"The Fiery Furnaces of Hell": Rhetorical Dynamism in Youngstown, OH

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“The Fiery Furnaces of Hell”:
Rhetorical Dynamism in Youngstown, OH

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English
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Abstract

This dissertation seeks to define the theory of rhetorical dynamism and illustrate how this theory can be applied to studies of rhetoric and place. The study builds on current rhetorical scholarship and adds to it with the four characteristics of rhetorical dynamism: that places are rhetorically invented, that they hold rhetorical tensions, that they are fluid and constantly evolving, and that they are active participants in a reciprocal rhetorical process. Rhetorical dynamism is illustrated in two places, Westlake Terrace and Idora Park, each in Youngstown, OH. By building a rhetorical history of each site, the study shows how each place is representative of the study’s theoretical claims. Finally, the study finds that rhetorical dynamism can be usefully applied as a heuristic in future rhetorical scholarship to uncover instances of inequality and injustice and to find avenues to address these issues as they are grounded in particular places.
Introduction

In Youngstown, Ohio’s heyday, downtown (Figure 1.1 below) was a center of entertainment, business, and shopping. One could safely stroll down Federal Street or take a trolley to see Aretha Franklin perform at the Oaks Ballroom, shop at the Woolworth’s department store, or watch a play at Stambaugh Auditorium. The downtown many current residents grew up with, however, was far different. From the 1970s on, if people even dared to brave this dangerous part of town, it was only to go to work at one of the few call centers populating the small skyscrapers or to drown their sorrows in a dingy dive bar. Boarded doors, empty buildings, and broken windows were the portrait of downtown for years. This makes the revived downtown of the past decade or so a stark contrast, but the signs of Youngstown’s decay and struggle are still prevalent. There are still demolished buildings and vacant storefronts, but they’re interspersed with new restaurants, bars, and even the first downtown hotel in 44 years. Businesses are finally starting to come back (see figure 1.1), young professionals live in downtown lofts, and entertainment is making a comeback. Yet many people are still uneasy walking downtown; they stick to Federal Street, they don’t go down the dark alleys, and they walk quickly past the broken windows to get to the sparkling new places of a city rebuilding.

Youngstown, then, is an example of how places are constantly (re-)invented and change dynamically over time. This brief example is one among many in Youngstown that make evident that the actual geographical and architectural landscapes that make up places are rhetorical - not just rhetorical artifacts to be read, but complex actors that are invented as rhetorical artifacts and
then generate their own rhetoric as they evolve and change. While some, such as Rai (2016), examine the rhetoric of place as a force enacted through dialogue and argument, I argue that places also enact rhetoric of their own, acting as “a form of communication” (Relph, 1976, p. 34; also see Adams et al 2001). Here I want to develop a theory of places that rests on the idea that places are both constructed by and generative of rhetoric. To encapsulate these concepts, I use the term rhetorical dynamism, which I employ because of the relative dearth of terminology available for rhetoricians to study places. While there are some terms, such as Rice’s (2012b) ecologies, Rai’s (2016) rhetorical force, or Rickert’s ambience (2013), to name a few, none quite capture the fluid, evolutionary, reciprocal, and active nature of place that rhetorical dynamism provides.

In this introduction, I begin to build a theory of rhetorical dynamism as a guiding framework for understanding place. Rhetorical dynamism means that places are active participants in an ongoing process of producing rhetoric, a process that is defined by shifting contexts and tensions. Dynamism connotes energy, force, power, movement, and vigor. As
Adams et al (2001) point out, “place is increasingly recognized as dynamic and fluid” (p. xxi), and rhetorical dynamism helps us understand these qualities of place in conjunction with places’ inherently rhetorical qualities. Rhetorical dynamism, then, means that places (or other rhetorical actors) are active participants in an ever-present kairotic (see Rickert 2007) process of meaning-making and negotiation; because of this process places are characterized by constant change, progress, and evolution. Furthermore, actors other than the place itself can be either the thing changing or the thing that is causing change at any given moment in the process of rhetoric. These actors are crucial to dynamism because places evolve with them in a reciprocal manner; they are part and parcel of the dynamism of a particular place.

Along with rhetorical dynamism, I use several other terms that have contested or complicated histories; because of this, I want to provide brief definitions now to lay the foundation for the rest of the dissertation. These will be discussed in more detail in Chapter One and appear throughout the dissertation. These terms include:

- **Placemaking** - a specific approach to urban planning, design, and management that emphasizes communal strengths to create places that promote the overall well-being of the populace. Good placemaking practices generally involve transforming under-utilized space into productive urban places (Lynch 1960; Lynch 1984; Schneekloth and Shibley 1995).

- **Place and space** - Though I focus primarily on place, space will come up as well, especially as I discuss how space becomes place. These terms are too often conflated, and I want to make a clear distinction here:
  - Space is that which we move through, the empty and open dimensions in which we all exist (Tuan 1977; Casey 1993). As Gieryn (2000) puts it, space “is more
properly conceived as abstract geometries … detached from material form and
cultural interpretation” (p. 465).

○ Place is a particular location, position, or portion of space which is built,
purposed, named, etc. As Tuan (1977) puts it, “enclosed and humanized space is
place” (p. 54).

These definitions inform my understanding of invention and of the rhetorics of place and help
build my theory of rhetorical dynamism. I put these concepts into play in a study of Youngstown,
Ohio. This dissertation explores Youngstown as one site that has been marked by the dynamism
of place. Two of Youngstown’s places in particular, Westlake Terrace and Idora Park, capture
the tension of what cultural geographers call “a living design which changes and is eventually
replaced by that of a future generation” (Jackson 1951). Similar to the example of downtown
above, these places have each experienced significant change over their histories and provide
tangible examples of places enacting rhetoric. Furthermore, each of these shows how the
rhetorical invention of places can have significant and far-ranging material impacts, especially
for under-privileged and marginalized groups.

In what follows, I provide some general background on Youngstown and then introduce
the two places I will study, Westlake Terrace and Idora Park, both for those unfamiliar with the
city and to show why it is a rich site of study. Then, I will outline my theoretical exigence,
including how my terms and theoretical framework help us understand place. Finally, I will
conclude with an overview of the rest of the dissertation.

“Here in Youngstown”

Situated in the Mahoning River Valley on the border of Ohio and Pennsylvania (see
Figure 1.2), Youngstown was once a thriving industrial town. With a peak population of
170,002 in 1930 (United States Census Bureau 1930), Youngstown was an important producer of steel, a place built upon huge, roaring furnaces and blazing foundries, most notably the famous Jeannette Blast Furnace (Linkon and Russo 2002). The city featured an amusement park (Idora Park), a bustling downtown, a public research university, and, at one point, even a professional football team, the Youngstown Patricians. Connected to other industrial cities by the Erie Canal, the Ohio-Pennsylvania Canal, and extensive rail networks, Youngstown was once the top producer of steel in the country, surpassing even Pittsburgh for a time (Linkon and Russo 2002). Steel made Youngstown a picture of prosperity. Neighborhoods embodied the city’s success with extremely high homeownership rates and a burgeoning and increasingly diverse population (Linkon and Russo 2002).

Unfortunately, on “Black Monday,” September 19, 1977, the Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company’s Campbell Works shut down. Almost all of the other mills in the area would soon follow suit, putting thousands out of work (Linkon and Russo 2002). “Steeltown USA” had been a “company town,” and now those companies were gone. Westlake Terrace, Brier Hill, and other upscale neighborhoods fractured as residents lost their livelihoods and subsequently their
homes. Much of the city, including the Idora Park amusement park, literally burned to the ground.¹ Instead of industry, the city came to be known for crime, unrest, and decay. The mafia seized upon the chaos, and the *Saturday Evening Post* dubbed Youngstown “Crimetown USA,” one among a series of unfortunate nicknames that also included “Murdertown USA” and “Bomb Town USA” (Grann 2000; Linkon and Russo 2002; Milliken 2012). While the mafia was mostly eradicated by the early 2000s, the city is still considered dangerous² and is visibly in decline (see Figure 1.4). The city’s demographics tell a tale of continued hardship: the median household income is $24,000 (United States Census Bureau 2011), the lowest of any U.S. city with a population over 65,000 (Christie 2007). The population is down to 66,982, with the decline of over 103,000 since its peak being the largest decline of any city in the U.S. (United States Census Bureau 2010). And the vacant housing rate is twenty times the national average (Tavernise 2010) in a city that once boasted the largest homeownership rate in the country (Linkon and Russo 2002).
Youngstown, as a city and as a rhetorical edifice, is full of complexities. Its decline is infamous and is emblematic of the issues seen in other Rust Belt cities. The city and its people are proud and still build on a blue collar, working class ethos, and yet the industry that provided that ethos is gone. In its wake lie entire city blocks of vacant houses, rows of empty storefronts, and overgrown lots. At the core of this decline is urban planning and land management, and this is why Youngstown is both an ideal site for my study and a site in need of more productive placemaking practices.

To explore how rhetorical dynamism works, I study the places of Youngstown. As interrogating the city holistically would be too large of a scope for this project, I have narrowed the project down to two of Youngstown’s places, Westlake Terrace and Idora Park. These two places each have unique and rich histories, but are also emblematic of larger trends across the city.

**Westlake Terrace and Idora Park**

Westlake Terrace (Figure 1.5) was one of the first public housing projects in the United States, and the first authorized by the U.S. Public Housing Act of 1937 (Linkon and Russo
When initially built, the neighborhood was populated by steel mill workers, as were most of Youngstown’s neighborhoods. Westlake Terrace was built because there weren’t enough houses in Youngstown to meet demand. The project was initially a segregated, low-income, family-oriented community; one even had to show their marriage license with their application. In the 1950s, the Madison Avenue Expressway cut Westlake Terrace in half, creating a physical barrier between the two halves of the community and cutting parts of the project off from key resources (Linkon and Russo 2002). The community gradually fell into decline thereafter, coming to be known for vandalism, drugs, and transients. Later, a maximum security county prison was built right next door to Westlake, another decision that deeply impacted the community. Finally, the project was torn down and replaced with a new housing project, the Village at Arlington (Figure 1.5), in 2013 (Milliiken 2013).

Idora Park (Figure 1.6) provides a different sort of site. Built in 1899, Idora Park was initially a “trolley park,” which were amusement parks built at the end of trolley lines to generate extra revenue, especially on weekends (Deblasio 2010). The park featured a roller coaster, a haunted house, a fun house, a bandstand, and a large ballroom, among other attractions. Though Idora faced stiff competition from other amusement parks in the area (Kennywood, Cedar Point, and Geauga Lake, to name a few), it continued to thrive for many years. As people began to be
able to travel more easily to further, larger-scale parks, Idora morphed into a picnic area for various cultural organizations, churches, and companies. However, after Black Monday, Idora Park turned into a repository for old rides from other shut-down parks (Kyriazi 1986). Finally, an enormous fire swept the park in 1984, destroying much of it, and the park closed that same year. After its closure, there were several more fires over the years, some intentional, some not. The remaining attractions were left standing but were not maintained, becoming a stark reminder of what had been; where once there was an amusement park, now there was a collection of decaying, vandalized roller coasters beset by weeds and other flora (see Figure 1.6). Intense debates occurred over whether to keep or demolish these historic relics. Eventually, after yet another fire in 2001, the remaining structures were demolished. At the same time, the housing market in the surrounding neighborhood plummeted, and when African Americans began to move in, the white residents fled to the suburbs. The neighborhood decayed along with the park, becoming a food desert with soaring vacancies and crime. Now, the park stands as an empty lot embroiled in a lawsuit over delinquent property taxes, surrounded by a neighborhood that is just now undergoing revitalization efforts.

Figure 1.6: Idora Park in its prime (left) and after its closure (right)
Left image courtesy of Oakland Public Library; Right image courtesy of mapio.net
At first glance, these sites might seem quite disparate, and in some senses they are. Their relation, especially in terms of my project, will become clear in the next section as I lay out my theoretical framework for the rhetorical dynamism of place.

**Theoretical Exigency and Framework**

This dissertation explores Youngstown’s rhetorical dynamism and the inventional processes that underlie these two places’ dynamic evolution. I claim that places are dynamic and generative of their own rhetoric, rather than simply being *topoi* for arguments. In doing so, I attempt to extend work that studies the ways that people argue about place (Rai 2016, Rice 2012b) or the ways in which places open up space for discourse (Fleming 2008, Cintron 1997). Rather, I want to understand how the built environment reflects a confluence of cultural, economic, and societal demands (Casey 1993), and how places reflect and construct the contexts in which they are made. Furthermore, dynamism means understanding that place is not a permanent fixture (Rice 2012a). Understanding places as instead fluid, as cultural geographers do (Adams et al 2001), allows us to understand them as dynamic, constantly changing entities (Huyssen 2003). Finally, I want to move toward understanding how place impacts and is invented by everyday, material practices (de Certeau 2011).

Rhetorical dynamism and its characteristics grow out of three realizations and extensions of current scholarship. First, that places are rhetorical in and of themselves. Places have suasive power (Rickert 2013; Herndl and Zarlengo 2018) and are rhetorical in their very being, affecting our ontological understanding by changing how we think of our place in the world and how we inhabit our surroundings (Larsen and Johnson 2017). Places affect our relations with one another and with Others; both those that inhabit a place with us and those in different places. They
change how we are able to negotiate our being-in-the-world, and I view this as the core of rhetoric - the negotiation of being (and specifically, being with others).

Second, Places are rhetorically invented. Places are invented for specific purposes, to reach specific audiences, and to organize our physical existence. Most often, places are invented as a means of organizing people in space (Rice 2012a; Foucault 2010; Cintron 1997). Yet no single rhetor invents a place; rather, the invention of a place is a distributed process in which multiple parties, such as city planners, architects, politicians, journalists, residents, and the place itself participate (Latour 2012). The invention of place, furthermore, is reciprocal; places both reflect and construct their context (Johnson et al 2017). The context surrounding a place is built into its invention, and it then affects and constructs its future context(s) in its rhetorical dynamism.

Finally, places are constantly evolving. Rather than static, permanent fixtures, places are, as Fleming (2008) puts it, “plastic.” Indeed, Rice (2012a) explains that “treating space as permanent is an ideological gesture often meant to keep things in their place” (p. 13). Places are constantly re-invented in various ways; as Rai (2016) argues, they are “remade through everyday practice, institutions, and spaces” (p. 6). When studying places, we too often fall into the same trap that Gries (2013) points out with images: treating them “as fixed, transitive things that have already been built” (p. 336) rather than as fluid and emergent processes of continual re-invention. This could occur because of the way that people talk about a place, because of change in the way we inhabit a place, or because of physical changes to a place. In any case, the place changes, as does its rhetorical affect.
These three points each help build rhetorical dynamism and define it and its characteristics. In the next section, I will provide a brief overview of rhetorical dynamism and discuss how it applies to each of the sites I investigate in this study.

**Dynamism**

I argue, then, for the rhetorical dynamism of places. Rhetorical dynamism brings rhetorical understandings of place into conversation with cultural geographers, helping us understand place as constantly changing and evolving. This theory responds to Jenny Rice (2013), who called on rhetoricians to engage with place as a “generative concept and practice” and puts this in conversation with Casey’s (1997) claim that place “has an active power as well as an incorporeal and definitive reality,” which I understand as part of rhetorical dynamism. This project will build on these claims to move toward framing place not just as a conceptually generative heuristic for rhetoric, but as an enacted form of organized space invented by and generative of rhetoric. I want to interrogate how places both are enactments of and enact rhetoric, and the ways in which these enactments are ongoing, dynamic processes and constant sites of change and tension. A rhetorically dynamic place, then, has the characteristics of being rhetorically invented, having rhetorical tensions embedded within it, being fluid and subject to constant evolution, and being an active and reciprocal participant in these processes. While I detail each of these characteristics in the next chapter, I will take a moment here to discuss invention closely, since invention is a fraught term in rhetoric.

I am viewing invention under the less traditional light here, following Lefevre’s (1986) conception of invention as a social act and John Muckelbauer’s (2009) understanding of *topos* as a “reciprocal and generative fusion of body and place” (p. 136). I focus on invention’s processual nature to argue that invention is not a single action but something that is continually done and re-
done. I want to build on this, as well, to argue that non-humans impact invention as well.

Invention, then, is a recursive process that flows through humans and non-humans alike, which a view that moves away from the more conservative notions of invention as an anthropocentric act of pure creative force. As Simonson (2014) shows, this understanding follows “Hawhee, Muckelbauer, and others in advancing a post-humanist understanding of the way invention flows through agentic pathways beyond individuals, minds, and purposeful directiveness” (p. 311). I follow this tradition to argue that invention is something that happens as a distributed process arising from interactions between places, bodies, and language. Invention is here a dynamic and active process of continual discovery and re-figuration.

Places have been involved with invention from the beginning, even in more traditional notions. Since Aristotle, invention has been understood to draw on *topoi*, or commonplaces. Yates (1966) shows us that place was deeply linked to both memory and invention, especially in the study of mnemonics where places were invented as mnemonic devices. And while *topoi* are often interpreted as topics of arguments that we “discover” in the invention process, the word literally translates to “places.” Indeed Rai (2016) re-orient *topoi* as “places of invention” (p. 8) to capture the way that rhetorical forces circulate through places. Here, I want to follow Rickert (2007) and argue for a deeper relation between place and invention. Places are, as Rickert (2007) points out, necessary for invention; in his reading of Plato, Rickert traces the thought that ideas must first have a place in order to grow, and thus “place and making are conjoined” (p. 254). In other words, our ideas flow through and are both mapped onto and affected by place. This process goes in and out of place fluidly; it re-invents them consistently, and then places re-invent their contexts, and the cycle continues. As Rickert (2007) puts it, “there is a movement to invention, a going beyond boundaries and returning, that precludes its being fixed in place, even
though it simultaneously emerges in and through place” (p. 270). Refiguring invention in this way shows us that invention occurs not as a singular act of imposing a creator’s ideas onto an empty void, but a process of negotiation through which places and those actors that interact with them are made and remade. This process is a key characteristic of rhetorical dynamism, and I will elaborate more fully in chapter 1.

Rhetorical dynamism and its characteristics manifest in Youngstown in several ways. Broadly, the inventional decisions made in the city’s heyday are still apparent in many instances but often conflict with the present reality and with more recent decisions about how to use space and invent place. As an example of what I mean here, in the early 20th century the city vastly expanded residential areas and built new homes and neighborhoods as more people were migrating there for work. However, as the population declined, some neighborhoods now have only one or two people left in them, and the city no longer has the resources to support these neighborhoods, especially if they’re out of the way of larger and more populated areas. The city realized this and embraced a placemaking framework of shrinkage with the Youngstown 2010 Plan, which would focus on “providing services to the neighborhoods with the most people, converting abandoned land into green space, and supporting the burgeoning healthcare industry” (Campbell 2016). The city was moving forward with place-based decisions leaning towards using place to re-invent the city’s identity and change its common narratives.

Many of Youngstown’s issues can be understood through examining inventional moments like neighborhood expansion and smart shrinkage. Youngstown has sought, and still seeks, to rehabilitate its image and stem the further shrinkage of its population through spatial and platial decisions such as the revitalization of downtown and elimination of entire neighborhoods. This history provides a plethora of instances to study the rhetorical aspects of
places, and provides a city where intervention by rhetoricians and the implementation of placemaking practices would prove quite productive, especially in the two places I have chosen to look at.

Of the many places exhibiting clear markers of rhetorical dynamism, Westlake is one that very clearly shows the material impact of rhetorical processes. Furthermore, Westlake serves as a useful example theoretically because, from its inception as a slum-clearance project, the place is constituted as a process of invention that deeply impact the lives of Westlake’s residents and that made the place itself into arguments about what the area should be, how it related to its immediate surroundings, and the value and purpose of its community. Namely, these rhetorical moves, especially the many that promoted structural racism, asserted that this neighborhood should be segregated, was dangerous, and needed to be constantly policed. These moves also show clearly how the invention of a single place can be driven by wider social contexts such as structural racism.

On the other hand, Idora Park shows us how places are rhetorically invented and some of the tensions that occur when a place’s meaning is in flux. The debates and decisions surrounding its decline and destruction provide insight into conflicts over how publics should remember their pasts and how those memories should shape the future, especially when that memory is anchored to a place (Dickinson, Blair, and Ott 2010). Idora Park, then, acts as both a memory place and a metonym for arguments about the city’s future. This case shows how the materiality of an empty lot or a decaying ghost town of an amusement park remain dynamic in spite of or even because of its emptiness and decline. Indeed, as Casey (1997) points out, some argue that places become more powerful as they become less material, and this is certainly the case - the stark portrait of Idora’s overgrown and falling down coasters and buildings present a vivid and tangible rhetoric
of loss. Idora also shows clearly how a place can drive changes in its surroundings, as we can see a clear relation between Idora’s prosperity and the development and decline of the neighborhood surrounding the park.

A housing project and an amusement park are obviously different places that illustrate different rhetorical moves. They have different purposes and audiences, and their design reflects that. Yet each place is a site of rhetorical dynamism. They provide evidence for the rhetorical nature and plasticity of places. Westlake and Idora also capture some of the tensions inherent in the rhetoric of place, as well as some of the tensions playing out more broadly across Youngstown. Finally, in each instance, the rhetoric and invention of place led to material impacts for under-privileged and under-represented groups, and many of the choices that were made by those in power ignored the concerns of these groups at best and negatively affected them at worst. Westlake Terrace and Idora Park, then, are ideal cases for showing the potential power and use of rhetorical dynamism as a theoretical concept and methodological framework. Moreover, seeing Westlake Terrace and Idora Park’s rich archival history and current material state through the framework of rhetorical dynamism demonstrates how places are rhetorical, how placemaking is a practice of rhetorical invention, and how rhetoricians can productively intervene in placemaking practices.

**Chapter Outlines**

To begin this process, Chapter 1 builds my theory of rhetorical dynamism. To do so, I examine literature from primarily rhetoricians and cultural geographers. Here, I will fully outline the rhetorical processes of place, bringing together and expanding existing theoretical concepts to build rhetorical dynamism as a theory. First, I provide an outline of how rhetoricians have studied place thus far and how that body of scholarship informs my own thoughts. Next, I engage
with Rice (2012b), Rai (2016), and Rickert (2013) to build a foundation for rhetorical dynamism. Finally, I use that foundation to define rhetorical dynamism and provide a full description of each of its characteristics: invention and re-invention, rhetorical tensions, evolution and fluidity, and place as a reciprocal participant.

In Chapter 2, I examine rhetorical history more fully as a methodological framework for my study. I explain that using rhetorical history and archival methods within a framework of rhetorical dynamism helps us understand the evolution and re-invention of places over time, illustrating places’ fluidity, tension, and change. I also discuss in detail how the framework will be applied to each of my sites. This chapter will also explain what archival materials I have found and how these archival materials will be read and integrated into the study. To explore how these concepts manifest in Youngstown, I build a rhetorical history of Westlake Terrace and Idora Park in order to identify key moments and tensions in each of their continued re-inventions.

Chapter 3 details some of the key moments in Westlake Terrace’s history that map its rhetorical dynamism. Here, I unravel the tensions that were consistently present in Westlake, the multiple roles the project took on, and its movement between sets of binaries, such as slum vs. home or “nice” neighborhood vs. high-crime area. Westlake will be traced from its inception as a slum-clearance project through its destruction and replacement, identifying the rhetorical moves that were made along the way. Furthermore, I will point to clear connections between race, place, and invention in this chapter as they manifested in Westlake.

Similarly, Chapter 4 will Trace Idora Park’s history. The chapter will show Idora’s changing identity over its lifetime and then examine the rhetorical power that it still held even after it was burnt down. The debates that surrounded its destruction and its memorialization will
be interrogated as effects of its rhetorical dynamism. The chapter will also note the impact that Idora Park’s opening and closure had on its surrounding neighborhood to examine both its material impacts and the ways that inventions of places can lead to future inventions of other places.

Chapter 5 will bring together the two places to explore the similarities between them. This chapter will also examine the material impacts that placemaking can have, and argue that rhetoricians can and should productively intervene in placemaking. The dissertation thus ends with some criticism of the inventional practices in these two places and some recommendations for better placemaking practices based on the theory of rhetorical dynamism mapped out in the rest of the project basing these recommendations on the characteristics of the theory. Finally, the chapter details the implications of this study for rhetorical theory and points to areas for future research.

Notes

1 It’s important to note that many of these fires weren’t considered arsons or ever investigated as such; the arsons were widely suspected to be a mob racket, and the Fire Chief was later indicted as a bagman for one of the prominent mob families (Linkon and Russo 2002).

2 The crime rate in Youngstown is 44 per 1,000 residents; the violent crime rate in 6.45 per 1,000 residents, which is more than twice the state average and 50% higher than the national average. Perhaps the most striking number is the murder rate, which is 0.19, which is nearly four times the national murder rate (0.05) (NeighborhoodScout 2018).

3 Unfortunately, this often leaves a few people stranded in less populated neighborhoods. The city makes efforts to relocate these people, but sometimes they don’t want to or simply can’t move. This consequence is an issue that needs more attention in this process; people cannot simply be abandoned with no resources.
Chapter One: Rhetoric, Place, and Dynamism

In this chapter, I fully detail rhetorical dynamism and the need for this new term. First, I will review the relevant literature on rhetoric, space, and place. Next, I will turn to Rice (2012b), Rai (2016), and Rickert (2013), as their theories of ecologies, rhetorical force, and ambience are foundational to my thinking about rhetorical dynamism. These three theories will be put into conversation to show what they collectively add to an understanding of rhetoric and place, and then show why a new term is needed to continue building on this understanding. Then, I discuss how rhetorical dynamism extends these theories and provide a definition of the term, as well as its key characteristics. Finally, I will detail each of these characteristics to provide a full picture of rhetorical dynamism.

Rhetoric’s Spatial Turn

Drawing on diverse, interdisciplinary work from philosophy, geography, and other disciplines, rhetoric and composition scholars have begun to ask questions about the intersections of space, place, and rhetoric. This “spatial turn” in rhetorical theory has been ongoing for some time, tracing its roots to philosophers such as de Certeau and Lefebvre as well as to geographers such as Tuan. There are several major threads of scholarship related to place and rhetoric, namely:

- Place as setting for rhetoric
- Rhetorical practices of engaging with space and place
- Place and space as an organizational practice that affect public discourse
- Place as a *topos* for public discourse
- Place’s effect on identity (either individual or collective)
- The relationship between place and memory

These themes are important to outline this project because they help to showcase and organize the ways that rhetoricians have previously studied space and place. Much of this helps shape my thinking about space and place, and thus these threads of scholarship help to build toward rhetorical dynamism. Each of these are key areas of study, and in this section I will discuss each of them to provide a thorough portrait of how rhetoricians have studied place thus far.

**Place as Setting for Rhetoric**

A number of rhetoricians have studied the ways that places serve as the setting for different types or practices of rhetoric, which is an important starting point that moves toward places as integral to rhetoric. This thread of scholarship extends back to analysis of Ancient Greek rhetoric in examining the placial nature of *topos* (Rickert 2007) and the ways that the Agora functioned as a space for discourse (Fleming 2008). Fleming (2008) in particular argues that “Greek cities were built by and productive of rhetoric” (p. 53). The idea of the place of an argument being productive either of the argument or as a *topos* for that argument extends into contemporary analysis, as well. For instance, Endres and Senda-Cook (2011) examine how the location of protests can be a rhetorical choice on the part of the protestors, and the place can act to reinforce the protest’s message. The places where discourse occurs can also have a deep impact on that discourse; for example, Enoch (2008) explains that the physical space of classrooms are deeply gendered in a way that has made them “enclosed, private, and feminine” (p. 276). Each of these call attention to the importance of the place of rhetoric; where we practice rhetoric matters, and changes how we are able to do so.
The idea that place is important as the setting for rhetoric moves us toward an idea of place being rhetorical itself. These scholars help us understand that the where of rhetoric is key to how rhetoric is practiced. Though I will extend this scholarship to theorize how places are inherently rhetorical, this theme in rhetorical scholarship provides an important starting point for that idea.

**Rhetorical Practices of Engaging With Place**

Others have studied how we engage with place rhetorically, borrowing from de Certeau to examine the ways that people use strategies and tactics to navigate and “re-write” places. For instance, Topinka (2012) argues that walking can be a rhetorical strategy that resists constructions of space that attempt to restrict agency or impose ideology. And Rice (2009; 2012a) uses Detroit to illustrate writing and rhetoric as a network through which we can uncover the multiple meanings of a place. Here, meanings are mobile and distributed, and mobilizing spaces allows those meanings to travel. Rai (2016) explores this as well, asking how people can affect place through everyday practices. And Rice (2012b) discusses the ways that people engage or disengage with places through particular rhetorical subjectivities. Rhetoricians, then, have come to view everyday practices as ways to rhetorically engage with places.

Examining the ways that people engage with places rhetorically is a key part of understanding how places contribute to ongoing rhetorical processes and how they are rhetorically invented. Here, much of the focus is on how people orient themselves to place and how that orientation encourages particular forms of discourse. This is a key foundation for rhetorical dynamism, as it shows that people are engaged with places in rhetorical and suasive processes, and I extend this theme to understand the ways that places actively contribute to this suasiveness.
**Place as an Organizational Practice**

Places also organize people, and through this organization they impact how we can communicate. Cintron (1997) shows this through his ethnography of Angelstown, which provides us with a sense of place as “the management of the body politic, hence, public discussion” (p. 25). And Fleming (2008) argues likewise, claiming that “the physical organization of our neighborhoods, cities, and metropolitan areas affects our practices of political expression and debate - the ways we represent our histories to one another, render and negotiate our differences, and determine together our future” (p. xi). Places, then, are not just important for thinking about where we practice rhetoric, but also because the ways that people are implaced impacts how we can participate in public discourse. This organizational aspect of place is additionally important because of the ways that it can perpetuate inequalities; Rice (2012a) reminds us that place can be an oppressive construct that “keeps people in their place” (p. 13), and this is precisely why Fleming (2008) argues that place “matters most for those with the least” (p. 192). How we are implaced, then, not only deeply impacts our capacity as citizens but also shows the potential of place for social justice work.

Places’ ability to organize people is one of the ways in which they deeply affect our practices of rhetoric. This informs my own thinking because it shows the power of place to affect our relationships and the possibilities of discourse. Places’ organizational capacity is one that will come into play in my own theory as one of the ways that places are able to actively exercise rhetorical power.

**Place as a Topos for Public Discourse**

Places not only affect public discourse but are often used in it, as well. Often, places will be evoked as a *topos* to help make an argument. Because places have so much meaning built into
them, conjuring up the place immediately conjures all of the meanings constellating around it. For instance, Rai (2016) discusses how when one brings up Wilson Yard in Uptown Chicago, it immediately brings to bear ideas about democracy, public housing, safety, and home ownership. Similarly, Rice (2012b) explores how places in Austin come to be *topoi* generating a discourse of urban crisis. And Simpson (2009) shows us through Ybor City how these discursive constructions of place can flatten the place and present it as a simulacra that can lose some of its materiality and history. These all point to the evocative power of place in discourse; places have meanings and memories attached to them that circulate throughout public discourse.

Here, I extend the idea of place as a *topos* by examining the way that these associated meanings become sedimented within places and create a series of shifting rhetorical tensions. Place, then, is not only a *topos* in discourse, but the discourses within which places are evoked become attached to the place and become a part of that place’s rhetoric.

*Place’s Effect on Identity*

The meanings that are attached to places can also come to attach themselves to the people that live there. Dickerson (2012) argues that people and the places in which they live can become rhetorically synonymous; a place can create a metonymic relationship with the people who live there, and can even take on an ontological argument. Furthermore, Johnson et al (2017) show that places such as Ybor City have a defined cultural identity that can be read through the artifacts produced by those places. And Wright (2015) explores the way that places can be built as a reflection of collective identity. So, places are not only able to conjure meaning when they are brought up in discourse, they can also attach that meaning to others, which can have a real, material effect on people’s lives.
The theme of identity in the scholarship informs my thinking in two ways. First, it shows one of the ways in which places accrete meaning and become rhetorical - that is, identity is one of the *topoi* that place presents arguments about. Second, it is one of the ways that places work in reciprocity with their surrounding contexts. Places, people, and other actors work together to build a sense of cultural identity, and this reciprocity is one of the key ways that places develop a rhetoric.

**Relationship Between Place and Memory**

One of the ways in which places gather and project meaning is through public memory, and this has been one of the major areas that rhetoricians have used to explore place. The connection between place and memory has been present since Ancient Greece; indeed, in Yates’ (1966) history of mnemonic systems, the art of memory depended on creating mnemonic associations with places, and this connection runs from Simonides to Bruno. More contemporarily, Dickinson et al (2010) explicitly link rhetoric, memory, and place, arguing that public memory is fundamentally rhetorical and is manifested in places. Likewise, Wright (2005) uses cemeteries to examine public memory and place, claiming that the cemetery affects public memory practices by being a material space of loss that also creates what we consider as our available past. And Huyssen (2003) understands certain places like the Berlin Wall and Times Square as palimpsests on which public memory is continually written and re-written. Many rhetoricians, then, understand memory, especially collective memory, as that which maps meanings on place and as the mechanism by which we receive meanings from places.

Studies on place and memory are foundational in rhetoric, and they deeply contribute to my understanding of places and their rhetorics. Here, I understand memory as one of the vehicles that drives the sedimentation of rhetorical meanings in places. I do contend, however, that this is
simply one of the ways in which places build their rhetorics, and we must continue to build a fuller picture of those processes. Memory, after all, is only one of the canons of rhetoric, and I argue that we can use others as well, such as invention, to understand places’ rhetorics.

**Building a Foundation: Ecologies, Force, and Ambience**

We have, then, productively analyzed the relationships between place, publics, discourse, and memory, albeit from a decidedly anthropocentric perspective. As Larsen and Johnson (2017) note, much of the work done thus far describes place as “the platform for human agency, the locale for social interaction, or the colorful stage upon which human meaning, history, and experience are set” (p. 17). But places affect our relationships with ourselves and our surroundings, both discursively and in a material, real sense. Some argue that places affect our ontological understanding by changing how we think of our place in the world and how we inhabit our surroundings; Larsen and Johnson (2017), for instance, argue that “place convenes our being together, bringing human and nonhuman communities into the shared predicaments of life, livelihood, and land” (p. 1). Combining these various ideas about places tells us that places both have a deep and material impact on our everyday, lived experience of the world and that they impact our capacities as citizens in the public sphere. Places tell us something about who we are, which in turn modifies our ability to participate in public discourse, which place also serves as the platform for.

The threads of scholarship above tell us much about the ways that places can affect publics or how publics make use of places, which is a key aspect of places’ rhetoricity. Rhetoricians have productively studied how places serve as a platform and *topos* for public discourse, how people engage with places rhetorically, how places can serve as a control mechanism, and how memory, place, and rhetoric are deeply intertwined. What this brings us to
is an understanding of place as a way to help organize and make sense of public discourse. This scholarship points to places as either an object of rhetoric or as a heuristic for understanding rhetoric. Yet they simultaneously point to places as inextricable from rhetoric and our practice of it, which I see as a disconnect that needs to be addressed. If place and rhetoric are so deeply intertwined, then this relationship must be more than places serving as a platform for rhetoric, as a text to be read, or as helpful in understanding discourse. Rather, places should be thought of as having a rhetoric of their own, rather than as a static object that rhetoric is done to.

I want to extend this scholarship by adding to it that places have their own rhetoric. As Relph (1976) tells us, places are a “form of communication in which all the elements may have messages” (p. 34). And I claim that this rhetoricity extends beyond public discourse (though that is certainly one platform for it), and that memory is not the only avenue through which places accrete meaning (though it is one of them). I claim that places are both invented for rhetorical purposes and generative of their own rhetoric, a rhetoric that is fluid and evolving, full of tension between multiple meanings, and reflective of a place’s context. To help build toward this understanding, I look at Rice (2012b), Rai (2016), and Rickert (2013), whose theories specifically show that places are agentive bodies that are sites of rhetorical invention and the development of public subjectivities. These three scholars provide the most relevant connection to my own work, as they provide a foundation on which I build and diverge.

Ecologies and Subjectivity

Rice (2012b) uses Austin, TX as a case study to interrogate development, gentrification, and urban sprawl discourse. Using this case, Rice (2012b) outlines three ways that publics rhetorically work against development initiatives: injury claims (the public is injured by displacement in some way, and these claims usually map a longer history of social wrongdoing),
memory claims (epideictic claims memorializing what a place used to be), and equivalence claims (which take the position that gentrification is both good and bad and that these negate each other). These claims become the *topoi* for discourse of urban crisis in Austin; they are at once sites for invention, driven by place, and for the creation of what Rice (2012b) calls the “exceptional public subject.” This subjectivity is one that does not consider itself outside of public life, but also does not participate or intervene productively; it is somewhere between publicity and isolation or withdrawal, and is connected to the public only through affective attachments. Rice’s primary claim, then, is that we must focus on cultivating different subjectivities that encourage interaction with the public and intervention in public issues.

Furthermore, Rice (2012b), understands rhetoric as ecological rather than situational (as traditionally conceived), which helps us see rhetoric as constantly changing and fluid. In her ecologies, the place, those affected by and affecting it, and the places and spaces surrounding it all form an interconnected whole where each part is constantly interacting with and changing the other (Rice 2012b). *Ecologies*, then, help us understand places not as isolated but as interconnected with their wider contexts, publics, and exigencies. To understand a place’s rhetoric, one must understand this entire ecology and how each part is participating in the overall process of rhetoric.

Rice’s work here provides several key aspects to understanding the rhetoric of place. First, the claims that she discusses are invented in conjunction with places themselves, pointing to the capacity of places to participate in the invention process. Second, understanding places as participants in ecological rhetoric helps us understand them as fluid, evolutionary, and deeply affected by their contexts. However, the focus here is very much on the way that people talk about and use places in public discourse. To move beyond this focus on public discourse as seen
in Rice’s work, scholars such as Rai (2016) move to a focus on the more dynamic aspects of places. Rai’s (2016) work expands Rice’s ideas by that show how places are participants in rhetorical processes and shows that places are forceful and active.

**Rhetorical Force**

Focusing on a study of Uptown Chicago, Rai (2016) seeks to understand the complex workings of democracy in public discourse. Rai (2016) argues that spaces, places, and the bodies that inhabit them have *rhetorical force* that determines their effect in the world. As Rai (2016) puts it, as a place has “more arguments, stories, experiences, human energies, and public memories become implicated in and tethered to its evocation, [it] increasingly absorb[s] and vibrate[s] with *rhetorical force*” (p. 5), which shows us that places absorb the social effects and meanings that are invented for them and then are active in projecting those outward. Rhetorical force also helps us understand that places are remade constantly as they accrete meaning. As they are remade, they become, to Rai, symbols that have the power to project the entire network of meanings that have become associated with them.

Rai (2016) also argues that invention can be understood as a complication of place, wherein physical places can discursively become commonplaces, or *topoi*, from which arguments are made. In this conception, democratic and rhetorical ideals are materialized in the everyday practices of people in places. Democracy is an ambivalent concept, here, however; it is full of paradoxes and rife with competing publics who use appeals to democracy itself to forward incommensurate viewpoints based on moral and ethical grounds. Within this milieu, Rai recommends finding the places of invention in the kairotic, exigent democratic situation as it is situated materially and rhetorically in order to create civic change.
Places, for Rai, become commonplaces onto which arguments are mapped; furthermore, these commonplaces can only be mobilized within the kairotic contextual situation in which they operate. Rai shows this through her exploration of Wilson Yard; this space becomes a *topoi* onto which was mapped arguments about gentrification, housing, class, ownership, etc. Furthermore, Rai (2016) argues that inhabiting a place is key to understanding its rhetoric, an important methodological claim.

Again, however, the focus here is very much on discourse. *Rhetorical force* moves us closer to the ways that places can be active participants in rhetoric, but in Rai’s formulation, rhetorical force is something that seems to operate exclusively through discourse. In other words, places project their rhetoric into the way that people talk about those places, and that force continually circulates as people use *topoi* related to the place. So, while Rai helps us understand places as more active and forceful in the process of rhetoric, we are still sitting with public discourse, just as in Rice’s work. Scholars still need to work to understand the other ways and arenas in which places are rhetorical, and Rickert is useful here in helping us understand the ways that places are active participants in an ongoing process of rhetoric.

**Ambience**

Rickert (2013) argues that external environments are integral to practices of rhetoric. His concept of *ambience* reminds us of the agency of places and other nonhuman actors. Ambience moves us beyond understanding rhetoric as a person or persons participating in discourse, showing that rhetoric is inseparable from the entire context, or ecology, surrounding any rhetorical act performed by any actor, human or nonhuman. Because of the inseparability of environment from rhetoric, the places in which we practice rhetoric necessarily have a deep impact on that practice, and indeed can have suasive power of their own.
Ambience helps us move between the subject/object dichotomy that pervades much of the scholarship on place, wherein places are inchoate objects acted upon or talked about by people. Rather, for Rickert, as Herndl and Zarlengo (2018) explain, “rhetoric encompasses not only human intention and language, but also the material environs in which we dwell as co-producers of meaning, perception and interpretation” (p. 54). Here, place has a distinct agency of its own as a co-participant in a processual rhetoric. Humans and places (and other non-human actors) create meaning together, rather than any single actor creating meanings and projecting them outwards. Thus, place is both the grounds of our lived, embodied experience and an agentive actor participating persuasively at the scene of invention to create a shared understanding of the world.

Ambience responds to the anthropocentric nature of previous scholarship by putting humans and nonhumans in conversation and making them co-participants in the process of rhetoric. The ambient and distributed nature of Rickert’s (2013) theory allows to see place as joining together the physical, social, and symbolic and to understand the persuasive nature of this joining. Places are indeed material artifacts that are also overlain by symbolism and wrapped up in social context. And while they may not have intentionality, they do have agency, if we read agency as a capacity to effect change. What ambience does not do, however, is capture the invented nature of places or the tensions that occur in the process of distributed meaning-making. Nor does it capture the fluid and evolutionary nature of places.

**Moving Toward Dynamism**

Taken together, Rice (2012b), Rai (2016), and Rickert (2013) show us that places should be understood in relation to their surrounding contexts and that they are able to contribute to the process of rhetoric in tandem with other actors. They show us that places encourage particular
forms of rhetorical subjectivity that should be understood ecologically (Rice 2012b), that places are sites of invention for rhetorical discourse through the rhetorical force they exert (Rai 2016), and that they are an active and agentive participant in a distributed process of rhetoric (Rickert 2013). These theoretical lenses show that places do indeed have a rhetoric; they have an ambient rhetorical force that is dependent upon their ecology. Furthermore, these each show in different ways that places are actors or participants at the scene of rhetoric and that they are at least involved in the process of rhetoric. These theorists go together by helping us understand the importance of context and showing us that places do contribute to rhetoric as active participants, in discourse as well as in other rhetorical processes.

However, while these provide a foundation, I want to build upon that foundation to capture the full dynamics of place. What we do not find here is an explication of the tensions inherent in the rhetorical processes of places, or the ways that places can be generative of rhetoric. Finally, they do not show the fluidity of places or the way that they constantly evolve through a processual rhetoric. They do not quite go far enough in showing us that places are dynamically evolving, generative rhetorical actors produced by invention processes and rhetorical tensions. For that reason, we need to further build on these theories to more fully understand how places themselves are rhetorical.

When read together, then, Rice (2012b), Rai (2016), and Rickert (2013) move toward a better understanding of places and their rhetorics, but we can build on them to more fully capture the fluid, evolutionary, reciprocal, and active nature of place, and to see how place’s rhetorics are contested and filled with tension. Thus, we need to continue to find new terms and concepts to add to our lexicon and fully understand the relationship between place and rhetoric. To that end, I turn to rhetorical dynamism as a term that helps fill some of those gaps.
Rhetorical Dynamism

To build upon the limitations of previous scholarship as I have described them and to more fully understand places and rhetoric, I propose the term *rhetorical dynamism*. For something to have rhetorical dynamism means that it is an active participant in an ongoing process of producing rhetoric, a process that is defined by shifting contexts and tensions. In a rhetorically dynamic place, then, the following characteristics must be present:

- Invention and re-invention
- Rhetorical tensions
- Fluidity and evolution
- Place as reciprocal participant

Rhetorical dynamism builds on previous scholarship by asking us to attend to the ways that places’ rhetorics dynamically evolve over time in conjunction with their contexts and interlocutors. Dynamism does this work in several ways. First, dynamism complicates other theorists’ notions of the link between invention and place. Others have primarily explored place as a grounds for invention or a complicating factor in the invention of public discourse; in other words, invention has been viewed rather anthropocentrically. I view invention as more of a sociocultural practice driven by shifting contexts and everyday practices. The invention of place is an ongoing process wherein places are constantly made and remade through emergent rhetorical processes.

Dynamism also asks to attend to places as living histories that are still being written. Many studies might discuss some short history of a place, but for the most part examine the place in current context; however, Lefebvre (1992) reminds us that “if there is a productive process, then we are dealing with history” (p. 46), and Casey (1993) argues that “place is historical” (p.
Places are historic because, to fully understand them, we must understand the way that their rhetorics have shifted and changed overtime in a dynamic invention process. Places are “dynamic and fluid” (Adams et al, 2001, p. xxi), and are “emergent or becoming” (Relph, 1976, p. 3). Rhetorical dynamism asks us to attend to this dynamic and emergent nature of places, to sit with them as they go through processes of continual change, and to continually turn back to the place to find the moments of invention and change embedded within it.

In the rest of this chapter, I will draw on relevant scholarship to expand on this definition of rhetorical dynamism by explaining each of the theory’s characteristics in turn.

**Invention and Re-invention**

Rhetorical dynamism first posits that places are invented through rhetoric and iteratively re-invented by rhetoric. I am viewing invention as a recursive process that flows through humans and non-humans alike, a view that moves away from more conservative notions of invention as an anthropocentric act of pure creative force. As Simonson (2014) shows, this follows Rickert, “Hawhee, Muckelbauer, and others in advancing a post-humanist understanding of the way invention flows through agentic pathways beyond individuals, minds, and purposeful directiveness” (p. 311). This process goes in and out of place fluidly; it re-invents them consistently, and then places re-invent their contexts in a cyclical and iterative manner. As Rickert (2007) puts it, “there is a movement to invention, a going beyond boundaries and returning, that precludes its being fixed in place, even though it simultaneously emerges in and through place” (p. 270). Invention, then, is a dynamic and active process of continual discovery and refiguration. Furthermore, places are not simply one of the things invented but, as Rickert points out, necessary for invention; in his reading of Plato, Rickert traces the thought that ideas must first have a place in order to grow, and thus “place and making are conjoined” (p. 254).
other words, our ideas flow through and are both mapped onto and affected by place, and
invention occurs not as a singular act of imposing a creator’s ideas onto an empty void but a
process of negotiation through which places and those actors that interact with them are made
and remade.

Places are an invented form of space, yet also invent space. By this I mean that places are
invented from empty, abstract space, or as Casey (1997) put it “void,” which “names the
circumstance of unoccupied space” (n.p.). When a place is invented, it “names the situation of
occupied space; it refers to the location of a sensible thing in space” (Casey, 1997, n.p., emphasis
in original). A place is invented to morph space into a tangible form that we understand, a
rhetorical artifact that situates us within the world. Space is then refigured as the (still-empty)
stretches between places. As Casey (1997) says, “space makes room for place” (n.p., emphasis in
original), and place then makes space mean something different. This initial inventive process is
key as a starting point for the dynamic rhetorical processes that unfold thereafter.

Place is what occurs when empty space is produced into specific, individualized social
space with a specific purpose and audience. This is an extension of Lefebvre (1992), who argues
that “space is undoubtedly produced” (p. 75), and I answer that it is produced as or into place.
My reading of Lefebvre (1992) brings me to this conclusion; the “productive process” (p. 46)
that Lefebvre talks about is invention in this interpretation. Furthermore, Lefebvre (1992) is clear
that “space is not a thing but rather a set of relations between things” (p. 83), and Tuan (1977)
adds that “the human being, by his mere presence, imposes a schema on space” (p. 37). Those
things and schemas are places, as “every social space then, once duly demarcated and oriented,
implies a superimposition of certain relations upon networks of named places” (Lefebvre, 1992,
p. 193). Social spaces are the relations between places, which must first be invented. Once places
are named as such, then relations build between them and this is social space. Social spaces are what pull places together at various levels into neighborhoods, cities, states, and so on - and thus are important here as the connective tissue that holds places together via their relations to one another.

Place is thus invented as a way to centralize and coordinate networks of relations and meanings. Heidegger realized this as well; in his figuration, the place comes first, and does so by both the material aspects of its being and the meanings we build into it. We then understand space in reference to those places. Heidegger (1971) explains this by using an example of a bridge, saying that “the locale is not already there before the bridge is. Before the bridge stands, there are of course many spots along the stream that can be occupied by something. One of them proves to be a locale, and does so because of the bridge” (p. 356, emphasis in original). In other words, we first have empty, abstract space that means nothing of its own accord. Once a bridge is built, that specific spot on the stream becomes a place, now laden with meaning and becoming a rhetorical artifact. As Heidegger (1971) explains, “building fulfills its nature by erecting places through the joining of their spaces” (p. 360). Only after this can we have space in the sense of the social space that Lefebvre discusses: “only things that are locales in this manner allow for spaces” (Heidegger, 1971, p. 356). In this way, “spaces receive their essential being from locales and not from ‘space’” (Heidegger, 1971, p. 356, emphasis in original). Space receives its meaning from the invention of place; before place, space can have no meaning for Heidegger. After place, space is the connections between places and so helps define them going forward.

Upon the initial invention of the place, there is always a purpose that the place is meant for; this is a rhetorical act, meant to convince people to use the place in just such a way. Yet sometimes the re-invention of place is almost immediate, as people miss the original purpose or
re-appropriate the place straight away. For instance, Barthes (1997) discusses just such a case with the Eiffel Tower: “Eiffel saw his Tower in the form of a serious object, rational, useful; men return it to him in the form of a great baroque dream which quite naturally touches on the borders of the irrational” (p. 3). The Tower was always, to Barthes, a pure signifier, laden with meaning, but it was also “a form in which men unceasingly put meaning … without this meaning ever being finite and fixed; who can say what the Tower will be for humanity tomorrow?” (p. 2). This reminds us that, while originary invention is important, re-invention is a key aspect of rhetorical dynamism as well, as it propels a fluid and changing rhetoric around the place.

The process of re-invention is one that is ever-ongoing and makes places the dynamic entities that they are. Relph (1976) reminds us that “places are emergent or becoming; with historical and cultural change new elements appear and old elements disappear. Thus places have a distant historical component” (p. 3). This re-invention both helps shape places anew and is informed by the already-present rhetorical dynamism of places. As McFarlane (2011) puts it, “the city is ultimately a project of becoming, of unfolding events and struggles” (p. 2). The concept that both Relph and McFarlane point out, that places are emergent and becoming entities that change with their contexts, point us to the dynamic processes of rhetorical invention constantly taking place in them.

Places invent themselves and are also invented by a variety of other actors, including both people and their surrounding/preceding contexts. This is how places can, as Molotoch, Freudenberg, and Paulsen (2000) put it, “make themselves up” (p. 819), while also serving, for Relph (1977) as “focuses of intention” (p. 43) and expressions of cultural values and concerns (Johnson et al 2017). The process of invention exists and is necessarily filled with tension and
recursion in part because of these two competing aspects and because of the way that they fill places with meaning and communicative, persuasive power.

**Rhetorical Tensions**

The tensions embedded in places by competing inventions is the next characteristic of rhetorical dynamism. As different actors work to invent places for their own means, the place becomes laden with meanings that are often competing with one another (Rai 2016). The communicative power of places arises out of these contested meanings, as they become sedimented within the place and coalesce to form entirely new arguments. This creates the dynamic rhetorical situation surrounding places; the differing meanings and constant negotiation that make up a place’s rhetoric cause it to be subject to constant and dynamic change. Since these tensions are so important, I turn to theorists in cultural geography and rhetoric to gain a deeper understanding of these tensions and their role in rhetorical dynamism.

Cultural geographers and others have for some time understood places to be communicative artifacts. Adams et al (2001) tell us that “geographers working in the human tradition … continue to explore how worlds, places, landscapes, meanings, and human experiences are socially constructed and help constitute specific cultural contexts” (p. xvi). This helps answer Tuan’s (1977) call for us to pay more attention to what I read as the invention of place “as a process of making up minds, of communication and learning” (p. 104), a call that has been answered by Relph (1976), McFarlane (2011), and others. For Tuan (1977), place “clarifies social roles and relations” (p. 102). Place, then, communicates to us and makes arguments about our social situation and about stratification of social hierarchies. Furthermore, “in some societies the building is the primary text for handing down a tradition, for presenting a view of reality” (Tuan, 1977, p. 110). In this way, places are also communicating to us our pasts and providing a
sense of who we are and how we have gotten to the present moment, which scholars in rhetoric have understood as the relationship between place and memory (Dickinson et al 2010). These acts of communication are key, especially as they change or become sedimented over the course of the dynamic changes that places undergo.

Places have specific meanings and messages embedded within them, which change and shift continually (Relph 1976). These messages are fundamentally rhetorical and communicate specific arguments, values, and interests to us. This rhetorical act begins at the point of initial invention, as the act of building “reflects the interests and concerns of the cultural group of which it is an expression” (Relph, 1976, p. 22). This sociocultural process leads to these interests becoming sedimented, such that place is able to “differentiate the world into qualitatively distinct centres and give a structure that both reflects and guides experience” (Relph, 1976, p. 143). These processes are constant for Relph (1976), especially in terms of the reciprocal identities of places and those who dwell in them. Relph (1976) argues that “the relationship between community and place is indeed a very powerful one in which each reinforces the identity of the other” (p. 34). So the rhetorical acts that constitute places are not performed once at the initial moment of invention, but are constantly under revision in the tensions between places and their inhabitants. This view helps build on rhetoricians’ foundations in understanding places as sites of rhetorical engagement (Topinka 2012; Rai 2016) and understand how places and their inhabitants continually co-create meaning and tension (Herndl and Zarlengo 2018).

The meanings embedded within places and the ways that they shift, evolve, and compete are one of the ways in which places can “generate a rhetoric” (Rice, 2012a, p. 3). Likewise, Said (2000) argues that “landscape, buildings, streets, and the like are overlain and, I would say, even covered entirely with symbolic associations” (p. 180). These meanings and symbolic
associations go beyond places as simply texts to be read, as they have often been viewed; Huyssen (2003) tells us that “the trope of the city as book or as text has existed as long as we have had modern city literature” (p. 50), but Rice (2012a) reminds us via Lefebvre that places are “an open text formed by those who engage with it” (p. 7, emphasis added). Rice’s claim reminds us that the meanings of places are deeply rhetorical, open-ended, and contested; they are full of rhetorical tension, rather than static texts. As Olwig (2001) points out, “the landscape is ... contested both as an actual place and as the figurative site of an ongoing sociopolitical discourse concerning the relationships between community, self, and place” (p. 94). This contestation and the tensions that come with it are both embedded within places from the outside and generated by places as rhetorical actors. When we map arguments onto places, as Rai (2016) describes, we fill them with meaning and with the tensions inherent in those arguments, and the place itself takes on and projects those arguments outward, conjoining them with whatever arguments have previously been made. These symbolic associations meld together and out of these rhetorical tensions comes something entirely new that is unique to each specific place.

Places’ identities “are always unfixed, contested, and multiple” (Massey, 1994, p. 5). They are not monolithic and static structures of meaning, but sites that people constantly attach meaning to. The meanings that people attach to place exist, often incongruently, alongside each other, and rhetorical tensions arise as people constantly try to negotiate these various meanings. This tension, then, and the continual evolution and negotiation of it, is a key part of what drives the rhetorical dynamism of places.

Fluidity and Evolution

Due to the continual processes of invention that places undergo, and because the rhetorical tensions embedded within them are continually shifting, places are fluid and constantly
evolving. This fluidity is key to rhetorical dynamism. As Tuan (1977) puts it, place is constituted by “a process with many aspects and contributing events” (p. 110). Other cultural geographers have alternatively understood place as fluid and dynamic (Adams et al 2001) or as emergent, with historical components that are key to understanding them. Here, I explore some of these theorists to understand the fluid and evolving nature of places.

Rhetoricians have also understood place as something that is defined by change. Fleming (2008) views place as “plastic” (p. xi), and Rice (2012a) argues against seeing place as static. For Rice (2012a), resisting the urge to think of places as static is important because doing so is a power move often meant to “keep things in their place” (p. 13). In other words, if a place is seen as static, it is done so as a move to keep order and control of whatever is in that place. Rather, for Rice (2012a), place should be seen as “an open text formed by those who engage with it” (p. 7), as something that is continually remade.

While rhetoricians have discussed place as dynamic or fluid (Fleming 2008; Rice 2012a), we have yet to fully capture the dynamic re-inventions that places go through. Part of the reason that I highlight the fluidity and evolutionary nature of places is that we need more studies that engage with the entire inventional and rhetorical history of places. Indeed, Tuan (1977) calls for more studies that look at building and construction “as a process of making up minds, of communication and learning” (p. 104). Yet the majority of studies that explore places use ethnographic methods that can only capture a place at a particular moment. To see how places are dynamic, though, we need a full picture of the recursive and iterative processes that places undergo throughout their history; we need to see the ways that they have evolved. As Lefebvre (1992) argues, “the history of space cannot be limited to the study of the special moment” under study, but “must deal also with the global aspect - with the modes of production as generalities
covering specific societies with their particular histories and institutions” (p. 48). We must understand places as dynamic and fluid, and to do so we must understand their entire histories, and I’ll touch on this more in the next chapter as I discuss my methods. For now, however, it’s enough to say that places are fluid processes of becoming, and are active participants in this process.

**Place as Reciprocal Participant**

Another key component of place’s dynamism is their active nature in rhetorical processes. Places are participants in both the processes of invention and re-invention that make them up and in circulating the contested meanings that they hold. And they are active in a nature that is reciprocal with their contexts. As Larsen and Johnson (2017) put it, quite simply, “place has agency” (p. 1). One way in which places exercise this agency is through rhetoric (Herndl & Zarlengo 2018), by contributing to a process of communication as an active participant with suasive power all their own. Here, I explore what agency means for place and how places exercise their agency.

It is important to define what I mean by agency here. I am using a limited view of agency here informed primarily by Latour and Rickert. When ascribing agency to places and claiming that they have an active role in rhetoric, I do not mean to say that places have intentionality, nor do I mean to anthropomorphize them. Rather, I see agency as a capacity to act, and I see places as having that capacity. Further, I see agency as something that is distributed (Johnson and Johnson 2018), and that emerges from relationships between various actors (Lecomte 2013). Places exercise agency, then, by participating in a co-equal manner with humans in processes of assembling and re-assembling meaning. As Larsen and Johnson (2017) put it, place “facilitates dialogue and relationship across ontological divides” (p. 13). Following this line of thinking,
places are active because of the ways that they inform and impact human decision-making and rhetorical processes. Humans and non-humans are entangled in an agentive process of rhetoric in which they each exercise their communicative practices. This makes places a key actor in the dynamic processes that make them up.

Rhetoricians have begun to use Bruno Latour and other materialists such as Jane Bennett to describe the way that non-human actors participate in rhetoric. Rai (2016), for instance, explores “how nonhuman public agencies, affective forces, and visual rhetorics constitute the everyday democracies I observe” (p. 12). Furthermore, Rice (2009) draws on Latour’s concepts of the network to argue for the distributed nature of meaning and agency. And Topinka (2012) discusses the ways in which place’s materiality can work in tandem with human actions to restrict or expand agency.

Much of our thinking about the active power of place comes from Latour. For Latour (2012), cities and places (among other non-human actors) are defined by the active relationships that they hold with other entities. The relationships that Latour continuously unfold throughout his work are defined by action, and, as Lecomte (2013) summarizes it, “humans have no privilege over non-human entities in that respect” (p. 466). These relations are material as much as they are invented by humans. Indeed, these relations are what define places for Latour; places “are defined not by spatial boundaries or scale, but by types and lines of activity” (2010, p. 6). Using Paris as an example, Latour (2012) argues that we should resist top-down views of cities as static, inactive, totalized, or objective. This is in fact a political move meant to situate and manage space. Yet Paris as a place is multiple, contested, and mobile. Latour (2012) argues that we have composed and arranged Paris in maps and satellite images, but we must give the ability to compose Paris back to Paris itself, by “not naturalizing or socializing it, or turning it into a
simple question of words” (Latour 2012). Ultimately, for Latour, what is important is the way that humans and non-humans, including places, are co-participants in a relational process that drives actions, and thus drives dynamism.

Places exercise their agency in reciprocity between places and their contexts. This is key to the way that places evolve through rhetorical processes; they do so in a reciprocal give-and-take with other actors and with their overall ecology. As Adams et al (2001) put it, “place … highlights the weaving together of social relations and human-environment interactions,” and places also “are socially constructed and help constitute specific cultural contexts” (p. xvi). Places both reflect and construct their contexts in a relationship of shifting tension. In other words, place, context, and other actors are co-constitutive. They work together in an active process that continually changes the place, its surroundings, and the humans and non-humans in that place.

Places, people, regions, and cultures are caught up in an emergent and ongoing process in which they each continually inform, construct, and reflect one another. This is important because these reciprocal relationships are what produce the dynamic changes that propel places through their various evolutions. And these processes, when taken together, are productive of both rhetorical changes as well as material changes.

**Developing a Heuristic**

Taking each of these characteristics together, then, I argue that places are active participants in the processes that invent them and embed meaning and tension within them. If invention and meaning-making are recursive and iterative processes, place contributes to these processes as much as any other actor does. Places can indeed invent themselves, can create new meanings and arguments. They have agentive capacity, which is reciprocal to their contexts and
to other actors, and this agentive capacity drives change in places and makes them fluid and dynamic.

Rhetorical dynamism and its constituent characteristics can be used productively as a heuristic for analyzing places, which will be demonstrated in Chapters 3 and 4. By understanding the dynamic processes that places undergo, we can more fully understand the rhetorical processes that have invented them and how various meanings have come to be embedded within them. Furthermore, we can put these into conversation with a place’s surroundings to understand how they have informed one another. Uncovering these rhetorical processes can point to ways that places have been driven by, for instance, systems of power or systemic inequality, and can help us begin to address some of the material impacts of places’ rhetorics.

Understanding places as rhetorical inventions and dynamic entities is important for rhetoricians because the meanings of places and the ways in which they are invented have material consequences. The theoretical framework outlined above and in my introduction can lead us to better rhetorical practice that can address these consequences. This theory has potential to help us understand the ways that we invent places, which can in turn help us find best practices for future inventions of place. By examining what has been done previously, whether right or wrong or somewhere in between, we can learn lessons that can help us create places with a rhetoric aimed toward equality, justice, diversity, mobility, flexibility, and hospitality. In the next chapter, I will lay out the reasons that this study constructs a rhetorical history using archival methods, a methodology which is ideal for studying the rhetorical dynamism of places.
Chapter Two: Archives, Histories, and Dynamism

The methodology for this study builds on the research gaps identified in the previous chapter and works in service of illustrating the theory of rhetorical dynamism. To show how rhetorical dynamism works in Youngstown’s places, any methodology must be able to answer the following questions, which break out the characteristics of rhetorical dynamism:

1. How are places invented and iteratively re-invented?
2. How do places and their rhetorics change over time?
3. How do the inventions of and changes in places relate to or interact with the contexts surrounding those places?

Because rhetorical dynamism illustrates the distinctly historical nature of places (Lefebvre 1992), and because these questions explicitly ask about how places evolve over time, the methods for this study need to account for the entire historicity of the places I examine. To this end, I looked to rhetorical criticism and rhetorical history as the grounding for my study and then turned toward archival methods. This combination of methodology and method enabled a research practice that allowed me to construct a rhetorical history of two of Youngstown’s places through archival research methods. I view places as emergent arguments with a history of rhetorical decisions that are necessary in understanding the place as it has evolved and is currently situated.

Relph (1976) reminds us that “places are emergent or becoming: with historical and cultural change new elements appear and old elements disappear. Thus places have a distinct historical component” (p. 3). To understand the places that I examine, then, I must look to each of their histories in full to see how they have evolved, what changes and inventions have happened, and
how these inventions are situated in surrounding contexts. To do so, I visited the archives to
construct a history of each place built from textual artifacts of that place - creating a history for
each that can help illustrate the fullness of their dynamism.

**Rhetorical History**

In this study, I take rhetorical history as a methodological frame that seeks to understand
the history of a particular context through the ongoing rhetorical processes that have animated
that context over a given period. In the same way that I understand places to be constituted by
dynamic rhetorical processes, Turner (1998) writes that “rhetorical history offers us the
opportunity to see rhetoric as a perpetual and dynamic process of social construction,
maintenance, and change rather than as an isolated, static product” (p. 4). To understand this
process, rhetorical history mixes rhetorical criticism and analysis with historical methods, and
this joining can “contribute to an understanding of the complex latitudinal and longitudinal
processes of social influence” (Turner, 1998, p. 4). Here, rhetorical criticism uses a historical
lens to both describe and interpret the object of study, understanding history and historical
artifacts as processual narratives that can be analyzed just like any other rhetorical narrative to
provide useful implications for contemporary practice.

To do this, rhetorical history seeks to “understand the context through the messages that
reflect and construct that context” (Turner, 1998, p. 2). Here, my context is Youngstown, and the
messages that reflect and construct it are its constituent places, Westlake Terrace and Idora Park.
Studying these through a rhetorical-historical lens will allow me to understand the way that these
places have evolved in concert with (and at times in resistance to) the spaces surrounding them,
as well as provide space for criticism and interpretation of specific moments in this evolution,
especially as they lead to some of the deep problems facing Youngstown.
Many understand history as an objective enterprise, one that seeks to transparently represent the facts of what actually happened in the past. For this reason, rhetorical history has at times been viewed as not critical enough to belong in the realm of historical studies. Yet Zarefsky (1998) argues that the distinction between rhetorical history and rhetorical criticism is an unnecessary one. For Zarefsky (1998), historical scholarship, with its selection of evidence and interaction between scholar and archive, is already an interpretive enterprise. For this reason, “the study of history is essentially rhetorical” (Turner, 1998, p. 8), and “good historical scholarship is also critical” (Zarefsky, 1998, p. 21). Thus, here I do not simply present the history of my sites as they “really were,” claiming to impart universal truths about their pasts. Rather, I provide interpretation and criticism of the moments of invention that constitute my sites’ histories.

In this study, the rhetorical histories of Westlake Terrace and Idora Park will be, for the most part, structured narratively, with my own criticism and interpretation interspersed throughout the narrative to connect moments in these sites’ history to the characteristics of rhetorical dynamism. Gronbeck (1998) argues that this narrative structure is common in rhetorical histories, which “identif[y] and organize a series of past events so that they can be narrativized” (p. 52). Likewise, Gaillet (2010) points to the importance of storytelling for historical and archival work. For Gaillet (2010), “storytelling - with a purpose, based on painstaking research, tied to a particular cultural moment, making clear the teller’s prejudices - is the real task of the historian” (p. 36). Here, telling the stories of Westlake Terrace and Idora Park will allow me to show how they are each illustrative of rhetorical dynamism. What’s more, the process of building these narratives has allowed me to further refine and understand rhetorical dynamism, showing that “doing rhetorical history generates theoretical as well as historical
knowledge” (Ball, 1998, p. 70). Pairing the historical, chronological narratives of Westlake and Idora Park with rhetorical analysis and connections to rhetorical dynamism will provide a full view of the way in which two distinct places each exhibit dynamic characteristics. To build these narratives, I visited archives in Youngstown in order to understand the histories of these sites.

Youngstown’s Archives

To construct the rhetorical histories of each site, I use archival research conducted in Youngstown. Following Gaillet (2010), I examined “archives in an effort to seek nuanced, complicated tales - ones moored to their own times and cultural exigencies” (p. 28). When searching for archival materials, I hoped to find and examine city planning documents, local newspapers, oral histories, and other documentation relating to each site over the course of its history.¹ These documents would help provide a portrait of how each site has developed by putting documents from different times and for different audiences and purposes into conversation with one another. The archival research helps me identify the constituent decisions and events that have been part of gone into the inventional process of each place, organize those decisions into a timeline, and then present them narratively (and with interpretive insights).

The archives that I visited to perform this research are the Maag Library at Youngstown State University and the Public Library of Youngstown and Mahoning County. I visited these sites over the course of the summer semester before the writing of this dissertation. Overall, I was in Youngstown for about two months, and spent about a month visiting each site.

The Maag Library

The Maag Library houses both an archival section and a special collection, both of which have a wealth of historical resources relating to the area. The library states that, in its archival holdings, it has 1,500 oral histories and 300 cubic feet of manuscript collections on local topics
(Maag Library). Furthermore, the special collections holds other “publications relating to Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley,” including “city directories, historical monographs,” and other resources (Maag Library).

Upon visiting this archive, I did not find as much as I had initially hoped; the archivists were helpful, but did not have much material relating to my two sites in the library’s manuscripts. While physically there, I ended up mainly looking through one rare book that was published locally and did not have wide circulation, which provided a protracted look at the history of Idora Park. As Glenn and Enoch (2010) point out, we usually don’t know what’s in the archive until we get there, and we must remember that, according to Gold (2008), “archival research is largely organic” (p. 18). This was the case here, as I certainly expected more material at this archive than I actually found.

What did prove useful from the Maag Library was the extensive Youngstown Oral History Collection. Begun in 1974, this collection provides first-person narratives on a variety of topics, and my two sites were included among them. Luckily, the project is entirely digitized and available to the public. Idora Park proved quite easy to research in the oral history database. However, while Idora Park was hyperlinked as its own topic on the Oral History homepage, Westlake Terrace was not.

To discover Westlake in this archive, I first had to do some creative searching. As Yakel (2010) points out, digital archives can be difficult to search through at times, particularly because of differences in what the researcher and archivist think of as keywords or topics. Sometimes these differ significantly, and searches must “jump institutional boundaries” (Yakel, 2010, p. 108); a researcher must ask what the archivist or curator might have found salient and how those salient points connect to the topic being researched. Researchers must always remember that
archives are “highly mediated constructions of the past” (Warnick, 2010, p. 91). This proved to be the case here. To find narratives concerning Westlake, I first started looking through the oral histories labelled “African Americans,” knowing that this was primarily an African American neighborhood. Combing through these histories provided three that directly mentioned Westlake, though the neighborhood was not the topic of these histories, which focused primarily on the African American migrations to Youngstown and their experience thereafter. To add to the difficulty in finding Westlake-related histories, the library has two search engines; a public-facing one and an internal one. Searching for Westlake in the public-facing engine provided two results focused on the project. Finally, after finding the internal-facing search engine, I found two separate, differently titled collections of histories each focused on Westlake.

The end result of this (at times frustrating) search proved fruitful. Ultimately, I found 34 oral histories focused on Westlake Terrace and 30 on Idora Park. These histories would prove integral to creating the rhetorical history of each site. In each case, the oral histories provided a vast array of experiences that spanned quite a long time. Stakeholders that were interviewed for the histories included:

- Residents of Westlake (and their family members)
- Regular attendees of Idora Park
- Construction workers who worked on the sites
- City officials
- Journalists
- Administrators, managers, or owners of each site
- Other employees of each site
- Residents in close proximity to each site
As I’ll discuss shortly, understanding each stakeholder’s positionality and relation to the site is key in reading these materials and putting them into conversation. The oral histories are helpful in this regard as each one gives a brief summary at the beginning of who is being interviewed and how they relate to the site.

The Oral History Collection proved to be the most beneficial material from the Maag Library. This collection helped me understand not just the history of my sites as a timeline of events, but provided important perspective from insiders and outsiders alike. This insight is crucial in understanding not just the places but their cultural and historical impacts, both in individual moments in their histories as well as in contemporary collective memory. The Public Library provided materials that helped me flesh out these sites even more.

**The Public Library of Youngstown and Mahoning County**

The other archival resource that I visited in my research was the Genealogy and Local History Center at the Public Library of Youngstown and Mahoning County. At this center, the library “maintains an extensive collection of genealogical and historical material” (The Public Library). Though this collection is largely focused on local genealogy, it does provide other resources as well, such as local newspaper articles dating back to 1869, city directories, a large index of local history books, and historical artifacts from each site such as pamphlets, government documents, land surveys, etc.

The Public Library proved to be a treasure trove for my research. Upon talking to a librarian there, I was pointed to a series of file cabinets containing folders on a multitude of different local topics. These folders contained all manner of historical documents, and in an act of serendipity sometimes characteristic of archival research (Ramsey et al 2010), I found both a folder for Idora Park and a folder titled “Public Housing Projects,” which contained a wealth of
documents relating to Westlake Terrace as well as other projects in Youngstown. Here, there were more materials about Westlake than Idora. I spent hours here reading these materials and scanning everything that I could in order to go back to them and re-read during the writing process. The materials that I acquired from The Public Library are listed below:

- For Idora Park:
  - 66 local newspaper articles published between 1953-1998

- For Westlake Terrace
  - 2 advertising/informational pamphlets for potential residents
  - 2 booklets laying out plans and justification for Westlake
  - 2 government reports on slum clearance and Westlake
  - 1 manual for Westlake residents, providing rules, regulations, and policies
  - 1 letter to the public library from the YMHA asking for resources to prove the usefulness of slum clearance and low-rent housing
  - 67 local newspaper articles published between 1935-1990

These materials made these two sites into truly rich archival exemplars. The materials from the Public Library add to the oral histories by providing a more holistic view of each place’s history. Here, we see perspectives of city officials, local media, administrators, and others, and these documents allow me to show how these perspectives and the dynamism of the places manifests in documents spanning the entirety of their histories.

**Reading the Archives**

In any kind of archival work, the material must not only be found and collected, but read and interpreted. As Masters (2010) reminds us, “archival research … is not the passive recording of objective data but a reader’s constructive, subjective ordering and making meaning out of
what he or she chooses to examine” (p. 157). With such a wealth of material, I had to create a method to limit the scope of what I needed from the material and sample accordingly, though that also included first reading all of the material. As Gold (2008) points out, “the basic methodology of archival research” is to “read absolutely everything and try to make sense of what happened” (p. 18). The first step in doing so was to create a timeline of the major inventions that occurred at each site, since my aim was to build a history of each site that exemplified rhetorical dynamism. While doing so, I kept in mind principles of emergent design, in which researchers allow their methods to evolve over the course of a study in response to new insight. In this case, I wanted to be sure to keep open the possibility that my materials could provide not just insights about the inventions at each site, but also entirely new inventions that I had not been aware of. Thus, I created a grid of the major inventions at each site, but kept an eye out in my reading for new inventions, making this grid flexible.

With the timeline in place for each site, I proceeded to begin combing through the material for any mention or relation to these moments. In essence, I engaged in grounded theory, coding my data in service of building theory, and then recursively going back to that data once I gained new insights to develop a robust set of codes. I used the timeline that I had developed as my coding categories; anything related to, for instance, the construction of Westlake or the closing of Idora Park was marked and set aside for both closer reading and eventual inclusion in the historical narratives of each site.

It is important to note that, at this point, I was not reading the archival material in the service of theoretical analysis or critique. Rather, I was interpreting the data as it pertained to the codes that I had developed and deciding if individual documents fit into the scope of the project. Much of the data proved to be relevant, but some was not, allowing me to create a more
manageable sample from which to construct the actual narratives contained in the next two chapters of this dissertation.

After the material had been sorted by which site and moment of invention it pertained to, I could read it more closely. This required further coding to help build narrative and interpretation together. To do this, I outlined the characteristics of rhetorical dynamism and then, as I read, coded bits of information from each piece to which characteristic(s) they applied to. I took careful notes and pulled out material that I thought could be quoted in the text. What I ended up with after this full process was two tables: one that showed how individual pieces fit into a timeline of events and one that showed which characteristics of rhetorical dynamism the pieces corresponded to. With this process complete, I was able to begin writing by using the timeline to structure the narrative and the characteristics to interpret and analyze that narrative in such a way that illustrates my theory.

The historical artifacts from the Public Library combined with the everyday perspectives from the oral histories at the Maag Library allow me to provide a truly in-depth look into the history of Westlake Terrace and Idora Park. The archival work described above provided me with documents that enable me to construct a narrative and critical history of each site, and the oral histories provide different perspectives to that history from people who were actually involved or impacted. In this way, the study will consist not simply of an outsider perspective on each site, but will infuse that analysis with the thoughts and interpretations of each sites’ insiders. Furthermore, the documents and oral histories conflict at times, making apparent the tensions that places construct as part of their dynamism. The archival process described above, in other words, helps me fully build the rhetorical history that I sought to construct for each site. Through the construction of such a history, we will be able to see the rhetorical processes that
continually reconstruct each of these places throughout the course of their history, and draw some conclusions for their present and future, an enterprise that Turner (1998) and Zarefsky (1998) both argue should be included in a rhetorical history.

**The Materiality of Place in Research**

Studying places means first keeping in mind that places are material and embodied, and that it is the physical place that is rhetorical, that communicates certain messages with us. In this sense, then, any study of place would be incomplete without the researcher experiencing the place and understanding it for themselves. Rai (2016) argues that we must occupy the places that we research, enmesh ourselves in their rhetorics. And Lefebvre (1992) reminds us that we must attend to the texture of places rather than just to places as texts. We can only do this by being present in a place, by describing the ways in which its materiality communicates to us, the ways that we occupy it and move through it, and how our embodiment effects and is affected by the place.

In some sense, I have already done this with Westlake and Idora; these are places I have known and been around my entire life. Yet the places in the archives are not the places as I know them. Westlake is a new, renamed project, and Idora Park has been an empty lot for most of my life. How, then, does one attend to the materiality of places that are ostensibly no longer there (and, even if they are still there, whose materiality has changed dramatically)? I answer that, through the archive, through the images and accounts of these places, I re-invent them in my narrative. Their materiality must constantly be attended to by looking for the affective points in the archival material: what it felt like to be in places, what those places meant, and similar sentiments. Through this, I will construct a sense of the places’ materialities as they have evolved over time, and finally juxtapose them with the places I knew as I grew up alongside
them. By consistently returning to the archive and building the narratives through to my understandings of the places as they are currently situated I will, as Dickinson (2019) says, constantly turn back to place rather than away from it.

Why Archives? Why History?

Many studies of place in the field of rhetoric use ethnographic methods (Cintron 1997, Rai 2016, Rice 2012b), which makes this study somewhat unique; not many studies have turned to the archives to build histories of individual places. Ethnographic studies, however, are often concerned with a place only over the course of the ethnography; the time frame studied and the timeframe of the ethnography are coterminous. The evidence presented is generally situated in the moment that the researcher was at the site and consists of observations and interviews with current residents. While these studies do often incorporate some research on a place’s past, this is done more in service of providing background or contextualization for the moment being studied.

My study, however, views place as an ongoing, dynamic emergence with a history of rhetorical decisions that are necessary in understanding the place both as it has evolved and as it is currently situated. Relph (1976) reminds us that “places are emergent or becoming; with historical and cultural change new elements appear and old elements disappear. Thus places have a distinct historical component” (p. 3). Furthermore, Lefebvre (1992) claims that, if place is invented, “then we are dealing with history” (p. 46). A rhetorical history built from archival work is the best way to fully elucidate this historical component of places and to understand them as dynamic and fluid.

This study provides a few unique aspects that have not to this point been seen in the field of rhetoric. First, it brings to bear rhetorical history as a way to show the historical and evolving
nature of places through the texts and artifacts of two specific places. Second, it foregrounds urban planning documentation to an extent thus not far done in a study like this; indeed, these texts are key in constructing the histories of my sites, especially when put into conversation with competing historical texts such as oral histories. The conflicts between the perspectives and goals of officials and residents will clearly demonstrate the rhetorical nature of place in a different way than other studies have been able to do. Finally, the study looks to understand the material effects of places on the people inhabiting and surrounding them, and the documents in the archives clearly show, when built into a narrative history, how the evolution of these sites and their rhetorics had material consequences for their stakeholders.

This historical look at places, then, differs significantly from previous studies on rhetoric and place. While these have been primarily ethnographic and contemporaneous, I seek to more fully understand how these places have evolved to bring us to the contemporary moment. I believe that the moments studied in an ethnographic study are important, but we should also take into account the long history of evolution and accretion of meaning that has led to this moment. This is what this study provides, and thus it gives rhetoricians a new avenue with which to approach places, one that can be paired with ethnographic work and action research to make our field’s overall engagement with place more robust.

Limitations

My positionality in relation to Youngstown could be viewed as a limitation. As a former resident of Youngstown, who grew up about a mile from Westlake Terrace and three or four from Idora Park, my arguments could appear to be biased - and they very well might be. A more detached and unfamiliar researcher might observe things that I would not, and might be able to provide critiques where I cannot. However, that same positionality also provides the advantage
of a researcher who cares very deeply about the site of research and has a vested interest in seeing positive solutions carried through in the city. Furthermore, Kirsch and Rohan (2008) argue that a connection to the archives, history, or research site “helps us understand and explore the fissures of historical narratives, the places at the margins where voices have been suppressed, silenced, or ignored” (p. 3). In other words, personal closeness to a research subject can lead to a deeper understanding, especially of the liminal aspects that outsiders might miss. Kirsch and Rohan (2008) also argue that this kind of closeness can actually lead to more serious research: “the most serious, committed, excellent historical research comes from choosing a subject to which we are personally drawn” (p. 8). So, my positionality might lead to a certain amount of bias, but also leads to deeper understanding of the sites and more commitment to the importance of this particular site. And, again, this investment will lead me to continually turn back to the place.

I am not fully an insider to the communities I study, though, which further complicates this positionality. While I grew up alongside the neighborhoods I discuss, I was not a member of their communities. Both the neighborhood of Westlake Terrace and the neighborhood surrounding Idora Park were (at some point or another) marginalized communities, as well. As researchers, we must acknowledge the communities we research and write for and to not appropriate or anachronize them. The materiality of the archives helps elide this somewhat, as Collins (1999) argues that “a methodology based on the concept of material rhetoric … can help scholars avoid problems of appropriation, anachronism, and decontextualization” (p. 546). It is also important to allow marginalized people to speak through us, rather than assuming to speak for them, as Spivak (1988) argues. This is part of why I build the history of these sites through
the archives; I want to let the voices of the people engaged with these places come through on their own merit, and build a narrative based on the stories that they tell.

My position as a researcher, then, is a complicated one somewhere in the middle of being an insider or an outsider. I am enough of an insider to have interacted with these communities for most of my life and understand their culture, contexts, and surroundings, knowledge that will become apparent in the narratives I construct for each site. But I am also enough of an outsider to these communities that I do not want to assume to speak for them or understand their values, beliefs, or convictions. A focus on the archive should help mitigate some of these concerns, and I approach my construction of these sites’ narratives with close attention to my position and a willingness to be reflexive in my thinking.

Furthermore, archival research always requires some amount of sampling; not everything can be included, after all. Johnson et al (2017) explain well the limitations of any rhetorical history, as this methodology is always a curated collection that cannot possibly represent everything. The archival research was, by necessity of space and time, limited; certain narratives had to be foregrounded at the expense of others. I don’t believe that this privileged only narratives of power, which was my biggest concern at the beginning, and I worked to make sure all voices were included in my narratives. Limiting the study to two main sites already precludes some narratives, but this is necessary given time and scope limitations. Regardless, this limited sampling, the process of which is described above, is an unfortunate but necessary limitation of the study.

Archives provide their own sets of limitations, as well. As Tirabassi (2010) points out, archives are never complete repositories of every bit of information about a subject. Rather, they are a “layered, historical record of dynamic stories” (Tirabassi, 2010, p. 170). Because of this,
archives will always contain gaps and holes between artifacts, or even in specific artifacts that are taken out of context. It is the job of the researcher to fill in these gaps and cross-reference the archival material with supplementary research in order to develop their position or narrative. I have done this here, and will provide research from other sources wherever necessary to fill in the gaps that the archives are unable to fill themselves.

**Conclusion**

Building a rhetorical history based in archival research provides a holistic understanding of each of my sites. By understanding Westlake Terrace and Idora Park from a historical perspective, we can see not only their rhetoric as it is currently situated but as it has dynamically changed over time. The documents I examine show the shifting tensions that were palpable in these places and the way that their rhetorics arise from these tensions. This research also provides perspectives from multiple stakeholders from each site, allowing me to analyze their histories as they were understood by those living in them. In the two chapters that follow, I provide a detailed history and analysis of both Westlake Terrace and Idora Park, illustrated through examples from the archival material discussed here.

**Notes**

1 It’s important to note that, for Idora Park, many official documents are not available as they were destroyed in the park’s first fire.
Chapter Three: Westlake Terrace

To illustrate rhetorical dynamism, the first site I explore is Westlake Terrace, which provides an especially insightful look into the invention characteristic of dynamic places. Tracing Westlake’s history illustrates the power of the invention characteristic of rhetorical dynamism because it shows that rhetoric surrounding the evolution of Westlake constructed it as, alternatively, a slum, a public good, a safe community, and a dangerous and violent racial ghetto, constructions that were grounded in ideals of public welfare, structural racism, and urban renewal. The process of continually inventing the project into these various rhetorical incarnations is a complex and iterative one and, as we will see, had very real consequences for those living there.

I choose to look to an affordable housing project to understand place and rhetorical dynamism because place “matters most for those with the least” (Fleming, 2008, p. 192), and the project affords us a view of how place can perpetuate inequalities. Westlake is one example of racist housing policies and African American ghetto formation and collapse across the United States, and we will see structural racism as a motivating factor for many, if not most, of the inventional decisions that comprise Westlake’s history. By building Westlake’s rhetorical history through a wealth of archival material, including oral histories, newspaper articles, and government documents, I will unravel the tension between the multiple roles Westlake took on in order to show the fluid and dynamic nature of the project over time. The project often moved between sets of binaries, which created the tension inherent in dynamic places: slum vs. home; “nice” neighborhood vs. high-crime area; ethnically-mixed but segregated area vs. solely African
American community; touted government project vs. dangerous and forgotten place starved of resources. As with most binaries, we’ll find that the truth, and Westlake’s rhetorical impact as an actor in its own right, lies somewhere in between all of these. We’ll see most of these identities that are placed upon Westlake coalesce and evolve to form something different as the place dynamically shifts through time. Here, we have a place that kept people ordered, as Rice (2012a) suggests, but did so through instituting dynamic changes that perpetuated segregation and racial isolation in response to changing contexts and material exigencies. Rhetorical dynamism, then, is key to understanding how Westlake’s shifting meanings and materialities in fact arose from and continued to sediment racist policies and sentiments. In the following sections, I will outline some of the major points in Westlake Terrace’s history and discuss how they each show Westlake’s rhetorical dynamism.

**Slums and Beginnings: The Invention of Westlake**

In the 1930’s, despite the Depression, Youngstown’s economy was booming. The city was one of the top manufacturers of steel in the country (Linkon and Russo 2002; Ohio Steel Council 2018), and the city’s population was exploding (according to census data, the population grew from just 44,885 in 1900 to 170,002 in 1930). This population explosion resulted in a housing market that could not match the demand. Westlake Terrace was born out of a dire need for more housing in Youngstown. This need coalesced with federal- and state-level action to provide adequate and affordable housing, such as the U.S. Public Housing Act of 1937 (Linkon and Russo 2002). Youngstown appointed a citizens’ committee to study the problem; this led to the creation of the Youngstown Metropolitan Housing Authority (YMHA), which in turn applied for and was granted funds totalling $2.8 million to build Westlake (YMHA n.d.). Westlake Terrace was thus born as the first public housing project in 1939.
The process of building Westlake started with the YMHA publicly arguing that slum clearance was an appropriate way to address blight in the city. A pamphlet issued by the YMHA tried to convince the public of the necessity of slum clearance by pointing to statistics that 1,681 families (6,900 people total) were living in 1,300 dwellings throughout the “slum areas” of the city. Of these, 70% lacked bathing facilities and 60% lacked central heating, among other necessities. In their report on slum clearance, the YMHA argues that:

The existence of slum areas in Youngstown cannot be denied. Through lack of maintenance and indifference housing accommodations have steadily grown worse in areas indicated in this report. Outdoor toilets are out of service and the tenants together with many others are compelled to use accommodations that would not be tolerated 24 hours in better residential districts. Serious fire hazards in rows of tumble-down dwellings are in evidence and families living in them are compelled to carry water from a distance for household and sanitary purposes. In one instance a single spigot was found to be the only source of water supply for 74 tenants including 25 children of school age. No inside plumbing fixtures, no bath tubs, and no inside source of water supply were found (YMHA 1934, p. 12).

The pictures seen in Figure 3.1 accompanied these statistics to help make the case. Thus, because of the lack of amenities, overcrowding, and possible dangers of living in these areas, “slum clearance and low rent housing is a social need and an economic necessity” (YMHA n. d.), which opened up a space where the project could continue.

The work of defining slums was powerfully inflected by race. The YMHA’s report defining slum areas points out that the city has “striking instances of negro penetration into white localities, with the blight and property retrogression which accompanies that process (YMHA
1934, p. 28). Further illustrating the relationship between race and defining slums is the fact that the areas that the YMHA studied had some of the highest African American populations in the city, with the lowest African American percentage of the seven areas being 32.7% and the highest being 90.5%. For comparison, African Americans made up 8.5% of the total population of Youngstown. Furthermore, the report finds a “concentration of serious social problems in these sections” (13). The YMHA’s concern with African American “penetration” into white areas, along with their detailed investigation of the racial makeup of the areas they studied and their designation of social problems in primarily African American areas clearly shows the importance of race relations in determining what constitutes a slum.

Though we might think of the building of a place as its primary inventional moment, the above arguments about slum clearance were in fact what began the process of inventing Westlake and thus propelled its rhetorical dynamism. These initial rhetorical moves worked to
stitch together *topoi* of race, economic and social need, and removal of blight to open up room for the building of Westlake. The YMHA’s claims about what constitutes a slum combine with the material conditions of particular places and race relations in Youngstown to construct those places as slums. And successfully arguing that slum clearance was a social good legitimized and authorized further acts of re-inventing those places. Based on a combination of discursive arguments, specific places’ materialities, and contextual exigencies, the YMHA was then given the sole authority to determine “what areas constitute slum areas, to prepare plans for housing projects in such areas and to construct such projects” (YHMA 1934, p. 1). The authority to designate an area as a slum is a move that is meant to re-define the space under scrutiny in order to eventually invent it as a new place; the place is not only constructed as a slum and sedimented with the meaning that goes with that, but marked as a site for invention.

What starts the process of inventing Westlake, then, are the discursive and material moments of arguing for slum clearance, which are the start of the iterative process of invention that I argue places undergo. The YMHA constructs an argument that defines blight, relates blight directly to racial issues, shows that specific areas have those features, defines those areas as slums, and argues that because slums equate to blight, they should be removed. This move, from discursive argument to materially creating a new place, clearly demonstrates Westlake’s rhetorical dynamism from its inception, especially as each characteristic is present. It is a place that is a subject of and propelling rhetorical invention, it is fraught with rhetorical tensions constellating around racial issues, it is fluid and evolving, and the materiality of the place works in tandem with current social contexts for all of this to occur. We will see this continue in the early stages of Westlake as a project.
Building Westlake: Re-Inventing the Space of Slums

Once the argument for slum clearance was successfully made, the YMHA could move on to selecting the slum that would become Westlake. The “slum” that was chosen as the site for Westlake was an area formerly known as Westlake Crossing. This site was chosen because it for a number of reasons, including fitting the description of a slum described above and having easy access to transportation, shopping, business, and schools. A YMHA (1934) report on slum clearance describes the area as such:

third class residential, light industrial and commercial. Second grade residential district is found on the north. On the east, third class residential including many dwellings unfit for habitation, and partly commercial in character. On the south is found light and heavy industrial districts and much rail traffic running parallel to interstate highway. Open territory, light industrial and third grade residential areas are found on the west (p. 15)

Statistics from the YMHA’s (1934) report on slum clearance show that this was a mostly African-American slum, with African-Americans making up 90.5% of the area (by far the highest percentage of the 7 areas studied in the report, with the next being 71.8%). This area was determined to be a slum for a few reasons:

- **State of Disrepair:** Of the 249 houses in the area, 125 were cited as in need of structural repairs and 21 were described as unfit for use.
- **Lack of Amenities:** 25 houses had no running water. 48 had no gas. 46 had no electricity.
- **Tenancy:** 197 of the buildings were occupied by tenants.
• **Overcrowding:** The YMHA found 57 instances of families doubling up in a single building; in this area, there were 960 people occupying 1,000 rooms, and 232 families occupying 199 dwellings.

Based on these criteria, the YMHA’s proposal was to clear and rebuild on the site.

Labelling Westlake Crossing as a slum sedimented it with the rhetorical construction of race and poverty, as these are part and parcel of what defines a slum. Sedimenting these constructions within the place allowed it to become so devalued that it practically did not exist and the YMHA could thus justify levelling it. Instead of an area full of people that could potentially be helped, the space was designated and represented as lacking substance. Earle Pfund (1985) echoes other interviewees when he says that “it seemed to me that there wasn’t much [there] anyway. It could only have been for the better” (p. 9). Being considered a “black slum,” then, made the place rhetorically invisible to those outside of it and acted as an erasure, both of the place and its people. As Marback (1988) argues, “an area is not a ‘slum’ simply because the people living there are poor and black. A community becomes a ‘slum’ when the space is represented for everyone … by those who don’t live there” (p. 82). In other words, Westlake became a slum only because of its designation as such by the YMHA, not (or not simply) because it was poor and black. A slum is not a static, material condition of a place, but an identity that is invented for that place.

Westlake Crossing was viewed by outsiders with the power to change it as a destitute place that required order and radical re-invention. This is our first illustration of Westlake’s dynamic re-invention: the slums created tension between those who saw chaos and blight and those who actually lived there, and out of that tension came the invention of the place as a slum,
shifting the meanings it communicated in order to demolish it and rebuild. The rhetorical label of
slum opens up a space where the physical act of destroying it and rebuilding it becomes a reality.

Once Westlake Crossing was chosen, nearly the entire area was demolished to make
room for the new housing project. According to Vincent Doria (1985), who worked on building
the project, “we tried to eliminate the slum areas and provide more suitable living quarters” (7).
Doria also noted that all houses in the area were levelled to make room for the project - the
YMHA supports this, reporting that 598 dwellings were demolished for Westlake. The first
building was demolished on May 10, 1938, and the only buildings still standing in the area were
the black YMCA and the Working Men’s Overall Supply Company. The construction of the
project would begin in earnest in 1939.

Along with demolition came displacement, another inventional move in creating a new
place. Where there were 598 homes, mostly inhabited by African Americans, there were
probably far more people; one of the conditions of marking a place as a slum was overcrowding,
and in one section of Westlake Crossing the YMHA found that there were 232 families
occupying 199 dwellings. Westlake would technically have more homes, with 618 units, but
because of overcrowding this would not be enough for those who were already there.
Furthermore, only half of these units would be inhabitable by African Americans, as multiple
residents from the early years say that the project was unofficially segregated at Madison Avenue
- white people could only live north of Madison, and black people were confined to the south.
This would shift the African American population from 90.5% of the area to a roughly 50%
maximum, so clearly many of those people would be forced to leave.

The people that were displaced were given little resources to do so. Lottier (1985), a
“relocation agent” for the YMHA at the time, describes the assistance given to those who had to
move as working “closely with the realtors in the area, and then we would scout the area to see if we could find rental properties or properties that were for sale and relay that information to the people who lived in the areas of Westlake, and they could make the decision as to what they wanted to do” (p. 2). So, they were free to make their decision, as long as their decision wasn’t staying where they lived, and they would be provided no compensation for that decision, apart from being “guided to the bank” (Lottier 1985, p. 3). And their options were severely limited by rampant redlining in other parts of the city. Many wanted to stay - indeed, according to the YMHA (1944), 136 families from Westlake Crossing applied to live at the new project. Yet, in the end, a report from the YMHA (1944) notes that twelve of those families were accepted to Westlake.

African Americans, then, were displaced without many options so that the YMHA could refigure both the place and its population. This displacement is another example of a racially motivated inventional decision - when you change who lives in a place and can live in that place, you indelibly change the place itself. You also change its rhetoric, moving it from being a home to many people and somewhere that was open to all types of people, to a place that is instead closed off and inaccessible to many.

Westlake’s beginnings are marked through the conflict between being a slum for the YMHA and others in power and a home for the predominantly African-American residents; in other words, between different rhetorical formulations of place, both powerfully inflected by race and poverty. Then, the area moves to being a harbinger of displacement and control for certain communities while serving as a touted new development for the public good.¹ This is precisely how places accrete meaning and become rhetorical. The messages that places send result from rhetorical invention that “reflects the interests and concerns of the cultural group of which [they
are] an expression” (Relph 1976, p. 22). Place was here invented as a rhetorical means of keeping specific classes and races of people separate and creating racial ghettos. And though it was seen by many as an improvement, that improvement came as the cost of displacement, and later of heavy regulation.

**A Nice Place to Live: New Meanings and New Tensions**

Once Westlake was built, people were able to apply to live there by providing proof of income and a marriage license. According to the YMHA (1944), there were 3,500 applicants to live at Westlake, out of which 618 families were selected. Westlake was extremely restrictive in terms of who could live there. A pamphlet from the YMHA (n.d.) outlines what they were looking for, saying that “the occupancy of a dwelling shall be limited exclusively to a natural family or cohesive family group” (p. 18). This could not include any of the following:

(a) Two distinct family groups
(b) Lodgers or transient paying guests
(c) A household composed of unrelated working adults
(d) A person living alone

Another pamphlet urging people to apply mandates that potential residents must bring “records of all income of all members of family, lease, if any, on your present dwelling. Receipts for payment of gas, electricity, water, coal bills. Social Security card. Citizenship paper and certificate of marriage” (YMHA n.d., p. 2). Residents confirm that these restrictions were carefully followed; several reported that they had to bring their marriage license to the leasing office with their application in order to be considered. A few tell stories similar to this one, from Florence Madison (1985), a longtime resident: “With this couple, the man brought his marriage license and his girlfriend. He had taken his license to show, but then he moved his girlfriend in
with him” (p. 18). When this was reported, “they had to go.” Not only would the offending person be kicked out, but the tenant would be evicted as well.

The people who were accepted to live there were implanted into situations of heavy regulation, embedding further tension and meaning in the place. The segregation of the project has already been noted; while it was not an official policy of the YMHA, it was certainly an unwritten one, and served to order people in specific ways. In this case, the segregation moved the African Americans into the southern part of the project, closer to the river and the steel mills, while the whites in the northern project shared a border with the local hospital and were closer to the vibrant Italian community in Brier Hill. According to residents, there were even different stores and community centers for whites and blacks.

Building these spatial hierarchies was a key part of inventing Westlake. According to Madison (1985), “they seemed to be under the impression that they could keep them [African Americans] down there and there wouldn’t be any problems” (p. 21). Segregation, in short, is one of the ways in which “the built environment clarifies social roles and relations” (Tuan, 1977, p. 102) in a decidedly rhetorical manner. By segregating, the YMHA was attempting to invent a place for each race and eliminate any perceived problems that could occur from races living together. The act of segregation itself further circulates arguments about race separation and clarifies to the people segregated that they should not live among people of other races.

Westlake, then, was re-invented as a tightly restricted place ordered by institutional racism, heteronormativity, and its materiality, and is dynamic insofar as these restrictions become part of the project’s rhetoric. Even in its construction and upkeep, one would most likely look at the project and understand that it was an orderly, quiet place to live. The project consisted of neatly rowed, bunker-style townhouses, with center courtyards for each half. According to
residents, lawns were mandated to be regularly maintained, all decoration and gardening had to be approved, and any painting had to be done in specific pre-approved colors. Former resident Eleanor Brittain (1985) said that “the people didn’t have strict overseers to make them take care of it; they just did.” Yet, nevertheless, these rules were codified and one could argue that they took care of it because the place’s newfound orderliness exuded a rhetoric of panopticism and discipline. This orderliness caused people to negotiate meaning with the place itself, which in turn convinced them to keep to the regulations.

On one hand, this order and strict regulation gave many a positive impression of Westlake; not only did Westlake argue for order, but it used order as a *topos* to argue for cleanliness and security. Romelia Carter (1985), a former resident who later worked at a settlement house in Westlake, recalls that her “earliest remembrance of the projects was that they *represented* a nice, clean kind of place to live” (p. 4 emphasis added), clearly demonstrating that these meanings had become embedded in the project. Furthermore, she notes that “you were a really cool kid if you lived in the projects because, first of all, you were in a place that was warm and it had the feeling of being tight and secure” (Carter 1985, p. 4). Another resident, Mildred Porter (1985), goes so far as to say that “it was nicer than anything we had ever seen” (p. 3). Many even expressed the sentiment that segregation didn’t matter as much because they had a nice, clean place to live. The key here is that Westlake not only *was* nice, clean, and secure, but it began to *represent* those things in its own right after it was initially invented as such. This is one way in which places exert rhetorical dynamism: they are constructed in a certain way because of context, values, and beliefs, and they then reciprocally inform people’s values, beliefs, and contexts going forward (Johnson et al 2017) - this reciprocal relationship being one of the key components of rhetorical dynamism.
African Americans did in fact attempt to make Westlake a place that they could call their own, an act of resistance in a place where they were forced to live in the less desirable portion. They worked to set up a settlement house in the center of the project, the Hagstrom House, that provided many different services for residents. They also resisted the strictures set out for them with events like the June Prom, a reaction to blacks not being allowed at local high school proms. Carter (1985) says that “the June prom was designed for the black community, to pay homage to the graduates from all over the city, for young people who did scuffle out the twelve years and graduate. The June prom was a large, black community event. Black adults and small black children went to June prom to pay homage and respect to those blacks who did graduate” (p. 5). Programs like this and others made Westlake, according to Carter, Porter, and others, a center of the black community in Youngstown.

Here, we have different attempts to invent Westlake, each differently motivated by racial politics, existing in tension with one another. On one hand, the YMHA segregated the project in order to clarify social hierarchies through a place-based, organizational rhetoric. On the other hand, African Americans took this in stride and essentially said that if the southern half of the project was to be the black half, they were going to make it a positive space for the black community. Each of these are attempts to invent the place and change both it and the discourse that circulates through and around it, and to some extent each attempt was successful, creating a place with a tense and complex set of meanings embedded within it.

The sense of order imposed by Westlake did not necessarily equate to stability, and even subverted the sense of community that the YMHA was trying to build, creating further tension between the various meanings building within the project. Westlake was meant for impermanent housing - a sort of bridge until residents were economically stable enough to afford housing on
the private market - and this was enforced in its regulations, as well. If a resident’s income was more than five times the rent, they had to leave. The place’s materiality helped enforce this impermanence: it was built in the international architectural style, which emphasized lack of ornament, functionality, and geometric order. This style emphasizes what Casey (1993) calls hermetic dwelling, in which one never feels truly at home because there is no real center, or hearth. Casey (1993) notes that “citizens who live in houses or apartment buildings constructed in a fixedly orthogonal ‘International Style’ feel rootlessly positioned and impermanently housed” (p. 139). In other words, because of the circumstances of its invention, the place now exerted a topos of impermanence that existed in drastic contrast to the topos of order - creating a marked tension between an ordered community and temporary housing.

Yet people want to stay in a place, want permanence and stability - after all, “we tend to identify ourselves by--and with--the places in which we reside” (Casey, 1993, p. 120). And dwelling is key to the invention of place, and thus key to its dynamism - many would argue that something cannot be a place without dwelling, including Heidegger (1971), who tells us that “building … has dwelling as its goal,” and that “to build in itself is already to dwell” (p. 148). In other words, building is an inventional act that moves us toward places that we can dwell in. Casey (1993) points to two main characteristics of dwelling, both of which Westlake lacked in some sense: re-accessibility and felt familiarity (p. 116). It was not re-accessible once you left (or at least, one would probably not want it to be because that would mean a significant income drop), and it would be difficult to develop familiarity in a place that bespeaks impermanence and in which neighbors come and go rather quickly. Carter (1985) tells a tale of one family who had to move three times due to constant development and displacement and notes that “they had the desire to stay in the same area” (p. 19). So, while many residents point to an awareness of the
temporality of living in Westlake, Carter (1985) recalls that “some people did not advance themselves economically to stay in the projects” (p. 17). So, while the project may have served as a rhetorical impetus for upward mobility for some, its income limitations forced others to stagnate economically so that they could remain implaced.

Further complicating this was the lack of options for African Americans to move elsewhere; they were tightly restricted to certain parts of the city. As Ethel Adams (1998), a Youngstown resident, put it, “You did not know blacks that lived in Liberty or Boardman” (p. 9), which were suburban townships on the edge of the city. She notes that “they were mostly in the inner city” in projects like Westlake. This created a situation where African Americans felt like they could not move, and feared having no place to go if they had to leave Westlake because they exceeded the income restrictions. The surrounding contexts of racist redlining practices in other parts of the city, then, combined with the income-based regulations, forced many to stagnate in order to maintain implacement and stability.

Westlake’s invention as a low-income community, then, had unforeseen consequences that drove its dynamic evolution and led to specific responses by residents. Thought the decision to impose income maximums and locate Westlake as specifically a low-income community was not itself motivated by racism, this invention nonetheless works against a backdrop of structural racism that causes it to disadvantage African Americans. Because of the importance people place on remaining implaced and because of the perceived difficulty in finding housing elsewhere, the income limits actually work to restrict people’s agency and upward mobility, and makes the place itself become emblematic of stagnation if it is to remain a permanent home.

Thus, in its nascence and early years as a place, Westlake yet again was a site of rhetorical tensions, and was re-invented constantly by residents and outsiders alike, creating new
messages, arguments, and *topoi*. In this way, Westlake serves as an example of a place that is “contested both as an actual place and as the figurative site of an ongoing sociopolitical discourse concerning the relations between community, self, and place” (Olwig, 2001, p. 94). Westlake was at once orderly and impermanent, a social good and a force of institutional racism, and a locus for larger debates about public housing and urban blight. The place served both as a complex nexus where multiple actors could invent their own arguments and as an actor that absorbed this network of arguments and projected them outward (or inward) to residents, passerby, and others. With further development, the complexity would grow, and Westlake would become something else entirely.

**Desegregation and Freeway Construction: Material Refigurations**

The next two major re-inventions of Westlake Terrace would occur very close together chronologically: first, the project was gradually de-segregated beginning in the 1950s; second, the Madison Avenue Expressway was built in 1964, cutting the project in half. These two developments would come in concert, and both decisions, along with residents’ responses to them clearly show dynamic and shifting tensions regarding what Westlake should be, who should live there, and how we should occupy places alongside others. In the following two sections, I’ll talk about desegregation first and then discuss freeway development, but it’s important to keep in mind that these developments happened very close together and are similar rhetorical acts in many respects. Furthermore, they each illustrate the dynamism of place as they are heavily couched in context and re-invent the place both materially and rhetorically.

**De-segregation and White Flight**

As early as 1953, African Americans slowly began moving north of Madison Avenue; the approximately fifteen-year-old tacit policy of segregation within the project was coming to an
end. Nationally, this coincided with the rise of the Civil Rights movement, as several residents pointed out. Finally, it seemed to residents that those with power to organize people in space were allowing for mobility, for differences to co-exist, for people to live among others who were unlike them.

Yet, while de-segregation was a rhetorical act that could have invented Westlake as a melting pot for different cultures, residents’ practices of occupying space would not follow suit. In a turn of events that was all too common in Youngstown as a whole (and in many other cities), as soon as African Americans started moving in next door, Caucasians left. White flight as a phenomenon is well-documented in Youngstown, and Westlake is no different. Some residents expressed the sentiments quite clearly, such as Ralph Madison (1985), who says that in 1953:

more people weren’t taking care of their property, stealing stuff out of your laundry. We used to keep the place clean like keeping grass cut and things like that, but a lot of the people moving in had quite a few children. They didn’t take care of their children. The whole atmosphere… they were all over. Blacks were all over the place by then (p. 25).

Resident Kathleen Moser (1985) adds a similar sentiment, saying that “the blacks were starting to outnumber the whites” (p. 7), and Brittain (1985) speaks to the phenomenon of white flight explicitly, relaying that “they did away with [segregation] and the blacks were able to move wherever. My sister said it caused a lot of white people to move out. The neighborhood became noisier” (p. 7). The rhetorical practice here was simply to leave, a move that very clearly rejected the attempts at desegregation. Carter (1985) says that “by 1965, the entire project here was black” (p. 11). Segregation was effectively reinforced by simply making the entirely of Westlake a black neighborhood.
In reality, what happened was urban de-densification, as blacks were given more space to live but were even more isolated and saw living conditions continue to deteriorate. This process is important to understand; as Marback (1988) argues, “our understandings of the rhetoric of city life must comprehend the spatial practices of racial segregation and civic disempowerment” (p. 87). Here, what seemed on its face to be desegregation was in actuality just a refugitation of the lines along which segregation occurred. Understanding the process that led to Westlake becoming a wholly black neighborhood, then, helps us understand how the institutional forces of structural racism, white flight, urban consolidation, and neighborhood organization work in tandem with a place itself to re-invent a place such as Westlake and indelibly change the rhetoric surrounding it.

So, the YMHA attempted to re-invent Westlake as a mixed area that celebrated difference, black residents took the opportunity to assert that they should be allowed to live among whites, and white residents exerted their own invention capacity to leave and re-invent Westlake as a black neighborhood. As Casey (1993) notes, buildings and even neighborhoods “reflect [their] regions[s]” (p. 149), and Westlake certainly reflected city-wide practices of continued segregation and white flight. This reflection is a clear example of rhetorical dynamism, as it shows the dynamic tensions between several stakeholders affecting both the context around Westlake and Westlake itself, and re-creating the place in the process.

The identity of Westlake was now that of a wholly black community, and outsiders again began to construct it as a slum (which contrasts with others, who still saw it as their home). As early as 1954, the Vindicator (Youngstown’s primary local newspaper) refers to Westlake as a slum, and residents noted in interviews that the place began to show signs of not being kept up as well as it had been earlier, though they’re not clear about what these signs are until the 1980s.
The recursiveness of Westlake from first a slum clearance project to becoming a slum again reflects the dynamic and changing nature of both the place and its context through rhetorical inventions that were consistently motivated by structural racism; each time it becomes a majority black neighborhood, it also becomes a slum. Again we have an example of the place being invented discursively that indelibly changes the material identity of the place and is entirely motivated by who lives in the place.

**Freeway Development and Material Re-invention**

The next re-invention of Westlake would come with freeway development, which came right on the heels of desegregation and white flight. As in many American cities, white flight was being accommodated by the construction of arterial freeways to allow for easier movement between downtown and the suburbs (DiMento and Ellis 2012). In Youngstown, this included the construction of the Madison Avenue Expressway in 1965. The Expressway would directly connect the East and West sides of the city, running north of downtown and Youngstown State University and cutting Westlake Terrace in half. As in many cities, poor neighborhoods were destroyed or degraded to accommodate quicker access between middle class suburbs and commercial areas (DiMento and Ellis 2012). For the first time since its construction, the physicality of the project was significantly changed. The freeway made Westlake into two separate projects, disrupting the rhetorical sense of community and unity that had been built there with a physical, impenetrable, and difficult-to-circumvent barrier.

The Expressway would have deep rhetorical and material consequences for Westlake, this time by dynamically re-inventing the materiality of the project. As Eakins (1985) said, “when they put that expressway through there and they split those buildings[,] that made a big change there again too.” In a 1988 Vindicator Article, a longtime resident argues that the
The isolation that the freeway brought to the project was profound, and in fact was a re-invention that explicitly contradicted part of the initial reasoning for Westlake’s location: easy access to surrounding areas. Originally, Westlake was cited as being “favorably located to transportation, employment, business, shopping centers and public utilities” (YMHA 1934, p. 14). Indeed, many residents discussed how easy it was to go downtown or to other close areas either by walking or taking the streetcar. Most tell similar stories to Eakins (1985), who says that “a lot of times my wife and I would walk to go to a show in town instead of taking a car.” The freeway construction severely limited this mobility (an issue which was soon compounded by the growing crime in the area and the scaling back of public transportation), removing Westlake’s connections to surrounding areas and leaving it hemmed in by arterial highways and industrial parks.

Furthermore, the freeway’s construction is perhaps the most clear example of a place and its surrounding social contexts and exigencies working in tandem to alter both the materiality and the rhetoric of the place. Here, as the materiality of the project changes, it loses its sense of community and its connections to vital resources. The physical project, then, exerts rhetorical agency in this instance as it is changed, and this has deep consequences for the project’s residents.
Segregation, white flight, and freeway construction are all physical practices that re-invent places and provide them with new or different rhetorics. Dynamic changes in the physical structure and demographics of a place change the ways people move, relate to each other, and feel their identity and experience in community. These acts change the arguments that circulate throughout, within, and around places. On one hand, desegregation and white flight are practices of re-situating people and re-distributing them in a way that rhetorically re-invents a place by affecting the ways that people live with each other and negotiate their shared existence (Larsen and Johnson 2017). Desegregation is a strategy that attempts to ameliorate difference by re-organizing people, while white flight is a tactic, in de Certeau’s (2011) words, through which people re-write the city by subverting the strategies imposed on them and asserting their own understanding of place - while also imposing a new organization on another, less privileged group. On the other hand, freeway construction is a material practice that changes the physical rhetoricity of a place by both displacing people and changing the landscape itself, making new arguments about priorities and organization. Each of these types of re-invention have lasting consequences and material impact on the places and populations that they affect.

**Dynamic Decay: The Decline of Westlake**

In the case of Westlake, the dynamic changes brought about by its recursive invention as a black slum led to some dark days for the project. Context is key here: the decline in Westlake’s image coincided with Youngstown as a whole, showing a reciprocity between place and context. The entire city struggled mightily once the steel mills closed, and at times Youngstown was cited as the most dangerous city in the country (Grann 2000; NeighborhoodScout 2018). Even against this backdrop, though, Westlake was viewed as especially dangerous. Former county sheriff James Traficant (1985) points to it as “one of the roughest neighborhoods in Youngstown
history” (p. 12). For Westlake, issues centered on drugs, vandalism, and violence. As Lottier put it, “it started out as a few fellows standing on the corner, and it was a big joke to everybody … and it’s turned into the ruination of Westlake Terrace” (Fitzpatrick, 1985, p. 27). This escalated to the point where Carter related in 1985 that “one young fellow down on that corner told me a few years ago that $250,000 per week in drugs go down at that corner” (p. 22). The Vindicator (1988) described Westlake as a “desolate outpost populated by the weakest victims of the poverty cycle” (Roberts, p. A12:1) and another publication called it “The Forgotten Badlands” (Roberts, 1988 , p. A12).

Simultaneously, the project was deprived of resources and finding solutions to these issues was no easy task; adding to the difficulty was the corruption rampant in the YMHA (and much of the rest of Youngstown’s government). Notably, the project was plagued by rats (Nord, 1984, p. A6:1), had very little police supervision, and was continually earmarked for renovations that never happened (Roberts, 1988, p. A1). Structural issues became so bad that at one point a leaking roof collapsed on a tenant. A 1988 Vindicator article claimed that the “startling physical deterioration assaults the senses. Broken glass litters the yards and sidewalks while graffiti taints the faded brick buildings. Vacant apartments are broken into and used as makeshift garbage dumps. Trash overfills the regulation garbage bins. The stench from the garbage is overwhelming” (Roberts 1988, p. A1:1). Westlake had evolved (or regressed) back to being a slum, the very thing it was built to negate. Its inventions are cyclical: from slum to neighborhood and back to slum.

The deterioration, isolation, and disregard for the project led Westlake to be seen as an opportunity for some; the lack of resources directly correlated to the rise in crime, leading outsiders to see the vulnerability of the project because of the rhetorical and material choices
surrounding it. Carter (1985) points out that most residents were “General Relief, or an Aid for Dependent Child person, or disabled veterans or widower or widow” (p. 9). and these people would be preyed upon by outsiders who saw the project’s isolation and realized that they could do whatever they liked because of the lack of supervision. Traficant (1985) agrees with Carter in saying that “people [from outside the area] have produced a lot of problems,” which he connects explicitly to the “lack of service in that particular community, especially police service” (p. 10).

We can see here an interplay of related choices constellating around the ways in which the place has changed physically, demographically, and contextually. As all but the least powerful and most poverty-stricken left the project, and as it became cut off from easy access, it lost resources and services, and came to appear more desolate and dangerous because of these decisions, which then resulted in a further loss of support, lack of movement, and difficulty dwelling. This demonstrates a recursive and iterative inventional process driven by the rhetoric of violence and crime surrounding Westlake and leading to an attitude that it wasn’t worth helping.

The crime and vandalism in Westlake are actions performed because of the isolation and decay brought about by this series of decisions, but they are also actions that physically re-invent the place in a material sense to reify that same identity. The complex network of crime, response to crime, resource and service management, and upkeep of the project all work together to change the place indelibly. For instance, in 1981 the Vindicator notes that “45 units in the neighborhood [are] so badly vandalized they can’t be rented” (Lamb 1981, p. D9), and that many were afraid to leave their homes because of the violence outside, or were afraid to live in the area, even when they had no other option. The physical reality of vandalism, trash on the streets, and drug dealers on the corner adds to the growing rhetoric of Westlake as a “blighted area” that
is in need of policing and resources. In this sense, the place itself is also participating in the process of invention, its materiality adding to the sense already circulating in discourse.

Policing was indeed an answer for many, especially as many believe that the only way to help minority communities is by policing them. Yet, policing itself, even as an attempt to rehabilitate this image, reinforces the persistent image of Westlake as an unsafe location. Traficant argued that Westlake should have its own police substation, and the Vindicator points to increased police presence, nightly patrols, and attempts to train residents to police themselves. Lottier (1985) points to the complex materiality of the project and the way that materiality affects policing and in turn affects the project’s rhetoric:

The police have to come into an area like this. There are so many different ways to run and hide behind buildings and there are no direct streets through most of the projects that they can’t bring one cruiser car; they just bring swarms so that they can chase from a lot of different angles. This creates a sensation, especially if new people are around saying the police are all over this project. Sure enough, they are. If you don’t have accessible roads to a project, that is about the only way to do it (p. 8).

The materiality of Westlake here propagates the idea that the “police are all over,” and thus that it’s a dangerous area. This then leads to more issues and lack of resources; for instance, Lottier (1985) relates that “some merchants won’t even deliver to some of the project areas” (p. 8) because they are too dangerous. The complex network of practices that produce a place as criminal or dangerous snowball, especially in this instance, to continue reinforcing and recirculating that rhetoric as the place accretes meaning and dynamically evolves.
Further propagating the perception of Westlake as a dangerous area was simple racism. The area was a black neighborhood now; this led many to consider it dangerous based on that fact alone. In fact, as I think back to my own experience growing up near Westlake, this was probably a factor affecting my own perceptions, even if I didn’t realize it as such at the time; the attitude was pervasive. As a child, I remember hearing things like “why would we fix that place up? They’re just going to destroy it again.” For these people, the rhetoric of Westlake was clear: the fact that it was a black neighborhood told them to keep away and leave it to its fate. And, not taking into account that much of the crime was the result of outsiders preying on the area, people operated under the racist assumption that Westlake should not be provided help or resources because its residents would simply continue to create trouble, as if it were their nature to destroy the places where they lived. As Traficant puts it, “the average person from the outside looks in and says that if these people really wanted to do something, they would clean these places up themselves” (9). But, as he is quick to point out, “it is beyond their control” (9). In reality, as Carter pointed out earlier, most residents were elderly, disabled, or single mothers. Yet the feeling persists that these victims of the poverty cycle should fix Westlake on their own. This attitude, held by many, combines with the structural racism in a vicious cycle that isolates the project and deprives it of resources to perpetuate the project’s status as a destitute slum. This provides yet another example of how places are invented through the rhetoric surrounding them and the rhetoric they create.

Unfortunately, the rhetorical dynamism of a place can also sometimes lead to aspects of the place’s identity becoming attached to the people that dwell there. Places often become an integral part of our identity, and even act as metonyms for individual or collective identities (Dickerson 2012). This was no different in Westlake. Lottier (1985) recounts that “some people
within a community, because of the fact that a person lives in a project, they automatically assume an air of superiority and this person can’t be anything because of the fact that they live in a project” (p. 10). This leads back into the reciprocity of rhetorical dynamism, as people’s identities can come to shift in line with the places they inhabit. Even some residents realized this. Freeman, for instance, while wishing that some successful former residents would revisit the projects to act as role models, realizes that “there is a stigma about living here, something people want to forget” (Roberts 1988 p. A12:1). This stigma works in tandem with the image of the project itself, and they grow and evolve together. Even if someone didn’t live in the project during its decline, they may still have the stigma attached to them now. This stigma, then, further serves to complicate Westlake’s rhetoric.

During this rhetorical quagmire, Youngstown was attempting to find new ways to bolster its economy, and one solution was allowing prisons (public and private) to be built within city limits to add jobs and tax income.7 Again, the context surrounding Westlake would reflect on it, as one of the two prisons, the Mahoning County Justice Center, was built less than a quarter mile from Westlake. The prison is an 8-story, multiple-wing complex which towers over the small two-story apartments in the project.

The inventional decision to place the prison directly between Westlake and downtown Youngstown shifted the physical landscape surrounding the project yet again. The southern half of the project was now surrounded by the prison to the east, the Mahoning River and a vacant industrial park to the south, and the expressway to the north and west. The prison looming over the project is a clear, tangible instantiation of the previous rhetoric of policing and discipline. It has the rhetorical effect of creating a panopticon in order to enforce specific behaviors, and served as a physical remnant of arguments about policing. Westlake’s materiality is now re-
invented again by its surroundings to reflect its reputation as a criminal area that needs surveillance and discipline to not slip into violence. Yet, despite these attempts to re-invent Westlake through the rhetoric of discipline and surveillance, residents’ practices (or outsiders’ practices) didn’t change much; they resisted this re-invention in favor of their own, instantiating yet more tension within the project. The crime rate in Westlake didn’t abate, vandalism rose, vacancies soared, and units became unusable or were demolished. In 2008, as part of the Youngstown 2010 plan which sought to accept the city’s shrinking population and shrink to better distribute resources, the northern half of the project was demolished. The southern half would soon follow suit as part of a public-private partnership to replace the project with a new development. This final re-invention of Westlake was to erase it, to return it to space so that a new place could be invented in its stead.

**The Villages at Arlington: A New Invention**

Westlake would be replaced with the Villages at Arlington, a mixed-income, townhouse-style development, that opened in 2013. Placid and unimposing, the Villages efface the strife that once took place in that same place, yet also recursively call to mind the original attitudes toward Westlake: an orderly and peaceful place to call home. As former Youngstown mayor Jay Williams put it, “The history of Westlake Terrace - initially positive and then the reputation that began to overshadow the good people that lived here - now can be redeemed” (O’Brien 2013).

The history that Williams refers to is erased by the palimpsest that is now the Villages at Arlington - an attempt at a complete rewriting and re-invention of the place. The creation of a new project was an attempt to erase Westlake and make public housing invisible, and it was physically designed to do so. Lester Walker, a YMHA project manager and designer, argued that Westlake’s barrack-style housing draws negative attention to the community (Milliken 2013) and
is obviously a project; indeed, most people can probably identify a project by physical design when they see it. But the new townhouse-style housing “blends in;” it’s invisible from the outside against the backdrop of the wider city scape. They don’t want people to know there is a project there. According to Walker, “This is what housing should be” (Milliken 2013). In other words, these physical moves attempt to ameliorate the rhetoric of a housing project and instead project a rhetoric of conformity with the larger city. These decisions are couched in the dynamism of Westlake and act as a culmination of what came before; the tensions that have driven Westlake’s change and evolution have come to a head in the attempt to re-invent it as an entirely new place.

Yet, despite the attempt to erase Westlake or subsume it under the auspices of the Villages and replace its associations to decay and deterioration with hope and change, we can see similarities. Most obviously, the Villages’ construction occurred under similar circumstances to the project they replaced - it was, in effect, another slum clearance project. Again, place was being re-invented as a way to both impose order and generate a sense of public good.

The rhetoric of policing was still circulating throughout the Villages, as well. While the Villages were an attempt to ameliorate or erase Westlake’s violent reputation, there was still a sense that the community had to be watched to prevent recurrence of those past issues. This is clear in the physical design of the new development. Walker noted that the townhouses would all face inward to inner courtyards, and explicitly connected this design to discipline and self-policing. He stated in an interview with the Vindicator that this design made it so that “if something looks wrong over there at your neighbor’s, you’re able to see that” (Milliken 2013). Thus, constructing the homes to be inward-facing circulates an argument in the community that
residents *should* watch each other and need to self-police. The Villages served as a physical stand-in for the rhetoric of surveillance.

**Conclusion**

I have examined Westlake here because it provides a rich example of a place that has undergone continual re-invention. Specifically, I have highlighted several of its major inventions: its initial conception as a slum clearance project; the order that placed upon it through regulation; de-regulation and responsive re-invention through resident mobility; the construction of a freeway that deeply impacted the project’s materiality; crime, corruption, and decay that turned the project back into “slums;” and, finally, the project’s demolition and the construction of a new project in its place. In Westlake’s constant re-inventions and the tensions and rhetoric circulating through it, we can clearly see how a place itself can be rhetorical. Specifically, here we see a number of rhetorical and inventional decisions motivated and animated by explicit and implicit racism; indeed, the rhetoric that invented Westlake before it was even built was centered around constructions of race and poverty. And while I have looked at one particular place here, I agree with Cintron (1997) that one can simultaneously look at the local and argue for a broader picture of building more socially just and equitable places. Westlake’s history and the myriad inventions that it underwent that made it exude rhetoric in line with the agenda of structural racism shows us how important attending to these inventions and their motivations can be. This way of looking at places has the potential to uncover similar instances of injustice, control, and power relations in other places, and if we continue to do that we can work towards more productive constructions of place in the future.

Understanding places as undergoing a process of invention is important for rhetoricians because the meanings of places and the ways in which they are invented have real, material
consequences for people’s lives, as evidenced by Westlake. Understanding how places contribute
to and are constituted by inventional processes can lead us to better rhetorical practices because
it emphasizes the power of how we write places, which can in turn help us find best practices for
future inventions of place. By examining what has been done previously, whether right or wrong
or somewhere in between, we can learn lessons that can help us create places with a rhetoric
aimed toward equality, justice, diversity, mobility, flexibility, and hospitality.

For some, the Villages will always resonate as Westlake and as home. For others, it will
always be a reminder of crime, violence, and deterioration, of good intentions gone wrong. As
Traficant (1985) says, “That was one of the roughest neighborhoods in Youngstown history. You
lived on that hill as a kid and you fought or you didn’t survive,” and yet, at the same time,
Westlake “is at least a symbol of having tried” (p. 12). The point is that it is a symbol; it is a
rhetorical manifestation of progress, structural racism, community, order, displacement,
dispossession, crime, renewal, and/or hope (and sometimes all of these at once). The coalescing
of all of these illustrates rhetorical dynamism and is a clear result of various rhetorical inventions
taking place within and animating the project. This chapter has sought to uncover some of the
meanings and tensions created by inventing places rhetorically in one relatively small place, yet
it’s a place that Traficant (1985) describes as “of social significance and a landmark for the
human experience” (p. 12). Westlake may be gone, but its rhetoric lives on, and remnants of it
remain in the archives, in pictures, and in this chapter; as a dynamic rhetorical force, it has
simply been re-invented one more time.

Notes

1 Indeed, the project’s construction was so important for political careers and Democratic Party
agendas that it elicited a visit from Eleanor Roosevelt.
The International Style is a modernist architectural style of the early-to-mid twentieth century. The style emphasized volume, repetition, and flatness, and rejected ornament and color. International Style views architecture with a focus on function rather than form.

Casey contrasts this with hestial dwelling, in which places are constructed to give a sense of center and permanence. It’s perhaps important to note in this context that Casey argues that both forms of dwelling are important, while emphasizing one over the other causes issues in people’s sense of implacement.

For instance, African Americans currently comprise 45.2% of Youngstown’s population, but only 15.9% of Mahoning County’s population; 80.1% of African Americans in the county live in Youngstown.

Several officials at the YMHA were investigated or indicted for taking bribes and shirking inspections. Youngstown’s government as a whole was known for corruption for decades; several prominent officials were in the pockets of the mafia, including judges, prosecutors, police officials, fire officials, and others.

According to the Vindicator (1990), even the homeless refused to live in Westlake. The paper reports that “most homeless families resist going to the housing projects … they’re willing to stay at the mission and wait until they can find independent housing” (Roberts, 1990, p. A1). This is despite over 100 units being available in the summer of 1989.

The construction of these prisons was vehemently opposed by many in the city (Linkon and Russo 2002), but came to pass regardless. Interestingly, both cities were built in low-income areas.
Chapter Four: Idora Park

In the previous chapter, we saw how Westlake Terrace is illustrative of rhetorical dynamism and of the importance of attending to dynamism because of place’s capacity to perpetuate inequality through new inventions and shifting rhetorical tensions. In this chapter, I will explore another site in Youngstown that is also illustrative of rhetorical dynamism, but in some different ways: Idora Park. Like Westlake, Idora Park exhibits each characteristic of rhetorical dynamism and thus shows how the theory can be used to study the rhetoric of places.

And in Idora Park, specifically, we have a place that was deeply interconnected to surrounding contexts and whose changes mirror shifts in the larger Youngstown area. Like in Westlake, these changes perpetuate inequality as well, but do so through urban abandonment rather than racialized planning policies.

Idora Park, a defunct amusement park and National Historic Site on Youngstown’s South Side, illustrates rhetorical dynamism in a different manner than Westlake does. In Idora Park, we have a place that is rhetorically dynamic because of the way that its meanings shifted over time, the way that it deeply impacted its surroundings, and the way that stakeholders chose to remember and understand it, a process which was fraught with tension.

In this chapter, I provide a brief history of Idora Park that is built from my archival research, including oral histories, newspaper articles, and several books documenting the park’s history. I will then use that history of an example to demonstrate the characteristics of rhetorical dynamism: invention, rhetorical tensions, fluidity and evolution, and place as reciprocal participant.
The History of Idora Park

In Youngstown’s early days, streetcar lines were one of the primary ways of getting around the city, and ran between multiple neighborhoods. One of these streetcars, run by the Youngstown Park & Falls Street Railway Company, led to the south side, which, at the time, was a rural, undeveloped area. The streetcar line leading to the area would be one of the major forces driving the south side’s development. As Shale and Jacques (1999) point out, “the streetcar line would have a considerable effect on the economic growth of Youngstown’s south side, but before this could happen two things were necessary: a way to connect the service to Youngstown’s Central Square and an attraction to lure people to the end of the line” (p. 6).

Terminal Park, the first iteration of Idora Park, was that attraction. Terminal Park opened on May 30, 1899 (Shale and Jacques 1999) as a trolley park, which were amusement parks built at the ends of streetcar lines in less populated areas to lure passengers to take the entire trip. The initially small park featured a carousel, outdoor theater, dance hall, and picnic areas, and became immensely popular very quickly: in its first year had as many as 20,000 visitors on one day (the population of Youngstown was around 45,000 at the time).

Figure 4.1: Idora Park in 1910.
Image courtesy Oakland Public Library
The park would be renamed to Idora Park later in 1899 and would see continued success over its lifetime. Indeed, it saw so many visitors that it needed to expand quickly to account for them. The first roller coaster was built in 1902 (see Figure 4.1), new attractions were built, and by 1915 the size of the park had doubled.

Idora Park featured both a scenic, bucolic background and attractions that were captivating and high-tech (for the time). *The Vindicator* (1901) called the park “one of the most beautiful sylvan spots in the country” and claimed that it was “gifted by nature with every requisite to make up the most ideal spot for a day’s outing.” After a regional horseshoers’ outing at the park, the *Horseshoers’ Journal* described Idora Park as featuring “rising hills and spacious lawns, great trees of oak and sycamore, scenery sufficient to provide the artist with a most beautiful picture and which enables the sightseer or picnicker to enjoy himself to the fullest as the balmy breezes sweep through the great oaks which stud the hillside” (qtd. in *The Vindicator*, 1901). This pastoral backdrop would mix well with nearby Mill Creek Park, too, making the south side a place where one could escape the urban-industrial areas in the rest of Youngstown to relax and get back to nature.

Yet the park offered more than simply a scenic backdrop. Attractions like cutting-edge figure-eight roller coasters, vaudeville shows, and fireworks could be enjoyed at the park, as well. And the park was entirely run by electricity despite fears that the new technology could cause fires, and even the now-simple electric lights that illuminated the park left visitors in awe (Deblasio 2010). Other attractions included live music, gondola rides, and even professional baseball games, ensuring that a visit to the park would be one full of excitement, but also offering a juxtaposition to the natural beauty of the park.
As the park grew, so did the neighborhood around it, which would come to be known as the Idora neighborhood. When Idora Park opened, this neighborhood was non-existent, as the south side of Youngstown had largely not developed yet. After the park’s opening, though, the area grew very quickly. Large manor homes (see Figure 4.2) were constructed in the neighborhood, schools and businesses were built, and a commercial area developed on nearby Glenwood Avenue. Many of the houses were owned by steel magnates and the area was a picture of wealth and prosperity.

![Figure 4.2: A home on Volney Ave. in Idora](Image courtesy of Realtor.com)

The park’s success would continue throughout Youngstown’s heyday, but the park would begin to lose prominence as a regional attraction in the 1950s for several reasons. First, the construction of freeways made it easier for people to go to other parks like Cedar Point in
Sandusky, Ohio and Kennywood in Pittsburgh. Second, the opening of Disney World made other parks around the country feel like they had to expand and improve to keep up. Idora Park was no exception, but by this time it had no room left for expansion. These factors caused the park’s significance to begin to diminish somewhat, as it was increasingly outdone by larger parks.

The decline in the rest of Youngstown, beginning in the 1960s, hurt Idora Park badly, as well. leading to a marked decline. Even though the park’s admission remained free for much of its lifetime, attendance saw a steady decline as Youngstown’s jobs and economy declined. In some cases, the events in the city at large would have a direct impact; for instance, the Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company’s yearly picnic was one of the park’s largest, and the company’s closing thus had a severe impact on the park. Resident Mark Hackett (1991) reports that, toward the end, the park’s finances were such that they could only afford to be open from Thursday-Sunday.

As the park’s attendance and finances declined into the 1970s, there were rumblings of potential closing or sale, all refuted by management. Their hand would be forced, however, as a spark from a welder’s torch ignited a huge blaze in the park, destroying significant portions of it, including several rides and park offices (see Figure 4.3). It simply wasn’t financially feasible to rebuild or to remain open after the fire, and the park closed in 1984, after 85 years of operation. Some rides were auctioned off, but many remnants of the park remained standing, providing a stark reminder of what once was. Because of this, many were hopeful the park could be reopened, but several more fires on the park’s grounds dashed those hopes.

After Idora Park’s closing, the Idora neighborhood declined, as well. One resident said that white flight was quick to take hold when the park closed; home values fell, and once the first African American family moved into the area, whites abandoned it very quickly. A few years
after the park’s closing, Norma Jean Carney (1991), a former patron, says that “the area is so bad, they’d have to build a barricade around it” in order to reopen the park (p. 18). This would only continue after the park’s closing. According to the Comprehensive Neighborhood Plan, “there are many issues that must be addressed including public safety, vacancy, disinvestment, absentee landlords, and a blighted commercial corridor” (City of Youngstown, 2008, p. 8). The Glenwood business district was abandoned, and the area became a food desert, with only liquor stores and convenience stores nearby. Much like Westlake, people were afraid to leave their homes because of the high crime rate. The area fell into disrepair, vacancies soared, and the once beautiful houses began to be overgrown and even destroyed (see Figure 4.4).
Figure 4.4: The South Side after Idora Park
Image courtesy of Rustwire.com

At the park, some of the attractions stood for some time, but the park was purchased by the Mt. Calvary Pentecostal Church in Youngstown, who planned to build a religious complex there, a move that many resisted. Yet the complex never came to pass, the church accrued a tremendous amount of debt on the land, and the structures that were still standing were vandalized, succumbed to nature, or were destroyed by arson.

The true end of Idora Park would come in 2001 with another fire, this time in the ballroom. Following this fire, all remaining structures were demolished to prevent any future fires. Though the remaining coasters had been listed on preservation lists, inaction had led to them being unsalvageable. The only part of the park that was saved was the Carousel, which was moved to New York City for restoration and still operates today in the Brooklyn Bridge Park.
Today, the land sits empty and unused, taken over by nature (see Figure 4.5). The Pentecostal Church is bankrupt and embroiled in property tax lawsuits regarding the debt they owe on the land, and they have made no moves to make use of the land to this point. Only a few old structures such as old lighting fixtures provide a reminder of what used to be there. Preservation and memorializing efforts still persist, though, including a museum dedicated to the Park’s history in nearby Canfield.

Figure 4.5: Idora Park in 2018
Photo by author

Idora Park’s history provides several insights as a rhetorically dynamic place. In the rest of this chapter, I will detail how this history illustrates each characteristic of rhetorical dynamism in turn, using the brief history above to inform this discussion.
The Invention of Idora

The first characteristic of rhetorical dynamism is an ongoing, sociocultural practice of rhetorical invention, and Idora Park both underwent this process and served as a site that drove discursive invention. As I will show here, the park was continually re-invented throughout its lifetime to meet consumer demands and societal exigencies. Later, it would serve to generate place-based arguments and to drive the invention of the space surrounding it.

Idora Park was popular from its inception because of the ways in which it was rhetorically invented as a place of escape and relaxation, an enterprise in which it was successful (Deblasio 2010). The park was initially created as an attraction to lure passengers of streetcar lines to the last stop on the line, in a sparsely populated area. It was meant to draw people away from the busy industrial backdrop of the rest of the city and provide a place of relaxation and pleasure. Because of this, Idora Park was designed with these principles in mind; it was rhetorically designed for the purpose of making an audience of blue-collar workers forget, for a time, the smog and soot of their daily lives. The park simultaneously projected a scene of bucolic, natural relaxation and of cutting-edge technology and entertainment. This juxtaposition drove the rhetoric of Idora Park as an escape from working class life in the city.

As Idora Park grew in popularity, it had to continually re-invent itself rhetorically to meet the demands of its audience, and did so by building new rides and attractions and re-building old ones. As Shale and Jacques (1999) put it, most of the park was constantly rebuilt over Idora Park’s lifetime. While it was originally meant to be a small, local park, and featured only a few attractions to serve that population, it quickly grew in popularity and received visitors from all over the region. Because of this, the park grew and re-invented itself as one of the premier amusement parks of the region. As Hackett (1991) put it, “Idora Park was a classic example of
what a traditional American amusement park was supposed to be like” (p. 4). They built more rides, provided more entertainment options, and even hosted scrimmages from Major League Baseball teams like the Cardinals and Giants (Zupko 1987). The park had to grow, then, to accommodate both the large local crowds and the people coming in from Pittsburgh and Cleveland.

The park’s continual re-inventions was also driven by competition from other parks. Idora Park’s ownership understood that they had to keep up with the likes of Cedar Point, Geauga Lake, and Kennywood to maintain relevance, especially as automobiles became more popular and people were increasingly able to go to these other parks from Youngstown. The park did what it could to keep up with these, even attempting to keep up with Disney World after its founding. Indeed, they invested so much money into their growth that they came to be known locally as Youngstown’s “Million Dollar Park.” Yet, as former park employee George Nelson (1990) puts it “it really could not expand because it was centered right by Mill Creek Park” (p. 11), one of the largest metropolitan parks in the country. The material realities of the park being hemmed in by new residential growth and by the nearby Mill Creek Park meant that it could only expand so much, and so as much as they wanted to invent the park as a premier attraction, it simply wasn’t financially or spatially feasible to do so.

Because of the park’s inability to keep up with other parks, and because of the decline in Youngstown’s economy overall, the park pivoted back to its previous identity as a local attraction. They began to focus much more on local company picnics, ethnic celebration days, and other local events. So, Idora Park moved recursively back to its original invention as a small, local attraction. This is another clear example of how invention can be a recursive process wherein the meaning of a place is shifted according to needs and social pressures.
After this, its popularity waned and it began to be seen as somewhat of a relic by many (Shale and Jacques 1999). The perception and popularity of the park dipped, and the neighborhood around it experienced white flight, causing many to see the park in a different light. As Carney (1990) put it, “In the end, I didn’t even like to go. And, I certainly would never have wanted my kids to go. There were gangs and people roaming through there” (p. 13). Other interviewees support this; Hackett reports that there was a lot of vandalism in the park towards the end, and Zupko, a former security guard, said he noticed more and more problems in the later years of the park. We see here a clear change in how the park is perceived - its rhetoric shifted to a relic of the past that was now dangerous to visit.

After the fire, the physical space of the park was re-invented as a memory place, a place where people could nostalgically hold on to remnants of a better past (Dickinson Blair and Ott 2010). This happened almost immediately; Nelson (1990) remembers people “making pilgrimages, almost like they were going to calling hours at a funeral home” (p. 11). A local resident, George Horvatch, explained this quite simply in *The Vindicator*: “It was part of everybody’s past” (Guy 1984). Though the importance and popularity of the park had waned in recent years, it here illustrates rhetorical dynamism because as its materiality shifts the park becomes invented as a place that people can map their memories on to. This re-invention drastically changed what the park was rhetorically. Now, it was a site for remembrance and served as a metonym for attempts to remember the better times in Youngstown as a whole. Yet it was also a blank canvas onto which could be mapped arguments about public housing, community welfare, and the city’s past.

Idora Park also became a site that drove discursive invention. It became what Rai (2016) calls a place of invention, a site which serves as a topoi for debate. Debates around the park
centered primarily on what should be done with the space and with its relics. These debates would ensure that Idora Park didn’t remain static, even though the park was gone.

Preserving the relics and buildings of the park were the first point where the space that was Idora Park prompted discursive inventions. Many thought that they should be restored and, at the very least, put in a museum. They argued vociferously against further demolition of rides and structures in the park. For instance, Hackett (1990), discussing the Jack Rabbit roller coaster, says that “to me, tearing that down is like tearing down the Statue of Liberty” (p. 6). Concerted efforts were made by the Mahoning Valley Preservation Club to preserve the park’s ballroom, seeking donations based on the “overwhelming sense of nostalgia surrounding Idora Park” (Meade 1992, p. B1:2). This same club campaigned for the park to be added to the National Register of Historic Places, an effort that was successful and that is a clear demonstration of inventing the place through discursive efforts.

Other efforts to preserve the park mainly centered around enshrining the remaining rides and other paraphernalia in museums. These efforts began as early as 1996, when the Idora Park Institute sought unsuccessfully to open a downtown museum (Vindicator 1996). And the Idora Park Historical Society sought to create “a living museum” on the actual property (Vindicator 1993), an attempt that was also unsuccessful due to issues purchasing the land. Some of the park’s relics were successfully, preserved, though. The famous carousel was moved to Brooklyn shortly after the park’s closing and still runs today. And two of the roller coasters were successfully moved to a museum of early-1900s amusement parks in Indiana. Attempts for local preservation continued, and were finally successful in 2014 with the opening of the Idora Park Experience in the nearby suburb of Canfield.
Importantly, a common thread in all of these preservation attempts was an underlying hope that they would stimulate interest in reviving the park, even after it had been gone for more than a decade. The Idora Park Institute, for instance, hoped that a museum would generate “community interest in buying or leasing the former amusement park property” (Vindicator 1996). Going even further, the Idora Park Historical Society thought that, at the time, many of the structures could be repaired and re-opened if purchasing attempts were successful. Here, the park continued to be dynamic even after it was closed; it drove the rhetoric surrounding it to re-invent it in as a museum, a site for preservation, or a site for revival.

The defunct park also served as a place of invention in driving arguments about what should be done with the space if it could not be rebuilt or preserved as Idora Park. Many felt that this was the case; Nelson (1990) believed that it could not “work as an amusement park ... anymore. Its day is now passed, unfortunately” (p. 16). Those that believed that the park could not work as a park anymore primarily argued that it should be made useful for the surrounding community. Nelson (1990) thought that they should put a community center on the property. Zupko (1990) saw it as a prime site for affordable housing. Here, the park was clearly serving as a platform for people to make arguments about what should be done with a space when its previous function is no longer viable, showing dynamic potential for another re-invention.

Despite all of these attempts at preservation or arguments for productive land use, the reality would be that the Mount Cavalry Pentecostal Church simply never made use of the land. Though their plans for re-inventing the site were to turn it into a religious complex, these never materialized. Instead, they neglected the property and left it to rot (literally in the case of the wooden structures). Time and more fires swept away much of the remaining park, and eventually all remaining structures were demolished due to “complaints about trespassers, stray dogs, and
rats” (Vindicator 1998) after the owners had been cited with multiple zoning and property violations. Even after the church went bankrupt, it refused to sell the land as recently as 2017, and to this day it is a vacant lot. It turns out that when discussing what to do with the land, Deblasio (1990) was prophetic in having “a feeling it is going to be over grown in a couple of years” (p. 9), which is indeed what has come to pass.

The recent re-invention of the Idora neighborhood is exemplary of rhetorical dynamism, as well. Longtime residents eventually became fed up with the real and representational issues in their neighborhood. Much like Westlake, the area was deprived of resources because of the perception that it was a run-down and nearly abandoned neighborhood, which created physical consequences of vandalism, crime, and unhealthy living situations due to vacant homes and lots. Yet residents, through their own practices, both physical and discursive, have gradually re-invented the place into a welcoming, revitalized neighborhood. The residents pushed for the neighborhood to be included in the Youngstown 2010 plan, and were successful because of the way they represented the neighborhood and community in public forums. According the Idora Neighborhood Association, every vacant lot has been turned into green space and crime has dropped precipitously. The area now includes urban community gardens and a farmer’s market, and the historic houses have begun to be repaired. Residents, then, rejected the rhetoric imposed on them by white flight and abandonment and used their own inventive capacities to craft the kind of neighborhood that they wanted to live in.

Idora Park moved through several inventions, then, both in its lifetime and after it was destroyed. It was initially invented as a small local attraction, then was re-invented due to increasing popularity and demand to become a full-fledged regional amusement park. It turned back to its initial iteration with falling popularity, and then once it was destroyed served as a
place that drove invention arguments and decisions about land management, public land, and memorialization. Each of these inventions comprises a series of dynamic rhetorical tensions between various stakeholders, as well, and I will detail these next.

Idora Park’s Shifting Rhetorical Tensions

Rhetorical tensions persisted around Idora Park from its inception. From its beginning, the park walked a line between natural beauty and new technology that could have been discomfiting to many. However, the tension between these two identities here produced a perception of the park as a place that anybody could enjoy as an escape from the bustling work life of the rest of the city.

Tensions also existed in who could enjoy the park’s amenities. There are early stories of racism in admission to the park or to specific amenities. This was especially true for the park’s pool. African Americans were not allowed to use the pool, but attempted to anyway and eventually began to demand access after World War II. As local resident Erskine Crenshaw (1998) says, “we could go to Idora Park, but we just could not go swim” (p. 11). Rather than providing this access, the park simply closed the pool to prevent further controversy. Deblasio (1990) says that the reason for the pool’s closing was simple:

Racism. Blacks were coming back from WWII saying ‘hey, we fought and died for this country,’ and they were pretty demanding to use the facility. They were right about that. They were tax paying citizens and they had every right to use it. Apparently, too many blacks were going to the management and saying they did not like it. (p. 10)

Here, rhetorical tensions based around identity markers, segregation, and racism drive change in the place. Idora Park’s ownership initiated these tensions by restricting African Americans’
access to amenities, and African Americans exerted their own rhetorical force in asserting that they should be allowed to use the facilities. Rather than a productive resolution to this tension, however, the response was simply to permanently close the pool. This is how rhetorical tensions work to make places rhetorically dynamic; as the tensions accrete through people making various claims on or about the place, they change the place, both rhetorically and physically.

The park’s shifting identity and inventions would also be driven by rhetorical tensions. As the park grew in popularity and as competition increased from other parks, it had to define itself in response to these exigencies. Should the park be a local attraction? A regional one? A picnic area? A place for local events and concerts? These potential meanings all existed in tension with one another as the park tried to find its way forward in its later years. Furthermore, these were complicated by the park’s materiality. The desire to further develop and grow the park was offset by the physical limitations of the property. As noted earlier, expansion was nearly impossible, and that materiality worked against both visitors and management who wanted to develop the park to be competitive in the changing economy and landscape.

As the park began to decline, new sets of tensions would be embedded within it. Youngstown residents had to weigh their understanding of Idora Park as an important and historical local gem against new perceptions: that the park and neighborhood were becoming dangerous, and that the economic downfall of Youngstown made it impossible for many to go. This tension caused many to look at the park as a relic even before it was officially closed, and the rhetoric surrounding the park was that it was, essentially, past its prime. This rhetoric directly drove the decrease in popularity of the park, to the point where it was put up for sale in 1982. Hackett (1991) reports that employee morale was low at this point, and Deblasio (1990) says that
the park would have closed even without the fire. The tensions between Idora Park’s past and present, then, caused many to see it with a sense of nostalgia even while the park was still open.

Rhetorical tensions persisted around the place even after the park closed. Many saw the now-empty space of the park as a place that could become a number of different things. While many wanted to re-open or memorialize the park in some way, others thought that it should be turned into a space that could be useful for the surrounding community. Possibilities included a community center, affordable housing, or turning the park into green space that could be used by nearby residents. These various possibilities for the park’s future existed in tension with one another, driving public debates about what to do with the property. These debates played out in public discussions, courtroom battles, and in local media. The rhetorical tensions underpinned attempts to purchase the land, community movements to register it as a historical place, and debates about what to do with the park’s remaining structures. For instance, depending on where people stood about the park’s future, they supported different attempts at purchasing the land by the city, private citizens, and historical societies. These debates, then, were animated by the park’s past, present, and future, and by what residents saw as valuable in a space that had been an important marker of the community’s history.

The surrounding neighborhood was fraught with tension as well. The Idora neighborhood being of historical significance and containing large, historic homes and other buildings existed in tension with perceptions of the neighborhood as dangerous and largely abandoned. Even these wider perceptions of the neighborhood butted up against residents’ understandings of their own neighborhood; they realized that there were issues, but pushed for the revitalization of the area. These tensions would coalesce to drive the development of the neighborhood into historic community that is on the upswing. Residents even played on this tension to increase support for
neighborhood revitalization. This can be seen in the Youngstown 2010 plan, where the space is described as having “beautiful views along many of the neighborhood’s streets” while, simultaneously, “Vacancy in many forms is concentrated here … crime is also concentrated within this area” (City of Youngstown 2008, p. 8). These physical facts of the area create tension between a potentially desirable place to live and a place with deep issues of crime, vandalism, and abandonment. Eventually, this would drive local efforts to make changes in the area, and residents’ advocacy would eventually get city officials involved in these efforts. After one stakeholder meeting, the city noted that “Idora residents filled the meeting to capacity and filled the room with healthy discussion as they voiced their desires for change” (City of Youngstown 2008, p. 152). At these meetings, residents asserted what they valued most in neighborhood revitalization: reduction of crime, demolition of abandoned housing, conversion of vacant lots, and a clean and green neighborhood. The rhetoric surrounding the area, then, manifested in civic efforts to improve the neighborhood, as the concerns about what the neighborhood had become drove civic action and priorities in redeveloping the beleaguered area.

Idora Park’s history is one that clearly demonstrates how places are rhetorically dynamic because of the various shifting tensions. Often, various rhetorics existed within and about the park that were in tension with one another and caused new meanings and arguments to manifest. These tensions drove the invention of the park at various stages, and also show how Idora Park exhibits the evolutionary characteristic of rhetorical dynamism.

The Fluidity and Evolution of Idora Park

In Idora Park, we have an example of a place that constantly evolved throughout its history. The park was never a static entity, either materially or rhetorically. From the beginning, it was continually shifting. Even the name was not its original name; it was first called Terminal
Park, and was renamed after a community naming contest in the local newspaper. Beyond this, the rhetoric of the park would evolve over time in various ways, as would the rhetoric of the area surrounding the park.

After the park’s opening, its rhetoric and purpose quickly shifted. While originally meant to be an attraction for people riding the southbound streetcar, it quickly evolved into an attraction that would draw visitors from all over the city. This evolution caused the materiality of the park to shift as well; new attractions were built and old ones rebuilt to accommodate the changing demographics of visitors. As Shale and Jacques (1999) note, the park was constantly rebuilt over its lifetime to adhere to changing demands. These changes were fairly quick in the beginning, as the park’s attendance and popularity grew rapidly: the first roller coaster was built in 1902, the dance hall was rebuilt to accommodate more people in 1910, and by 1915, the size of the park had doubled.

The surrounding neighborhood would evolve with the park, as well. Where originally the neighborhood had been virtually uninhabited, Shale and Jacques (1999) relate that “in a little more than two decades, the south side of the city had evolved from a rural, isolated area with few residents to a rapidly expanding community with ten public schools, a high school, and hundreds of new homes” (p. 37). The area would evolve rhetorically, as well. Where it used to be viewed as an rural area of parks and open space, it evolved to become known as Youngstown’s “Millionaire’s Playground.” Here, the rhetorical dynamism of the park and the neighborhood propelled both material and rhetorical change.

The park’s rhetoric would further evolve as it began to decline. As it became more difficult for many to go and as regulations in the park were relaxed, residents began to view the place in a different light. Its rhetoric now evolved to one of nostalgia, apathy, and in some cases
fear. People simply were not able to go as much, and viewed the park as a relic of Youngstown’s prosperous past. And there were those like Carney (1991) who began to view the park and the neighborhood around it as a dangerous place to avoid.

The neighborhood’s rhetoric began to shift here, as well. What was once seen as one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in the city was now seen as a bad area. Carney (1991) is only one of the residents to point out that the neighborhood was declining. In many cases, this shift was very similar to Westlake. As African Americans started to move in to the area, white flight occurred en masse. One former resident, who claims to have been the last white family in the Idora neighborhood, noted that this happened as soon as the first African American family moved in. Here, the area shifts from a wealthy neighborhood to a primarily African American neighborhood (today, the area is over 64% African American). This in turn shifted the perception of the neighborhood, and led to a loss of businesses and resources.

After the park’s closing, it would continue to be a rhetorically dynamic site, as it would continue to evolve. Many saw it as a site of tragedy, loss, and nostalgia. Discourse about the park now centered on memorialization and re-development initiatives. The first shift after the park’s closing was to a ghost town; the park existed as a physical reminder of what used to be, a visceral look into a past that was no more. The materiality of this shift drove arguments about preservation, and provided urgency to them. The desolation of the park while its structures still stood provided a clear visual argument that something needed to change. Rotting and overgrown wooden structures that were vulnerable to the elements and to fire provided the basis for arguments by the Idora Historical Society and others that the park needed to be preserved and that these efforts should happen quickly. Despite the park itself reinforcing these arguments, however, these preservation efforts would mostly fail.
The rhetoric of the neighborhood would shift one last time, as well. Where for some time after its decline the place had a feeling of despair and danger about it, today it is looked at with hope. Signs adorn street poles celebrating the “Historic Idora Neighborhood,” and residents have adorned their homes with signs urging revitalization. The future is optimistic, and residents attempts to transform the place have served to shift the place’s rhetoric along with its materiality; no longer is it thought of as a place to avoid, but one with a robust community transforming it into a green and sustainable space for middle class families.

Idora Park and the Idora neighborhood constantly changed and evolved over their lifetimes in response to shifting exigencies and rhetorical tensions. The various inventions of the park and the neighborhood serve to illustrate that they are dynamic places because they are fluid and subject to continual evolution. It’s key to remember that, as a dynamic place, the park participates in this fluid process, as well, and does so in relation to its surrounding contexts and exigencies.

**Idora Park as a Reciprocal Participant**

As a rhetorically dynamic place, Idora Park acted as a participant in its rhetoric and drove the dynamic changes discussed above in reciprocity with its context. From the beginning, Idora Park arose out of a coalescing of economic and social exigencies. The park “could trace its origins to the popularity of fairs and expositions that swept America during the last years of the nineteenth century” (Shale and Jacques, 1999 p. 6). This larger country-wide context would provide the context for the park’s initial invention. Idora Park was also a response to economic growth and urban sprawl, as it was made possible by the streetcar line. As Shale and Jacques (1999) argue, Idora was one of the major factors enabling the streetcar line to impact the development of the South Side. However, Idora Park was reciprocal in this; the streetcar line
would not have grown as it did without the park. So, the park grew out of a need for the streetcar to attract riders, and the streetcar developed in popularity because of the construction of the park.

Idora Park also showed an agentive reciprocity with its surroundings in the way it participated in the development of the surrounding neighborhood. The park was so popular that it drove the development of the space around it. The place exerted agency in propelling construction of homes, railway lines, schools, and businesses. The entire south side of Youngstown grew as a direct response to the popularity of Idora Park, and this development increased the popularity and attendance at the park, which then led the park to continually improve. This illustrates a clear reciprocal relationship between the park and its surrounding context, wherein each are direct participants in the development of the other.

Nationwide contexts would again affect Idora Park, this time negatively. As competing amusement parks grew, the park had to do the same or risk losing business and losing its status as a premiere regional attraction. This was further complicated by the development of the freeway system making it even easier to get to these other parks from Youngstown. Idora Park attempted to grow and develop to stay in competition with these places, but its materiality here entered the conversation to resist this development. Though the park wanted to position itself rhetorically as a competitor on the regional stage, it simply could not physically expand any more, and had to stagnate and eventually did lose prominence among its competitors.

The decline of Youngstown provides another instance where surrounding context work reciprocally with Idora Park to indelibly change it. The decline of Youngstown’s economy and the closing of the steel mills proved dire for the park. They lost many of their company picnics, a huge source of income, and many residents, now unemployed, simply did not have the resources to go anymore. This change in the city at large drove changes in the park, as it tried to shrink to
accommodate its changing role; eventually, Youngstown’s economic collapse would prove a major factor in the park’s attempted sale and moves toward closure.

After the fire and the park’s closing, the physical reality of the abandoned amusement park served to drive rhetorical arguments and decisions about its future. In the conversations noted above about memorialization or development, Idora Park was as much a participant as other stakeholders. Its materiality gave exigency to arguments that something needed to be done with the space to either save the park or remove an imminent fire hazard. Here, the park’s materiality participated in rhetoric by providing a stark reminder of what used to be and a prompt that something had to be done with the space.

Idora Park was also a direct participant in the decline of its surrounding neighborhood. Just as the park drove the development of the south side, it also propelled it into decline and disrepair. To many, the park made the neighborhood, and if the park was not there, then it follows that the neighborhood would be abandoned as well. Indeed, the abandonment and disrepair of the park and its structures reflects the neighborhood. They fell together, and each drove the decay of the other.

In each of these instances, Idora Park acts as a direct participant in inventing its rhetoric. The park works with its surrounding contexts and with stakeholders to invent new meanings and to accrete and project the various meanings sedimented within it. It also drives and is driven by changes in its surroundings.

Conclusion

Idora Park illustrates rhetorical dynamism and each of its characteristics: invention, rhetorical tension, evolution, and active reciprocity. It is rhetorically invented and continually re-invented over the course of its life. These inventions are driven by rhetorical tensions that
continually embed themselves within the park and are projected by the park. Both the physicality and the rhetoric of the place are fluid and evolving. And, finally, the park was a participant in these processes, working with its surrounding contexts and stakeholders in the process of dynamism.

While Idora Park’s early history shows how places mirror their surroundings by serving as a mirror for the prosperity of Youngstown at the time, it would shift along with the city itself. As the city deteriorated, the park changed from being a regional attraction to a more localized site fit for company outings and family reunions. After the fire and the park’s subsequent closing in 1984, the area that was Idora Park changed drastically. The surrounding neighborhood experienced white flight similar to that of Westlake and became almost entirely African American. The park itself had attractions standing for years, decaying and sparking more fires until their eventual demolition in 2001. Now, it is embroiled in lawsuits over property taxes, and the park has been memorialized in a local museum. This history provides us with insight into how places should be remembered, what we should do with places when they reach their end, how places impact their surroundings, and how discourse surrounding places can shift the rhetoric of the place itself. Perhaps most important is the fact that Idora Park was so popular that it drove the development of the space surrounding it - but that space was all but abandoned with the park’s closing, making clear how relations between places can drive our commitments to them.

Further, Idora Park shows the consequences that place’s rhetorics can have. As the place’s rhetoric changed and it became less useful, the neighborhood surrounding it was impacted and residents saw dire consequences, from violent crime to vandalism to food insecurity. For most of my life, the area has been known as a neighborhood to avoid, and Idora’s
story shows that that perception was a direct result of the rhetoric surrounding both the park and
the neighborhood. That is, physical abandonment leads to a rhetoric and an attitude of
abandonment and apathy, which leads to a lack of resources, especially when residents feel like
they do not have a voice in civic proceedings or in requesting resources because of where they
live. Many of the people here were afraid to leave their homes, nevertheless attend neighborhood
or city council meetings.

Luckily, the Idora neighborhood has begun to see a turn-around as residents resist the
rhetorical perception of Idora as a forgotten or lost neighborhood. They have begun to re-invent
the place for their own needs, set their own priorities, and make these priorities heard in civic
proceedings. This process, too, was partially built on Idora Park’s rhetoric; the park’s former
prominence and glory is key in re-framing the neighborhood as a historic area that is worthy of
being saved. Those efforts have, thus far, been successful, and provide insight into how we can
move forward in places like Idora Park and Westlake Terrace and participate in productive
rhetorical placemaking practices that are responsive to the needs of the people that live and work
in those places. The rhetorical dynamism of these places that I have illustrated in the previous
two chapters is key to successfully participating in those practices, as I will show in my
conclusion.
Chapter 5: Conclusions and Implications

Both Westlake Terrace and Idora Park illustrate rhetorical dynamism and its characteristics, though they do so in different ways. While Westlake Terrace shows the ways that various outside forces and actors can work to re-invent a place and propel its rhetorical dynamism, Idora Park shows how the rhetorical dynamism of a place can drive the development of surrounding spaces and contexts. In each case, though, the four characteristics of rhetorical dynamism are each present; furthermore, in each case we see examples of the types of material effects that rhetorically dynamic places can have, including in perpetuating systemic inequalities.

In this concluding chapter, I will first discuss Westlake and Idora together, using the characteristics of rhetorical dynamism to do so. Then, I will discuss the ways in which places can materially impact people, especially underserved populations, and how those populations can potentially work to re-write their places through acts of community rhetoric. Next, I will explain how rhetorical dynamism can be used as a heuristic for further study of places and rhetoric and provide some implications for the field. Finally, I will discuss plans for future research using both Youngstown and rhetorical dynamism.

Westlake Terrace and Idora Park as Rhetorically Dynamic Places

Rhetorically dynamic places are ones that are active participants in ongoing processes of rhetorical invention, processes which are marked by rhetorical tension and in which places work in reciprocity with their surrounding contexts. Westlake Terrace and Idora Park are two such places; they are each emergent places that evolve over time in conjunction with their interlocutors and are composed of rhetorical tensions. To understand more specifically how these
places present similar but different views of rhetorical dynamism, I will discuss their relation to each characteristic of rhetorical dynamism in turn.

**Invention and Re-invention**

Both Westlake Terrace and Idora Park go through a series of rhetorical inventions throughout their histories. These inventions occur for various different purposes; for Westlake Terrace, inventions were built on ideas of public welfare and institutional racism. Working through the various inventions of Westlake shows how place serves as a locus for exigencies such as housing crises, segregation, white flight, freeway construction, and criminal activity, as well as how people use place rhetorically to respond to these issues. Westlake, then, shows how the process of invention can be driven by forces like structural racism and used as a means of control.

The inventions of Westlake were both discursive and material, and each served to shift or maintain the rhetoric of the place in some way. Discursive inventions such as marking the place as a “slum,” as a “neighborhood, not a project,” or as the “Forgotten Badlands” shift the narrative of the place and the perception of it, re-writing what the place is and enframing it differently as these narratives continue to circulate. Meanwhile, material inventions such as segregation, freeway construction, and demolition serve to change or complexify the materiality of the project and to shift or reinforce existing rhetorics, as well as affecting the ways that people within the place can practice rhetoric. Understanding all of these inventions as occurring in a fluid process that moves through and around a place is important because it shows how discursive moves and material moves can work together to drive inequality as a slow process that is responsive to various exigencies.
On the other hand, Idora Park’s inventions were motivated first by commercialism. Idora was, first and foremost, an attraction built to generate profit, first for the trolley line and then, later, for the park itself. Its various re-envisionings as a larger regional attraction or as a smaller community park were in service to that goal. Later inventions of Idora show how memory and invention can work in tandem; the space where the park once was served as a locus for collective memory, and those memories drove further discursive inventions of what the space should be going forward and what should be done with its relics. The processes through which memory and invention work together to produce rhetoric in such instances are complex. The collective memory surrounding Idora is epideictic (Gronbeck 1998) in that it turns Idora into a metonym for the golden age of the city of Youngstown, and this epideictic collective memory in turn leads to arguments for preservation. Yet letting memory drive invention in this way does very little for the community surrounding the park, and does nothing to drive progress. As Hern (2016) puts it, “invoking halcyon days closes off possibility and collects power as a memory unavailable to those who weren’t lucky enough to be there” (p. 45). In this case, possibilities of turning Idora Park into affordable housing, green space, or a community resource are closed off by epideictic memories that work to invent it as a site for preservation and memorialization.

The Idora neighborhood is important for understanding the role of invention in Idora Park’s rhetorical dynamism, as well. The neighborhood went as the park did; its development from a rural area was driven by the popularity of Idora Park, and its decline into a food desert and high-vacancy area was concomitant with the closing of Idora Park. Perhaps most importantly, the neighborhood shows a clear instance of residents working to re-write their place, as they continue to work on developing green spaces, argue for development, and repair worn
down structures, providing an exemplary illustration of using the rhetorically dynamic nature of a place to shift its rhetoric for the better.

Westlake Terrace and Idora Park each underwent (and, indeed, are still undergoing) a continual process of rhetorical invention that was motivated by various intentions and responded to specific exigencies. The specific intentions and exigencies differ from place to place, but uncovering them at each place shows us the underlying processes that make the places up, the societal and contextual demands that places are rhetorically responding to, and the cultural values and concerns of those writing places. Exploring these processes can also uncover mechanisms through which inequalities are perpetuated, and thus can lead to more informed, responsive inventions as we work to re-write places for the better. The histories of Westlake and Idora both show how this work can be done by looking at the full history of a place and continually turning back to a place, its rhetoric, and its materiality. Furthermore, the process of invention in each of these places is driven by rhetorical tensions, which I will discuss next.

**Rhetorical Tensions**

The dynamic inventional processes that both Westlake Terrace and Idora Park undergo are both driven by and productive of rhetorical tensions that become sedimented within each place and give them power as communicative artifacts. In each place, we see different examples of how various rhetorics are placed within and circulate through the place, and in each place these rhetorics exist both simultaneously and incongruently. This creates a tension between these different rhetorics, and this tension shifts, expands, or collapses depending on contexts and exigencies as these rhetorics compete and as people and place try to negotiate them. The process of these tensions shifting and evolving, sometimes productively and sometimes perpetuating
asymmetrical power relations, is one of the key drivers of the rhetorical dynamism of both Westlake Terrace and Idora Park.

The process of inventing Westlake Terrace led to a long history of various meanings being sedimented within it and existing in tension with one another. In this case, these tensions were created and powerfully inflected by constructions of race and poverty throughout the twentieth century. The tensions extant in Westlake were built by race relations and class division, as residents, city planners, housing officials, and others forwarded arguments through the place about public welfare, racial segregation, and community. Most of these arguments were built on similar outcomes of what was best for the public good and how to best cater to underserved populations and respond to housing crises. Yet, even when these emplaced arguments were built on the same *topoi*, they manifested very differently - for instance, in freeway construction done under the auspices of increased mobility, but that residents argue tore their neighborhood apart. Here, all involved use invention as a way to reconstruct their place - invention here is, like collective memory for Mulrooney (2018), “a place-based tactic used by both races to achieve related, yet oppositional ends” (p. 274). That is, it is something used on all sides to reach different goals but respond to similar exigencies, and because of that tensions are created as differing rhetorics struggle to maintain prominence in the same place.

Idora Park’s early rhetorical tensions circulated around the park’s identity. The park moved between being a bucolic, picturesque depiction of natural beauty and a center for amusement and entertainment, and struggled with whether to instantiate itself as a local attraction or a wider, regional one. These tensions would continue throughout Idora’s lifetime and influenced both the perception of the park and the way that it would develop. Rhetorical tensions would be more apparent, though, after the park was closed. People saw it as,
alternatively, a place for further development into something that could be useful to the surrounding community, or a place that should be marked for preservation and memorialization and thus not subject to development. In the case of Idora, these various rhetorics co-existed to the point where their incommensurability led to stagnation. The indecision about what to do with the park arose from these rhetorical tensions and brought the space to a point of stasis, and it is still an empty lot today.

In each case, the rhetorical tensions embedded in Westlake Terrace and Idora Park arise from invention and drive further invention. These tensions propel the places’ rhetorical dynamism as they shift, separate, and coalesce. In each case, these tensions were responsive to material exigencies and produced new meanings as people worked to negotiate them. In one case, these tensions were a locus of contested meanings built on racialized politics and policies. In another, they worked to determine the identity of an amusement park and, later, to overdetermine it to the point where nothing could be physically done because the arguments around it were so incommensurate. In either case, we can see a clear illustration of how various meanings can be embedded within a place and compete with one another in order to determine the rhetorics that circulate within and around those places, and thus each place is illustrative of this characteristic of rhetorical dynamism. Furthermore, in each place, these tensions and the inventions that produce them and are driven by them are fluid and constantly evolving.

**Fluidity and Constant Evolution**

Westlake Terrace and Idora Park both have rhetorics that are fluid and constantly evolving. In this way, they are both “plastic” places (Fleming 2008, p. xi); their rhetoric is not static and they do not have a fixed set of meanings that carry throughout their lifetimes. Rather, these are continually shifting, and these shifts are what makes their rhetoric dynamic and
emergent. Attending to the histories of these places allows us to see precisely how these evolutions have played out and gives us a full picture of the iterative and, at times, recursive processes of change that each place undergoes.

In Westlake, both the material place and the rhetorics surrounding and within it were subjects of constant change. Westlake moved from being a primarily black slum to a segregated, federally administered housing project, and then back to being considered a black slum, which in turn led to freeway construction cutting the project in half and crime and lack of resources driving the decline of the project. This provides one example of how places can evolve in a recursive manner, as we can see a clear loop in Westlake Terrace - it moved from being seen as a slum in need of demolition and rebuilding to being seen the exact same way seventy years later. In between this, the project’s rhetoric shifted several times, but in this case it appears to have moved back to its starting point.

Idora Park underwent constant change, as well. As Shale and Jacques (1999) relate, the park was constantly rebuilt to meet evolving demands, with new attractions being added or closed to better fit whatever the park’s base was at the time. And the park’s rhetoric certainly shifted as it declined and eventually closed, as well, moving to being seen as a relic and then as a historic artifact in need of preservation. Over its history, then, and even after its closing, Idora shows clear change and evolution in both its materiality and its rhetoric.

In each of these places, the rhetoric of the place shifts as the materiality of the place evolves, and vice versa. The two go hand-in-hand; in Westlake, we see the rhetoric of the place shifting its materiality in most cases (slum designation leading to demolition, etc.), while in Idora we often see the materiality driving change in its rhetoric (the lack of the park leading to calls for
memorialization, for instance). In either sense, it is important to remember that places are active participants in this process, and participate in reciprocity with their surroundings.

**Place as Reciprocal Participant**

Places and the contexts surrounding them work together in a reciprocal process to generate rhetoric and drive material and rhetorical change, and Westlake Terrace and Idora Park are no different here. In each case, the places themselves were active participants alongside societal demands, cultural concerns, current exigencies, and human actors in a complex network that was productive of the places’ rhetorics and of the changes that they underwent.

Westlake Terrace exercised its agency as a place in a variety of ways. First, its materiality made it an ideal place for development - and the contextual situation of a burgeoning housing crisis led directly to that development. Furthermore, its segregation, arising out of the societal institution of structural racism, worked together with the materiality of the project to ensure that African Americans lived in the less desirable part of the project - closer to the steel mills and the river. Even the architecture of the project worked to reinforce its rhetoric as a place for impermanent housing (Casey 1993). A very clear example of the project’s materiality working in tandem with surrounding contexts to drive change in its rhetoric is the construction of the Madison Avenue Expressway. The Expressway, built as a response to societal demands of mobility and suburban expansion, provided a tangible, material sense of isolation. The freeway provided a distinct reminder that mobility was more important than cultivation, and further reinforced the sense of impermanence in the project. Finally, the materiality of the project worked to reinforce its reputation as a dangerous area, as told by Lottier (1985) - because of the way that roadways were constructed within the projects, there was an impression that police were “all over,” which caused it to seem even more dangerous than it was. In each of these
instances, the materiality of the project works in tandem with wider exigencies and issues to invent new rhetorics for the project.

Idora Park, too, provides a clear example of a place exercising agency in reciprocity with its surroundings. As Idora grew, it drove the development of the surrounding space, moving it from a rural area to an affluent neighborhood. The growth of this neighborhood would in turn increase Idora’s popularity, which would then further drive growth in the neighborhood. Here, the park and the neighborhood reciprocally build one another through rhetorics of commercialism and affluence. Wider contexts would affect Idora, as well; easier access to other parks in the region, along with the economic decline of Youngstown, helped drive the decline of Idora, and the materiality of the park shifted in response to begin seeming more barren and desolate. Finally, the park’s destruction would drive arguments about what to do with the space; the materiality of the abandoned ghost town, and then of the empty lot, provided a sense of urgency to arguments about what to do with the space, a sense that was reinforced by attempts to revitalize the beleaguered Idora neighborhood and Youngstown as a whole.

Both Idora and Westlake clearly worked as active participants in the process of rhetoric, and each did so in tandem with events occurring around them. Societal demands such as housing crises, commercial growth, structural racism, and economic decline come together with the materiality of each place to create a confluence that is productive of the rhetoric generated by these places. This dynamic process, then, is important for understanding the roles that these places’ materiality plays in both local issues and wider issues such as those noted above.

Westlake Terrace and Idora Park both clearly exhibit each characteristic of rhetorical dynamism, and thus serve to illustrate how this theory can be applied to the study of places, their rhetorics, and their histories. In some ways, Westlake and Idora provide very different pictures of
rhetorical dynamism - one is a housing project that serves as a cautionary tale and a microcosm of the larger story of twentieth century African American ghetto formation and collapse in the United States, while the other is an amusement park that shows the consequences of losing a cherished local attraction. Yet they each show the power and consequences of places and their rhetorics, the way that place rhetorics have material impacts, and the way that places dynamically shift their rhetorics in response to changing tensions and contexts. Furthermore, they each show the ways that places can, through their rhetoric and materiality, work to disadvantage underrepresented groups, as well as some ways that communities might work to resist these moved. In the next section, I will discuss these material impacts, as well as community attempts to rewrite both Westlake and Idora.

**Material Impact of Place**

Places and the ways we experience them have deep impact on our lives. Heidegger (1971) even argues that “dwelling is the essential part of man’s Being” (p. 354), and Casey (1993) reminds us that places are key to the human experience. Places are powerful, ontological structures that inform our existence and ground us in the world. As we have seen previously, places can have deep impacts on how we and others understand ourselves and our identities. The associations we develop with places can leave deep and indelible marks physically, psychologically, and rhetorically. Places affect the quality of our lives, both through their physicality and their rhetoric. They affect our possibilities for public discourse, open up or foreclose action and agency, and tell us things about ourselves, our histories, and our cultures.

The rhetorical aspects of place are important because they affect people’s perceptions of their surroundings and themselves, and this in turn affects the way that places are used, dwelled in, supported, and remade. As McClellan (2008) argues, “studying how people make sense of the
city as a particular place and/or space is more important than ever for city officials, architects, landscape designers, planners, and urban critics as they make decisions that affect the ways in which we experience a city on an everyday basis” (p. 2). Understanding the rhetorical processes that flow through places can help us build better places; for instance, “the official rhetoric of city planning … can be inclusive and more widely applicable if it incorporates its varied population’s preferences for use and/or accessibility in addition to its planning goals” (McClellan, 2008, p. 2). Because of this, building better places is an enterprise that rhetoricians can productively engage in.

The political nature of place is important too, and oft-overlooked. Fleming (2008) points out that many think “of space as apolitical and of politics as ageographical,” and both “have been mistakes” (p. xiv). Rather, places deeply impact the political structures of our neighborhoods and cities - even at a basic, material level such as organizing people into voting districts. As Fleming (2008) reminds us, the political habits impacts by place also go on to “shape the design of the built world” (p. xi), which then further shapes political habit in a recursive cycle. Identifying the rhetoric that places generate and the ways places are invented, then, is key to making better places that encourage more productive civic engagement (Fleming 2008, Rice 2012b).

Because of all of these points, studying place and rhetoric should have a specific social justice component behind it. Fleming (2008) argues that “place matters, and this is as true for rhetoric as for education and employment,” (p. 184), and if that is the case “it matters most for those with the least” (Fleming, 2008, p. 192). I would argue that building places that are better physically, rhetorically, and in the ways they organize people and experiences is a key social justice concern because of this.
Ultimately, then, building better places should be the goal of even a theoretical study of place. Though many of the claims here are generalizable to place as an overall concept, we can put them into practice in local situations as well. As Cintron (1997) asks, “can one argue critically for a big picture of social justice and simultaneously find solutions that make sense from the perspective of the local? I think so” (p. 196). I agree, and would even argue that a big picture formulation of place, rhetoric, and social justice is necessary to provide concepts that can be put into action at the local level.

Studying the history of a place can support these social justice aims, as well. Looking at a place’s history shows us how its rhetoric has developed, uncovers the material effects of that rhetoric in the past, and points us to what we can do in the future. Furthermore, as Mulroe (2018) argues, “an inclusive approach to the past can promote civic engagement and cultural belonging” (p. 6). Understanding a place’s past, then, can lead to better rhetorical practices in the future; but that history must be inclusive. Mulroe (2018) reminds us that “a community that ignores the histories of its nonelite, nonwhite members effectively says: only white elites matter here” (p. 6). I have endeavored to provide such a history here, one that looks to how the history of these places has impacted everyone that lives there.

Place and rhetoric had such material effects in both Westlake Terrace and Idora Park. In each place, whether intentional or not, the way that each place evolved eventually led to severe consequences for underrepresented groups, primarily African Americans. Westlake was eventually isolated, deprived of resources, and dangerous enough that Youngstown’s homeless would rather remain in shelters than live there. And Idora park’s closing and the white flight that occurred with it sent the Idora neighborhood into a spiral that eventually resulted in the neighborhood becoming a food desert with soaring vacancies and rampant crime and vandalism.
In each case, the places and their rhetorics worked to shape racial and civic identities and politics and led directly to the creation of communities that were all but left to die.

In such a case, rhetorical agency is restricted for community members by the materiality of the place and the rhetoric surrounding the place. One might argue that working to cultivate productive rhetorical habits, such as Rice (2012b) or Rai (2016) advocate for, can help these populations enter into a civic discourse which they can use to affect change in their local situations. However, while I do not wholly disagree and think that such an approach can work in some places, in instances like Westlake Terrace and the Idora neighborhood these approaches are putting the cart before the horse. Cultivating better rhetorical habits can only do so much in places where people are literally afraid to leave their homes. That fear, a rhetoric generated by the materiality of where those residents live, deeply restricts their ability to participate in civic discourse at all.

What can we do, then, in situations such as these where residents’ agency is so restricted that cultivating better rhetorical habits simply isn’t a feasible solution? I would argue that, because rhetorical dynamism points us to the importance of invention and the ways that those inventions can sediment ideas of race and poverty, which can in turn lead to a dearth of resources and support for these places, intervention in those inventional processes and practices is a good place to start. Westlake Terrace and the Idora neighborhood show us two very different ideas of what this might look like.

**Inventing Better Places?**

Both Westlake Terrace and the Idora neighborhood have recently undergone processes of what might best be described as urban renewal. At each location these attempts were performed
under the auspices of the Youngstown 2010 Plan, the vision of which rests on four main principles:

1. Accepting that Youngstown is a smaller city.
2. Defining Youngstown’s role in the new regional economy.
3. Improving Youngstown’s image and enhancing quality of life.
4. A call to action.

Key to this plan was the idea of “smart shrinkage,” based on the realization that the city should stop trying to return to its glory days, accept that it is a smaller city, and find ways to better distribute resources based on that realization (Campbell 2016).

To many, the Youngstown 2010 plan is looked at with optimism and is seen as a model for other transitioning cities such as Detroit. Proponents point to its focus on citizen engagement and the acceptance of Youngstown’s decline to a smaller city as strong points in favor of the plan. However, critics point to issues with racial dynamics and a neglect of some neighborhoods, specifically those that are most poor and have only a few residents left. One critic argues that “there were few relocation allowances and there were few residents who wanted to leave their home and the neighborhoods that were targeted for this were largely African American” (Kalman 2014). The argument, then, is that the plan abandoned the city’s poorest residents in focusing resources on areas with less vacancy. Indeed, the plan led to the bulldozing of entire city blocks, and one can find in many parts of the city streets that lead to nowhere, single occupied homes in otherwise empty neighborhoods, and overgrown areas where only a few residents are left.

The juxtaposition between the positive and negative aspects of the plan can be seen clearly in Westlake and in Idora. Westlake’s transformation into the Village was aided by the
Youngstown 2010 Plan’s focus on a central anchor district, which Westlake is in close proximity to. The plan looked to revitalize downtown and integrate Youngstown State University with surrounding areas to boost investment opportunities, start-ups, and economic growth. Because Westlake was considered a blighted area just north of downtown and fairly close to university housing, it was a near immediate target for revitalization. This came as a welcome change for the few residents still living in the project; those that were interviewed looked upon the changes with a great deal of hope.

The creation of the Village is an example of a top-down strategy employed by urban planners to attempt to give the place “direction” (Youngstown 2010). In doing so, they were starkly aware of the reputation and rhetoric surrounding the project. Because of this, part of their goal in creating the new development was to have it blend in with the surrounding city and to integrate it more fully as a neighborhood in the central anchor district of Youngstown. Here, then, we have an attempt by placemakers to create a place that is better both materially and rhetorically, and to eliminate some of its major problems through integration and public engagement. Perhaps most importantly, it appears that this was done without displacing the residents who were already there. Because of these things, I would argue that the Village has potential to serve as a model for the ways that we can productively re-invent places. Time will tell, however, if these positive changes can last.

The Idora neighborhood is a more complicated example. This neighborhood could have easily become one of those that were abandoned by the Youngstown 2010 Plan; it lacked proximity to major targets of development, the commercial area was largely defunct, and perhaps its only advantage was its proximity to nearby Mill Creek Park. Yet, in this example, residents took it upon themselves to affect change. They made their voices heard at city planning and town
hall meetings and fought for their inclusion in revitalization plans, and were in the end successful. Idora, then, points us to the ways that communities can employ practices of public rhetoric to re-invent their places.

Idora provides an example of a more community-driven strategy, one which was implemented because of the efforts of its residents. Because of these efforts, Idora was able to accomplish “organizing monthly neighborhood meetings, events, projects, and a neighborhood festival; shutting down 3 problem corner stores; demolishing 5 known drug houses and dismantling a 30-member neighborhood gang; establishing a 4H club for neighborhood youth; and working with community police officers to address priority quality of life issues” (Kidd 2018). It would seem, then, that in this case effective rhetorical strategies by residents were key to re-inventing this place.

Yet this is complicated by other choices made by the Youngstown Neighborhood Development Association (YNDC) and by the circumstances that allowed Idora residents to participate. First, it’s important to note that Idora appears to be the major focus of the YNDC, and they have been effective in mobilizing resident support and improving quality of life in the area. This focus, Rhodes (2013) argues, is based on “the extent to which the areas … align with private interests and possess the potential for significantly increased market value,” and “many of the neighborhoods with poorer, more heavily African-American populations do not possess these assets and as a result remain largely outside the scope of the 2010 Plan.” The focus on Idora, then, seems to be a result of perceived increases in market value and private interests, and other neighborhoods are left behind because of this focus; even those adjacent to Idora have not seen the same benefits. As Rhodes (2013) says, then, “neighborhoods like Idora … represent islands of relative stability in a larger landscape of disinvestment, blight, and instability.” Idora
appears to be a successful but unique case supported by the development of community development corporations and levying investment capital and neighborhood potential.

Those who can participate in Idora’s redevelopment further complicate the idea that this was a success story of bootstraps-style rhetorical action. As with Westlake, many residents were still afraid of leaving their homes due to the crime rate and had little access to essential services such as food and transportation. How, in this case, were these residents able to organize with their agency so restricted? According to a documentary on the neighborhood, this was largely thanks to one resident, a man who used to work for the Mexican cartel as a member of a biker gang in Arizona (Tabbara et al 2013). Reformed after a stay in prison, he moved back home to Ohio and into the neighborhood because of the cheap historic home he was able to buy. Because of his experiences, he was unafraid of the crime issues and wanted to affect change in the neighborhood, and so he organized the Idora Block Watch, which helped reduce crime and make residents feel safe. This then turned into the Idora Neighborhood Association, which then worked with the YNDC to bring the Youngstown 2010 Plan to the neighborhood.

The Idora neighborhood, then, was lucky in a sense; a community member who was not a part of the vulnerable populations living in the neighborhood (primarily African Americans and senior citizens) and who had the privilege and capacity to act used that privilege in a positive way to affect change in the neighborhood. This is certainly an overall positive, and does point to the effectiveness that instilling productive rhetorical habits can have, but it’s important to realize that not every neighborhood like Idora or Westlake has these types of residents; sometimes they really are vulnerable populations that have their rhetorical agency restricted to the point where they cannot affect change, and in those cases (like Westlake), affecting positive change in the place itself can help to unbound their agency to allow them to make positive contributions in the
future. Rhetorical dynamism has potential to help us do so, or at the very least to perform research that shows us ways to do so.

**Implications**

Rhetorical dynamism can effectively be used as a heuristic to study places and their rhetorics. This study works as a theoretical and methodological exemplar for future work in the field of rhetoric that examines specific locations and places in an attempt to understand the persuasiveness of the built environment and the material effects of that persuasiveness. Taken as a whole, when rhetorical dynamism is applied to a place, it can help us understand the complex processes that have made those places what we are, and thus gives us insight into what that place has been rhetorically, what meanings have been sedimented within it, and what has been done in the past that has worked or not worked. This, in turn, can be used to think about how to move forward in that place - to put it simply, we can build to the future by learning from the past.

The inventional characteristic of rhetorical dynamism provides two things to rhetorical studies. First, it provides an additional lens through which we can understand how places come to be rhetorical. By understanding places as a confluence of an ongoing inventional process, we can point to specific instances of inventional rhetoric and better understand their consequences. Second, a focus on invention allows rhetoricians to more productively intervene in future inventional decisions. When we examine the inventional processes that have made up places, we can have a better sense of how to affect positive change as part of that process.

Interrogating the rhetorical tensions that have been sedimented into places allows rhetoricians to more fully understand the competing narratives that exist within those places. Understanding, exploring, and analyzing these tensions can help us unravel instances where the predominant narratives are contested by less visible, less privileged ones, and thus intervene in
and critique instances of inequality perpetuated by the rhetoric of places. Furthermore, examining these tensions can help rhetoricians to bring marginalized voices to the forefront and allow them to speak, through our research, on what their place means to them and what they think their place should be.

Understanding places as fluid and evolutionary allows us to move beyond conceptions of places as static entities. When we understand places as static, we can miss the nuances in their rhetoric and the ways that they change over time to conform with wider contexts and shifting populations. A view of place as an ever-changing confluence of sociocultural and rhetorical demands lets us look to the broader history of a place and understand how its changes have been productive of its rhetoric and vice versa.

Finally, realizing that places are active participants and that they work in reciprocity with their surrounding contexts allows scholars to get at the complex interplay of forces that generate the rhetoric of a place. This points us to the active power of place and shows us the importance that physical changes in a place can have on its rhetoric and on its population. And viewing places in this way allows us to understand how other actors and outside forces (for instance, social processes like structural racism or actors such as city planners) participate in this process, as well, which can help us to understand the role that these forces and actors have had and continue to have.

While I have focused here on places in which there are marked instances of social inequality that result from the places’ rhetorics, rhetorical dynamism can be applied to any place. The theory works as a heuristic to understand the ways that the place and its surroundings participate in a complex, ever-changing process of invention marked by embedded rhetorical tensions. By applying each of these characteristics in turn to a place, one can craft a study that
interrogates various place-based issues, such as transportation equity, race and place, and even environmental issues. The major contribution of this study, then, is providing this heuristic and illustrating the way that it can be employed in two different sites. In the future, I plan to produce more research that does much of the same.

**Future Research**

In the future, this study will be further extended in Youngstown. Other sites such as downtown, Youngstown State University, Mill Creek Park, etc. could potentially be productive sites for continuing the study in order to build a more generalizable picture of rhetorical dynamism in Youngstown as a whole. Furthermore, I plan to take this study into public work and participate in future processes of city planning in the city using my research to make recommendations; indeed, I have already made contact with several planning experts in the area in order to do so.

In addition to expanding this particular study on Youngstown, I also plan to do more research using rhetorical dynamism in the future. As of this writing, I reside in Tampa, Florida, a city which provides an excellent opportunity to apply rhetorical dynamism to a place that is currently undergoing rapid and far-reaching changes. Tampa is a site of booming development, and has had recent and deep changes in areas such as Ybor City. Rhetorical dynamism can be applied here to examine current, ongoing processes of development and study them in the context of the city’s wider history.

For others, I would call for the use of rhetorical dynamism as outlined above. This theory has potential to provide some far-reaching insights into how places and rhetoric are connected. We need to continue to better understand this connection, and so I would call on rhetoricians to employ this theory elsewhere to continue to build on this growing area of study and to work
towards answers to questions of rhetorical inequalities that have been built into other places. I would particularly call for further studies into struggling Rust Belt areas, especially those that are undergoing processes that build on the principles of the Youngstown 2010 Plan, which has been seen as foundational for the region.

**Conclusion**

This study has used rhetorical history to employ *rhetorical dynamism* as a theoretical heuristic for examining two places in Youngstown, Ohio: Westlake Terrace and Idora Park. By doing so, the study has pointed to the rhetorical roots of issues such as systemic inequality and neighborhood decline in specific places. These issues show us something about how Youngstown came to be what it is today: a shrinking city that is still in some ways stuck in its past and beset by continuing economic, criminal, and social issues. Yet it also points us to some hope for the future as Youngstown tries to move forward and redefine itself. The city itself is a rhetorically dynamic place, and it is one that is currently trying to re-invent itself as something better. Youngstown, then, once again has hope for the future; this time, let’s hope that it does not succumb to the issues outlined here, but that this re-invention leads to a better, more sustainable and equitable city.

**Notes**

1. Though I use urban renewal as a close term to what is happening at these places, it is a term that is fraught and complicated. Rice (2012b), Rai (2016), Marback (1998), Hern (2016), and many others point to issues with urban renewal both as a term and as a process. Perhaps more importantly, residents of Youngstown (especially black residents) are suspicious of the term. Carter (1985) puts the skepticism best: “Urban renewal. We called it instant black removal.”

2. By one estimate, the city had torn down at least 2,566 structures between 2006 and 2013 (Denvir 2013).
References


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## Appendix A

### Code Book

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Westlake Terrace</th>
<th>Idora Park</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Slum</td>
<td>Trolley park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project</td>
<td>Regional attraction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Company picnics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulations (Income, demographics, upkeep, lifestyle)</td>
<td>New construction (rides, buildings, other)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Displacement</td>
<td>Attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affordable housing</td>
<td>Neighborhood (Glenwood Ave, Volney Rd, Brentwood Ave, Parkview Ave)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Segregation</td>
<td>Food desert</td>
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<td>White flight</td>
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<td>Freeway construction</td>
<td>Museums</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crime (Drugs, vandalism, violent)</td>
<td>Land use (affordable housing, green space, religious complex)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policing</td>
<td>Idora Neighborhood Association</td>
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<td>Prison construction</td>
<td>Youngstown 2010 Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Villages</td>
<td>Mount Cavalry Church</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintenance/Upkeep</td>
<td>South Side development</td>
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