



The Architecture of Ethnicity in Chicano Literature

Monika Kaup

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For cultural geographers and architectural theorists, house forms, the structures of buildings, settlement patterns, and city plans are manifestations of cultural, social, and national character. To the observer in the street, house facades, like human faces, reveal (and conceal) essential features of their interior lives. Architecture is a master code for the construction of identity. Buildings and cities express social aspirations and values; they function as barometers of social permanence and change. By reading the built environment, we can decipher attitudes toward history. Both nostalgia and amnesia, the sense of the past and the dream of modernity, are expressed in architectural structures. In a classic study of the emergence of a vernacular American aesthetic in diverse arts, John Kouwenhoven writes, "Architecture is the most public and tangible expression of a civilization."¹

In the United States in particular, the home is more than just a shelter; it is a national institution almost as sacred as the American flag. In home ownership, the American Dream and the American Way are manifest: the civic values of individualism, economic success, and self-sufficiency are asserted, according to Gwendolyn Wright, in "the single-family detached house in the suburbs."² Wright's examination of this familiar claim offers a wide-ranging analysis of its inherent problems.³ Her well-documented study of fourteen types of settlements in American history places suburbia and middle-class domesticity next to such different forms of housing as the southern plantation, row houses in the commercial city, urban tenements, company towns, and modern public housing, revealing structures of

social inequality in the built environment that belie the ideology of the American home and its promise of equality. Her introductory comments are worth quoting at length:

. . . the process of giving meaning to the home has not always been salutary. Slavery and racism, industrial exploitation, the segregation of classes, and a limited role for women have found expression in American patterns of residential architecture. The longstanding national tendency to view the home as the expression of the self has encouraged a staunch defense of social homogeneity on the one hand, and a cult of personalized decoration on the other. Yet, there is no necessary correlation between personalized architecture and a great range of character distinctions. In many cases, consumerism became institutionalized in home decoration as advertising promised new ways to promote family togetherness, social prestige, and self-expression. A preoccupation with the private dwelling has also encouraged a false sense of the family's self-sufficiency and a fear of others intruding. All too often, in suburbs and in cooperative apartments, community has meant the exclusion of those who are not like ourselves. . . . Americans' passion for the home gives the history of housing a significance that goes beyond antiquarianism. Each debate about housing needs extended across class lines. (xvii-xviii)

The uniform ideology of the white middle-class American home is a smokescreen that obstructs the recognition of other house forms in the United States. I want here to focus on Mexican houses and the Mexican vernacular architecture found everywhere in the Southwest. Missions, the working-class *jacal*, the *hacienda*, and adobe buildings all constitute an organic Mexican built environment differing from American architectural patterns. While a separate Mexican vernacular tradition exists in the landscape, it would be a mistake to assume a radical separation. It is common knowledge that from the very beginning of the United States' conquest of the borderlands Anglo-Americans first lived in Mexican houses. Later, Anglo architects borrowed Mexican stylistic features, such as the California mission-style walls, roofing, and arcades, and incorporated them into modern constructions in the region. Because of massive American borrowing from the vernacular Mexican mission design, mission architecture is a major component of U.S. conceptions of "Mexicanness."⁴

The often overlooked point of the present discussion, however, is that Mexican American cultural discourse—in particular, Chicano literature—has used architectural forms to express a Mexican American subjectivity as it was constituted in the cultural border zone between Mexican, indigenous, and American influences. For Chicano writers, as for American writers generally—and for writers anywhere, according to Bachelard and Heidegger—the architectural metaphor is a key figure of identity; the dwelling is the house of being.⁵

In Chicano literature, houses attained unprecedented prominence in the decade of the 1980s, in what is known as the period of postnationalism. Richard Rodriguez's *Days of Obligation* (1992)⁶ and Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* (1984)⁷ both employ the house as the master metaphor for the construction of identity. With the transition from the heroic mode of Chicano nationalism of the early seventies to the more ironic and contingent mode of the present, a shift in symbols has occurred in which we find that the focus has passed from land, a central symbol of Chicano nationalism indebted to the notions of *tierra* and Aztlán (the Chicano homeland), to houses.⁸ Whereas earlier the natural environment provided inspiration for the symbolic expression of collective identity, now the built environment has assumed that role.

This is no accident. Houses differ significantly from the natural environment often identified with old Mexican vernacular landscapes in what is now the U.S.—for example, the Hispano homeland of New Mexico or the *corrido* world of the Lower Border in South Texas⁹—in that they shed light on man-made aspects of culture, on fabrication, artifice, design, and construction. Unlike the natural environment, houses can be torn down, modified, remodeled, and replaced. Houses tend to remind us that landscapes, like the buildings implanted on them, are actually, as J. B. Jackson points out, crafted and synthetic, “a composition of man-made or man-modified spaces to serve as infrastructure or background for our collective existence.”¹⁰ The distinction between the natural and the built environment refers to key oppositions related to the issue of human changes in the land—the conflict between permanence and change, landscape stability and development, the natural and organic as opposed to the manufactured and mechanical.

The legitimacy of the new Chicano politics of minority nationalism of the late sixties and early seventies, which challenged the authority

of “Americanness” as a framework for Americans of Mexican descent, was built on the premise of the Chicano “homeland,” that is, on the permanence and stability of Mexican vernacular landscapes in the U.S. I use the term *building* deliberately here to suggest that the image of the traditional *mexicano* homeland is actually a construction, a house for Chicano identity built on a site that had already been transformed into the contemporary American urbanized and technological landscape. The house of Aztlán conceals its modern design, gesturing instead toward the permanence of the land upon which it is implanted and toward past-oriented notions of territorial rootedness. Consider, for instance, Américo Paredes’s influential description of the Texas-Mexican homeland in South Texas, on the Lower Rio Grande border.¹¹ Paredes became one of the foremost architects of a resistant, nation-based Chicano identity with the publication of his scholarly study of the *corrido*, a Mexican American folk ballad highly socially symbolic in its expression of *mexicano* resistance against Anglo violence and domination in what was Mexican territory before its incorporation into the U.S. in 1848. Paredes’s “*With His Pistol in His Hand*”: *A Border Ballad and Its Hero*, begins with an introductory chapter significantly entitled “The Country”:

The Lower Rio Grande Border is the area lying along the river, from its mouth to the two Laredos. A map, especially one made some thirty or forty years ago, would show a clustering of towns and villages along both river banks, with lonely gaps to the north and to the south. . . .

The simple pastoral life led by most Border people fostered a natural equality among men. . . . More important was the fact that on the Border the landowner lived and worked upon his land. There was almost no gap between the owner and his cowhand, who often was related to him anyway. . . .

Thus the Rio Grande people lived in tight little groups—usually straddling the river—surrounded by an alien world. From the north came the *gringo*, which term meant “foreigner.” From the south came the *fuereño*, or outsider, as the Mexican of the interior was called. . . . Even in the larger towns the inhabitants ignored strangers for the most part, while the people of the remoter communities were oblivious of them altogether.¹²

Ancestral land, a rural landscape to which the *mexicano* settlers feel strong organic ties, gives them a collective identity. Boundaries

isolating the settlements from the outside world are emphasized because they maintain stability. The occupants form a kind of super-family whose domestic hierarchies are accepted as a given. The *patrónes* (fathers), all the way back to the founding father Escandón, watch benevolently over their children and *peones* (laborers), while the latter respond with obedience and loyalty. Accordingly, Chicano critics and anthropologists Renato Rosaldo and José Limón have identified, in Rosaldo's terms, a nostalgic poetics of "pastoral patriarchy" in Paredes's work.¹³ Gregorio Cortez, the representative legendary hero of the *corrido* folk ballad on whom Paredes's study focuses, is a common man who steps forward from this idealized community to defend "with his pistol in his hand" (the *corrido*'s refrain) his rights—and by extension, the rights and values of his close-knit and independent-minded community—against injustices and dispossession at the hands of Anglo authorities. His heroic action is authorized by, and defends, the organic relationship of *mexicano* settlers to their homeland. Thus the *corrido* responds to and protests the progressive dissolution of a self-contained *mexicano* cultural landscape and the opening of these border settlements to external forces—Anglo settlers, Anglo society, and Anglo markets. The *corrido* universe is an inward-looking rural world, with the houses turning their backs on change from the outside. Nonetheless, Texas-Mexican settlements are distinct from the land that they claim as theirs, even though this territory, the homeland, is offered as the spatial symbol of a natural society rooted in its environment. The continuity of local Mexican residence claimed by Chicano nationalism derives from ancestral and vernacular Mexican houses in the borderlands, in Richard Rodriguez's phrase, "house[s] of memory" (*DoO*, 52).

In the subtle descriptions of vernacular landscapes that inform his arguments, J. B. Jackson offers a complex vocabulary of analysis for envisioning the natural and the built environment.¹⁴ His distinction between two types of houses expresses two central points of conflict: between permanence and change, and between the collective and the individual. The first type is the traditional ancestral house, identified with long occupancy by the same family over generations (like the Mexican *jacal* or the *hacienda* settlement); the second is the new, temporary, and/or movable dwelling, a structure that is flexible and can be altered.¹⁵

My object here is to examine a range of architectural images in Chicano literature as keys to identity. My material consists of four

texts, two of which work primarily with the symbol of the Chicano homeland, Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987)¹⁶ and Américo Paredes's novel *George Washington Gómez* (1990).¹⁷ My task is to identify previously unnoticed features of building and design within the natural codes of the homeland and to redescribe it as a "built environment." I examine next two narratives that represent the shift from land to architectural symbolism, Richard Rodriguez's *Days of Obligation: An Argument with My Mexican Father* (1992), and Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* (1984); my goal in this section is to relate this shift to the transition from national to postnational, post-*movimiento* concerns with internal heterogeneity—differences of gender and sexuality. I argue that both Cisneros and Rodriguez employ the architectural metaphor of the new and temporary dwelling to question the organic view of Chicano culture embodied in old houses and ancient landscapes. Countering the view that Chicano ethnicity is an organic process unfolding in one single place, the place of one's birth, the homeland and the ancestral house, Cisneros and Rodriguez suggest that moves from original to new homes are essential for the formation of Chicana feminist and Chicano gay identities. They no longer see themselves as children of natural families striving to fulfill filial obligations in ancestral houses but as artificers of identity in their own right. Feminism has given Cisneros, as homosexuality has given Rodriguez, an enhanced sense of the architecture of ethnicity, its artifice. Architects by temperament, they encode the crisis of the order of Mexican genealogy in the metaphor of migration and the move from family homes to houses of their own construction.



I begin with two passages from Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987). Even though Anzaldúa's influential manifesto of Chicana feminist-lesbian identity derives its terms from a critical revision of the discourse of the Chicano homeland—Aztlán—she makes telling references to architecture:

Tierra natal. This is home, the small towns in the Valley, *los pueblitos* with chicken pens and goats picketed to mesquite shrubs. *En las colonias* on the other side of the tracks, junk cars line the front yards of hot pink and lavender-trimmed houses—Chicano architecture we call it, self-consciously. (*B*, 89)

And if going home is denied me then I will have to stand and claim my space, making a new culture—*una cultura mestiza*—with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar and my own feminist architecture. (B, 22)

The two kinds of architecture Anzaldúa outlines here correspond to the two house types identified by Jackson, old and new, ancestral and modern, unchanging vernacular dwellings and their contemporary substitutes. The latter are designed by rebel children whose flight from the native village represents a flight from the domestic order maintained by the structures of the built environment. Throughout *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa attempts to balance her feminist-lesbian critique of the old order of Chicano filiation with a concern for maintaining its adaptable components. Her project is, to use her architectural metaphor, both to design the housing of new individual identities and to preserve the structures of community and collective unity. What has rarely been noted is that the spatial models of Anzaldúa's border landscapes are produced as much by architectural thinking as by critical geography, what has become known through the work of Edward Soja, David Harvey, and others as the geopolitics of difference.¹⁸ As Anzaldúa's brief reference to the architectural tools of her feminist activism informs us, she is as conscious of vertical buildings as of horizontal homescapes.

Because of her interest in negotiating conflicting social impulses, Anzaldúa focuses on installations in the built environment other than houses that are equally essential to her reconfiguration of the territory of Chicano culture: passageways that enable mobility and facilitate new meeting places for people—roads, paths, bridges, and crossings. Here Jackson is helpful for understanding Anzaldúa's role as a community architect, which is, I suggest, that of the planner of an entirely new infrastructure of the political landscape. In "A Pair of Ideal Landscapes," Jackson proposes that the history of landscapes reveals a struggle between two opposed relationships to the environment: "man, the political animal, thinks of the landscape as his own creation, as belonging to him; . . . whereas man the inhabitant sees the landscape as a habitat which was there long before he appeared. He sees himself as belonging to the landscape in the sense that he is its product."¹⁹ *Borderlands* has a distinctly utopian cast, most manifest in the final and visionary essay-chapter, "*La conciencia de la mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness.*" In this chapter Anzaldúa moves be-

yond the construction of single objects, such as a house of her own distant from her birthplace. Here, her aspirations correspond to those Rodriguez describes as his childhood dream: "I was going to be an architect and have a hand in building the city" (*DoO*, 219).

Thus, alternating between a sense of organic belonging to the land and a desire for a restructuring of the land to implement a social ideal, between the role of child of the land and that of its master-developer, Anzaldúa both celebrates the survival of traditional *mexicano* vernacular landscape in the borderlands and offers her designs for their postnationalist, feminist-lesbian restructuring. Her call to Chicanas to "[d]econstruct, construct" the worlds they inhabit relies most crucially on the building of routes of communication across existing boundaries (*B*, 82). Her concern with redesigning the political infrastructure of Aztlán alerts us to the fact that in Chicano cultural discourse architecture is a tool in the political process of community building.

A glance at contemporary American urban architecture, however, seems to deny any communal concern. The creation of an ideal social order has not been a priority in contemporary architecture dominated by famous architects and their high-prestige designs. In his introduction to the collection *Variations on a Theme Park*, ominously subtitled *The New American City and the End of Public Space*, Michael Sorkin writes that the "impulse to a new urban segregation seems ubiquitous: throughout America, city planning has largely ceased its historic role as the integrator of communities in favor of managing selective development and enforcing distinction."²⁰ Private, separated (and separating) spaces like theme parks, underground and overhead walkways, and shopping malls have taken the place of communal spaces like city parks, public squares, and the street. The authors of the essays in the collection suggest that contemporary analogues of the street do away with the messiness and the unpredictability of street life. Demonstrations are hard to imagine in shopping malls, where security guards screen out undesirable persons. In his book about the urban architecture of Los Angeles, Mike Davis suggests that "[t]he contemporary opprobrium attached to the term 'street person' is in itself a harrowing index of the devaluation of public spaces. . . . The decline of urban liberalism has been accompanied by the death of what might be called the 'Olmstedian vision' of public space. Frederick Law Olmsted, it will be recalled, was North America's Haussmann, as

well as the Father of Central Park, . . . [a man who] conceived public landscapes and parks as social safety-valves, *mixing* classes and ethnicities in common (bourgeois) recreations and enjoyments."²¹

I would like to suggest that Anzaldúa's redesign of the landscape of the borderlands, when set beside these analyses of contemporary urban architecture as a system of spatial segregation, seems anachronistic, related more to old-fashioned Enlightenment beliefs in the good of building for a dream of democracy than to contemporary (postmodern) cynicism about the need for defensible spaces and crowd control. Indeed, it seems closer to the Olmstedian vision than to current conceptions of urban planning. The distinct sense of place evoked by Anzaldúa testifies to the persistence in vernacular American landscapes of notions of community out of fashion in elite architecture. Vital structures of community and impulses toward its regeneration, though often nostalgically praised in U.S. debates, are today more likely to be found in such landscapes than in suburban housing projects. According to Gwendolyn Wright, American prejudices against communal housing as socialistic and communistic have encouraged the projection of the American Dream, in the twentieth century, onto the model of the single-family detached home in the suburbs.²² This contrast between architectural forms confirms the need to study ordinary dwellings and vernacular architecture, in cross-cultural comparisons, apart from the tradition of grand architectural design. Amos Rapoport points out that architectural critics' single-minded focus on monuments and "important" buildings has resulted in the neglect of the bulk of the built environment.²³ The vernacular dwelling, according to Jackson, "is designed by a craftsman, not an architect, . . . is built with local techniques, local materials, and with the local environment in mind: its climate, its traditions, its economy—predominantly agricultural. Such a dwelling does not pretend to stylistic sophistication. It is loyal to local forms and rarely accepts innovations from outside the region. It is not subject to fashion and is little influenced by history in its wider sense."²⁴

Let us now take a closer look at the vernacular in *Borderlands*, whose structure Anzaldúa proposes to reshape. Her description of the Chicano homeland features essential elements of the political landscape enumerated by Jackson: boundaries, roads, public meeting places. Anzaldúa's goal is to transform, not just celebrate, the infrastructure of the cultural landscape she inhabits. She achieves this

by developing, so to speak, the local road system. Her objective is the creation of new meeting places, new public 'forums where presently segregated classes, races, and sexual orientations "can come together" and "have unity" after learning about each others' histories and identities (B, 86). Anzaldúa sees architecture as an important didactic tool for the building of community: "our psyches resemble the bordertowns and are populated by the same people" (B, 87). It is through reading the visible features of the vernacular landscape and the built environment—such as the border between the United States and Mexico that divides the first and third worlds (B, 3) and similar borders within towns that divide classes—that Anzaldúa diagnoses the state of her native community. She insists that the proposed social changes are to be made substantial and manifest in the built environment: by building new paths across these barriers a mixed and inclusive community in the borderlands will become a reality.

She thus shares Jackson's belief, stated most strongly in *A Sense of Place, A Sense of Time*, that roads and paths have been unduly neglected by landscape historians. Agents of change and mobility, roads, according to Jackson, are disturbers of the peace, of the status quo. Whereas houses and boundaries offer shelter and protection against intruders, roads serve opposed needs—for freedom, an encounter with the unknown, and new relationships.²⁵ In the renovation of the vernacular Chicano landscape, the negotiation of this opposition is Anzaldúa's objective:

Because I, a *mestiza*,
continually walk out of one culture
and into another,
because I am in all cultures at the same time. . . . (B, 77)

She has discovered that she can't hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries. The borders and walls that are supposed to keep the undesirable ideas out are entrenched habits and patterns of behavior; these habits and patterns are the enemy within. Rigidity means death. (B, 79)

As a *mestiza* I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman's sister or potential lover. (As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races.) I am

cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos; yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture. . . . (B, 80–81)

In the new *mestiza*, Anzaldúa projects an ideal borderlands citizen who is a street person and a nomad rather than an occupant of a house and an owner of the land. It does not follow, however, that her cultural heritage is lost, as these passages demonstrate. They are, in another formulation, the “weight on her back” (B, 82), the possessions that the migrant carries on her person. By taking to the road Anzaldúa’s new *mestiza* has not discarded her genealogical inheritance; but rather than merely reproducing what has been passed on to her, she questions it: “which is the baggage from the Indian mother, which the baggage from the Spanish father, which the baggage from the Anglo?” (B, 82). Anzaldúa, like Cisneros and Rodriguez, does not live in the old houses of their Mexican ancestry. Old buildings, as Hawthorne shows in *The House of the Seven Gables*, are architectural metaphors for the inflexibility of an inherited social order. To live in them is to fulfill the designs of the dead, to be immobilized by the weight of a past whose authority is materialized and perpetuated in their very structure. Yet Anzaldúa, unlike Hawthorne’s daguerrotypist, does not want to incinerate the houses of the dead to make room for new buildings constructed by the living. For her, flexibility in the domestic order is to be achieved by shrinking the heritage of ancestral houses, monumentally displayed in brick and stone, to a size fit for a migrant’s backpack. In this way the structures of traditions survive to the extent that they shed the dynamics of oppression. Their inheritors replace rigidity with flow and change by dragging the old interiors into the street and turning them into the raw material for the new landscape.

In *Borderlands*, permanence and change, inhabiting and engineering, rigidity and alterability—the Chicano architecture of Anzaldúa’s past and her new feminist architecture—have struck a provisional balance. More than Cisneros and Rodriguez, Anzaldúa preserves the architectural vehicles of Mexican-Indian genealogy and the territorial metaphor of Chicano nationalism, Aztlán, within her model of the political infrastructure intended to take their place. The scope of her design is large; it is a model environment rather than a model

house. Despite being filtered through the individualized figure of a projected “new mestiza,” its accent is on community planning rather than individualized dwellings.



In preparation for my discussion of Cisneros's and Rodriguez's use of the architectural code, I wish now to focus on Américo Paredes's novel *George Washington Gómez* (1990), a text that features a Mexican vernacular house, the South Texas *jacal*. Among remnants of Spanish and Mexican architecture in the borderlands, the Spanish missions, especially in California, and the adobe structures of New Mexico and California (few of which are to be found in South Texas) have received much attention.²⁶ Rarely do we find discussions of Mexican folk housing or Mexican vernacular architecture in South Texas—the third significant region in the borderlands—outside of examinations by architectural, anthropological, or historical specialists in the area. Yet these resources exist.²⁷ However, this material has not, until now, been integrated by cultural and literary critics into their discussions of the formation of Mexican American identity in South Texas. Yet there, as in Rodriguez's California, the metaphor of the house expresses the conflict between Mexican and American influences on the shaping of a collective *tejano* identity.

George Washington Gómez is a case in point. Unlike Anzaldúa's *Borderlands*, whose projected design of a new Chicano political landscape expands beyond the author's birthplace to include the entire Southwest, Paredes's novel is a narrowly placed regional text. The narrative is set against the historical background of Anglo-Mexican conflict in South Texas. Specifically, it begins at a climactic moment in the decline of the Mexican social order in South Texas, the 1915–1916 seditionist uprising and its defeat by the U.S. Army. As historians David Montejano and James Sandos have shown, the *sedicioso* uprising was a result of the destruction of traditional Mexican ranch culture by modern Anglo farm developments.²⁸ In what became known as the Plan de San Diego, the rebels, natives of the South Texas border, proclaimed an independent state for Mexicans, blacks, and Indians in the borderlands. Significantly, the main targets of their raids were railroads, irrigation pumps, automobiles—the elements in the built environment introduced by American modernization.²⁹ The suppression of the insurrection, which was accompanied by massacres of innocent

American citizens of Mexican descent by Texas Rangers, signified the end of the heroic period of Mexican resistance against the American conquest. Mexican collective memory of this history of race conflict was preserved in the *corridos*, Mexican folk ballads whose political significance Paredes discusses in "*With His Pistol in His Hand*." This period marks the final consolidation of American political domination in the borderlands.

Written in the 1930s, before Paredes began his academic career as a scholar of border folklore, and left unpublished for fifty years,³⁰ *George Washington Gómez* examines the decline of the *corrido* world. While the novel's composition precedes Paredes's folkloric study of the *corrido*, the period it examines actually follows the flowering of the *corrido*. Together the books compose a two-volume history of South Texas organized around a crucial political change. As José Limón has argued, the emplotment of Texas-Mexican history in the mixed genres and independent volumes of Paredes's work follows a coherent narrative model of heroic flowering and tragic defeat.³¹ The historical process is narrated as the tragic fall of a vibrant native *mexicano* border culture. This means that latecomer-sons, born into the modern era, are quasi-programmed to betray the values of their precursor-fathers because the world that sustained the dominance of traditional Mexican culture has disappeared. The novel's eponymous hero is born in 1915 in rural South Texas during the height of the armed conflict, shortly before his father, Gumersindo, a civilian, is murdered by Texas Rangers. George Washington Gómez is then raised by his uncle Feliciano, who heeds Gumersindo's dying request that his son remain unaware of the circumstances of his father's death so he will not grow up with hate. Feliciano, a rancher, becomes one of the men fighting on the rebel side, but he conceals this from his family. Retiring from fighting after the end of the troubles, and deprived of his rural livelihood by the consolidated Anglo farm order, the *corrido* warrior veteran migrates with his widowed sister and her children to Jonesville-on-the-Grande (Brownsville), where he starts a new life. While the hero of the seditionist prologue to the novel is Feliciano, the courageous defender of the old order, the novel proper is a bildungsroman. The focus of the main plot is on the next generation, and its subject is the formation of a new—dual and conflicted, Mexican and American—identity.

Criticism of the novel has focused on the issue of identity, examin-

ing the protagonist's ominous naming as a foreshadowing of his eventual betrayal of his Mexican descent.³² In naming his son for a famous gringo, Gumersindo and his wife Maria intend to prepare him for life in a new era of coexistence among Mexicans and Anglos in a South Texas sliding irrevocably into U.S. control. The boy's Anglo given name and Mexican surname, along with his nickname Guálinto—a corrupted form of “George Washington” given to him by his Spanish-speaking grandmother and labeled by his uncle an “Indian” name—identify the opposition between Guálinto's Mexican and American selves. Born to Mexican parents on the rural border but raised in the city and educated in American schools and an American university, Guálinto develops a “divided personality” (*GWG*, 147): “Consciously he considered himself a Mexican. He was ashamed of the name his dead father had given him, George Washington Gómez. . . . But there was also George Washington Gómez, the American. He was secretly proud of the name his more conscious twin, Guálinto, was ashamed to avow publicly. George Washington Gómez secretly desired to be a full-fledged, complete American without the shameful encumbrance of his Mexican race” (*GWG*, 147–48). As he develops, this balance is reversed and tilted in favor of the American self. At the end of the novel, Guálinto's ancestral Mexican identity has descended to the subconscious regions of his mind, as though into the basement of a house, where it dominates his dreams. His American self has come to define his consciousness and determine his waking decisions.

This Bachelardian analogy between the house and the imaginative life of the psyche, with its attendant comparison between lower and upper levels of buildings and consciousness,³³ is suggested by architectural cues in the novel. Though criticism has identified the formation of George Washington Gómez's dualistic identity as the central issue in the narrative, what has passed unnoticed is that Paredes's novel, like *The House of the Seven Gables*, links the development of Guálinto's double identity to the influence of the built environment. His name is the “housing” of his dual identity: “In the schoolroom he was an American; at home and on the playground he was a Mexican. Throughout his early childhood these two selves grew within him without much conflict” (*GWG*, 147). Here we are introduced to the principal conflict in the novel, the conflict between traditional Mexican and modern American cultures on the border as localized worlds that are materialized in and assert their authority through buildings.

Further, it is suggested that Guálinto's two selves are "housed" in those buildings before they are—and to a greater extent than they are—rooted in and integrated with his personality. Guálinto cannot mobilize those identities, take them along and implant their seeds elsewhere, so to speak. To the contrary, by entering these structures, he assimilates their character and metamorphoses into them, becoming a representative of their identity. At school, for instance, at the celebration of Armistice Day, Guálinto is selected to recite a poem about George Washington. But the personal motive for his exceptional performance in memorizing the poem—the fact that he is named for Washington—is not known to the teachers until after the celebration. In his performance before the school audience, and even during practice runs in the classroom, he cannot infuse George Washington, the public American symbol, with his private Mexican meaning—give his name a Mexican accent, as it were. The public American culture suppresses any meddling with its institutions by its Mexican users. That cross-fertilization of cultures, with which Guálinto's optimistic father experiments at his son's baptism, fails to spread to the American side. That is because the public buildings America erects on the border—on former Mexican territory—are turned away from the streets, refusing to face the Mexican houses on the other side. Facing inward instead, cultivating segregation instead of contact and creating an alternative, enclosed space rather than fusing with existing Mexican public spaces, the new American constructions in Brownsville refuse to keep alive what Jane Jacobs names the "sidewalk ballet" on a vibrant city street: the dance of circulation of all the different strangers who share the same public urban space.³⁴

In the American school Guálinto attends every day, he is "gently prodded toward complete Americanization" (*GWG*, 148). The school functions as a microcosm of America where educators seek to make Americans out of a new generation of border Mexicans. Their task is to turn the students into dwellers of American houses, to permanently estrange them from their original Mexican homes. This process is scheduled to be completed by graduation, when the children are formally and permanently released back into the street. Guálinto thus grows up under the influence of the two opposed environments he inhabits but cannot remodel to fit the integrated identity his father had dreamed for him. His duality is formed by migrating back and forth between two segregated environments, the lifeworld of the *barrio* and

public American buildings. His physical mobility represents no real freedom, for he fails to modify the buildings—as he might have had he become an architect in his own right—that have imposed their identity on him. The tenant-rebuilder who takes control of the house s/he moves into is precisely the role Rodriguez and Cisneros envision. Guálinto, however, remains a mere receptacle for the identities conferred by the houses, homes, and institutions he temporarily inhabits, as the end of the novel makes clear. After his university education in Austin and his residence with his Anglo wife in Washington, D.C., he returns to the Valley during World War II radically transformed into an American military counterintelligence officer willing to use his Mexican background to inform against his former neighbors, friends, and schoolmates. Yet Mexican loyalties still haunt his dreams, as in the telling daydream that transports him to the Texas Independence War of 1836 and revises the course of history; he imagines himself as a war hero instrumental in defeating the U.S. army. But by now his “Mexicanness” and the heroic role his parents conceived for him as a “great man who will help his people” (*GWG*, 16) have receded far into his subconscious. Guálinto’s psychological distance from his “Mexican beginnings” corresponds to the length of time that has passed since he lived in a Mexican home in Brownsville; it is as great as the distance he has traveled in his journey through American institutions.

Let me return now to the description of the *jacal* in the first part of the novel. The time is 1915, and though the seditionist uprising and Texas Ranger reprisals have made isolated life in the countryside dangerous for *mexicanos*, Guálinto’s family still inhabits the dwelling:

There was frost in the Golden Delta, that heavy killing frost Mexicans call *hielo prieto*. . . . The wind . . . made sudden fitful rushes at the ungainly little shack, causing it to shake and clatter, seeking to pry its way through the cracks stopped up with rags and newspapers, through the paneless window frame into which an old pillow had been stuffed. Under the burlap covering the doorway it forced an occasional chilly breath into the shack’s only room, even though the door faced south and the burlap was held down with heavy concrete blocks.

Though it was not yet twilight, the family was preparing for bed. On the side of the room farthest from the window and the door was a rusty iron bed raised from the dirt floor on wooden blocks, the

bed where Gumersindo, his wife, and the new baby slept. A screen made of burlap bags stretched on poles separated it from a bigger wooden bed which belonged to the grandmother and the two little girls. Feliciano, who slept in the open when the weather was good, had laid his canvas folding cot at the drafty end of the room. He had pushed the table against the wall and put the cot close to the wood stove that sizzled away pleasantly, still warm and greasy from the supper cooked an hour before. In the middle of the room was a battered washtub half-filled with earth and ashes, and on this was a charcoal fire, around which the adults were sitting. (GWG, 14)

In this description of the Gómez's *jacal*, we are presented with an image of rootedness, of native belonging to this specific place. But it is only in light of subsequent developments and the family's enforced dislocation and homelessness that the house's full symbolic meaning unfolds. Genealogical continuity is visible in the cohabitation of three generations. This sharing reveals that the shack, though small and humble in appearance, is in fact an ancestral house evoking notions of permanence, memory, and continuity. Other clues, specific to the vernacular Mexican architecture of South Texas, can be explicated with the help of Joe Graham's descriptions of the *jacal*. A house form that moved northward from Mexico, the *jacal* testifies to the primacy of Mexican settlement in South Texas. It is thus a symbol, signaling—through its thatched roof, single all-purpose room, walls of sticks and mud, and packed dirt floor—collective Mexican claims to land rights.³⁵ A “house of memory” in a more than personal sense, the *jacal* stands as a monument to a vernacular culture in decline. The house also embodies class issues. While it is permanent housing for the poor, as in this novel, it also served as temporary housing for the wealthy (in this matter Anglo immigrants followed patterns set by Spanish colonists) until the landowner's main house was completed.³⁶ The *jacal* thus approximates a universal regional dwelling that housed, if only temporarily, all classes of the old ranch society before the coming of the American farm order around 1900.

According to Graham, the *jacal* passed into history between the 1870s and the 1930s, when it was replaced by what Graham calls second-generation house types, small board-and-batten structures. It “did not disappear because it was not functional, for many were more functional than some modern types. It disappeared principally be-

cause it did not fit the changing aesthetic and social demands or needs of those who occupied them.”³⁷ In other words, the *jacal* represents in Mexican folk housing what the *corrido* represents in Mexican folk music—an expressive form that becomes obsolete as a new generation of Texas-Mexicans adapts to—or, as Paredes’s portrait of Guálinto suggests, is co-opted by—a new, U.S.-dominated geopolitical order. A link between Paredes’s novel and his folkloric study of the *corrido* emerges here. An intellectual native to the culture he describes, Paredes displays his understanding of the diverse manifestations of Texas-Mexican folk culture by placing their concurrent declines in the historical framework of the gradual lessening of Mexican resistance to American occupation of the borderlands.

Their condition of homelessness in their native land pervades the image of the rootedness of the poor Mexican family dwelling in their ancestral *jacal*. For though the birth of a son and heir to the Mexican order announces hope for cultural continuity and renewal, little Guálinto is born into a home that already shows signs of irredeemable decay: “The baby, meanwhile, was feeding greedily at his mother’s breast. Born a foreigner in his native land, he was fated to a life controlled by others. . . . Nobody had asked him whether he, a Mexican, had wanted to be born in Texas” (*GWG*, 15). Politically, Guálinto is a stranger in his own home, though his family hasn’t yet abandoned this particular house, which stands for the integrity of the old order. A latecomer to an ancestral structure that no longer seems viable, Guálinto would face overwhelming opposition should he try to preserve it. A child of his time rather than his place, he does not attempt to do so. Instead, his life is a journey on roads that lead away from the world of the *jacal* and towards modern America.



Richard Rodriguez’s emplotment of his Mexican American ethnicity—particularly in his recent *Days of Obligation* (1992)—is one of the most complex reinscriptions of the Mexican American rhetoric of consent and descent, of the crisis of Mexican filiation and the formation of new Mexican American affiliations. Homosexuality enters the picture here and, as an excluded nonreproductive sexuality, unsettles the “natural” continuity of both nationalism and diaspora. In the confessional *Hunger for Memory*, Rodriguez portrays the conversion of a Mexican child into a member of the American middle class as a pro-

cess that requires the casting-off of his Mexican origins,³⁸ but the narrative is haunted by the muted subplot of “grow[ing] up homosexual” (DoO, 30). *Hunger of Memory* silences this story and conceals it behind the mask of “Mr. Secrets.” A more complete portrait emerges in *Days of Obligation*, as the novelist explores more fully the ironies of his Mexican American journey. Rodriguez abandons his earlier self-fashioning, patterned on an American “type,” the successful child of poor immigrants, a figure that a conservative readership has mobilized in their public battle against affirmative action. In its portrait of a Mexican child estranged from the house of his parents, *Hunger of Memory* is similar to the story of George Washington Gómez; both tell the story of assimilation into mainstream America. This is true despite the distance between turn-of-the century South Texas and mid-twentieth-century California. The difference between the two books consists in the encoding of this story as a tragedy of betrayal by Paredes, whose writings heralded the politics of resistance of the Chicano Movement,³⁹ and its representation by Rodriguez as a success story during the postmovement neoconservatism of the Reagan era. However, Rodriguez breaks the pattern of *Hunger of Memory* in *Days of Obligation*. He both returns to his Mexican origins and reveals his homosexuality, though in an indirect and mediated manner, in a chapter entitled “Late Victorians.”

It is these indirect inscriptions of homosexuality that interest me here. Eschewing a confessional coming-out narrative, Rodriguez represents his sexuality not through a “sexual persona” or a portrait of a human face and identity,⁴⁰ but through an architectural metaphor—the Victorian houses in the Castro district of San Francisco inhabited by the gay community. The “late Victorians” of this chapter are modern rebels against the conventional family, gays who have moved into San Francisco’s Victorian houses. Rodriguez writes, “The grammar of the gay city borrows metaphors from the nineteenth-century house. . . . Two decades ago, some of the least expensive sections of San Francisco were wooden Victorian sections. It was thus a coincidence of the market that gay men found themselves living within the architectural metaphor for family” (DoO, 30). In *Hunger of Memory*, Rodriguez offered the reader the text of his American life. As he writes about the issue of homosexuality for the first time in *Days of Obligation*, he switches codes, presenting the reader with a text that reflects not on lives but on *houses*. However, for Rodriguez

to reveal his homosexuality by saying, “the gay district has Victorian architecture, and I am a late Victorian” is not to hide a shameful secret in a formalist code. Architecture as a symbol for identity is crucially linked to Rodriguez’s family history of northward migration from Mexico and assimilation into America: “I was born to America, to its Protestant faith in the future. I was going to be an architect and have a hand in building the city. There was only my father’s smile [his dark Latin skepticism] that stood in my way” (*DoO*, 219).

In the fusion of architectural forms and gay identity formation in “Late Victorians,” old buildings become a symbol of the weight of the past upon the living, a means of raising the question of how to tear down old structures that obstruct future happiness. Architecture as a memento of the past—venerated, but also feared as a prison of the living—is an old subject. Like Bachelard, Rodriguez invites us to “read a house.”⁴¹ But there is also future-oriented architecture, the constructions built by modern city planners, who condemn (the pun is telling) and demolish old buildings and neighborhoods to erect modern houses, projects, suburbs, and freeways. Rodriguez introduces the opposition between the houses of the past and the future to explain the difference between Mexico and the United States, the enormous emotional distance between “a country of tragedy” (*DoO*, xvi) and a modern nation of optimists, between a nation that lives in the “house of memory” and a nation that—as Wright’s book documents—wants to build the dream of the future. Mexican immigration into the United States thus becomes a journey from ancestral houses to dwellings designed for the present and future.

Rodriguez’s development from *Hunger of Memory* to *Days of Obligation* confirms Werner Sollors’s reminder that generations are manufactured, not natural.⁴² In the formation of an American identity by immigrant peoples, generations serve as a rhetorical construct to make sense of the clash between descent and consent. Having articulated a second-generation “American” identity in *Hunger of Memory*, Rodriguez takes the third-generation perspective in *Days of Obligation*, wishing to remember (to strain the conceit somewhat) as his father’s grandson what he wanted to forget as his father’s son. As his second-generation self, Rodriguez rejects the authority of descent and the memory of Mexican beginnings: “Aztec ruins hold no special interest for me. I do not search Mexican graveyards for ties to

unnameable ancestors. . . . What preoccupies me is immediate: the separation I endure with my parents in loss. This is what matters to me: the story of the scholarship boy who returns home one summer from college to discover bewildering silence, facing his parents. This is my story. An American story" (*HoM*, 5).

Days of Obligation, by contrast, depicts a third-generation Richard Rodriguez busy reconstructing his origins: "The youth of my life was defined by Protestant optimism. Now that I am middle-aged, I incline more toward the Mexican point of view. . . . [T]he journey my parents took from Mexico to America was a journey from an ancient culture to a youthful one—backward in time. In their path I similarly move, if only to honor their passage to California" (*DoO*, xvii–xviii). The former convert to the American way reclaims his heritage, marking this change with a trip to Mexico from California that reverses his father's migration. At first sight, this appears to be a return to the fold of "nature" and biological continuity. Once Rodriguez has rhetorically arrived in Mexico, he writes two essay-chapters about the country. The first, "India," deals with Mexico proper and discusses its self-image as a *mestizo* nation grappling with the tragedy of blood, that is, with the paradox of the ancient wound of the conquest and Indian survival in the *mestizo*. The other Mexican essay, "Mexico's Children," is concerned with the Mexican diaspora and its agonistic relationship with the mother country. Here Rodriguez asserts the rejection by the Mexican diaspora in the U.S. of the claims of "Mother Mexico": Mexico's emigrant children will no longer accept the authority of descent.

Wedged between these "Mexican" essays and their charting of a genealogical "family" quarrel between parent nation and emigrant children—blood and diaspora, loyalists and traitors—is "Late Victorians." The narrative seems suddenly to stray into an essay on art and architecture, a guided tour of his American home in the gay—not Mexican—ghetto, a district placed in the diverse urban architecture of San Francisco. *Days of Obligation* does indeed continue the story of immigration begun in *Hunger for Memory*, with its conflict between past and present, Mexican and American, original and substitute, homes; but Rodriguez introduces a third "home": the gay community. Having reconfigured the agonistic duality of descent and consent into a triangular shape, Rodriguez refuses to make the unequivocal choice

of allegiance demanded by oppositional thinking. He is, it turns out, a part of "India," one of "Mexico's emigrant children," and a "late Victorian."⁴³

Given this triangular model of identity, "Late Victorians" contains new keys to understanding Rodriguez's vigorous defense of the breaking of filial ties maintained in *Days of Obligation* but argued most strongly in *Hunger for Memory*. As the editors of the collection *Nationalisms and Sexualities* contend, sexuality is a crucial, though understated, factor in the constitution of the nation as an imagined community. "This 'deep, horizontal comradeship,'" they suggest, "spills into and out of libidinal economies in ways that are at once consistent and unpredictable." The "idealization of motherhood by the virile fraternity," the editors further argue, "would seem to entail the exclusion of all nonreproductively-oriented sexualities from the discourse of the nation."⁴⁴ Rodriguez's text reflects a similarly intense awareness of sexuality and gender as part and parcel of the discourse of Mexican nationalism and its rebel offshoot, the discourse of Mexican American ethnicity.

Rodriguez's critique of "family" obligations to Mexico and to "Mexicanness" in the U.S.—to descent and ethnicity—identifies an opposition between biology and "nature" on the one hand and "artifice" on the other. Thus Rodriguez's description of Mexican emigrants escaping the house of memory and pledging allegiance to America and the future is parallel to his account in "Late Victorians" of homosexuals' covenant against nature and their survival through artifice:

Mexico, mad mother. She still does not know what to make of our leaving. For most of this century Mexico has seen her children flee the house of memory. (*DoO*, 52)

The age-old description of homosexuality is of a sin against nature. . . . [H]omosexuals have made a covenant against nature. Homosexual survival lay in artifice, in plumage, in lampshades, sonnets, musical comedy, couture, syntax, religious ceremony, opera, lacquer, irony. (*DoO*, 32)

The pure accident and paradox that gay men found themselves making their homes in gentrified Victorian houses affords Rodriguez the opportunity to explore the breaking of family ties from another angle: "To grow up homosexual is to live with secrets and within se-

crets. In no other place are those secrets more closely guarded than within the family home. . . . 'Coming out of the closet' is predicated upon family laundry, dirty linen, skeletons" (*DoO*, 30).

This perspective contradicts the voice of filiation, which never stops insisting that the house is home as Bachelard defines it ("our corner of the world")⁴⁵ and the space of original well-being to which allegiance is owed. Rodriguez objects that some children are exiled within these family homes, living like foreigners in their homeland. The homelessness of Mexico's gay children in the U.S. recalls that of the heterosexual heir of the Mexican border world portrayed in *George Washington Gómez*. Its causes, however, are different, for they are inherent in the structures of the Mexican American community and cannot be blamed on a foreign invasion. Here is one root of Rodriguez's conservative dissent from the politics of Chicano nationalism and its father-precursor Américo Paredes that has been obscured by Rodriguez's closeted autobiographical "confession" and unaccounted for in the antagonistic responses of his Chicano readers.

Having broken the silence about homosexuality within the family home, Rodriguez goes on to describe how the gay community has moved into the family houses of the past and remodeled them to suit the tastes of their new occupants. His "late Victorians" are homemakers of a different kind:

The impulse is not to create but to re-create, to sham, to convert, to sauce, to rouge, to fragrance, to prettify. No effect is too small or too ephemeral to be snatched away from nature, to be ushered toward the perfection of artificiality. *We'll bring out the highlights there*. The homosexual has marshaled the architecture of the straight world to the very gates of Versailles. (*DoO*, 33)

Homosexual men sought to reclaim the house, the house that traditionally had been the reward for heterosexuality, with all its selfless tasks and burdens. (*DoO*, 35)

Moreover, according to Rodriguez, gay men become homemakers in premodern family homes at the very time when the heterosexual population is moving to single-family detached homes in the suburbs. Moving into the home of the extended family after it has ceased to exist among white middle-class Americans, gays are untimely heirs of Victorian dwellings built to unite several generations under the same

roof: "What strikes me at odd moments is the confidence of Victorian architecture. Stairs, connecting one story with another, describe the confidence that bound generations together through time—confidence that the family would inherit the earth" (*DoO*, 31).

Those who have inherited this family home—in part because the modern family has rejected it—are not its proper children but strangers who appreciate the idea of communal living, if not its heterosexual definition. Signifying on "Victorianness" and "family," they have remodeled these multi-story homes into "dollhouses for libertines" (*DoO*, 31–32): "I live in a tall Victorian house that has been converted to four apartments; four single men" (*DoO*, 30). In a move that throws a very interesting sidelight on Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*, Rodriguez makes a point of the differing architectural tastes of feminists and gays: "Feminists, with whom I include lesbians—such was the inclusiveness of the feminist movement—were preoccupied with career, with escape from the house in order to create a sexually democratic city" (*DoO*, 34–35). Like postmodern architects punning on outdated house forms, gays produce slanted simulations of obsolete styles of family dwelling, while women reject these homes for the modern "one-lifetime house" (*DoO*, 32), the architectural symbol for individualism. By redecorating the interiors of the architecture of genealogy, gays replay the past as a farce that subverts the principles of biological reproduction. Feminists strive towards the same goal by moving into modern and smaller houses. Rodriguez's assessment of their individualist aspirations is validated in *The House on Mango Street* by Esperanza, who dreams of a "house of her own."

Homosexuality, Rodriguez is saying, is like migration. It is constituted (as is feminism) as a journey from the house of one's birth to a substitute home. From this angle, homosexuals are allies of the second-generation children of Mexican parents, traveling ever further away from home on the road into America. Both groups are struggling to throw off the rule of repetition and reproduction. Architects by temperament, they want to build new homes for the present rather than be miserable in the "houses of memory." Rodriguez likens Mexican American ethnicity to homosexuality as a built—not organic—thing. Ancestral houses must be completely redesigned and rebuilt or they must be abandoned. On no account is one to occupy without altering the house where one was born. This attitude rules out the

nostalgia for ancestral houses that stand as empty monuments to a past social order found in *George Washington Gómez*.

In sum, homosexuality gives Rodriguez an enhanced sense of the architecture of ethnicity, its artifice; it affords him a clear view of ethnicity's design, the narrative plot of its public discourse. Here we can look for an explanation of Rodriguez's remarkable shapeshifting, his exchange of generational personae, his change of masks. The architect's creed allows him to remain one of Mexico's renegade *pocho* children while also portraying himself as the mythical *indio* of Mexico's *indigenismo* (all as he writes in a remodeled Victorian house in the Castro district):

The Indian stands in the same relationship to modernity as she did to Spain—willing to marry, to breed, to disappear in order to ensure her inclusion in time; refusing to absent herself from the future. The Indian has chosen to survive. . . . I take it as an Indian achievement that I am alive, that I am Catholic, that I speak English, that I am an American. My life began, it did not end, in the sixteenth century. (*DoO*, 24)

In the final analysis, Rodriguez's construction of homosexuality, self-conscious and ironic as it is, confirms the process of "becoming American" rather than "remaining Mexican." Challenging what they view as Rodriguez's assimilationist ideology, his Chicano critics have looked at the plot of ethnicity first and that of sexuality second. This approach may well conflict with Rodriguez's own priorities; his emphasis on sexuality in his second book consolidates his previous insistence on deconstructing the house of Mexican descent.



Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*, a novel composed of forty-four short vignettes, was conceived as a critical response to Gaston Bachelard's hermeneutics of the house as a space of the imagination and memory.⁴⁶ To Bachelard's readings Cisneros opposes her portrait of the house she grew up in, the house on Mango Street in a Puerto Rican neighborhood in Chicago. Cisneros's family home is anything but the warm and sheltering center of her world. An ugly little red house, it is not only too small to accommodate the imaginative world of the narrator-daughter Esperanza, but also incapable of fulfilling the dreams of other family members:

The house on Mango Street is ours, and we don't have to pay rent to anybody, or share the yard with the people downstairs. . . . But even so, it's not the house we'd thought we'd get. . . . They [Mama and Papa] always told us that one day we would move into a house, a real house that would be ours for always so we wouldn't have to move each year. And our house would have running water and pipes that worked. And inside it would have real stairs, not hallway stairs, but stairs inside like the houses on T.V. . . . Our house would be white with trees around it, a great big yard and grass growing without a fence. This was the house Papa talked about when he held a lottery ticket and this was the house Mama dreamed up in the stories she told us before we went to bed.

But the house on Mango Street is not the way they told it at all. It's small and red with tight steps in front and windows so small you'd think they were holding their breath. . . . There is no front yard, only four little elms the city planted by the curb. . . . There are stairs in our house, but they're ordinary hallway stairs. . . . Everybody has to share a bedroom—Mama and Papa, Carlos and Kiki, me and Nenny. . . .

I knew then that I had to have a house. A real house. One I could point to. But this isn't it. The house on Mango Street isn't it. For the time being, Mama says. Temporary, says Papa. But I know how those things go. (*HMS*, 3–5)

Esperanza invites us to complete the comparison, to contrast the architectural features of this house with those of various dream houses. Bachelard's house of childhood memory is one of these ideal houses, symbolizing the realm of the imagination; another is the middle-class American suburban home, standing for material comfort. The rooms, attics, and basements of Bachelard's house, and the staircases connecting the stories, correspond to different dimensions of the psyche, with all locations, all aspects of the subconscious and waking life, well connected by interior passages and with the walls sheltering and protecting the entire psychic universe. In contrast, the interior of the house on Mango Street is unpoetic; it has "ordinary hallway stairs" (*HMS*, 4) unsuited to flights of the imagination. Compared to the model suburban home, the house on Mango Street lacks interior and exterior space, the extra bedrooms and bathrooms, the front and back yards of the single-family American dream home. The house's

colorful red facade, like the brown skin of its inhabitants, marks it as a nonwhite residence.⁴⁷ Too small and brightly colored to pass as a suburban expression of individual economic success, and too prosaic to convey the spirit of place of Bachelard's house of memory and imagination, the red house seems not "real" to its child-occupant; it is seen as "temporary," a compromise that will do until the family can move to a better place.

This sense of disappointment testifies to the power of public norms to disqualify the reality of the houses of poor and nonwhite families. It is also proof of the conformism of American culture that minorities should want to live in the standard American house in the suburbs—one size fits all—as they move into the middle classes. The desire to pass undermines ethnic difference; there is a narrowing of the range of house forms, for the diversity of cultural house forms is discarded at the line where middle-class housing begins. According to Graham, "early Hispanic vernacular architecture [in South Texas] has had little impact on the region's modern popular and elite architecture."⁴⁸ This is true despite the fact that many of the owners and inhabitants of those modern houses are of Mexican descent. We see again in the text of the house a mirror image of the cultural process. The experience of rupture, of uprooting and refashioning identity that characterizes assimilation, "becoming American" as described in Rodríguez's *Hunger of Memory*, is mirrored in making a home within Anglo-American architecture.

Cisneros's narrative, at once a Chicana bildungsroman set in the *barrio* and an architectural essay on Latino neighborhoods in the contemporary American city, centers on the contrast between temporary and permanent dwellings. Temporary dwellings have a prominent place in the history of American housing, a fact usually attributed to the mythical mobility of American society.⁴⁹ Seen from this angle, the temporary character of the house on Mango Street does not differ from general American patterns of residential mobility. Further, it appears, as Julián Olivares has noted,⁵⁰ that the vision of a "House of My Own" offered by Esperanza at the end of the narrative conforms to modern generational mobility and the American Dream:

Not a flat. Not an apartment in back. Not a man's house. Not a daddy's. A house all my own. With my porch and my pillow, my pretty purple petunias. My books and my stories. My two shoes

waiting beside the bed. Nobody to shake a stick at. Nobody's garbage to pick up after.

Only a house quiet as snow, a space for myself to go, clean as paper before the poem. (*HMS*, 108)

Virginia Woolf's "room of one's own" made the architectural metaphor part of the European modernist store of figures. Cisneros is thus signifying on modernist architecture in two ways—on its manifestation in the built environment and on its literary expression. As Olivares concludes, the tension between the family home and Esperanza's dream of a house of her own derives not from aspirations toward assimilation but from a feminist critique of women's confinement in domestic spaces.⁵¹ And yet, while Cisneros would concur with Virginia Woolf's modernist denunciation of the Victorian house as a metaphor for the Victorian confinement of women, she goes beyond Woolf's modernist deconstruction and reconstruction in order to recover the meaning of the ethnicity of her home. This is why Cisneros's novel is entitled *The House on Mango Street* rather than "a house of my own."

To summarize: the dream of a "real" home, which is contrasted with the crowded house on Mango Street, a house lacking the qualities of primal refuge and belonging that Bachelard evokes, specifies the ideal house as a space for solitary and quiet reflection.⁵² A further opposition critics have noted in Cisneros's novel is that between inside and outside, between domestic interiors and the street. As Olivares points out, *The House on Mango Street* presents a series of women confined in their homes by the orders of fathers and husbands. A recurring image of domestic confinement, boredom, and loneliness is a woman sitting in a window frame, or standing in a door frame, longingly gazing out.⁵³ In "My Name," Esperanza describes her great-grandmother, for whom she was named, as one of those women: "She looked out the window her whole life, the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow. . . . I have inherited her name, but I don't want to inherit her place by the window" (*HMS*, 11). I do not wish here to go over what Olivares has already explicated in detail—the contrast between the relatively free Esperanza and the neighbor women whose lives she comes to view as negative examples. That is to say, instead of focusing on the opposition between interiors and exteriors as expressions of women's imprisonment and freedom, I wish to direct attention to a

third space: the street as a public space, a space of contact in which the many lives of all the houses on Mango Street are interwoven. I want, so to speak, to shift the accent in *The House on Mango Street* from “house” to “street.”

Given this more inclusive vision, the question immediately arises whether Esperanza’s hatred of the small red house extends to the street. For Esperanza’s education takes place primarily in the street, which, unlike the house, is anything but dull and bleak. Mango Street is a busy street with densely packed buildings all facing onto the street, in the sense that their occupants spend time in the street rather than keeping to themselves behind the walls of their homes. The constant circulation and contact between residents and strangers generates the kind of complex and unpredictable series of events that Jacobs calls the “sidewalk ballet”:

Under the seeming disorder of the old city, wherever the old city is working successfully, is a marvelous order for maintaining the safety of the streets and the freedom of the city. It is a complex order. Its essence is intricacy of sidewalk use, bringing with it a constant succession of eyes. This order is all composed of movement and change, and although it is life, not art, we may fancifully call it the art form of the city and liken it to the dance—not to a simple-minded precision dance with everyone kicking up at the same time, twirling in unison and bowing off en masse, but to an intricate ballet in which the individual dancers and ensembles all have distinctive parts which miraculously reinforce each other and compose an orderly whole. The ballet of the good city sidewalk never repeats itself from place to place. (Jacobs, 50)

Jacobs here asserts that the artists of the city are not the self-appointed planner-gods but the ordinary users of urban space. In so doing she replaces the notion of grand architecture-from-above with that of spontaneous art-from-below. The quality of city life is defined by everyday practices, not by designs and theories. The ultimate test of projected buildings is the way they are used; if they are abused, the fault lies with the planners, who have simplified the complex factors involved and neglected to consider the surrounding environment.

This “sidewalk ballet,” this dance of chance and brief encounters, shapes *The House on Mango Street*. Its organization into short, single-

episode narratives formally imitates the art it portrays. Like Hawthorne's *House of the Seven Gables*, Cisneros's *House on Mango Street* fuses the themes of identity and architecture in its design. The design of Hawthorne's novel resembles the design of the House of the Seven Gables: the narrative is constructed like a large and spacious house, as a single massive structure in which each chapter builds on the previous one. The entire edifice would collapse if any of its component parts were displaced. In contrast, the design of *The House on Mango Street* is street-oriented. Its episodic structure follows the movement of street life, where events begin and end suddenly. Order is provided by the solid rows of houses facing each other across the street. The entire street becomes a large stage with spotlights illuminating the temporary settings of street encounters. Thus, the real subject of Cisneros's narrative is not so much the solid architecture of the houses (which is often bleak) as the movements and contacts of the many lives that flow in and out of them.

This structure naturally has implications for what I call the architecture of ethnicity. Considering her double focus on the street and the house, I wish to suggest two things about Cisneros's take on this issue. First, her focus on houses rather than "land," as I argued earlier, marks a shifting of the problematic of ethnicity from organic unity to the constructedness of identity. It revises our preconceptions, changing our view of Chicana identity as a permanent thing, a natural trait produced through generational succession and long residence in the homeland, to a recognition of it as an artifact, the result of (wo)man-made designs and installations on the land and therefore subject to dislocation, demolition, and reconstruction. Furthermore, the house becomes a vehicle for expressing internal (sexual and gender) differences within Chicano culture, for articulating what Anzaldúa has called a borderlands identity. On both these counts Cisneros concurs with Rodriguez, whose parallel concern with architecture expresses a similar awareness of individual (re)design and decoration. Yet, and this is my second point, Cisneros moves beyond Rodriguez's position by expanding the focus from a single, isolated house to the street. In so doing she diminishes the status of the individual and reintroduces the communal perspective—bringing us back to Chicano nationalism's concerns with the collective. Through the street, Cisneros reintroduces a collective Latino public space, the urban equivalent of the homeland. Esperanza's individual itinerary becomes part

of the dance of her urban community and is interwoven with and influenced by contact with the lives of her Latino neighbors. These others—some strangers, some acquaintances—are her partners in gathering together an “organic community,” a living neighborhood whose order is not determined from above by the paternalistic designs of city planners. She pays her respect to Mango Street thus:

I write it down and Mango says goodbye sometimes. She does not hold me with both arms. She sets me free.

One day I will pack my bags of books and paper. One day I will say goodbye to Mango. I am too strong for her to keep me here forever. One day I will go away. . . . They will not know I have gone away to come back. For the ones I left behind. For the ones who cannot out. (*HMS*, 110)

It seems fitting to conclude with some scenes from *Mango Street*: “Down, down Mango Street we go. Rachel, Lucy, me. Our new bicycle. Laughing the crooked ride back” (*HMS*, 16). As Esperanza, by herself and with her friends, goes up and down the street, she introduces the reader to the occupants of its houses and apartments. For instance, “Downstairs from Meme’s is a basement apartment that Meme’s mother fixed up and rented to a Puerto Rican family. Louie’s family” (*HMS*, 23). Louie (a boy) has a cousin from Puerto Rico, Marin, who “can’t come out—gotta baby-sit with Louie’s sisters—but she stands in the doorway a lot, all the time singing . . . the same song” (*HMS*, 23–24). Marin is one of those women confined to domestic interiors, “waiting for a car to stop, a star to fall, someone to change her life” (*HMS*, 27). And yet, despite her limited world, she is also one of Esperanza’s teachers in the street community, representing an adult female life Esperanza later comes to reject.

Mango Street seems a safe place for the children who live there, for they are under the casual surveillance of the adult residents, many of whom are those indoor women. The street is not anonymous; residents take an interest in what goes on there, so that Esperanza and her friends are integrated into a complex social world which interacts with them and opens up a lifeworld beyond the confines of the “sad houses.” House and street form a unit, and together they create what they cannot offer individually—a felicitous space, a space of primary belonging—as they perform the roles of educators and architectural shapers of gender and ethnic identity. A perfect example of the many

and complex interventions of neighbors in the doings of Esperanza's group of girlfriends is the episode in "The Family of Little Feet." The action begins when a neighbor woman gives them a bag with several pairs of discarded colorful high-heeled shoes that enable the girls to perform adult femininity; soon they are strutting down the street. The girls all take turns in wearing the high heels, as they compete with each other and collectively discover that they "have legs" (*HMS*, 40). Then the grocer intervenes: "Mr. Benny at the corner grocery puts down his important cigar: Your mother know you got shoes like that? Who give you those? Nobody. Them are dangerous, he says. You girls too young to be wearing shoes like that" (*HMS*, 40–41). Of course, the girls just run away, put on the high heels again further along the street, and "keep strutting" (*HMS*, 41). But the next encounter brings them closer to discomfort, fulfilling the grocer's warning. A "bum man" calls out to them: "Your little lemon shoes are so beautiful. But come closer. I can't see very well. . . . You are a pretty girl, bum man continues" (*HMS*, 41). Finally, he offers them a dollar for a kiss, and now the girls back off, running away as the street person yells after them. They have had enough of acting like grown-up females for the time being, and the high heels go back into the bag: "We are tired of being beautiful. Lucy hides the lemon shoes and the red shoes and the shoes that used to be white but are now pale blue under a powerful bushel basket on the back porch, until one Tuesday her mother, who is very clean, throws them away. But no one complains" (*HMS*, 42).

In sum, Cisneros's novel contradicts negative stereotypes about sinister inner city streets dominated by crime, drugs, and gangs. However, this is a matter of territory: "All brown all around, we are safe. But watch us drive into a neighborhood of another color and our knees go shakity-shake and our car windows get rolled up tight and our eyes look straight" (*HMS*, 28). The street encounters cited above and similar incidents form "the sidewalk ballet" of a good city street. Even after her departure, Esperanza continues to belong to Mango Street, though she felt homeless in the red house. The faults of the house are compensated for by her love of the street.

University of Texas, Austin

Notes

I would like to thank Robert Mugerauer and Dennis Medina for their generous sharing of material on the subjects of architecture and Mexican houses, and Ray Sapirstein, Joel Huerta, and José Limón for sharing their ideas and suggestions on the subject of this article.

- 1 John A. Kouwenhoven, *The Arts in Modern American Civilization* (1949; reprint, New York: W. W. Norton, 1967), 159.
- 2 Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983), xviii. Subsequent page references to this work are given in the text.
- 3 At the end of his classic study of primitive and vernacular house forms, Amos Rapoport takes a look at the case of American culture, offering an incisive application of his theory that socio-symbolic factors are more important for the shapes of houses than physical influences like climate and site: "What then does 'house' mean to Americans? They have a dream 'home—the very word can reduce my compatriots to tears,' and builders and developers never build houses, they build homes. The dream home is surrounded by trees and grass in either country or suburb, and must be *owned*, yet Americans rarely stay in it more than 5 years. It is not a real need but a symbol. This symbol means a freestanding, single family house, *not* a row house, and the ideal of home is aesthetic, not functional" (*House, Form, and Culture* [Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1969], 132–33). Similarly, David Hummon writes, "Today, our sense of social rank and of 'making it' in the economic system has become so closely identified with the dwellings in which we reside that the 'American Dream,' traditionally connoting social mobility, has become synonymous with home ownership and the single-family dwelling" ("House, Home and Identity in Contemporary American Culture," in *Housing, Culture and Design: A Comparative Perspective*, ed. Setha M. Low and Erve Chambers [Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1989], 214).
- 4 See Carey McWilliams, *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States*, rev. ed. (1948; reprint, New York: Praeger, 1990). Architectural critic Stewart Brand also discusses the creation of what has become known as the "Santa Fe style" under the motto "imitation re-shapes original" (*How Buildings Learn: What Happens after They're Built* [New York: Penguin, 1994], 142–50).
- 5 See Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (1958; reprint, Boston: Beacon Press, 1969); Martin Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).
- 6 Richard Rodriguez, *Days of Obligation: An Argument with My Mexican Father* (New York: Penguin, 1992). Page references to this novel are given in the text using the abbreviation *DoO*.
- 7 Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street* (1984; reprint, New York:

- Random House, 1989). Page references to this novel are given in the text using the abbreviation *HMS*.
- 8 The focus of Chicano nationalism on land is central and tends to find its way into the titles of books on this subject; see John R. Chávez, *The Lost Land: The Chicano Image of the Southwest* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1984); Rudolfo A. Anaya and Francisco Lomeli, eds., *Aztlán: Essays on the Chicano Homeland* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1989).
 - 9 See Richard L. Nostrand, *The Hispano Homeland* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1992); and Américo Paredes, "With His Pistol in His Hand": *A Border Ballad and Its Hero* (1958; reprint, Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1971).
 - 10 J. B. Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1984), 8.
 - 11 See José Limón's study, *Mexican Ballads, Chicano Poems: History and Influence in Mexican-American Social Poetry* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1992), for an account of the links between Paredes's ethnographic work on the *corrido* and the subsequent poetic production of a new generation of Chicano activists.
 - 12 Paredes, 7, 10, 13.
 - 13 See Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 150ff; José Limón, "Américo Paredes," in *Dancing with the Devil: Society and Cultural Poetics in Mexican-American South Texas* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 76–94.
 - 14 See the following works by J. B. Jackson: "The Westward-Moving House: Three American Houses and the People Who Lived in Them," *Landscape* 2 (spring 1953): 10–42; *Landscapes: Selected Writings*, ed. Ervin H. Zube (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1970); *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1984); *A Sense of Place, a Sense of Time* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1994).
 - 15 See Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*, 91–101.
 - 16 Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987). Page references to this work are given in the text using the abbreviation *B*.
 - 17 Américo Paredes, *George Washington Gómez* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1990). Page references to this novel are given in the text using the abbreviation *GWG*.
 - 18 See Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989); Soja and Barbara Hooper, "The Spaces That Difference Makes: Some Notes on the Geographical Margins of the New Cultural Politics," in *Place and the Politics of Identity*, ed. Michael Keith and Steve Pile (London: Routledge, 1993), 183–205; David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

- 19 Jackson, "A Pair of Ideal Landscapes," in *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*, 40.
- 20 Michael Sorkin, ed., *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), xiv.
- 21 Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Random House, 1992), 226–27.
- 22 See, for instance, Wright, 114ff and 240.
- 23 Rapoport, *House, Form, and Culture*, 1–2.
- 24 Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*, 85.
- 25 Jackson, *A Sense of Place, a Sense of Time*, 189–205.
- 26 On the architecture of South Texas, see Joe S. Graham, "The Built Environment in South Texas: The Hispanic Legacy," in *Hispanic Texas: A Historical Guide*, ed. Helen Simons and Cathryn A. Hoyt (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1992), 59–75, 66. On the missions and adobe structures, see, for instance, Carey McWilliams, *North from Mexico*; David Hornbeck, "Spanish Legacy in the Borderlands," in *The Making of the American Landscape*, ed. Michael P. Conzen (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 51–62; Alvar W. Carlson, "Spanish Americans in New Mexico's Río Arriba," in *To Build in a New Land: Ethnic Landscapes in North America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1992), 345–61; Roger G. Kennedy, *Mission: The History and Architecture of the Missions of North America*, ed. David Larkin (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993); Jackson, *A Sense of Place, a Sense of Time*, 15–67.
- 27 See Daniel D. Arreola, "Mexican American Housescapes," *Geographical Review* 78 (July 1988): 299–315, "Plaza Towns of South Texas," *Geographical Review* 82 (January 1992): 56–73, and "The Mexican American Cultural Capital," in *Re-Reading Cultural Geography*, ed. Kenneth E. Foote et al. (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1994), 34–47; Eugene George, *Historic Architecture of Texas: The Falcón Reservoir* (Austin: Texas Historical Commission and Texas Historical Foundation, 1975), and "Lower Rio Grande Architecture," in *An Exploration of a Common Legacy: A Conference on Border Architecture: Proceedings*, ed. Marlene Elizabeth Heck (Austin: Texas Historical Commission, 1978), 22–23; Joe S. Graham, "Folk Housing in South and West Texas: Some Comparisons," in *An Exploration of a Common Legacy*, ed. Heck, 38–45, "The Jacal in South Texas: The Origins and Form of a Folk House," in *Hecho en Tejas*, 293–308, "The Built Environment in South Texas: The Hispanic Legacy," and Graham, ed., *Hecho en Tejas: Texas-Mexican Folk Arts and Crafts* (Denton: Univ. of North Texas Press, 1991); Eric Ramos, "Mexican-American Yard Art in Kingsville," in *Hecho en Tejas*, 250–62; Mario L. Sánchez, ed., *A Shared Experience: The History, Architecture and Historic Designations of the Lower Rio Grande Heritage Corridor* (Austin: Los Caminos del Rio Heritage Project and the Texas Historical Commission, 1991).
- 28 David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836–1986*

- (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1987), 117–28; James A. Sandos, *Rebellion in the Borderlands: Anarchism and the Plan of San Diego, 1904–1923* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1992).
- 29 See Sandos, 103.
- 30 See Ramón Saldivar, “The Borderlands of Culture: Américo Paredes’s *George Washington Gómez* and Chicano Literature at the End of the Twentieth Century,” *American Literary History* 5 (summer 1993): 274.
- 31 See Limón, “Américo Paredes.”
- 32 See Saldivar.
- 33 See Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*.
- 34 Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961; reprint, New York: Random House, 1992), 50. Subsequent page references to this work will be given in the text.
- 35 For variations in the form of the *jacal*, see Graham’s work, listed in note 27 above.
- 36 See Graham, “The Built Environment in South Texas,” 64.
- 37 Graham, “The *Jacal* in South Texas,” 299.
- 38 Richard Rodriguez, *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (New York: Bantam, 1982). Subsequent page references to this work are given in the text using the abbreviation *HoM*.
- 39 See Limón, *Mexican Ballads, Chicano Poems*.
- 40 See Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (New York: Random House, 1990).
- 41 The phrase is from Bachelard, 38.
- 42 Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986), 210.
- 43 Another chapter in *Days of Obligation*, “The Missions,” offers a parallel and fascinating examination of the architecture of Mexican ethnicity in the United States focused on the Spanish missions in California. Following Carey McWilliams’s argument in *North from Mexico*, Rodriguez suggests that the restoration of the buildings of the Spanish colonial past by California preservation societies in the early twentieth century paradoxically produced a more profound amnesia about California’s history before the American colonization of the former Spanish, then Mexican, province. The restoration of the poorly maintained missions involved their “Americanization,” their transformation into what McWilliams has called California’s “Spanish fantasy heritage.” The California missions, according to McWilliams, have no bearing on contemporary Mexican American identity; they have been translated into and preserved within an American code, serving partly to deny the continuity of Mexican dwelling in California.
- 44 Andrew Parker et al., eds., *Nationalisms and Sexualities* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 5, 6.
- 45 Bachelard, 4.

- 46 See Pilar E. Rodríguez Aranda, "On the Solitary Fate of Being Mexican, Female, Wicked and Thirty-Three: An Interview with Writer Sandra Cisneros," *The Americas Review* 18 (spring 1990): 65; Wolfgang Binder, "Sandra Cisneros," in *Partial Autobiographies: Interviews with Twenty Chicano Poets* (Erlangen: Palm & Enke, 1985), 63; Julián Olivares, "Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* and the Poetics of Space," in *Chicana Creativity and Criticism: Charting New Frontiers in American Literature*, ed. María Herrera-Sobek and Helena María Viramontes (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1988), 160-70.
- 47 According to Arreola, "For the Mexican American barrio, color is an important component of an ensemble of cues that lend an ethnic identity to the landscape" ("Mexican American Housescapes," 305).
- 48 Graham, "The Built Environment in South Texas," 68.
- 49 See Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*, 91-101; Wright, *Building the Dream*.
- 50 Olivares, 168.
- 51 Idem.
- 52 Tomás Rivera, in . . . *Y no se lo tragó la tierra: . . . And the Earth Did Not Devour Him*, similarly links houses with the search for quiet spaces of reflection. Rivera's book has been compared to *The House on Mango Street* for both formal and thematic similarities; see Erlinda González-Berry and Tey Diana Rebolledo, "Growing Up Chicano: Tomás Rivera and Sandra Cisneros," in *International Studies in Honor of Tomás Rivera*, ed. Julián Olivares (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1986), 109-19 [Special issue of *Revista Chicano-Riqueña* 13 (fall-winter 1985)].
- 53 Olivares, 163.