

The Enacted Environment:

The Creation of "Place" by Mexicans and Mexican Americans in
East Los Angeles

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James Thomas Rojas

Submitted to the Department of Architecture on May 10, 1991
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degrees of Masters of City Planning and
Masters of Science of Architecture Studies

ABSTRACT

In this thesis I will examine how residents of East Los Angeles use their front yards and streets to create a sense of "place." The environment created in this way I call "enacted." People are both users and creators of a place and thus become "texture" in the urban landscape. People activate environments merely by their presence. People enact place because of use and social interactions, contrary to the belief of architects that peoples' lives neatly revolve around functions of physical form.

There are many different approaches to understanding physical environments and social characteristics of people, but very few deal with "enacted environments." The sociologist examines peoples' behavior. The urban planner analyzes numbers. The anthropologist examines artifacts while movie directors and writers recreate the "feeling" of a place by combining peoples' lives with the physical form. All are excellent in understanding a specific dimension of a place. However, in comprehending the complexities of the enacted environment one needs to rely on all these disciplines.

Those who "enacted" in East Los Angeles are Mexican and Mexican American. By the year 2010 it is estimated that the Latino population will be 40% of the total population of Southern California. By understanding the transformations of the physical form and social relations in Latino neighborhoods, I can develop a framework of what is taking place so that this thesis can serve as an aid to better understand the "Mexicanization" of space in the suburbs of Los Angeles, but this methodology can also be used in understanding other "enacted environments" in the urban landscape.

Thesis Supervisor: Sandra C. Howell
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*Dedicated to my grandmother and
the residents of East Los Angeles*

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Most of the credit goes to Jose Resendez and family, Easter Celiz and family and the residents of East Los Angeles, especially Rowan Avenue, Burma Road, and Hendricks Avenue, past and present, who I interview, as well as the many residents I did not know, but who provided me with valuable knowledge, just from being there.

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*No longer Mexico, not yet America, for a fleeting moment of a generation
or two, springs an unheard and unknown magic in the streets of
East Los Angeles.*

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Prologue: Growing up in East Los Angeles



Growing up in East Los Angeles

My image of home is the street I grew up in rather than the actual house. Home life was bleak and indifferent compared to the excitement and fascination I had with the street. I felt sorry for my shy sister, because she preferred to read books rather than be outside playing with other children, which caused my father to make fun of her. My brother and I never had this problem and always had the streets as our second home, like my parents as well as most children in East Los Angeles at that time.

Starting at age 3, like most children on my block, I set out on my small tricycle to explore my immediate environment from a very low perspective. Because of my small size, I knew every crack and construction stamp on the sidewalk, as well as the direction the water flowed in the sewer which I would spend hours trying to damp up with leaves and mud. Intuitively, I began to understand the relationship between me and the street by observing carefully what was around me. My street was a typical residential block in the area, but it had a unique physical and social character that I have recently reexamined.

"Hendricks *Mada*" is the name we children coined for the street because to us it had special meaning. The street ran one block from a major commercial artery to a dead end where a factory and power lines were located. Unlike most dead end streets, it did not have a cul-de-sac and its narrow width made it difficult for cars to maneuver out. Its location and great length caused many drivers to speed and crash into the factory fence at night, which always created an unexpected, exciting scene where everyone would gather in their bed clothes.

All of the homes on the street were small single family homes and duplexes that rarely exceeded two bedrooms. Most were "cracker box style" built in the thirties and forties with a few homes built at later dates. These wood frame, bungalow homes were built on very narrow deep lots with small front yards and deep back yards. Very few houses had basements, and were mainly slab foundations, which gave them a very low profile. The semi-seclusion and small scale of the physical environment of the street give it a sense of place and very intimate character that children could relate to easily, much like Disneyland.

In 1963 when we moved in, the residents consisted mostly of older white couples and a few Mexican/American families. White houses with pristine yards created a sense of order to the neighborhood, except for some of the Mexican households whose front yards were not as pristine as the rest or had fences around them. Initially, I thought the neighborhood was unfriendly, partly because I was new and I did not understand the

different Anglo culture. We moved from a neighborhood in which many of our extended family were neighbors or lived in the immediate area.

Many of the elderly households did not have children and always had their doors closed which focused inward and seemed very mysterious to me.. I could never figure out what was going on inside, and it really bothered me coming from a expressive household. In the old neighborhood people would often get mad at each other: my father and mother, my father and grandmother, my grandmother and great grandmother. As a child I learned how to take sides, maneuver in this situation and more importantly knew how people felt about me.

Within a few years after moving to Hendricks, a large number of Mexican families moved in. Mexican immigrants moved in along with the Mexican/American families. Spanish was spoken in most households while a mixture of English and Spanish was spoken on the streets, making it easier for Mexican children to assimilate to the new environment. It always amazed me how small children learned English in a matter of months on the street. Though each group had very distinct values, on the street all children shared a common ground that brought us together.

Mexican families ranged in size from one to fourteen children. The Estrada family was the biggest with fourteen children, followed by the Beltrans with ten and down the line. The average number of children per household was between three and four. Most of the children were close in age, so generally everyone knew each other and occasionally we all played together. We would boast who had the biggest family and could name all the names in order, as well as argue whose family and father could win at beating up each other. My father was small so I always had to replace him with my big uncle. The size and the physical power of the family were important to us at this early age, making us feel sorry for the small families with one or two children because we thought they were vulnerable and lonely.

This increase in children greatly changed the quiet and orderly residential streetscape. We would yell and scream down the street as we trampled over the once pristine lawns by foot and by bikes, like herds of wild buffalo. Fences went up around the front lawn as soon as families moved in to keep us out and police the toddlers, and the dogs which would escape and raise havoc on the streets by running after cars, fighting amongst each other and knocking down trash cans.

During this time the adult world was in the house and our realm was outside, for good reason. Rarely did I ever go inside homes of my friends. Most of the bedrooms were small, cramped quarters dominated by beds everywhere. Most of us slept three to five per room. In many cases boys slept in the garage and girls slept in the house. Living

rooms were show cases of plastic covered furniture with “beautiful little things” everywhere.

The home was the center of power in the family which outsiders rarely entered. The home was the territory of the mother. From here she watched over as well as brought up the children. Depending if the family was Mexican or Mexican American, the role of the mother were very different. Most Mexican wives did not drive, while most Mexican Americans did. Depending on family size and economic necessity the mothers did not work in general. The kitchens, in most of the homes, were enlarged because so much activity took place around eating. Most fathers worked hard and were seen in the evening hours. Men were the bread winners and their place was either inside watching TV or in the front yard watering or puttering around.

Although we had backyards, we rarely played in them because of their seclusion and upkeep condition. They usually ended up the territory for the unfriendly family dog. The street was accessible by all any time of the day. The asphalt provided an ideal surface for riding our bikes, bouncing balls and other games. It was a stimulating space where everyone on the block gathered and depending on the age "took control" of certain localities on the street. Girls tended to play on the front porches and lawns taking care of the toddlers. Boys played touch football and other group contact games on the street. People walking, talking, watering their grass or fixing their cars made this the place to be and be seen. Fixed up low riders would cruise by with their music blaring and the ice cream man with his goofy tunes added to the stimulation. Like a plaza, the street acted as a focus in our everyday life where we would gather daily because we were a part of something big and dynamic that allowed us to forget our problems of home and school.

Alcoholism, drugs, unemployment and other problems plagued many of the families. David's landlord would occasionally remove the front and backdoor from his house because his father would drink the rent money. Leslie's mother was always drunk and beating up her and her brother. The family next door were always smoking and selling pot and causing trouble that only the police could control. Veto's father burned down their house while he was drunk and smoking in bed. Teenage boys were always being arrested for different crimes. No one's family was free of problems, however these problem belonged in the house with the adults and not on the street with us children.

After a confusing day at school, we would hit the street where the abstract concepts of the days lecture did not apply. The street offered us a real place with real experiences that we could touch and feel. Unlike school, where cliques were made according to popularity, sports, grades and intelligences, the competitive edge did not exist here and no one was ever judged by any type of criteria. On the contrary, in this casual and informal

setting we really got to know each other and appreciated each other no matter who we were. Every one who wanted to play was always included in the games like hide-and-go-seek and kick-the-can.

Five to seven of us would gather daily after school to play or hang out and discuss the events of the street. Everyone's business was our business We knew who was moving in or out, received new toys and what was going on in our families. We knew who received visitors and who they were. Since many of our mothers were busy in the house, we would relay the information to them.

Like the old show, the "Little Rascals", we did everything in large groups of five or more because older children were obliged to take care of the younger ones and there was also safety in numbers. Most of our parents were too busy to take us out so we did everything with our friends. We would walk to the store or the swimming pool as well as the movies. One Saturday afternoon a group of us walked to the movies in an unsafe part of town, to see "Chitty-Chitty Bang-Bang". We liked the movie so much we stood to watch it again and again. and returned home very late only to all be punished.

Playing on the street was fun and dangerous because we had to dodge cars, but no one seemed to mind. At 4 o'clock the factory down the street would close for the day and a whole procession of cars would stream down the street for what seemed to be a long time. By this time you knew it was time to go home and eat. Mothers would yell at the top of their lungs down the street to call us in, while fathers would pull their cars into the driveways, coming from work. I knew the cars and the time all my friends' parents came home from work. Little by little we would withdraw to eat dinner and meet later on.

After dinner, around 6 or 7 o'clock during most of the year, the street really came to life. Mothers hovered over fences gossiping and every front door in the neighborhood was wide open. The flickering light of the T.V. set highlighted fathers drinking beer in their living rooms and relaxing. Made up teenage girls would appear miraculously in the evening hours only to walk down the street a couple of times and act silly.

During the late afternoon and early evenings, especially on Friday and Saturday the energy and excitement level on the street was high. As children we did not understand what was going on till much later in our lives, but we knew it was big and wanted to be part of it. Adults dressed up in all their finery to go out on the town and party. Even if the house looked a little shabby, people were always aware of how they looked and wore the latest fashions. In my mothers case, she would make the clothes herself or shop at K-Mart. I remember one night my mother went out to a party wearing "Hot Pants" and guys were whistling at her. I felt really embarrassed.

Partying was a big part of life on the street every weekend. From baptisms to weddings there was always a reason to celebrate and "get out of control." Driveways turned into dance floors for parties that lasted till 4 or 5 in the morning. My parents were always their happiest at these wee morning hours dancing swing to old Joe Houston 78's and reminiscing about the "good old days" in the barrio.

I wanted to be a *pachoco* (gang member) like my father. I envied the world they once belonged too. Their East Los Angeles was a social circus where everyone cool somehow knew each other. They talked about people I never knew and places that were no longer there and exciting stories about street life.

Week nights, as little children were put in bed, the streets belonged to the boys. We would sit on the curbs under the street lights and talk for hours, telling spooky stories. The quiet, still air of the night made the street so vulnerable, mysterious and exciting. Darkness was the time when crazy events would happen that nobody ever new about on the block, like graffiti scribbled on a wall or a dent on a car. This was a different image of the street.

We survived collectively, but very much retained our personal identities that allowed us to do what ever we wanted in the streets. Life on the street may look very chaotic, but to us this was our order, since we always expected it. We always found fun, adventure and comfort, away from our homes. I do not know how different my experiences on the street were from other children in East Los Angles, but I do know that many streets were similar in their liveliness.

The streets of East Los Angeles taught me how to appreciate and learn from other people. Because of the nebulous nature of the street, I learned how to live in a world of uncertainties.

Returning to East Los Angeles is always a reflective and sentimental time for me, because I find myself coming back to all those good and bad memories that played a crucial role on the development of my life. This thesis will allow me to explore these memories and sort out the realities of "life" in East Los Angeles. This study will enable me to understand my strongly influential Latino upbringing which has given me a very unique perspective as an American, yet has created many uncertainties I have about myself being an American: concerns that one has when they are living in and between two cultures. Hopefully through this thesis I can better understand myself, my uncertainties and the relationship my Mexican culture has with the American mainstream.

Introduction: The Enacted Environment
Architects & the Enacted Environment
Me & the Enacted Environment
East Los Angeles & the Enacted Environment



The Enacted Environment

In this thesis I will examine how residents of East Los Angeles use their front yards and streets to create a sense of "place." The identity of a place is not only created by the physical forms but by the way inhabitants use exterior space around buildings. This environment is "enacted." Exterior space provides a background for people to manipulate as they please and to act in, much like a movie setting. To understand the enacted environment one must examine people as users and creators of a place through their behavior patterns which are affected by culture, space and time. This study will demonstrate and attempt to understand the enacted environment, by showing how the Mexican and Mexican Americans use and create the identity of "place".

A house in East Los Angeles generally resembles any other house in Los Angeles. However the tremendous difference in the appearance of the community is formed by the residents use of space around the house. By working, playing, and "hanging out" in these outdoor spaces, their presence creates a spontaneous, dynamic and animated urban landscape which is unlike any other in Los Angeles. The streets, front yards, driveways, and other spaces around homes bring residents together in East Los Angeles, while in other communities these same spaces isolate residents. The identity of place in East Los Angeles is created through the culturally related behavior patterns of the residents, rather than the physical form.

The character of many residential streets, on the other hand, is generated by physical form and to a limited extent by the inactive environment. Commonwealth Avenue in Boston is an example of such a street. The design of the street reflected the spaciousness of Baron Haussmann's Paris boulevard.¹ However, the architects of Commonwealth Avenue failed to reproduce the enacted environment of Parisian streets. "The sixteen-foot wide alleys behind the residences serve the purpose of separating commercial and passenger vehicles and pedestrians. These alleys also brought the butcher, the baker and the grocer to each door every morning, which accounted for the lack of shops in the area."²

In Paris these commercial uses, and people they generate, are an integral contribution to the "enacted environment. The cafes and shops, that line the boulevards

¹Whitehall, Muir, quote taken from, Lewis Mumford, Back Bay Boston: The City as a Work of Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1969, p. 86

² Mumford, Lewis, Back Bay Boston: The City as a Work of Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1969, p. 20

anchor people in the enacted environment. Commonwealth Avenue lacks this enacted zone. One can experience the majestic architecture of the place with or without people.

Architects & the "Enacted Environment"

Architects have missed the role of people in creating a "place" because they are trained to look at people as users of space. Most architects elaborate in great detail on how people use a space, and rarely discuss how people activate and embellish the space. People are both users and creators of a place and thus become the "texture" of the urban landscape. People activate settings merely by their presence. Their bodies, faces and movements create an energy that is almost a metaphysical aesthetic, because the central core of the enacted environment is motion.³ Human movement creates a dynamic, exciting and personal place that no stone, glass or wood facade can ever reproduce.

Architects are trained to design interior not exterior spaces. Therefore architects have little understanding of exterior spaces. Instead architects concentrate their energies on interior space and approach exterior space as foreground in highlighting the two dimensional facade. The facade of a building says very little about the identity of a place. People, can and have adapted to any building type but they cannot adapt to any societal type of behavior and cultural norms. Buildings in Boston's Chinatown resemble other buildings in Boston. However, Chinatown is separated from other parts of Boston by the the behavior patterns of the Chinese residents which takes place in the space in between buildings. The behavior patterns of people cannot be totally created and manipulated by the built form.

Where architects do note the role of human activity in defining place, they tend to attribute it to the built form. The physical form of the Italian piazza has been studied, copied, and "idealized" by architects because of the human activity it produces. Architects reproduce, in new settings, the enclosed spaces of the Italian piazza, believing this is the essential element in environments that create human activity. Enclosed space may define and create public, open space, but it does not enact the place. People enact it.

People enact place because of use and social interactions, contrary to beliefs of architects that peoples' lives neatly revolve around the functions of physical form. Most architects and urban designers use physical form as an important part of the urban fabric, thinking this element centers the users' lives. The physical form locates peoples' lives.

³ Rose, Dan, Black Amerian Street Life, University of Pennsylvania, 1987. p. 173

However, people live their lives by uses and social interactions that are overlaid over the physical form, which is more important to the residents on a daily bases.

The Italian piazza illustrates a well-orchestrated physical form that is designed for the needs of the users, who enhance the form. This situation creates an ideal, comprehensible enacted environment for most architects. The enacted environment of East Los Angeles illustrates a space not designed for the users. The residents, however, manipulate the space to create their "ideal" enacted environment.

Me & the Enacted Environment

The idea of the enacted environment is an accumulation of my past experiences and observations. Growing up in East Los Angeles set the foundation for recognizing the enacted environment because these experiences gave me an insight on how to view and understand the world around me. Moving away from East Los Angeles, to a larger house in a "mixed" Anglo and Mexican neighborhood was the first time I noticed how different people used space. In this new neighborhood people no longer "hung-out" outside. Therefore we stood indoors and in the back yard and rarely talked to the neighbors. However, I did not miss East Los Angeles because I had a car so I still could be "socially connected" there.

Joining the U.S. Army, after college, I was stationed in Germany and Italy, for three and a half years, which made me rethink the enacted environment. I had more time than the typical vacationer who goes through Europe quickly. Living in Heidelberg and Vicenza gave me an in-depth chance to examine physical structure and get to know the inhabitants and how they used the environment. Each country has an enacted environment in which I was able to participate. Running from shop to shop on chilly German mornings was as much as an enactment as the warm evening "passeggiata" in Italy. The physical forms of both countries, such as the "platz" and "piazza," are vaguely similar but the rhythms of people and use of the space separated them.

To what extent are the differences in behavior patterns between Germans and Italians, is not clear. However, they do make a impact in the enacted environment. Americans flock to Italian cafes and architects romanticize about Italian public life and not about German cafes and public life. For the Americans and architects the perception of public life has become synonymous with Italy. All other forms become difficult to comprehend.

Italians embellish the existing architecture while the Mexicans in East Los Angeles create it. However, what contrasts the two places is what we perceive as being "correct behavior." In Italy we expect Italians outside; in this country when residents hang-out in

spaces not designed for this, it's considered "deviant" behavior, by the local police and American society at large.

Vicenza and East Los Angeles illustrate two different urban forms, one designed for public social interaction and the other one being retrofitted by the residents to allow for and enhance this type of behavior. This is not a comparison of Mexicans and Italians but of the production of the enacted environment. Both share in the importance to be around others, which is expressed in the congregating of people on a daily basis. This "knowing when to congregate" of the inhabitants is out of utility and entertainment. In Italy the entertaining is done in the piazza, while in East Los Angeles it is done on street corners, front yards, etc.

Coming back from Europe, I had a new interest in studying city planning. However I find in city planning that there is a misunderstanding of enacted environments. Like architects who become caught up in physical form, planners get involved in "knowing what is right for people" and fix-up situations that are not necessarily broken. Planners develop abstract concepts about cities, by examining numbers, spaces, and many other measures which sometimes miss the point or harm enacted environments. One planning report on East Los Angeles said "it lacks physical identity ...therefore needs a Plaza."⁴

Initially, when I approached East Los Angeles, even as a resident I did not know its identity until I began to examine the enacted environment. Like the planners and architects before me, I thought the place needed a "center" or plaza - place like the ones in Mexico where the residents could hang out, therefore taking them off the streets and neatly organizing them in a comprehensible space. However, East Los Angeles is not Mexico and the front yards in East Los Angeles combine both the "plaza" and "courtyard" of Mexico into one form that is expressed by the use of the residents. This defines the identity of the place.

There are different approaches to understanding people and physical form, but very few deal with the enacted environment as one entity. The architect examines form, the sociologist examines peoples' behavior. The anthropologist examines artifacts while the movie director and writer recreate the "feeling" of a place by combining peoples' lives with the physical form. All are excellent in understanding a specific dimension of a place. However, in comprehending the complexities of the enacted environment one needs to rely on all these disciplines. The approach in this thesis is to try to examine the enacted environment in the creation of place by "People."

⁴ Telacu, El Zocalo. National Endowments for the Arts, 1975 p.101

East Los Angeles & the Enacted Environment

Architects look to form as the creator of place and the boundaries form produces as a control mechanism. In East Los Angeles people create the control and protection mechanisms through the enacted environment. The way the residents use the environment and its undesirable location have spared East Los Angeles from major changes. This has allowed the area to be the "traditional" point of entry for the Mexican immigrant as well as poor European ethnics previously. The many "multi-ethnic" cemeteries in the area give reference to a place that at one time had low property values.

The factories and warehouses between Downtown Los Angeles and Boyle Heights (ELA) protect it from encroachment as well as the many now defunct factories at the southern tip of East Los Angeles. The freeways that rip through East Los Angeles, as much as they harmed the area with pollution, breaking up neighborhoods and dislocating the residents, have protected it by making it more undesirable. East Los Angeles is centrally located in the metropolitan region. However, few non-residents venture into East Los Angeles; most only pass through it on the numerous freeways which go to Long Beach, Orange and San Bernardino Counties and many other places.

Because of the undesirable location and the urban chaos created by the "enacted environment," the gentrifiers have been kept out. Everybody hates the place. Many of the residents are well aware of how this place looks and many would like to move out but can not afford to, or are too old and too socially attached. The Mexican Americans or Mexicans, who have been living in the Los Angeles for many years, do not seek housing here because this would be a downward move both socially and economically. This frees up the housing market to incoming Mexican immigrants. Mexican immigrant might be compelled to move here because of other Mexicans therefore increasing the price of already homes in short supply.

The urban character of East Los Angeles is coherent to people that live or grew up here. By no means is East Los Angeles without its unemployment, gang, and drug problems, but residents of the area "read the streets" and know how to avoid bad situations. The incoherent urban form is another protective measure because people who do not understand the "place" keep out of it.

The very aspects of East Los Angeles that to some, constitute blight, may be looked at as protection. From the standpoint of an enacted environment, East Los Angeles epitomized the "All American City" because the residents have gained control over their environment and have designed outsiders out. Just like the strict design guidelines of Nantucket or some New England town, that keeps undesirable "things" out, the urban character of East Los Angeles keeps outsiders out. Chinatown, Harlem, and East Los

Angeles are places where the residents take control of space through the enacted environment. These residents might not even "own" the place they live-in but their presence and actions do.

Organization of Thesis

This thesis is broken down into three parts: People, props and the vernacular form. These three elements define the enacted environment of East Los Angeles:

1. People are the most significant part of the urban landscape because through their presence they create the place.
2. Props are significant because they are what people bring into a space that helps connect people to the physical landscape.
3. The vernacular form includes all of the above, but generally can be considered structural, permanent changes that people create to enhance the enacted environment.

Methodology

Literature Review

Framework: Time, People, Props, & Space,
Applied to East Los Angeles

Methodology

Literature Review

The understanding of the enacted environment involves many fields of study. One must understand people, who they are and how they behave. Examples are such works as Herbert Gans' *Urban Villagers*, Elliot Liebow's *Tally's Corner*, Gerald D. Suttles' *The Social Order of the Slum*, and Dan Rose's *Black American Street life*. The studies conducted by these people examined the interpersonal, household and economic relations of different groups of people. These studies charted out a methodology in understanding people, especially ethnic groups. However, they do not clearly examine the relationship of their ideas to the physical form, which is largely background.

Another set of works provided a framework on how to examine physical forms. Many examined transformations of physical space, because of culture, economics and progress. There were Philippe Boudon's *Le Corbusier's Pessace Revisited*, Amos Rapoport's *House, Form and Culture*, and Robert Venturi's *Learning from Las Vegas*. While these studies examined the physical structure, most did not clearly define the enacted environment as I have defined it. Works such as the writings by J.B. Jackson, Irwin Altman's *Culture and Environment*, Oscar Newman's *Defensible Space*, examined the psychological affects of the public space and their meaning.

Since the enacted environment is public space, in the most general terms, and deals with how people use and interact with it, Robert Weiss' *Fairs, Pavilions, Exhibits, and Their Attendance*, and William Whyte's *The Social life of Small Urban Spaces*, suggest a method of studying people in public space. John Collier, Jr.'s *Visual Anthropology: Photography as a Research Method*, provide a system for studying culturally related objects in the environment through photography.

For general knowledge on environments, numerous others works were used as well as conversations with faculty and friends. Fritz Steele's *The Sense of Place* comes very close to examining the enacted environment. All these approaches have been synthesized in a framework to help in understanding the enacted environment. However, it was through going back into my childhood memories that the idea of the enacted environment began to develop. In the search for myself, I revisited the "place" in order to understand it and in doing so I found what I missed most. Only through my describing and analyzing East Los Angeles did the idea of the enacted environment occur.

Framework

The process of enacting environments can be broken down into a few essential components in order to understand its dynamics. Figure 1. illustrates this process.

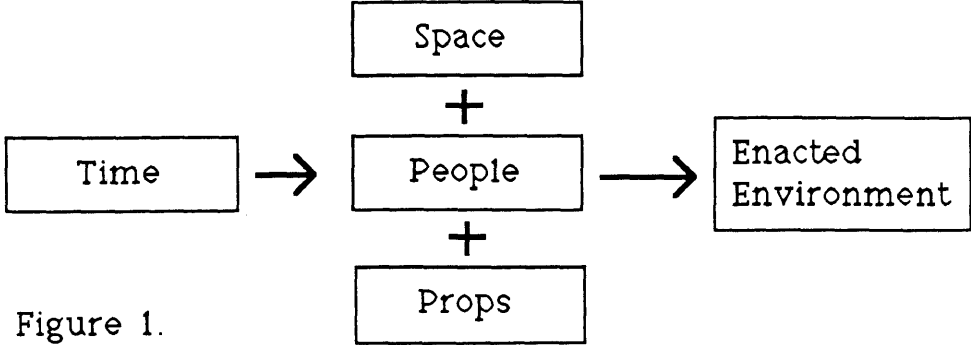
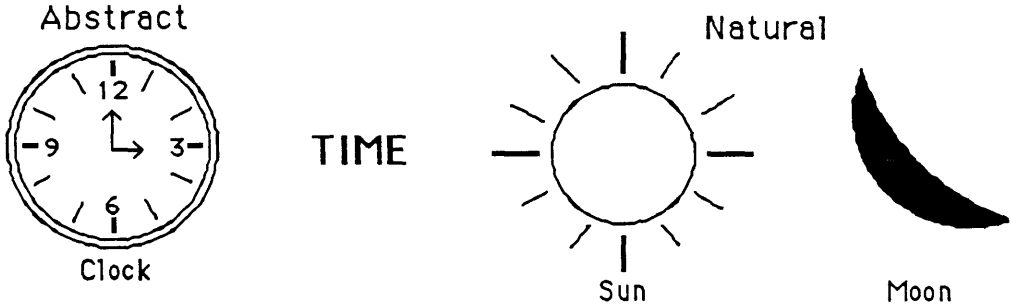


Figure 1.

The world is ordered by time, therefore we can understand a setting by the events taking place at a certain time. We wake up, go to work and come home and go to sleep. Basically our lives revolve around two types of time: abstract and natural. A clock represents abstract time that has been created by man in order to control activity, such as work and leisure. Natural time is created by nature through the cycles of the sun and moon, which leads to the four seasons and depending on the season activities will change from winter to summer. Figure 2.



The enacted environment evolves around both times but more importantly natural time. Activities that take place during daylight hours in general cannot take place at night because of darkness. Therefore a space will be used differently from day to night.

Because people are not architecture, it takes time to understand the places they create. One can see a building for any length of time and, the physical characteristics will not change, under most circumstances. People, however, do change, so the spaces they occupy changes and place they create changes as they do. Examining East Los Angeles, I knew the when and where the residents would be on the streets. I had to approach East Los Angeles on its time not my abstract time. This makes the enacted environment more complex, yet more exciting to try to understand.

People

An in-depth understanding of people's behavior is essential in the enacted environment. This is achieved by "knowing who the people are" intimately through observations and interviews. Mexicans and Mexican Americans activate the enacted environment in East Los Angeles. There are roughly three categories:

1. Mexican immigrants who have just arrived from Mexico. Central Americans have also recently moved into East Los Angeles but they are the minority at this point.
2. Mexicans who have been in this country for many years and may not be American citizens.
3. Mexican Americans who were born in the United States.

Collectively, however, these groups are connected by ethnicity and form a continuing cycle of the Mexican presence in East Los Angeles. Therefore I will use the term Mexican in its broadest meaning in describing the residents of East Los Angeles. Generally the residents of East Los Angeles are working class Mexican immigrants, Mexicans, and Mexican Americans.

Props

"The simplest means for creating a personal place is simply to mark an area off as a space that is yours." ⁵

Props are movable items, easily manipulated by the user that provides instant modification. Props can be moved between inside and the outside space as well as allowing for "privatization" in public, open space by making a "temporary home" in a space.⁶ Like furniture in a room, props in the street connect the user to the space in the enacted environment. Props are what people bring into the space for various reasons and most of the time cannot be designed by the architects because it is hard to predict the needs of the users in the enacted environment.

People uses of space are sometimes spontaneous. A group of chairs outside or on the sidewalk can mean impromptu social interaction. Gerald Suttles conducted a study in a housing project in which the "administration forbade the moving of furniture onto the street. In many housing projects residents often structure their own interaction by bringing chairs, tables, and TV sets into the street. Prohibitions against such practices coupled with

⁵ Steele, Fritz, The Sense of Place, CBI Publishing, 1981. p.195

⁶ Lennard, Suzanne H. Public Life in Urban Places, Gondolier press, 1984. p. 29

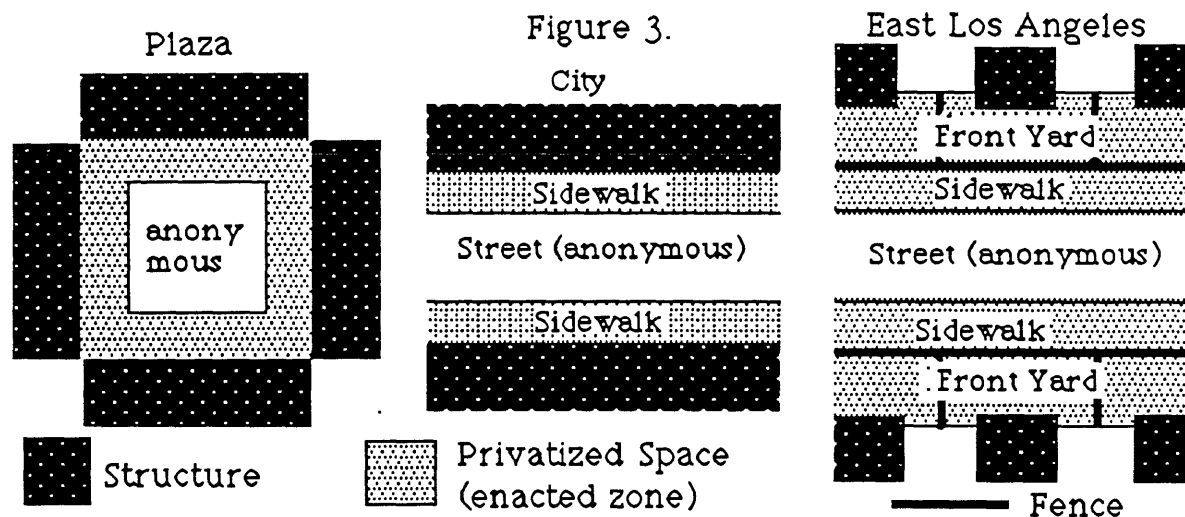
the failure to provide equivalent facilities served to further diminish opportunities in the housing project for social interaction."⁷

Props are personal in use and reflect how people "retrofit" a space. Props become symbols of place for the residents by reinforcing their presences. Growing up in East Los Angeles I know what these props are but to many outsiders these props are hard to read.

Urban Space: The Setting for the Enacted Environment

Space, the peoples' uses and time are a dialectical process that interweave to create enacted environments. The space in between buildings define the enacted space and become one constraint in creating boundaries of the exterior space as well as do weather and time. Plazas, streets and open spaces are interwoven into the physical structures of a city which creates the traditional public space and setting for the enacted environment. "The exterior spaces of the city are the rooms of the city, and the built structures are the walls of those rooms. These walls owe a responsibility to the formation of those rooms."⁸

The setting for the enacted environment consist of three elements.



The grey zone are areas where the "privatization" of enacted space occurs. This enacted zone is crucial in creating the setting because it "anchors" the users in the space. Props or physical structures such as stoops, stairs, and fences can stabilize the enacted

⁷ Anderson, Stanford, On Streets, MIT Press, 1986 p.p. 234

⁸ Ellis, William C. quote from Stanford Anderson, On Streets, MIT Press, 1986, p.130

space. The user has a sense of control in this open space, much as at a table in a restaurant where the table provides a temporary private zone in a public setting.

The dark zone are physical structures that create boundaries of enacted environments. Fully or partially enclosed structures, depending on climate, generally define the perimeter of enacted space. How much "control" is exerted into the public space, varies with the use and design of the structures. Generally open space surrounded by blank concrete or glass walls will create an "unprivatizable" zone because of the lack of anchors. Stores, cafes, etc, on the other hand, would make temporary privatization possible.

The white zone are the anonymous spaces which anchors the enacted space at the other end. This space can have activity or not. A flow of cars, pedestrians or a water fountain are some activities that can occur here. Like a stage this space stimulates the whole area by providing a place that people can look out on or provides a foreground for physical structures.

The area I chose to examine in East Los Angeles was the grey zone (enacted) around the houses. Driveways, front yards and streets create the space for people to interact. The front yard becomes the anchor of the public space in the residential neighborhoods in East Los Angeles. Residents activate and connect both the public and private spaces. In the enacted environment, the task of defining what is public and private is very difficult because "good public" or enacted space has a little of both.



Diagram of the "Enacted Environment" in East Los Angeles

Applied to East Los Angeles

*"A reflexive ethnography is like travel in one's own country in that the anthropologist ... looks to other humans as varieties of the self rather than as varieties of the other."*⁹ Dan Rose

In applying this methodology of enacted environments to East Los Angeles, I had a head start because I was born and raised there. I know the people, props, space, time and rhythm. I am both observer and examinee. The challenge in writing this thesis is not collecting and understanding data, but limiting and presenting information critically. Because I know this subject so well, I must remember to examine the everyday and not unusual events. As Tunney Lee, a professor at MIT, said "By examining everyday vignettes of life, I can describe and understand the place."

Most literature I read about East Los Angeles was historical or physical. Literature on Mexicans, and Mexican Americans varied from early works focused on "Americanization" of the Mexicans and works from the sixties and seventies centering on self awareness. Few dealt with issues I was looking for. Planners I interviewed only had very general observations on Mexicans and East Los Angeles. Therefore, I have developed part of this thesis as conjecture based on personal fact and outlook. My hypothesis is that Mexican and Mexican American residents in East Los Angeles look for social interaction in their environment and therefore create a place for interaction to occur. This thesis is not a scientific study to demonstrate how sociable Mexicans are relative to other ethnic groups or themselves, but an examination of the urban environment of East Los Angeles and how it enhances social interaction.

Exploring the enacted environment in East Los Angeles was a fairly easy task because I was established here socially, understood the area, and knew what to look for. The informants I used were residents of East Los Angeles I knew intimately. On Rowan Avenue it was my uncle. On Burma my informant was my cousin. On Hendricks, because I grew up there, they were the many old neighbors as well as new ones. I chose these people because of the neighborhoods they lived in and the good relationship I had with them. They varied from Mexican Immigrants to Mexican American. Their socioeconomic situation varied as well as the physical constraints of the streets they lived on.

My relationships, with these people, allowed me to "slip" in and out of the different neighborhoods, some of which may be dangerous to "outsiders." In the neighborhoods, I

⁹ Rose, Dan, Black American Street Life, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987. p.4

was introduced as a family relation or friend and, by the way, a "student." This bonding was important. Otherwise it would have been impossible to develop trust with the residents.

My interviews were informal. I would play them by "ear" to see how to approach the situation and what to ask for, and how to ask it. It was also important to be sensitive to each group and behave accordingly. I asked residents general questions about their neighborhoods, where they moved from, and if their family relations lived close by. If they were Mexican Immigrants the questions were in Spanish, if they were Mexican American the questions were in English. I let them talk and tell me about their neighborhoods.

Establishing myself in the neighborhoods allowed me to take pictures, which was important in recording behavior patterns of the residents and the modified spaces. In East Los Angeles, because many of the residents use the front yard and street most of the time, I had to get their permission to photograph. Many residents and street vendors were hesitant in having their picture taken if I did not know them or my informants - not that they were shy, but scared that I was "stranger" working for some U.S. government agency. Many residents may have been illegally in this country. In these circumstances I avoided taking their pictures. My method of photography was just driving through East Los Angeles visiting family, friends and places and snapping pictures when the opportunity arose.

"Hanging-out" in these neighborhoods doing my interviews, allowed me to examine the behavior of the residents. Observing people, props, streets and front yards, I was able to make computer drawing of people in these space.

I would not advise a non-resident to conduct a study like this if they cannot firmly establish social connections into these Mexican and Mexican American neighborhoods.

Part I

People

People's Presence

Residents' Perception

Social Control

A Social Network

"Neighboring" in East Los Angeles

Cultural Baggage: Social Links

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Observations of People

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People

"If the physical features of a setting can be loosely called its geography, the social factors that contribute to its spirit of place can be called its sociography: the impact of other people's presence and their activities in and expectations for that setting."¹⁰

Fritz Steele

People's Presence

Very few signs or landmarks in Los Angeles will indicate where East Los Angeles is. One will know when they have arrived there because of the large number of people in the streets. Instead of automobiles, that are the trademark of Los Angeles, people are the trademark of East Los Angeles. People seem to spring forth from the asphalt and can be found on street corners, sidewalks, front yards as well as marginal places like parking lots and alleys, talking, selling, repairing and playing. The group behavior patterns of the Mexican and Mexican American residents distinguish East Los Angeles from other parts of the city.¹¹

John de Monchaux, Dean of Architecture and Planning at MIT, described East Los Angeles as an "opened book", when he worked there because so much social activity occurred on streets. Like walking into someone's living room streets are center stage for all types of activities that might otherwise take place indoors or in secluded areas. One feels like a voyeur peeking into someone else's world that is so boldly on display when traveling through the streets of East Los Angeles.

One day I was surprised while I was driving down Cheeseborough Road in East Los Angeles because I noticed a man standing on a Volkswagon van holding a rope. As I approached the house I noticed that another man was standing on the roof of the porch and holding the other end of the rope. In the middle of the rope was a *pinata* that they were raising and lowering while blindfolded small children were hitting at it. Around forty people, young and old, had gathered in the front yard and were celebrating a child's birthday party. I felt awkward approaching this site because many of the party goers were staring at me. How does one approach such a private affair in such a public setting? I did not know the people, but felt I intruded for a brief minute into their world. I just drove on. Events like this usually take place in the backyard in most neighborhoods, but in East Los Angeles it was right out front.

¹⁰ Steele, Fritz, The Sense of Place, CBI Publishing, 1981, p.63

¹¹ Ibid. p.65

Residents' Perception

Non-Latino residents of Los Angeles identify East Los Angeles as a place of intense public social interaction. They often have difficulty locating East Los Angeles because there are an increasing number of Mexicans and other Latino groups living in traditionally white and even black communities.

For the Mexican and Mexican American who has moved away from East Los Angeles, people on the streets refer to a way of life that they left behind in the barrio. The term "East L.A." distinguishes a specific type of behavior pattern that Mexicans and Mexican Americans have determined amongst themselves which was stated when I conducted my interviews. Many Latino residents from East Los Angeles, living in the outlying eastern communities said they could identify people who have moved in from East Los Angeles by their behavior patterns.

One Mexican American resident, I interviewed, lives on a long street that is separated in the middle between the City of Montebello and County of Los Angeles (ELA). He kept on referring to how different the people in East Los Angeles acted. " On that side of the street they live different from us. They speak Spanish more, they fix their cars in the street and play their stereos loud as well as build fences and put things in their front yards." Physically and socially the changes on the street are obvious with the people on the streets on the East Los Angeles and lack of them on the Montebello half, even though all residents were Mexican. These physical and social factors symbolize the "East Los Angeles Barrio Lifestyle."

The general consensus was that the barrio is a place where people "hang out" in the streets and front yard. The barrio offers the Mexicans a place where they could be themselves as well as where they can identify with other Mexicans. Many residents in East Los Angeles call their neighborhoods "barrios." One resident from Mexico on Rowan Avenue defined her street as a barrio because of the people she knew, which center around her house. Therefore every resident has a different definition of place because they interacted with different people on the street. She later explained that in Mexico, the barrio is a place where poor people live because the rich people do not consider their neighborhoods barrios. People in the barrios of East Los Angeles socially interact more with each other, for many reasons that include cultural homogeneity, length of time in one location, having children, as well as that of an immediate safety network.

Social Control

People come, people go but people are always in the streets of East Los Angeles.

The presence of people on the streets and outdoor spaces in East Los Angeles creates what I call "social control" of the environment. Even for me, born and raised here, I know when I do not belong in a neighborhood because of the stares I get from the residents. Their piercing eyes and gazes lets any newcomer know they are a stranger. Residents also know which other neighbors might be potential problems: *Hypes, gang members.*

"Social control" of a place separates the streets of East Los Angeles from the anonymous streets of the suburbs. In most residential suburban streets, strangers are challenged by outside parties, like policemen, not by the residents.¹² Because the residents in these neighborhoods do not use the outdoor spaces such as the front yard and street it is difficult to establish "social control."

Jane Jacobs argues that the presence of people establishes this type of control or safety mechanism. "There must be eyes upon the street, eyes belonging to those we might call the natural proprietors of the street. Sidewalks must have users on it fairly continuously, both to add to the numbers or effective eyes on the street and to induce the people in building along the street to watch the sidewalks in sufficient numbers."¹³

People on a street, however, do not create an automatic safety net as Jane Jacobs describes. One of the tragedies of mankind is the anonymity crowded places create. There is nothing more disturbing, than a crime being committed or a person that needs help, in a place where there are many people around. No one takes initiative. This might occur because the space is "too" public and no one can take control, therefore nobody feels responsible or totally safe in it.

In the residential streets of East Los Angeles everybody is a proprietor of the street. Children control the street by playing in it. Teenagers (gang members) exhibit physical control of the street, which can be read by other gang members. Adults control the street by knowing who lives around it. Elderly exhibit control over the streets watching quietly every move that takes place. Oscar Newman calls this "living residential environment, a

¹² Baumgartner, M.P., The Moral order of a Suburb. Oxford Press, 1988. p. 11

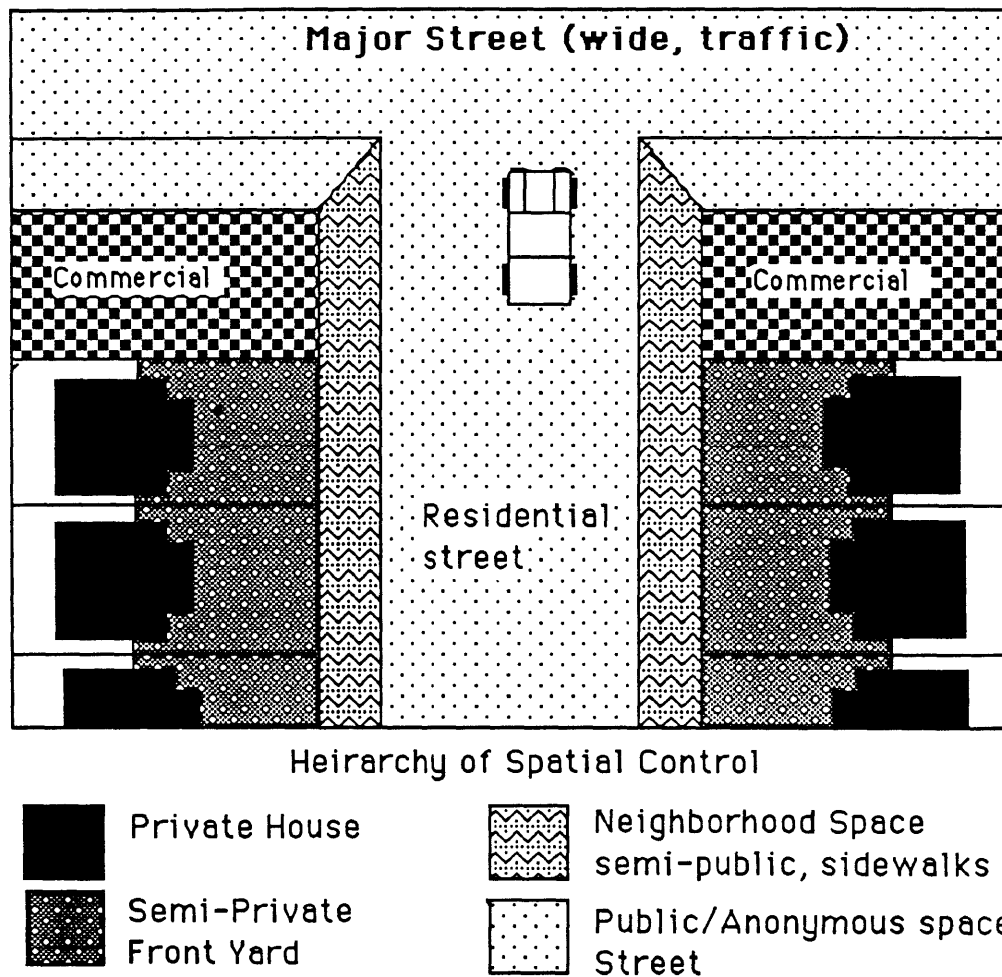
¹³ Jacobs, Jane, The Death and Life of Great American Cities, Vintage Book, 1961. p.35

defensible space, which can be employed by inhabitants for the enhancement of their lives, while providing security for their families, neighbors and friends."¹⁴

This diagram illustrates the different levels of control over the street related to the physical features. By where the different age groups of people position themselves they, intentionally or unintentionally take control of the area. Each group creates a sense of control over a space.

Figure 5

Diagram of the different levels of "Social Control"



I do not know what the number of crimes committed in East Los Angeles are, but what I am suggesting is that, if the residents did not establish "social control" which creates a safety through solidarity, figures might be higher. People identify East Los Angeles and at the same time protect the area.

¹⁴ Newman, Oscar, Defensible Space, Collier Books, 1978, p. 3

East Los Angeles: A Social Network



"Visiting the Old Barrio"

East Los Angeles: A Social Network

East Los Angeles --which is made up of small barrios, neighborhoods and "greater East Los Angeles"-- is defined by the social connections of the residents. The inhabitants create a social overlay over the physical form that identifies "their" East Los Angeles. The Kevin Lynch approach to understanding the city is through physical landmarks. In East Los Angeles, however, these landmarks are people the residents interact with. The physical form becomes secondary and could be any shape or condition. For most people in East Los Angeles, their main concern is their immediate social connections not the whole physical and social structure of the place.

Social connections are an important part of daily life in East Los Angeles for each segment of the population. Each looks for different relationships and reads different cues. Children's social connections are created through the street, family, and school. Teenagers define their social territory in East Los Angeles on a much larger scope centered around high school. Adults center their social connections around families, friends, and colleagues at work. The elderly look to the church as a source of social connecting. *Cholos* (gang members) define East Los Angeles in terms of territories. *Hypes* (drug addicts) search out different relationships in East Los Angeles. However, many of these circles of people cross connect in this matrix of social networks, because much of the connecting is done on streets.

The street and public areas provide the setting for these social connections to take place. Public "appearance" is important part of life in East Los Angeles. People communicate through body language by acknowledging each other, very often by staring. Males stare at females, residents stare at strangers, gang members might begin a fight through a stare. Day laborers stare down passing motorists. Eye contact is the public language of strangers in the barrio. In the neighborhoods, however, residents strongly bond with each other.

"Neighboring" in East Los Angeles

When I asked residents on Rowan Avenue, "What makes your neighborhood special or what do you like most about it," most replied it was their neighbors. Many residents went into elaborate stories about their neighbors on how they help each other out. On the other hand, when I asked Mexicans and Mexican Americans living outside East Los Angeles the same question, I received a different response. Many talked about the physical qualities of their home, the better schools and environment for their children. Rarely did they mention interactions with their neighbors. In fact, many of the residents

from East Los Angeles, talked about the changes in patterns of neighboring that they had to adjust to in their new neighborhoods. One Mexican American resident in Glendora, a mixed community of Anglos and Latinos, said that she had to learn a new body language and was frightened when she moved into her new home.

Neighboring in East Los Angeles is an intense social relationship rather than a social obligation. People interact constantly with each other. In the barrio instead of asking what they know about their neighbor one should ask what they don't know. "*Pasale, Pasale*" means enter my home and was what my informants neighbors said when we were interviewing in her barrio. Many would invite us into their front yards, porches and houses to sit and chat for a while. Many of the residents in East Los Angeles are very proud of the social connections they have established in their neighborhoods. In East Los Angeles the role of neighbors and friends is sometimes one in the same and very often neighbors became friends

Mexicans, who moved away from the barrios of East Los Angeles, return to the "old barrios" to visit friends and family. These residents no longer describe their new neighborhoods as barrios because they no longer define their neighborhoods by who they know. Many Mexicans I interviewed displayed a feeling of loss about the leaving the social life of the barrio behind, but there was a stronger feeling of achievement by moving out of the barrio into a higher income location.

Cultural Baggage: Social Links

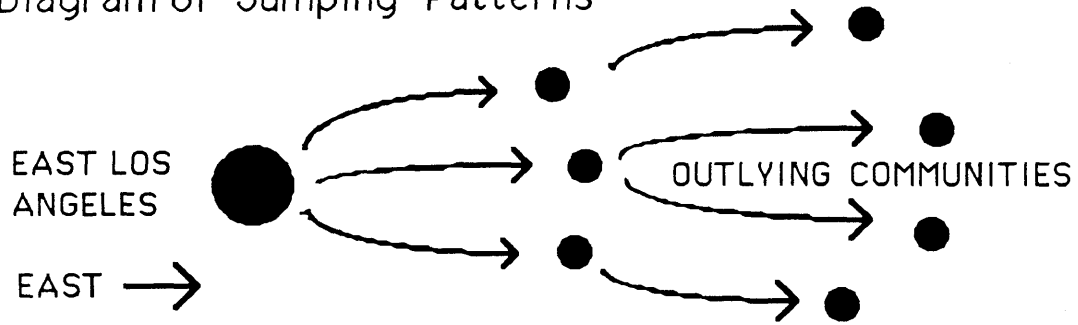
Generally the arriving Mexican Immigrant will seek out neighborhoods where other Mexicans live, while Mexican Americans will seek out neighborhood that they can afford and that are relatively accessible to family and friends.

As Mexican Immigrants move in to East Los Angeles, many will try to move near family, friends, or others from the same town or village in Mexico. In a few cases this might mean a higher rent. Some residents in East Los Angeles said the rent is comparable to other "nicer" areas in Los Angeles. Because it is East Los Angeles many landlords can charge these higher rents to the Mexican immigrants. When residents move out of East Los Angeles they take with them their "cultural baggage" of who they know into the outlying suburban communities. Here are vast social networks that are rooted in East Los Angeles, through family and friends.

This social linking or "jumping" as one resident called it, means that as the Mexicans moves out of East Los Angeles they generally move eastward to better, affordable housing and with them move all the networks of people.

Figure 6.

Diagram of "Jumping" Patterns



In interviewing first, second, and third generation residents this pattern was evident in most cases; presently as well as historically. In general most families always moved east of East Los Angeles. To the west of East Los Angeles is Downtown L.A, to the south is a huge industrial area and to the north are the Asian communities, which might be some of the constraints. East is where the freeways and new development pushes. Because everybody in East Los Angeles moves this way, this eastward migration creates a "greater East Los Angeles" much like a city.

Mexicans in these outlying communities are likely to recognize people on the streets, stores, banks, etc. from the old neighborhood or will meet someone who knows "so and so" from the old neighborhood, school or family. Most of these communities look like any other middle class neighborhood but it is the invisible social overlay that binds these tract homes together.

This phenomenon distinguishes "Mexicanized" suburban communities from the typical middle class suburbs. The typical suburb "may be characterized as a place where comparatively 'weak ties' to other people, rather than strong bonds of enduring and greater attachment." ¹⁵ In many cases the role of the extended family of the Mexican changes in suburbia.

¹⁵ Baumgartner, M.P., The Moral order of a Suburb. Oxford Press, 1988. p. 9

Extended Family & Suburbia

"In the North American ethic the center is the individual; in Hispanic morals the true protagonist is the family." Octovio Paz, Mexican poet,

In many situations in East Los Angeles extended family are neighbors or live in close proximity to each other. Many studies have pointed out that this is quite common in many working class, ethnic neighborhoods. However, in East Los Angeles these family connections remain important as they move away from the "Barrio."¹⁶ One can only speculate why this occurs amongst Mexicans in Los Angeles. The change in neighboring patterns, in the new neighborhoods, may prohibit Mexicans from developing stronger ties with neighbors. This might account for the extended family fulfilling this social need.

In my interviews with Mexican residents in the outlying communities, there were strong locational links to where other extended family lived. In many cases as one family member would moved to a new community, other extended family soon follow, creating new base for the family outside of the barrio. No one would ever see these invisible family networks, because most drive or telephone each other. Like anyone else in suburbia, they have no reason to interact in the streets, which make East Los Angeles the ideal case study.

¹⁶ Griswold, Richard Del Castillo, La Familia, University of Notre Dame, 1984. p.119

Part I

Observations: People

Rowan Avenue, Hendricks Avenue & Burma Road



“Strangers at my door”

People on Rowan Avenue, Hendricks Avenue & Burma Road

The rhythms of the users' lives create and dominate the enacted environment of East Los Angeles. In East Los Angeles these cycles are not known to the outsider, this gives the illusion of a chaotic ordering of people. However this chaotic ordering of people under close observation reveals a rhythmic and organized structure of behavior patterns that reflect the daily lives of the residents. From the vendors in the commercial strips to the children in residential areas, every one has a place and a time on the street. The arrangement of people and ensuing social interaction that takes place changes with uses during the course of the day. The three neighborhoods I have examined had different behavior rhythms that may have been related to physical, social and economic variables.

Rowan Avenue

On Rowan Avenue, the enacted environment was the most animated of the three neighborhoods I examined. Located between a major traffic artery and trucking distribution warehouse, this one block street had a very "transient" ambience. Many residents did not have cars or many women did not know how to drive so many walked or rode the bus. The bus line ran down Olympic from Downtown Los Angeles, where many of the residents worked, affecting the rhythm of the street in the evening. When the bus stopped at the corner, huge crowds of people quickly filed through the street. Motorists, coming home from work looked for parking spaces which were in limited supply. Small children, adults and the elderly walked home from the corner stores, which cater to the Mexicans, carrying white plastic bags of daily food supplies. Teenagers also walked around the neighborhood visiting friends. Some working women could be seen coming home from work with small lunch bags or tupper-ware cases. *Hypes* (drug addicts) stood in front of their houses waiting to make deals or "cased out" the neighborhood. Elderly people sat on the front porch just observing all the activity on the street, or puttered around their front yard. The heavy automobile traffic and many people walking, gave the street an almost frantic pace.

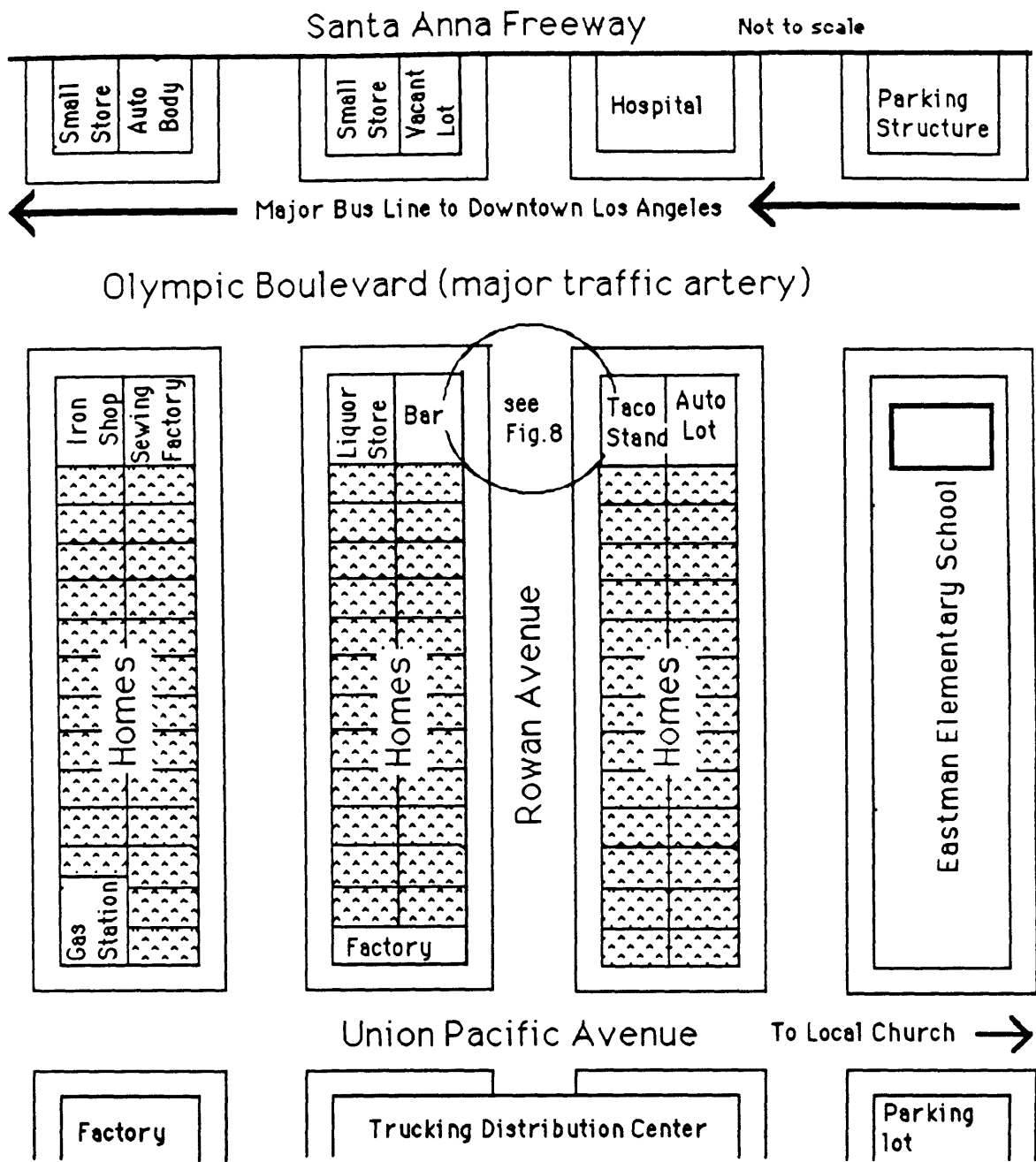


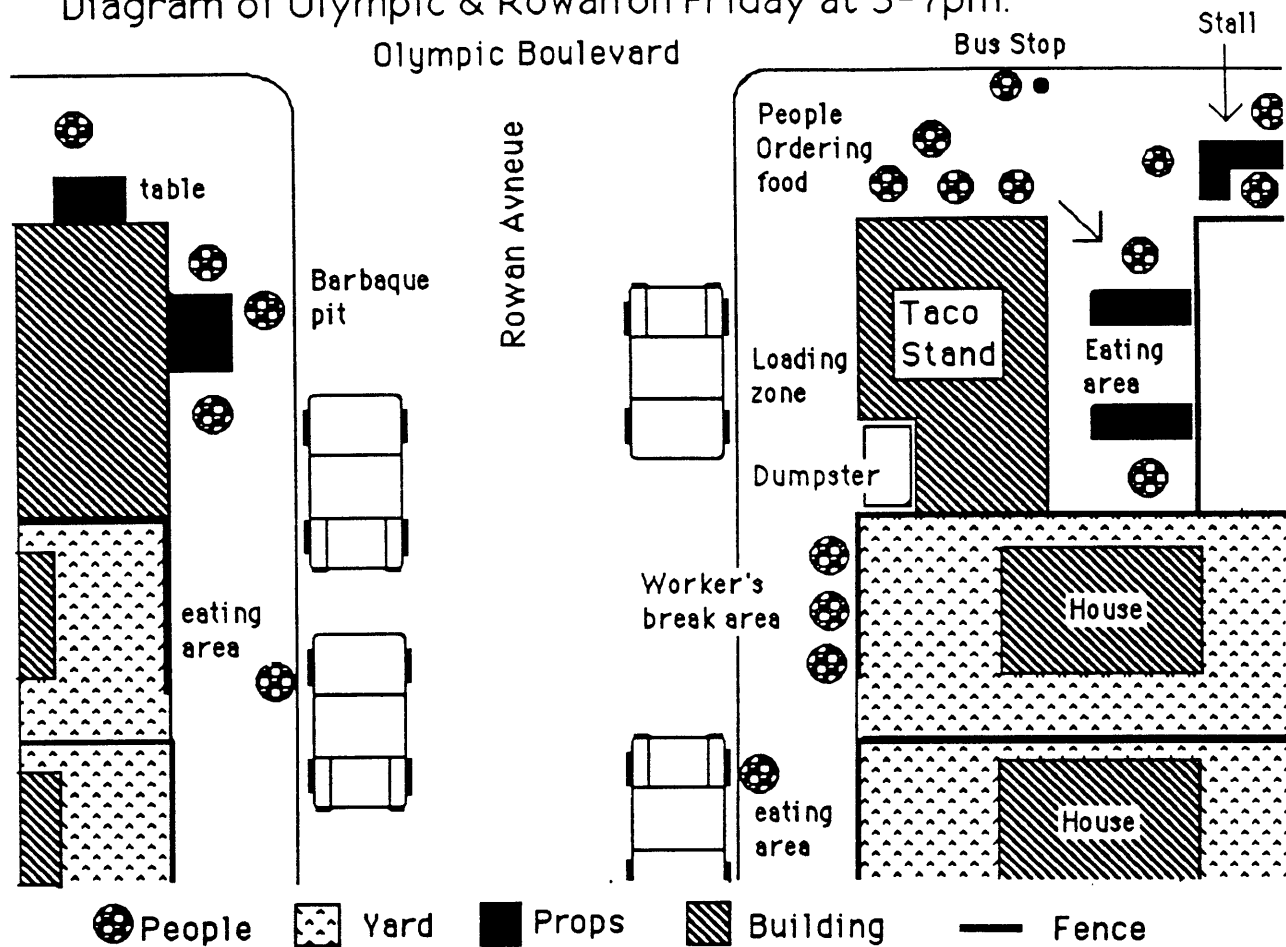
Figure 7.

Because of the heavy automobile and truck traffic, very few children played on the streets and most played within their enclosed front yards. Rowan Avenue is therefore dominated by adults and their rhythms.

Furthermore, the commercial activity on Olympic had a big impact on the residential character of Rowan Avenue that was reflected in the enacted environment. The strong relationship between the residential street and the commercial strip on Olympic Boulevard

was like many other corners in East Los Angeles. Much activity occurred on the corners where these two zones meet. Many people congregated here and the traffic from the two streets created a dynamic flow of movement. In most suburban neighborhoods, the corner between the commercial and residential streets is ambiguous and is rarely used because people usually park their cars here and will walk to the front of the store. On the contrary, most of the social activity on Rowan Avenue took place on the corner. As one architect said, the residents here "know how to use a corner". Figure 8.

Diagram of Olympic & Rowan on Friday at 5-7pm.



The commercial buildings on Olympic Boulevard were not deep in length. These lots did not have alleys running behind them, therefore there was a strong physical attachment to the rest of the block. Houses on Rowan abutted the backs of the commercial structures on Olympic Boulevard. The structures on Olympic were generally one story buildings, or vacant lots which create transition space between the residential neighborhood.

The south side of the intersection of Olympic Boulevard and Rowan Avenue was the busiest with pedestrian activities. Here, on either side of Rowan Avenue are two food establishments that were very different in style and physical shape. One was permanent and the other was a stationary vendor.

A small marginal structure housed "*Antojitos Denise's*" taco stand on the corner. Because of the lack of storage room, food supplies were brought in twice a day by a large white truck which parked on Rowan Avenue. On this side most of the clean up work was done for the kitchen which generated lots of activity on the street. Furthermore employees took their lunches and breaks here in front of the house next door. There was also a mural on this side of a traditional Mexican family making and eating tacos. This generated another level of visual excitement on the corner.

Across the street was Carmen, the *elote* (corn) woman, who every weekend set up her grill and a small table and chairs and sold roasted corn for a dollar an ear. She lived only a few feet from the corner in a small house with a large front yard, where she could be seen cleaning the corn. She talked to all the pedestrians that walked by. Most people stood for at least ten minutes with her and talked local street gossip. Since this study last year Carmen has been cited by the city of Los Angeles and has moved out of the neighborhood.

The taco stand and "Carmen the Corn Woman" generated much activity which created the rhythm on Rowan Avenue. Seating was provided at *Antojitos*, on the other side of the structure, but most customers preferred to eat standing up facing the street or in or on their parked cars on Rowan. Many end up eating in front of my uncles house and I asked him if he minded having people he did not know eating in front of his house. He did not care. The push cart vendors added to the "eating environment" by selling snacks.

On the weekends, because of the lack of traffic and no work the rhythm of the street changed. Saturday morning was like any other suburban neighborhood, with people doing chores, only more intensely here. One woman dusted off a rug over the fence, while another had brought out her dinette set and scrubbed it down. People washed their cars. Men tend to fix cars while young men added stereos that enhanced their already nice cars. Some residents sold items from their front yards. And again the pedestrian activity picked up as people headed for the bus stop or to the small shops on Olympic.

Evening hours, during the weekend brought excitement to the street. Young teenage girls dressed up, buzzed around the front of their homes on the sidewalks. Teenage boys cruised in their mini-trucks while the *cholos* (gang members) cruised in their low-riders. *Mariachis* walked down the street ready to serenade residents who would pay for a song or two. Some mariachis might become lucky and find a birthday, *Quinceada* (debutante) or small gathering to play.

Sunday morning began with a strange silence. Saturday nights' residues of beer cans could be found on the street. The early light did not find many people on the street, just old men that collected the aluminum beer cans. These beer cans were a "hot" item in East Los Angeles. One resident said that many times people will go into his yard and try to steal them. Slowly the street woke up as parents went to church with their small children. Teenagers went to a later mass along with the more fashionably dressed. People could be seen walking home from the corner stores with a Sunday paper and a bowl of *menudo* (Mexican tripe soup).

By the afternoon the block had fully risen and people had come back from church. The "front yard society" emerged as people begin to sit outside on in-door house furniture, on the front porch or lawn. They greeted visiting family members and friends. Parking was a problem because the small lots did not allow for much street parking that was heavily taxed on Sundays with all the visiting relatives. On Sunday, the pace was much slower than the rest of the week.



A Quinceada in the Driveway

Hendricks Avenue

The 600 block of Hendricks Avenue was located one block away from a major traffic artery which had many local convenience shops and bus line that ran to Downtown Los Angeles. It was a 5 minute walk from Hendricks to the Whittier Boulevard. The street was also a dead end which made it very secluded. At the end of the street was a school maintenance yard and a school playing field. (Figure 9) Even though the school field was close to Hendricks most children did not play here, but rather in the street itself. .

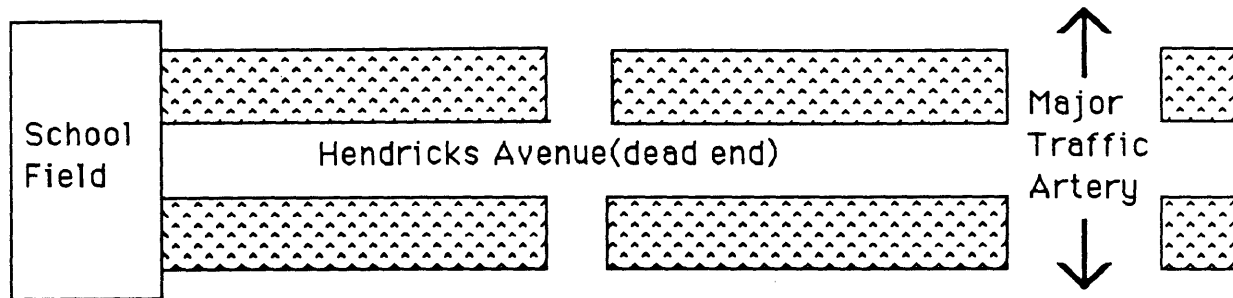


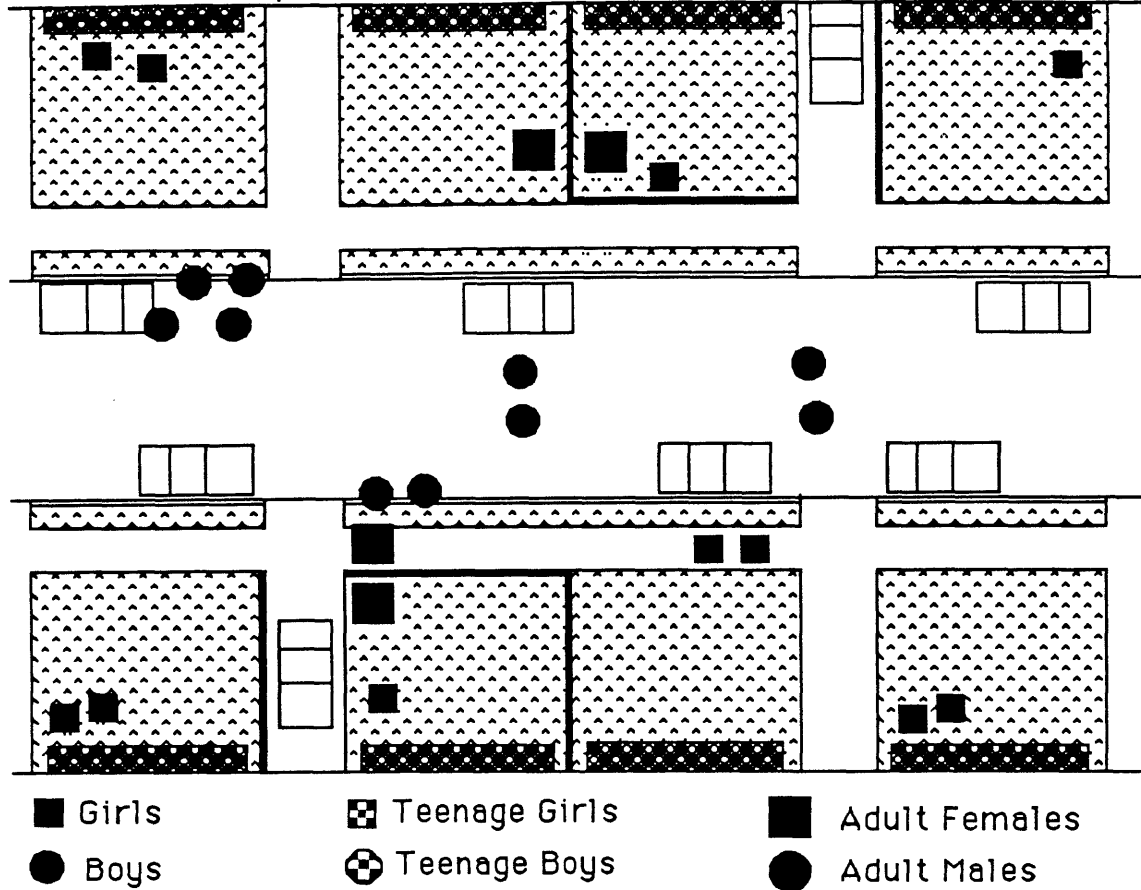
Figure 9.

The lack of traffic and relative seclusion made the street child-dominated. today as well as when I grew up here. The only difference today was that many of the homes that the elderly used to live in when I lived on Hendricks, had been replaced by young families with children. This created a shift to where the children play on the street relative to their house.

"Children playing on the street is a common occurrence in most neighborhoods because the street provides a 'social hub' where children can meet and learn about each other and the environment. Two phenomena occur which make this possible: the close proximity and easy access to the street from the house, and the hard (concrete and asphalt) linear surface of the space of on the street make a smooth surface for many of children's activities."¹⁷, Children were always out in the street playing on Hendricks Avenue. The rhythm of Hendricks evolved around the child's schedule, such as school and holidays. The diagram below illustrates the "rhythm" of the street during the course of a week day. Figure 10

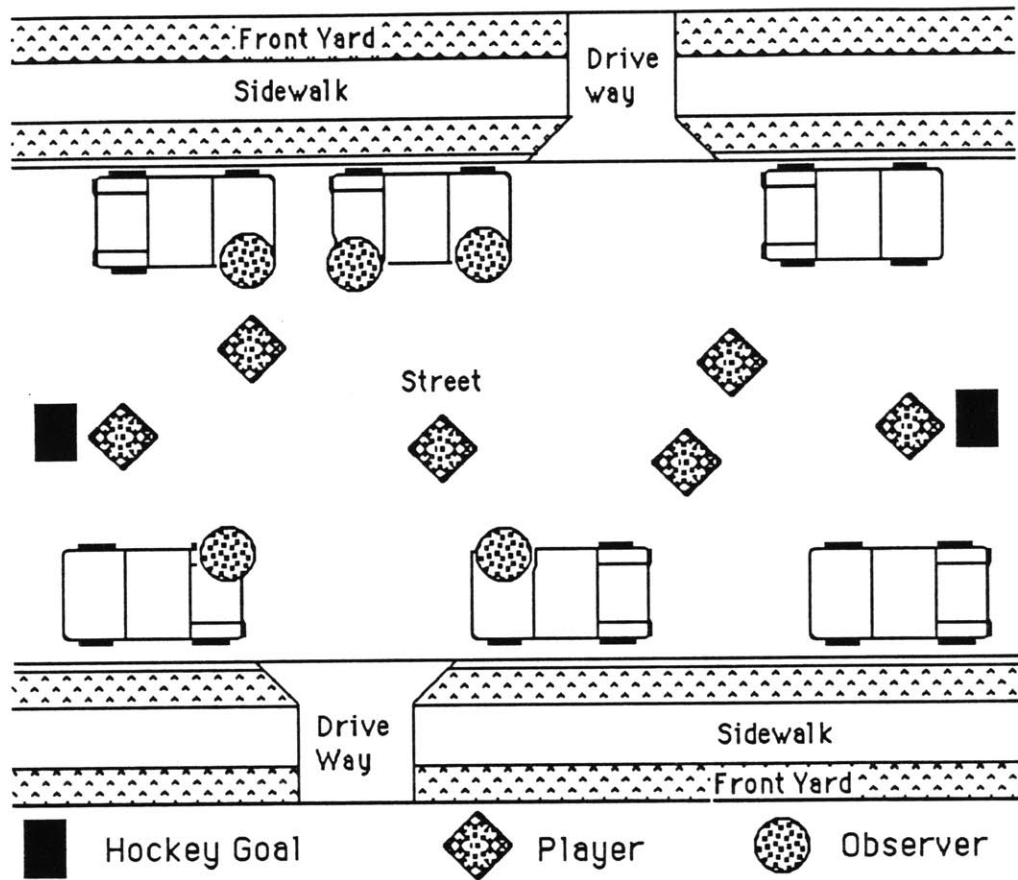
¹⁷ Moudon, Anne Vernez, Public Streets for Public Use. Van Nostrand Reinhold Company 1987. p. 47-48

Diagram Hendricks Avenue (ELA) After School: 2-5pm



After school and during school holidays many children played on the street. Between the children there exists a hierarchy of spaces. Small toddlers were kept in close range of the house, usually in the front porch and enclosed front yard, and were supervised by older children, usually girls. Here the toddlers played with their toys. The girls range on the street was on the front porch or in the front yard. Many girls would visit each other in these areas. Small boys and girls usually took control of the sidewalks with their toys and tricycles. Older boys had full range of the street from curb to curb and from one end to the other. Their space began in the front yard and extend out to the street. On the street, boys play many contact sports, such as touch football, and street hockey. Because of the lack of traffic, games on the street became very elaborate and used props, such as a hockey goal. Figure 11.

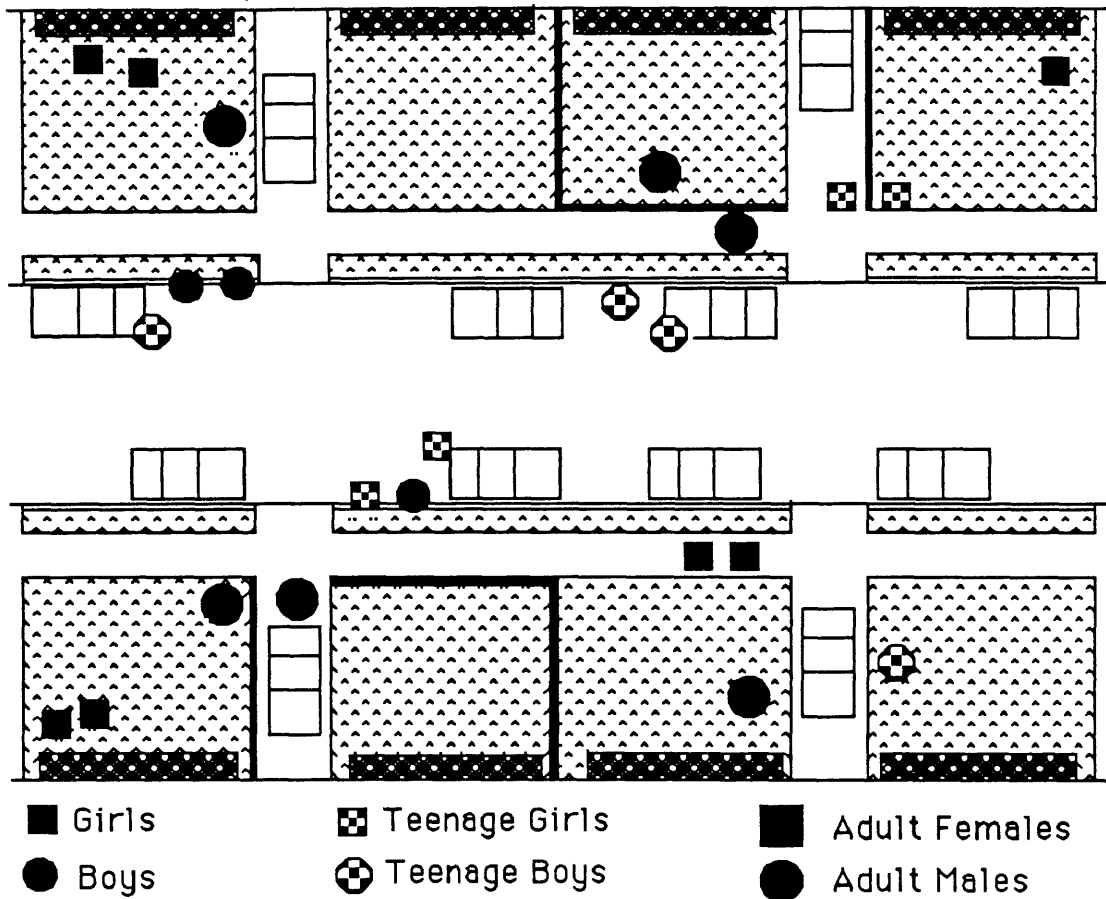
Diagram of Street Hockey on Hendricks Avenue



Goalie

By late afternoon the dynamics of Hendricks started to change as men started coming home from work. Men had a public presence on the streets because many were outside in the front yards involved in various activities such as watering the front yard, while others congregated in groups by fences. Figure 12.

Diagram Hendricks Avenue (ELA) Evening 5-7 pm



Few women were out in the street at this time of day because many were making dinner. However some had time for a quick conversation with a neighbor.

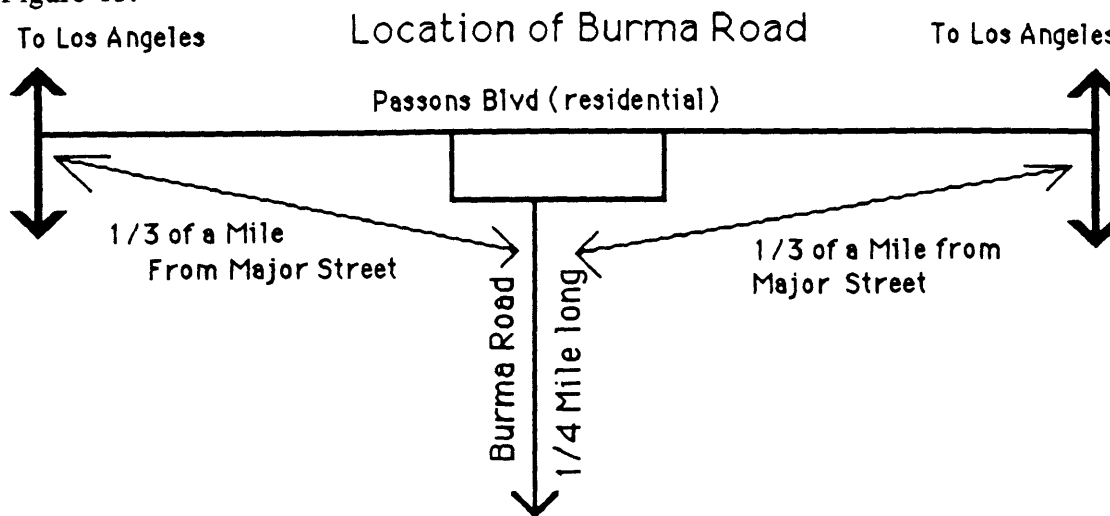
On the weekends people did chores like any other "typical" suburban neighborhood. Many of the behavior patterns of Rowan were not expressed on Hendricks. Residents rarely had "sales" on this street. This might be due to the relative seclusion of the street from traffic. *Mariachis* never walked down this street; maybe it is too far from the major street.

The enacted environment on Hendricks is different than on Rowan Avenue. One can speculate why.

Burma Road.

No group of people dominated the space as on Rowan Avenue and Hendricks. Burma Road was very far from the bus stop. If a resident wished to use the bus, they were more than likely driven, as one resident said. Therefore people did not walk on this street.

Figure 13.



From my observations children did not play on the street. It is hard to speculate why. One thought, was that maybe on this street most of the children have grown up. My informant has three siblings, two boys in the early twenties and one girl seven years old. The boys played on the street when they were younger with the rest of their friends. Presently the young girl plays in the backyard with her toys: a swing set and a play house. My aunt said because of child molestations, she did not let her daughter play on the street like her sons. In any case children were not on the street. One Mexican American resident in Whittier, a mixed Mexican and Anglo community, I spoke to said "Even though I grew up in *Maravilla* (ELA) and played on the street here I do not let my children play on the street."

The enacted environment on Burma Road was not heavily used by the residents. One family with cholos sat in the front yard and wrote all over the sidewalk in front of their house. Otherwise, the "place" was generated by its architecture: single family houses. Burma Road resembles a "typical" suburban street both physically and by the behavior patterns of its inhabitants. People left for work in the morning and return in the evening. Cars in the driveways illustrated this cycle. The behavior patterns of the residents functioned on a week/weekend pattern. On the weekends residents washed their cars, and mowed the grass. Parking was a problem on the weekends because many of the residents had families and friends visit.

Conclusion

Each neighborhood revealed a different enacted environment by the way people did or did not use it. In comparing the three neighborhoods there were many variables that were similar and different which might have affected my observations. All three streets shared the same weather and the observations were done the same time in the year as well as time sequencing during the day and week to weekend. In generally dwellings were single family houses, with smaller and more densely packed homes on Rowan, than on Hendricks. The homes on Burma Road were not as dense. On Rowan there were mainly two houses on the lot. On Hendrick's less than half of the lots had two houses on them. Burma Road was all single family homes per lot. There were three apartment buildings housing 3 to 4 units on Rowan, one on Hendricks and none on Burma Road. Density might be a factor in effecting the enacted environment.

Location affected all three neighborhoods, especially the relationship to the bus stop. Rowan and Hendricks are near bus lines, Burma road was not. The amount of traffic affected the behavior of the residents. Children did not play on Rowan because of too much traffic. Most of the children played in the front yard, which in many cases, were small playgrounds with toys and swings sets. One could only speculate how often children from different families play with fellow children on the street. My informants two boys 3 and 4, mainly stood in the enclosed lot. The girl 12 watched over the boys and on occasion would visit friends in the area. Children of all ages did play on Hendricks because of lack of traffic. On Burma Road, they did not. even though it also lack traffic.

Mexicans lived on all three streets, with a few whites on Burma Road. However the types of Mexicans greatly differed. On Rowan mainly Mexican immigrants lived here, some have been in the U.S. for many years others were recent arrivals. Spanish was spoken on this street. On Hendricks most of the residents were Mexicans who have been in the U.S. for a long time and Mexican American families. A few residents were arriving immigrants. Here one spoke both Spanish and English. On Burma Road the residents were generally Mexican American, with only a few Mexican families. Here English was spoken. On Rowan many of the extended family lived in different houses on the same lot or next door to each other. Hendricks had a few related families living on the same street. None of the residents on Burma Road were related to each other. However, many of the residents on Burma said their extended family lived in the area. This might have affected neighboring ties and patterns.

The economic factors differed on the three streets. On Rowan many of the residents rented, mainly because there were more homes on lots to rent. However there were absent landlords on some of the properties. On Hendricks most of the residents

bought and lived in their homes; very few were rented out. On Burma Road generally the homes were bought by the residents with few if any being rented. The length of time a resident lived in the home varied from the neighborhoods. On Rowan because of the large number of rentals and incoming immigrants, many residents move in and out, which was also confirmed by my informant. On Hendricks many of the residents did not move in and out, and many of the residents were still there when I came back 15 years later. Many of the residents on Burma Road, like my informant who has lived there for 16 years, have been living there for many years. Length of stay by the residents did not have an effect on the enacted environment.

The conventional wisdom of length of time and children did not not make the residents of these streets "publicly" socially interact more with each other. In East Los Angeles the pattern is reversed. The more transient and traffic on the street the more enacted the space. Further studies can be conducted in comparing neighborhoods that are equal in physical and income circumstances to give a clear reason why people activate the enacted environment.

Because of the presence of people in the enacted environment in East Los Angeles, there is also a connection to the props or moveable items people bring in to a "space." The more residents used the enacted environment the more props were used. Moveable and non-moveable like fences were common where more interaction took place. Moveable props were prolific on Rowan but few on Burma Road. Street vendors are not as visible on Burma, as they in Rowan and Hendricks. Vendors added a rhythm to the streets by their presence.



Part 1

Street Vendors



Street Vendors

"In the most civilized communities the wanderers become distributors of food and of industrial products to those who spend their days in the ceaseless toil of city life." Adolphe Smith, London, 1877¹⁸

The streets of East Los Angeles provided Mexican and Central American immigrants a backdrop for economic survival by allowing them to sell items and their labor. Economic survival adds to the importance of streets as well as changes the urban landscape by adding more activity. Vendors strategically map out intersections and temporarily transform vacant lots, old gas stations, sidewalks, and curbs into little money-making markets. Corners are most popular, especially between commercial and residential areas which are accessible to the many pedestrians in East Los Angeles.

The vendors are not beggars, but are people starting economically from the bottom, in the United States. Some vendors sell as a full time job, while others to supplement their family income. Many of them have "eyes of hunger", which are the kind of eyes immigrants arriving at Ellis Island had at the turn of the century. These eyes separate the Mexican Immigrant from the less intense eyes of the Mexican American.

Street vendors are one of the most noticeable elements in the urban landscape of East Los Angeles. There are vendors on just about every corner that have high pedestrian activity as well as others walking and driving down the streets. On Whittier Boulevard, a commercial strip, 30 were counted within a few blocks. Quietly or noisily, vendors flow in and out of commercial and residential areas and attract crowds accordingly. They provide services that are common in Mexico: easy access vending on the streets day and night. They can be categorized into groups according to their style and approach.

"Los Moscos" (flies), as they have been coined, are Mexican and Central American day laborers. These laborers are not vendors, however they use streets to sell their labor. In Los Angeles, they have become a common sight and there are an estimated 40 sites where 10 to up 50 men wait for patiently for work.¹⁹ They station themselves at strategic locations (near hardware stores and major traffic arteries) throughout East Los Angeles and other parts of the city. They compete for menial jobs, "which are in short supply" as one unemployed Mexican American said. These men position themselves on the street so they can confront the driver with their eyes. If the driver shows any kind of interest and slightly slows down he will be swarmed over by work-hungry men.

¹⁸ Smith, Adolphe, Street Life in London, Benjamin Bloom, Inc. 1969. p.9

¹⁹ Kelley, Bruce, El Mosco, Los Angeles Times Magazine, March 18, 1990. p. 11



Mariachis (Mexican musicians) walk from bar to bar in East Los Angeles in their black uniforms and instruments looking for work. They station themselves on one particular corner, where people go to hire them for parties.

The "carriers" are usually men that sell anything they can carry. These men are the simplest form of vendor because they do not have much of an overhead and sell various small items. One man carried around a box of tapes while another man had a long pole and at each end were wicker baskets of silk flowers.

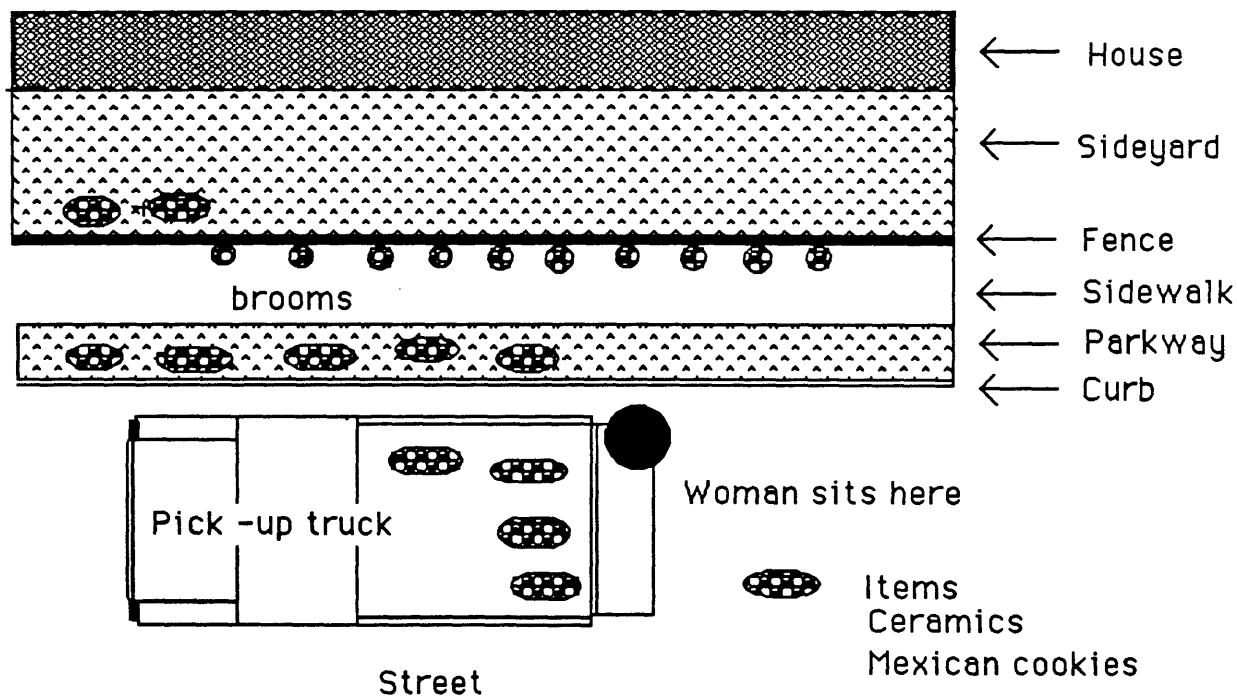
The "Asphalt Vendors" are usually men who stand by strategic freeway off-ramps and on median strips at major street intersections all over East Los Angeles, as well as many other parts of the city. They have replaced the "paper boys" that used to stand in these spots in L.A. Many will keep their wares in market shopping carts, or tie the plastic bags to the chain link fences, if they are by a freeway. These men approach cars as they stop at the intersections and try to sell the drivers a bag of oranges or peanuts for a dollar. A common sight in Mexico, these vendors have invaded the streets of Los Angeles in the past years. However, these vendors are less aggressive than their *Tijuana* counterparts.

"Pushcart vendors" are men and roam the commercial and residential streets of East Los Angeles selling exotic fruit cocktails, tamales, ice cream and vegetables etc.. The pushcart vendors have set patterns of walking a beat. One resident said " In the morning a man comes around selling bread and vegetables and later on in the day different vendor

comes selling other eatable items." The pushcart vendors look out of place in the suburban streets of East Los Angeles, as they push their small carts dodging moving cars.

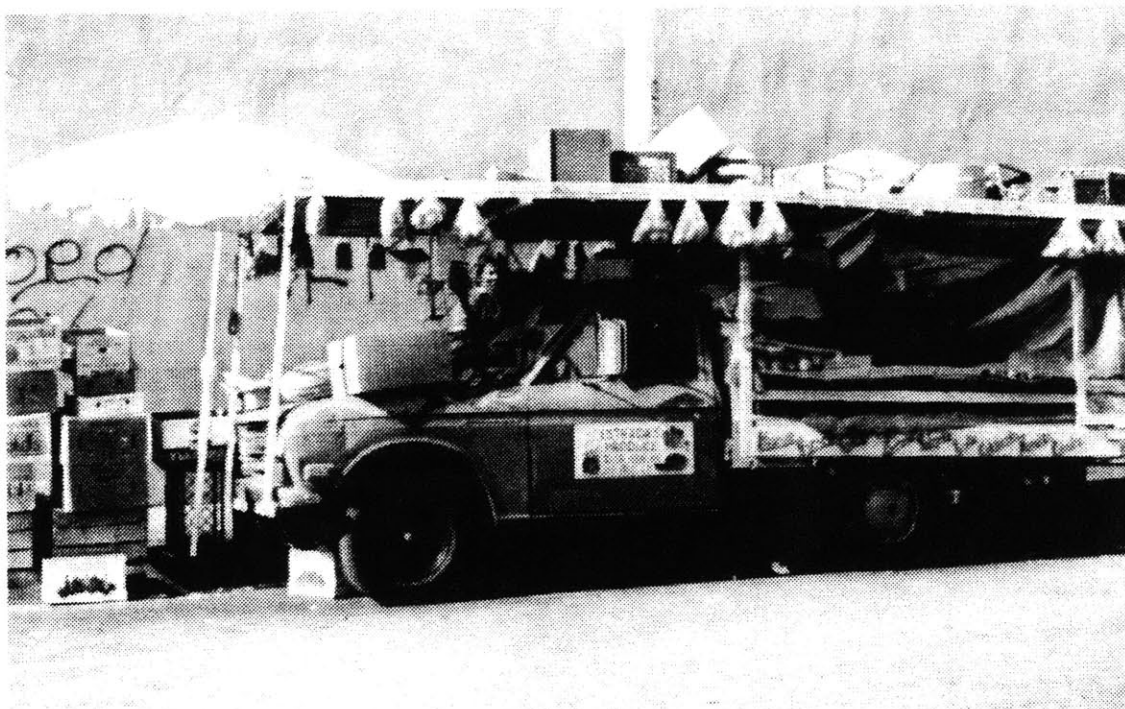
"Tent vendors" are usually female, and create small, enclosed stalls by attaching plastic or fabric from poles, buildings and other means of support. Therefore many tent vendors can be found wedged between building and structural supports. These arrangements are always the most ingenious uses of space. One woman from Guatemala hung a blue plastic cloth from a pole to a fence and created a semi-enclosed stall on the sidewalk. From Thursday to Sunday, she and her daughter sold small items, like bright hair pins, etc.. Others simply place a table outside. Most of the women vendors live around the area in which they have their small stalls.

"Weekend Vendors" sell odds-and-ends, used clothing and household goods mainly on Saturdays; much like a garage sale. Weekend vendors sell these goods from their front lawns and sidewalks via the fence. Fences are an important part of this composition because they hold up items and delineate the selling space. One young boy had sacks of peanuts tied to the fences in front of his house, and placed a small table on the side walk where he conducted business.

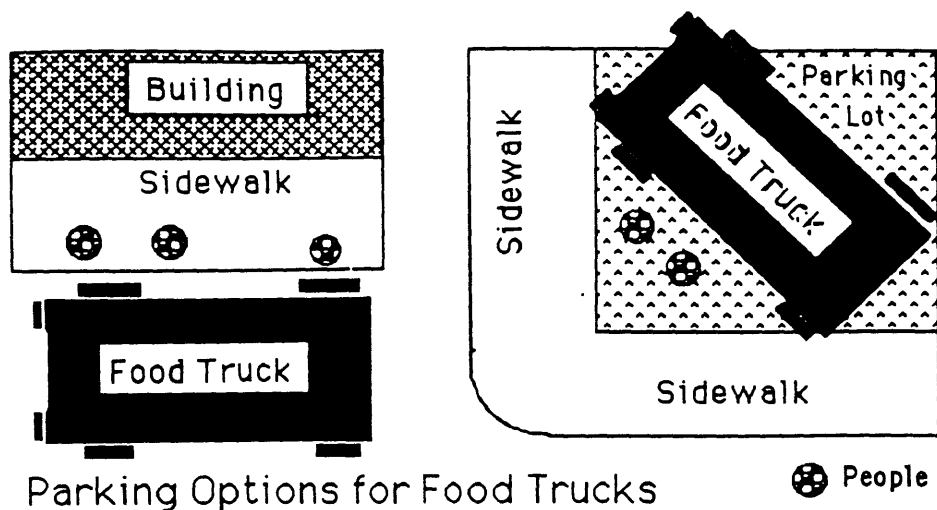


One woman on Lorena Street parked a pick-up truck on the side of her house and sold brightly colored mops, brooms and household items between the truck and the fences, creating her own selling zone. (Figure 14.)

"Auto vendors" are a spontaneous sort and drive around to different locations to find the right market. One auto vendor changed his location three times one Saturday. They conduct business from their truck or car by parking on the roadside and setting up shop. Some will look for vacant lots and set up tents while the others try to find street corners. For some reason these vendors tended to sell new items, like Mexican ceramics or home made objects. Some trucks and station wagons drive around with full cargos of "Mexican white corn." Some trucks are more elaborate and have been converted to roving "bazaars" with things attached everywhere.



The "Roach Coaches" or large food trucks have traditionally been part of the American vending fabric which sell ice cream in the summer, baked goods in the morning and lunches to hard to reach construction and work sites. In East Los Angeles these stainless steel trucks are given names like "*Maritita's*" and have custom built, long windows on the side to serve customers. In the past few years the roach coaches have become very popular and follow the Mexican all over the city from West Side construction sites to *Discotecas* in Hollywood. Women, work long and hard, serving breakfast to men waiting for work, till 2 am when the bars close. These trucks have a style that attracted many people instantaneously. They park everywhere but prefer parking at corners in gas stations or off major streets where they have relative control over the space. Figure 15.



Street vendors are not new to East Los Angeles . During the twenties in the Old Plaza Barrio,(Olveria Street area) there were many food vendors. However, in the past few years they have increased dramatically. When I showed pictures of these vendors to Mexican Americans who had moved away from East Los Angeles many years ago, a few thought these pictures were from "Tijuana." Many were very ambivalent about the vendors.

This type of selling is prohibited in many communities around East Los Angeles. Many residents complain about the trash that these vendors generate. Policemen sometimes wait at city borders and harass and escort these vendors into the correct municipalities. There has been talk in Los Angeles about licensing or prohibiting the vendors for sanitary reasons. On the other hand, the argument has been that many of these vendors are not applying for welfare, therefore saving the taxpayers money. One resident said that many make from \$10 to \$ 80 dollars a day depending on the items and services sold. Licensing might destroy this fragile economy by suppressing the vendors response to their markets.

In the many "Festival Marketplaces" pushcarts are used but they are pre-planned and programed. There is nothing planed or "fake" about the vendors in East Los Angeles. They are genuine reflection of "real" life.

East Los Angeles is an ephemeral. place Things come, things go, but some things never change. East Los Angeles lives in a daily cycle all its own as well as being part of a greater cycle of the Mexican immigrants "on there way north."

Part II

Props

Personal Markers

'La Yarda:' A Personal Expression

Fences: A Social Catalyst

No blank Walls

Grafetti, Store Signs Murals

Conclusion



Props

*"The selection of objects and the nature of their grouping constitute nonverbal expressions of thought, need, conditions, emotions. Thus, when people shape their surrounding, they introduce man-made order."*²⁰
Jurgen Ruesch & Weldon Kees

Personal Markers

Props add the second layer of "architecture" to the urban landscape of East Los Angeles. Props produce a sense of security in a place by acting as markers for territory. "Plains Indians and other nomadic tribes traditionally created personal places simply by throwing down rugs, blankets, and hides to show the bit of ground had been claimed by a person until he chose to move his markers."²¹

East Los Angeles is a low-income area, but what separates it from other low-income public housing sites is has been individualized by residents through props. "For low-income housing, it has been suggested that a special effort needs to be made by housing administrators to encourage personalization by residents. The goal is to encourage symbolic messages in housing that residents can identify with, and that will reinforce a positive self-image rather than the negative one associated with many housing projects."²²

No space in East Los Angeles is left unused or unmarked. Therefore the juxtaposition between objects that occurs is not always understandable to the outsider. The props, in East Los Angeles, are more apparent and aggressive in their use. They can be seen, heard, felt and smelled. On weekends in East Los Angeles one can follow the crowds. Smell roasting ears of corn. Taste the tangy fresh cut pineapple and chile powder. Touch the smallest trinkets. See the colors and the people. Hear laughter and sway to . music and the rhythm of the city. East Los Angeles is an animated and extroverted urban environment that confronts the viewer.

A parked car can become the center of a day's activities just from shifting its location. A pushcart selling ice cream captures a fleeting moment of social exchange between eager children. A sofa under a tree or on a porch, can allow the resident to wallow away the afternoon, while a barbecue pit can generate some revenue and neighborhood gossip.

Music can be used as a prop because it can control and define space through generating an audio mechanism. People use a Walkman or a boom box to create their own

²⁰ Collier, John, *Visual Anthropology*. University of New Mexico Press, 1986. p.46

²¹ Steele, Fritz, *The Sense of Place*. CBI Publishing, Boston, 1981. p.195

²² Becker, Franklin D. *Housing Messages*. Dowden, Hutchinson and Ross, Inc. Stroudsburg, PA, 1977 Chapter 4.

personalized environment through sound; one quietly and the other aggressively. In East Los Angeles the Spanish and rhythmic Disco music sounds are aggressive to some, normal to others. From walking *mariachis* to car stereos, both create an ambience through their music. Each appeals to a different audience; however it is through music that an extra layer is added to the urban landscape. One store on Whittier Boulevard every weekend hires *mariachis* to play in front of the shop. Figure 16.

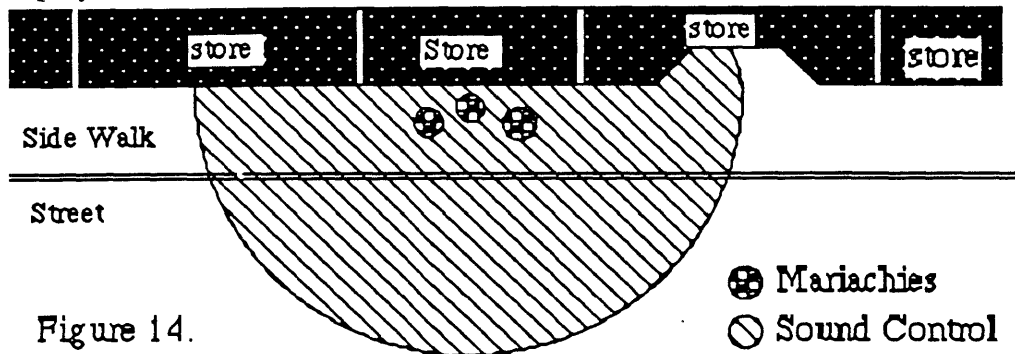


Figure 14.

In East Los Angeles many of the shop owners have opened up the front walls of stores and place glass walls that open up during the day, which provide an "open end." The opened end to the street connects the indoor and outdoor spaces. Inexpensive wares of the store are placed outside on the sidewalk, which advertise by creating a three dimensional display enhancing the pedestrian experience. (fig.18) Parked cars, pushcart vendors and saleable merchandise take over the sidewalks and streets. Props create a tactile quality to the sidewalks in front of these stores. Figure 17.

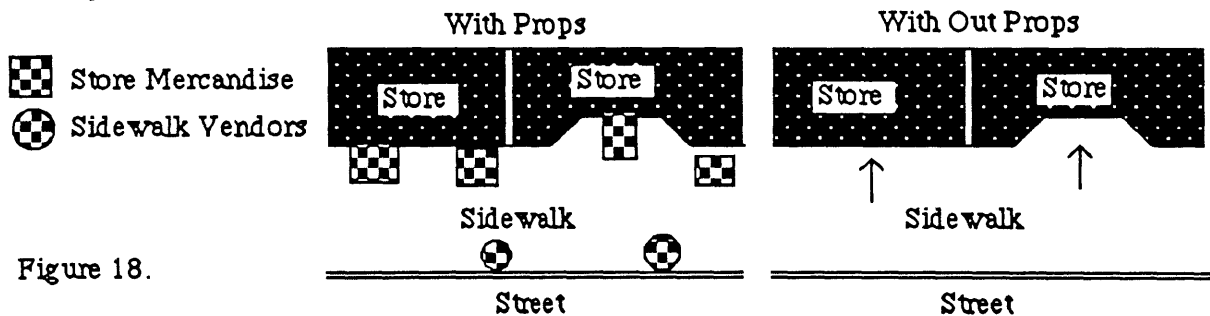


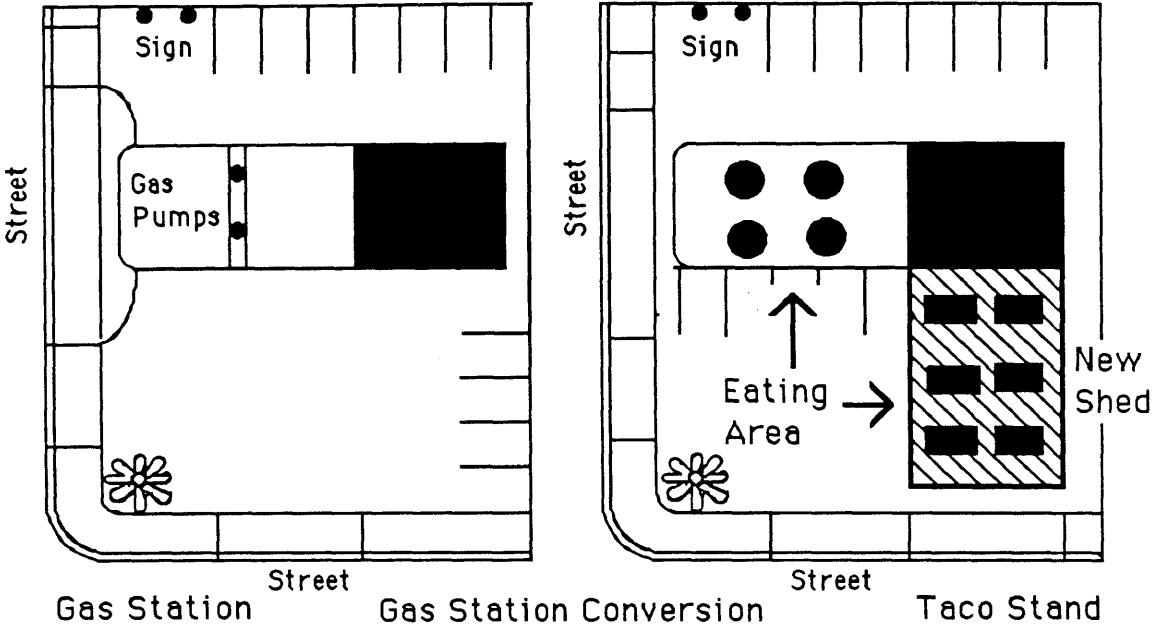
Figure 18.

Olympic Boulevard, a no-mans land, has been "pedestrianized" by the use of props. Abandoned gas stations, vacant lots, auto repair shops, and large signs on one story commercial building strengthen banal appearance. The street has been transformed with only minor physical changes to the structures.

Many gas stations in East Los Angeles have been converted into Taco Stands by the heavy use of props, with only minor changes to the structure. Instead of saying Shell or Exxon the thirty foot signs will advertise the taco stand. Wrought iron sheds are

sometimes added in an attempt to enclose some of the open space. Pumps are replaced by tables and chairs and arranged in a very formal pattern. These "arrogant" arrangements of small tables and chairs, as grand as any European outdoor cafe, make a bold attempt to capture and reenforce street activity. People sit and eat here having direct visual access to the street. This function is being express with a minimal amount of built form and uses props and people to create the atmosphere.

Figure 18.

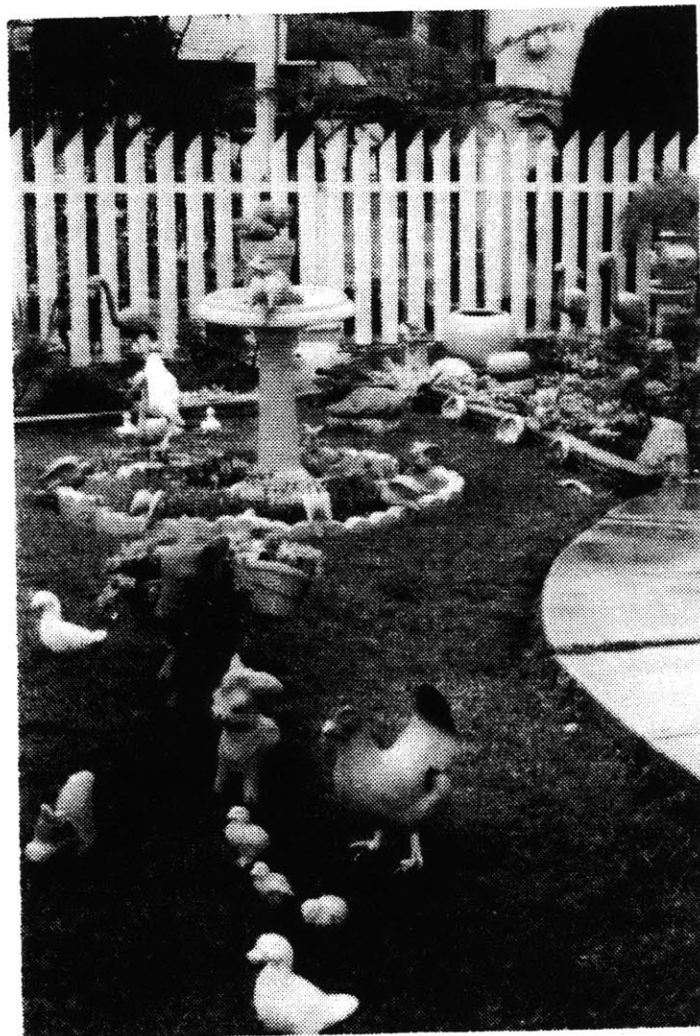


The use of props in both the residential and commercial areas in East Los Angeles creates a connection between the two zones. Props scale down the urban landscape to a pedestrian level, which contradicts the automobile scale of Los Angeles. Rapoport suggests that for different speeds, different cues and levels should be designed.²³ In East Los Angeles the cues are at the pedestrian level on the commercial strips and in the residential neighborhoods. Driving on the streets of East Los Angeles all one sees is clutters, of people, props and vendors. Walking, however, one experiences a rich tactile landscape that enhances the enacted environment.

The small homes in East Los Angeles become intimate in scale by the use of props. In Los Angeles, most residential streets are scaled for the "automobile viewing": what one sees driving is what one will generally see walking. Expansive lawns, trees, and shrubbery look good from the automobile, but might not keep the interest of the pedestrian. In East Los Angeles the majority of homes are geared for pedestrian viewing. What may

²³ Moudon, Anne Vernez, Public Streets for Public Use, Van Nostrand Reinhold Company 1987 p.p.87

seem like a mess from the automobile becomes a very personal experience for the pedestrian. The attention to detail is increased by the use of small objects in the front yard and porch. Props are very personal items in East Los Angeles and say something about the owner and user.



A front Yard

"La Yarda: A Personal Expression"

Nowhere else in the urban landscape of East Los Angeles is the Mexican use of space so illuminated and celebrated than in the enclosed front yard. As Mexican immigrants settled into their new homes, the front yards became a very personal expression. Depending on the practical needs of the owners, the use and design of the front yard vary from elaborate courtyard gardens reminiscent of Mexico to junk yards. The Mexican brings a new interpretation of the American front yard because many homes in Mexico do not have them. One Mexican resident said "In Mexico I never had such a piece of land like this", as he pointed to the front yard which some Mexican residents refer to as "la yarda." The front yards reflects Mexican cultural values applied to American suburban form.

Upon entering one of these enclosed front yards, suddenly the residents private world unfolds. I saw the neighborhood from the resident's perspective. I was in a space where all sights and sounds from the uncontrollable street have been manipulated and tailored to the needs of the owner. All the things that looked like clutter from outside the fences became as organized and detailed as objects in a room: such as a potted plant on a table, a set of chairs, and a shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The enclosed front yard acts like a room without a ceiling because of the privacy and sense of security.

The homes in East Los Angeles are sited like other "American homes which are usually located at the middle or rear part of a lot, with a visible expanse of land separating the home from public thoroughfares."²⁴ However the personalization of the front yard by the residents and the fences enclosing them have greatly changed the appearance of the "visible expanse of land." Enclosed front yards are so dominant that they have altered the residents' behavior patterns, and the general physical characteristics of the neighborhoods. The green continuous park-like setting that symbolizes the American front yard in the suburb has been cut up into individual slices in East Los Angeles. These "slices" create diversity, and allow individuality and sociability to take place more readily.

In order to appreciate the neighborhood transformations in East Los Angeles by the Mexican residents, one must understand the values of American suburban neighborhoods. The front yard in middle class suburbs, as J.B. Jackson suggests has become "a space dedicated to showing that we are good citizens, and responsible members of the community".²⁵ The responsibility toward the community is measured by how well the

²⁴ Altman, Irwin, Culture and Environment, Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1980. p.186

²⁵ Jackson, J.B., The Popular Yard, Places, Vol. 4, No. 3,

household maintains the neighborhood standards through the up keep of the front yard. Community identity is further developed through a collective understanding in the treatment of the front yard by all residents. A balance is struck between the collective and the individual identity in the front yard. In East Los Angeles, the community identity of the neighborhood is not measured by the collective understanding of the front yard, but rather the collective understanding of the individuality of each resident.

The appearance of the front yard is the standard for acceptance in many middle class neighborhood.. In East Los Angeles the acceptance is not based on appearance of the front yard but through physical and social contact with the neighbors.

The front yards in East Los Angeles are not anonymous spaces but are personal vignettes of the owner's life. While J.B Jackson describes the front yard as becoming a very impersonal space in which "no one sits there, no personal objects are left lying around and beds of flowers are few,"²⁶ each front yard in an East Los Angeles neighborhood can be read as to who uses and lives at the space by the use and treatment of the space. Porteous and Altman both agree that in the middle class neighborhood personalization is achieved through changes in the appearance of the home. This is achieved through the color of the house and the placement of flowers, antique carriage lamps, cart wheels etc. on the front lawn. However, these collective symbols of individuality somehow fall short because they are universally accepted symbols that are tolerated in most American middle class suburban neighborhoods. These symbols remain anonymous; who are the "Smiths or Jones" as their name plate in front of the house indicates?

In one sense, many of the symbols used to personalize the front yards in East Los Angeles such as fences, potted plants, fountains,etc., have become impersonal within the Mexican community, and only separate these households from the society at large. Within the Mexican neighborhoods it is the daily use of the front yard that creates the personality or identity of the owner. A use might occur because of lack of space in the house or for reasons of practicality. The Mexican residents expose much of their personal life and daily habits in the front yard, while as J.B. Jackson indicated most middle class Americans put their daily habits in the backyard. Mexicans bring the family dog, the vegetable garden and everyday objects to the front yard.

²⁶ Ibid.

NEIGHBORS



Upon walking down a neighborhood street in East Los Angeles one becomes quickly aware of who might be living in each house. If the residents are not outside doing something in their front yard, they leave traces and symbols by the objects left there. Children's toys give reference to children living here. A lack of planting around the fence might indicate a dog runs around the front yard. Intricate gardens, potted plants, small statues and a more removed presence from the street might indicate an elderly person may reside here or a person who is not too involved in the street activity. Auto parts and lots of cars might indicate that teenagers live here at this address.

Some have small grass lawns while others are like jungles with plants growing every place with no order. Still others are totally concrete and used as parking lots. Others combine many of these conditions. From old appliances, car parts, children's toys, plastic bottles with water, junk, chairs and tables, every thing has a place in the front yard.

Still one may come across a front yard that has no fence enclosing it and wonder why because it is so rare. Depending on the condition of the house, this may be a sign for one of a home of one of the remaining elderly Anglo or Japanese residents, or if the yard has heavy usage, the people that live here might be renters or are too poor to build a fence.

The maintenance of the front yard varies from house to house; one may be nicely kept up while the next is a junk yard. No one is ever penalized for not watering or taking care of their front yard. As one person put it "I do not care what my neighbor does in their yard".

J. Douglas Porteous argues that the personalization of space promotes security and identity.²⁷ Security, because people have manipulated the space to their own practical and aesthetic needs, creating a physical indicator. Personalization, also, is a defense against burglars as a study by Brown (1979) indicated. Brown found that homes that were more personalized with fences, hedges, name signs, etc. were less likely to be burglarized than homes that were anonymous.²⁸

Residents in East Los Angeles identify with these front yards because they understand and can "read" into the personalization. Most outsiders to East Los Angeles are not prepared to read the front yards and think that they are unsightly.

²⁷ Porteous, J. Douglas, Home: The Territorial Core, Geographical Review, Vol 66, 1976. p. 384

²⁸ Bell, Paul, Environmental Psychology, Holt, Rinehart and Wilson, Inc. 1990. p. 269

"Fences: A Social Catalyst"

Good Fences make Good Neighbors



In many front yards across America one can find fences, however, for the Mexican and Mexican American residents in East Los Angeles fences have a different meaning. "The egalitarian attitudes of American culture have led many people to think of fences entirely in terms of exclusion,"²⁹ seclusion, or security: a barrier against the world. In the neighborhoods and barrios of East Los Angeles fences are a social catalyst that bring neighbors and pedestrians together for social interaction.

The American pioneers built fences as they expanded westward, from the stone fences of New England, to the barbed wire fences of the great plains. Fences helped the pioneers to stake out their claims in the new frontier by creating a "feeling" of security and permanence: the builder is here to stay. In East Los Angeles, where fences are very popular in the front yards, fences represent the stability of the home owner at that location. The fences may represent the insecurity of the Mexican immigrant living in a strange land. Fences create easily defendable spaces and illustrate a simple, straight forward approach to possession: "This is my space."

J.B. Jackson has stated that boundaries bring people together³⁰ and the fences in East Los Angeles define boundaries between neighbors and public and private space. In Spanish there is a saying "through respect their can be peace". Respect for the individuality of each resident is reenforced in the use of fences which clearly delineate

²⁹ Greenbie, Barrie B, Spaces, Dimensions of the Human Landscape, Yale Press , 1981. p.9

³⁰ Zube, Ervin H., Landscapes: Selected Writing of J.B. Jackson, University of Massachusetts Press, 1970. p. 70

property ownership. Therefore the residents can personalize their front yard without physically interfering with the neighbors. Porteous states "higher levels of stimulation emerge when that which is personalized is also defended."³¹ Like small castles the households of East Los Angeles interacted with each other.

The general consensus among many Mexican Americans is that fences have always been a part of the barrio landscape. A study conducted in 1947 in the Maravilla section of East Los Angeles reported "that even though the fences were old and dilapidated there were very few lots not enclosed by some kind of wire or wood fencing material"³²

While some households in the barrio have had fences "forever" others residents built the fences to protect their home, keep their neighbors pets out of their front yard or keep their small children from running into the street. None of the residents indicated that the fences were built to promote social interaction; however driving through the neighborhoods of East Los Angeles one would see fences being used for this very function.

People do not always mean what they say, as William Whyte proved when he conducted a study on the use of public open space in New York City. He found that while most people spoke about public space as being a retreat or an oasis, they did the opposite and went to and congregated in the busiest open spaces in the city. Very few people said they liked to sit in the middle of a crowd. "What people do however reveals a different story"³³ as in the case of the fences in East Los Angeles.

The fences break down the social and physical barriers by creating an edge "which is where people tend to congregate."³⁴ The lawn that separates the front yard from the street no longer exists in East Los Angeles neighborhoods. The American suburban house uses this "visible expanse of land" as a psychological barrier that separates the private space of the home from the public space of the street. People do not walk on the grass of another person's front lawn unless they are invited or are children and pets.³⁵ The fence can create a comfortable point for social interaction between a front yard and the sidewalk compared with a front yard that is not enclosed.

³¹ Porteous, J. Douglas, Home: The Territorial Core, Geographical Review, Vol 66, 1976. p. 385

³² Ginn, Mabelle, Social Implication of the Living Conditions of a Selected Number of Families Participating in the Cleland House Program, University of Southern California Masters Thesis, 1947. p.47

³³ Whyte, William H, The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces, The Conservation Foundation, 1980, p.19

³⁴ Greenbie, Barrie B, Spaces. Dimensions of the Human Landscape, Yale Press , 1981. p.12

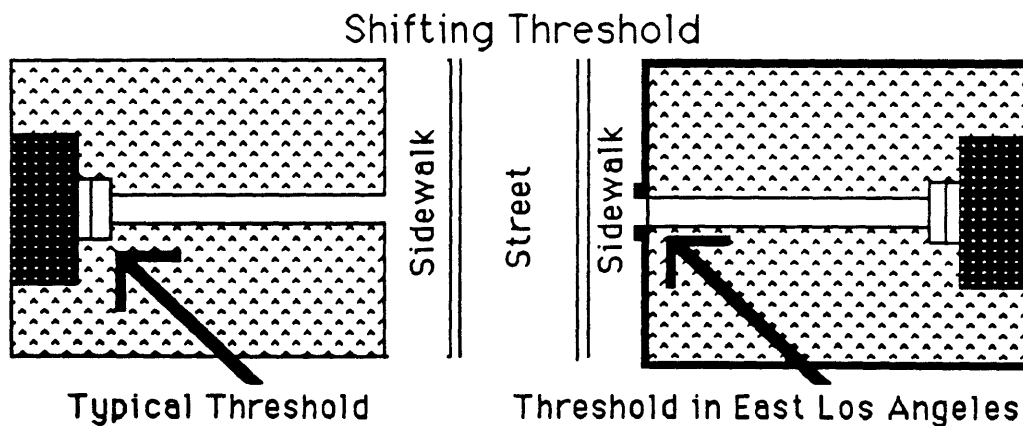
³⁵ Porteous, J. Douglas, Home: The Territorial Core, Geographical Review, Vol 66, 1976 p. 385

can create a comfortable point for social interaction between a front yard and the sidewalk compared with a front yard that is not enclosed.

Amos Rapoport hypothesizes that the approach of a stranger to an unfamiliar private door raises the anxiety level of both stranger and occupant.³⁶ Different cultures have varied methods of dealing with the separations of public and private space. In Islamic architecture high walls are built to separate the home from the street. One Mexican said that expensive homes in Mexico, built in the "North American Style", without the courtyard also tended to build high walls in front of the house. Because the City and County of Los Angeles have restricted the height of fences in the front yard to 30 to 42 inches high it is unknown if Mexicans living in East Los Angeles would build likewise.

Because of these restrictions and the permeable materials used for fences (such as chain link or wrought iron) the viewer is physically confronted by the fence initially; however, they are visually "invited" into the front yard. "The essence of civilized life is sharing space with others without intruding or being intruded upon"³⁷

The use of fences in the front yard modifies the approach to the home and moves the threshold from the front door to the front gate. The enclosed front yard physically defines a barrier between the public and private spaces of the home in relation to the street. The enclosed front yard in East Los Angeles acts as a large foyer, and becomes an active part of the "housescape". The mailbox is usually placed on the front gate or is accessible from the sidewalk. Figure 19.



One develops a sense of entry into the home as they step into the front yard off the sidewalk. In East Los Angeles, the front gate or entry way of masonry and wrought-iron

³⁶ Rapoport, Amos, House Form and Culutre. Prentice-Hall Inc., 1969,

³⁷ Greenbie, Barrie B, Spaces, Dimensions of the Human Landscape, Yale Press , 1981. p. 9

The threshold of the home is a pivotal part of housescape. "The threshold of homes conveys openness/accessibility and closeness/ inaccessibility of families to outsiders. Visitors rarely cross the threshold of a home unless invited to do so. And inviting or not inviting someone to enter the home is a clear signal of the occupant's desire for more or less contact. One can keep visitors 'At bay' by not inviting them to cross the threshold, and this is a powerful device in American society to regulate interaction."³⁸

The enclosed front yard becomes a large "defendable" threshold in East Los Angeles, which in fact, allows for more social interaction to take place between the residents and pedestrians. In a typical threshold of an American home and especially apartments, which lack a defendable threshold,³⁹ there is great pressure to define the social interaction because one can not have a comfortable conversation at the front door or in a hallway. On the other hand one may not want to get too involved in a conversation and have to invite the other party in.

In East Los Angeles it is perfectly acceptable to have conversations at the front gate and not invite the people inside the home. Push-cart vendors will sell their wares from the front gate and never expect to be invited into the front yard or the home. By coincidence most of my interviews in East Los Angeles were done from the fence. It is a very casual informal spot in which one does not have to enter the domain of the resident but is free to come and go as they please. On the other hand, the resident is very much in control of the area. They can greet friends, neighbors and strangers from the semi-private space of the defined front lawn.

The social interaction one experiences in the enclosed front yard is not as demanding and intimate as being in a house. Since this space is public the interaction is very casual, like being in a European cafe where one could stare off for a few seconds and not offend their companions. In the front yard, one is always aware of cars and people going by on the street.

Collectively, the enclosed front yards in the neighborhoods create a very intimate atmosphere as apposed to the non-enclosed front yards of typical suburbs. The fences along the street break up the lawn space of each home and the street becomes more urban rather than suburban in character, because the fence reflects a personality of the resident on the street. Don Schon, a professor at MIT, thought that fences in the front yard create a rural setting rather than urban feeling, however in East Los Angeles because of various factors (the narrow streets, around 25ft. set backs of the house from the street, and use of

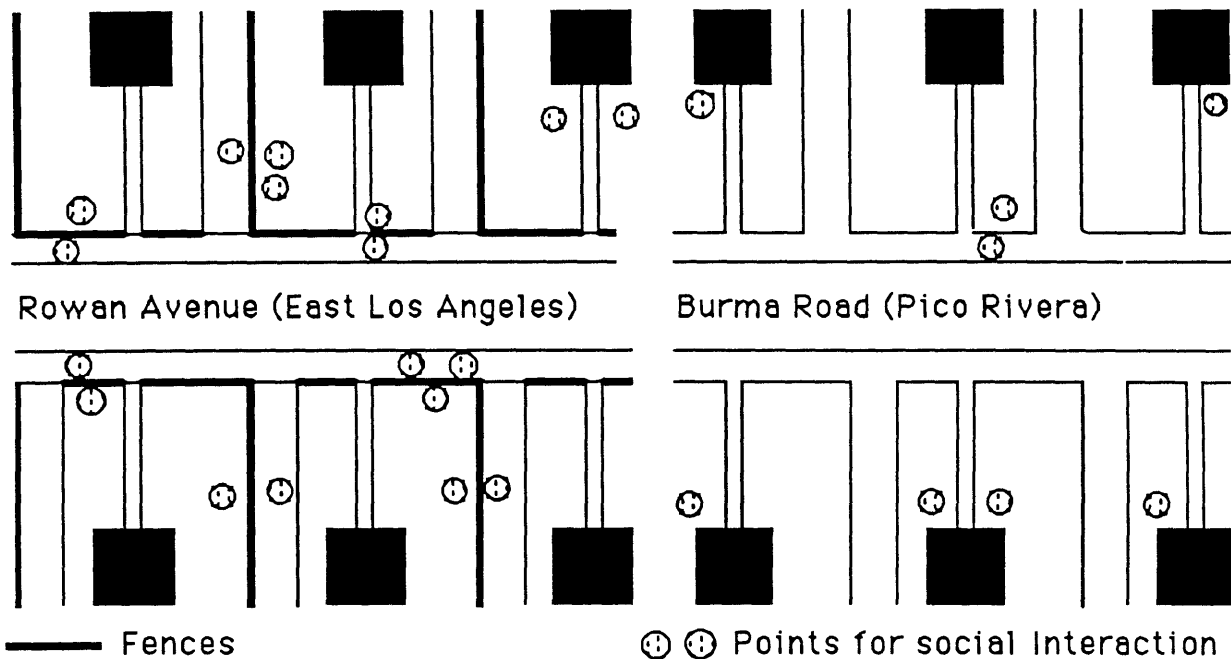
³⁸ Altman, Irwin, Culture and Environment, Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1980. p.190

³⁹ Newman, Oscar, Defensible Space, Macmillan, 1972

space) the housescape pushes itself into the street via the fence. The street can now function like a suburban plaza where every resident can participate in the public space of the street from a private space in their front yard. This relationship between the public and private space can be described like a table in a restaurant. The table creates a defined private space for the individual seated there while at the same time they are part of the bigger public space.

Many points for social interaction occur when the front yard is enclosed. The diagram below records the locations of interaction over one weekend in two neighborhoods in the East Los Angeles area.

Diagram of Fenced Frontyards and Non-Fenced Front Yards



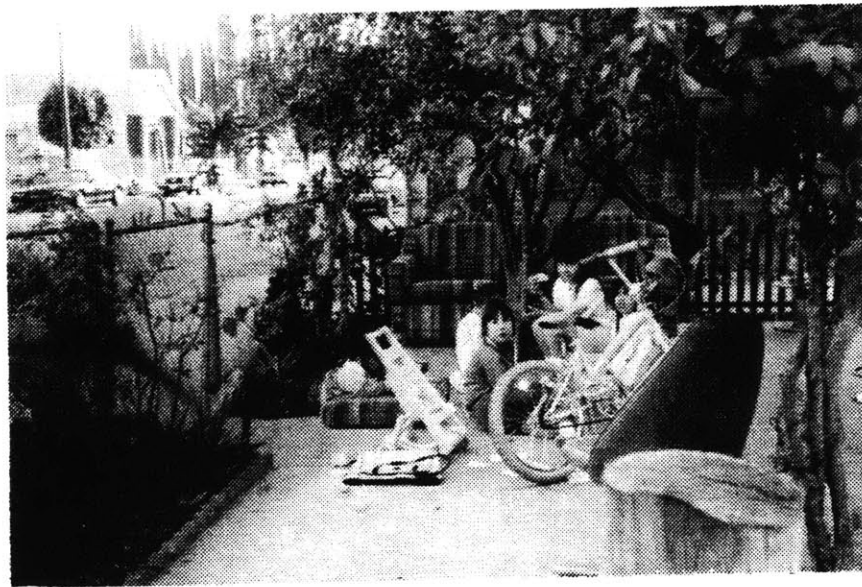
A hierarchy of spaces is created when the front yard is enclosed. The resident can give the signal for social interaction just by being outside in the front yard. The resident has a choice of the type of social interaction they want to take place. By positioning themselves in different areas within the front yard they can control different levels of social encounters. To the right or left of the yard, the resident has the possibility of talking to either neighbor on a very intimate and independent basis over a long period of time. On the other hand, if the resident chooses more casual, quick conversation, they can position themselves by the front gate and have more public access to the street and its pedestrians.

In William Whyte's study of New York City's Plazas and how people used the space, he found that " people will stop and talk in the middle of the traffic stream. They

show an inclination to station themselves near objects and like well-defined places such as steps. What they rarely choose is the middle of a large space."⁴⁰ This is also the case in the neighborhoods of East Los Angeles where the sidewalks serve as the "traffic stream" and the fences become "well-defined place".

Conclusion

Recently architects and urban designers have started to use street furniture, such as plants, benches, and vendors, in the design of public spaces, especially for the "Festival Marketplace". However, in the "Festival Marketplace" the props used are planned and reflected a control of the user in the space, even though props enhance the space. The props used in these planned situations are generic and reflect a "pedestrian friendly" environment rather than culture indicators of a specific group of people. East Los Angeles, however, is not planned as such and the props reflect the nature of the people and are "cultural indicators."



A front Yard

⁴⁰ Whyte, William H, The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces. The Conservation Foundation, 1980. p.21-22

"No Blank Walls"



"The dominant feature of the townscape of U.S. cities is coming to be the blank wall."⁴¹ William Whyte

Very few walls are left untouched in East Los Angeles. From graffiti, store signs and murals, blank wall space becomes a cultural expression of many forms for *cholos* (gang members), political groups and shop owners. Expressing one's self through visual symbols is a universal concept and in East Los Angeles one can read the walls. Garage doors, fences, sidewalks, building walls, benches, buses and, recently, the freeway signs have become targets of personal expression. All this expression creates a new reality of visual stimulation as well as "fills in" the urban environment. The order of the place and the purity of the blankness are violated by these images.

"Blank walls proclaim the power of the institution and inconsequence of the individual, whom they are clearly meant to intimidate."⁴²

Graffiti

Graffiti are the most prolific form of visual communication and can be found just about everywhere in East Los Angeles. Graffiti have been around for such a long time and have developed into such a personal expression that the characters have evolved into

⁴¹ Whyte, William H. City Rediscovering the Center. Anchor Books, 1988. p.222

⁴² Ibid. p.226

distinct shapes and symbols. Traditionally, *pachocos* and later *cholos* have used graffiti as territorial indicators. To the outsider none of these visual markings make any sense, but to the people that do them and read them they do. Most residents in East Los Angeles do not like graffiti and are constantly painting over it. Nevertheless, this graffiti is very much part of the urban landscape of East Los Angeles.



Signs & Symbols

In Mexico graphics and symbols are an important communication tool as they were historically in the United States and Europe. In the Mexico City subway graphics and names are used to indicate stops. In East Los Angeles, store owners use both pictures and words to advertise.

In East Los Angeles certain pictures indicate the type of store. A large pig's head or jersey cow indicate a butcher shop. Cornucopias indicate vegetable and fruit stands. However, these graphics add a strong visual element to the structures and urban landscape. Stores in East Los Angeles are kinetic because of the graphics and flamboyant use of words. Many of the "tasteful" signs from chain shops have been replaced in many of the shopping districts in East Los Angeles by locally made signs and graphics. Many buildings are painted from top to bottom which changes the character of the sometimes, sterile structures.

In *Learning from Las Vegas*, the authors examine signs in relation to buildings on highways and conclude that "Symbol dominates space. Architecture is not enough. Because the spatial relationships are made by symbols more than by forms, architecture in this landscape becomes a symbol in space rather than form in space. Architecture defines very little: the big sign and the little building. The sign is more important than the architecture." ⁴³

Murals

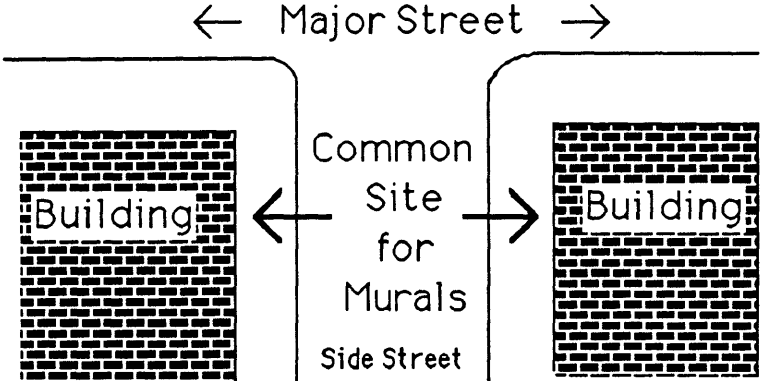


Murals are another form of advertisement, which traditionally has been a political way of communication in Mexico. During the revolution, murals by Rivera, Tomayo and others were used to express social ideologies. In East Los Angeles there are political, religious and whimsical murals used by shop owners. All the murals are expressions of different values in the barrio. Murals of Our Lady of Guadeloupe are popular because she is the patron saint of Mexico. Many of the murals from the seventies express social ideologies. However, it is the murals that the shop owners commission for advertisement, which are very common in East Los Angeles. The whimsical murals are very animated. Here is the description of a few I saw.

⁴³ Venturi, Robert, *Learning from Las Vegas*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1978. p.p. 13

Neptunes eyes gazed at me with a mischievous look to them. The whole corner structure has been covered with ocean blue. This mural is on a bar that has an aquatic theme. Three winos are sitting on a ledge under Neptunes mouth talking in Spanish and drinking beer wondering why I am taking a picture. On another corner, a mural also on a bar, is of a woman in a bathing suit smoking a cigarette and having some fun. Across the street is a mural of a woman making tortillas for two men, in an alpine village.

Murals make an otherwise marginal space very tolerable. Most are painted on the large expansive, walls on the corners of building. These spaces are usually targets for graffiti and the murals may not stop it but they prevent the graffiti from dominating the space. Plus they provide advertising for the owner as well as employ local youths to create the masterpieces. What they do is "wrap" the commercial activity into an otherwise forgotten space by livening it up. These corner areas are important spots in East Los Angeles.



Murals add an element of public art and local culture to otherwise dull buildings and streets. Again they salute the street on a pedestrian level. Murals and graphics can be appreciated from a car or from the perspective of the pedestrian. In many cases vendors will hang out in these locations further activating the space.

Murals, signs and graffiti create an identity of place by being a personal expression to the creators and markers of place. They offer an inexpensive, quick procedure on personalizing a space. These elements, combined with the physical form, create the vernacular.

"Corporate advertisers control the airwaves, printed media, and most city walls. . .The lesson of the mural groups is that some exterior spaces can be reclaimed by the community to reflect its own culture."⁴⁴ Robert Sommer

⁴⁴ Sommer, Robert, Street Art, Links Books, 1975, last page

Mural & Props



Part III

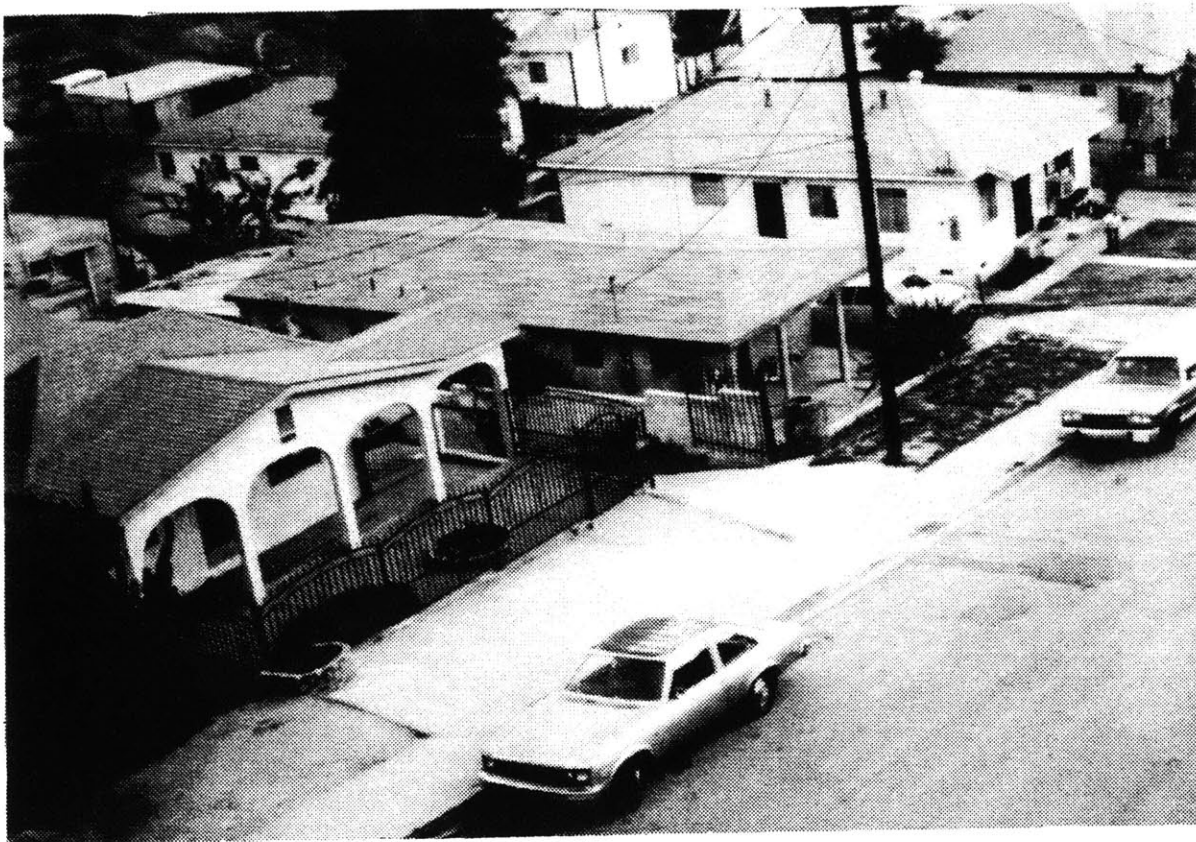
East Los Angeles Vernacular

Extroverted Housescapes

Multi-Purpose Driveway

Outgoing Porches

Meaning



East Los Angeles Vernacular

*"A house form is not simply the result of physical forces or any single causal factor, but is the consequence of a whole range of socio-cultural factors."*⁴⁵
Amos Rapoport

People and their needs are the bases for changes made to the enacted environment. This is the final phase of the three tiered urban landscape which examined people, and props. The homes of East Los Angeles set the stage for the enacted environment. Mexicans live in small wooden houses, built by Anglos, which have evolved into what I call "East Los Angeles Vernacular," because it is unique to this area.

In Los Angeles, the city of suburbs, and where architectural freedom runs rampant, the small housescapes of East Los Angeles seem inconsequential compared to the homes designed by Greene & Greene, Richard Nuetra, Rudolph Schindler, and Frank Gehry. However, these East L.A. houses are distinct because they are built by non-architects. East Los Angeles vernacular is not built by architects in anticipating users needs. On the contrary, it is users needs dictating the form of the architecture.

*"You know, it is always life that is right and the architect that is wrong."*⁴⁶
Le Corbusier

The houses of East Los Angeles are customized and personal with every change, no matter how small, having meaning and purpose. East Los Angeles vernacular represents the struggles, triumphs, everyday habits and beliefs of the working class residents. The vernacular form offers cultural, economic and regional solutions to the residents' set criteria. The beauty of the vernacular cannot be measured by any architectural standard but in life's experiences, which are ambiguous. The vernacular represents peoples' manipulation and adaptation over their environment.

This not a new phenomenon, but a dynamic process that is constantly being conducted by people all over the world. Philip Boudon in his book *Lived in Architecture*, documents the changes made by the residents to a housing project in Pessac, France designed by Le Courbusier. These modern houses were designed as "machines to live in" but as the author notes, forty years later they have been converted into 'chez soi'.⁴⁷

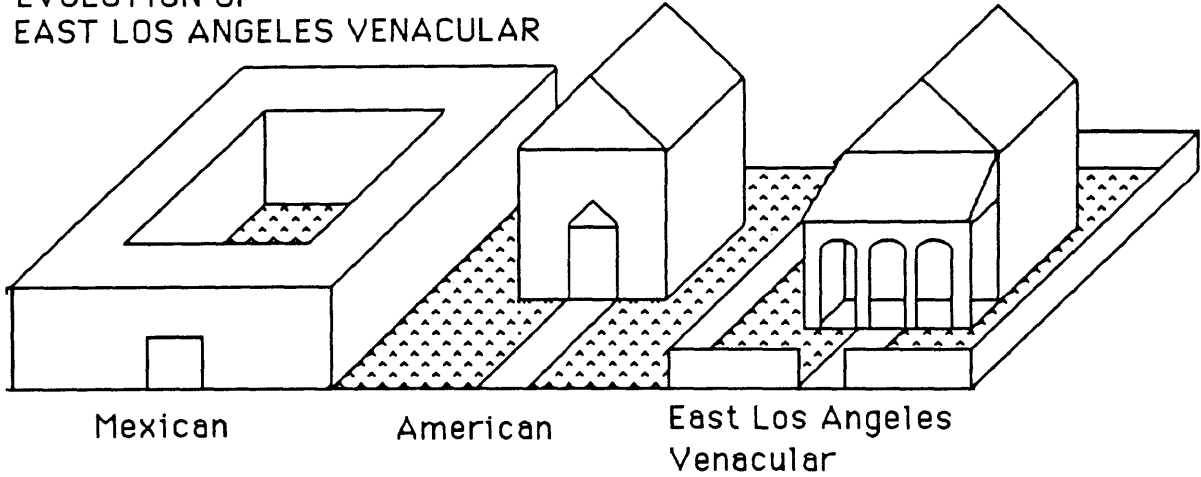
⁴⁵ Rapoport, Amos. *House, Form and Culture*. Prentice Hall, 1969. p. 47

⁴⁶ Boudon Philippe, *Lived-in Architecture*, MIT Press, 1979. pp 1-2.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. 1-2

East Los Angeles vernacular is more complicated than Pessac because it engages the issue of cultural difference. One must understand the difference and similarities in the Mexican and Anglo values towards the urban landscape in order to be able to comprehend and appreciate the unique combination in East Los Angeles. A bastard of two architectural vocabularies, it creates a new language that uses syntax from both cultural styles that is neither "Spanish" style as the general public views it, nor is it Anglo American. The diagram below illustrates this:

EVOLUTION OF EAST LOS ANGELES VENACULAR



East Los Angeles vernacular is not faceless and artificial but consists of stages and layers that reflect the behavior patterns, wealth and character of the residents. The transformation of each home varies from house to house in the following stages:

1. Minimal change, in which the house is defined by the use of the residents.
2. Minor changes, with the construction of a fence (chain link), painting and stuccoing.
3. Major Spending up to thousands of dollars on major structural changes, such as adding or enlarging the front porch, expensive wrought iron fences, fountains and other adornments.

Each stage communicates something about the owner to other neighbors and outsiders.

Flow of Space

"Shy" American style homes are transformed into an extroverted structural form that is expressed in the enacted environment. Each house "communicates" with each other. Although most homes in East Los Angeles are single family detached dwellings, they bond with each other by sharing a cultural understanding that is expressed many ways. The residents communicate with each other by personalizing the front yard. By consistently building fences they create a bond 'which binds together'⁴⁸ the homes according to J.B. Jackson, who interprets boundaries as bringing people together. By adding and enlarging front porches they extend the household out into the front yard. The physical changes are reinforced by the social connections and the heavy presence of the residents in the front yard.

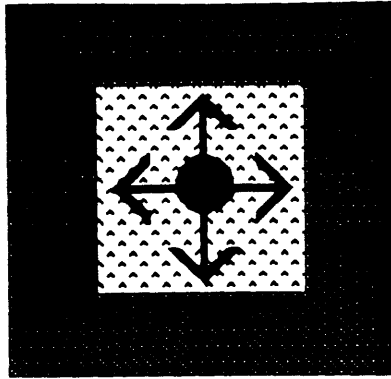
Upon walking into one of the neighborhoods in East Los Angeles I quickly realized I walked into a community that defines and measures its identity by a different set of social and physical symbols. People and fences were a common sight. I felt the presence of every house because people, fence and porches helped extend the household uses out to the street. Instead of hiding behind a lawn and shrubs, suddenly each house comes forward staking its claim to the pavement. The neighborhood felt very "filled in" physically and socially because the fences made me aware of another line on the street horizon, much like a perspective drawing. The sidewalk and street felt more "controlled" because the household spilt itself beyond the fence and tapped the public area in front of the house. In most suburban neighborhoods this public area remains anonymous.

Unlike the middle class suburban house that pulls itself in from the outside world, the Mexican house and household extends itself to all four corners of the lot. Therefore in defining the East Los Angeles vernacular house I will include the front yard up to the fence as being part of the household or as Dan Arreola defines it as the "Housescape."⁴⁹ The front yard and fence in East Los Angeles are integral parts of the households.

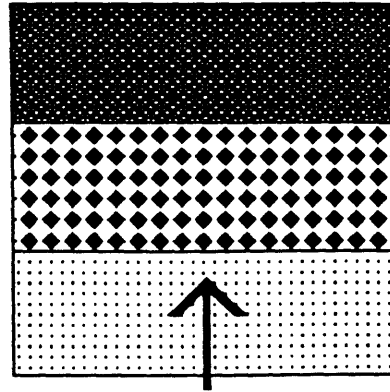
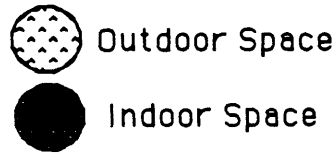
⁴⁸ Zube, Ervin H., Landscape: Selected Writings of J.B. Jackson, University of Mass. Press., 1970. p.70

⁴⁹ Arreola, Daniel D, Mexican American Housecases, Geographical Review, Vol 78. no 3

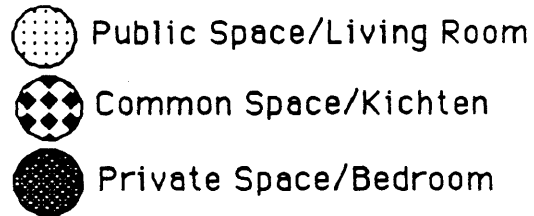
Diagram of Circulation Patterns of Homes



Traditional Mexican Plan



American Plan



The traditional Mexican courtyard home, which is still common in Mexico today,⁵⁰ is built up to the street line and designed with a "patio" or courtyard in the center, because of the warm weather and Spanish precedents. "The patio allows for light, ventilation and access to rooms on it' periphery."⁵¹ Because most rooms face the patio, it becomes a physical central point into which the flow of the household radiates. The American Plan has a strong linear movement and begins in the front of the house and works its way back. American rooms are arranged from the public, the living room, being in front to the private, the bedrooms, being in back. In the Mexican Plan, it is not an issue of privacy but rather being inside or in outside spaces. In the Mexican household as one Mexican told me "Most rooms are not private because many times rooms have been attached to each other as the family grows, regardless of their adjacency to other rooms. Many times one has to go through one bedroom to get to other bedrooms. Many people also keep their doors open to the patio because of the hot weather." Unlike the American that is accustomed to individual privacy, the Mexican might define privacy in other spatial situations.

In American house plans individual privacy is accomplished through rooms, while in the traditional Mexican house plan privacy is between the family and the general public.

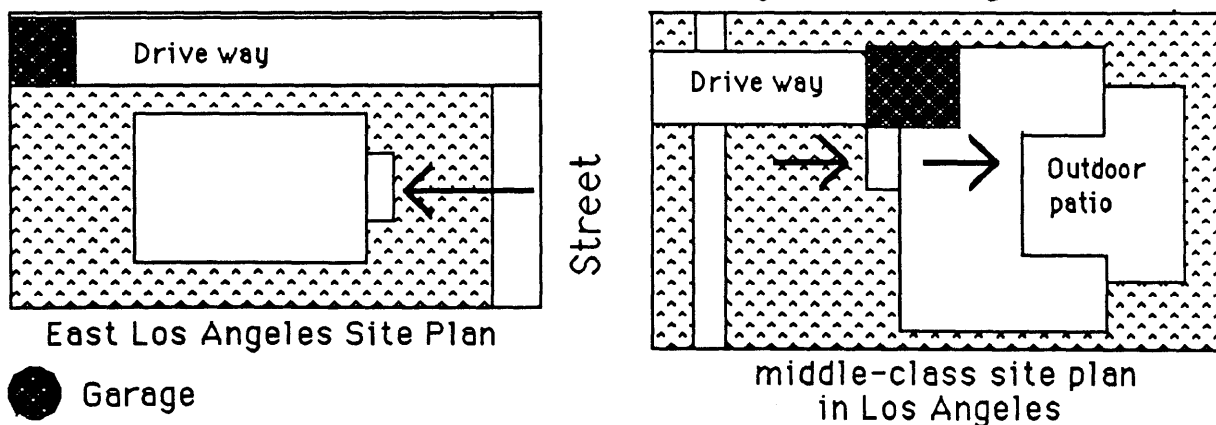
⁵⁰ Tan, Yew-Hoe, Formal Intervention in the Urban Fabric. Master's Thesis, Architecture, 1989.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Therefore the front yards in East Los Angeles become heavily used and reflect the household. The front yard and porch can be considered semi-private rather than semi-public because the space flows out of the home into the porch, the front yard and to the fence. In the American home the space flows inside the home and into the backyard, which is used by the household. In East L.A. the house is defined from the property line rather than the floor plan and walls of the house.

The fusing together of outside and inside spaces reflects an understanding of the climate. Reyner Banham describes the architecture in Los Angeles as having developed strong indoor and outdoor living patterns because of the mild climate. Therefore "this penetrability throws greater functional loading on the surrounding environment."⁵² In most middle class homes in Los Angeles there are strong connections between the home and yard. The front yard connection remains visual with large picture windows, while the back yard connection becomes more physical with the use of sliding doors, french doors, etc.. This physical connection is further reinforced because the private outdoor entertaining areas are located in the back yard which is a "recent feature in the American home."⁵³ In East Los Angeles the outdoor connection is greater in the front of the house because many of the homes in East Los Angeles are "pre-ranch style" and are long and narrow reflecting the lot lines. Therefore they are oriented to the street. Many homes have dwellings in the back yards, creating less back yard space. As the middle class Angelenos look to the backyard for the outdoor living, in East Los Angeles the residents look toward the front of the house.

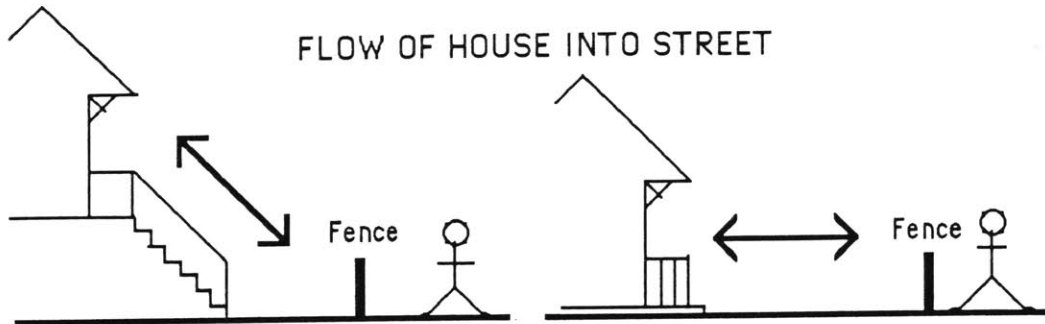
Oreintation of the house to frontyard and backyard



⁵² Banham, Reyner, Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies, Peguin Press, 1971. p. 57

⁵³ Altman, Irwin, Culture and Environment, Brooks/Cole publishing, 1980. p.p. 202

In East Los Angeles the flow of movement from the home, to the front yard and street is uninterrupted by grade changes. Most of the homes are sited on flat land with a few in hilly areas. Most homes do not have basements and are built on slab foundations. The lack of stairs creates an easy transition of spaces which the diagram illustrates:

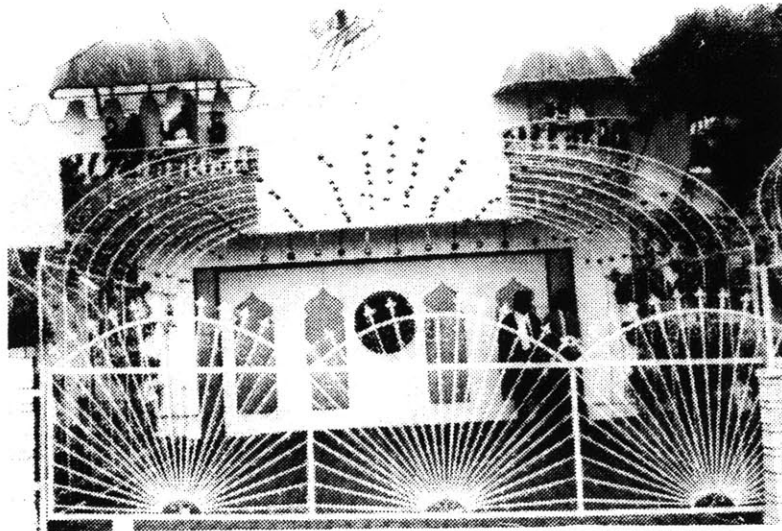


Most homes are one story and are set back around 25 feet, from the street and lack a parkway (the strip of grass between the sidewalk and street). The small scale of the physical structure make the enacted environment intimate in scale, which makes it an easy place to inhabit.

The fusing together of outside and inside spaces, as well as public and private areas, are key elements of East Los Angeles "housescapes". Mexicans bring with them a understanding of outdoor living because of the traditional flow of movement in the courtyard home. In East Los Angeles, the Mexicans applies their "cultural baggage" to a form that is not designed for this use, creating a unique manifestation.

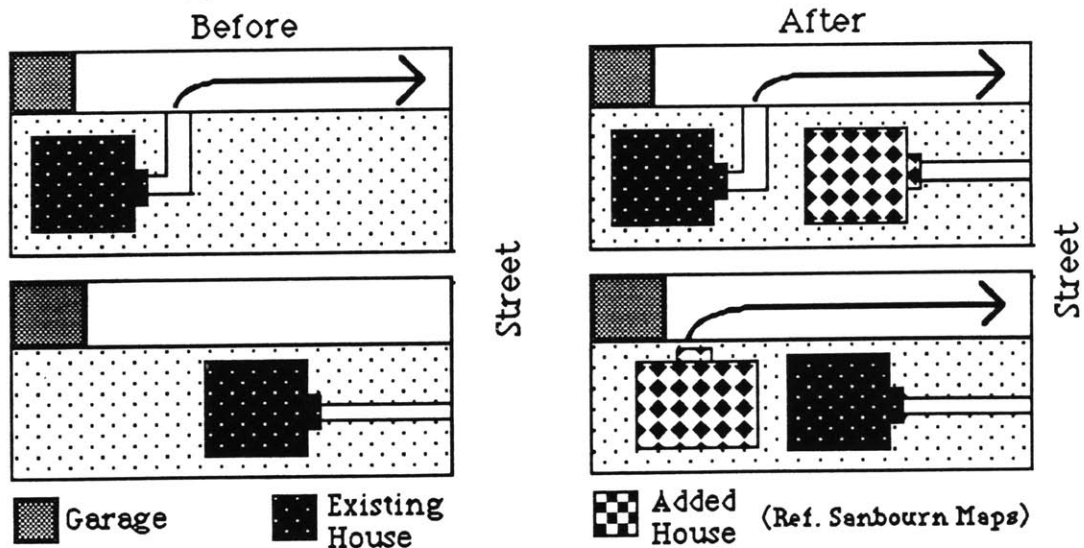


Multi-Purpose Driveway



Driveways in East Los Angeles "housescape" are an important feature that allows for many ephemeral uses from parking cars, children playing to barbecuing or partying. The props vary to the appropriate use. On most lots in East Los Angeles the driveway runs the full length of the lot on one side. The garage is placed in backyard, rather than the front yard. Most homes have easy access to the driveway from the side of the house. The importance of the driveway increases as houses are added to the lot, as in the case of East Los Angeles which has developed over a long period of time. The driveway serves as an "outside" hallway as residents walk to and from their home to the street.

Typical Growth Patterns in East Los Angeles



The Outgoing Porch

"The piazza usually had a hammock and several chairs, and relaxing their with or without visitors, permitted a pleasant relation to the life of the community which was not as private as being indoors and not as public as being out in the street."⁵⁴

Barrie B. Greenbie



In most American homes today the use and importance of the front porch has declined for various reasons. However in East Los Angeles the front porch has gained a new importance, with residents enlarging and expanding them. Residents sit here to escape the heat, entertain family, friends and neighbors.

The porch is often decorated with personal and useful items, such as: potted plants, bird cages, and furniture. Because most homes in East Los Angeles are very low to the ground, these props sometimes extend out to the lawn, reenforcing the flow of space to the fence and street.

There are a few types of porches in the existing houses in the East Los Angeles. The older Victorian homes and the few of the California Bungalow types will have a "nice size" front porch that usually extends the width of the front of the house. The owner of the home does not have to enlarge it, but just change the wood banisters and columns to wrought iron. The owner can become elaborate and change the finishes to stucco and create an arch. The second type is the side porch where half the front of the house is porch while the other half is house. The owner does not have to enlarge the porch just change the appearance. However it is to the small homes that were built with small or no

⁵⁴ Greenbie, Barrie B, Spaces. Dimensions of the Human Landscape, Yale Press, 1981. p.17

porch that the most changes occurs. Many of these small porches are in the front, and center, of the house and serve as an entry way rather than a porch. The porch has usually has two columns that hold it up on either side and corresponds to the pitch of the roof. Many times the owner has to create many structural changes to enlarge this type of porch. Many time there is an awkward break in the roof line that creates a unique form.

East Los Angeles Porch Typology

No structural change



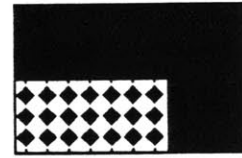
Structural change to enlarge or create a porch



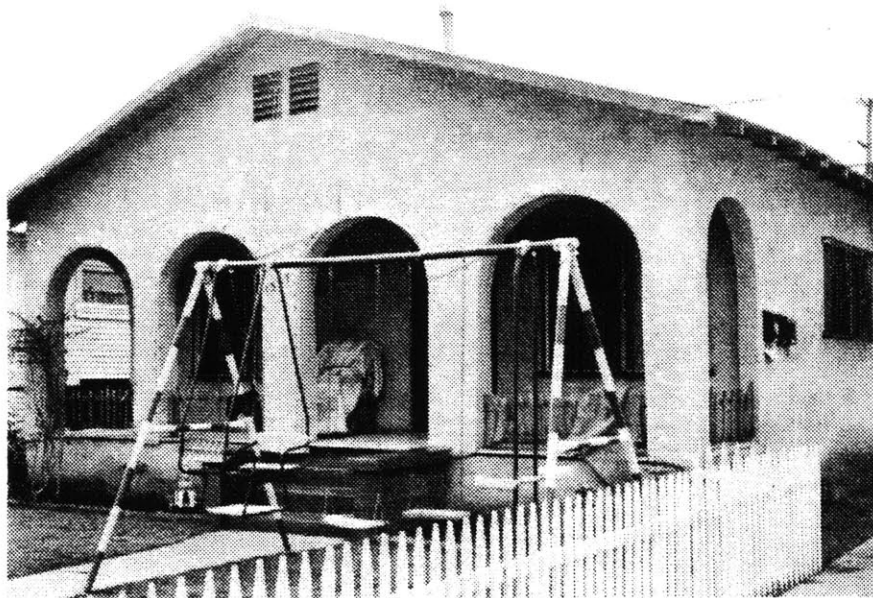
House



Porch/Entry way



There are many reasons why porches are enlarged. However these large porches help enforce the enacted zone in front of the house.



East Los Angeles Vernacular: Meaning

East Los Angeles vernacular is a combination of people, props and physical form. Each element helps in the creation of "place" both within the community and outside it. Through the artifacts found in the housescapes the residents communicate with each other. Homes in East Los Angeles are treated like little jewel boxes that are constantly being embellished by people and objects. Color, wrought iron, stucco, fences and personal items the residents bring to the housescape create a public face to the street.

Fences are a very important element in the vernacular. Besides bringing residents together, fences can be read as wealth, workmanship, and social standing. The chain link fence is the most popular but is being replaced by expensive wrought iron fences. Some of the men that own and build these fences take great pride in the design of them. Although fences are built by many different cultures, in East Los Angeles, they have become tell-tale signs of the Mexican housescape. As the residents move out of the barrios they may build a fence or not build one, depending on many situations. Many Mexicans, that live in the affluent suburbs surrounding East Los Angeles do not build fences. One woman said that when she moved out of East Los Angeles into Montebello (a higher income neighborhood adjacent to East Los Angeles) her Mexican and Mexican American neighbors approached her and told her not to build a fence around her front yard. One city near East Los Angeles has changed its policy in the fences enclosing the front yard in the past couple of years. Chain link are prohibited, but one could build a wrought iron fence.

The elaborate wrought iron fences and other expensive renovations means that the residents must have money and have a different idea of home. A urban planner, I spoke to from the city of Pico Rivera said "Today many of the residents of Pico Rivera have finished paying off their houses, so with the extra money they are investing in the remodeling their homes." This is speculation and would require more investigations. However, a dive through Pico Rivera or East Los Angeles shows that many homes are being "Mexicanized."

Two issues are taking place here. Mexicans and Mexican American might be living in houses longer than the average American. If one has paid off a house they most often have been living there for a long time. The second issue is that the residents are building such elaborate renovations which may or may not increase the value of the home. If the residents renovate and personalize so much they are not going to get the full value of the home and second they will have to sell to other Mexicans or Latins.

The personal value of home might be more than the market value. These are all interesting issues that warrant future investigation. However East Los Angeles vernacular represents the empowerment of space by the residents.

"A (vernacular) landscape without visible signs of political history is a landscape without memory or forethought. We are inclined in America to think that the value of monuments is simply to remind us of origins. They are much more valuable as reminders of long-range collective purpose, of goals and objectives and principles. As such even the least sightly of monuments gives a landscape beauty and dignity and keeps the collective memory alive."⁵⁵

J.B. Jackson



⁵⁵Lowenthal, David, Landscape Meaning and Values, 1986, Allen & Unwin LTd. p.81

Conclusion

Learning from the Enacted Environment

The Politics of Non-Politics



"Shunted into the worst houses and worst districts"
Picture & Quote taken from Lee Shippey: *The Los Angeles Book*, p.65,
right before urban renewal, 1950

Conclusion

The streets of East Los Angeles illustrated the enacted environment. Through props and the presence of people the ordinary landscape has been transformed into a vibrant, unique "place." This transformation has occurred in spaces in between homes and buildings, which was only limited by the residents imagination. The enacted zone has been overlooked by architects because of the way architects look at exterior spaces. In my analysis of the enacted environment I examined people and their behavior patterns as well as the physical structure. Most architectural renderings show building with "people in general" or "boulevardiers" using the space. To architects, people are used to enhance the space in the most appropriate or general way. Buildings are usually drawn from a birds eye perspective, that only a "bird" can appreciate in reality. Many places are identified, in this general way, by showing pictures of the structures or skylines. The concern of the enacted environment is the ground level; the curb, the sidewalk, the asphalt. All pictures I used, except for one, were shot at eye level. Real life begins where people meet the ground, not by the images and abstractions of skylines.

Structures neatly package and organize people in comprehensible arrangements of space. Life becomes hidden behind the facades of buildings. The presence of people in my pictures adds a rich texture to a sometimes banal environment. In the enacted environment people become part of the ambiguous, exciting nature of the urban landscape.

Exposing life is dynamic because it changes every second as people move, unlike physical form which is motionless. The enacted environment is made up of individual actions that are ephemeral. However, they are all part of a persistent process. The pictures in this thesis illustrated the everyday habits of the residents of East Los Angeles, which changed constantly from day to day and as they moved away. The enacted environment is a stream of events in time that people create.

The ambiguous nature of life is what the enacted environment is all about. Even though the enacted environment is created by walls and boundaries, the space lacks barriers and is as fluid as the people that move through it. Human life is sloppy and moves freely from space to space, without changing behavior patterns--from inside to outside, from private to public, and from crowded to empty. It is the spatial connections or thresholds in between spaces that create the enacted environments. The enacted environment in East Los Angeles represented a fluid space, that was composed of front yards and street as well as inside and outside spaces, which people united by their behavior.

The social interactions of people are crucial in the enacted environment. In East Los Angeles, or any other enacted environment everyone had a role and place. The front yards

anchored the space for the residents, while the street created the dynamic ambiguous space for the cars and passersby.

Social interactions and public life has become the recent craze in American for architects, planners and theoreticians . The recent trend is to reconstruct Italian hilltop villages and plazas, and little communities like Seaside, Florida. These new developments, are to create social interaction through physical form. How much of this romantic lifestyle will be achieved is sheer speculation. Developers, planners and architects look to Europe or back into American history for their models of the enacted environment, both from a social and physical perspective. As this thesis proves, public life does exist in East Los Angeles and could be found in American's Black, Chinese and other Latino communities.

The enacted environment allows people to be "public" in a private way or in a "public" way by choosing how to express themselves. In the enacted environment even no expression is expression. In East Los Angeles every person, vendor and prop created the identity of place that was a genuine orchestration of events. Nothing was pre-planned here by any architects, or urban designers.

The greatest deception is to the deception of life itself which has been done very successfully by the festival market place concept, such as Faneuil Hall in Boston. Here the enacted environment has been prerecorded, from the auditioning and time scheduling of street performers and vendors. People have the right to express themselves in the enacted environment even if it is in a "Disneysque" vacuum. Although, Faneuil Hall brings people together, the lack of personal expression, which is created by boundaries between public and private ownership is what's disturbing. Faneuil Hall gives the impression of public space yet it is privately own and operates as any enclosed space. People are not allowed to express themselves as freely as they could on a publicly owned street.

The Politics of Non-Politics

People have always criticized the Mexicans of East Los Angeles for being "non-political" because they do not vote yet they environment is one of the most expressive in Los Angeles. The word politics comes from the Greek word *polis* meaning city. There are two kinds of politics in the world: theoretical and practical. Theoretical politics are the politics of politicians in which they sit around and discuss how people should live their lives. Practical politics is every day life that each and every one of us expresses by our existences.

By examining East Los Angeles I became aware of the politics of every day life which was essential to the residents. They constructed a life in their environment that says something about themselves. Like it or not it, East Los Angeles makes a political

statement. Most will argue East Los Angeles does not have any political control, which is true in the theoretical rhetoric. However, I will argue that the residents have much physical "empowerment" that they have created themselves through the front yards and streets.

America has to stop trying to spatially organize its poor into public housing, like England and France, because in many cases they have failed. These housing projects have failed because they did not provide the residents with spaces to manipulate outside the home, which was important for the identity of place. In this country identity is important for everyone.

At a lecture at MIT, Cesar Chavez was asked how to organize communities and he said, "Let the community do it themselves, because it becomes their organizing, therefore they will believe in it." In East Los Angeles the residents have created the identity of "place," through the manipulation of the enacted environment.

"I come to the conclusion that the highest point on my scale can only be met by the man who possesses a combination of qualities which fit him to serve others and to be served by others in the most intimate, complete and extended degree imaginable. Shall we call it communicativeness? Then I find not merely less of a community but less possibility of a community, or communicativeness, here among my neighbors of all kinds than in any other equal body of men I ever saw. And the white men, the Englishmen, the Germans and other civilized men do not possess it often in as high a degree as the Mexicans, Chinese and Negro's - nor do the good men always possess as much of it as the rogues, the wild fellows." 56

Frederick Law Olmstead

⁵⁶ Roper, Laura. FLO, 1973, John Hopkins University, p. 253

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