shapes ethnic as well as affinity group and familial identities as young Latinos interact with their elders (fathers, brothers, and uncles) around the care and maintenance of lowriders. These young men also named virtual spaces such as www.thefastandthefurious.com (a site devoted to information on a popular movie about, among other things, cars) and www.speedlogic.com, which they described as a site devoted to imported cars.

Each of these virtual spaces provided the youth with access to other people and a wide variety of texts, and although their access of virtual spaces, texts, and people seemed weighted toward Latino/a texts, they also gained information about and engaged in communication with people and texts from a wide variety of sources. As Ramiro remarked in one interview with Pilar and me:

- R: Technology is making you more lazy and stuff....
 E: Really?
 R: Yeah, 'cause like in the old times you used to change the TV with your hands and you'd be sitting down—
 P: Next thing [you just push a remote]—
 R: Or if you wanted to order a movie, just push a button.
 E: Some people say, though, that because we don't have to do all that physical stuff we can think more, think faster. We have more time to do other things—
 R: But still it helps you think more, you need to learn all the things you have to do with the remote.... *My grandpa and my grandmother from Mexico said they were amazed when they saw that I was on the computer with somebody in France. They were saying that when they were young they were thinking that was ever going to be possible because that was like a fantasy but now that it's coming true....*

Ramiro's linking of technology and the ability to cross space virtually to the ability to expand our access to physical space in the future exemplifies the

youth's sense that, via virtual space and technological innovation, they were linking to and constructing new communities, spaces, and, potentially, texts and identities.

Does Space Matter? Conclusions about Youth, Literacy, and Space

It seems that space does matter, especially for how people represent themselves. As in the example of my own identity enactments in the different spatial arrangements of meetings I attend, these youth enacted different identities and were differently positioned in different spaces. Perhaps more important, the youth had access to different material, textual, discursive, and human resources in different spaces. As they read menus in restaurants, for example, they encountered particular kinds of information, particular languages, and particular representations of people and cultures. As they looked through music texts of stores in different spaces, they saw particular kinds of music, certain colors of skin, and certain languages, depending on the space. The space of mainstream malls provided them with, perhaps, more possibilities for building hybrid identities, but they carried markers of their ethnic identities with them into those mainstream spaces, and they carried the globalized and hybridized identities into their ethnically constructed neighborhoods via dress, music, oral language, and print texts.

No matter the space, ethnic identity was particularly salient for this group of young people. All of their conversations, even when engaged in suburban spaces with mainstream texts, involved some sort of ethnic or racial labeling. Even the mainstream music texts they listened to were inscribed with race and ethnicity. Although they chose mainstream gangster rap when at the mall (as opposed to the Mexican CDs they perused in shops on Virnot Street), the youth identified the music with an explicit eye toward the race and ethnicity of the performers. Their choices were shaped by the spaces they inhabited, but the ethnic community space of their lives remained dominant in their textual choices and literacy practices. The books I saw the youth read outside of school were books about Latino/as, the newspapers that dominated their reading were papers produced within and for their ethnic community space, and the Internet sites they frequented were ones that foregrounded Latino/as.

Thus, space did matter to these youth and to their literacy and identity practices. The historical distribution of Latino/a bodies into their neighborhood or community space contributed to their strong Mexican identification. Their neighborhood-community edging of a predominantly African-American city population, a predominantly Arab-American suburban com-

munity, and several, more distant and predominantly European-American suburban communities contributed to their deeply ethnic identification. Finally, their lack of mobility, due in part to their age and in part to the poor mass transit of the city space, shaped the material, human, and textual resources to which they had access (Moje et al., 2002). Their turn to virtual spaces mitigates some of the physical or geographic segregation they experience, but, again, their access to virtual spaces is constrained by their access to computer hardware and to adequate telecommunications systems for using their hardware to obtain Internet access.

That said, although these youth are relatively isolated beings, limited for now to accessing particular physical spaces and, on some occasion, virtual spaces, they are also constructing strong, but hybrid, ethnic identities that draw increasingly from multiple texts of multiple spaces. As they grow older and more mobile, they will continue to consume and produce texts of different spaces. They will use the texts—whether websites or ball caps, music lyrics or written essays—to build identities and relationships that maintain strong ethnic, cultural, and familial relationships and claim new spaces. And this is where schools can come in. Rather than attempting to restrict the space to which youth have access, educators and schools should provide young people with opportunities to learn to navigate these spaces both strategically and tactically (see Lankshear and Knobel, 2002) and to help them build portfolios that allow them to access other spaces (Gee, 2002). The more we know about the literacies and identities of the multiple spaces of youth's lives, the better chance we have to develop curricula and pedagogy that work within their life spaces, rather than against them.

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