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Dylan B. Dryer
University of Maine

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Composing Citizens: Epistemic Work in the Interstices of Comprehensive- Planning Genre Systems

Dylan B. Dryer

This case-study examines the ways citizens took up, and in some ways resisted, city planners' assumptions about their lived experience of "Portstown." While it is necessary to acknowledge the coercive properties of institutional documents and genre-systems, community-literacy workers must not efface the epistemic potential of everyday compositions, for this quality creates opportunities for strategic interventions in the solicitation and reception of civic writing.

As composition studies enacts the "spatial turn" described by scholars like Sidney Dobrin and Nedra Reynolds, it has drawn widely on research in urban planning for concepts like "situatedness" (Marback), "space-making" (Peeples), and "civic literacies" (Grabill). Since urban planning is in the midst of a "rhetorical turn" of its own, as documented by planners like Leonie Sandercock and James Throgmorton, composition studies can settle this particular conceptual debt by offering urban planners a better understanding of writing practices and genre systems. Genre researchers like Anthony Paré or Catherine Schryer have shown how writers' uptake of the conventions of institutional genres tacitly involves these writers in the reproduction of institutional ideologies.¹ Yet as Min-Zhan Lu or Janet Giltrow might also suggest, differences in writers' material conditions cause slippages in both institutions and ideologies by creating opportunities for contestation and change. I argue below that both insights are relevant to what Susan Marie Turner has called the "peculiar public text-mediated discourse of land-use planning," particularly since all city-dwellers must stand somewhere on the ground such texts mediate ("Texts" 300).

In bringing a compositionist's perspective to this case-study of a community survey designed and distributed by the Department of City Planning (DCP) of "Portstown" (a mid-size, postindustrial city on the US Great Lakes), I wish to extend our understanding of how citizens use writing to work in and on what Lu calls their "actual, imagined, or possible selves and lives" ("Essay" 28). In so doing, I suggest that community-literacy scholarship might do more in constructing communities as sites *of* (rather

than simply *for*) intellectual work, an omission that constrains our ability to recognize opportunities for intervention. To provide some context for the first part of this discussion, I draw on my pre-grad-school experience in land-use consulting to briefly historicize US comprehensive planning and to examine how a discourse of New Urbanism permeates the Portstown survey. I then turn to my post-grad-school background in genre theory and discourse analysis to develop quantitative and qualitative analyses of a corpus of survey responses to show how citizens negotiated the survey's neoliberal assumptions about them. Alongside Kimberly Emmons' call for careful attention to the embodied "disposition of subjects" that results from readers' and writers' uptake of genres, I argue that survey questions like those discussed below dispose respondents to speak for communities of thousands and as such, are crucial sites for motivated redesign by community-literacy workers (137).

Citizen Participation—Uptake by Cities and Academics

Cities, notes Gregory Crowley, "can do little to control flows of capital and labor across their borders" and so "must focus on manipulating the use of land, the only factor of production they can regulate directly" (15). Departments of urban planning orchestrate such regulations through complex systems of genres, and we owe much to Susan Turner's careful explication of the "textually standardized sequences of actions and outcomes" that enable certain civic activities "to be counted as doing 'planning'" ("Mapping" 146; "Texts"). Innumerable plats, reports, proposals, agendas, memoranda of understanding, applications, legal agreements, press releases, and zoning and building codes give urban planners what Amy Devitt might call a broad and deep "genre repertoire" (56-59).

One of the most important genres in this repertoire is known in the US as the "comprehensive plan." Comprehensive plans are long-term guiding rationales for thousands of everyday municipal land-use decisions: which sorts of businesses will be approved to operate in which districts, which sorts of housing and streetscapes and districts will be encouraged, what areas will be deemed "historically significant" (and thus more stringently restricted development-wise), what kinds of developments will be subsidized, which sorts of industries will be courted and perhaps incentivized, and so on. As first envisioned in the 1926 *Standard City Planning Enabling Act*, comprehensive plans were to make public the ends to which zoning and other land-use controls were the means, thereby avoiding "haphazard or piecemeal" regulation (6, fn 22). For example, Portstown's DCP explains in an eponymous newsletter that the "Comprehensive Plan will form the basis for reviewing zoning changes and Board of Zoning Appeals requests." As Charles Haar notes (and consistent with the future tense in this press release), cities developed these master plans far more slowly

than the zoning controls they were meant to rationalize—if they developed them at all. Growing awareness of the unsustainability of urban sprawl, however, gave rise in the 1990's to the "Smart Growth" initiative, which offered states resources (and a strict deadline) for each of their cities to "have a comprehensive plan adopted by the governing body of the unit of government" ("Plan" 1).

Comprehensive planning was always at least nominally collaborative, although what Turner calls its "peculiarly public" aspect is now more overt. The *Standard Act* initially provided for six men with "capacity for leadership in city planning" and a certain *noblesse oblige* ("there is nothing in city planning experience hitherto to indicate that compensation is needed to obtain men of the necessary qualifications and enthusiasm") to advise their mayors (10 fns 16, 18). Today, all cities are statutorily compelled to "foster public participation, including open discussion, communication programs, information services, and public meetings for which advance notice has been provided." Moreover, the boilerplate for relevant statutes continues, cities must "provide an opportunity for written comments on the plan to be submitted by members of the public to the governing body and for the governing body to respond to such written comments." These "opportunities" have been obligatory since the HUD reforms of the late 1960s, and critiques of governing bodies' responses to these comments are very nearly as old.² Rina Ghose summarizes such critiques trenchantly: "collaborative government...entices citizen groups with promises of effective participation, but in reality it channels the energy of citizens into forms of participation that are more manageable for the state and less useful for the citizens" (67).³

As this story has it, local governments downsized by pro-market, anti-welfare neoliberal reforms leave social services in the keeping of a "shadow state" of "non-profit agencies, public-private partnerships, [and] community development corporations" (Elwood 122). Meanwhile, planners are encouraged to rely on a "growth-first' approach to urban development" that defers social welfare concerns until "after growth, jobs, and investment have been secured" (Peck and Tickell 47). The operating construction of "citizen" that permeates contemporary city administrations is therefore entrepreneurial: rights and access are not necessarily accorded by "birthright or naturalization" but by understanding how "to perform actively as a citizen" (Ghose 64) and how to cooperate with local governance that uses "market mechanisms to free consumers to exercise choice, secure their own welfare, and receive redress when things go wrong" (Docherty *et al.* 2226). Or, as both citizens and city officials could be heard to say on several occasions at the meetings described below: "those who show up get to make the rules." Thus the material conditions that inhibit (childcare, eldercare, lack of transportation, work-related fatigue, medical conditions, a felt-sense

that “there’s nothing anybody can do about all this anyway”) as well as those that enable (access to announcements of meeting times and locations, the financial capital to perceive oneself as a “stakeholder,” the social capital to be made to feel welcome) are effaced. As Sarah Elwood or Fiona Smith might say, Portstown “infuses its ideology” into the citizens who show up after all this invisible winnowing “by engaging community groups and voluntary organizations in its activities and priorities” (Elwood 123).

Yet at least one of the assumptions on which this critique relies is too reductive in its understanding of human motive and agency. As Elwood herself rightly points out, we simply do not yet know enough about “how neoliberal urban policy might affect neighborhood-level discourse and practices” (123). Nor do we know much about the particular strategic and tactical ends for which citizens choose to participate (or not) in these discourses and practices; nor still do we know what becomes of citizens *as a result of* this participation. Jeffrey Grabill for one insists on the “productive knowledge” of those occupying “subordinate positions with respect to powerful systems” (composition students, shop-floor workers, citizens). Joining Robert Johnson, he writes, “user knowledge constitutes a form of expertise. But it is a form of expertise that is wasted when traditional hierarchies of knowledge (*e.g.* expert/novice) are thoughtlessly maintained” (136).

This hierarchy persists—even in scholarship and initiatives designed to deconstruct it—in the routine failure to construct citizens as workers in and on the literacies they employ. They are of course routinely imagined *as* workers (or aspirant workers) in nearly every other sense (blue, pink, or white-collar, service, wage-earners, skilled, unskilled, etc.) whose perspective is collected or consulted or sought out or accommodated. After “work,” that is, they can do some (nonepistemic, nongenerative) composing so as to report on (but seldom to develop or transform) their thinking and social relations. While it has been noted that citizens’ routine positioning as recipient, supplicant, client, and so on typically has the effect of limiting their access to and influence on decisions made for and about them, the equally pervasive construction of their work as only instrumental does not significantly problematize this positioning.

Other community-literacy scholarship suggests otherwise. In “Intercultural Knowledge Building: The Literate Action of a Community Think Tank,” Linda Flower tracks conversational turns by members of a “Decision Point” session as they complicate and revise each other’s understandings of a case-study of a new welfare-to-work employee. Her reading of the transcripts suggests that the participants are “not only sharing perspectives but are collaboratively building, elaborating, qualifying and conditionalizing a collaboratively constructed representation. And... this representation exists, at some level, as a transformation of their own

knowledge and understanding” (265-6). Patrick Bruch suggests that teachers go beyond asking students to write about “relations of difference that characterize city life and move instead toward asking them to see their writing and others’ writing as working both *in and on* those relations” (226, emphasis added; see also Long 116 and Goldblatt 140-3). As these scholars make clear, to construct citizens’ discursive abilities as something that can be “channeled” is to efface citizens’ complex motives for speaking and writing, since discursive abilities themselves change and are changed by the constructions upon which they are brought to bear. There are therefore alternatives to concluding that citizens’ labor is always or only in the service of neoliberal agendas or, indeed, to ignoring the intellectual work of composition.

Surveying New Urbanism

Citizen participation is not the only change to comprehensive planning since the 1920s. Its aims have changed as well, as most planners dream not of the large-lot single-family housing, clear separation of land-uses, and the “healthful and convenient distribution of population” envisioned by the *Standard Act* (17), nor of Corbusierian “towers in the park” (Jacobs 22), but rather what is now known as “New Urbanism.” New Urbanism seeks “an urban form that stimulates neighborliness, community involvement, subjective feelings of integration with one’s environment, and aesthetic satisfaction” (Fainstein 190). Rather like “process” theory in composition programs, it’s now more or less conventional wisdom in contemporary departments of city planning.

We can see this conventional wisdom permeating the Portstown Plan Project Manager’s description of the Survey aims to the Plan Advisory Group.⁴ As she explained at their first meeting, the Survey would inform DCP on “topics such as mixed use, public realm and public spaces, connectedness, overall quality of built environment, transit-oriented design, traditional neighborhood design, historic preservation, and urban place-making” (Manager “Introductory”). These topics are less abstract than they might sound, since, as an alderman of one of the affected districts explained a few minutes later, parts of the Plan Area are “developing quickly.” He elaborated:

there are a lot of people wanting to invest in the area,
and we all agree that investment is good;
and people returning to the city is good;
and rediscovering and revitalizing our neighborhoods is good;
but without some directions and some sort of planning,
those positives can very easily become negatives.
I tell people when they ask me

what I think my determination of the success of the plan would be

I have a specific form answer, and that answer is

When a car gets off the freeway

To the time they get to the lake

they will not be able to distinguish leaving one neighborhood and entering another

There will be a line of good quality development

active neighborhoods, built commercial spaces, good residential housing,

from the freeway to the lake

This is a much bigger area than that,

but that's a very simple thing to keep in mind as we do this.

(Alderman)

In the alderman's references to "people" "returning to" and "rediscovering and revitalizing our neighborhoods" we can hear the operating assumption of "growth-first" planning, wherein some "people" fortuitously "discover" sites for future retail and dining establishments through speculative real-estate ventures. So the theory goes, more businesses with longer hours draw consumers whose "eyes on the street" (in Jacobs' famous phrase) help ensure each other's safety. These neighborhoods—now safely behind what Gary Bridge has called the "gentrification frontier," or the "boundary of socially legitimized taste of the new middle class" (722)—become places in which such "people" now feel they might be able to rehabilitate a property. The success of the plan will thus be measured by its ability to push the gentrification frontier out of the plan area entirely.

As the Plan Project Manager explained when I interviewed her about three weeks before her scheduled visit to my neighborhood association to introduce the survey, DCP planned to use the results of this survey to

basically look for patterns, strong consensus

what it points to

does it reinforce some of the other conclusions?

So we can hear what people are saying

by creating a lot of different ways for information to come in

It takes it from anecdote to something that has greater, broader validity

And maybe there are things that you don't hear

there are people who are just not going to go to a meeting

unless you provide a buffet

The problem is getting people out of their immediate concern

like the corner tavern that's driving them nuts. (Manager, "Interview")

Again, we might wonder what conditions (discursive and conceptual) enable such residents to imagine a neighborhood's possible futures and how they negotiate the materiality of the present—the corner tavern, that “immediate concern,” the prospect of postponing dinner or finding a sitter to volunteer time at a meeting—in order to get access to the spaces and kinds of talk that might bring those futures into reality.

DCP went about its search for these “patterns” first by asking survey respondents to identify which of five “sub-areas” they lived in, rather than the neighborhood with which they might identify. In the survey, these subareas were simply lettered “A-E,” and, according to a community organizer involved in developing the Survey, their partitions followed the major thoroughfares in Portstown that “everybody knows are the big socio-economic dividing lines,” streets often mentioned in everyday “right side of”/ “wrong side of” constructions of Portstown's social geographies (Community). Since the discussion that follows will often compare responses from different subareas, it will help to review the map of Portstown and the neighborhood descriptions in Appendix A before proceeding. The neighborhood names are pseudonyms; the descriptions are built from my own observations as a resident of various parts of this Plan Area for nearly five years and from direct quotations from the “Tour Notes” compiled by project planners and community representatives as they visited the area in late summer 2006. (Note: the map may not represent Portstown's actual orientation to the lake in question.)

Nearly 75% of the 1470 respondents who identified themselves as living in one of the Subareas were from Harbortown and Watersedge

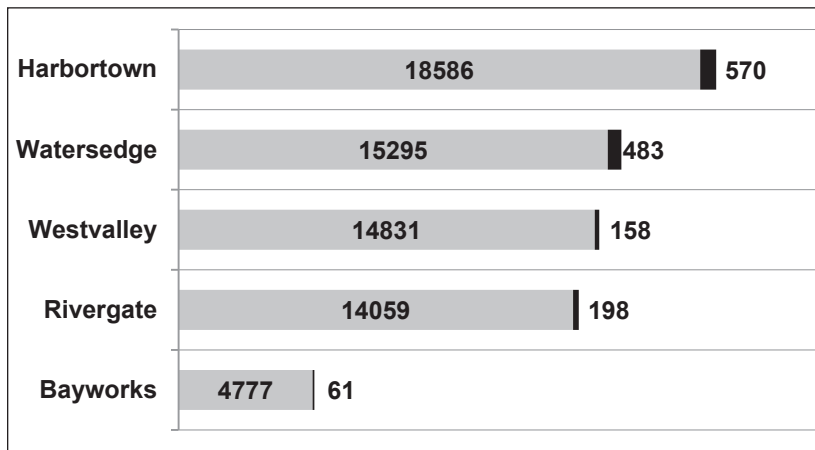


Figure 1: Plan Area Populations / Residence of Respondents

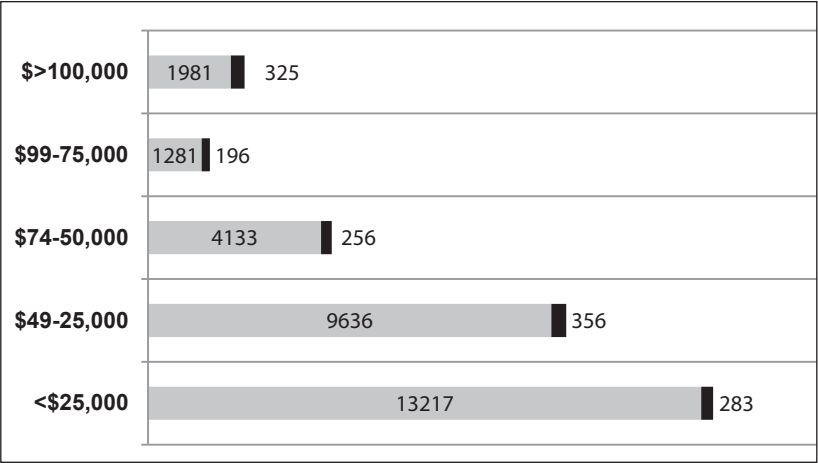


Figure 2: Plan Area Incomes / Incomes of Survey Respondents

(although the populations of the other three sectors slightly exceed those two). And it is impossible that 23% of the Plan Area earns more than \$100,000 a year (US Census data on annual household income in the corresponding census tracts indicate that only 6.5% of the 30,228 households earn that much money, as opposed to the 43.7% earning less than 25,000). Put another way: 23% of the survey data came from a demographic that accounts for less than 7% of the population, but only 20% from the demographic that actually accounts for more than 40% of the total.

That the survey was almost entirely (93%) answered online has much to do with this imbalance, despite DCP’s efforts to correct it by taking paper copies to community meetings in Rivergate and Westvalley (“Agenda”). But differences in private access to the internet versus access at, say, a public library, are held to be of little importance to the entrepreneurial citizen; as W.J. Craig suggests: “the question is what [citizens] do with this access, especially with regard to the participation in the planning process” (398). If “the question” of access is settled, we can move on to a discussion of the “what.” But in fact, as Darin Payne, Charles Moran, and others have demonstrated, the question is far from settled, for the “how” that Craig dismisses has everything to do with the “what” he’s ready to move on to, for the “access’ fault line lays bare...the class structure itself” (Brady 354).

However citizens accessed this survey, it’s necessary to get a better picture of the context in which they were prompted to write before considering any responses in detail. The Survey’s first seven questions request demographic data (age, number of children, mode of transportation, income, and so on), after which it turns respondents’ attention to planning issues—but does so in a way that makes irrelevant the information they were just asked. For example, question 10 provides a list of “elements” on

which residents can rate their neighborhood. The nouns that begin these elements (“affordability of housing,” “cleanliness of streets,” “access to medical services,” “proximity to destination shopping”) have an effaced context: *relative to what?* Other questions prompt citizens to speculate on existential qualities that might “positively” or “negatively” impact the Plan Area, yet all lack agents; no specific entity is named as having a hand in “increased property maintenance,” “increased job opportunities,” or “improvements to neighborhood shopping districts.” Finally, other qualities are assumed to be transparently good or bad; for example, “more police” is not counterbalanced with an option for “less police”; “increased homeownership” and “greater choice in housing options” are not paralleled with options for decreased homeownership or “less choice” in housing options for those needing *lower* rents to stay close to their workplace, childcare facility, or bus line.

While DCP had an intern ready to tabulate the easily quantifiable questions, they were less prepared to deal with the fascinating—and sometimes heartbreaking—compositions that also arrived in response to the four open-ended questions that concluded the Survey:

18. Why do you enjoy living, working, shopping, or spending time in the [Plan Area] of Portstown?
19. If you could add one more thing to the [Plan Area], what would it be?
20. In your opinion, what is the most critical issue for the [Plan Area]?
21. Please share any additional comments or concerns you have about the [Plan Area], including specific neighborhoods, districts, or places.

As I’d been nominated to the PAG by virtue of volunteering at one of the many neighborhood associations whose turf was affected by the Plan, I was gratified to see that citizens would have the opportunity to do some writing about their city. Yet I was also concerned that DCP might lack the resources to invest granular attention to the resulting compositions—especially those that might initially seem off-topic. For their part, DCP needed to do *something* with the comments to help satisfy its legal requirements for public outreach and response (see above); for my part, I needed a case-study for a dissertation chapter. So we were able to arrange a version of what Ellen Cushman calls a “network of reciprocity” for qualitative research.⁵

My respect and regard for the deeply-committed, hard-working DCP notwithstanding, I am now freer to say what I felt when first looking at these questions: while obviously well-intentioned, their shortcomings are plain to any compositionist who reads these questions for what they are—prompts for writing assignments. Indeed, they resemble the cursory

paper assignment that David Bartholomae once described as likely only to “prove the law of reciprocity—what you ask for is what you get. It’s poorly written and demonstrates, more than anything else, a teacher’s boredom and inattention, and it would be the exceptional student who would make anything of it other than an occasion for poor writing and inattention” (309). Question #18 is simply presumptuous; #19 unnecessarily delimits citizens’ responses, since in asking for “one thing,” it asks writers to assume both autonomous action and that the addition they could imagine could somehow take place without other changes necessary to bring it about. And in #20, “in your opinion” devalues the lived experience of the respondents, while asking them to confine themselves to only “*the* most critical” issue.

The prompts’ chief problem, as I see it, is that they are most amenable to residents of neighborhoods in which specific agents of change can be readily and succinctly identified, rather than neighborhoods suffering from longer-term, causally complicated social problems. As one resident speculated about a run-down commercial strip in her neighborhood:

Let [—] St. have a local grocers, bakers, restaurants, architectural or engineering firms, bank, pharmacy, natural dry cleaning, small retail that is useful to residents...a place where residents can walk to, meet & greet, and obtain most of their daily needs. Bring services & jobs closer to residents so that we don’t need to rely on the car so much. Bayworks is far away, and it’s horrible to walk along. Let [—] Park be an amenity to the

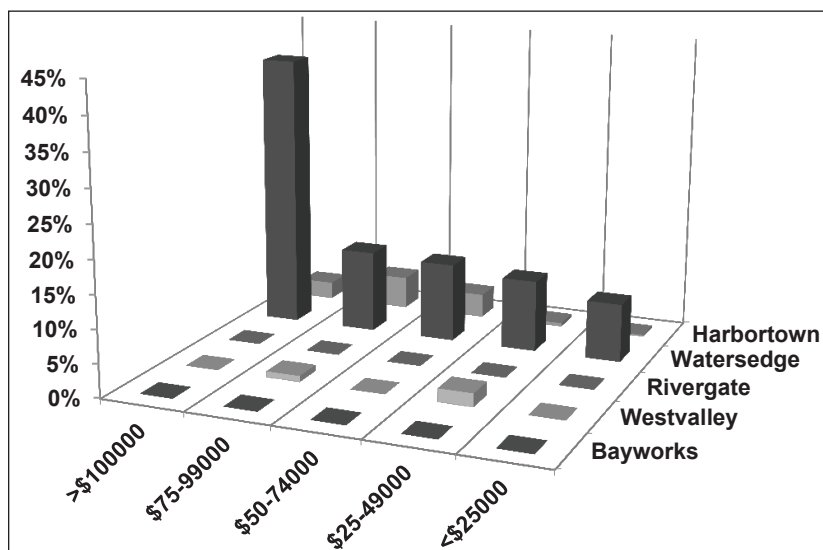


Figure 3: Distribution of Commentary on Undergraduate Behavior Issues by Sector and Declared Income

street as its sole green space. The farmers' market is a true gem for the residents.

The lost potential in this response is remarkable: she clearly shares the City's goals, *i.e.*, she sees the interconnections between the lack of amenities in her area and reliance on the cars that make Bayworks so "horrible." Yet she's not given the opportunity to imagine how DCP could "let" [—] Street "have" these things because, as framed, the "critical issue" question inhibits her ability either to surmise how what she wants could come about or to challenge DCP to come up with some way (*e.g.* incentives, rezoning) to make it happen.

To help manage the response corpora, I transferred DCP's Access file of survey responses into NVivo 8 qualitative research software. To avoid reading citizens' responses through my own assumptions about the different sectors, I deleted the demographic data and coded each response at nodes developed from the survey questions. When coding was complete, I restored the sector-of-residence and declared-income indicators and ran two queries to see whether my coding correlated with concerns articulated by community members to the PAG in the Tour Notes described above.

Figure 3 displays the results of the first query: that complaints about undergraduates predominate among the wealthy of Watersedge—that is, those who can afford the historic homes in the lakefront neighborhoods surrounding the university. Figure 4 also confirms the Tour Notes' summaries: Bayworks' residents' relative silence on development issues

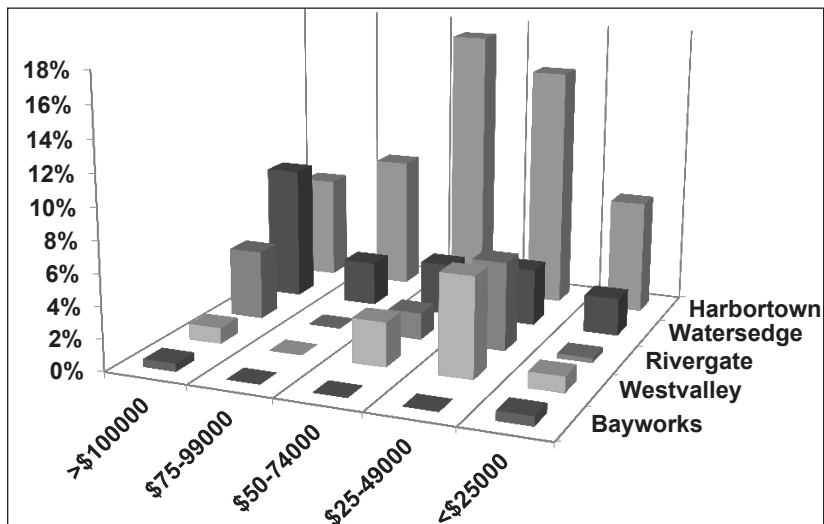


Figure 4: Distribution of Commentary on Development Trends by Sector and Declared Income

reflects the lack of new development projects there, as opposed to the acute anxiety felt in the rapidly gentrifying Harbortown. More subtly, we can register other significant spikes in commentary among the wealthy of Watersedge and Rivergate, anxious about condominium towers, and the lower-middle class of Rivergate and Westvalley, worried about infill developments raising rent.

Since it's necessary to keep in mind the disproportionate response rate among Plan Areas, it's helpful to consider other measures alongside the distribution-rates of commentary on a single topic. For example, querying the response corpora for what percentage of each sector's respondents mentioned New Urbanist god-terms (walkability, green space, access to "cultural" opportunities, references to "diversity"), shows in a rather extraordinary way the extent to which these terms are grounded in

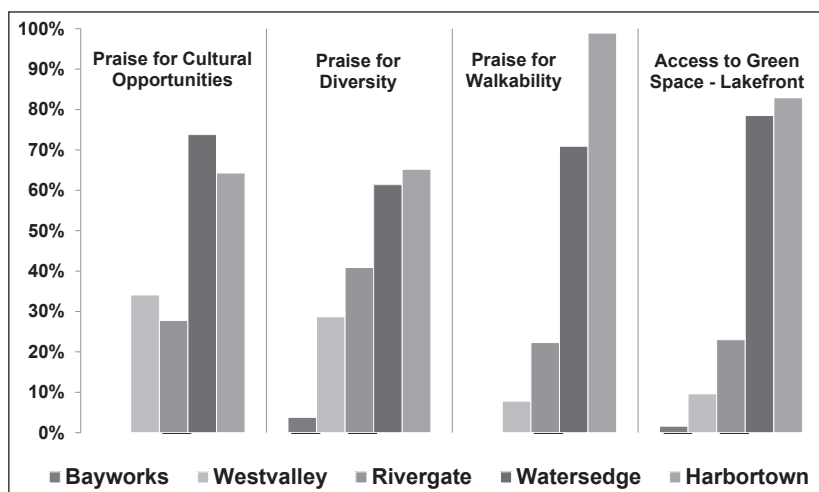


Figure 5: Percentage of Sector Respondents Referencing "New Urbanism" Priorities

neighborhood-specific senses of the city, as Figure 5 reveals.

For example, whatever else Watersedge residents might feel about the university in their neighborhood, they certainly enjoy its plays, concerts, and movies. And what ought we to make of the seemingly inverse correlation between levels of praise for the Plan Area's "diversity" and the presence of New Urbanist amenities? Of course lakeside Harbortown and Watersedge experience a dramatically "greener" city than their neighbors across the Portstown River, but note that the Survey's repeated references to "walkability" (and all that entails: less need to drive, better contact with neighbors and business owners, denser communities with easier policing and higher tax base, etc.) resonated with very nearly *every single resident*

of Harbortown, but gained no traction whatever with any resident of Bayworks, and barely at all in Rivergate.

Merely “rediscovering the obvious,” as Christophe Hilse might say (359)? Perhaps, although “the obvious” is still a matter of who has access to the material conditions that enable walkability, access to green space, or a preference for those activities the designers of the Survey would recognize as “cultural.” More specific questions uncover the less obvious. For example, the coding category of “development commentary” charted in Fig. 3 elides an important difference between aesthetic concerns, *e.g.*,

Although I'm somewhat pleased with the condo developments, it's clearly crossed the threshold and is now encroaching upon the onerous. The scale of the two condo towers being built on [—] for example, is incredibly disgusting.

or

that high rise on [—] will be completely out of place in the midst of all those gracious old apartment buildings and homes. It's CRASS.

and concerns about these developments' impact on housing and livability issues, *e.g.*,

By creating extremely expensive housing that mostly only white upper class people can afford, the [Plan Area] risks losing the diverse population (students, seniors, mentally ill, children, bums, old Polish and Italian families, homosexuals, religious zealots, artists, normal working people, etc.) that has made it an interesting, rich, and open community.

or

[Development] seems to be driving out those in the area who held a sense of pride and community. My grandmother has also owned a home in the area for as long as I can remember and I worry about her ability to keep up with the cost on a fixed income. I think it is critical not to forget about those who have spent their lifetimes in these communities.

If, as Virginia Woolf noted, £500 a year and a “room of one's own,” provides the “shelter from the claims and tyrannies of their families” that women need to be able to write (52), then as Figure 6 suggests, \$50,000 a year in Portstown is evidently enough to tip one's concerns from livability issues to aesthetic.

Such bird's-eye perspectives on these citizens' responses have their uses—and not merely to make easy correlations between income and enfranchisement or aesthetic sensitivity and standard of living. For example, only some of the citizens whose concerns about development

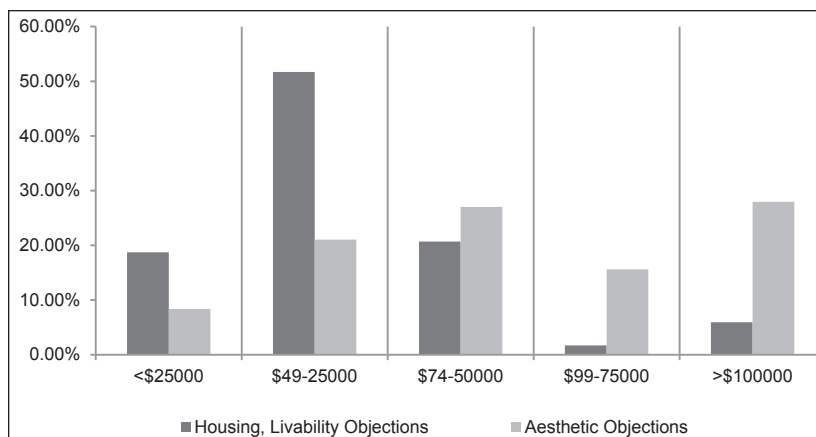


Figure 6: Development Discourse Disaggregated by Income

trends are mapped above made active planning recommendations (requests for “a slower pace of development,” “preservation of historic landmarks,” “conformance with neighborhood development patterns”). Fig. 7, below, shows the distribution of planning discourse (those mobilizing such vocabulary as “zone,” “code,” “plan,” “district,” “permit,” “overlay,” “commission,” etc.). Some of the groups most anxious about development (and also those most concerned about development’s impact on housing and livability, per Fig. 6)—the working class of Bayworks and Harbortown; the lower middle-class of Westvalley—appear to have little access to the vocabularies in which their concerns would be most effectively framed for readers at DCP.

We might also account for the concentration of this discourse in other income brackets in Watersedge and Harbortown: these residents, if the neighborhood associations’ Tour Summaries are any indication, are more likely to see development as a process in which it is possible to intervene. These interventions have given them access to the discursive resources to speak directly to such planning issues, thus facilitating their involvement in those issues, in turn giving them greater access to the discursive tools with which such interventions are affected. If the discourse of New Urbanism is already inequitably distributed (see Fig. 5) (even if it’s already everywhere in the Survey and offered to citizens in the prompts to which they are responding), the more significant difference is the meta-discourse: the language used to shape and articulate and intervene in the social processes of urban planning, that is, the discourse *in* and *through which* New Urbanism is planned and implemented.

But my ultimate point is not that the experience the Survey constructs for its respondents is not universal, nor is it that the Survey “discovered” profound inequities among residents of different neighborhoods in the

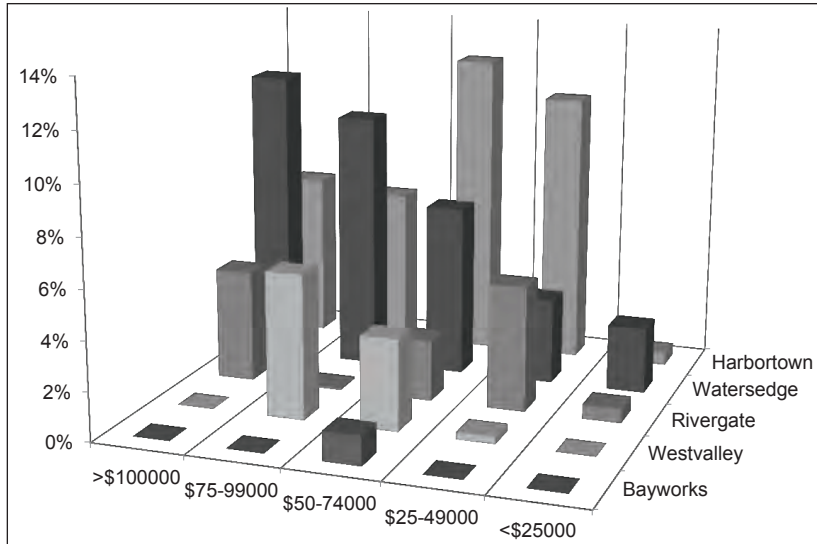


Figure 7: Distribution of Planning Discourse by Income and Sector

Plan Area. It is rather that the design of these questions works against reflection that citizens might do on the sector- and income-specificity of the amenities they describe. To make this point, it is necessary to move to what Janet Giltrow calls the “ground level,” examining places where, as she says, language is staged “in the ‘real presence’ of system” (369). But before looking closely at a handful of citizens’ complete answers to these questions, it is also necessary to acknowledge some constraints. These texts were either composed online or were transcribed before I had access to them, so all evidence of false-starts, changes in thinking, and redrafting is gone. In the absence of such traces of shifts in thought or perspective, I focus instead on relationships that I see writers developing in the articulation between questions—what one response seems to lead them to conclude and anticipate in another; where one sort of trajectory set by one question seems to land them with respect to another question; how one line of thinking is disrupted or maintained in sympathy with or resistance to a line of thinking suggested by the sequence. (Note: as these writers lacked access to proofreaders enjoyed by published writers, I have standardized spelling where it seemed obvious that a writer had transposed letters or was spelling phonetically a word s/he wasn’t accustomed to seeing in print, *e.g.*, “skewed” for “scued.” Otherwise, everything reproduced here is exactly and entirely as it was written; please especially note that all ellipses are the writers’ own.)

How well, for example, do the following two responses fit into the consumerist discourse the Survey invites respondents to take up?

Why Enjoy?	It's where I live so I have to enjoy shopping and spending time in that area
Add What?	A nice community center for every one to go to and have things happening all year round
Critical Issue?	Crime and safety and speeding
Additional Comments	<p>The service you receive in certain area of [—] is terrible. They do not like to prepare food right always have attitudes when you ask questions.</p> <p>Speeding in this area is bad too. They sit so low in the seat trying to show off and can injure someone.</p> <p>Please create more affordable housing. Because every year my rent keeps increasing.</p> <p>There is too much over crowding at welfare building.</p> <p>I am tired of picking up trash behind my neighbors and the manager seems to think it okay that they keep dropping it down and leaving big bag of garbage on the outside of can drawing attention to rodents.</p>

Why Enjoy?	I do not enjoy any of it
Add What?	
Critical Issue?	Safety
Additional Comments	I do no shopping in the [plan area]. I travel west, out of the area. Get rid of the drug dealers in the three houses across the street from me, and I may have other opinions.

The first writer's first answer is a level critique of the Survey's assumptions about his ability to choose his neighborhood; the "have to" is a brave face put on the life glimpsed fragmentarily in the "additional comments." Recall that he would have been asked to consider the "affordability" of the Plan Area's housing in the same way he was asked to consider its "variety" and "quality"; the Survey does not recognize that speculating on housing's "variety" and "quality" are predicated on its "affordability," nor are these considerations held to be interrelated (e.g., there's no provision for "quality of affordable housing"). For him, the increasing cost of living is a burden made heavier by the difficulties he has in obtaining the subsidies that alleviate it, part of the poor living conditions with which he's surrounded. It's another window into the lopsidedness of access to this Survey that "rodents" (or any of its synonyms) is not a word used by any of the other 1647 respondents; indeed, no one else uses the word "welfare" in any sense other than the pejorative.

The second writer struggles against the Survey's presumptions to argue that "opinions" about the construction of the plan area she has been asked to take up by the survey are a luxury for those whose everyday choices are not negotiated in the presence of "drug dealers." The presumptions of the survey, as much as its physical constraints, make it difficult for these writers to assert the material conditions of their lives (much less their inevitably complex relation to the social).

Neoliberal Compositions

Those two are outliers, as most citizens seem to have readily taken up the Survey's suggestion that they imagine themselves as "consumers," an uptake with at least three consequences for their responses, particularly as they correlate with wealth (see Fig. 8). First, comparatively well-off writers readily take up this vision as a way to construct their taxes in terms of exchange-value for social services (not) rendered:

Student behavior and violent crime is rapidly worsening while police resources are being used for other neighborhoods. This despite the fact that my high taxes go to pay for these police resources.

Second, they threaten to move if their demands are not met:

I am concerned about the construction of tall condo buildings in a neighborhood that is primarily small (3-5) story buildings and single/duplex homes. Large out-of-scale buildings like the one going in at [—] is completely out of character and will prompt me to look to buy a home further north in order to stay away from that traffic congestion and horrible tall building. If I wanted to live near tall buildings I'd live downtown.

Third, and most distressing, they construct their neighborhood in what I am calling "isolationist" rhetoric, following David Fleming's concern that in "identifying some people as 'poor' and consigning them to certain neighborhoods, we do not only demean them, we hurt the society as a whole, making all of us more selfish, distrustful, and isolated from each other" (215). By "isolationist" rhetoric I mean specifically writing that reifies other geographies within the Plan Area at the expense of the Survey's attempt to establish all the sectors as a single "Plan Area":

While we like our new Harbortown neighborhood, it would be nice to see a lot of the rundown, shabby rental properties that surround our home be replaced with new construction similar to ours. I think this should take priority over the continued development of Rivergate.

or

I drive through Rivergate every day on my way to work and it is much more run-down, less clean and higher-crime than the rest of the Plan Area. I am concerned with these conditions spreading and affecting the rest of the East side, particularly the emerging Westvalley area where I plan to buy a house in the spring.

or

Some of the area that falls within your map is very very dangerous. The east side really includes [Watersedge and Harbortown] only. Also there is a pretty school on [—] Street but neighborhood kids can't go to it because of busing. It is a dangerous school.

The citizen who sees “rundown shabby rentals” (but not what would become of their residents were they “replaced with new construction similar to ours”) and the citizen concerned about dirt and crime in Rivergate (to the extent that it might spread to his new home) write from the same place as the citizen who drops the “my” when speaking of the “neighborhood kids”

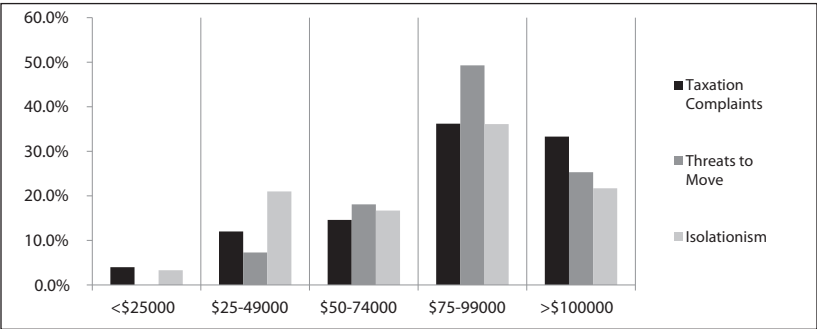


Figure 8: Distribution of Uptake of Neoliberal Rhetoric by Declared Income

(who, but for busing, would be going to this “pretty school”). These writers resist the survey’s assumption that their neighborhoods can or should be conflated with “dangerous,” “run-down,” and “shabby” areas as a single imagined community.

Again, it’s not surprising that taxes aren’t prominent on the minds of those making less than \$50,000, nor that those earning so little felt unable to threaten to move. The question, rather, is what material conditions were necessary for the writer below—one of those who is writing from the right of the \$75,000 line—to imagine a “you” answerable to her imperative to use her tax money to “support the lifestyles of people like me who will put up with a little of this ‘urban experience’”? To be able to say, in effect, that if her ‘urban experience’ is leavened, as it were, by the “good parts” of diversity,

her taxes should support the lifestyle that is there to be leavened by her experience of diversity?

Why Enjoy?	I couldn't deal with the [suburban] lifestyle and attitudes; I like the many alternatives that are available to us in terms of shopping and entertainment; proximity of these things; the good parts of the diversity of my neighborhood
Add What?	movie theater
Critical Issue?	drugs, hookers and gangs.... personal safety....it is falling prey to the malcontents..... and developers who want too much density to pay for a project that doesn't make economic sense
Additional Comments	I have personally added over \$200.0m to the tax rolls by completely rebuilding my house in Rivergate....this week I had three different hookers approach in my neighborhood ...one who actually tried to open my car door!! What are you doing with all this tax money?? You have to take responsibility of being better stewards of this money and using it to support the lifestyles of people like me who will put up with a little of this "urban experience"....otherwise I and others like me will get out and you guys can turn out the lights.

Unfortunately, this writer is not the worst of the lot; others complained of crime emanating from Valleywest, "where the loser population lives," while another theorized that "the bus lines that feed directly into the ghetto are direct links to crime," suggesting that such buses be re-routed to "defer easy access" to Harbortown. After all, s/he concluded, "I live in a more expensive part of the city and deserve not to deal with inner city issues." As troubling as they are, such writers are not simply rejecting the Survey's imagined geography of the Plan Area; rather, the Survey's contradictory directions to talk about the Plan Area in terms of their own, individual experience of it was too mixed of a message to interfere usefully with their inclination to see the City as failing to provide the lived experience to which they believe they're entitled.

Composing Epistemic Work

As the survey itself clearly lacked uptakes that might have facilitated reflectiveness on those points, it's worth asking how writers might have been compositionally encouraged in different directions. Other citizens' responses provide a partial answer. Armed with Elwood's critique of the scholarly tendency to overstate the hegemonic abilities of state and local governments, we could look for ways in which the discourses of neoliberalism and new urbanism are locally translated. We might also look for moments in which representations of those social relations and material conditions seem to be intellectually transformed by and through citizens' writing. When one

citizen is asked by the Survey why he “enjoys” the Plan Area, and responds “I don’t, there are too many crack dealers and beggars. My daughter can’t go outside,” what makes him suggest a “Drug Rehab Center” as the “one thing” he’d add to the Plan Area, but another (who identified the “critical issue” merely as “Parking” demand that (someone?) “round up and haul away the filthy bums and panhandlers on [—] Street”? What prompted the first writer I examined above to propose—despite long lines, dangerous drivers, garbage, and rats—that what the Plan Area really needs is a “nice community center for every one to go to and have things happening all year round”?

That we cannot know for sure should not distract us from the real tragedy of neoliberal compositions like those in the preceding section. As Lu explains, “How individual users of English make sense of and work with their discursive resources when reading, writing, and revising matters. The

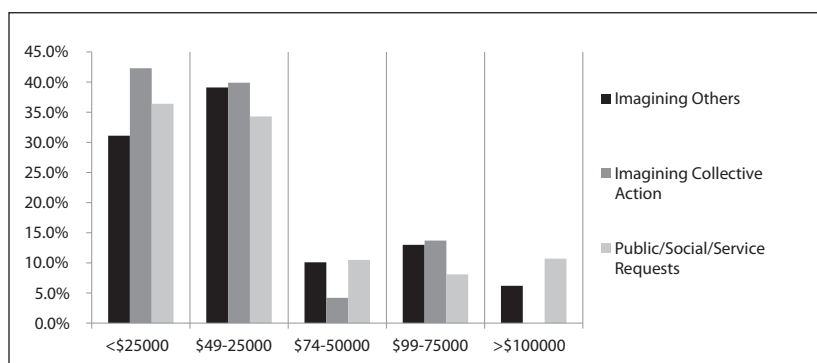


Figure 9: Outward-Directed Thinking by Declared Income

individual users shape and are shaped by the texts they produce. They are shaped by and reshape the realities of their lives” (“Composing” 28). For it’s not that the Survey “discovered” what these writers thought; it’s that it prompted compositions that re-entrenched these citizens ever more slightly into unreflective, even intolerant, versions of citizenship. To ignore this epistemic dimension of “writing assignments” in any genre—public, private, corporate, or pedagogic—is to ignore the generative work of everyday compositions. Against that tendency, the remainder of this paper discusses several instances of citizens’ resistance of the neoliberal design of writing prompts, as charted in Figure 9.

Such resistance can take the form of a broader social concern for fellow citizens, even if they had to work against the configuration of discursive resources the survey offered them to express it. The “drug rehab center” and the “nice community center” are examples of requests I coded as “Public-Social-Service” (other examples include requests for increased

library hours, mental health facilities, public swimming pools and recreation centers, more frequent buses, and so on). As alternatives to “isolationist” rhetorics, I coded places where citizens imagined the needs of others, *e.g.*,

That we understand having a older group living among us that we take care of their needs and the needs of the homeless.

or

I have no problem w/ [taverns] using the sidewalk [for outdoor seating] as I imagine it greatly helps them bring in revenue during our short summer months. But I would just like to see some middle ground met where they would police their own tables, chairs and customers so the elderly, people w/ strollers, children on bikes, etc. can come and go without being impeded.

or

We are adjacent to an area of tremendous poverty. It is unsurprising that desperate people would seek crimes of opportunity in an area near them where more affluent people live. Portstown will never succeed until all its residents are doing well.

as well as places where citizens imagined collective action:

I think the increase in police funding and closing of parks is adding fuel to the fire of underprivileged kids and teens getting into trouble. We need more positive things for the kids to do after school and on the weekends so they don't resort to drugs, drinking, and violence. Let's all work together in this beautiful city to help those who aren't as fortunate as us, and who need our help the most!

or

Since gentrification is a problem that is resulting from more affluent people moving in, we need to find ways for good homeowners to afford the property taxes on homes where they have made the community. In addition to this more affordable housing measures on the east side would also help the issue of diversity.

Such compositions, I argue, are real intellectual work toward what Susan Fainstein hopes will be New Urbanism's successor: “the Just City.” As she describes it, the Just City is “an urban vision that also involves material well-being, but that relies on a more pluralistic, cooperative, and decentralized form of welfare provision” (190). A significant—but surmountable—obstacle to the Just City is the dismaying poverty of the imagination charted in Fig. 8; that is, those most likely to be heard seem

the least able to imagine others, the least likely to think of plans that would benefit the *entire* Plan Area, and utterly incapable of imagining working with others.⁶

What might such writers make of this response?

Why Enjoy?	I can get to work quickly. Some places are safer than others, some places like [---] have a friendly, safe, and clean environment, enjoyable area to look around.
Add What?	Recreation Center for youth. There are a lot of kids, youth in the area with nothing to do but tear up because they have nothing to do. The more you build the more they will cause disruption
Critical Issue?	Drugs, alcohol, lack of prevention programs for youth/adults, no free basic educational plan for adults.
Additional Comments	<p>I live here all my life I am 48. I see my community go (going) from rags to riches and I don't know if I will be able to afford to live here anymore, the rate all of this development and changes are taking place. This area is turning and if blacks can't keep up we have to move out.</p> <p>I know I did not really answer the question I just needed to get that out.</p>

This writer understands that what distinguishes the “enjoyable area to look around” from his neighborhood (that “look[s] bad”) is not happenstance; it has everything to do with the “kids” and “youth” who will “tear up” what “you” (DCP?) build. Distressingly, his third response reconstructs the “kids, youth” as “adults youth”—the protracted idleness and misdirected energies of those with “nothing to do” that both reflect and create the conditions of a neighborhood now “going from rags to riches”—an upward mobility for some that means outward displacement for others.

Since the Survey can be read as an attempt to gauge citizens’ assessment of DCP’s gentrification efforts, his apology for raising the question of gentrification in the last response is complicated. On the one hand, this writer suggests prevention programs, a recreation center, educational plans for adults (that is, something “to do”), and unlike so many of his fellow citizens, what he would “add” is something that would redress the “critical issue.” So we might read the urgency of “keeping up,” *i.e.*, some ends to which the energy otherwise spent “tearing up” and “hanging out” could be directed, as what this writer “just needed to get...out.” Yet because question 21 wasn’t a question at all, but an invitation for “additional comments,” perhaps this is not an apology but a request that this writer’s lived-experience of being black in Westvalley not be dismissed as off-topic.

That is, “I know I did not really answer the question” is also a way to insist “don’t think that I don’t know what I’m saying and to whom I’m saying it.”

The staccato sequence of these survey questions clearly worked against writers’ abilities to develop a sustained, reflective line of inquiry by scattering their focus and inviting them to consider complex social phenomena in reductive ways. Yet others found ways to work out an understanding of the interrelation of material conditions and the changes they’d like to see:

Why Enjoy?	Good location for transport (roads and public transit), racial mixture, proximity to Downtown, access to shopping outside of [Plan Area]
Add What?	Greater safety and security for residents, workers, shoppers and other visitors
Critical Issue?	Public safety and property security
Additional Comments	<p>I would like to see substantial improvements in public safety and property security.</p> <p>There are many disused commercial and industrial buildings. What could we do to put these to use as businesses again? There are also many empty lots near these disused buildings. How can these be put to good use as well?</p> <p>I would also like more residential units for middle-income households. Greater safety and more attention to street cleanliness and maintenance would make some areas with existing but underutilized housing more attractive to middle-income home buyers. A greater stock of affordable housing might also keep Northeast Side rental and purchase price increases in check as a matter of market forces.</p>

Unlike most of her fellow-citizens, when this writer asks for “greater safety,” she’s doing so for the benefit of a spectrum of people all in the Plan Area for different reasons. While it’s fair to theorize that this thinking-of-others has its roots in not feeling *personally* threatened, it’s also fair to note that she ends up in a significantly different place than nearly everyone else who made a priority of safety. The paragraph breaks in the “Additional Comments” section signal a move out of and away from a second restatement of safety and security and into a remarkable construction of “affordable” housing as something that might keep others’ cost of living down. Against the constraints of the survey, she has found a way to subvert the neoliberal evocation of the market by invoking “market forces” as a mechanism of rent *control*.

If the previous writer’s paragraph breaks signaled (and enabled) generative, epistemic composing, this last writer’s “I also think” does similar work. His initial closing peroration, whose conventional stylistic smoothness

leads him into some rote remarks by way of closure, proves insufficient to contain the forceful critique of gentrification (note the scare-quotes on ‘fixed’) and the call for social justice that flourish in the space opened by that “I also think.”

Why Enjoy?	I have loved living in Westvalley the last ten years, I knew it was home the first time I came into it when I was 15 years old. I am now raising my family here, after being involved in many different community projects. I like keeping my money and energy local. I feel a village mentality here that needs support, so we can learn to support and care for ourselves more thoroughly. I have worked in a bunch of places in the [Plan Area] and had the joy twice of working within blocks of my house. You really get to know people and understand what is going on when you don't spend hours commuting in your car.
Add What?	
Critical Issue?	Lack of true integration... as the most segregated city in the country we need to start walking the walk and look for new solutions and listen to each other across race and class divides or our city will never heal, not an easy task but true growth never is
Additional Comments	<p>I hope that this plan takes into consideration the differences in the neighborhoods it encompasses and truly listens to all the feedback it was given.</p> <p>I also think it is more important to help the people that already make the Plan Area their home than to make it more appealing to people to move into once it is “fixed” Keep our homes ours. I am not saying I am against new people in my neighborhood, just am sick of ones who want to turn it into the ‘burbs, I live in an urban environment for a reason.</p> <p>Also please remember that though an opinion may be a minority all voices count</p>

Rethinking Uptake: Some Tactical Considerations

For Eugene McCann, Lefebvre’s famous concept of “the right to the city” entails *by definition* “the right not to be marginalized in decision-making, nor to be channeled into certain political discussions or decision-making processes and not into others on the basis of one’s similarity to or difference from other individuals or groups” (78). While any writing prompt tries to “channel” those taking it up, it’s also true that such “channeling” can make writers feel as though certain kinds of input are solicited. This may seem like a long way back to Bartholomae’s simple point that “you get what you ask

for,” but we should not forget that these were the same citizens who were criticized for being too focused on parochial issues (as the Project Manager said, “the corner tavern that’s driving them nuts”)—when that was the very way that they were prompted to write about their experience.

By abandoning its initial construction of the various neighborhoods as a single “Plan Area,” and by encouraging its respondents to construct their experience of the City in individualistic and consumeristic ways, the Survey did too little to interfere with the isolationist tendencies endemic to the demographics most likely to respond. Nor did it do much to teach respondents about planning or the language of planning, and thereby to work against the inequitable distribution of that discourse. Yet some of the citizens whose writing I discussed in the previous section obviously desired to understand “the complexity of planning issues” that some believe deter even their *desire* to participate (Fagence 370); the question, rather, is to what extent the survey *positioned* them and their fellow citizens as limited in their capacity to understand. These writers do understand the reproduction of the social relations in which they act, even when faced with uptakes that seemed to discourage such reflective work, either ideologically, in the case of the neoliberal discourse of the questions themselves or materially, when the time is not long (a growing queue at the public internet terminal at the library or an unreliable dial-up connection) or when the space on the form is small.

Imagine as well what the writers in the previous section might have been able to do, had they also been armed with a sense that such connections were worth working out and would be taken seriously—conditions for reading, writing, reflecting, and revising that my fellow academics and I routinely take for granted. To that end, writers in organizations must look to their own uptake of institutional genres, in particular the spaces they design for *other* writers to do the work of composition. For realizing the (or even “a”) “Just City” will require a great deal of repositioning—of capital, of resources, of time, of habituations, of genres, of tactics of reading and writing. But if we begin with the premise that writing is intellectual work as well as a means of recording it, even the fact that the consultant’s “Scope of Service Requirements” provides only that the “image preference survey,” the “community survey,” and the three “focus groups to gather input...*may* become part of a ‘public outreach summary’ *appendix* to the plan” (emphases mine) is not necessarily cause for despair. This document sets up the communities’ input to be physically marginalized in the Plan itself; indeed, in the most cynical reading, this “Appendix,” will serve only to demonstrate compliance with the statutory requirement that such public input did in fact take place. Yet the cynical view assumes that composing in this survey *had no effect on those who did so*.

David Fleming argues that “[c]hanging our language will not change” the “social fragmentation of our communities, the causes and effects of poverty, inequities in power” that his work on the Chicago Housing Authority revealed. “[B]ut if we want to build more just and equitable cities, we will need to talk *about and to* one another in more just and equitable ways” (219 emphasis mine). For those involved in what Lu calls “word-work” (teachers of composition, community literacy workers, writers and administrators of tests, program coordinators, bureaucrats, urban planners, and citizens), a place to make strategic interventions might be those crucial moments where readers and writers uptake institutionalized genres. To that end, I propose that survey questions like those above be strategically reconfigured to facilitate more reflective, situated, and collectively-oriented uptakes. Here, I revise the questions to show how much can be done in this direction, even while operating within the original constraints of number of questions and initial subject matter of the originals above:

18. What have been your experiences of living, working, shopping, raising a family, getting the assistance you need, walking, talking with neighbors, being entertained, or otherwise spending time in the [Plan Area]? Why do you think that these have been your experiences?

19. Which of these experiences have changed over time? For better or for worse? Why do you think that is so? What would you have tried to change earlier, or stopped sooner, if you could have?

20. What issue(s) could you imagine working together with your neighbors and the City to address in your neighborhood? What could the City provide that would make that work easier to organize and complete?

21. What parts of your life-experiences in the [Plan Area] did this Survey not seem to ask you about? How would you describe those experiences?

In the spirit in which I have been insisting that we consider writing—generative, knowledge- and self- and relationship-altering—I am prepared to say that such changes would be enough, even if DCP promptly threw the answers away unread. That it is highly unlikely that DCP would do any such thing opens other possibilities: first, that it might help DCP (and organizations like it) to understand that surveys and questionnaires are always pedagogical; that is, they construct and produce as much as they “discover” and “reveal.” Second, revising survey questions in ways that position citizens as thoughtful, reflective respondents to and participants in the social and built environments continues urban studies’ honorable and decades-long work undoing the Modernist paradigm of “master planners” and docile citizens.

Responses to these questions will be, to say the least, harder to mine for easy conclusions or quick consensuses. They will demand a different kind of reading; in fact, they will require the kinds of patient, close, and careful readings of texts marked as “periphery,” “nontraditional,” and/or “outsider” writing that compositionists and particularly community literacy workers have trained themselves and others to perform. I believe we will find our colleagues in urban planning receptive; they are, after all, no strangers to social complexity. In fact, for fifty years now, urban studies has anthologized Charles Lindblom’s assertion that administrators’ work was often a “muddle” complicated by the majority’s lack of preferences “in the absence of public discussion sufficient to bring an issue to [their] attention” (81). Simply making the obvious point at Lindblom’s expense that “discussion” is always a way of constructing *certain* preferences doesn’t get us very far. And surely we have heard enough of “the ability of institutions to exercise power through establishing the customary frame or posture that is to direct any unreflective instance of document consumption (or for that matter, production)” (Wallace 176). Citizens’ preferences are *constituted* by and through discussion (whether administrators are present to hear these discussions or not) and that inasmuch as such preferences defy the expectations of those who seek to ascertain them, there is cause for reconsidering and redirecting at least some of the energies of community-literacy work and urban planning alike.

Endnotes

1. For detailed case-studies of genre uptake that specifically concern the genre systems of local and regional land-use planning, see recent work by Derek Wallace, Lynda Walsh, and Diane Wegner.
2. See, for example, Sherry Arnstein’s justly famous 1969 critique of “tokenism,” “group therapy,” “placation” and other forms of orchestrated (non)participation for citizens.
3. For persuasive examples of the “genre” of critique that Ghose summarizes here (or what might in critical-theory circles be called “institutional capture”), see work by Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt or Jeff Makovsky.
4. The Plan Advisory Group consisted of a few dozen citizens identified as Plan Area “stakeholders” and who were invited to serve as a kind of *ad hoc* sounding board for drafts of the Plan.
5. To be sure, Cushman would likely have reservations about my use of this phrase in this context, since she uses it to describe academics who make their cultural (and sometimes financial) capital available to help solve problems for the disadvantaged they are studying (15, 19-20).
6. Interestingly, Paul Piff *et al.* published a very similar finding in their well-designed study “Having Less, Giving More: The Influence of Social

Class on Prosocial Behavior,” which went to press just a few months ago in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

Appendix A

Map of Portstown

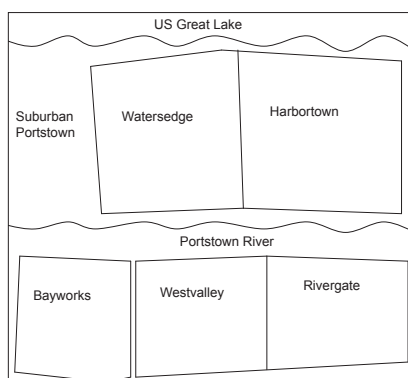
Watersedge: This sector boasts a powerful neighborhood association capable of ensuring “that government is aware of neighborhood concerns” about the National Register and Historic Districts that make up these “compact walkable neighborhoods that enjoy a range of cultural amenities, shopping, and family-oriented recreational opportunities.”

“High property taxes” and development pressure for larger and taller high-rises preoccupy the wealthier residents, but a city university in transition from a commuter to a residential student body has others worried about undergraduates seeking off-campus housing. Their “culture of binge drinking,” residents argue, “threatens to undermine the good will” needed for coexistence.

Harbortown: The lakeside Harbortown streets, like those of Watersedge, enjoy “parks, beaches, and trails.” The most populous sector, it is best known for a famous street—40 years ago a kind of mini-Haight/Ashbury—and today an “unofficial Main Street” whose “scene” includes many restaurants, nightclubs, and outdoor cafes. Residents near that street are keenly interested in protecting it from “non-contributing” developments that might compromise its “unique character.” Closer to the river (and to Rivergate), residents’ concerns shift to “lower-grade speculative housing,” and the impact of gentrification and the “outmigration of jobs” from these “old ethnic working class neighborhoods.”

Bayworks: The least populated and most industrial sector. Isolated from the lake by a prosperous suburb, many old factories are vacant, leaving fenced-in lots and dilapidated buildings, reuse of which “may be complex and often involves environmental remediation.” The large lot-sizes of the remaining operations disperse residential districts and make it hard to sustain small local businesses. A six-lane arterial, known for “big box” retail and “speed of traffic,” separates Bayworks from the rest of the plan area and “adversely affects a customer-friendly pedestrian-oriented atmosphere.”

Westvalley: Two-family flats predominate; mixed-uses include restaurants, taverns, small galleries and co-ops. A core of residents with



a “strong sense of place and history” defend it as a neighborhood of first-time homeowners, graduate-student renters, the elderly working class, first-generation immigrants, hippies, and hipsters, yet can do little to slow the decay of other streets as jobs leave Bayworks. Nearby livelihoods that once sustained “walk-to-work neighborhoods are now scattered...throughout the metro area.” “Combined with other ongoing social problems,” that displacement “threatens to undermine the fabric of the community.”

Rivergate: “Sporadic media coverage of crime in the larger area tarnishes [the] image” of this area and deters nearby residents of “densely developed neighborhoods with good purchasing power.” Recent renovations and streetscape improvements to the main commercial corridor help, but are not enough in themselves to sustain enough businesses to achieve the “intensive and highly clustered retail” planners hope for. Planners hope for adaptive re-use of late nineteenth-century warehouses for condominiums, yet others worry that “gentrification ...may make the area unaffordable to some longtime residents...on fixed incomes.”

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