

The Stompin' Ground Games:

*A poetic tour of Denver's  
shifting landscapes*

**STOMPIN'  
GROUND  
GAMES** EXPLORE YOUR CITY

By Molina Speaks



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## For Word

This collection of poetry is for and about the people of Denver. As Live Poetic Scribe of Warm Cookies of the Revolution's *Stompin' Ground Games*, October 2015 – August 2016, I have been walking the city's streets, visiting her corners and cafes, listening to her stories and her heartbeat, her conversations, her sounds, her poetry, her secrets, her trees and weeds, and the jackhammers and bulldozers that are redefining our experience within Denver. It has been my job to transform observations and realizations into poetry and prose. In addition to readings and performances in the neighborhoods reflected, these writings are compiled here as a time capsule to the city.

I did not set out with an agenda or a particular story to tell. Yet as I began the process of choosing and editing material for this chapbook, the theme of swift, defining and dramatic change was evident. The cultural, political and economic changes within this city within this moment are a microcosm of the shifts that are redefining social and structural landscapes across the planet. In these mechanized times of comfort for the few and survival of the many, my goal here is to present threads of our humanity.

We should not fear change. We are self-defeating when we loathe in our perceptions of powerlessness. We also should not feel compelled to accept change that does not serve us, we the people, the community. As poet—as architect of the palabra—I recognize our power to inspire ideas that provoke conversations that lead to intentions and actions that Manifest our outcomes.

We are in need of new realities for humanity. We cannot remain within the old frameworks and old tropes. We must speak, write, and create new stories for our seeds, our cultures, our townships, and our planet.

In palabra, in celebration of the Denver's history and future,

Molina Speaks  
August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2016

## **For Ruby Hill, A Real Gem**

Along the Platte River sits an unassuming  
Ruby Hill of dreams  
watching mines become railroads  
become mills become gentrified  
eye prize,  
a time lapse.

I was asked  
by one resident to tell  
the working class truth  
before the neighborhood disappeared,  
searching I could only find stories  
layered in complexity:

Comings and goings from home  
to work and back home,  
crossing borders, some real  
and life threatening  
and some imagined,  
all in search of quiet charm;

All in search of a place  
that would not change so fast,  
a cultural safe haven  
for spotted monarch wings gliding,  
a safe place for los niños to play  
without the threat of gang signs.

Meanwhile the "fix and flip" signs  
are being painted, planted;  
You can smell and even hear  
the paint drying and the up-and-coming parties starting  
and the bright lights coming  
and the dogs running and—

The diamond in the rough is spoken of  
as a real diamond now;  
not a ruby,  
not a garnet,  
not a rare stone,  
but a shiny new gem.

It has come a long way, all can agree  
from an Indian lookout point,  
from a mining camp,  
from a landfill and asbestos.  
Some see "a short road" to fame,  
while some will proclaim it "a long way from home"—

A final destination of sorts  
in these times of final destinations  
where everyone has a big plan  
and everyone sees a landing pad,  
a place in space for themselves  
along the edges of new frontiers.

Ruby Hill, you  
quiet gem, you  
are the next big thing.  
Plant your flags in your lawns.  
Speak your cultures in your tongues.  
Spend your ones and tens and benjamins  
with Moms and Pops.

*("Dear Ruby Hill", as well as "South Fed" on the following page,  
can be streamed on Soundcloud as an audio track, backed by  
master trumpeter Randy Runyan.)*

## South Fed

*Do the South Fed Pho Jitterbug Cumbia Step*

Hustle. Flea market Saturdays, pachanga.  
Lowrider Sundays, chale.  
Vietnamese sandwich, banh mi every day.  
Paleteros pushing helado y paletas,  
me gusta el coco.

*Do the South Fed Pho Jitterbug Cumbia Step.*

Immigrant, South Fed, South, North, Pho—  
finger basil leaves cut, lime squeeze, Sriracha,  
chili garlic spoon, sprinkle soybeans, rice paper,  
Vietnamese sopa for the soul.

*Do the South Fed Pho Jitterbug Cumbia Step.*

Mexicano, tacos de barbacoa, speaking tres lenguas,  
sopas de siete mares, chili con huevos,  
chili con queso, chili con pizza, chili con todo,  
pueblo chiles roasting  
to the sound of Hip-Hop blaring, Conjunto Norteño,  
Ondatrópica, con juntos, familias  
vibing en el parque on a Sunday afternoon.

*Do the South Fed Pho Jitterbug Cumbia Step.*

Selling Locs, selling smokes, selling sodas y botas de aqua  
no joke, selling clothes, selling elote.  
Politicos selling hope.  
Selling rims, selling dreams, dispensaries selling legal dope.  
Poetas y trumpetistas capturing and packaging  
the bumble and the sound  
to help the hustle people cope.

*Do the South Fed Pho Jitterbug Cumbia Step.*

## **Siri's Aliens**

There were lights circling above a whispering Four Mile Historic Park on a chilly Scorpio Denver night. It was Sunday. The winds were calm, awaiting snow. It was approximately 34 degrees. Muhammed had walked from the African Community Center. He had been circling the park, then walking along the river, deep inside his new moon thoughts, when she said it. "Alien." In his ears it sounded like she was pronouncing it to the world.

Muhammed was a Somali refugee. Siri, he often imagined, was Syrian. In reality she was very Anglo, very hipster, unapologetically so. Muhammed was sometimes mistaken for Jesus when he walked by the Mizel Museum on Kearney Street. They marveled at his beard and his wise proverbs, though they did not crown him or associate him with the sun. A mile or so east a little known Denver tribe of Burmese folk sometimes confused him for Buddha. He walked all over southeast Denver within a three mile radius. The stripmallians typically ignored him altogether. Most cultural enclaves off the strips tried to claim him as their own. The Ethiopians. The Greeks. The Jews. The darker skinned whites, the lighter skinned blacks, even the Japanese. He was called many names in many tongues. "Alien" was not one. And for this he shouted curses at Siri! He had endured two Bushes, one Clinton, one 9-11, counter terrorism surveillance that tagged him Public Enemy #1, and now the threat of more Bushes and Clintons, or much worse a Trump. He was an honorable man. He was an elder. He was no alien.

Muhammad's curses at Siri were heard just northwest of Four Mile Historic Park. The low hanging clouds seemed to carry his rage. The horses sneered. The owls hooted. Then the sirens came. The officers drew their guns and yelled "Freeze" with intent to kill. There were three of them, then five, then seven, and still more appeared. Muhammad stared down at his hotline bling, gripped Siri by her stubby neck, closed his eyes, and vanished. When he materialized, he found himself among a familiar sea of cloth patterns tacked onto clay walls. He lit a candle, and he pulled a weathered, chipped indigo flute out of his bag. He played a collection of harmonies he titled "Justice." This wasn't about cartoons. This wasn't about strip



mall pop culture or pop culture's ignorance. It was a small thing, but the final straw had broken the camel's back.

Muhammad set his flute down. He closed his eyes, legs still folded and overlapping, and he drifted off to sleep with prophetic resolve. He was not on Facebook. Or Snapchat, nor Spacebook. He had never heard of the Twittiverse. Muhammad was unaware that millions of people all over the world also heard Siri's cry, "alien," and her follow up message: "Denver Four Mile Historic Park." Muhammad was unaware of the 578,000,000 #Alien hashtags that had accumulated in hundreds of languages all over the world while he slept. Muhammad was unaware of the FBI and CIA swarming Four Mile Park and the surrounding neighborhoods. As he dreamt, hundreds of "believers" also made their way to the park, demanding they be let in past the newly erected steel gates. Instead of going to work in the morning, more people made their way to the park in preparation for THE LANDING.

When he woke on Monday morning... Muhammed the Jesus looking sometimes Jew, who was likened to Buddha depending on where he went, what time of year, and with whom... left home on foot in search of an attorney. He was prepared to take his battle all the way to the Supreme Court. Not just for himself, but for the countless refugees all over the world, the African, Arab, Indigenous, and Latin diasporas. For the European immigrants. For all those immigrants who lost their lives in the mountains and the deserts trying to survive. All those mothers and fathers, children, human beings, who lived in dignity, only to find contorted privileged heartless faces, and now even machines... calling them "Alien."

Fast forward. Through some combination of divine luck and strange timing, a motion was filed by an attorney, a judge reviewed the motion, and an injunction was issued by a federal court by noon. The injunction required Siri to cease her use of the word "Alien." If she did not cease her use of the word by midnight, all Apple products would become illegal devices. With this success, the same attorney began to work on a similar Android injunction. Later, as the world waited on Siri's alien prediction, protestors and conspiracy theorists would question the motives of the lawyers and the courts. This was surely a grand cover-up.

Clouds of space dust now swirled overhead at Four Mile Historic Park. Thousands of photographers descended upon the quiet, seemingly rural nostalgic park treasure. They fought to be let in. Two billion people were now live tweeting in anticipation of the big landing. They speculated about what the aliens would look like. They tweeted about Denver International Airport, claiming that it was New World Order headquarters. Denver tweeters bantered about alien gentrification, and some speculated it all had something to do with Snoop Dogg's new marijuana home delivery service. It was 12:17PM and the word "alien" had now been hashtagged approximately 3.4 billion times since Muhammad's encounter with police the night before.

News of the cease and desist injunction reached the Internet at 12:26pm. Swarms of stripmallians took to the streets, forming human chain links around all digital device stores on Colorado Boulevard. No ridiculous, politically correct, overreaching lawsuit was going to destroy their way of life. Who could even remember what life was like before Siri? Muhammad and his multicultural band of friends and followers, Black and White, Christians and Jews, Muslims and Monks, Mexicans and Vietnamese, walked up and down the streets, stunned, speechless, wordless, admiring Siri's supporters. If only they themselves had such comradery among their fellow human beings.

As the fast-paced legal battles intensified, people all over the world asked each other the same questions. What did it mean to be "human?" What did it mean to be "alien?" Who deserved protection? Who could be trusted, when it was always uncertain who was who, when bullets flew in all directions, without regard, as though they were immune to blame?

The most challenging question of all: What if Siri was actually silenced for her insensitivity? Or was she being silenced for her prophecy? In any case, what would the people do without their devices among foreign visitors? The day marched on. The low hanging winter sun continued its descent. It was four p.m. at Four Mile Historic Park. Some had dubbed the landing event "The Stompin' Ground Games." The skies were quickly changing. The curious looked on from inside the park welcome center, eating homemade ginger cookies, drinking soy milk, listening to stories about their reflection.

## Our Plutos

Pluto, the abandoned child, we have cast you  
out of our solar system, but still we cannot let you go,  
we string you along when it's time for show.

*Pluto,*  
*fa show, fa show      Pluto,*  
*"bring back Pluto"*  
*fasho, fasho,*

*Pluto.*

We imagine you in the darkest corners, the forgotten  
supernovas of our Indigenous American diaspora.

Yours are the souls we launch  
to the furthest reaches of our light zones,  
kept in the blackest holes,  
still identified as unseen by the bluest eyes.

But right here in the brownest dirt  
we find America's oldest bones.

A wonder that we marvel at returning images  
of planets and satellites from afar,  
out in the very darkest solars,  
without caring for our own Plutos here at home.

*(Scribed for Biennial of the Americas 2015 during a conversation  
about Beer and Space, revisited and adapted for Stompin'  
Ground Games Montbello Edition.)*

## Inspiration

The motivation to direct and drive internal change  
in an ever changing external exchange  
of information.

Particles precipitate frustration  
through challenges  
that rearrange us.

Reality feels so strange,  
us: over-processed brains  
but society is numb.

Hearts want to move in meditation  
like drums. My art gives me patience  
for this long run.

This tool of translation  
penetrates the pain and isolation  
to create another destiny,  
another possibility,  
another actuality,  
even when they're telling me  
I cannot *Dream*—

*Inspiration.*

*(Inspired by middle school students at Noel Community Arts  
School in Montbello.)*

## **The Wings of La Mariposa**

On this day the governors of La Alma  
proclaimed Youth On Record  
a social justice organization.

It was a day some snickered,  
some sneered, some jeered.

The community at large cheered La Mariposa  
peering into mirrors of self-doubt,  
inferiority complexes and barrels of disbelief,  
turning over leaves from falling dreams,  
from making something out of nothing  
to taking old things we knew  
and making them new,  
speaking truth to news cameras  
in search of sound bites,  
barking at the heavens  
a triumph  
of horn lines,  
rapping 16 bars at a time  
about transformed lives,  
watching the street signs change  
under disappearing telephone lines,  
in gentrifying times  
we thought we might change something too.

So we asked You  
to support a vision.

My son asked me last week about Capitalism  
My response was a story about \$2.1 million  
collective footnotes in history, a building

that would broadcast the next seven generations,  
constructed on the backs of artists,  
activists, dusty foot philosophers  
and working class dreamers,  
brave enough to collaborate with bigger money,  
and big money brave enough to collaborate with the people.

A step in a direction  
of shedding the divisions  
that imprison humanity's wings.

It was a day of celebration en La Alma,  
a day we all breathed with less fear,  
a day we knew you would remember us  
standing here  
speaking with you  
the wings of La Mariposa.

*(A poem to mark the grand opening of Youth On Record's Youth  
Media Studio on the West Side of Denver, May 15, 2015)*

Chicano Movement  
A history scribed in breath  
On Santa Fe Drive

has word reached the heard, nouveau?  
under the roar of the nu city bird, crane?  
above the hum of the Jack hammers    bang  
next to Allen wrenches    panhandling change  
gentrifying Neal, Opalanga, and Lalo's city?  
did the hipsters or the yuppies or the smokers  
brief you on the roaring development of  
**A New Poet's Row?**

word en la calle is  
housing, public space, and keys to la ciudad  
for the cultural architects of denver

ah shit they said westword and ums were gonna showcase the  
ppls shit now and that is wasn't just about beer sales and that  
jupiter's weed tax was gon trickle down to the masses so the  
dope folk actually living her present future past paving the stories  
into her streets and writing Beats into her cloud atlas could  
actually afford their fuckin rent. palabra.



1976, Gay Community Center,  
first **Pride**, a visual  
visible reality, Out Front, a statement  
reflecting history:

1889, first letters(?)

1914, first books(?)

1939, the Pit

lacking ownership,

hiding from police,

vilified, suicides, shadowed lives of resistance.

1975, boulder defies the "right."

denver follows.

what is right?

to marry Love(?)

amendment 2, 1992.

unconstitutional bans on equal protection, 2006.

all mute now, supreme court, 2015.

every june, denver singing, dancing, parading,

dreaming, being, kissing, speaking, loudly

i, ally, observing, traditions of liberation,

flying lovers.

colors.

dear denver, where  
have you hid your **Homeless**,  
your wandering, wondering  
if I may search your shirt  
pocket of your shiny new suit?  
do you know where they  
have gone when they  
find your city office doors  
closed, your council policies  
constructed  
to kick  
push  
us

out of our homes and our parks and our  
public space, no more. have  
you hidden your transient, your immigrants,  
your black, your brown, your red, your children  
so they won't disturb the tourists? where  
might i find them and your soul?

## **Se Mueven, Gente Se Mueven**

De colores de primavera,  
los plumas, se mueven, poetas  
off top the head, dance for the dead  
dance for the seeds, drum beats.

Rattle rattle, snake of sacred Life  
we gather to break  
papas y tamales, ¡vale!, ¡vale!, awake  
en nuestros espíritus we dance for you  
like we used to do,  
old days becoming new  
in times of American fascism and hate  
we commune to break  
papas y tamales, chale, chale.

Los jóvenes, bless us  
with your sun, cloud and rain movements,  
se mueven, se mueven, bless us  
with your sun, cloud and rain movements  
se mueven, se mueven.

\*\*\*

She was just a student when she began  
moving. The passion of your young mind niña  
is a movement waiting to be born  
like a Bird Seed growing community. We are  
done being reactive to power decisions  
made before our time. Claim your seat  
at the table, young world. They kick push  
to move us from our homes. We root down,  
we push back, dreams within our bones.  
Se mueven, se mueven, like a Bird Seed  
growing community.

\*\*\*

The world is sustained by truth, justice  
and peace, little river strings,  
coded dreams—  
music reigns supreme, El Sistema  
se mueven, se mueven.

\*\*\*

You can see the beauty in the graffiti  
that imprisons young batos, but can you  
see the fine art—  
the Frida, the Diego—within  
the souls of los Chicanos Picassos?

\*\*\*

Papeles, papeles, puro papeles  
in this constructed reality—  
trash heaps of documents.  
In between the paper thin “justice”  
of this system is the soil of a community  
striving to help us grow  
from the seed to the root  
to the branches reaching heaven,  
su mueven, se mueven.

\*\*\*

Los jovenes, bless us  
with your sun, cloud and rain movements,  
se mueven, se mueven, bless us  
with your sun, cloud and rain movements  
se mueven, se mueven.



Our designs surreal, coded within the sun's memories...  
We know we live forever.



(blackout poetry / polaroids collage)

## **The Other City**

The Other City drops the needle on the records  
of brown and maroon brick buildings  
on black pavement, condemned.

DJs drop it hot for shine for newcomers  
coming money making Other profits  
off histories' cultural gems.

Dog parks cover New ground covering old footsteps  
covering traces of homelessness—a corporate hex;  
white faces show no traces of shame.

Documented cover-ups cover up  
tax dollars diverted, doctored up sexy to convert us  
in plush cafes and rooftop bars.

Diverse public space then wears a private whitened face  
Now, a multimillion dollar baseball game,  
while "weed connoisseurs" play host to fame.

The Northside gutter pride was gutted;  
barrio landmarks plundered  
under new signs made to market "The Highlands";  
a place-making race to embrace the Newcomers—  
a profiteering charade.

Another black body shot dead—white noise,  
minority issues Now ghost;  
another mom-and-pops shop closed;  
another knock on another door, harassing,  
"fixing", "flipping", fixes and flips, these backflips,  
"up and coming" bullshit, rhetoric; planned erasure  
of mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, sisters, brothers—Others.

Five Points Jazz and Opalanga have been set ablaze;  
historic buildings said decayed, "dilapidated"—  
nobody knows exactly what that means  
but Juneteenth is Now corporate booth space  
for banks and mainstream press, devouring culture.

Alas, the Other City is here, built atop the Others,  
looking down from plastic pop-top balconies,  
from ripped pages out of histories; a drunken celebration  
of White Flight in reverse, remixed on Ipod decks,  
soundtracks of sledgehammers and bulldozers  
driving up the rent, driving out the natives  
without Reservation.

The Other City of native "foreigners"  
has been removed, signs of the streets disappeared; we are  
over-patrolled in our old places, displaced to Other spaces  
again—outer concentric zones,  
our zip codes criss-crossing  
with Pluto, inner city and suburban  
prison town cages we know.

The Other City  
is being built again  
in America.



## **Welcome Signs**

All themes are International.  
The times—International.  
The Now is changing ever constant out loud.

Question: Are we more honest with ourselves  
Now? Who fits here? Who belongs?

The “Welcome” Insignia says “Open”. So  
how do we make our *Cultural Arts and Events* signs feel  
Real?

(who speaks the word “insignia”???)

She said on the panel she was the only gringa  
working with los Chicanos en el teatro,  
and she spoke of her feelings.

Speaking of a feeling  
in times of cold data  
in walks the dusty foot philosopher  
appearing with few words stuttering out interrupting.  
He questions aloud his place in this space, His  
right to be  
Here,  
his wooly hair,  
his dark curious eyes,  
white clothes smudged with street signs.  
Does he see a lack of Color?  
Or the color of Class?

(We are all “going Green.”)

“This is a diverse space.”  
“We are All welcome here.”  
Echoes. Affirmations.  
Reverberations.

Unconvinced, he solemnly contemplates his existence Here.  
He is not an “Internationally Presenting” Black Artist,  
not Black Violin, not an Award-Winning Vegan Eco-Hip-Hop-  
Legend-in-the-Making, not rolling deep with a well-marketed  
internationally celebrated Afro-Brazilian dance troupe.

He is just a man, a young weathered African dream  
wandering through American wilderness  
searching for truth in cultural quotes on white walls,  
searching for truth in a panel or a workshop or a Ted Talk  
or a cultural cakewalk,  
or maybe a mestizo poet who can relate  
to His Story?

History, you are eclipsing now  
as Confederate flagpoles are scaled and lowered  
beneath the surface  
as we surge ahead,  
as times change and we become  
more honest about our designs  
and the colors  
on our beautiful Welcome Signs.

We are all trying.  
We are all doing better.  
And yes, we are sincere.

We still must face our challenges  
and our challengers  
with dignity  
as we build the new  
Now,

America.

*(Scribed for Biennial of the Americas 2015 during a conversation  
about “International Arts Presenting.”)*

**Autumn Sun**

Summertime one mile high  
city, red bricks tell the history.  
Heat strokez begin to fade  
and we bid her farewell,  
as yellow school busses cast 7PM shadowz  
on the wide eyez of the winged.  
They began to believe they ran everything, they did  
under longer dayz,  
wearing their youth on their browz  
running from time,  
running from each other at play,  
laz vocez de los inmigrantes spilling out  
into the streetz,  
alongside the thick thump of el loco's bass  
cruizing by helado carts and lemonade standz  
watching the street signz change,  
gentrified.  
Star signs shifted abovehead, dancing with sliver moonz  
under grass blanketz,  
below Scorpio,  
above doubtz.  
Even the grown folk, we thought we could do anything  
like mountain streamz running and running,  
running like lil Carlos running from Jalene,  
like lil Chris running from Esperanza,  
running up and down the sizzling streetz,  
el jefe grilling carne asada,  
mama boiling greens from the community farm,  
Joslyn juicing fresh carrotz and beetz  
at the pop-up market on Welton Street,  
summer setting on the North Side, South Denver,  
West Side, East Side, Park Hill,  
Montbello, out to Aurora  
where suburbz are becoming inner-city,  
where schoolz close and reopen under new names

with welcome back barbeques para las familias.  
Everything changing, remembering  
how the hood felt so good  
under the banner of summertime—  
fall winter spring we daydream  
summer  
chanting down the autumn sun.



**“Who woulda thought the ground would shake  
for a little escape /  
The 1980s had New York, the 90s had L.A. /  
Now it’s Denver they say, New Amsterdam of the day /  
The ghanja tax tell only half the game we play...”**

—“Watching”, *Everyday Denver*, Molina Speaks

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