

KIDS AND SPACE IN THE PUERTO RICAN HIGHLANDS

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ABSTRACT. The spatial world of the child comprises two great realms, “in” and “out,” more or less corresponding to the great behavioral domains of “got to” and “doing nothing.” Within the “got-to” domain—and thus “in”—are home, school, and other loci of secure, stable authority. Included in “doing nothing”—and so “out”—are street and yard, field and stream, pool hall and movie theater, the spaces of games, things to do, and really doing nothing. This study looks at the shifting relationships of these realms across the life cycle of kids in the highlands of Puerto Rico in 1969–1970. *Keywords:* children, Puerto Rico, spatial world.

Despite the recent publication of important geographies of children by Stuart Aitken (2001) and Cindi Katz (2004), the spatial and temporal worlds of children remain essentially unmapped. My aspiration here is to help remediate this situation by putting on record some observations I made in the late 1960s about a group of children living in a *caserío* (public housing project) in Barranquitas, in central Puerto Rico. This is the third in a series of articles about these children. The first focused on the kites the kids made (Wood 1982); the second described four encompassing behavioral domains: “got to,” “something to do,” “doing nothing,” and “nothing to do,” a typology inspired by the great if underappreciated work of Robert Paul Smith, “*Where Did You Go?*” “*Out.*” “*What Did You Do?*” “*Nothing*” (Smith 1957; see also Wood 1985a, 1985b).

The “got to’s” are things kids have to do: They have to go in, they have to eat, they have to go to bed, they have to go to school. The “somethings” are more or less self-willed: organized sports, going with friends to a movie, dating. “Doing nothing” is almost unwilling and includes wandering around, fooling about, and hanging out. “Nothing to do” refers to a sense of emptiness, a kind of lassitude, a sinking down exhaustion of the spirits.

In this article I explore where these behaviors took place. In general the “got to’s” took place “in” (and usually inside), the “somethings” took place “someplace,” and “doing nothing” took place “out” (if not always outside). “Nothing to do” could overwhelm one anywhere, but invariably it implied there was “nowhere to go.” I begin with a brief description of the setting and then distinguish “in” from “out” along phenomenological, spatial, and temporal dimensions. “In” has received limited attention in geographical studies of children’s behavior, even though most of a child’s life unfolds in it. I document this fact first by glancing at studies of children’s time budgets amassed in a number of settings over the past thirty years by anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists and then by demonstrating how closely the behaviors of the Barranquitas kids conform to these stable and cross-cultural, if far from universal, norms. I then look at “doing nothing” / “out,” where I focus on the expansion of “out” with increasing age, especially for boys. Finally, I turn briefly

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