enculturation

Skid Row Notes: The Place of Rhetoric

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print version

As a rhetorician and teacher of composition, I am concerned about the fate of public discourse; I am concerned about the relevance of rhetorical studies for our students and our world. This concern has led me to look to the conditions of possibility for public discourse, conditions that I am increasingly discerning in the realms of architecture, city planning, and public policy, and in the ever-widening gap between rich and poor. As a result of ten years of Service Learning teaching and a semester long sabbatical in Los Angeles's Skid Row, I have begun to take seriously the rhetorical nature of our built environment and the need to actively engage our situatedness in material, physical place. For me, this has become my ethical obligation as a rhetorician and teacher.

My response to questions of the relationship between composition and rhetoric always includes reference to John Trimbur's exchange with Maxine Hairston in 1993 in which he argued that rhetoric and the rhetorical teaching of composition is primarily about participation in civic discourse and democracy. His comments became a benchmark for my own teaching and opened a way for me to bring my classroom alive, to motivate myself and my students to conceive of writing as action, to consider rhetorical composition a vital force in public life. The Hairston-Trimbur exchange was fundamentally concerned with the nature of the place of composition: Hairston arguing for a protected, safe place for student exploration and experimentation, and Trimbur arguing that rhetoric called us out of place, out of our comfortable academic space, and into the world of conflict and action.

This "Trimbur orientation" helps explain my response to Susan Jarrett's piece in the first edition of this special double issue of *Enculturation*. In her efforts to locate rhetoric, to show it alive and well, she first leaves the university and goes out into public discourse where she demonstrates that there is indeed a whole lot of rhetoric going on. Her doubts grow as she makes the turn back into academia, into English departments, into writing programs, and perhaps that is why she ends before going into class. I, too, want to find it in class, but end up going out. I'm beginning to think that's just what rhetoric does: it's always on the move, always out and about, which is perhaps why Plato takes Socrates outside the city walls for his conversation with Phaedrus.

Underlying my teaching is a strong belief in the power of public discourse; I have staked my teaching of writing on the power of rhetoric to change our world. But, along with many other rhetoricians, I have been concerned over the apparent erosion of public discourse; the degeneration of rhetoric into pitched battles between entrenched opponents; and the general sense of resignation to the inevitability of things as they are. I have been frustrated

with the decreasing quality of life of the middle class, the growing gap between rich and poor, the squalor of urban centers, the decay in both quantity and quality of our public spaces, and the decline of physical beauty in our architectural environment. And perhaps most frustrating of all, I have been increasingly pessimistic about the ability of my teaching and scholarship to positively impact these and other issues that we care deeply about.

My teaching of composition as civic discourse led me to Service Learning. The work I have done with my students has been rewarding for both them and myself, yet a feeling that my rhetoric and my teaching were disconnected and largely irrelevant nagged me. My hands still were not dirty enough; I hadn't fulfilled the potential I had found in Trimbur's words. Or perhaps I hadn't done enough walking, mapping, and dwelling, spatial practices through which Nedra Reynolds seeks to develop "geographical rhetorics." Her work encourages me to connect back to composition studies all the walking I've been doing in the streets of downtown LA over the past year.

Reynolds begins her *Geographies of Writing* with a retelling of the *Phaedrus* that dwells on Socrates' movement from his usual haunts in Athens to a place outside the city walls. The unusual setting for this dialogue, she suggests, illustrates the role of place in persuasion, argument, and learning. She argues that composition studies needs writing theories that engage with metaphorical ways to imagine space without ignoring actual places and spaces (3). Reynolds attempts to found new metaphors for writing based on geography and place, inviting us to think of discourses as places to inhabit. Through the spatial practices of walking, mapping, and dwelling, derived from cultural geography, she develops "geographic rhetorics informed by the material, the visual, and the everyday" (2). Geographic rhetorics need a sense of place; Reynolds argues that "theories of writing should reflect a deeper understanding of place defined by contestations and differences" (2). Her project is grounded in notions of identity as positionality (the "acknowledgment that our own locations do much to determine our ability to 'see'") and notions of persuading arising in *ethos* as dwelling and requiring common ground (117).

However, as teachers of writing we increasingly find ourselves facing students with whom we share little in common. How do we reach such students? Reynolds asserts that we can find ways to bridge racial and socio-economic gaps in geographic metaphors. She suggests that we all move through the world, traversing space and connecting with places; at the very least, we share with students the space of the university campus. Understanding our movements through places such as campus, as well as the encounters with difference they inevitably produce, gives us common ground, we all participate in such movement in the course of our everyday lives (4). Examining these movements rhetorically with students can establish a base of understanding of the ways in which we imbue space with meanings. She argues that movement is essential to learning and persuasion; Plato takes Socrates and Phaedrus outside their habitual haunts so that Socrates may be more open to new ideas, more apt to be "moved." Dwelling is equally as important; while persuasion requires reaching out

across difference, writing is also situated within a specific environment. Geographic rhetorics that examine metaphors for place and envision "discourses as places to be inhabited" can help us negotiate encounters with difference that are crucial for learning. Metaphors describing discourses as places of habitation may help build common ground in rhetoric and composition classrooms. However, the loss of common ground is a hallmark not only of our classrooms but of communities and cities as well.

Like Reynolds, I have worked to teach social justice through Service Learning as a core component of my composition courses. I have required my students at Pepperdine, a private, Christian university in Malibu, California, to venture out into downtown Los Angeles in order to test out the arguments of course texts as well as their own presuppositions by viewing them in the light of what they see downtown. We discuss whom they think the homeless are and why they are homeless; we read social scientific descriptions of the homeless and arguments taking a variety of stances, and then we take all these ideas into the laboratory of the city to see which ones hold up to what we see and hear. This practice is, of course, replete with ethical pitfalls[1] as well as some danger that students may simply be confirmed in their harshest stereotypical assumptions. However, as Reynolds points out, moving people is difficult when their lives are lived within a small radius (2). The physical location of our campus in Malibu, perched on a steep hillside above the Pacific Coast Highway twenty minutes from Santa Monica, is in many ways remote and isolated from Los Angeles; it has a tendency to lock students into a very small radius. From within the beauty and order of our campus, it is very easy to miss what happens out on the streets. While I worry about leading students on an urban "cultural safari into the jungle of otherness" (Reynolds 134), I am working against the powerful forces of developers, suburbanites, architects, and urban planners who render invisible everything "other."

As a result of my social concerns and my frustrations with an insulated academia, I decided to spend my sabbatical during spring of 2004 in downtown Los Angeles working (mostly "hanging out") among homeless people and advocates. Most of my time has been spent with my neighborhood council's committee on poverty and homelessness, with a coalition of activists working on a campaign against the criminalization of poverty and homelessness, and at the Dome Village, a transitional housing community. I became interested in the Dome Village ten years ago when I first met the founder, homeless activist Ted Hayes, and learned of his innovative approach using a tribal model, in which every member has a vital role in the functioning of the community, to foster active citizenship among village residents.

Hayes developed the Dome Village model based on his experience with Justiceville, a spontaneous gathering of people on Skid Row to form an encampment on a vacant lot. In 1986, Hayes obtained a lease from the property owner for one dollar a month and the people of Justiceville built homes, obtained portable toilets and established codes of conduct, building a surrogate family of support. Under pressure from city officials, however, the property owner ended the lease after only a few months, and the residents were evicted. After they camped in various prominent locations

across LA, including the lawn at City Hall, in an effort to call attention to the problems of housing and homelessness, the ARCO Foundation made a large grant to found a permanent location for the community. Located on the eastern edge of downtown, in the shadow of a major north/south freeway, the Dome Village was finally erected in 1993 on an abandoned parking lot. With the skyscrapers of Bunker Hill rising above them, the white domes seem to spring up like mushrooms beneath tall trees. Hayes chose geodesic domes for his villages after reading Buckminster Fuller and his prediction that domes would house the world's population. Made of molded fiberglass in small sections, the domes can be easily assembled by two people in about four hours for less then $2,000. The Dome Village is comprised of about twelve dwelling domes; additional domes house bathrooms, a laundry, offices, a community room, and kitchen facilities. However, according to Hayes, housing is but a small part of the need of homeless people; the Dome Village aims to help residents learn to function as members of a community by providing a measure of privacy, a basic human need, as well as by requiring chore sharing and participation in community decision making. The lesson from this "tribal" model is that the community functions well only when each member performs his or her role. Residents pay one third of their income to live in the Village for up to two years during which time they participate in community life, job training, or schooling, working toward self-sufficiency and permanent housing. Case managers and a social worker oversee their progress. It is the only shelter facility in Los Angeles that provides a private room, allows couples and families to remain together, and accepts pets. Children and dogs, cats, rabbits, and birds are cared for by the entire community. The waiting list for a dome is long.

My informants from the Village and from the Los Angeles Community Action Network (LA-CAN) drew a map of a Los Angeles I hadn't seen before, a rich, detailed map of the geographies of exclusion and of hotly contested space. Hayes walked me through downtown Los Angeles pointing out the many locations where he has "camped out" in protests during his 20 years as a homeless activist. We walked through the halls of the county court house as we tried to discover the status and whereabouts of 18 people arrested when their encampment just outside the gates of the Dome village was raided at 5 am. Activists from LA-CAN walked me down Main Street in the Historic Core District, past Single Room Occupancy (SRO)[2] hotels where they fight against the "28 day shuffle" that prevents residents from establishing legal tenancy. They showed me hotels that are targeted for loft conversion and wonder where the current residents will end up. They pointed out private security men wearing brightly color shirts and riding bicycles. Hired by the various downtown Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), these security men patrol the streets and sidewalks, spending much of their time moving the homeless along and, some argue, targeting them for harassment. While we saw and spoke with individuals on the streets, my informants were intent to focus my attention, as Reynolds argues we must, "towards questions of boundaries and movement, locatedness and surveillance, and a sense of place" (138).

The sense of place these men and women showed me resonates with the

portrait Mike Davis draws in "Fortress Los Angeles: The Militarization of Urban Space." Davis argues that LA is embroiled in "open social warfare that pits the interests of the middle class against the welfare of the urban poor. In cities like Los Angeles, on the hard edge of postmodernity, architecture and the police apparatus are being merged to an unprecedented degree" (155). He juxtaposes the streets of Skid Row, where I spent my time, with the new downtown built on Bunker Hill in the 1980s when the original city center was abandoned to Skid Row, describing its lavish high-rises, plazas, and malls and the architectural and design practices that work to let the homeless know they do not belong here. The spaces of the new downtown have abandoned the streets and turned inward. "The universal consequence of the crusade to secure the city," Davis claims, "is the destruction of any truly democratic urban space. The American city is being systematically turned inward. The 'public' spaces of the new megastructures and supermalls have supplanted traditional streets and disciplined their spontaneity" (155). He links the eradication of true public space to security concerns and the "middle class demand for increased spatial and social insulation" (156).

The fixation on security is one of the three characteristics Michael Sorkin attributes to the "ageographical" city of postmodernity: 1) the "dissipation of all stable relations to local physical and cultural geography," 2) and obsession with security, and 3) a preoccupation with simulation, what he calls city as theme park. Disneyfication is a common charge against contemporary places and cities, but Sorkin imbues it with high stakes. He argues that such a

> happy regulated vision of pleasure . . . [acts] as a substitute for the democratic public realm, and it does so appealingly by stripping troubled urbanity of its sting, of the presence of the poor, of crime, of dirt, of work. In the "public" spaces of the theme park or the shopping mall, speech itself is restricted: there are no demonstrations in Disneyland. The effort to reclaim the city is the struggle of democracy itself. (xv)

Reynolds' streetwork charges us with the task of distinguishing such inauthentic places from authentic places by walking the streets and learning to see (110). Drawing from the work of Jane Jacobs, she describes redevelopment as a "relentless modern crusade against the street", and its inhabitants, that stand in the way of progress (111).

Many critics of Disneyfied cities have voiced concern with the slick, ageographical city devoid of true public space. Perhaps the most prominent of these is the architectural school of New Urbanism. The New Urbanists might best be described by their refrain: "No more housing subdivisions! No more shopping centers! No more office parks! No more highways! Neighborhoods or nothing!" In their best-known manifesto, *Suburban Nation*, leading New Urbanists Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck seem to hail their design solutions as a panacea for a wide array of contemporary problems from economic segregation, the corporatization of life, urban decay, and disaffected middle class youth, to the national obesity problem.

One of their more compelling claims is the lack of lifestyle choices offered in suburban America; the only viable option in the suburbs is to "own a car and to need it for everything" (25).

Despite the grandiose nature of their claims, their founding assumption, "a shared belief in a direct causal relationship between the character of the physical environment and the social health of families and the community at large", rings true. They argue:

> Life once spent enjoying the richness of community has increasingly become life spent alone behind the wheel. Lacking a physical framework conducive to public discourse, our family and communal institutions struggle to persist in our increasing sub-urban surroundings. And suburban growth seems to have also drained much of the vitality from our inner cities, where a carless underclass finds itself with diminishing access to jobs and services. (xiii)

Their notion of neighborhood is based on the distance a person can comfortably walk in five minutes, roughly one-quarter mile, and they suggest that all the necessities of daily life, including work, home, shopping, and civic institutions as well as a full array of housing types and costs, should be accessible within that distance. This mixed-use arrangement puts a diverse population in daily contact with one another, thus increasing the sense of shared fate across racial, economic, and age differences. Our policies and interests shape our cities, they claim, and our cities shape us (83).

The communities built under the auspices of the Congress for New Urbanism have their own problems. While some planners insist upon inclusionary zoning (a certain percentage of housing designated as affordable), most New Urbanist neighborhoods are upscale and exclusive. David Harvey, a Marxist cultural geographer, considers New Urbanism as a materialization of a utopian vision that, in the tradition of Lewis Mumford, considers the region as a whole, urban and suburban areas working together with common resources, and recognizes its potentially revolutionary force for change in suburban design. Its focus on communities and neighborhoods appeals to many, yet the realization of these neighborhoods in built communities such as Kentlands and Seaside tends to enforce conformity even as it praises diversity of use and lifestyles. As do most utopian visions, based upon a desire for community in the face of social disorder, New Urbanism falls prey to the darker side of community, fraught with control and exclusion. As Harvey suggests, community often means enhancing privilege for the already privileged and leaving the underprivileged to their own devices (240).

I would suggest that New Urbanism should not, however, be dismissed out of hand on the basis of its current built communities, all designed by a tightly constructed set of highly specific principles and overseen by a congress; there are valuable lessons to be learned from its founding assumptions that can give rise to other creative visions. New Urbanism

holds that the nature of the built environment matters, to quality of life, to public discourse, to democracy, that details from the width of streets and sidewalks, number of stories, and setback distance, to location of porches affects the lives of residents in real and significant ways. My own place of residence for the past fourteen years has served as a touchstone for my ideas of community and confirms for me the potential of New Urbanist claims. I live in a 1940's style urban courtyard located in a beachside neighborhood of Venice, CA. The five individual bungalows face a central common yard and provide more privacy than a typical apartment complex; at the same time, their tight proximity and shared public space encourage a certain level of familiarity and intimacy. Courtyard neighbors often remain friends after moving out.[3] Within easy walking or biking distance of my home are a pharmacy, world-class restaurants, a clinic, grocery stores, locally owned markets, a homeless drop-in center, and an independent coffee shop; I know my neighbors well and also know the local merchants and street folks.

While New Urbanists themselves have paid scant attention to urban cores and the poor and near poor, I cannot help but also consider their argument compelling as I walk down Skid Row or through the halls of a mission. These places are designed and constructed with security and containment in mind. The official policy of LA toward the homeless is "containment", to the ten square blocks of Skid Row that house the shelters and service providers in what Hayes calls the "homeless industrial complex." The subculture of street life that emerges here is stark. The homeless residents are heavily inscribed by the rhetoric of these places; their days can be mapped by the timing of meals at the missions, the queue for the vans to winter shelters, the sprinklers set to go off periodically during the night in Skid Row's only park. While most residents of LA are unsure of the precise dimensions of Skid Row, those living within its borders are well aware of the boundary lines; the police are quick to remind them.[4]

But the homeless are not the only ones experiencing a public policy of containment; the working poor are increasingly locked into depressed areas through economic and market forces. In *Place Matters: Metropolitics for the Twenty-first Century*, Dreier, Mollenkopf, and Swanstrom argue that rising economic segregation is the fundamental problem for urban planning and public policy. Their heavily documented and tightly argued study examines the state of American cities and concludes that only more regional approaches to planning and government can satisfactorily address the increasing economic division between rich and poor, city and suburb. Their central tenet is that "where we live makes a big difference in the quality of our lives, and how the places in which we live function has a big impact on the quality of our society" (1).

These places are, however, becoming more unequal. Working from the assumption that democracy depends upon social cohesion, the belief that "in the long run, we are all in the same boat," Dreier et al. see a potential for the "unwinding of American democracy" (19). Increasing inequality suggests that we are in different boats, lifted by different tides, and thus it threatens democracy by eating away at social cohesion. We lose our sense of being in the same boat, or having common ground, in the vast

differences of our experiences. This effect is further exacerbated by the physical segregation of the poor and near poor into concentrated areas. In this context, social and public policies, as well as economic forces, can have vastly different effects on the rich and poor. "When the most negative impacts of economic change are confined to the poor and near poor," they argue, "the main political effect may be growing middle-class enmity or indifference toward the poor." The real danger sets in when these negative effects spread to the working and middle classes (19).

Since the beginning of the post-WWII era and the 1950s, the nature of our architecture and zoning laws have fostered the separation of the economic classes, destroyed open space, and eroded the sense of community and care for the common good. In this climate, public discourse degenerates into competitive clashes over resources pitting the suburbs against downtown, the rich against the poor, drivers against bus riders. Harvey notes in *Spaces of Hope*:

> The rich form ghettoes of affluence (their 'bourgeois utopias') and undermine concepts of citizenship, social belonging, and mutual support. Six million of them in the US now live in gated communities as opposed to one million ten years ago. And if communities are not gated, they are increasingly constructed on exclusionary lines so that the levels of segregation (primarily by class but also with a powerful racial thread) are worse now . . . than ever. (150)

Harvey argues that the direct effects of this polarization of rich from poor are "division and fragmentation of the metropolitan space, a loss of sociality across diversity, and a localized defensive posture towards the rest of the city that becomes politically fractious if not downright dysfunctional" (152).

Many conservatives argue that even though the gap between rich and poor is widening, it doesn't matter since the poor are better off financially than they used to be, given the availability of cheaper and better consumer goods. However, Dreier, Mollenkopf, and Swanstrom argue that the gap matters a great deal because the poor must live alongside the wealthy and vie with them for political power and access to state and local tax bases. Drawing from Paul Jargowsky's *Poverty and Place*, they also argue that the spatial concentration of the poor intensifies the problems of poverty in what are called "concentration effects" of poverty (47). As the percentage of poor[5] households in a given area rises (40 % is the threshold for an area to be deemed underclass or ghetto), the physical appearance of the neighborhood disintegrates, businesses leave taking jobs with them, and higher-income residents move out eroding the tax base. Property tax rates increase, so that poor neighborhoods pay a higher percentage of their income to taxes, which nonetheless generate a significantly lower pool of funds than the lower tax rates of wealthier neighborhoods. The more impoverished an area, the fewer resources there are available for the remaining residents.

Suburban sprawl and concentrated poverty are indirectly related through

zoning laws. Suburbanites enact exclusionary zoning in order to avoid the negative effects of concentrated poverty and guard against their primary fear: an influx of poor people, which would cause area wide decline. These zoning laws foster suburban growth outward at low density and also confine poor people to the urban core (53). Sprawl itself further fosters the concentration of poverty in central cities through the car-dependent lifestyle it requires.

Coupled with federal policies that encourage suburban growth (e.g., FHA loans, interstate highway funding, etc.) and the competitive relationship between suburbs and downtown, zoning practices have also encouraged central cities to "specialize" in social services for the poor, adding to the concentration of poverty. City officials exacerbate this situation by relying on the growth of social services to provide jobs, build political support, and enhance their budgets (176). Dreier et al. suggest that "although growing economic inequality is bad, it is greatly worsened by growing economic segregation" (12); they conclude "we can never adequately solve our national problem of growing inequality until we specifically confront its spatial dimension" (228).

The spatial dimension of inequality is palpable in Los Angeles. We have officially reached the limits of its geographical space, locked as we are between the mountains and the sea. All space is rapidly becoming contested space in which rich and poor struggle for belonging. In such liminal spaces of mixing it might be hoped that knowledge and thus understanding of difference could take hold. However, as David Silbey argues in *Geographies of Exclusion*, "Feelings of insecurity about territory, status and power where material rewards are unevenly distributed and continually shifting over space encourage boundary erection and the rejection of threatening difference" (69).

As gentrification expands and urban centers are re-colonized, the non-consuming poor and homeless are increasingly visible and troublesome. They must be removed in the effort to clean up city streets and make them habitable for consumers. Working from Julia Kristeva, Silbey argues "abjection" is crucial to an understanding of this exclusion. He characterizes individual and societal responses to the homeless and gypsies in terms of the abject, the dirty and disordered refuse that threatens our boundaries (of ego and society) and generates the anxiety that stems from an inability to control the environment (8). But where to put all those people?[6] Los Angeles has considered several possibilities over the years, relocation camps in the desert near Barstow, derelict barges in the Long Beach Harbor, but such radical steps would make too visible the practices of maintaining the prohibitions protecting public space (Davis 161). Like New York, LA has worked within accepted practice and quietly begun criminalizing the homeless so that they are more easily herded into shelter space and, increasingly, jails.[7] Because they have no private space of their own, homeless people are especially vulnerable to the contestation of public space. They are forced by their poverty to put on display all the private, abject behaviors the housed keep behind closed doors, eating, urinating, defecating, drinking, sleeping. When public space is contested, these normal behaviors are targeted for criminalization. Los Angeles has

recently passed and begun enforcement of ordinances against sleeping on sidewalks and public urination and defecation (now all misdemeanor crimes). We are still fighting to prevent additional ordinances extending the hours of closure at public parks and libraries. At the same time, we fight an uphill battle for 24-hour access to public toilets and winter shelters in Venice and in the upscale Westside.

Dreier et al. maintain that "the trend in the spatial organization of American metropolitan areas is not the simple result of individuals making choices in free markets. Rather, federal and state policies have biased metropolitan development in favor of economic segregation, concentrated urban poverty, and suburban sprawl" (1). If policy created the situation, perhaps policy can alter it. Such a change will require geographic rhetorics and much imagination. Toward this end David Harvey advocates a renewal of utopian dreaming.

Harvey argues that global income inequalities are causing large-scale environmental devastation, cultural destruction, and the undermining of social cohesion (177). But hope is his final word: "As we collectively produce our cities, so we collectively produce ourselves. Projects concerning what we want our cities to be are, therefore, projects concerning human possibilities, who we want, or, perhaps even more pertinently, who we do not want to become" (159). Harvey encourages us to engage once again in imagining "utopias of spatial form," that we inhabit the role of architect as one "deeply enmeshed . . . in the production and pursuit of utopian ideals" and constantly struggle to open spaces of new possibilities for future forms of social life (200).

The Dome Village has become one such "space of hope" for me. Its staff and residents are struggling against the forces of concentrated poverty, the entrenched culture of street life, the whims of HUD funding, city budget cuts, the criminalization of poverty, and the revitalization of LA's downtown, in order to preserve the sense of place they have created. Their utopian dream is to replicate their village for homeless people across the nation, villages that open spaces beyond the suburban middle-class lifestyle increasingly out of reach for those on the streets and the working poor and to provide private spaces for those without the economic means to purchase them. I have begun to dream utopias with them.

I continue to hold fast to the notion that rhetoric is about situatedness, about context, about living and moving in the agora. Such context once provided common ground, a place in which to meet and struggle with the adjacent adversary, the one we had to live and work with in order to get things done. However, we are increasingly a place-less people, living in ageographical cities, utilizing "instruments of instant artificial adjacency [that] are rapidly eviscerating historic politics of propinquity" (Sorkin xi). Place matters, and yet, we are trading place for convenience, security, and the comfort of homogeneity. Increasing geographic segregation, especially between rich and poor, of our cities, suburbs, and towns has eroded our common ground. We have lost the sense that we are all in the same place, that we must struggle together to understand and make decisions. The architecture of our cities works to render the others invisible and therefore

essentially non-existent, not at the table, not in the same room, not a party to the conversation. This segregation erodes public discourse and is thus a significant threat to democracy.

Through my walking, I have realized that rhetoricians must fight this segregation and re-establish common ground. We need to work to make visible the other, not only in our texts, but in actual places. We are not in a global village for we are not a tribe sharing place and knowing one another. We are instead withdrawing into pseudo-tribal enclaves, protected, secure locations from which we exclude, ignore, and criminalize others. Geographic rhetorics can seek to understand the rhetoric of urban architecture and public policy, can question its assumptions and intentions, can encourage students to analyze the places in which they live and study in order to discover who these places are for, who they exclude, and how their prohibitions are maintained in practice (Silbey x).

And so after a semester long sabbatical, I'm trying to go back to class, to take my place, but it is becoming increasingly difficult. Politics and economics have followed me home. Under the corporate model of the university that reinforces the segregation of power and knowledge, two sites of social action and hope on my campus, the Writing Center and Service Learning, sites that fight against the solid boundaries of university locatedness, are now targeted for reduction or elimination; they cost some money and generate no revenue. Perhaps I'll become a real sophist and hit the streets for good, that seems to be the place my rhetoric is leading.

Notes

1. See Herzberg; Forbes; and Goodman. (Back)

2. SRO hotels provide a majority of the housing on Skid Row, particularly for single men; they allow only one tenant per room. (Back)

3. The courtyard model has been hailed as a California architectural concept that supports an excellent quality of life; unfortunately, developers can erect condominiums or apartments housing many times as many potential residents on the same lot. The few remaining examples of courtyards are thus highly desired residences. (Back)

4. See Snow and Anderson for an excellent depiction of homeless subculture generated by policy practices in Austin, TX. (Back)

5. Government definitions of poverty, devised in the 1960s assuming an average family pays one third of its income on food, greatly underestimate the extent of poverty. The problem with this definition is the cost of food has risen at a slower pace than has other necessities, especially housing. In LA, a two parent, two-child household must make $44,700 simply to meet basic needs, a figure three times the official poverty line. "If the poverty rate is revised to two times the official poverty threshold, then at least one out of four workers in Los Angeles County is poor" (Dreier, et al.). In fact, one in four is the figure recently cited in a national report by Waldron, Roberts, and Reamer. (Back)

6. LA County Sheriff Lee Baca has called the LA County Jail the largest mental health facility in the country. The majority of these inmates were homeless at the time of their arrest. (Back)

7. The latest figures from the LA Coalition to End Hunger and Homelessness suggest that 80,000 people are homeless on any given night in LA County. There are 18,529 available beds in shelters, including winter shelters. (Back)

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