Spatial Genres of Revitalization: Desiring-Machines and the Production of Public Subjects

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SPATIAL GENRES OF REVITALIZATION: DESIRING-MACHINES AND THE PRODUCTION OF PUBLIC SUBJECTS

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SPATIAL GENRES OF REVITALIZATION: DESIRING-MACHINES AND THE PRODUCTION OF PUBLIC SUBJECTS

by

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ABSTRACT

This project, *Spatial Genres of Revitalization: Desiring-Machines and the Production of Public Subjects*, is guided by the need to understand how the recent changes in El Paso’s gentrifying downtown are impacting the development of public subjectivities. This thesis is concerned with how the formation of public subjectivities is occasioned by changes in a city undergoing “revitalization” in terms of how people move through urban space. At the same time it is also concerned with how the people moving these spaces imagine and configure it to different ends which surpass the intention and violence of gentrification.

To this end, *Spatial Genres of Revitalization*, grounds itself in Dylan Dryer’s work on genres as enacting “Geographies of the Possible” works in the consideration of spatial genres like parks, plazas, and streets. It then borrows from Deborah Brandt and Katie Clinton’s work on “literacy-in-action” to articulate revitalization as an historically rooted literacy with agential status in its own right. In addition to this, it adds Jenny Edbauer’s work on “rhetorical ecologies” to show how meanings of space and genres are unsettled and shifting in a wider network of encounters. The aim here is to understand how subjectivities, collective and individual, are produced at the point of movement as we weave through space.

Drawing from the work of Deleuze and Guattari and scholars like Arun Saldanha, this thesis draws out an ontology which explains how space is constituted through movement and how that movement creates horizons of possibility and identity based in the movements of desire and assemblage. In order to arrive at how that is working for individual people, it articulates a methodology combining arts based research, walking interviews, and situational analysis which show how each participant is being positioned by, and positioning themselves in, the flux of movement.
Finally, this thesis argues that the changes wrought in El Paso’s recent revitalization are enjoining a “molecular public,” a kind of public subjectivity based in the atomized and individualized act of consumption. The desired public is one which can only find a sense of collective belonging through distributed acts of private consumption in gentrified space. At the same time, this thesis argues that the dictums of gentrification are constantly unsettled and rendered contingent as the peoples who move through its spaces graft in their own rhetorical ecologies and bring along new possibilities for collective becomings.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................ iv  
ABSTRACT .......................................................................................................................... vi  
TABLE OF CONTENTS ...................................................................................................... viii  
LIST OF FIGURES ........................................................................................................... xi  

## CHAPTERS

1. INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................. 1  
   Review of Literature ........................................................................................................ 1  
      Revitalization Across Time ......................................................................................... 2  
      Material Rhetorics in Public Spaces .......................................................................... 3  
      Materializing Public Subjectivities .......................................................................... 4  
      Disciplinary Lens ....................................................................................................... 8  
      Revitalization as Literacy-in-Action ......................................................................... 8  
      Revitalization and Geographies of the Possible ..................................................... 11  
   Research Questions ...................................................................................................... 13  
   Study Overview ........................................................................................................... 14  
      Critical Place Inquiry ............................................................................................... 14  
      Situational Analysis ................................................................................................. 15  
      A/r/tography ........................................................................................................... 15  
   Chapter Summaries ...................................................................................................... 16  

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ...................................................................................... 19  
   Interlude 2.1 A Cross-section Walking South ............................................................ 19  
   Figure 2.1 .................................................................................................................... 19
3. ASSEMBLING METHODOLOGIES: CRITICAL PLACE INQUIRY, SITUATIONAL MAPPING, A/R/TOGRAPHY

Critical Place Inquiry .................................................. 33
Walking Interviews ................................................. 35
A/r/toigraphy .......................................................... 39
Situational Analysis ................................................. 41
Abstract Situational Maps ....................................... 42
Positional Maps ..................................................... 44

4: THE PLAZA, THE PEOPLE, AND THE MOLECULAR PUBLIC ........................................... 46

History and Context of the Redesign of San Jacinto Plaza ......................... 46
Method .......................................................... 49
Data Production .................................................. 50
Walking Interview with Chris .................................... 50
Positional Map 4.1 .................................................. 52
Walking Interview with Rosemary ................................ 52
Positional Map 4.2.................................................................54
San Jacinto Plaza..............................................................54

5. COLLAGE AND THE RHETORICAL ECOLOGY.................................66
   Summary of Interviews and Collage Process................................67
   The Collages......................................................................69
   Conclusion.........................................................................75

WORKS CITED........................................................................77
CURRICULUM VITA.................................................................84
LIST OF FIGURES

2.1 Oregon looking South ................................................................. 20

2.2 St. Mary plaque ........................................................................ 20

2.3 Streetcar vendor ....................................................................... 20

3.1 Abstract Situational Map ............................................................ 43

3.2 Working/Ordered Situational Map ............................................... 44

3.3 Positional Map ........................................................................ 45

4.1 Chris’s Positional Map ............................................................... 52

4.2 Rosemary’s Positional Map ......................................................... 54

5.1 Art materials and scholarly cat .................................................. 68

5.2 Eric’s collage ........................................................................... 69

5.3 Eric’s collage detail ................................................................. 70
5.4 Rebecca and Larry’s collage

72
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

I first came to El Paso in the fall of 2010, as part of a military family moving in from Germany. I’ve spent the better part of my life to this point travelling from place to place. Over the course of the last eight years, I’ve been immersed in the city in a way that has changed me deeply. El Paso has become a home to me, and while I’ve been living here and taking the bus for the better part of my time here, I’ve seen the city change bit by bit, especially in that area we call downtown. At the same time, I’ve gained deep connections to friends and loved ones throughout all parts of the town, who have shared their time and hospitality with me and taught me about what this place means for them and to them. It was these connections, finding myself part of a community and adjacent to many more besides, which pointed my attention to how these revitalizing changes aren’t as positive as they advertise, and led me to consider the implications these changes have for the development of publics and peoples here, going forward. My hope is that this study can act as a work that comes from the care I have for the city and for the people I hold dear who help constitute it, the people I’ve become with. I want to write as an extension of my gratitude to the place and people amongst whom I’ve found a home. It is in this spirit that I want to formulate an approach to studying and contextualizing the recent turn of revitalization in El Paso.

Literature Review

The literature reviewed in this section works towards three goals: The first is to ground revitalization in historical context and articulate its features as a literacy. The second is to provide an exigence through scholars in rhetoric whose work on urban space and civic life give both precedence for the study but also exhibit a gap in their focus. After introducing new materialist scholarship, the literature review then turns toward the third goal of establishing the
disciplinary lens by nesting in the concepts of literacy-in-action, rhetorical ecologies, and genres as geographies of the possible.

**Revitalization Across Time**

Gathered under the auspices of programs like The Downtown Management District or the It’s All Good EP campaign, the city of El Paso has been going through a self-conscious project of rebranding and development in order to mark itself as a modern metropolitan city (M. Garcia; DMD). Revitalization projects are not a stranger to the city; they have visited and left their mark on its places and peoples in different eras, employing or being employed by spatial genres which range from statuary like the “12 Travellers” to sports stadiums and parks/plazas (XII Travelers). From the very beginning of the city known as “El Paso,” the logics of revitalization were whispered. As early as the first occupying U.S. forces, John T. Hughes, while serving in the occupying army under Colonel Alexander Doniphan (whose name now adorns a major street) in 1846, fantasized about the “inert” Mexican lands in a report on agriculture that promised a ten-fold increase in production under the auspices of “energetic” White Americans (M. T. Garcia, 12). In earlier eras, these visions of revitalization invoked the wholesale replacement of Mexican, Indigenous, and other peoples while configuring the city for White and “civilized” publics.

Today, revitalization has taken the form of capturing and commodifying a vision of Mexicanidad. Instead of directly attempting to erase it, the city sanitizes it for consumption under orders of capitalist White supremacy. The official discourse of the El Paso city government’s revitalization of downtown is written on websites and bus stop maps, where neighborhoods like Duranguito, Segundo Barrio, and Chihuahita are erased and zones of entertainment, shopping, and business are proffered instead (“Downtown El Paso Districts”; Figure 1.1; Figure 1.2). While the particularities of specific barrios and histories are glossed over in this consumptive mapping,
what substitutes those particularities is a kind of generic mapping of El Paso as a “bi-national” space marketed by its “authentic” roots. Particularities are swiped off the table and replaced by a vision of an authentic Mexican history and experience open to all who would patronize it. Bars, nightclubs, redesigned parks, sports stadiums, and so on offer visitors a vision of authenticity, of a world of “realness” that one can experience and participate in through consumption alone.

**Material Rhetorics in Public Spaces**

Spatial genres, thus, exert a rhetorical force on public space through their materiality, as seen in Carole Blair’s study of contemporary U.S. memorial sites. Blair examines public monuments like the ACT UP AIDS Memorial Quilt, the Vietnam Memorial, and others as rhetorical agents in their own right. Blair argues that the “recalcitrant presentness” of memorial works exert a rhetorical force through their materiality that is not equivalent to something like a book, which can be put away, or a speech which terminates. In the fact that memorial sites are always in the spatial field of perception, they are always working as gathering points and reference points in the spaces they work in. Memorial sites exert gathering force, such as the way that the ACT UP quilt occasions marches and commemoration of the dead for the LGBTQ community. They can also re-contextualize group identities, as in the redemptive work of the Vietnam memorial and its role as a reference point for veterans of that war.

In their material rhetoricity, memorial sites, change and alter the possibilities of public roles, public formations and civic action. The same could be said of other everyday things in their own material rhetoricity, in the way in which all things from sidewalks to bus benches and boulevards exert gathering force. The rhetorical work Blair sees public monuments doing on people can be seen similarly in the very way that other spatial genres like wall murals or night clubs legitimate and invite the movements of gentrifiers in the downtown area. As material
agents, spatial genres act “alongside and with” human residents and discourses (Barnett & Boyle 1). Through the “concrete but essential fact of proximity and repetition”, these material, human, and discursive elements together become part of the assemblage which makes possible the cultural practice of everyday life which altogether produce the urban public subject (De Certeau 8-9).

Under the ontological weight of this assemblage in El Paso, Downtown becomes a space of floating consumption, aimed squarely at people who are primarily asked to exist as consumers and spectator-participants within it. The city itself, its towering brick buildings built as testament to industrial age prosperity, inscribe histories of racial, gendered, and monied inequities. The spaces of the city, from architecture to avenues, index like sedimentary beds a history of the White spatial imagination, of capitalism and colonization. They exert their own agency on the becomings of public subjectivities under the “redeveloping” of a transnational urban space. They channel desire and exert power in varying ways, through aesthetics, through capital, through culture. Tuning into this material/spatial flux will all aid in developing what Tuck and McKenzie call “a complex and historicized” orientation to a place like downtown El Paso, allowing a focus on gentrification that is not solely limited to the immediate (even if important) question of political resistance going forward but that instead attends to the accretion of public subjectivities through the everyday materiality of public space.

Materializing Public Subjectivities

The relation between urban space (particular and general) and the generation of publics (democratic and otherwise) in light of gentrification, has been taken up by a range of rhetorical scholars with a focus on democracy and the relationship between urban space and its bearing on the possibilities of human action in democratic frames. Candice Rai’s Democracy’s Lot explores
the possibilities and limits of democracy in the conflict around a vacant lot named Wilson’s Yard in a gentrifying area of Chicago. Ralph Cintron’s work in the anthology *Rhetoric Revealed* explores “democracy” as a two pronged *topos*—processual and justice seeking—each prong working for opposed groups in the same space (Clifton). Finally, and most importantly for the aims of this thesis, David Fleming’s *City of Rhetoric*, is an historical account of the Cabrini-Green neighborhood in Chicago and the differing ways that space exerts influence both on political realities and public becomings. Fleming’s work aims directly at the geographic nature of politics and the political nature of space itself, holding that it has been a “mistake” to think of these things otherwise (xiv). Examining the gentrifying of the area in the late 20th century, Fleming asks in his introduction “what would the new neighborhood look like? who would live there? what kinds of lives would they lead? how would they relate to one another? and what would happen to those who no longer fit in?” (10).

Fleming asks these questions and launches his study with the aim of showing how material space has configured the public(s) of modernity as unequal and conflictive. He does so with a nostalgia which calls back to an ancient Greek democracy where “equals constituted their union without denying their difference” (13). For Fleming, this vision of the past is also a hope for a future, where the values and principles of a “pure” democracy “can be practiced, where we can literally see our diversity, where we belong but others belong” (16). Fleming shares a concern with the other rhetorical scholars of urban publics for the actualization of democratic values, and for the efforts that peoples within these contested spaces have made to resist their own subordination. They are concerns primarily to deal with human actors and the possibilities for better futures enacted through them.
While Fleming looks at urban space for its bearing on possibilities of democratic action, other scholars have developed more robust understandings of space as a dynamic emergence beyond its potential connections to democratic action. They work from interdisciplinary strands of critical geography, New Materialism, and philosophy. Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie, in their book *Place in Research*, develop a concept of space as a processual emergence, laced with power and dynamic encounters between human and non-human things. In the realm of New Materialism, scholars like Karen Barad explore the relation of people and spaces as a kind of generative intra-action (141). In urban spaces, this intra-action can be seen in Carol Blair’s study of U.S. Memorial Sites, which I described earlier. Other strands of materialist thought, through the work of philosophers like Gilles Deleuze and Deleuzian scholars like Arun Saldhana, explore how desire, captured and channeled by and through space, opens up a way to explore the rhetoricity of gentrified space.

Public spheres scholar Jenny Rice has also taken up this affective turn to theorize the creation of public subjectivities. In referring to a long and complex history of studying subjectivity in critical theory, she notes:

> We generally recognize that subjectivity is not a state of self-presence or consciousness, nor is subjectivity something solidified over time. It is an articulation of multiple narratives, practices, and apparatuses that coalesce at any given moment. Michael Warner cautions against theorizing a single universal subject at the expense of all others who are denied entrance into the single public sphere (“Mass Public”). We do not only exist in one role or speak as only one kind of public subject. (44).
Rather we enact multiple subjectivities, some temporarily, and the resources and constraints for enacting these subjectivities are made available (or not) and also made significant (or not) through particular discourses and apparatuses that precede any individual.

Methodologically speaking, Rice asserts that “[e]xamining public subjectivities is not a process of listing characteristics” (45). Instead, researchers must consider how these subjectivities “invite certain modes of encountering and interacting with others” (Asen 193). Public subjectivity, then, is “a process of interfacing with others, a kind of being-in-the-world” (Rice 45). For Rice, this process is catalyzed “in a relation to claims made by others about public situations” (45).

Rice traces an ancient history of rhetorical scholarship theorizing the ways public subjects are constituted through discourse and cultural habits. Calling on Ronald Walter Greene, Rice also notes that “[s]ubjectification is a process embedded in material forms of production” (45). Greene encourages researchers to interrogate the “technological dimensions of rhetoric—that is, how the rhetorical techniques and technologies manufacture a rhetorical subject” (51). Following Greene’s lead, Rice calls for the examination of “public subjectivity, or the roles that are oriented to encountering and interacting with others” to include “investigation into the ways people come to think of themselves as subjects who exist in relation to others and to the world” (47). Where Rice explores “how familiar patterns of public discourse serve as a productive technology for crafting public subjects” (47), in this study I explore how spatial genres and everyday materialities of “revitalization” in El Paso act as a productive technological apparatus for the creation of public subjects. This subjectification is a relational process of becoming that occurs through the production of desire as residents encounter spatial genres of “revitalization” in the city.
Disciplinary Lens
Revitalization as literacy-in-action

In the vein of Deborah Brandt and Katie Clinton’s exploration of the “thing status” of literacy (337), seeing “Revitalization” as literacy-in-action grants it “certain kinds of undeniable capacities--particularly a capacity to travel, a capacity to stay intact, and a capacity to be visible and animate outside the interactions of immediate literacy events. These capacities stem from the legibility and durability of literacy: its material forms, its technological apparatus, its objectivity, that is, its (some)thing-ness” (344).

Drawing on Bruno Latour’s essay “On Interobjectivity,” Brandt and Clinton recognize “two of the key social roles played by objects in human life. One of them is to hold steady a certain frame such that a discrete interaction can take place and another is to mediate and aggregate events – to relocate them – in a network of events” (344). They propose the concept of literacy-in-action as a means of “opening the door between people and things in the accomplishment of literacy practices in order to understand their formal and functional interrelationships” (348).

Brandt and Clinton draw from Bruno Latour in their coinage of this concept. In Latour’s work on the sociology of science, things in their objectivity (their “thingness”) figure as actors in themselves, they are not just “endowed with local meaning by local agents but endow meaning to the locales in which they appear” (344). Objects can serve, “as Latour suggests, as ‘comrades, colleagues, partners, accomplices or associates in the weaving of social life’ (from “Must sociology remain without an object?”) (348). According to Brandt and Clinton, “figuring out what things are doing with people in a setting becomes as important as figuring out what people are doing with things in a setting.” (348). To accomplish this shift, Brandt and Clinton propose the analytical concept of “literacy-in-action” as a unit of analysis rather than the anthrocentric
“literacy event” typical in social-practice perspectives. They argue theorizing “literacy-in-action” would involve an “objective trace of literacy in a setting (print, instruments, paper, other technologies)” to see “whether they are being taken up by local actors or not” (349).

This study considers the spatial materiality of “Revitalization” as “literacy-in-action” and explores “its ability to travel, integrate, and endure” (338) as well as its “capacity to connect, mediate, represent, and hold together multiple interests” (354). Attending to “Revitalization” as “literacy-in-action”—as a technology, as a collection of things and mediums—does not decouple revitalization from human contexts or ideological designs. Brandt and Clinton warn that it would be unfair and dangerous to treat literacy as if it did. It is important, then, to recognize the technologies of “Revitalization” as complex ground of historical and contemporary ideological struggles.

Revitalization is a form of the logic of development. It is a “detachment and flattening...at the basis of what is called “development,” which is in turn the condition for global capitalist accumulation” (Saldanha 149). Even though revitalization-as-literacy-in-action may act in different ways in different times and places and its features as a literacy are fluid, with a brief sketch of three studies indexed under the term “urban revitalization” on JSTOR we can perhaps arrive at some working assumptions for how this literacy operates in the reading and writing of cities and publics.

In 1982, Peter J. May situates revitalization in the concept of “residential mobility”, citing “white flight, gentrification, and so on.” He situates this at the level of “individual households” and individuals themselves, seeing them as driven by expectations of living conditions. The take away assumption we can graft onto a working understanding of revitalization is that it is a consumptive and individualizing literacy. In 1992, Leon Deben, Sako
Musterd, and Jan van Weesep connected revitalization to the renewal of singular urban culture and urban public *tout court* and contrasted it against its inverse: the decline of urban culture means the decline of the urban public, both culture and public in this sense are singular and homogenous. From this, we can take and say that revitalization posits a homogenous becoming for a homogenous city, acting as a plan(e) of organization inscribing a molar identity on a city conceived as container—an idea I’ll return to in chapter 2. Finally and most usefully for where this is going, in 2008 Larry Ford, Florinda Klevisser, and Francesca Carli explored the potential applicability of American revitalization techniques to European cities. “It is difficult”, they write, “to find a major American city today that has not used ethnic-theme neighborhoods in a revitalization strategy.” From this, we can say that revitalization-as-literacy-in-action employs aesthetic captures of ethnic and cultural identities on a plan(e) of composition, which is relevant not only to the spatialization of Whiteness in El Paso, but also to its freezing and capturing of Mexicanidad in the current neoliberal model. If El Paso’s downtown revitalization project wants to lean into identifiable Mexican aesthetics, it does so in a broad fashion which promotes cultural belonging as an act of eating the right food at the right restaurants, or shopping for the right goods at the right stores.

Perhaps the biggest cue to the features of revitalization-as-literacy-in-action is in the name itself: “Re-vitalization.” Something before is being named as dead, inert, or useless. It must be brought back to life like breath given to clay, or sussed into new life as something recognizably lively and useful. And yet the lack of vitality supposed by “Re-vitalization” as literacy-in-action has a vitality of its own.

The thirty spokes converge at one hub,
But the utility of the cart is a function of the nothingness inside
The hub
We throw clay to shape a pot,
But the utility of the clay pot is a function of the nothingness inside it.
   We bore out doors and windows to make a dwelling,
But the utility of the dwelling is a function of the nothingness inside it.
   Thus, it might be something that provides the value,
       But it is nothing that provides the utility.
    -Dao De Jing, Chapter 11 (trans. Roger T Ames and David L. Hall)

Revitalization in El Paso, in its different temporal formations, has been a movement of realizing what George Lipsitz called “the white spatial imaginary (13)”. This is a movement that has carried from the ages of conquest and colonization, of “settlement” and industry, into the age of neoliberal late capitalism.

Revitalization and geographies of the possible

Revitalization as “literacy-in-action” produces not only documents and discourses but also spatial genre-ecologies of a (re)vitalizing city that work to channel desire into particular forms of public and personal becomings. Folding into literacy-in-action, we can turn now to genres and how they work with and within and through revitalization-as-literacy-in-action, and how their behavior in conjunction with literacy-in-action takes place in wider ecologies of rhetorical production. Moving into genre studies from literacy-in-action is a movement in scale, from the wider picture of how a literacy-in-action organizes and acts down to the particular materialities of genres it employs, and how those genres both shape and condition the form of the acting literacy and how human and non-human agents are taken up and imagined within and through the literacy-in-action. Revitalization projects across time might come from a describable literacy-in-action setting forth what urban space is and for whom it exists, but the spatial genres these projects employ (or the genres revitalization-as-literacy-in-action is employed by) have been fluid, variable and full of their own implications. From public parks to monumental
statuaries to nightclubs, each spatial genre marks and enjoins different forms of desiring-production to different ends and purposes.

Genres condition forms of knowledge, imagination, and relationality. Dylan Dryer reckons genres as “textual forms already embedded in ways of knowing, established readerships, and routes of circulation that precede writers and in which such writers must take their “place” (personal, institutional, “authorial”, and so on)” (505). Dryer points to the fundamentally spatial implications of genre, using examples such as city zoning codes and their conditioning of the urban sphere and a person’s “place” within that sphere. This understanding can be expanded to include not only textual genres and spatial metaphors but also spatial genres of urban life such as public parks, stadiums, and restaurants.

Each genre—each textual or spatial artifact and its accompanying sets of social practices and norms—works as a desiring-machine which conditions forms of becoming and relationality. As Carolyn Miller writes in her landmark essay “Genre as Social Action”:

What we learn when we learn a genre is not just a pattern of forms or even a method of achieving our own ends. We learn, more importantly, what ends we may have: we learn that we may eulogize, apologize, recommend one person to another, instruct customers on behalf of a manufacturer, take on an official role, account for progress in achieving goals. We learn to understand better the situations in which we find ourselves. (p. 165)

Miller saw that genres and the social relations they routinize persist because they frame what they permit as that which is possible. Dryer expands this concept beyond the fruition of intentional action to encompass becoming. He points to the “affective consequences” of, for example, taking up an unfamiliar artifact. In unsuccessfully engaging a text or computer, we may
experience the “bodily experience of frustration and feeling thwarted…, feeling one’s “place” as an inexpert and therefore excluded. Taken as a desiring-machine, a spatial genre like the nightclub enacts a certain desiring production, a need for communal space or pleasure where participants locate each other through the shared experience of dance or drink, through aesthetics or sexuality, as members of a fashionable or unfashionable crowd. Experiences like these index larger ecologies with other artifacts and interpretive habits that likewise produce affective consequences, bodily experiences, and social positioning. These genres and their affective consequences are then a spatialized accretion that actually *produce* particular kinds of subjectivities as they form assemblages. People stepping through the Downtown Transfer Center might remember when the central transportation hub was San Jacinto Park, which might occasion reflection on the deterioration of that part of the city, which might also bring up memories of its previous liveliness in the 70s, all of which together might produce a subjectivity marked by nostalgia, feelings of racialized displacement, anger or resistance. Each particular spatial genre gains additional meaning and connotation through its machinic connections to particular literacies-in-action.

**Research Questions**

This study explores the ways spatial genres of revitalization-as-literacy-in-action relationally assemble in the desiring-machine of El Paso, Texas, to produce public subjects. The organizing research questions of this study are:

1) How are the rhetorical ecologies of spatial genres in the downtown area of El Paso contributing to formations of particular kinds of “citizens” or public/counterpublic subjectivities?
2) How is downtown made present, or imagined differently, by people affected by the “revitalization” the city government is instigating?

**Overview of Study**

I situate this study within Mirka Koro-Ljungberg’s conceptualization of fluid methodological spaces. This allowed for a responsiveness and an ethical responsibility to the kinds of complications which I inevitably encountered in my movements with the people and places of downtown. Research is an emergent process, and Koro-Ljungberg’s work provides a rhizomic bearing for dealing with that emergence. To put human and non-human becomings in dynamic and provisional relationship to one another, this study engages in the production of fluid methodologies that combine Critical Place Inquiry, Situational Analysis, and A/r/tography. Chapter 3 will explore this assemblage of methodologies in more depth; here, I offer a brief overview.

**Critical Place Inquiry.** The methods employed in this study are grounded in Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie’s conceptualization of Critical Place Inquiry. Critical Place Inquiry invites us to consider the ways in which memory and cognition take place in embodied, dynamic, and spatialized relations between human and non-human things. This has a direct bearing on how public subjectivities are formed, and opens up investigation into the ways that people are experiencing the transforming of downtown spaces.

To begin this critical place inquiry, I conducted walking interviews, described by James Evans and Phil Jones, in the form of guided, visually recorded (around 90 minute) structured tours by four participant-residents as they moved through and narrated their understandings and experiences with downtown. After the initial interview, I asked two participants to participate in
follow-up meetings where they were asked to produce an a/r/tography collage to further layer and thicken the data made available in their walking interviews.

**Situational Analysis.** The understanding of relationality articulated in this theoretical framework also lends itself to ecological explorations through Situational Analysis. Engaging in situational analysis through mapping helps avoid over-simplifications and helps “to address head-on the inconsistencies, irregularities, and down-right messiness of the empirical world” (Clarke 15). Situational mapping lays out a situation of concern by considering the following questions: “Who and what are in this situation? Who and what matters in this situation? What elements ‘make a difference’ in this situation?” (Clarke 87). Because I am attending to the impact of revitalization as literacy in action, this study draws on positional mapping in particular to analyze the ways the materialities of revitalization position different residents to produce public subjectivities.

**A/r/tography.** Because I also focus on desire as an important productive mode of public becoming in the gentrified space, I combine situational mapping with A/r/tography, an aesthetically oriented methodology derived from educational disciplines which “folds the identities of artist, researcher, and teacher (a/r/t), in contiguous relations. None of these features is privileged over another as they occur simultaneously in and through time and space” (Irwin, Beer, Springgay, Grauer, Xiong, & Bickel 70). A/r/tography folds aesthetics and research in a way that demonstrates the “rhizomatic relations of living inquiry” (Irwin et al. 70). Patricia Leavy describes a/r/tography as a methodology which “invites and celebrates interconnectivity” (6). This is a methodology which has a very fluid form, taking in multiple types of aesthetic practice with a deliberate openness to interdisciplinarity and heterogeneity. While the educational bent of early a/r/tographic work does not apply here, its rhizomatic bearing and focus
on dynamic, interconnected networks with no points of greater privilege dovetails nicely with Adele Clark’s situational mapping.

I employed a/r/tographic methods as a way of enjoining participants to collaborate in creating their own aesthetic versions of situational mapping—showing how the ecologies of downtown act as desiring spaces from the point of view of their own life. In the same way that the walking interview allows space to speak with and through the particular and dynamic lives of individual participants, the a/r/tographic collage allows those spaces to also speak with and through them in terms of desire, showing downtown as a desiring space.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter one provides an overview of the study, situating my research interests in a local history of “revitalization” in El Paso. This chapter also reviews literature in rhetoric about materiality in public spheres and the making of public subjectivities. Finally, the chapter puts spatialized genre ecologies in relation to revitalization as literacy-in-action.

Chapter two draws on Deleuze and Guattari to articulate the theoretical framework that the genres, literacy, and rhetorical ecologies of revitalization will be interpreted through. The ontology of desire and the mechanisms of desiring production which Dryer and Edbauer make reference to will be drawn out to examine the physics of subject-production in revitalizing El Paso. Through the work of Arun Saldanha it also articulates the theory of plan(e)s and their significance in how geographies of the possible are charted out by genres and literacies of revitalization. I also include an interlude as a narrated walk through downtown intended to draw the reader into the significance of the work and ask them to feel and think their way through the spaces discussed in this thesis.
Chapter three describes how I assembled methodologies to approach the impact that space has on the production of subjects. In this chapter I use Mirka Koro-Ljungberg’s articulation of “fluid methodological space” to combine Eve Tuck and Marxia McKenzie Critical Place Inquiry, Adele Clarke’s Situational Analysis, and the methodological frame of A/r/tography. From these I arrive at a combination of methods including participant lead photography oriented walking interviews processed through situational and positional mapping, and collage. These relational and participant-driven techniques are meant to allow downtown space to speak with and alongside each participant through both movement and aesthetic production.

Chapter four draws from walking interviews with two participants, Chris and Rosemary, and centers them in terms of their encounters with San Jacinto Plaza. In this section, two major studies commissioned in the recent turn of revitalization (the Glass Beach Study by Sanders/Wingo and the architecture firm SWA’s conceptual drafts of San Jacinto Plaza) and contrasts their visions of downtown spaces with the ways that participants moved through them. After analyzing their position maps and encounters with the Plaza, I arrive at the concept of a “molecular public” as a way of answering what kinds of public subjectivities the revitalization is encouraging.

Chapter five centers around the A/r/tography phase of the research, drawing from two collages made over one evening by myself with the assistance of my friend Rebecca, and Eric, another participant in my initial phase of walking interviews. This section describes the initial process of creating the collages then describes and analyzes them. The collages and A/r/tography are accounted for here as a way of aesthetically mapping Jenny Edbauer’s concept of rhetorical ecologies, showing how participants encounter space affectively. These collages are analyzed for
the ways in which rhetorical ecologies unsettle the meanings of revitalized space and graft in their own senses of possibility and futurity.
“But what is a city?” as Arun Saldanha asks (143). Saldanha argues that the city is constantly moving and becoming, “a machine that segments and differentiates bodies” (143). In the city as machine, material objects and spatial genres are not merely symbolic, representational and expressive, rather they are machinic: they give desire the means by which to produce something (or someone). Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptualization of machines moves us past the subject/object split toward thinking of how becoming is enacted through relational processes. What Deleuze and Guattari posit through desiring machines is not an ontology where pre-determined subjects interact with pre-determined objects; instead what is primary are the relationships that come together in an encounter to interrupt or code human and non-human elements along particular lines of becoming.

Interlude 2.1 A Cross-Section Walking South

Boundless love will surge through my soul, 
And I will wander far away, a vagabond 
- Arthur Rimbaud, Sensation

El Paso, TX—Say it’s a chilly night in December: You start on the corner of Rio Grande and Oregon streets and walk south, toward the border, from the moment you cross the bridge over I-10, you find yourself (or whatever self that might end up being, just for a moment before it moves on to something else) moving through a great and moving cross section of time, space, human, and non-human, a constantly shifting assemblage. To the right the newly constructed Roderick Artspace Lofts loom over the sidewalk, the shop fronts and galleries it hosts shining their lights out to the street and beckon visitors, investors, and artists alike (Figure 2.1). Sticking out from the building, just as you arrive on the first sidewalk on the other side of I-10, a
memorial plaque erected by the El Paso County Historical reminds you that the highway crawls over what once was the Saint Mary Chapel, a Jesuit church built of stone, the first to cater to English-speaking Catholics in downtown, then later a school, and still again a church for Porfirista refugees from revolutionary Mexico (Figure 2.2). You pass the shopfronts of the Artspace, proudly declaring the Chuco Town provenance and style of their art, pass the open door of the Japanese themed Nobu cafe, and you keep heading south. Now you are moving over the railroad which hastened the speed of white migration and its imperial-industrial machine, channeled ore, cattle, and other goods through the region’s accommodating geography, and spoke the promise of “civilization” to its Anglo proponents (M. T. Garcia 14).

Here’s what you encounter next: San Jacinto Plaza, lit up in the holiday style (it is, after all, a chilly night in December), the city’s first and main municipal square, instrumental in translating the old ranching pueblo into something its Anglo residents could call “municipal.” Once it was ranchland owned by the wealthy criollo Juan Maria Ponce de Leon, then a military encampment, then a dedicated city square named for the decisive battle in the U.S. expropriation of Mexican territories (Nanez). Now it is thronging with people: families enjoying the lights, cops who’ve done the
civic-patriotic duty of fending off the homeless, and vendors selling baubles out of carts shaped like the old El Paso streetcar (Figure 2.3). You are standing in the shadow of the Mills building, commissioned by and named for a “founding father” who boasted in his 1918 autobiography of its “monolithic cement,” featuring no wood or steel—“the first building of the kind erected in the United States, and so far as I know, it is still the only one of that magnitude” (Mills 245). Its walls are newly whitewashed, it hosts high end dining, a bank, and a self-consciously philanthropic endeavor called the El Paso Community Foundation. Curving right and following Mills Avenue (now facing west) you run into the seasonal WinterFest, a newly created festival which promises to “bring downtown El Paso to life” (WinterFest EP). You move past the attractions and the push through the crowd and you are now in front of the Plaza Theater. A Sun Metro bus sits outside waiting to take festival goers back to their parking, it is decorated like a streetcar and harkens to the return of the old municipal railway next year. To your right is the Plaza Theater, where a worker is adding to the marquee, a theater that sat derelict until reopened in 2006 under the auspices of bringing more entertainment downtown (El Paso Live). To your left is “Pioneer Plaza”, a small plazita that hosts the statue of the missionary Fray Garcia de San Francisco, commemorating him as “Founder of the Pass of the North.” This statue, commissioned by the city, was developed by the sculptor John Houser, the same who chiseled the equestrian memorial to the genocidal conquistador Juan de Oñate at the El Paso International Airport, which was originally proposed as a component to a planned downtown revitalization in 1988 (Houser). You continue on a little bit down the road, where Mills Avenue becomes El Paso street and stretches down to the vast military encampment they call a border, but let’s say your walk ends there. Maybe because it’s getting too cold and you’re hungry, maybe because you realize you dropped your keys while taking a picture of that stupid statue and you at least want to sleep in a bed
tonight so you at least have to take care of that situation. From there on, you just head back where you started.

The question (the first of many) is, during that whole walk, what happened? You walked south, so maybe that’s too simple, a little insufficient. You saw a lot of people and things, and they affected you differently than they affected me or someone else, or another you in a different moment. Different connections and associations moved through your mind, different feelings and different bearings. Maybe it is better to ask what were you as each affect played across your senses. Did you feel smoothed into the public enjoying the park, or did the lack of a naked cent in your pocket put you at a distance, segmenting you away? Were you of a class? How did the play of racial and colonial histories inscribed in every little corner from Saint Mary Chapel to Fray Garcia mark you in time and place as you walked by? How did you locate yourself in race, gender, culture, and so many more points beside? Every little encounter compounded, and every little encounter did something different. You were many things at a time, and could be many more as even the walk back was different, or the same walk would be different on another time and day. Perhaps it’s better not to ask what were you, but what were you becoming, and are becoming now? Each affect that jumped out, every sensation of separation or agglomeration, was an intensity that moved through your body, an intensity that signalled new becomings. You became a map of these intensities, just as a swimmer’s body is a map of the water they swim with (Saldanha 175).

This flow of encounter is all there is in the smoothing and segmenting of populations, the generation of human and non-human selves and others. This flow of encounter, each movement, each intensity playing around and through the bodies that map them, is what it means “to city” (Saldanha 175). When you walked south you were a play of becomings, as sure as your feet hit
concrete you were moving through threadwork, through a “networked interconnection of forces, energies, rhetorics, moods, and experiences” which made you differently at each juncture (Edbauer 10). You were yourself the juncture(s) of these mutual encounters. You were a cross-section walking south.

This flow of encounter and intensity is what makes for the becoming-city and becoming-publics, for cities-to-be and peoples-to-be. But to understand this, it has to be asked what the vehicles of these intensities are. These are the things and the practices-of-things that teach us how to read each other and ourselves, and the spaces that emerge from our confluences. What sorts of things and networks of things and people make these connections across time and space, what rhetorics and what materialities occasion our becomings and what changes in these networks do our encounters occasion in turn?

**Desire and the ontological ground of becoming (in the) city**

In Interlude 2.1 where the text positioned you as someone taking a walk through the city, the city functions not as a stable noun, as a steady container of fixed identities but rather as something like a verb, an unfolding process of emergence. Similarly, Deleuzian machines do not have a fixed interior identity; they exist only in their relations. A machine in this sense can range from the human body itself, to money, on to social projects like education or agriculture. Or as Saldanha argues, a city. Every machine is part of a system of machines. There is no starting point or ending point. Instead, relationships are expressed as flows. The flows are transformed through interruptions. As flows are interrupted, they express lines of becoming in their conjunction, disjunction, or connective actions with other machines which they are plugged into in moving, shifting constellations. In Deleuzian terminology, a machine (or desiring-machine) is, then,
simply “a system of interruptions or breaks” (AO 36) that is constantly producing and reconfiguring. Desiring-machines are, thus, vehicles of production, producing subjectivities as flows of desire are interrupted, caught up, coded and connected with constantly shifting topographies of relations.

As machines always interact with desire, the particular role desire plays in Deleuze and Guattari’s thought and the production of subjectivities needs clarification. Desire is the motive force of becoming as a synthetic process, it is not a lack satisfied by a missing object. To illustrate this concept of a machine and this understanding of desire, we can look at the practices of advertising, as an example. Advertising as a desiring-machine channels desire in the production of subjects who perceive themselves as lacking. Here it is not desire which is lacking, but the creation of a lack as a function of market economy, the “art of a dominant class” (AO 28). Consider this scenario: [I] see the figure of a model with a product, generically attractive, socially fulfilled, an object, so to speak, of desire. The message might be something like “This could be you!” That figure is not a representation, it can never be, even if the work of photography captured representations, after all the arts of advertising have processed it in every touch up and tweak of lighting, the figure [I] encounter can never be achieved, it was never meant to be, and even if it was I can never be -that- model.

Instead, the advertisement is an expression of possibility. The rhetorical force of the advertisement positions [me] towards the image of the [me] that could be, something beyond the immanent moment which persuades [me] toward the purchase of the product. It opens a vector towards a transcendent possibility of being, impossible to achieve and never outside of the field of immanence, but whose rhetorical force comes in that very gesture towards a stable regime of beauty and social acceptance which starts with buying the product. The advertisement couples
with the viewer, in a network of discourses on beauty and capital, in its materiality as an image, and in that assemblage of exterior relationships, lines of becoming are generated which produce a subject.

A city can be considered in multiple ways from this perspective. A city’s identity is not fixed or essential, despite what attempts to configure it in this manner might produce. It is also a “a desiring-machine,” which, because it is relational, is always a social machine also. In proximity to the city as social/desiring-machine, one can encounter many social/desiring machines alongside: school machines which render us as student and citizens as well as political machines, infrastructural machines, and so on. The city exists alongside and as an assemblage of social/desiring mechanisms which are constantly reassembling, enacting new becomings in their channels of affect. A city segments and differentiates bodies by placing them in neighborhoods, classes, races, and genders. The city as a desiring-machine channels desire in terms of civic-being, consumerism, community, property relations where people are produced as lessors or landlords or marked as dispossessed, and created as many other possible subjectivities through many other relations besides.

**Desiring-production and planes of becoming**

In theorizing how desire, captured and channeled by and through space, functions in the city, Saldhana, calling on Deleuze, considers the kinds of “planes” that are enacted by, with, and through the city. Plane has a special meaning in Deleuzo-Guattarian thought—“the French plan is both “plan” and “plane,” and can signify map, blueprint, diagram, layout, outline, program, scheme, schedule, strategy, and so forth, in addition to level, standard, and plane” (Saldanha 146-147). For this reason, following Brian Massumi’s adoption of the term plan(e) in his translation of A Thousand Plateaus, I will use this rendering of plan(e) from hereon out.
The language of plan(e)s provides a vocabulary for how the material rhetorics of gentrification act on the production of group and individual subjectivities; stamp historical conscious; inform notions of belonging and exclusion, periphery and center; and shape imaginations of what a city could be and for whom. Desiring-machines, like cities, and their assemblages chart different topographies of relationality to past(s) and future(s), and possibilities of becoming happen in the form of “planes” (Saldanha 146). In the city as machine, the production of desire is immanent in the ontology of becoming. While a city’s assemblages never escape immanence, they exert rhetorical force on the paths of becoming for particular and collective subjectivities in the way that they gesture “beyond” it in any direction. To illustrate, returning to the advertising example, as the advertisement poses a possibility for becoming that seems transcendent, it simultaneously attempts to represent a law of what the viewing subject should be.

There are four plan(e)s that will be described here; each of the planes are immanent, but they exhibit different senses of temporality, looking backwards to the past, forward to the future, or straight ahead at the present. They are situated in the immanent field of becoming, but, as with the previous example of advertising, some planes open vectors to a never-achieved transcendence that still informs trajectories of possible becomings and relationality. The advertising example of transcendence-inside-immanence shows one way desiring-machines can open up different sorts of topographic relations of possibility in their workings while still remaining immanent to the social field. To get a fuller sense of how this plays out, it is helpful to consider the varieties of plan(e)s Deleuze theorized.

The first is the \textit{plan(e) of immanence}. The plane of immanence is a “field of potentialities particular to the present situation or process that cannot be represented, only thought and sensed.
Instead of a recognizable structure, a plane of immanence or consistency is an assemblage’s unreplicable and indivisible virtual side, a mass of pure events” (Saldanha 147). The plane of immanence is the ontological ground of becoming in Deleuzo-Guattarian thought, but it is also the ground of philosophy, where concepts are created and ontologies are articulated. The plane of immanence is “that which constitutes the unspoken, the un-thought internal conditions of thinking itself” and “what cannot be thought as such, and yet, it is constituting”(Spindler 152). It is where actions create ideologies. In a city, for example, any pedestrian meandering is engaged in a point-to-point movement of becomings in the plane of immanence, a movement through different possible subject positions and relationalities. A pedestrian is not simply within a city as desiring-machine, but folds from that machine, functioning and acting upon it, with it and through it; immanently mapping possibilities and terrain; and discovering their own dynamic powers and kinetic relations along with the relative limits of those powers and relations. The plane of immanence is the space in which human and non-human move in rushes of encounter, where the push and pull between the coded and uncoded flows of desire and desiring-production take place.

Second, there is the plan(e) of reference which is held as particular to science. The plane of reference is a topological space where the accreted body of previous work is constantly reworked, sometimes revolutionized in what is called a paradigm shift. The plane of reference is enacted through “discursive rules like peer review, experiments, deduction, and so on. Reference is what allows for ruptures to take place precisely by retroactively rewriting the centuries of work done by one’s predecessors” (Saldanha 146). In the city, we can see the plane of reference enacted through literacies of urban planning, demographic study, civil engineering, and so on. In
the advertising example, we can also see this in the assemblages of focus-groups and impact studies which feed into the materialization of particular ads.

Third, there is the plane of organization. “Also called plane of transcendence or plane of development, [it] is the virtual blueprint whereby a process takes shape and its perfection is evaluated” (Saldanha 147). Saldanha states “while a plane of immanence does not exist outside of its expressions, a plane of organization attempts to become transcendent, to become actualized as separate representation or law” (147). Projects of social organization that open toward this plane in their working enact what Deleuze and Guattari term the molecular/molar distinction. The molar is a coded whole: a level of aggregation “with an all-encompassing morphogenesis: ‘the structures.’ ‘formations’, ‘relations’ and so on of which Marxism and psychoanalysis talk, the stable aggregates that people identify with” (Saldahna 101). By contrast, molecular processes are “supple, fluid, rhizomatic, and fleeting,” expressed in local linkages. These are the idiosyncrasies that must be suppressed to obtain a molar categorization. In conforming to the “law” or a transcendent, representative idea of stable identity, the molecular is what must be put aside but also what escapes that capturing attempt at representation.

In terms of identity, a salient molar example is race, where social practices and discourses on biology, capital, culture, and so on concentrate on bodies to assign groups fixed properties which subjugate them to power. Molecularity stands in for what is not captured, the things that come as possibilities of escape and that have not yet been fixed in place. This is a ground of power where subjectivities are regulated and rendered as fixed in regimes of homogeneity. Any molar subjectivity enacts a plane of organization, as a molar subjectivity charts being rather than becoming. In the example of advertisement, when considering the figure of the model with the product, we can see the ad’s organizing work in the light of how steeped
advertising practices are in regimes of heteronormativity, racialized beauty standards, and so on which attempt to organize and configure what makes for a more-or-less acceptable body.

Plan(e)s of organization can be enacted in many forms. In El Paso’s context this can be seen in the tightening of the border and markings of citizenship; in the way that Mexican identity is branded into hegemonic regimes of authenticity and respectability for marketing purposes; in the demolition of “undesirable” barrios; and in the way that El Paso’s identity as an American city is marked by celebrating the names of conquerors and industrialists through monumental art and street names. The plane of organization organizes experience according to transcendent in-group norms: who can belong where, who is a “real” group member or a true outsider, who must conform to what standards in order to be seen and heard. Molarization is often a hegemonic process, but it is important to note that at the same time, molecularization is not always positive. Capitalism works on a constant deterritorialization and also works on molecular levels. Barrios are demolished and peoples undergo a material and discursive deterritorialization of flows, only to be re-territorialized into social disparities at a number of interpenetrating scales. Peoples are displaced, neighborhood communities are disrupted, and in this sweeping away of their previous organizations they are shifted into new urban relations. As Saldanha puts it, “flows usually end up in places” (104).

The fourth and final plan(e) is the plan(e) of composition, which is enacted through art by artists or artful agents. The plane of composition is the second plane which opens a transcendent vector. As Saldanha has it, “when an artist succeeds in extracting consistent affect or sensation from a particular assembling and transformation of materials, the resulting artwork ‘ascends’ into an aesthetic plane of composition” (Saldanha 145). Still further, “the plane of composition is the potentiality of the thickness in the materiality of materials. It has nothing to do with any
hermeneutic depth or what the art ‘represents’...By materializing the plane of composition in its affective corporeality, art creates a refrain, a territory, a *house* that filters the universe” (145). This is a particularly salient category in the discussion of public rhetoric. If we hold the definition of rhetoric as an art, the implications should become clear. Any genre—texts, materials and associated practices—is a consistent mobilization of affect, a house or territoriality which channels the people and things it encounters through “the perspective of its own flux” (AO 1). The rhetorics of urban revitalization put stakes on what an urban public is, *could be*, or *become*, an act of territorialization on the plane of composition. Setting these stakes is a transcendent gesture because it universalizes in a specific way the capacity of that public to act materially in its situated ecology. If a desirable urban public is seen as upper middle class, respectable, White, in possession of disposable capital, and so forth then the urban space becomes configured so that it can invite and condition consumption, investment, and tourism of that particular public, or on a hegemonic level it is written and read only along those terms. Opposing and/or counter-hegemonic compositions of an urban public, such as the leftist rhetorical trope of “the people,” are still claims on what is rhetorically constituted as and constitutive of any given public or people, and still make universalizing gestures. Different forms of artistic production on the plan(e) of composition will gesture toward different universalities, but these are always contingent, strategic, partial, and never fixed in space or identity. They only work toward different ends and promote different forms of desiring-production.

No plan(e) is mutually exclusive from any other; they can be enacted or opened up separately or simultaneously. A scientific work of civil engineering gestures toward the plane of reference, but in the fact that it assumes and works to maintain a vision of a particular people/public (to see we need only note the sheer unevenness of infrastructure across racialized,
ghettoized, rich and poor neighborhoods) then it is gesturing toward a plan(e) of organization. If we accept Jean-Francois Lyotard’s insight that scientific knowledge and its practices must always make recourse to narrative knowledge, particularly the meta-narrative of progress, when it comes up to its limits, then we can see civil engineering’s existential justifications are a gesture towards transcendence and can sit in plan(e)s of organization and composition (27). If we accept that there is a rhetoric to all things, or at least that all things can become-rhetorical when they encounter a machine of rhetorical thought, then there is a plane of composition situated in the immanence of all things. This is important to note as we continue, as all of this is meant to map out an ontological ground in which the concatenations of the literacy-in-action of “revitalization” and its accompanying genre ecologies will be situated, and to make room for how the vehicles of revitalization constellate and concatenate in the shaping of public subjectivities in their desiring-becomings.

The use of this framework provides a way to mark and name how the material/discursive genre ecologies of revitalization as literacy-in-action act on and through urban publics. As flows of desire are taken up by literacies-in-action like revitalization and the suasive forces of material space, they produce in the masses who encounter them different becomings and maps of possible relations. With all the technologies of power the literacy-in-action of urban revitalization employs, it unfolds homogenous notions of identity, race, class, different insider/outsider dynamics at the same time as they disrupt and de-code communal identities through targeted demolition, shifts in infrastructure, hikes in property taxes, and so on. It channels resources into projects of public art that celebrate visions of disembodied cultural authenticity and histories of colonial conquest. It undertakes demographic studies that mark out spaces to be transformed for the enjoyment of more “acceptable” public subjects, and it moves in police patrols to enforce
that. On the plan(e) of immanence, the literacy-in-action of revitalization attempts to organize, compose, and referentially legitimize transformations of public space. The desiring-production enacted by the literacy-in-action of revitalization moves in all directions, establishing vectors of becoming, casting historical events in new light, legitimizing homogenous regimes of power and identity while sweeping away inconvenient collectivities and practices to be recomposed elsewhere on its own terms.
CHAPTER 3:
ASSEMBLING METHODOLOGIES: CRITICAL PLACE INQUIRY, SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS, AND A/R/TOGRAPHY

In framing research as an emergent process, I situate this study within Mirka Koro-Ljungberg’s conceptualization of fluid methodological spaces, which provides a rhizomic bearing for dealing with that emergence. To put human and non-human becomeings in dynamic and provisional relationship to one another, this study engages in the production of fluid methodologies that combine Critical Place Inquiry, Situational Analysis, and A/r/tography.

Critical Place Inquiry. Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie’s formulation of critical place inquiry brings into conversation the variegated logics of new materialism, decolonizing Indigenous studies, environmental research, and other relevant critical projects (5). Each thread they take up has different implications for how it reads the manifestations of space and place in each case it applies to. In mainstream Western traditions, space is taken as independent and static, a container of stable identities. Place, in turn, is often rendered as a similarly static location inside a spatial field, often given only a cursory engagement in research (7). Finding these mainstream approaches to space and place inadequate, Tuck and McKenzie explore the differences in how these concepts are framed from the perspectives of the spatial turn in qualitative research, alongside Indigenous and New Materialist scholarship.

Tuck and McKenzie do not seek to fully synthesize these approaches, but to offer a meaningful way for them to be brought into methodological conversation. Decolonizing indigenous frameworks, for example, are as a variable as indigenous cultures, but can often be characterized in terms of their focus on land, ethical relationships, and consistency with their particular cosmogonies and worldviews (10). The spatial turn in qualitative social science
research in turn has sought to think of space less as an external, abiding surface and more as a continual act of interaction amongst multiplicities, an ongoing project of construction (13). This form of thinking about space attends to questions of spatial justice, the consequences of how space is configured in globalization, and how forms of power like race act spatially (13). Space is processual here, and places become sites of practice, or practices in their own right. New Materialist frameworks share a rejection of space and place as autonomous and fixed, seeing these orientations as inherently dualist, and turn away from these geometrical considerations to examine “affect, force, and movement as it travels in all directions” (16). New Materialist approaches examine the ways that “matter comes to matter”, the processes of materialization of place and space through the active roles of human and non-human agents. In this light, this methodological frame allows for an approach towards the kinds of machinic assemblages that shape the subject positions of peoples in downtown El Paso.

Critical Place Inquiry recognizes “place(s)...as sites of presence, futurity, imagination, power, and knowing” (Tuck and McKenzie xiv) and invites us to consider the ways in which memory and cognition take place in embodied, dynamic, and spatialized relations between human and non-human things. Critical Place Inquiry takes up methodological approaches that are “informed by the embeddedness of social life in and with places” (2). Space is a multiplicity, it is a dynamic process of emergence, laced with power and entangled relationships between materialities and people. It both shapes social practices and is continually being (re)shaped by them (19). This has a direct bearing on how public subjectivities are formed and opens up investigation into the ways that people are experiencing the transforming of downtown spaces.

Critical Place Inquiry, as a Tuck and McKenzie articulate it, provides a wealth of approaches to accounting for space with an assembly of techniques. Critical Place Inquiry keeps
itself open to the transversality of the new materialist project and the way that place and space are articulated through dynamic and moving connections across materialities and discourses. Because of this openness to transversality and a wide range of techniques, this methodology suits itself well to understanding the desiring productions of gentrification and the different ways it acts on plan(e)s of immanence, reference, organization, and composition. To approach the primary research question with the significance of these actions in mind, an assembly of methods is articulated within this framework, which includes (1) walking interviews that capture the mutual relations and narratives of participants and downtown spaces, (2) a/r/tographic techniques that capture and express aesthetic and affective figurations of space for each participant, both of which are finally processed (3) through the methodological frame of situational analysis as articulated by Adele E. Clarke.

**Walking Interviews.** One of the primary modalities by which people interact with, produce and are produced by urban space is through walking. In the weaving movement of peoples in the city, Michel De Certeau sees the articulation of the “pedestrian speech act” (98). For De Certeau, the intertwining movements of peoples in an “innumerable collection of singularities” are the forces that shape, read and write the city and the innumerable subject positions of its constituents. Points of identity, lines of becoming, for collectives and singular people, and the city writ large are established through mutual entanglements across the surface of the vast urban “texturology” (98). Moving through the city is a fundamental practice of literacy, multiplied by other concurrent literate practices, which Valerie Kinloch explores in her videographic study of Harlem. Kinloch’s work built off the understanding that literacy and its practices are everywhere, and turned to the question of gentrification in her work with two high school students. In particular, she explored how high school students in Harlem contextualize,
document, and narrate the changes associated with gentrification and the re-appropriation of public space in Harlem. To this end she employed videos, snapshots, and walking interviews to document the discourses and spaces these teens engaged with as literacy practices around issues of access, privilege, and public life in Harlem.

Following De Certeau’s theorization of the city as a vibrant and ever-changing living text and Kinloch’s study of everyday literacy practices in Harlem, this study adopts the methodological technique of walking interviews. Walking interviews, described by James Evans and Phil Jones, are built to sidestep the limitations of sedentary and closed off interview techniques and instead incorporate the lived relation to space (850). By bringing in the visual, auditory, and haptic flow of movement they lend themselves to the kinds of spatially sensitive insights that are so important in discussions of urban space. Alex Mahoudeau, drawing from his work in Syrian refugee camps notes that walking interviews ground the spatializing work of participants, let materiality work through their narrations, and provide them a resource to make points or generate discourse (3).

I implemented walking interviews in the form of guided, visually recorded (around 90 minute) structured tours by participant-residents as they moved through and narrated their understandings and experiences with downtown. I asked 4 people to do walking interviews with me along a route they each choose through an area or neighborhood they see as particularly significant to the history of downtown El Paso, their communities, their experiences within it, etc. Because I wanted to foreground my positionality and express my own relationality with the city, I also decided to perform a walking interview of my own with the assistance of my advisor, Dr. Jennifer Clifton. The walking interviews were requested for 30-90 minutes, but all ended up in a range of 50 to 90 based on the route that participants selected. Each participant was given a
camera and asked to take photos of places or things they see as particularly significant to the narrative they construct over the course of the interview, either with the camera I provided or with their own phone cameras. This method allowed for the places of downtown to speak with and through people in a way that showed their particular constellation relations with the area and its materialities—at least as they were configured in the span of the interview.

Participants were selected based on relationships I have developed in the downtown community with potential for a snowballing effect if they chose to involve others in their circles. The first was Rosemary, a Mexican-American woman who was born and raised downtown who has extensive experience in community organizing and activism and also heads up the Farm Worker’s Center downtown with her husband Clavo. Clavo, a Mexican-American man who comes from Roswell, New Mexico, and has lived here since the 90s, was also interviewed separately because of his experience in local politics and dealing with immigration politics. Eric, a young Mexican-American man born and raised in El Paso and self-identified Chicano, who is currently a PhD student at University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), spoke about his experience growing up and coming closer to the downtown area. Chris, an African-American man, former neighbor and current friend, asked to participate after a conversation with me and spoke over the course of his interview about his experiences living on the streets downtown and the changes in space and police presence that revitalization has wrought there. Finally, as I mentioned earlier, I chose to perform my own interview with the assistance of my advisor because of my own personal relationship with downtown and because I felt I could not ethically speak about these experiences or examine my positionality without participating in this process and comparing my personal experience with theirs. In the end, I drew only on Chris’s and Rosemary’s interviews in the fourth chapter as they had the most intensive and long experiences of downtown, particularly
around San Jacinto Plaza, where I chose to concentrate my analysis. Eric’s and my own walking interviews are touched on in Chapter 5, but were mainly used as jumping off points as we sat down in the a/r/tography portion of the project.

While the interviews were participant driven, I prepared a tentative protocol and to guide the content of the interview with the following questions:

- What route have you selected and why?
- Why is this space significant to you?
- What makes this place significant to your community, or the communities around it?
- How has this area changed over the last few years?
- What do you think drove those changes?
- How has this change affected the communities downtown?
- How has the revitalization affected your sense of the city?
- Do you feel these changes have been positive, negative, or mixed?

After the initial interview, I asked two participants to participate in follow up meetings where they were asked to produce an a/r/tographic collage based on the content of their interview, as a kind of personal aesthetic mapping of the city, its communities, and their place in the changing landscape they discussed. The first participant was Eric, who I wanted to include in the process as his living in downtown with his daughter, his own experiences and political commitments in El Paso, and his experience with the arts community, give him great perspective and insite into imagining El Paso as it does critically and could exist potentially. I asked my close friend and roommate Rebecca, who did not perform an interview, to participate in creating my own. I did this because I felt in making a map accounting for my own experiences and my understanding of
downtown, and after having written so much about relational theories and how I found myself through others, I could not make the map on my own. Her dialogue and choices were invaluable to me in producing my own collage.

A/r/tography. To explore desire as an important productive mode of public becoming in the gentrified space, this study drew on A/r/tography, an open-ended methodology that developed in educational theory and focuses on aesthetic inquiry, blurring and co-equalizing the roles/identities of artist/researcher/teacher. A/r/tography “folds the identities of artist, researcher, and teacher (a/r/t), in contiguous relations. None of these features is privileged over another as they occur simultaneously in and through time and space” (Irwin, Beer, Springgay, Grauer, Xiong, & Bickel 70). Aesthetic production technique works in the “in-between” space where “theory-as-practice-as-process-as-complication intentionally unsettles perception and knowing through living inquiry” (qtd. In Artistic Intellect). A/r/tography aims at embracing the messy and often inconclusive nature of inquiry while still focusing on the particular ways that we all move through rhizomatic networks of becoming. The interface of text and aesthetics produces meaning-making in a manner where research and knowledge are seen as acts of complication, not necessarily smooth and certain (Artistic Intellect). Rhizomatic thinking creates networks of interconnections with multiple entry points that spread in all directions. Patricia Leavy describes a/r/tography as a methodology that “invites and celebrates interconnectivity” (6). It is a methodology that has a very fluid form, taking in multiple types of aesthetic practice with a deliberate openness to interdisciplinarity and heterogeneity.

Stephanie Springgay, Rita Irwin, and Syvia Kind see a/r/tography as a kind of “relational aesthetics where patterns exist not as predetermined identities but as ‘co-appearance’—a being with one another” (86). The relational aesthetics of a/r/tography see the production of meaning as
something not external to action, to the interpenetrating elements of a situation that occasion the production of artistic work. Through this lens, the assemblages of artists, researchers, locations, discourses, and more are folded “with, in, and through” each other and are confronted as sites of interrogation (86). Just as the significance of an artistic work is a component of the relationalities brought about in a particular situation, so to are communities more than pre-existing group identities with fixed interior meanings. In the framework of a/r/tography, just as the meaning of aesthetic production is imagined through the relational situation, so to is community “re-imag(e)-ined as a set of circumstances that are not fixed but are ever evolving” (83). It is through a/r/tography that the situations that produce particular forms of community can be approached through affective and aesthetic productions with participants.

While the educational bent of early a/r/tographic work does not apply here, its rhizomatic bearing and focus on dynamic, interconnected networks with no points of greater privilege dovetails nicely with Adele Clark’s situational mapping. Irwin, Beer, Springgay, Grauer, Xiong & Bickel conceptualize a/r/tography as a “methodology of situations” which works through its employment of rhizomatic relationality (71). I employ a/r/tographic methods as a way of enjoining participants to collaborate in creating their own aesthetic versions of situational mapping—showing how the ecologies of downtown act as desiring spaces from the point of view of their own life, how the changing situations and relationalities of downtown enacted by each participant invoke different and shifting understandings of “community” (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 83). A/r/tography can involve many singular methods, such as collage, music, videography, and more, and it lends itself to participants producing affective mappings of their own desiring and emotional experiences of downtown using the materials at hand. In the same way that the walking interview allows space to speak with and through the particular and
dynamic lives of individual participants, the a/r/tographic collage allows those spaces to also speak with and through them in terms of desire, showing downtown as a desiring space.

After the initial interviews, I used content from the transcripts and the photographs the participants took over the course of the walking interviews. The set of photos and the content of the interviews were used to create constraints to make a collage, to keep them within the range of what the interviews covered. Participants were asked to choose among the photos they took, or to use those photos or their interview content as jumping off points to create collages. Photos and audio excerpts served as a basis for the generation of artistic collages by each participant, showing particular affective and relational encounters with the processual emergence of the situation of revitalization and with what downtown means to each participant (how do they make downtown mean?). The photos and audio interviews served either as reference points for collecting material for the a/r/tography (such as the kinds of material a place might invoke) or as material in their own right to be added into a collage. Participants chose the materials they wanted to employ ahead of time and assembled them with me to create a kind of aesthetic map that layered onto and complicated the data garnered in the initial walking interview.

Situational Analysis. An understanding of the desiring-machine of the city, its spatial genres of revitalization, and the production of public subjectivities as relational also lends itself to ecological explorations through Situational Analysis. These maps are primarily used here as analytic tools and do not show up in the final analysis, they were instead used to deepen my relationship with the data and feed into positional maps. Engaging in situational analysis through mapping helps avoid over-simplications and helps “to address head-on the inconsistencies, irregularities, and down-right messiness of the empirical world” (Clarke 15). Situational mapping lays out a situation of concern by considering the following questions: “Who and what
are in this situation? Who and what matters in this situation? What elements ‘make a difference’ in this situation?” (Clarke 87). Situational Analysis uses three forms of analytic exercises (Situational Maps, Social Worlds/Arenas Maps, and Positional Maps) to pull the researcher into a deeper relationship with the data (Clarke, 83). The processes Clarke articulates attune the researcher to different kinds of relationality visible in the data, including those that might not at first seem relevant. Moving through the processes of Situational Analysis through mapping and memos makes visible the material, discursive, and social agents that make the data possible. This framework enjoins a systematic working through of what assemblages bring about the relations, possibilities, and positions articulated in the data. The focus on different forms of mapping becomes potent in the light of this study when combined with Dylan Dryer’s understanding of “Geographies of the Possible” as expounded in chapter 1, lending itself to chart how spatial, material and rhetorical ecologies shape possibilities of public subjectivities and configure horizons of desire, imagination, relationality, and the becomings of public subjectivities.

**Abstract Situational Maps.** Situational mapping, through Adele Clark, is a useful analytical tool for describing and accounting for the dynamic and juxtaposing relations among people and materials, mapped on a kind of flat ontological space which shows interdependence and interpenetration of elements which produce subject positions and possibilities of relations. Based on walking interviews, and the later a/r/tography sessions I moved through four stages: First, I constructed messy abstract situational maps based on each interview. Then I processed those into ordered situational maps. Next I built on the ordered situational maps to construct positional maps to explore the ways participants were positioned by spatial genres and the literacy-in-action of revitalization.
In the abstract situational map phase, I took down all “ideas, concepts, discourses, symbols, sites of debate” and other material and cultural aspects which appeared in the interview (88). The situational maps aided in providing a messy, and deliberately open-ended way of relating the key things participants focused on in their narrations of their walking interview route. Situational maps as pictured below, provide a way to visualize the relationships between human and non-human actors, institutional, private, public, and so on which people situated as activists might see as particularly salient to the enactment of revitalization downtown. The initial situational maps were sifted into ordered maps, which categorize each term on the map under a range of terms which mark their status as individual or collective human agents, material agents, their discursive constructions, and their spatial natures (89). Below are examples of the kinds of situational maps I use, taken from a study in Adele Clarke’s work based on emotion work in nursing. The first is a messy abstract map of human and non-human actors alongside an organized map of human and non-human actors (Figure 3.1). The second is an ordered version of that map which collects and categorizes key terms contained in the interviews (Figure 3.2).
Positional Maps. Positional maps lay out “the major positions taken in the data on major discursive issues therein—topics of focus, concern, and often but not always contestation” (126). These maps are built on the understanding that “individuals and groups of all sorts may and commonly do hold multiple and contradictory positions on the same issue” (126). These
maps constellate a range of positions taken in the data of particular interviews, charting them along axes determined by prevailing themes in the data. For example, Figure 3.3 is a position map based around emotion work in nursing. My interest is in the public subjectivities occasioned by the materialities of revitalization as literacy-in-action, so positional maps explore the multiple and conflicting ways different people are positioned by material expressions of revitalization as it produces desire around concepts like “community” or “progress,” to take an example from the next chapter. Drawing from my production of situational maps to create these this allowed me to look at each point and examine what kinds of material/discursive, human/non-human partnerships came together over the course of the walking interview to produce those positionalities. Because these position maps work over a single axes, I chose to split my maps into quadrants to show a fuller range of positions across complex data. In the next chapter, I draw from two such position maps from my participants Chris and Rosemary (visible on pages 52 and 54) and apply them to their movements through San Jacinto to show how movement positioned them alongside their own self-positioning, and I finally apply that to the question of what public subjectivities are occasioned by revitalized space.

Figure 3.3 Positional Map
CHAPTER 4: THE PLAZA, THE PEOPLE, AND THE MOLECULAR PUBLIC

This chapter explores how the Plaza as a spatial genre is shaping the possibilities and public subject positions available to residents in El Paso today. I first offer some context about the redesign of San Jacinto Plaza, an important site of downtown El Paso prominently featured in each participant’s walking interview, except mine.

History and Context of the Redesign of San Jacinto Plaza

On April 15, 2016, KVIA ran a profile on the recent redesign of San Jacinto Plaza in which city representative Courtney Niland states the general consensus in city government that “we had a park that didn’t function like a good central park should” (KVIA). What this statement calls attention to is how central parks, and the urban park in general, function as spatial genres in the organization of the city and what kinds of planar organization a park cuts across when it is shaped with the literacy of urban revitalization. San Jacinto’s establishment was already a founding gesture of transforming El Paso into an “American,” specifically Anglo, urban scape and its historical markers alongside its very name celebrate the march of industry, “civilization,” and martial victory. As material conditions and times have changed, and ideologies along with them, literacies of urban revitalization have taken on new techniques and formed new connections, but the genre of the park has held steady as a way to instantiate these visions. What does it mean now to have a central park that functions “like it should”? To provide a provisional answer, I turn to two primary sources that argue for downtown transformation that inscribes the values of gentrification and its desired peoples on the urban park: 1) the “Glass Beach Study” commissioned by the El Paso city government and produced by the advertising firm Sanders/Wingo and 2) the architectural drafts for the San Jacinto redesign by the architectural group SWA.
Commissioned in 2006, the Glass Beach Study was an extended case study on downtown El Paso with the stated assignment of “gaining an understanding of the emotional relationship the City of El Paso has across all segments: Business community, relocation, & tourism” (Sanders/Wingo 2). This was a study that approached El Paso through the desiring process of branding, with the stated objective to “flush out the emotional connection the business community and consumers have with the city of El Paso brand” (3). The study itself is instructive for a few reasons from its methodology to the way that, in the previous quote, it marks the residents of the city as either “consumers” or members of the business community. Most salaciously it was the racial coding the study employed that marks it as a touchstone of outrage in El Paso activist community.

Moving between the framework of “El Paso today” and “El Paso tomorrow,” it takes the time to mark El Paso today with a racialized figure of the “Old Cowboy,” an elderly Mexican man a slide in the study marks as “gritty, dirty, lazy, Speak Spanish [sic]” and “uneducated” (11). Using a blend of interviews, ethnography, and cross-referencing other cities in the United States, the study argues for a downtown of whitewashed consumers with a robust art and entertainment sector and business sector.

While SWA’s 2011 concept plan for San Jacinto only deals directly with the Plaza and its surrounding environs, it dovetails nicely with the stated goals and ambitions of the Glass Beach Study for downtown writ large. The 74-slide presentation is mainly pictographic, going over road plans, adjacent parking infrastructure, and available entertainments, contrasting the Plaza as it existed then against the architectural features of parks across the country from New York to San Francisco. SWA promoted an “informal axially” in the pathways of San Jacinto that promoted peoples moving through “to linger, to inhabit” to not use the space as a “thoroughfare from one end to another” (45). They argued that parks are a space for engagement with “art,
culture, and history” among other public programming (45). This new design was meant to promote a sense of color, rest, enjoyment, and incidentally “crowd control” (9). Above all else, the redesigned Plaza was “envisioned as an urban respite” and a new “spark” in the life of an area presumed dead. SWA promoted and then enacted a vision of the genre of urban park as a project of revitalization meant to promote leisure and art for an everyday and homogenous public. Taken alongside the specific kind of public envisioned in the Glass Beach Study, it is obvious that a much more specific kind of public subjectivity is being enacted, and the changes the Plaza produces are not as innocuous as their marketing suggests. While the Glass Beach Study and SWA’s drafting plans for the Plaza do not express the full study of gentrification downtown, and the workings of revitalization as a literacy across the whole area, they do provide an instructive backdrop to place the experiences expressed in the walking interviews as we moved across the Plaza.

In order to understand implications for the ways spatial genres, like the urban park, work to produce revitalization and particular public subjectivities, I focus on interviews with two participants: Chris and Rosemary. I chose their interviews because they had the most direct experience of the Plaza before and after the redesigns started to move in full swing. They had both spent extensive time in and around the Plaza and recognized it as a major feature of living their lives. Other participants’ experiences of the Plaza recounted in the interviews were much more recent or at least more tertiary. For example, in my walking interview I never chose to go near San Jacinto, because I came here after the busses had moved to the Downtown Transfer Center, so I had no real experience or knowledge of it. While all of the participants, except me, spoke about the Plaza, Chris and Rosemary provide the best study of the Plaza owing to their
close to the ground experience. Before recounting those experiences I want to make some clarifications on my method for interpreting these interviews.

**Method**

I am not attempting to examine each interview as an expression of a deeper and transcendent truth about the participants, looking for a stable voice “which can speak the truth of consciousness and experience” (Mazzei & Jackson 1). It would defeat the purpose of this project to write about each interview as a search into the nature of a freestanding individualist voice. Rather, voice is “one part of an assemblage of heterogenous elements” (Mazzei & Jackson 2). Taken as an assemblage, no utterance given on a walk can be taken as separate from the spaces we encountered over the course of our walks, from the couplings of discourses and materials that substantiated them. Each interview is an event that was occasioned by the transcorporeal encounters of moving through a city (Taguchi 270). Events such as these require a diffractive approach, which Lenz Taguchi defines as “thinking as a process of co-constitution, investigating the entanglement of ideas and other materialities in ways that reflexive methodologies do not” (271). Diffractive reading involves layering data and looking for the differences expressed in each case, and the ways that different, sometimes contradictory (but always partial and incomplete) voices emerge in them owing to the assemblages that locked into place during the event of the interview. Following from this approach, and from my focus on the significance of place in public creation, I will center San Jacinto Plaza as the main site of encounter downtown and through the data show how urban revitalization expressed itself in different markings and segmentations of myself and my participants as we moved through them. Before making that move, however, I will first describe each interview and the position maps derived from them, with some notes on how I chose them as provisional conveniences for the analysis.
Data Production

Chris

Out of all the participants, Chris chose the most complex route to take over the course of our walk, ranging from the exterior of the El Paso Public Library over to San Jacinto and past the hotels, bars, and shops adjacent to Aztec Calendar Park before looping back. Chris borrowed from military language to frame the locations we visited, referring to the library as “homeless headquarters,” parks are “Forward Operating Bases.” This language and the particular narrations our encounters with places enjoined conveyed a sense of struggle and strategic thinking. Chris spoke of the increase of police presence and incarceration, the formal and informal economies that dominate homeless life, alongside practices of social networking that made his life survivable. Chris spoke of a climate of intermittent violence, of robbing and being robbed, of an ecology of drug houses like the Gateway Hotel, and of a constant state of vulnerability. He characterized his life while homeless as “survival of the fittest.” It was a way of living that institutional and carceral practices made it extremely difficult to escape. Chris listed at least five jobs he took on while homeless; in each case, his boss would fire him a week later when his background checks came in. Our walking interview occasioned Chris to focus in on the tensions and deprivations he experienced while homeless, as the textures of the streets and the parks sparked Chris’ memory alongside fresh experiences of particular sites. This interview highlighted Chris’ own struggle to get ahead as well as how the city works to position homeless populations as itinerant and excluded.

The walk brought about a keen awareness of how humanity and legitimacy is constructed alongside access to capital, and the way in which the practices of humanization and de-humanization play out on both sides of the law. In the positioning map below, I chart the

50
different contradictory positions Chris narrated throughout the interview (Figure 4.1). Some of these were positions Chris took for himself, others were ways the sites positioned him. I borrow from Chris’s terminology, places where he recounts the mingling of people with “official power” alongside people wrapped up in gangs or homelessness at places like the Tap, a local neighborhood bar that caters to downtown El Paso. I chose to divide his map along an “official” and “unofficial” continuum. I chose this division first because it avoids the moralistic connotations that come with terms like “legal” and “illegal,” and also because “unofficial” captures activities and attitudes that are not necessarily against the law but which are not given social legitimacy. An example of this is begging, which is a form of labor that isn’t exactly labeled criminal, but which Chris marks as a disreputable activity. Accordingly, I chose to examine the positions articulated at various points in his walking interview through the city along the axes as a way of understanding how the spatial assemblages of the city produce the kinds of violence and humanizing / dehumanizing subjectivities he recounted during the walk.
Rosemary

My walk with Rosemary started at San Jacinto Plaza, moved south into Duranguito, and then looped back as she took time to emphasize the memories and values each place implied to her. Rosemary, a long-time participant in El Paso’s activist scene and someone who was born and raised in the downtown area, feels each space as imbued with the memory of place.

Rosemary spoke in the language of flesh and blood: the beating hearts of communities and roads like veins that circulate its peoples. Rosemary drew from her years of experience, going back to her childhood, in the downtown area and spoke about what her political involvements have
taught her. Over the course of the walk she noted features like the mannequin policeman outside of a longstanding tactical supply store where Juarez and El Paso law enforcement frequent: “What is the purpose for that? The purpose for that was desensitize people to somebody in a uniform, with a gun…with authority…with no feeling, with blue eyes.” In encounters like these she reflects on the history of the “man-made border” and the institutional divisions of peoples downtown, seeing it as a way in which whiteness is developed as function of capitalism: “There is no color of white…it’s not about the color of your skin. It’s about your mentality.”

In the position map below, I attempt to account for the tensions she expressed in her data (Figure 4.2). In her discussions of race and place and the fraught histories of immigration and capitalism in the downtown area, Rosemary was grappling with tensions between, on the one hand, community as mutual recognition and shared resources and, on the other, the conditions for their stability or instability. At the same time, different formulations of progress, either communitarian or neoliberal, were expressed in the data. For example, she spoke of the intensification of anti-immigrant ideology and how that has fed into the city, from “progress” being based around shopping in the 80s to the increase in border policing leading to destabilization of Mexican communities downtown. There is a tension expressed over the walk between communitarian notions of progress—what she characterized as equitable institutional access and rights to space—and neoliberal brands of progress which individualize people, cutting off community ties and treating people as consumers.
San Jacinto Plaza

After introducing San Jacinto Park, contextualizing the recent turn of revitalization downtown, and offering a general overview of my walking interviews with Chris and Rosemary, I want to return to my research questions:

1) How are the rhetorical ecologies of spatial genres in the downtown area of El Paso contributing to formations of particular kinds of “citizens” or public/counterpublic subjectivities?

2) How is downtown made present, or imagined differently, by people affected by the “revitalization” the city government is instigating?
In order to approach these questions, I layer these two interviews into the park in order to examine how San Jacinto Plaza functions as a spatial genre of revitalization-as-literacy in action in the way it produces particular public subjectivities in each interview. Because my participants all called attention to the movement of the transfer center, I take the transfer of the busses from the Plaza as a watershed moment in this turn of revitalization. I begin there with Rosemary’s and Chris’s memories, then contrast those to the park as it is now, as they encountered it on their walks, in order to highlight the way these changes work on the people who move through them.

To start with looking at how the park is producing these “readers and writers,” and how it habituates power relations in its desiring-production, it is helpful to look at how movement was previously patterned by the park. A major part of this was its status as the central hub of public transportation until the establishment of the Downtown Transfer Center. The current conditions of San Jacinto and its environs brought Rosemary to remember coming up in the area and to recall the Plaza as a feature. She noted its previous function as a central hub for downtown, an imperfect but relatively stable condition that fostered community as I noted on her position map:

“All the busses rotated around here. And so, anybody that traveled in El Paso knew the people that sat [there]…families…used to gather around here because they were going to another part of town to either go to work, or coming back from work, or shopping…it was a functioning part of…living here…It was a place where you felt …your neighbors, your community.”

As we moved south on Oregon Street, Rosemary remarked on the array of closed grocers, pawn shops, investment and loans operations, upscale boutiques and tattoo shops. The interview turned toward how the changes in the park have functioned: to “herd” and racialize, and to
exclude “undesirable” populations as surplus. She stated “when you herd animals to another location…you herd them to another location, and you let them graze there…When they started this gentrification process…they herded the Mexicans away from the center, from the heart….they destroyed the functioning part of this city.” The changes in the park manifest in three positions articulated from her interview: 1) For Rosemary and her community, they acted as destabilization, producing new dependencies and throwing a vulnerable population further off center. 2) For El Paso’s Mexican community, for Duranguito, for all the working peoples who circulate through the “heart,” the changes obstruct their mutual recognition and drive them into margins. Rosemary also noted how this has functioned for the homeless population from her perspective running the Farm Worker’s Center. She noted that this has also pushed homeless people to the fringes, often pushing them to the door of the Center where they have had to make the choice between sheltering populations they are not specialized for or leaving them literally out in the cold. 3) For the elite families of the city that she identifies and for their ideological compatriots, it enacts a vision of “progress” built on fostering individual consumers with no solid group ties.

As we arrived at Duranguito, we stopped by the plantón, a staged sit-in to watch over the buildings of the neighborhood after their attempted demolition on September 11, 2017. Rosemary spoke about the buildings of the neighborhood as a kind of open-air museum about the life of the neighborhood. At this point, we heard from two of the women there about how their complaints were dismissed by the city with a sweeping statement that Duranguito simply didn’t exist as a neighborhood with a unique history. Later, after a prolonged discussion there, with our backs to Duranguito, and once again at the Plaza, Rosemary focused on a sidewalk clock from El Paso’s early years showcased in the redesign. She spoke of the rewriting of history, and the
means by which that is contested: “Every day that we get up and we walk through these streets, every day that we repeat this history, every day that we are able to share it with another person that was unaware of the historical significance of what this means, or can see the contradiction with these historic signs that they've placed up, and see the contradiction and the hypocrisy.”

Chris, who was also present before the busses moved and the redesign began in earnest, noticed resonant themes as he came to the park but through a much stronger focus on police presence: “this was the center…it was easy to find everybody because the people who had no money, there was a free bus…they’d hop on that and go through here and go do their thing.” It was what he calls a “Forward Operating Base,” a place for the homeless to network, to shelter and communicate, where many different populations were mixed in with each other including students and workers of different collars. It was after the busses left that he said, “Everything started to die.” Concurrent to the increase in construction and design changes across downtown, Chris observed an increase in police presence and detainments. Whereas before there would be a relatively minimal presence of bicycle police. Chris said, they:

“would just roll through and harass people, keep people from thinking it was lawless…it got to a point when they went from two cops to four bike cops to six…to eight…and they’d come through and just fuck your day off. ‘Sorry there’s no amnesty today! You got warrants you’re going to fuckin’ jail, c’mere’.’ You know, just to clear up the area, it’s how they clear it up.”

Police activity increased in surveillance and aggression to the point that “they would just harass and harass people…they would just harass people that weren’t even regular homeless people…if you looked like you were just loitering or anything they were on your ass.” In Aztec Celandar Park and San Jacinto Plaza this started to include increased undercover operations and the use of
mass arrest vehicles, including one incident where two police driving a jumpout van pulled up on him and called out to him by name: “It was fucked. You know, it was like 3 months gone.”

Chris’s assessment of the changes was stark and fraught with tensions. Noting the presence of defensive architecture in the park, specifically benches designed to prevent a person from resting on them, spoke about the thinking behind it: “Keeping the homeless from laying the fuck down. I ain’t mad at you, if I bought this shit, put a park in, I’d kick your ass for sleeping on my shit too.” He moved back and forth between accepting the logics of revitalization and the placement of homeless populations in them and critiquing them. As we moved through the streets, observed the park and the places where he experienced different degrees of danger and vulnerability, he said, “As far as gentrification as a whole, when it comes to who they move, they move the poor people off because they’re not fuckin doing anything for anybody…if you’re not a fuckin’ asset you’re a liability, bottom line.” Later in the walk, Chris expressed a dissonance between the actions of revitalization and its consequences: “You’re supposed to clean up your neighborhood and shit, but at the same time part of is like, wow! I see how you’re literally like, ‘Fuck these people…and make it accessible for these people.’” When I asked if there was a way for these changes to take place with attention to both populations he said, “There’s got to be a way to do it! That’s what pisses me off, because the problem here is nothing is seen like that.”

To see how San Jacinto functions as a spatial genre in the downtown area of El Paso contributing to formations of particular kinds of “citizens” or public/counterpublic subjectivities, it is important to look at in terms of the kinds of movement it promotes, or as Dryer writes, how it enacts “institutional activity through the practical production of generic readers and writers” (527). This is an act of location and uptake, a form of desiring-production, where people find senses of themselves and others (subject positions) as they couple with the genre, in this case, of
a Plaza. (506). How this process of locating occurs depends on the rhetorical ecologies each walker or organization grafts onto the Plaza. These ecologies continually re-contextualize the park through their “networked interconnection of forces, energies, rhetorics, moods, and experiences” (Edbauer 10).

Prior to the bus transfer, the Plaza, as a place of relative shelter and stability, stood in relief against Chris’ experiences struggling to survive while living on the streets, navigating increased dangers in more tertiary parts of the city. Rosemary, with her experience growing up and in politics, encountered the Plaza as a space where working peoples located themselves together as a community through the act of passing through, talking with one another, and sharing in each other’s life. With both we can see San Jacinto as a place where people were more or less smoothed in together across differences. Not an ideal situation, as many of those differences were still constitutive of class, race, and other forms of social violence, but this smoothing produced a kind of stability whose absence has left a sense of loss and disadvantage. It was the loss of the bus infrastructure in this area that marked a major turning point, as the populations that moved through the park were fragmented, and the literacy of revitalization began serious work on the Plaza.

Taken up by sponsors like, but not limited to, Sanders/Wingo and SWA, this literacy-in-action has re-contextualized the Plaza as a core place to rewrite the desired public for downtown. The public that is being asked for is something like a molecular public. You are an individual or a group of individuals and anything else is beside the point, unimportant or obstructive. This atomized public is produced through revitalization as an acting literacy, establishing globalizing connections as it joins “abstract constituencies or categories” by folding in disparate spaces and peoples as it reads and writes downtown and the Plaza specifically (Brandt & Clinton 351).
These connections are established in both the Sanders/Wingo and SWA presentations as they orient their reading of El Paso by folding in similar events in other American cities.

The Glass Beach Study accomplishes this by roping in cities across the Southwest, including Phoenix, Denver, and Albuquerque (Sanders/Wingo 9). Because revitalization is a literacy that moves towards positioning people according to consumer relations in a business climate, these locations are framed as general competitors and models to emulate. At the same time, they smooth in these disparate spaces, producing what Brandt and Clinton refer to as localizing moves that frame and partition particular interactions amongst peoples and materials (351). It is in these localizing moves that the Glass Beach Study partitions peoples and places in terms of qualities like buying potential—“young professionals, contractors, business decision makers” but also in heavily racialized terms: El Paso offers a “great Hispanic labor force” but is marred by perceptions that it is “felt like an extension of Juarez” (8, 24, 34).

SWA also makes globalizing connections as it situates itself into a wider ecology of urban parks from San Antonio to New York City. It focuses these connections on architectural features—textual features of the spatial genre of an urban park producing revitalization—such as fountains, lighting, and greenspaces, localizing these features as a “new spark” in the city which promotes “lingering” and enjoyment by friends and families. But this is an enjoyment for particular kinds of “friends and families” which are only asked to exist in certain ways.

As these changes were implemented in the park, the literacy of revitalization coupled with the “park” as a genre. The central Plaza here is the “heart” of the city, a desiring-machine producing a central pathway where the acceptable members of the public can circulate and express the desired life of the city. This desiring-production of a new urban public for El Paso
comes from how spatial genres like the Plaza promote movement. These movements through the city and the central park cut across a particular planar organization.

The relevance of planar organization is that the world we live in is built where feet hit pavement. It’s in how we move; how we make sense of each other; how we become “we,” a desired public; how we sense our histories or experiences and make sense of what those experiences mean; and in what possibilities we have for motion and further becomings. The planar language gives a fuller sense of how spatial genres and revitalization as an acting literacy condition our very lives.

In the first place, revitalization seeks to instantiate the concept of its ideal citizen. In the Glass Beach Study this concept is expressed through either “consumers” or the “business community” (3). This is further subdivided into “tourists”, “young professionals”, “contractors”, “artists” and more all marked as sub-populations of consumers (8). In SWA this is grounded in relational terms: “friends, family, and children” (33-34). The virtual side of these concepts, their range of potentials and possibilities is the plane of immanence these concepts share, which is grounded in capitalist norms of personhood. These are implicitly racialized as they express the whiteness Rosemary identified as a “mentality”--individuals marked by their buying power and their distance from markers of poverty. The range of potential action on this virtual side is shaped by how the park allows movement, as it brings you into sensual contact with the businesses it is surrounded by and those it contains. To be outside of the subject positions constructed here is to be completely unnamed or taken as an invasive element. On the plane of reference this is legitimized through the accreted bodies of studies, such as the architecture draft by SWA and the Glass Beach Study by Sanders/Wingo, which layer up on the city and take the exclusions implicit in the Plaza’s plane of immanence to the level of paradigm. Downtown and
the Plaza become a problem approached scientifically, through a terministic screen of accreted studies which enable it to be contextualized only through the lens of “strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats” (Sanders/Wingo 6).

As revitalization through the Plaza cuts across these planes of immanence and reference and limits the possible kinds of participation and participants, it also cuts across a plane of composition through the means in which it mobilizes affect. In the loose seating, axial paths, greenspace, and soft lighting, the park is designed to invite feelings of openness and warmth, a space that seems universally inviting for an homogenous public, characteristics that argue for a vision of the city. Its affective use of historical artifacts also does historiographic work on the people it moves through, as it showcases fragments of history in a way that Rosemary identified as “rewriting” when she examined the clock in the park. The past becomes smoothed into the present as a play of progress and nostalgia works itself out in the walking city. As it accomplishes this, it also cuts across a plane of organization as it maps out possible ranges of identity. As it began to scatter and molecuralize the parks previous organization, the new revitalization sets about organizing new discourses of identity, it builds with one hand what it destroyed with the other. Peoples moving through the park are molarized, smoothed into desired “identities” as consumers, as business owners, as citizens and taxpayers.

To move through these spaces is to be caught up in these planes and to experience its conditions for becoming and belonging. To be made to move in a certain way is to be enjoined to desire in a certain way, or to be positioned by that space’s desiring. For Rosemary, this produces a sense of being racialized as a subject, to be made taken up in a whitewashing where past foundations are erased and community building is obstructed. She is taken up by the genre as it is featured by revitalization as a literacy event and in this moment experiences “the solubility...of
the dominant” as partitions in race and class are accomplished through the park’s design (511). At the same time as these planes create limits on what is possible they produce an argument for their own inevitability. Pulling from Carolyne Miller, Dryer notes how genres frame “what they permit as that which is possible” (506). This can be seen in the way Chris grapples with the reconfigurations of downtown as an inevitability, their exclusions homeless and low-income populations as a necessary by-product of revitalizing a struggling area. Moving through creates an enjoinder to identify with the goals and aims of the changes in this case. At the same time, the very features of the park, textual conventions like its rest-foreclosing benches or extensive lighting which create a sense of openness, actually work as silent partners with police roundups and aid the process of identifying “illegitimate” bodies. The knowledge of this, the experience of it, throws Chris into a position of fundamental ambiguity as “the rhetorical construction of inevitability leaves those dissatisfied with its reasoning with no one place to locate their dissatisfaction” (Dryer 516). It is in this position of ambiguity that he moves from internalizing the logic of the park to questioning it. Both Rosemary and Chris find themselves positioned by the park in racialized or otherwise marginalized subject positions because of the features of its design and the rhetorical ecologies they graft onto it. In Rosemary’s case, she locates herself as a witness to a long process of “herding”, of race making and conflict over the meaning of the city, In Chris’s he finds himself marked by the struggles he endured, and experiences the park as locating him as an outsider, for him and those who undergo homelessness, the closer you are to the center, the more on the margin you really are.

When we look at the way San Jacinto Plaza via revitalization-as-an acting rhetoric has worked through my walking interviews with Chris and Rosemary, and through the texts of Sanders/Wingo and SWA, we can already see that is working along an axis of individualization.
The public subjectivities and norms of citizenship asked for in the new city, the city-to-be and the people-to-be that the assemblages of genres like the park and the literacy of revitalization are enjoining people to become are based around their capacity for self-enjoyment, you become more realized through buying power. Your primary characteristic is that buying power and then what skills or desirable traits you bring as an individual. You are a young professional, an artist, an innovator and a decision maker, you are an individual or group of individuals any other characteristics or group identification you have are irrelevant or outright obstructive. The public subjectivity this asks for is what I term a molecular public. People are not organized into a stable group identity, although the way they are individualized obviously carries all the weight and violence of race and class, they are organized into groups of individuals who share public space through private acts of consumption, tied together only by these acts. The production of these public subjectivities is accomplished by the ontological actions of gentrification on the level of desire, where the reconfigurations of space make that public seem inevitable, always destined, and the only route forward for all who live or will come to live in the city.

At the same time, readers and writers of the park like my participants and myself make what their own localizing moves of their own as they graft their own rhetorical ecologies onto the Plaza and its environs. It in these moves that alternate ways of imaging or opening possibilities for downtown space are produced. For Rosemary this comes in holding up a history of community as mutual recognition and aid and in the activist community’s striving for a city that answers the needs of its constituents. For Chris, this comes in the way he imagines the possibility of a city being improved without recourse to violence against dispossessed people. Ultimately, this process of counter-imaginings and counter-struggles is an opening up of new possibility, but it happens in an asymmetric relation with the forces of desire, capital, and state.
violence leveraged against it. While the counter-histories of resistance and the possibilities of future victories swirl around and reveal themselves, while they can never be fully foreclosed, they remain possibilities only against the prevailing force of revitalization.
CHAPTER 5: COLLAGE AND THE RHETORICAL ECOLOGY

In the previous chapter, revitalization and the Plaza as a genre were discussed with the aid of walking interviews, looked at through the content of my walks with Rosemary and Chris. While gestures were made toward their imaginings of the Plaza and of downtown space generally, revitalization was approached primarily on its own terms through their interviews. In this chapter, the aim is to approach downtown on the terms of participants as they approach it affectively, through their own aesthetic production. A/r/tography is at base a rhizomatic relational approach where we engage in an “interstitial relational space for creating, teaching, learning, and researching in a constant state of becoming” (Irwin et al., 71). In this interstitial relational space, research becomes a situation where “process is an act of invention...where concepts emerge from social engagements and encounters.” (72). This focus on relational process means that previous “concepts, objects and identities” are destabilized as new ways of seeing and relating emerge, marginalization is eroded “as the role of artist is shifted to become facilitator, mediator, and/or creative contributor within a community” (72). Collage in this sense is a means of breaking down the direct workings of revitalization on the production of subjectivities. As its configurations are destabilized and the point of production becomes the labor of art, new senses of relationality and therefore possibilities of public space are brought forward by each participant, even as it wages critique on those same spaces. Collage itself is a relational technique in the way it is generated through the joining of separate textual fragments into a coherent whole, it functions primarily through the use of “juxtaposition and difference”, and in that play of difference it creates ways of knowing (Butler-Kisber 268). As fragments of previous texts, be they advertisements, photographs, or pages of text, are arranged they are recontextualized and pulled into dialogue with one another. They are used to illicit ironies,
desirings, and arguments. They diagnose spaces through critical assessment and integrate personal modes of knowing and engagement with them, they show in a fuller sense the affective dimension of the rhetorical ecologies which each person brings to bear on their lived worlds.

Summary of Interviews and Collage Process

Before turning to the process of collage, a brief overview of the walking interviews for both participants would be helpful in understanding the final products. The two primary participants in the a/r/tography were Eric and myself. When we performed our walking interview, Eric chose to split his up into three parts, starting first at San Jacinto, driving out to the neighborhood he grew up in in the Lower Valley, and then back again at downtown in the streets surrounding his apartment. Eric chose San Jacinto to start with owing to its status as “the center of the city.” He felt it necessary to drive out to where he grew up to communicate that downtown was a place that had always been “distant...Downtown was not accessible to us at all. You needed a car.” For Eric, coming up in El Paso and growing closer to Downtown and the city center was a process facilitated by educational access, starting first at El Paso Community College’s Val Verde campus and then UTEP, and by artistic participation, particularly music and graffiti. Eric expressed the changes in downtown as an attempt at whitewashing noting the way in which the area is racialized: “They don’t want to make it seem like where Mexicans go and shop for Chinese goods.” Eric’s engagement with Downtown is marked by his life as a student, but to the greatest degree by his family ties and in particular his relationship with his young daughter.

My own walking interview started at Aztec Calendar park, the first point of departure I took from the city bus I took as I looked for the Metropolitan Community Church and an LGBT community center I had researched before moving into town but had already closed without my
realizing. I recounted my experiences across the bus lines, of moving to a city where I first felt like I could build a sense of my own self, of crashing across friends couches, watching life crawl by on every walk under the sun, and building an identity as I moved through work, school, and living conditions. It was living in this way and finding a worthwhile sense of “myself” that drew me into the city, to “be able to be in my own skin and have [a] community and kind of built it….in a sense that [I was] actively seeking and fostering relationships...That’s what kind of made me identify with El Paso more than I feel like a lot of military brats end up identifying with the places they move into.” My walking interview is an expression of my history and connections here, but what it also highlights when contrasted with the others is the differences in my placement. I share a concern over class with my participants, but I also do not experience racialization the same as a white man, when I invoke race I do so through an indirect knowledge of its working on people. I also notice police less directly.

With both of our interviews established as data points, the actual process of production can be drawn out before turning to the final products. We began the collaging process in the afternoon, on a table I had set with a shoebox full of free promotional materials like the Downtown magazine, various artscene publications, which I had collected piece by piece over the last few months, alongside a very scholarly cat (Figure 5.1). I had also previously asked Eric to curate a selection of his own photographs, both from his walking interview and his Instagram account, which communicated his personal life and values

Figure 5.1 Art materials and a scholarly cat
in El Paso. I took this selection and had it printed, and the envelope of photos were added to the stack of materials. In addition to this, paper cutting knives, scissors, and glue, we sat at the table and selected mounting boards from a selection of the finest artisanal cardboard boxes. As we sat, we talked about the choices we were making, the way we were placing images and their rationale, and suggested alternatives back and forth to each other. I asked my friend and roommate Rebecca to join me in making mine as Eric made his, because I felt I wanted an element of dialogue in the process.

**The Collages**

Eric’s collage (Figure 5.2) constructs a rhetorical ecology contingent to his life through its use of imagery that draws in and connects themes of family, enjoyment, art, and the buildings of downtown. In the center portion these elements are visible in his choice of subject matter. In the bottom center is the Franklin Canal, adjacent to the neighborhood he grew up in which he played alongside as a child. Mixed in with this are images of his daughter at play, his family, his apartment window, the Mills building and the Caples building, the Tap and its nachos and the Las Lunas Cafe, a major feature of Duranguito which now sits condemned. The view from his apartment window is cut out so that it looks out on the Mills building, newly refurbished and contrasting both with the Las Lunas
Cafe and the Caples Building, the latter of which sits above the wine glass. The Caples Building is significant to Eric because of its importance in the history of the Mexican Revolution, and the fact of its destitution when contrasted against the priority given to refurbishing the Mills building as a herald of El Paso’s past is significant. Interspersed among these are the images of flowers in bloom, an expression of life found in the city or near the border. Against the backdrop of advertising slogans, art proclaiming liberation, prose and poetic signals to materiality (top left), the affective ecology is constructed as an assemblage, where downtown as a space is constituted by the interconnections and cutting in of disparate places and encounters, people and activity.

All of this comes together, from the center piece to the way it is contextualized on the wings, into a collage which expresses a series of tensions through affect (Figure 5.3). The primary tension I will take up that is expressed in this collage configures downtown as a space caught between contested futures and modes of living. The collage calls attention to the materiality of revitalization, with its closed buildings and destitution set against a background of art and sales material, enjoinders to support local business set against the muralist with his spraycans and prose fiction, or menus against poetry. This materiality is signalled in the naming on the bottom center: **Figure 5.3 Eric’s collage detail**

Downtown: Dreams to Reality. The latter part of this naming
was taken from a photo of a newly constructed hotel, it is a realtor’s slogan advertising further
construction. Eric chose this because he felt it resonated with the focus of my study, the idea of
revitalization shaping space in terms of consumer enjoyment, but in his aesthetic production he
adds multiple layers to its meaning.

This multiplicity becomes apparent where the main tension over futurity opens most
heavily in the portions of the work which feature his daughter (Fig. 3.), whose image acts as an
organizing figure in the centerpiece of the collage, appearing first as a large element, reaching
out towards the center of the piece as if to take it all in. The second time she appears is at play, a
photo taken in San Jacinto but here re-contextualized - she plays alongside the canal Eric himself
grew up beside, and played along, his past is smoothed into her future, a narrative of succession
and forward movement is generated the third time she appears, walking along with her
grandparents. In this act of smoothing, in conjunction with the image of flowers in bloom, this
opens an affective sense of futurity. A sense of hope, nurture, and possibilities still to come. As
she plays next to the realtors slogan, the tension becomes activated: As past is smoothed into
present then into future, where his life has lead and what in turn her life will lead to, so “Dreams
to Reality” takes on a double meaning. Through this collage we see a sense of foreclosure, a
sense of danger to the future as capital bleeds in, at the same time a sense of possibility moves
against it. What downtown becomes in this affective ecology as it moves across enjoyment,
exclusion, and hope is a struggle of liberation against closure, art against commodity, forward
motion against arrest. While the inevitability of revitalization, the posture of its transcendent
future, is destabilized and rendered still present but ultimately contingent, the connotations of
growth and change feed into new emerging conditions. All of these possibilities are smoothed in
together, and the future is uncertain but the kernel of the good things that might emerge and the
life that awaits his daughter render downtown and El Paso by extension as a thing worth holding onto and striving for instead of a conclusion already arrived at.

While Eric was working on his map, I tried to make this map as a way of communicating my own experiences, and to do this I asked Rebecca to join in, both to give me advice or make contributions, but also because I felt I could not make it myself. My experiences and my thinking thus far had been built around relationality and dialogue, and the key themes in my walking interview were about how human and non-human others in my world made it possible to construct a sense of self, so I felt that had to be true also of constructing a map relating my affective experiences of downtown. The collage Rebecca and I produced acts as a kind of psychogeographic map, it shows a contingent rhetorical ecology based on my own walking interview and experiences while also attempting to cut themes across my data (Figure 5.4). On the base level the map is laid out using fragments of sheet music left over from my mother’s childhood piano lessons, alternating with notepad sheets I jacked from the hotel hosting my first conference. Together they supply small amounts of negative space. On top of this is a topographic map of the city I lived in when my family was stationed in Germany, blended into a map of downtown El Paso and a segment of Juarez taken from a promotional magazine, juxtaposed with a flyer advertising a cafe I frequent on Avenida Juarez. The collage is laid out on
a north-south axis moving from San Jacinto to Juarez, much like sequence of encounters described in the Interlude in Chapter 3—encounters I have frequently as I walk to buy cigarettes at Oxxo. The bottom left, “La Frontera,” is constructed from a picture that Eric took of the sunset over the border fence, an advertisement that features a model photographed between barriers overlaid with a rose seller who frequents a bar I go to often. The bottom right corner is a sheet from a research methods class I took detailing different priorities in varieties of research methodologies. Rebecca provided the cut out of Frida, from a mural composed by the artist Dead Punk, and overlaid the word “ESCUCHANDO” to make a comment on what she felt the place of listening to stories was in my project. To this I added a happy hour advertisement to communicate a sense of how space and art take place in conjunction with commodification, alongside a scrap from the El Paso Herald which reaches back to the historical legacy of revitalization. Rebecca also provided the cut out of dresses in a shop to signal the ways downtown has acted as a place to find affordable goods which is rapidly going more exclusive.

From San Jacinto we move to the Plaza, and the silhouettes of my friends playing pool at a bar, the microphone looming over them, not far from the Federal Court & Federal Building, in an effort to communicate how entertainment, spectacle, and governmentality mix together uneasily in this climate.

The affective rhetorical ecology constructed in this map points to my understanding of relationality as I constructed a sense of self, calls back to the history of the town, and the segmentary nature of the border. What was constructed through this map emerged through a dialogue over choices between Rebecca and myself. The dialogic construction and its elements points towards the experiences I named in downtown as a way in which I constructed myself through movement and cultivation of relationships with friends, a personal interface reinforced
in the image of friends silhouetted at the bar. Rebecca’s inclusion of Frida and the process of
listening signals the presence of multiple voices, and the dynamics of conversation
contextualized by the research methods scrap as taking place in the context of the study, but also
by the contribution of Eric’s photos and the image of friends as part of what constitutes life in
this space. As the maps blend the River Main into the Rio Grande and the Autobahn into I-10,
downtown as a space is stitched together with other places in an act of folding, my engagement
with this ecology is informed by my experiences elsewhere. At the same time, the advertisement
for Happy Hour Specials over Frida, the juxtaposition of the bar to the Plaza, and Rebecca’s
juxtaposition of the border obstructing the rose seller signal forms of commodification and
segmentarity. Where some can participate in the pleasures of the city or have their voices
amplified by it, others are excluded by arbitrary standards of race and citizenship, or have to find
their survival on its periphery. The temporality exhibited here comes from the El Paso Herald
clipping, an early act of revitalization in the city’s industrial era. This reaches back to the past to
argue that what we encounter in the present is the continuation of an old process, the constant
cycle of revitalization which at each turn acts to renew and reinvigorate colonial and capitalist
relations in the living city. This is a relational mapping where community, commodity, and
global space sit in an uneasy truce where inclusion and exclusion play out simultaneously.

Comparing this map with Eric’s, also highlights the limits of my perspective,
positionality, and engagement. I have only lived here eight years at this point, and while they
were intense and formative my engagements are not shaped by long family roots in El Paso. The
history told in this map is one sided, focusing on revitalization as a consistent practice. There is a
distinct temporality at play, so much as an affective mapping of the space now as I inserted into
it, reaching back to pull in a colonial history. Where Eric constructs an affective ecology through
the presence of family mingled in with sites of contest in the city and the people who move from it, I construct a space of community where there is possibility of becoming, but where that community is always already ensnared in the things which undermine it. The construction of futurity in my map is somewhat more ambiguous. I cannot point back or forward to family here as a part of how my ecology informs my understanding of this place and its possibilities. I am caught up with the possibilities of community, of escaping what has made me feel cut off and individualized, but at the same time my hopes for mobility are caught up in what the research scrap signals: My degree, this thesis. This is an opening to an uncertain future, and these are real possibilities but it is also an expression of individuation as my possibilities are based on my certification, and carry me forward here or elsewhere into new places where I am once again a stranger. What I struggle with here is those possibilities of a community based in mutual recognition and care, the same thing which has sustained me as I have gone through this process and wandered streets, as I was comforted through breakdowns or showed up at someone’s apartment to talk them through difficulties. It was seeing others and myself struggle with mental illness and substance abuse with only each other to lean on, people catching charges, giving the bed to a friend because they couldn’t go back home and taking the couch, hearing stories about this and that deprivation and the efforts to carry on making ends. The stake that brought me to this work was what the possibilities of collectivities and public subjectivities would be without these machines of violence, desire, and money” which set us apart and against one another, undercut our efforts and set few over many (Saldanha 45). That’s more than any one text can do but the condition is what I reach toward here while struggling for a language that articulates what things “hold [us] in place” and how (Brandt & Clinton 345).
Conclusion

Between all of these points, my uncertainty, Eric’s hope, Rosemary and Chris’s desire for a city which meets the needs of its peoples on bases other than class and race, lie the capitalist and colonial logics expressed through revitalization. As we move through its spatial genres it positions each person differently in acts of desiring-production fraught with violent and individuating logic, producing molecular public of people isolated one to another except in shared acts of consumption. For people who fall outside the reaches of its desire, this means being swept aside by force and compulsion and having their name written out of place and history by things as simple as a bus map, as explicit as an eviction notice, or as overt as a cop’s nightstick. For those of us that can locate ourselves in this scheme (and as shit as the money I make might be, as a respectable “young professional” I certainly fit the bill) we walk in a space that presents itself as an extension of the inevitable march of progress and the market, we tread often without knowing or caring to know, and make ourselves complicit in the sweeping aside of others if we take the spatial text as gospel. The aim of this chapter has been to demonstrate through a small sample how this technique might show the ways that people and the rhetorical ecologies, composed as they are of human and non-human materialities, act to destabilize that social gospel. These maps signal the multiplication of possibilities, collectivities that can come forward, the violence that abides in space but also what new relationalities might come. The important thing here is that what is inevitable is shown to be contingent, its universalities are only partial, its word is not final. Gentrification continues full swing and sells itself as a future with no alternative while it continues the legacy of displacement and exploitation, but it can only do so partially, and it carries the seed of its own unwriting.
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CURRICULUM VITA

Larry Morgan was born in 1991 in Memphis, Tennessee. He graduated from called Faith Covenant Academy in 2008. In 2010 he began his undergraduate studies at the University of Texat at El Paso. From 2013 until the end of his undergraduate program he worked as a tutor in the University Writing Center. There, he took an interest in rhetorical scholarship which lead him to attend and present at the International Writing Center Association’s annual conference in October of 2016 in Denver, Colorado. He earned his bachelor’s degree in History with a minor in Anthropology, Cum Laude, in Spring 2016.

In the Fall of 2016, he entered the Graduate School of the University of Texas at El Paso in pursuit of a Master’s in Rhetoric and Writing Studies. As a Teaching Assistant, he started first with a year of training at the University Writing Center and then began to instruct introductory 1301 and 1302 writing classes for new undergraduates. He took classes in Postmodern Theory, Research Methodology, and Composition Pedagogy which introduced him to the full scope and depth of the field of RWS.

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