

THESIS

TACTICAL THIRDSPACE: THE PHYSICAL AND VIRTUAL SPACES OF COMMUNITY  
LITERACY

Submitted by

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## ABSTRACT

### TACTICAL THIRDSpace: THE PHYSICAL AND VIRTUAL SPACES OF COMMUNITY LITERACY

Using the lens of Edward Soja's Thirdspace, this thesis investigates the physical and virtual spaces of two community literacy programs. This study makes use of narrative inquiry and presents a thematic analysis of the narratives of two literacy facilitators, and applies Michel de Certeau's framework of strategies and tactics to the narratives, demonstrating a tactical navigation of space within drop-in centers for homeless youth. The tactics used by the facilitators result in the production of a "Tactical" Thirdspace. Additionally, the study includes a dialogic analysis of discourse included in the online spaces of the two literacy programs, which examines the multiple ways in which the organizations and their writers challenges prevailing stereotypes against homeless youth through what Gwendolyn Pough describes as "bringing wreck," as well as the ways in which the discourse presented in the spaces produces and fails to produce Soja's Thirdspace. As in the physical space, the tactical nature of community literacy efforts produces Tactical Thirdspace. The study concludes with an exploration of the possibilities and limitations of Tactical Thirdspace within community literacy work and by arguing for additional spatial analysis of the physical and virtual sites of community literacy.

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## Introduction

*The message is clear, . . . Social reality is not just coincidentally spatial, existing “in” space, it is presuppositionally and ontologically spatial. There is no unspatialized social reality. There are no aspatial social processes.*

-Edward Soja, *Thirdspace*

My interest in literacy and literacy studies is one that has grown and shifted over the course of my life. If I were to pinpoint the beginning of this interest, I would have to look to a particular moment riding in the car with my grandmother. I looked up at a sign, a sign I had seen countless times before, and I wondered what it would be like if I could not read the words. I was struck then by the realization that I could not look at the English language in written form and not read it. This was an oddly upsetting realization for me; I loved to read and would never have wished to be without a skill I valued so highly, but I deeply wanted to know what it was like to *not* have literacy, although at the time I did not use that term. From there I seemed to bump into literacy at various stages in my life. As my own literacy practices were fostered through school, and I began to study literacy acquisition and development, I became more concerned with the literacy of others, at first my younger family members, then the elementary-aged struggling readers I worked with as an AmeriCorps intern for two summers during my undergraduate career. After that it was the discipline-specific literacies of my peers, with whom I worked as a writing consultant in the university writing center.

My own literacy has been encouraged by individuals and policies which Deborah Brandt terms “sponsors” or “any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way” (19). There were certainly factors,

individuals and institutions, which can be said to have withhold or attempt to withhold literacy from me, but in general my reading and writing were encouraged and even commended. This sponsorship took place primarily in spaces such as classrooms and occasionally in my home. As I moved into the role of literacy sponsor and facilitator, the spaces became more varied and I began to notice the ways in which space influenced the literacy practices of those with whom I worked as well as my practices as a literacy sponsor and advocate. As a high school senior, I spent part of my school day at my former elementary school working with second graders. My role as assistant was to encourage the students' overall academic achievement, but frequently I was asked to focus on their academic literacy development. I was sent to sit with them in the hallways or school library, where I listened to them read and tried to diminish the distractions of other students and teachers passing by and the tick-tocking of the clock counting down to the end of the school day.

As a college student I spent my summers interning with AmeriCorps. The children I worked with came from impoverished neighborhoods, and the literacy program consisted of a day camp housed in a local Methodist church. The children read and wrote while lounging on red felt-covered pews in the sanctuary, surrounded by bibles, songbooks, and images of Jesus Christ. I taught art lessons in a room most frequently used for Sunday school classes, and where, in fact, several of the campers came on Sunday mornings when they attended church with their parents. They would tell me about the other activities that the room held on Sundays, explaining how it was the window came to be cracked and how the bluish stain came to be on the carpet in the corner of the room. The writing center where I worked during the school year was a

much different space. It was a space *designed* to accommodate writing and writers, with tables and chairs and computers all intentionally placed. One of the tables was transformed once a month into a breakfast area when the center offered waffles and students came in with no papers in their hands, unabashedly asking for waffles smothered in syrup or peanut butter. There were also comfy couches surrounding a large ottoman, an area staff jokingly referred to as the “Ottoman Empire,” where writers could sit and wait for their consultation and where consultations occasionally took place. These features, the flexibility of being able to sit at a table, with or without a computer, or plop down on a comfy couch for a few minutes to wait or a few hours to write, were all part of creating the “safe” and welcoming space the directors and staff felt conducive to our writing center mission.

Writing Centers were both similar and different from the next spaces in which I took on the task of fostering literacy, classrooms. Classrooms are, ideally, designed for learning, but I found myself frequently working against spatial and material constraints such as inadequate technology, awkward desk arrangements, and poorly placed projector screens. These were interferences of space that I had not noticed as a student or teacher assistant. I experienced several moments of frustration when a surplus of desks, or long tables instead of desks, made it either impossible for me to put students into the group arrangements necessary for their small group work and discussions, or took so much time that I would not be able to cover all of the material necessary to help students prepare for their upcoming writing assignment.

Eventually my studies brought me to the subdiscipline of community literacy. I was immediately drawn to the idea of literacy situated within specific contexts and

communities and saw reflected in the work my own belief in the power of writing. Community literacy, and more broadly, New Literacy Studies, brought to front more fully issues of space and place as I studied the literacy practices of individuals and groups living in various countries, regions, and even neighborhoods. I began working as a volunteer and then intern for Colorado State University's Community Literacy Center (CLC). In this position, I facilitated a weekly creative writing workshop for teenage girls at a residential rehabilitation center. Each week the other facilitators and I entered the residence, writing prompt in hand, ready to begin. Often the girls were finishing up other activities, and we waited in the office until they finished and we could enter the living room where we held the workshop. Spread out on soft, worn couches and chairs, we spent an hour writing and sharing poems and stories. Occasionally one of the girls would need a reminder that only two of them could sit on a particular couch, to maintain proper boundaries, or a writer would lament that she had forgotten her poem in her room, and was not allowed to leave the living room to retrieve it. There were times when we would have to tell one or two writers that they should wait to share the rest of their work until the following week, as we were only allowed at the residence for a certain amount of time, and we needed to make sure everyone had an opportunity to share. These were policies, and politics, of space that the other volunteers and I had to abide by in our work with these writers.

In each of these positions, I had been asked, implicitly or explicitly, to foster the reading and writing skills of various populations. Most often the literacy was function, "basic" reading and writing skills such as those second graders are expected to master and which will be rewarded in other educational settings. In my work with the CLC,



doors were opened for more alternative ways of reading, writing, speaking, and thinking. The writing produced did not always resemble that produced by the students in my writing class at the university. Community literacy offered opportunities for the voices and stories of real people in their non-student/academic identities. In my studies I learned how literacy expanded beyond restricted notions of “standard” English, to the various written, verbal, and embodied language practices. Community literacy scholars entered into the spaces of these practices to study them. And they moved into spaces, such as rehabilitation centers and drop-in centers, to foster them.

I grew more curious about this process, how it worked, what factors complicated it. I had witnessed the impacts of space on my own literacy work, and wanted to know more about community literacy work in other types of spaces and the similar or different impacts those spaces had on the literacy work that took place inside of them, as well as alternative spaces of which literacy organizations make use. My curiosity became more interrogative as I approached my thesis work. This thesis examines community literacy creative writing workshops in the physical spaces of homeless shelters. It draws upon Edward Soja and Michel de Certeau to investigate the specific spatial practices that take place and how those practices impact the writing workshops. It also examines the literacy facilitators’ navigation of physical and mental space. The second part of the study explores the online spaces of the literacy organizations, which serve as additional spaces for community literacy work. The study applies Gwendolyn Pough’s concept of “wreck” to the online discourse of the literacy programs and their writers. Such a study offers insight into specific spatial practices, the possibilities and limitations of physical

and virtual spaces of community literacy work, and the ways in which community literacy scholars can make effective tactical use of various spaces.

## Chapter 1

### Review of Relevant Literature

Over the past few decades, compositionists have become increasingly interested in the literacy practices of individuals and communities outside of the university. They have been concerned with the implications of these practices for progressively more diverse classroom populations, building bridges between the university and the surrounding community, and the value and significance of these reading and writing practices as they exist on their own. Many literacy workers, in a subfield termed “community literacy,” are calling attention to the literacy practices of marginalized populations by entering directly the spaces that these populations inhabit (Grabill; Long; Flower; Mathieu). This work grows out of New Literacy Studies, an area figure headed by scholars such as James Paul Gee, Brian Street, David Barton and Mary Hamilton. New Literacy Studies establishes literacy practices as socially and locally situated, inextricably linked to specific places, cultures and identities. Connected to this work, community literacy attempts to empower marginalized groups by helping to assert the value of their local literacy practices. Community literacy scholars often list as one of their goals working towards a more socially just world by helping these groups share their voices and stories with mainstream audiences. Homeless youth are one of the marginalized populations that literacy workers often find themselves working with. The literacy facilitators may work with the homeless on the streets, or, as in the case of those interviewed in this study, enter directly into the physical space of a service organization, such as a homeless drop-in center, to lead a writing workshop for the youth. They may also extend these efforts to the online spaces of their program

websites. This review presents an overview of the relevant trends and conflicts in the areas of study of theories of space and community literacy. It also discusses the specific spaces of homeless youth shelters and drop-in centers, pointing to spaces in the scholarship where the various areas of scholarship can come together to improve community literacy efforts and better serve the youth populations.

### **Spatialized Literacy and Literacy Practices**

In *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*

Edward Soja presents his triple-dialectic of Firstspace, Secondspace, and Thirdspace, which are a reconfiguration of a previous trialectic by Henri Lefbvre. The first two parts of Soja's triple-dialectic are Firstspace, which details the physical, material aspects of space and Secondspace, which refers to mental space, or how individuals think of, feel about, and consider space. Soja describes Thirdspace as "an-Other" option to Firstspace and Secondspace. He asserts that Thirdspace, "rather than being a combination of Firstspace and Secondspace, is the creation of another mode of thinking about space that draws upon the material and the mental spaces of the traditional dualism but extends well beyond them in scope, substance, and meaning" (11).

Thirdspace emphasizes the social interactions within space, which take into account issues of physical and mental space. Soja asserts that all social interaction is spatially configured, writing, "*There is no unspatialized social reality*. There are no aspatial social processes (46 his emphasis). Given this assertion, it seems necessary for literacy workers, and compositionists in general, to take closer consideration of the spaces in which we are working and teaching. Doing so may offer new understandings of space and spatialized literacy practices.

In recent years literacy educators and workers have turned some attention to matters of space. They draw on the theories and frameworks put forth by theorists such as Lefebvre and Soja, using these frameworks to examine how writing and reading practices happen within various spaces and locations, as well as how cities and even buildings may be designed to emphasize or maintain difference. Although little work has been done with formal community literacy programs such as those I am interested in investigating and spatial theory, there is an ongoing conversation that considers the spatial aspects of classroom and alternative literacies. In particular, literacy scholars have become interested in how the physical and social space of a classroom interacts with student and teacher identities, performance of identities, and enactment of literacy events (Leander and Sheehy).

One of the most influential scholars on literacy and space is Nedra Reynolds, who in her 2004 book *Geographies of Writing*, emphasizes the effects of space on writing practices. She writes, "Places, whether textual, material, or imaginary, are constructed and reproduced not simply by boundaries but also by practices, structures of feeling, and sedimented features of *habitus*" (Reynolds 2). How we perceive and use a place, with its material and spatial features, is significant, and as composition work moves outside of the classroom, through community literacy and other public writing efforts, Reynolds urges compositionists to take deeper consideration of the spaces they and their students enter.

Alongside Reynolds, other scholars have taken up space as it relates to nonacademic literacy practices. Elizabeth Moje, for example, examines the various use of literacy by Latino/a youth and investigates how location can influence and perhaps

even determine what the youth can say and write. For example, the youth that her work follows are more reserved in their speech depending on what street they are walking down and whether or not they are within their own community or in a larger, public environment surrounded by individuals with varying values and cultures. Her work examines how location can influence and perhaps even determine what an individual can say or write. Reynolds describes this as the “adjustments and compromises . . . shifts and turns in the process of accommodating to a space”(14). Elenore Long, in her 2008 work *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement*, refers to it simply as the “politics of space” (20). Moje’s work is useful for the insight it provides into how certain groups may be indirectly censored by their physical location. However, it does not speak to groups such as homeless youth who, in addition to being indirectly censored in how they express themselves, are deliberately silenced through anti-homeless legislation (Amster).

Online spaces present themselves as potential alternative spaces for the marginalized groups, including homeless youth, to assert their identities and engage with wider audiences. As with physical spaces, scholars have analyzed these online spaces using the spatial theories of Lefebvre and Soja. Jude Edlund applies Soja’s Thirdspace to Second Life, an online virtual world, arguing that the interactions in Second Life offer a reconfiguration of space and work to break down the binary between real and imagined space that constitutes Soja’s Thirdspace. While Goquin et al. describe an online bulletin board as a Thirdspace created by the human spatial practices of ESL and LGBTQ participants.

## Community Literacy

Linda Flower describes community literacy as a means of “reveal[ing] the rhetorical agency of both community and university partners” (8). She goes on to say, “The premise of community literacy is that such a rhetoric calls us to speak out *about* and *for* silenced voices. But, in addition, it calls us to talk *with* ‘others’ across gulfs we may not always know how to cross” (emphasis in original 9-10). The notion of working “*with* ‘others’” is central to much community literacy work, which seeks to create partnerships with individuals and groups, who often have been “othered” by mainstream society, with specific needs, using literacy as a means of meeting or expressing those needs. In short, community literacy work seeks to work directly with individuals, particularly those who are marginalized in some way, and provide them with a way to share their voices and stories with others by creating a space for “dialogue across difference” (Flower 9).

In school settings, value is typically placed on academic and mainstream ways of writing. Students, particular students whose primary discourses reflect differences in language and dialect, may feel that academic literacy is not representative of their true voice. One way to address these concerns has been to push for wider variety in the valued ways of reading and writing (Williams; Mahiri; Kinloch). Educators then examine the literacies that their students employ in out-of-school settings in an attempt to build a bridge between various out-of-school and in-school practices. They work to understand literacy in ways that encompass academic, family, and community literacy practices and promote understanding of and proficiency in academic discourses, particularly those related to reading and writing.

Community literacy work takes this even further in its attempts to validate the various literacies used by individuals in nonacademic settings. They achieve this through creating partnerships between a writing program and an existing community or government organizations such as a church, community outreach center, homeless shelter, senior living home, substance abuse program or correctional institution. The organizations commonly serve groups that can be considered marginalized in some way. This may be determined by race, social class, level of education, sexual orientation, age, gender, religion or other aspect of identity. Because of the populations that the literacy workers serve, it is vital that literacy organizations understand the needs of the participants, taking into consideration what forms of reading and writing the participants are already making use of and what forms of reading and writing they feel they need (Mathieu; Goldblatt; Grabill). This is to ensure that the community members are actually benefiting from the literacy program, that they are being served, rather than imposed upon. Mathieu in particular calls attention to the limited outcomes of community literacy efforts, asserting their value on an individual level as well as their inefficacy for achieving large-scale social change. Pushing further in our examinations of these limitations may also call to light the limitations in our partnerships with community organizations, requiring community literacy workers to give more attention to power, purpose, and space in these partnerships. The scholars cited above discuss these limitations, but do not examine partnerships in the context of physical spaces using a distinctly spatial lens. Doing so may be beneficial for approaching and understanding community literacy work within these spaces.



Another key “practice” of community literacy work is that of publication and/or performance. Community literacy work offers opportunity for writers to share their voices with the literacy workers and other writers at the program. They may do this within the confines of a specific space, such as a youth drop-in center. However, community literacy programs frequently make it possible for writers to also speak to a wider audience through publication in print form or online. This is often a key part of achieving the various purposes of community literacy work, which may include speaking out against discrimination or prejudice, calling attention to important social and community issues, countering negative perceptions of marginalized populations, self-expression, or all of the above (Flower; Feuerverger and Mullen; Long; Heller; Mathieu). It is for this reason that community literacy workshops often emphasize feedback on writing, so that when it is presented through some sort of publication or performance, it is as effective as possible in representing the writer and in getting its point across to the audience. Many community literacy programs have websites on which they also publish their writers’ work. But thus far community literacy scholarship speaks little about the possibilities and limitations of these online spaces, despite the fact, through the Internet, these online publications can be accessed from greater and farther locations and therefore may provide more opportunity for the writing to reach the wider, mainstream audiences they target. Reaching these audiences through publication provides an outlet for frequently silenced individuals and promoting agency for marginalized populations.

The notion of agency is a common thread throughout literacy work in academic and nonacademic settings (Yagelski; Flower; Long; Morrell; Peck, Flower and Higgins;

Leander; Grabill; Kinloch). Yagelski argues that the concept of agency may be inadequate for "helping us confront the complexity of the 'local-ness' and the 'human-ness' of writing and reading" (87). However, he observes that writers may experience the "simple joy of being able to manipulate written language in order to say something [they] have to say" (88). The "human-ness" and "local-ness" of literacy are essential to community literacy theory. They enact the "community" of community literacy in local publics, the sites and spaces in which people go public with their stories (Long *community*, 5). I contend that web spaces should be further examined as sites of public community literacy efforts to reach audiences and enact social justice.

A central debate within community literacy scholarship centers on what, realistically, community literacy efforts can achieve. Leaders in this debate include Linda Flower, whose influence is undeniable in the establishment of community literacy as an area of study. Flower, along with other scholars, promotes community literacy as a means of "problem solving," identifying issues significant to communities and using writing as a means of resolving those issues. The critique of this "problem solving" way of framing the purpose of community literacy can be seen in works by scholars such as Paula Mathieu, who in her book *Tactics of Hope: The Public Turn in English Composition* questions the presentation of literacy as a means of solving considerable problems such as those often addressed in community literacy work (stereotypes, discrimination, lack of resources and equal opportunity). In fact, Mathieu claims that community literacy efforts are "radically insufficient" for resolving these issues ("Not your Mama's Bus Tour"). She instead presents this work as a means of responding appropriately to occasions that arise on their own to make injustices known to wider

publics, posing problems, but perhaps not having the resources or power to enact structural change. She draws on Michel de Certeau's definition of "tactics", which she says are "available when [literacy workers] do not control a space" (*Tactics of Hope* 16). She also makes use of Ernst Bloch's notion of hope, writing "To hope, then, is to look critically at one's present condition, assess what is missing, and then long for and work for a not-yet reality, a future anticipated. It is grounded in imaginative acts and projects, including writing and art, as vehicles for invoking a better future" (19). However, she is careful to repeat throughout her work that in promoting the optimism of hope, she also recognizes its limitations. Specifically, Mathieu urges literacy workers to reflect critically on what their work *cannot* do. In many ways, the present study takes up Mathieu's call, while also extending her use of de Certeau's strategies and tactics to specific physical and virtual spaces.

Like Mathieu, I am also hesitant to view literacy, particularly the creative forms of writing and expression done in the writing programs examined in this study, as capable of solving the multiple and complex problems of homeless youth. I would therefore position myself more closely to the "problem-posing" end of the spectrum in how I view the purposes and potentials of community literacy work.

It is the emphasis on critical thought and expression of voice in which I find the power and meaning in writing and specifically in community literacy work, emphases also present in Paulo Freire's work, which has influenced literacy instruction both inside and outside of the classroom. In the introduction to Freire's *The Politics of Education*, Henry Giroux writes,

As a referent for change, education represents a form of action that emerges from a joining of the languages of critique and possibility. It represents the need

for a passionate commitment by educators to make the political more pedagogical, that is, to make critical reflection and action a fundamental part of a social project that not only engages forms of oppression but also develops a deep and abiding faith in the struggle to humanize life itself. (xiv)

Ellen Cushman's *The Struggle and the Tools* tells of the struggle of members of one community to navigate through the obstacles put up by gatekeepers as they seek food, shelter, and other necessary resources for their family. Cushman sheds light on the rhetorical awareness that members, specifically women, of this community demonstrate as they respond to the situations in which they are placed. She also outlines the struggle of community literacy workers and facilitators to break down barriers and humanize the lives and experiences of marginalized and/or disadvantaged groups through the work they do with members of those groups. The homeless youth who participate in the literacy programs examined in this study share common needs and goals with the community Cushman studies in their struggle for recognition and resources.

It is important to note that community literacy, while given its name by persons associated with universities and conducting this work in part due to scholarly interests, also exists outside of the realm of universities and university-sponsored programs. Betsy Bowen writes about a community-based program for adult women in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Stephen Parks and Nick Pollard share a dialogue on the community writing and publishing efforts by the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers that have taken place in the United Kingdom since the federation was established in 1976, and Caroline Heller's 1997 work *Until We Are Strong Together* studies a women's community writing group in the tenderloin district of San Francisco. Like university-sponsored community literacy programs, this writing group placed

significant emphasis on feedback, performance and publishing as well as on writing about and responding to issues relevant to both the writers and their communities. The women addressed concerns regarding homelessness, race, and illness, drawing on their own experiences and those of others in their communities. Community literacy can be said to exist anywhere people read and write as a means of personal growth and expression, whether they be guided by financial, political, or personal motivations. This then includes the writing done in the community writing organizations and homeless centers such as those included in this study. However, current scholarship, while giving considerable attention to service-learning and university-sponsored literacy programs, provides little information about public, nonprofit, or community-based programs. However, these programs share many common core practices and beliefs that make them interesting and useful sites of investigation. Similarly, community literacy scholarship discusses the social contexts surrounding writers, but offers little explicit attention to the locations in which community literacy workers are moving their work in regard to the spatial practices that take place inside that location and how those practices may impact their work.

#### *Homeless Youth and Centers*

Homeless youth as a category are difficult to define. Many homeless youth have run away from home, and have the option of returning or living with friends or relatives, while others are deemed termed “throwaways”, meaning that they are no longer welcome in their homes by their parents or guardians and have no options other than homeless shelters or the streets (Murphy and Tobin). Homelessness is a difficult condition to determine, and because homeless individuals are often left out of census

data, it is even more difficult to quantify. Assessing the number of homeless individuals in the United States “depends entirely on where the homeless are counted, how representative the study is, and who is considered homeless (Johnson 49). Recent studies suggest the number of people experiencing homelessness each year in the United States stands at around 3.5 million (Tierney et al.) These homeless individuals face social prejudice from mainstream publics that warrants further consideration in composition and rhetoric studies, particularly community literacy work that directly engages with homeless individuals. Additionally, legislation by city and state officials is frequently geared towards excluding and even removing the homeless from physical public spaces (Johnsen and Fitzpatrick; Amster).

Tierny and Hallet, in their article “Writing on the Margins from the Center: Homeless Youth + Politics at the Borders” outline the troubles many homeless youth face with literacy as well as simply with day-to-day concerns. They explain that the youth are often focused on securing food and shelter for themselves and many times their families as well. They may be worried about being separated from family, as shelters often separate the children from their parents or siblings based on age and/or gender. (Tierny and Hallet; MacGillivray, Ardell, and Curwen). Homeless shelters have been in existence in some form almost as long as the United States has been an independent nation, with emergency shelters appearing around 1796 (Harter et al.). Centers for youth seek primarily to provide food, shelter, and safety to youth in need. (Karabow and Clement). They deal with considerable spatial constraints, which often limit the literacy practices of youth and even their parents because of insufficiencies

both of physical space to store literacy materials such as books and journals and freedom and privacy for children to read and write (MacGillvray, Ardell, and Curwen).

In addition to providing basic services, homeless centers may help the youth work towards independence and self-sufficiency, often times through work or educational resources such as math tutoring. The youth may also be required to attend school or work on their GED. However, even attending school, which many housed youth take for granted, becomes either more complicated or less important for homeless youth. Tierney and Hallet write, “Those [homeless youth] who were in school largely did not want to be known as homeless because of the social stigma attached to the term; those who were on the street or in shelters thought of their educational selves largely as secondary as they struggled to make it through a day” (20).

Caroline Wang also comments on the conditions of homeless individuals, writing that the youth are often “a highly stigmatized group with minimal access to the media or to the policy makers whose decisions influence their lives (81). As a result of this stigma, as well as an inattentive public, the youth and their needs often go unrecognized (Harter et al.) It is not uncommon for homeless youth to have histories of sexual, physical, and mental abuse. Furthermore, after becoming homeless, they are significantly more likely to be raped, become pregnant, or be physically assaulted than their housed counterparts (National Network). When compared to the United States youth population as a whole, homeless youth “are 7 times as likely to die from AIDS and 16 times as likely to be diagnosed with HIV”. They are also more likely to use substances such as marijuana and cocaine (National Network). The extreme circumstances faced by homeless youth, such as the elevated risk of rape, assault, HIV,

the emotional stress of seeking food and shelter, and the fact that they are underage make homeless youth a particularly vulnerable population, Tierney and Hallett emphasize the importance of relationships and ethics, asserting that, “If the aims of qualitative research are to be more than doing research for research’s sake, then as a research community we need to develop more robust ways to consider how to protect those with whom we conduct research” (20).

Designed specifically to serve homeless youth populations, shelters and drop-in centers provide services to address the additional challenges such as elevated risk of abuse and sexually transmitted disease faced by youth. In some instances homeless shelters and drop-in centers may offer creative programming for their clients, but limited funding puts restrictions on their ability to do so (Thompson et al.; Washington). And youth seek out drop-in centers primarily for food and hygiene services (De Rosa et al.). Because of this, the day to day practices of the shelter are intended to help youth deal with their various struggles, requiring literacy workers must take into consideration the primary purpose of the shelters and the youth’s motivations for seeking out the shelters’ services in order to appropriately situated their workshops alongside the other services the shelters provide. The literacy workers interviewed in this study come from organizations sensitive to the situations and needs of vulnerable populations. These organizations seek to help the youth, but as they are entering into spaces that serve the youth in different ways, they must take into account both how to best serve the youth, as well as how to negotiate space, resources, and purpose with the staff of the homeless centers.



## **Community Literacy and Space**

An examination of these spaces through a spatial lens offers a way for literacy workers to increase our understanding of the spaces we enter, such as homeless youth drop-in centers, and create, such as web spaces. However, there is an absence of explicit attention to both the physical space of formal and semi-formal community literacy work within restricted spaces as well as the online spaces of community literacy programs. Community writing efforts are ongoing in locations such as youth homeless centers, which are created primarily for the purposes of providing youth with food, shelter, and safety and basic hygiene services. These purposes are not directly related to the purposes of community literacy work, which as detailed above typically focuses on matters of identity and community, self-expression and reflection, or speaking out against prejudice and injustice. The purposes are not in direct opposition to one another, but when working within locations already strained by spatial and material constraints, locations inhabited by individuals struggling to meet their physical and emotional needs, the potential for conflict in purpose within the space is clear. An understanding of this conflict and how it can impact community literacy practices is needed, as is further consideration of what purposes can be and are enacted in the online spaces of community literacy programs.

This study starts to work toward an understanding by addressing the following research questions:

- 1 How do community literacy workshop facilitators situate their workshops and purposes alongside the purposes of drop-in center directors within the physical space of drop-in centers for homeless youth?

- What are the purposes of the two services being offered?
- What physical and mental spatial practices are used to achieve those purposes?
- What spatial and material benefits or constraints affect the achievement of these purposes?

2. What purposes are served by and in the online spaces of community literacy organizations?

- What discourse is included in the web space?
- Towards what audience(s) is this discourse directed?
- What factors promote or inhibit the achievement of these purpose?

In this chapter I have provided an overview of the relevant research fields from which this study draws. I have pointed areas in the research, specifically community literacy studies, that require further attention and offered my research questions and the present study to address these areas. In the following chapter, I will detail my methodological approach to this study as well as my specific research methods for data collection and analysis. I will then present and analyze the data collected for this study, which examines the physical and virtual spaces of two literacy programs that work with homeless youth. In the final chapter I will discuss the limitations of the present study, applications of the findings, and areas of study requiring further research.

## Chapter 2

### Methodological Approach and Research Methods

In this chapter I detail the methodological approach and specific research methods used in this thesis, which investigates first the perspectives on space and purpose of community writing facilitators and youth homeless center staff working in two drop-in centers for homeless youth across the United States. Homeless shelters and drop-in centers provide an interesting and complex setting for community literacy work, as their primary purposes center on serving the immediate needs of individuals who may otherwise go without food, clothing, shelter, and basic hygiene services. Community literacy purposes are often less concrete, seeking to engage individuals in critical discussions on issues relevant to their daily lives and concerns or provide them a creative outlet for sharing their stories with others. While youth homeless shelters may list empowerment as one of their objectives the empowerment comes primarily from helping the youth attain formal education, find work, and become self-sufficient. Community literacy typically uses writing as a tool for empowerment, a practice resting on the belief that there is power in language and in allowing people to tell their stories in their own voices. Thus, while the goals of these two services appear similar on the surface, there are significant differences in approaches to and definitions of empowerment, and indeed, differences in purposes. This study then examines how community literacy efforts, in the specific form of weekly creative writing workshop, are situated within the physical space of youth homeless shelters and drop-in centers and how the spatial practices related to space impact literacy work. The second part of my investigation turns to the online spaces of the literacy programs as additional sites of

community literacy work. Online spaces, while still limited by variations in access, provide useful alternatives to and extensions of physical spaces for marginalized populations to engage in critical discourse about events relevant and important to their lives. This study interrogates the purposes of these online spaces in relation to the purpose of the organizations.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

Edward Soja's theory Thirdspace provides the overarching spatial theory guiding the study. The study also applies the more specific frameworks of Michel de Certeau's *Strategies and Tactics* and Gwendolyn Pough's *Wreck* in the analysis of the physical and virtual spaces of the community literacy programs.

#### *Conceptualizing Space: Soja's Thirdspace*

In the introduction to his 1997 book, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, Edward Soja provides an overview of what he describes as the "triple-dialectic" of space (7). This three-part conception of space includes Firstspace, Secondspace, and Soja's alternative, Thirdspace. Soja describes Firstspace as "fixed mainly on the concrete materiality of spatial forms, on things that can be empirically mapped" (10). Firstspace includes the material objects located within a space, such as furniture and decorations, as well as the space itself. Soja critiques limiting focuses on Firstspace, which he believes as a failure to "see much beyond the surface of things" and giving little attention to how space is socially and mentally constructed (64). Too much emphasis on Secondspace, which is "imagined" space, "conceived in ideas about space," can also be harmful, according to Soja, who stresses

the importance of breaking down the binary between the two through his process of “thirding-as-Othering”. Rather than focus on Firstspace as the “real” and Secondspace as the mental, or “imagined,” Soja suggests looking to “Thirdspace as an-Other way of understanding and acting to change the spatiality of human life” (10).

Soja derives much of his work from the previous work of Henri Lefebvre, most directly he draws on Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space*, in which Lefebvre presents his *trialectics* of space. Soja writes of Lefebvre,

[Lefebvre] argued for a need to struggle on a wider terrain for [. . .] the right to be different. . . . He located these struggles for the right to be different at many levels . . . . he opened up a new domain, a space of collective resistance, a *Thirdspace of political choice* that is also a meeting place for all peripheralized or marginalized “subjects” wherever they may be located. (35)

Homeless youth can certainly be considered a “peripheralized or marginalized” population. In fact, it is the youth’s marginalized status that led to the writing programs’ work with the youth and the need for online spaces for community literacy in addition to the physical spaces, or Firstspaces, of the drop-in centers. Like other community literacy workers, the facilitators interviewed in this study imagine elevate the voice of those who are traditionally silenced.

#### *Negotiating Space: de Certeau’s Strategies and Tactics*

Michel de Certeau, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, presents the concepts of strategies and tactics. Strategies, he asserts, are used by institutions or formalized programs that are spatially situated. He writes “A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as *proper (propre)* and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it” (xix his emphasis). Homeless shelters and drop-in

centers seek out ways to provide homeless youth with connections to exterior institutions, which will then enable the youth to find housing and employment and, ideally, a more stable life. Homeless shelters as formalized programs with control over a particular space have the power and authority to make decisions about what happens within that space. However, for groups or programs, such as writing workshops, who use but do not have control of a space, there remains tactics. A tactic is “a calculus which cannot count on a ‘proper’ (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality” (xix). De Certeau goes on to say that “A tactic insinuates itself into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without take it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance” (xix). In other words, tactics are what groups and individuals must rely on when they make use of a space, but cannot separate the other practices and purposes of that space from their own work. They must “make-do” by working around or alongside the other spatial practices taking place in the space they occupy (de Certeau 29). The workshop facilitators interviewed in this study provide insight into the various practices of the homeless shelters, the impacts of the practices on their writing workshop, and the specific ways they must work with or around the drop-in center practices their own purposes.

### *Impacting Space: Pough’s Wreck*

Wreck is a Hip-Hop term used to describe a level of skill possessed by an artist, as well as the aggressive and at times violent discourse common in Hip-Hop music and culture. In her 2004 book, *Check It While I Wreck It: Black Womanhood, Hip-Hop Culture and the Public Sphere*, Pough adopts the concept of wreck to point out the ways in which African Americans have had to “fight hard and bring attention to their skill and

right to be in the public sphere” (17). She describes how African Americans have intentionally “brought wreck,” pointing to the discourse of African Americans in the Civil Rights Movement and Hip-Hop music as well as the African American clubwomen of the late 1800s and early 1900s as specific examples of how African Americans have brought wreck. These African Americans helped to disrupt and reshape the negative images of African Americans prevalent in mainstream United States’ culture. I adopt Pough’s use of wreck to examine the efforts to disrupt negative and dismissive attitudes towards homeless youth that take place on the websites of the literacy programs.

Pough’s analysis is based upon a rereading of Jurgen Habermas’s concept of *representative publicity*, which he defines as “wedded to personal attributes such as insignia (badges and arms), dress (clothing and coiffure), demeanor (form of greeting and poise), and rhetoric (form of address and formal discourse in general) -- in a word, to a strict code of noble conduct” (qtd. in Pough 21). Pough clarifies, “For Habermas, representative publicity . . . is something that is placed before the people, a form of spectatorship that lacks political possibilities because there is no participation.” But as she also points out, spectacle functions differently for those who do not already have access to and representation in the public sphere (21). Many of the characterizations of the homeless resemble those of African Americans as described by Pough. The homeless may, in similar ways, bring wreck by “reshaping the public gaze in such a way as to be recognized as human beings- as functioning and worthwhile members of society” (17).

## Methods

### *Sample Selection*

This study investigates literacy programs in homeless centers in two cities across the United States representing the eastern and western regions of the country in an attempt to understand literacy work in major cities across the country. The purpose of this study is to discern how community literacy workshop practices and purposes are spatially situated within homeless centers and how the primary purposes of youth homeless shelters and centers facilitates or complicates literacy work. This study also investigates the websites of the two literacy organizations as additional sites of their community literacy efforts. My research was directed by the following questions and sub questions.

1. How do community literacy workshop facilitators situate their workshops and purposes alongside the purposes of drop-in center directors within the physical space of drop-in centers for homeless youth?
  - What are the purposes of the two services being offered?
  - What physical and mental spatial practices are used to achieve those purposes?
  - What spatial and material benefits or constraints affect the achievement of these purposes?
2. What purposes are served by and in the online spaces of community literacy organizations?



- What discourse is included in the web space?
- Towards what audience(s) is this discourse directed?
- What factors promote or inhibit the achievement of these purposes?

### Literacy Program and Drop-in Center Selection

Research participants included two literacy facilitators and two homeless shelter employees. Potential participants were selected based on their affiliation with the two writing workshops and locations:

- 1 Poets Inc. at Futures to Come Homeless Youth Drop-in Center
- 2 New Beginnings Poetry Group at Next Step Drop-In Center

Only “formal” writing workshops were considered for this study, “formal” meaning that the workshop met regularly (once a week in the case of the two programs selected), with structured sessions led by adult literacy facilitators. I identified several writing programs across the country and then selected the two mentioned above based on the following criteria:

- 1 Geographic Location. Community literacy is a growing area of study, with programs of varying degrees of structure and formality being established across the United States as well as in other places in the world. This study looks at programs in two different cities to provide a wider, yet deeper, look into how different community writing organizations, working within the different social and geographic settings of those cities, enter into and situate themselves within youth homeless centers.

- 2 Creative Writing. Many literacy organizations, including the two examined in this study, focus on creative writing, primarily genres such as poetry, fiction, song lyrics, and plays. Other organizations focus more on journalism, essays, or other academic writings that may help individuals attain a General Equivalency Degree (GED). While these more academic forms of writing serve a purpose and are beneficial to the writers participating in the programs, this study focuses on writing programs that encourage creative writing. Creative writing is often used as a means of self-expression, again, a common purpose behind community literacy work, and a purpose that, while valuable, does not serve the same immediate needs that youth homeless centers seek to meet and therefore may require more consideration when layering it onto the services already offered.
- 3 Locations within Existing Homeless Centers. As discussed above, there are several differences in the primary purposes being served by youth homeless centers and these community writing workshops. However, it can be assumed that the homeless centers see enough value in literacy work to allow outside organizations to use their space and work with their clients. This study looks at literacy programs that exist separate of the particular homeless center, but have entered into the center to layer literacy onto the services already provided for the youth. This provides an opportunity to examine the perceived benefits as well as conflicts that may arise in the shared space of the center.

### *Poets Incorporated at Futures to Come Drop-In Center*

Futures to Come is a drop-in catering to homeless LGBTQ youth in a large city on the eastern coast of the United States. Futures provides services such as a weekly Sunday dinner, counseling, and case management designed to help the youth negotiate legal issues, name changes, and obtaining identification. It also provides life skills groups and recreational activities, as well as “Basic Needs”, which they identify as food, clothing and basic hygiene products. The center hosts a writing group, called simply Creative Writing, facilitated by members of Poets Incorporated on Sunday evenings before the dinner. Poets Incorporated is a community writing organization focused on helping residents of the city grow as writers. Poets Inc. describes the writers it serves as “people from groups that have been historically deprived of voice in our society”. The organization provides one- or two-hour weekly writing workshops for various populations including homeless youth, new immigrants, senior citizens, cancer patients and victims of natural disaster.

### *New Beginnings Poetry Group at Next Step Drop-In Center*

Next Step an organization for homeless youth with two locations in the western half of the United States. One location operates as a drop-in center that provides services such as food, showers, counseling, ID and housing assistance, and STD testing to young men and women in the downtown area of the city. The drop-in center hosts the New Beginnings Poetry Group each Tuesday night. New Beginnings is a community writing organization that seeks to “empower struggling youth by providing creative programs that facilitate health and hope through expression, connection and

transformation.” The organization also provides workshops in schools and other student support organizations.

### Literacy Facilitators

Literacy facilitators work directly and regularly with the writing program. They organize and lead the weekly sessions of the writing program at the drop-in center. Community literacy programs are often affiliated with colleges or universities, however, both of the programs for which the facilitator participants in this study work are nonprofit organizations with no formal connections to institutions of higher education. The literacy facilitators are not employees of the homeless center.

#### Nicole

Nicole is a co-facilitator for the New Beginnings workshop at Next Step. She has been working with New Beginnings for a year and a half. Nicole started working with the organization as an intern, before taking on the roles of co-facilitator and programs manager.

#### Pamela

Pamela is the workshop facilitator for the Poets Incorporated weekly writing workshop at Futures to Come. She has been working with the organization since 2010 and also serves as the program manager.

## Homeless Center Staff

Staff members are both full-time employees of the drop-in centers. They are responsible for carrying out the administrative and daily duties of the center. They are not directly involved with the writing program.

### Karen

Karen is the director of the Futures to Come Homeless Youth Drop-In Center. Karen worked with homeless youth in her previous positions, prior to founding Futures in 2008. She has a variety of duties, from day to day planning to ordering food and supplies, to helping the youth obtain identification and other services.

### Keith

Keith is the site-supervisor at Next Step Drop-In Center. He has worked for the organization for two years and oversees all of the programming at the center including the weekly barbeque and scheduling of events and activities.

## *Data Collection*

### Interviews

Data were collected through semi-structured, life-world interviews. Interview research is research that views “people, their interpretations, perceptions, meanings and understandings, as they primary data sources” (Mason 56). Kvale and Brinkmann assert that rather than being collected by the researcher, interview data is *co-authored* by both the researcher and the interviewee. Interviews and their transcripts constitute a conversation situated in a discourse that provides meaning to the words (192-3). The

life-world interviews investigated the “interpretations, perceptions, meanings and understandings” as they relate specifically to the subjects’ life-world, situated within the discourse of a specific writing group, which is housed in a particular homeless center for youth. Kvale and Brinkmann write, “A semi-structured life world interview attempts to understand themes of the lived everyday world from the subjects’ own perspectives. This kind of interview seeks to obtain descriptions of the interviewees’ lived world with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena” (27).

Adrian Holliday emphasizes the importance of setting in qualitative research, writing that qualitative research is meant “to go deep into a definable setting in which phenomena can be placed meaningfully within a specific social environment” (37). The phenomena in the life-world of my participants relate to their lived experiences of the daily spatial practices that take place in the physical setting of homeless centers. The interviews include questions about the purpose of the respective programs that the participants provide for homeless youth to establish what the participants see as the primary purpose of the services they provide. The interviews also prompt the participants to describe the physical spaces they use and the impact of those physical spaces on literacy work.

The semi-structured nature of the interview is not identical to that of a conversation among colleagues, but has similarities which make it appropriate for my position as researcher carrying out similar work to that done by the literacy facilitators and working in a space which has similar restrictions as those in place in youth homeless centers (Kvale and Brinkmann 27). According to Kvale and Brinkmann, Interviews are not a process of “merely ‘tape recording sociologies,’ to use Bourdieu’s

expression, but [of] actively following up on the subjects' answers, seeking to clarify and extend the interview statements" (7). The semi-structured nature of the interviews conducted in this study allows for the type of follow-up that Kvale and Brinkmann encourage. The emphasis on the informant's life-worlds helped to draw out specific examples in the informants' narratives of their lived experiences working within the physical space of a homeless youth drop-in center.

I conducted telephone interviews with each of the four informants. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. From the literacy facilitators, I generated data which a) investigated how the literacy facilitators perceived the purpose of their writing workshop and homeless shelter or center, b) probed into the common spatial practices of the workshop and the homeless shelter or center, c) invited the literacy facilitators to consider how their workshops and the practices of those workshops were impacted by the physical space in which they occurred. From the homeless center staff members I gathered information which 2) investigated how the staff perceived the purpose of their homeless shelter or center and the writing workshop, b) probed into the daily spatial practices of the shelter or center overall, and specifically the room in which the writing workshop is held and c) invited the informants to consider how their purposes and practices within the space of the drop-in center impacted the workshops. Since the purpose of this study is to examine the impacts of space on community literacy writing workshops and literacy facilitators' experiences leading these workshops, the narratives of the facilitators and the primary focus in the analysis, and the narratives of the drop-in center staff members serve to complement, extend, or complicate the accounts provided by the literacy facilitators.

## *Data Analysis*

### Narrative Inquiry

#### Thematic Narrative Analysis

Narrative inquiry presents itself as an appropriate and effective approach to the research data in this study because of its emphasis on lived experiences. A thematic analysis is useful because the themes grow out of the data, such as interview data, but allows for “theorizing across a number of cases by identifying common thematic elements across research participants” (Reissman 74). The life-world interviews in which the informants participated seek to understand the phenomena of using and experiencing space for the purpose of either providing basic needs services to homeless youth, or helping homeless youth use writing as a means of self-expression. Within their stories, the informants discuss common factors and elements that lend themselves to thematic analysis.

Narrative inquiry through interviewing is a collaborative process that makes it suitable for researchers and participants with shared knowledge and backgrounds, such as community literacy workshops. As Jolesson writes, “Most generally, narrative research is an interpretive enterprise consisting of the joint subjectivities of researcher and participants subjected to a conceptual framework brought to bear on textual material by the researcher. . . . “Grounded in hermeneutics, phenomenology, ethnography, and literary analysis, narrative research eschews methodological orthodoxy in favor of doing what is necessary to capture the lived experience of people in terms of their own meaning making and to theorize about it in insightful ways” (225).



The common background in phenomenology is applicable to analysis of life-world interviews. And, as stated previously, the semi-structured nature of the interviews allows the informants more freedom to tell their narratives, while still being invited by the researcher to theorize about the meanings behind the events they account and develop themes from their stories. Additionally, the interviews are guided by an understanding of Edward Soja's Thirdspace, which serves as the appropriate conceptual framework called for by Joleson, particularly when applied to life-world interviews that demand an intentionally spatial lens. Application of this framework, along with the conversational nature of the interviews, results in stories that are co-constructed by the researcher and informant and that offer critical insight into the lived experiences of individuals (Creswell 71).

Narrative inquiry is also appropriate for research that uses small samples as participants. According to John Creswell, narrative inquiry recommends small sample sizes in order to delve deeply into the informants' stories and draw out individual meaningful experiences. These experiences can then be categorized thematically in order to "restory" the narratives into a framework that conveys the significance of the stories (Creswell 74-5). I categorized the narratives of the study informants into the themes of Multiple Uses of Firstspace, Temporally Aware Tactics, Creating a "Safe" Space, and Relocated Tactics.

#### Dialogic Narrative Analysis

I also applied narrative inquiry to the discourse presented in the online spaces of the literacy programs. Catherine Kohler Reissman, in *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*, describes a dialogic approach to narrative inquiry, which relies less on

interviews and more on narratives that already exist or are created in more natural manners, such as conversations, performances, and stories. Thematic narrative inquiry focuses primarily on “what” informants say and “how” they say it. A dialogic analysis includes “what” and “how,” but also extends to examine the “to whom,” meaning the audience to whom language is directed (Reissman 105). This allows researchers to further examine “what the narrative accomplishes” for the speaker/writer/performer(s) (Reissman 121). The consideration of audience as part of the analysis makes dialogic narrative analysis appropriate for analyzing the discourse of the New Beginnings and Poets Incorporated websites because the discourse is intended for various audiences relevant to their work, unlike their interview narratives, which are intended for me as the researcher/audience. Reissman argues that interpretation of a text “must be linked to features in the text” (111). An analysis of a website necessarily takes into account the site’s features, specifically the various components the websites contain and the audiences for which those components are intended. Websites often serve the important function of providing the first impression to interesting publics and can influence the way the purpose of the site is assessed and supported. For nonprofit organizations such as those used in this study, proper representation of the organizations and their purposes is essential for the organizations to maintain their services, since they rely on grants and donations to stay in operation. As Reissman writes, “We are forever composing impressions of ourselves, projecting a definition of who we are, and making claims about ourselves.” She goes on to say that, in composing these impressions, “Language is the major resource we draw on” (106). An

analysis of the language presented within the web spaces is then appropriate for examining the ways in which the organizations represent themselves and their writers.

## **Delimitations and Limitations of Research**

### *Delimitations of Research Methods*

This study was limited to interviews with two workshop facilitators and two staff members at two homeless centers for youth. It focuses primarily on the narratives of the literacy facilitators, while drawing in the voices of the drop-in center staff members as necessary. The stories accounted in the narratives are related to the purposes of the informants' services to the youth, as well as their perspectives on how those purposes are influenced by and situated within the physical space of the homeless centers. The study does not examine participants' perspectives on the effectiveness of either the writing program or the drop-in center. These topics are excluded to focus the study on considerations and uses of space. However, they may be relevant and worth investigating in future studies on community literacy programs housed within youth service organizations. The study also does not include the perspectives of the youth who participate in the writing program. These voices, while important to community literacy work, are not appropriate for the focus of this study, as the youth do not establish or direct the writing program or homeless center. Therefore, their considerations of space and purpose are different from and less relevant than those of the literacy workers and homeless center staff. The dialogic analysis is also limited to the online spaces of New Beginnings and Poets Incorporated. These spaces are investigated as additional spaces for the literacy organizations that the informants

represent to continue their efforts in supporting the voices of homeless youth and other marginalized populations. The opinions of the facilitators are not included in the examination of the websites to limit the analysis to discourse presented within the actual web space that may reach its intended audience(s). The facilitators' perspectives, while potentially valuable for future research, fall outside of the scope of the present study.

### *Limitations of Research Methods*

The delimitations above are intended to place parameters on the scope of my study. The One limitation of interview methodology is that it restricts the number of participants. As a result, the study only looks into two programs, and only draws on the perspectives of four individuals, two literacy facilitators and two homeless center staff members. The original design of the study included six informants from each of the two groups. However, low response rates led to a smaller sample size. As a result, the findings may not be generalizable to other homeless center staff members or literacy facilitators working in homeless centers. It also only investigates the perspectives of writing facilitators and homeless center employees about space and purpose. It does not examine the actual literacy practices of homeless youth participating in writing programs and so cannot speak to the effectiveness of the programs or to the youth's perspectives on the programs.

Furthermore, this study relies on the self-report of the informants as a main source of data. Observations may have provided a more objective perspective into the impact of space on the purposes of the literacy program as well as into how the two groups of informants used the same physical space for different purposes. However,

given the scope of this study, interviews regarding the regular practices of the workshops and the homeless centers presented themselves as the most appropriate method of data collection. Future studies, perhaps investigating only one site, may include observation in addition to interviews. Another limitation to the interview methodology employed in this study is that I only conducted one interview with each participant. The one interview, while providing useful information, does not allow me to take into consideration possible shifts that participants may have in how they view the physical and mental spaces in which they work or the specific events they account.

The small sample size is also a limitation on the dialogic analysis of the web spaces. Because I look at only two websites, the findings may speak little to the virtual spaces of other community literacy programs that serve different populations, are located in different cities or emphasize different forms of writing. A further study investigating only virtual spaces might look across several programs to examine representations of the programs and writers as well as the nature and potential outcomes of the discourse. Additional studies might also examine all or more content held in the web spaces. The present study limits inquiry to three “pages”: mission or about, volunteer, and published poetry. The limitations allow for more detailed analysis of these three sections of each website. However, valuable insight may also be gained by examining newsletters, blogs, videos, images, and other features of community literacy websites.

### *Significance of the Study*

This study contributes to the growing field of community literacy. As more and more literacy workers “take to the streets,” to use Paula Mathieu’s phrase, the need to consider these new spaces for literacy and learning, with their various purposes and spatial, material, and social constraints, becomes more pressing in order for the literacy workers efforts to be effective and helpful to those they wish to serve. This study provides insight into the spatial practices of homeless shelters and drop-in centers and of the writing workshops housed within them. It takes into account the perspectives of both the literacy facilitators and the staff of the homeless centers in order to understand the purposes of the two groups serving the same population through different means and for different purposes.

## Chapter 3

### Purposeful Tactics: Writing Workshops in Youth Drop-In Centers

“Our mission is to try to help homeless young people become more self-sufficient so that they’re able to live able, adult lives”

- Karen, Futures to Come Homeless Youth Drop-In Center Founder and Director

“We give voice to the voiceless by providing opportunities for people who don’t typically get an opportunity to express themselves to larger audiences[ . . . ] our mission is to give those people an outlet and a voice in the world around them”

-Pamela, Poets Incorporated workshop facilitator

### **Edward Soja’s First-, Second-, and Thirdspace**

The epigraphs above indicate the distinct purposes of the drop-in centers and writing workshops, the former focusing on looking towards the future and the youth’s adult lives, in which they will hopefully be able to provide for themselves. The mission of Poets Incorporated, however, emphasizes the present, providing a way for the youth to express themselves as they are now to a wider audience. The purposes are related, yet distinct, and during the writing workshops, the drop-in centers and literacy organizations work towards these purposes within the same Firstspace. Firstspace, as defined by Edward Soja, refers to as “the concrete materiality of spatial forms” (10). It consists of the “material and materialized ‘physical’ spatiality.” This spatiality is “directly comprehended in empirically measurable *configurations*: in the absolute and relative locations of things and activities, sites and situations” (74 his emphasis). Put simply, Firstspace refers to the “real,” the physical and material aspects of space such as location, furniture, design and decoration, etcetera. Firstspace is frequently complicated, challenged, or undermined by Secondspace, which Soja explains is the “imagined,” how we think about and mentally construct space (10). Soja writes that too often Firstspace

is ignored when scholars emphasize Secondspace. He argues that limited focus on the mental or imagined results in “naive categorical idealizations” that imply that the “mental defined and indeed produced and explained the material and social worlds better than precise empirical descriptions.” Soja goes on to say, “In such illusions of transparency . . . Firstspace collapses entirely into Secondspace. The difference between them disappears” (80). Physical space and material objects are folded into mentally produced space and their significance is overlooked. Similarly, an emphasis on Firstspace and neglect of Secondspace is also limiting as it reduces the understanding and production of imagined spaces. Attention to both calls to light the ways in which Firstspace imposes realities and material constraints, such as inadequate space, technology and resources, which can interfere with the mental construction of Secondspace. The conflict between First- and Secondspace, and the tendency of researchers to stress one while overlooking the other, produces a binary which Soja finds reductive and detrimental to our understanding of space. He offers Thirdspace as another conception of space in which this binary is broken down, creating a space that encompasses both, that is “real-and-imagined” and in which “Everything comes together” (11, 57). To achieve Soja’s Thirdspace in the context of the Poets Incorporated and New Beginnings workshops, the workshop practices and the imagined space for writing would exist and function alongside the practices of the drop-in centers and within the same Firstspace.

The Firstspaces included in this study include the physical spaces of two homeless youth drop-in centers, Next Step and Futures to Come. The Next Step site is located in an urban area of a large city in the Western half of the United States. It is



housed in a building previously used as an arts center for an afterschool program targeting at-risk youth in the city. The organization has two residential shelters in addition to the drop-in services offered at the location which houses the New Beginnings Poetry Group. Initially, the New Beginnings workshop met in a large space downstairs. However, a time conflict with another Next Step service required the workshop to be moved upstairs to a room deemed the “art room,” its current location. The Futures to Come center is housed in a church in a large city on the eastern coast of the United States. The center was previously housed in a church in another part of the city, but changed locations in April of 2011. The Futures director, Karen, has an office within the new church where the Poets Incorporated workshop meets weekly. The workshop facilitators, Nicole with New Beginnings and Pamela with Poets Incorporated, make use of these Firstspaces by entering into them with the purpose of layering their literacy services in with those offered by the drop-in centers. They work to create mentally suitable Secondspaces of support and safety within these Firstspaces for the writers of their workshops, breaking down the Firstspace-Secondspace binary and achieving Soja’s Thirdspace. However, as demonstrated through the narratives of the facilitators and the drop-in center directors, Karen and Keith, the breakdown in this binary is incomplete and at its best, temporary.

In this chapter, with an understanding of Soja’s triple-dialect of space, and using the spatial lens of Michel de Certeau’s *strategies* and *tactics* as outlined in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, I will provide an examination of the narratives of two writing workshop facilitators working in youth drop-in centers. I will first provide a more specific explanation of de Certeau’s framework before moving into a reading of the two

facilitator's narratives through this theoretical lens to demonstrate how the facilitators perform a tactical navigation of the Firstspace of youth drop-in centers for the purposes of community literacy work. I will also discuss the conflict still existing between Firstspace and Secondspace, which results in the production of what I call *tactical* Thirdspace.

### **Tactics of Community Literacy**

As discussed in chapters one and two, de Certeau presents tactics as appropriately timed actions of resistance taken by weaker groups and individuals in response to institutions of power. He writes that tactical approaches are helpful when operating “in enemy territory” as the weaker power attempts to negotiate the power dynamics (37). Institutions and organizations that have a set place of being operate strategically as they control and manage physical space and create rules and regulations that help them maintain that control. They additionally play a larger role in imaging a space and the purposes that the space serves. Youth homeless shelters and drop-in centers are often focused on tangible outcomes that lead to the “self-sufficient” lifestyles mentioned in Karen’s epigraph. These outcomes include things such as education and employment for the youth. They are observable and can be measured and recorded for the sake of justifying the existence of a shelter and therefore justification for the request of funds to keep the shelter in operation (Thompson et al., Washington). They are also the services, along with food programs, residence, and hygiene services, for which youth seek out shelters and drop-in centers (Washington, Spiro, De Rosa). Futures is open two days a week, on Tuesdays and Sundays. Next Step is open five days a week and provides special services on Tuesdays and Fridays.

Figures one and two provide an overview of the services provided by the Futures and Next Step.

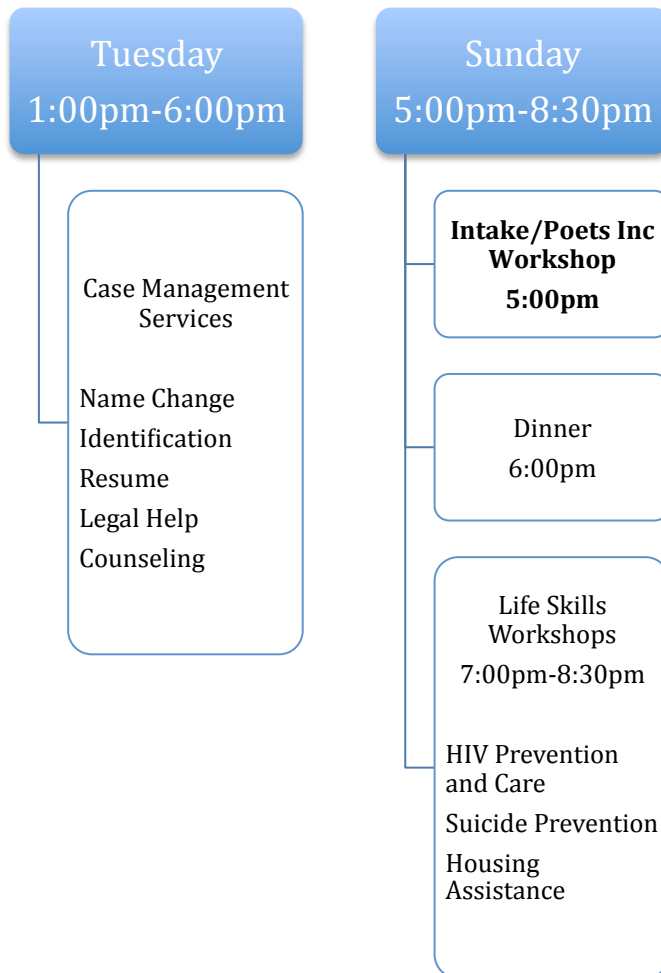


Figure 1. Futures to Come Services

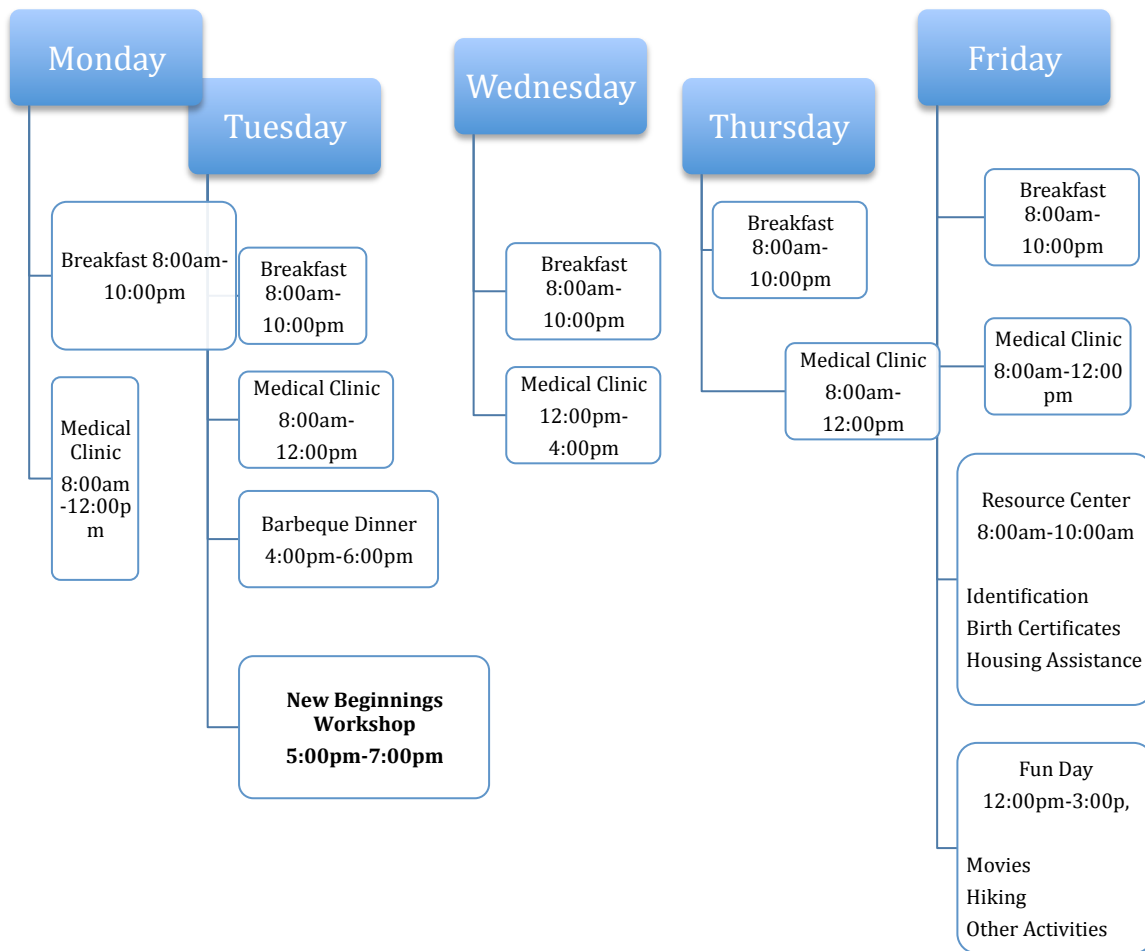


Figure 2. Next Step Services

Some of these services, as can be seen, are oriented towards recreation, but most are oriented primarily towards providing the youth with food, counseling and legal services, and housing assistance. The intended outcomes of the drop-in center services are much more tangible than those of the literacy organizations. The facilitator informants in this study list “voice”, “self-empowerment” and “identity” among the benefits they believe the youth writers to gain from participating in their workshops. However, these benefits are difficult, if not impossible, to quantify. Clearly, the

homeless shelter and drop-in center staff members see the less tangible benefits of the partnership and permitting the facilitators to enter their spaces and work with their youth clients, but there exists a difference in the purposes that the two organizations serve as well as in the power each partner holds that causes conflict in the day-to-day spatial practices of the drop-in center and writing workshops.

Weaker powers making use of the same space or location as strategic powers have no control over the space. The literacy facilitators included in this study, although they are not operating “in enemy territory,” do not control the space of the drop-in centers, and therefore must operate tactically to “make do” with the little time they have for their weekly writing workshop (de Certeau 30). Paula Mathieu argues that community literacy work can only operate tactically, at least initially (*Tactics*, “After Tactics”). Literacy scholars and facilitators engage with individuals and groups who are marginalized by political, societal, and economic institutions. Mathieu questions the potential of writing and community literacy work to create institutional change because these efforts take place in spaces controlled strategically by powerful institutions. She claims, “The effects of tactical discourse are not easily measurable in the short term and their overall effects are not always clear” (*Tactics* 33). These are contrasted by the tangible outcomes that youth homeless shelters and drop-in centers seek primarily to create. However, both the facilitators and drop-in center staff express the added challenge to assessing the success of their programs that comes from working with a population such as homeless youth. Keith, the site supervisor at Next Step, explains, that even when the youth are excited about Next Step and New Beginnings services, other factors get in the way of their attending because “they’re not just worried about

creative writing. They're worried about where they're going to lay their heads down for the night" (Keith). A tactical approach by the facilitators allows them to do their work without attempting to gain permanent control over the First- or Secondspace of the drop-in centers. It also reminds them to be considerate of the circumstances faced by and needs of the youth with whom they work.

Pamela, the facilitator from Poets Incorporated, leads her workshop in the office of Karen, the executive director of Futures to Come Homeless Youth Drop-In Center, while Nicole, the facilitator from New Beginnings Poetry Group, uses a multi-purpose art room at Next Step Youth Drop-In Center. As I stated previously, the writing workshops examined in this study are not operating "in enemy territory," as de Certeau describes. In this way, his binary between strategies and tactics and the groups who make use of them may be limiting. However, as I will discuss later, the tactical nature of the facilitators use of space, while necessary, also inhibits their achievement of Soja's Thirdspace. The narratives of the literacy facilitators reveal a tactical use of space that can be organized into the following four themes: Multiple Purposes of Firstspace, Temporally Aware Tactics, Creating a "Safe Space," and Relocated Tactics.

### **Spatial Tactics: Navigating the Space of Youth Drop-In Centers**

#### *Multiple Purposes of Firstspace*

In his chapter, "Making Do': Uses and Tactics," de Certeau identifies "use," also referred to as "consumption," as a specific form of tactics that involves individuals making use of products that do not belong to them. He provides several examples of how individuals "make do" within spaces controlled by those with more power. He discusses "a North African living in Paris or Roubaix [who] creates for himself a space in

which he can find *ways of using* the constraining order of the place or of the language. Without leaving the place where he has no choice but to live and which lays down its law for him, he establishes within it a degree of *plurality* and creativity” (30). As in this example, the order and language become products appropriated by the North African for his own purposes. “Making do,” characterized by flexibility, is an art that enables weaker powers to exist within dominant power structures. For both of the writing workshops examined in this study, facilitators use Firstspaces that serve a number of different purposes. At Futures to Come Homeless Youth Drop-In Center, the Poets Inc. writing workshop is held in Karen’s, the center executive director, office. Karen’s office contains items typical of any office, a desk, a printer, file cabinets. It is also used for storage of donations, particularly clothing, and of other supplies the center needs in order to operate, such as napkins and plastic forks, even the food pantry, which are used for the dinner service the center provides. These other Firstspace purposes, as a food pantry, storage room and office, frequently interfere with the Poets Incorporated writing workshop that Pamela leads, as youth and Futures volunteers enter the room to retrieve various items they need for the other services the center provides. These services are not in direct conflict with one another, and both Pamela and Karen agree that both of their services in fact complement one another and work well together, yet there exists a tension between them due to an overall lack of adequate physical space that requires one room to serve multiple and disparate services. Karen, as the center director, is aware of this challenge to the writing workshop. When asked about the challenges to having the writing workshop to make use of the same space states,

I mean the only place that’s at all stressful is just, you know, trying to make a time, and you know, a space. And you know, I try to minimize it, but, you know,

people are constantly barging into the office while they're trying to have group because they need, whatever, and it's all stored in here. So that's the only thing, is that while they're having group we can't use the office for other things.

In Karen's account, she begins by acknowledging the struggle of trying to fit in, temporally and spatially, the writing workshop among the other services that Futures to Come provides. Within Karen's story is an example of First- and Secondspace conflict, as Karen images the room as her office, a space she should be able to access at any time because it "belongs" to her. So although she states that she "tr[ies] to minimize" the interruptions for Poets Incorporated, she unintentionally emphasizes why the arrangement is inconvenient for her and Futures to Come because she and the volunteers cannot make full use of the space. Her frequent "you knows" indicate a desire to feel validated in her feelings about the inconvenient arrangement. She makes it clear that she wants Poet Incorporated to have the time and space they need, and is conflicted over the staff "constantly barging into the office" during the workshop. Still, she and the Futures staff do not stop "barging" in, because although they do not wish to interrupt, they can and perhaps must in order to retrieve paperwork or forks or whatever it is they need.

Pamela's narrative also addresses this conflict, although less directly, stating that "people tend to trickle in and out of the writing space . . . throughout the hour". The difference in language, "barging" vs. "trickling" is significant and is reflective of the difference in power within Firstspace. The room belongs to Karen seven days a week. She is in a position to admit that her staff, and perhaps even she herself, are guilty of "barging" into the room, disrupting the writing workshop. And while she knows this is disruptive, she does not attempt to stop it completely, because she and the staff must



carry on with the other activities of the drop-in center in order to meet their purpose of providing the youth with a weekly meal, helping them attain identification, and offering case management services. Pamela, occupying the room for just one hour each week, is not in the position to question, or even to complain about, the disruption. She frames the intrusion as a “trickling in” rather than “barging” because she has no means, strategically, of creating change in this spatial practice. De Certeau writes, “A tactic insinuates itself into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. It has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances” (xix). Pamela states several times that the Poets Incorporated workshops are “designed to fit into the location’s existing program.” Her narrative reveals an understanding that the location, and the organization that controls it, will maintain that control. She will not be able to take over the space or keep the drop-in center services “at a distance”. She and the Poets Incorporated workshop enter into the partnership knowing they will be required to “make-do” with the space they are given, and work alongside the other purposes that space serves.

### *Temporally Aware Tactics*

In order to operate efficiently, homeless shelters and drop-in centers must function by some schedule. The lack of structure in the youth’s day-to-day lives, not knowing when and from where their next meal will come or if they will be able to attend school or find warm clothing, means that the drop-in centers must serve the youth when they see them. They schedule activities before and after the writing workshops, and the workshop facilitators must always be aware and considerate of these other activities

and services being offered in the time surrounding their workshop. The writing workshop at Futures to Come is scheduled for 5:00 each Sunday. Pamela discusses some of the time conflicts that happen at this site.

So, intake for Futures, intake meaning they bring the kids in and check them off and sign them and make sure they have all the information they need from them, it starts at 5:00 as well. So once the kids come in they are given the choice just to kind of hang out or they can come to writing group. And writing group is scheduled from 5:00-6:00 and we usually try to keep to that schedule because we're working with homeless teens and you know, who knows how long its been since they've had their last meals and dinner's at 6:00 so we try and respect that.

The Poets Incorporated workshop is scheduled for the same time that the drop-in center opens its doors to the youth. As the youth are required to check in, this means that the workshop does not start with all of its writers at precisely 5:00. The workshop is then affected by the loss of potentially valuable time that could be spent writing, sharing, and giving feedback to the writers. Pamela's response indicates an awareness of the challenges facing the writers she works with and consideration of the contexts in which they live, which is crucial for community literacy work (Mathieu *Tactics*; Flower; Long). As a workshop facilitator, Pamela cannot control or expedite the process of intake. And since the process is a way to keep track of which youth make use of Futures services and how often they do so, she understands the importance of this practice that comes with entering and working in the Firstspace of Futures to Come. Instead she "makes do" by allowing the youth to come in late to the workshop. She also is flexible with the workshop format, commenting that although ideally the writers would have time to write and share for two writing prompts, there are times when there is only time for one. This is an example of what Nedra Reynolds calls "accommodating to a space," a process in

which writers and literacy workers or teachers respond to and navigate the material and temporal constraints of the spaces in which they are writing (14).

On the other side of the Poets Incorporated writing workshop is dinner. As Pamela acknowledges, many of the youth writers have uncertain meal opportunities. The weekly meals offered by Futures to Come may be the most complete meals they eat throughout the week. In fact, for many youth, food programs are the primary motivation for visiting a drop-in center (De Rosa et al.). For this reason, the workshop loses the luxury of being able to run over their assigned time if the writers or Pamela have more writing to share or feedback to give. If Pamela and the writers mentally construct, even temporarily, Futures as a space for writing, Firstspace realities enforce themselves at 6:00 when the spatial practices of the youth and Futures staff change to engage in a community dinner. Given the significance of sharing and feedback to the purpose of Pamela's writing workshop, which aims to give a voice to the writers and to view them *as writers*, this is a considerable disadvantage to working in the space of Futures to Come. Here is an example of indirect conflict between the purposes of a drop-in center and the writing workshop it has permitted to use its physical space, as well as conflict between Secondspace imagination and Firstspace realities. The scheduling of check-in and dinner are not intended to inconvenience the facilitators or the workshop, yet drop-in centers, also working with limited time and space resources, must meet the youth's primary need of food by providing them with dinner, and they must also keep track of which youth are entering their premises, how often, and for what purposes, for safety reasons, and also to continue to receive funding (Washington). This then is an occasion when workshop facilitators must rely on temporally sensitive

tactics, which mean flexibility and once again “making do” with the time they have and seizing the opportunity to help the homeless youth grow as writers.

Within the workshop Pamela also demonstrates a tactical approach to taking advantage of time, an approach which is built into the very mission of Poets Incorporated. Pamela explains how, during workshop, she and the other writers provide feedback under the assumption that all of the writing is fictional. She states,

[This approach is] another of those things that keeps the focus on the writing. As opposed to what the writer may or may not have done, or what might or might not be an actual personal happening in the writer’s life. A part of me just thinks it is a really good facilitating trick. When people starting talking about personal experiences as personal experiences as opposed to experiences expressed through writing it leads to a lot of tangents that happen in that feedback portion or discussion portion. You know, as you can imagine, an hour is not a long time in my particular workshop, so we like to keep in on the writing.

Pamela uses the term “trick,” which de Certeau defines as a specific type of tactic. A “trick” is an “art” used by an “artist” and which allows her to decide the “order of things” (26). Pamela’s “trick” is one of her methods she makes use of in order to keep the workshop on track and make the most efficient use of her time within the space.

### *Creating a Safe Space*

One method through which weaker powers respond to subjugation and imposed structures, according to de Certeau, is consumption, a “tireless but quiet activity” that “shows itself not in its own products . . . but in an art of using those imposed on it” (31). The two facilitators in this study engage in a tireless struggle to create a space that is mentally and emotionally “safe” for their workshop participants within the physical spaces they are assigned. The workshop “trick” that Pamela discusses earlier as a way to keep the workshop on track is also a way to create this “safe space”. The Poets Inc. workshop uses a workshop model developed by Pat Schneider, the founder and

director of Amherst Writers and Artists. In this model a “safe space” is defined as a space in which all writers are “treated with kindness and respect,” in which their writing is taken seriously as writing and the possible experiences behind their work are kept confidential (Schneider 187). This is to create the level of comfort necessary mentally for the writers not only to write, but also to share and to give and receive feedback on their work. Pamela’s temporally conscious tactics then make an impact, not on the physical space of the center, but on the mental and emotional space by creating an environment in which the writers feel the level of comfort necessary for the workshop. However, the physical disruption of Futures staff “barging in” could interrupt this “safe space,” particularly if the staff members overhear a story or poem that was only intended for Pamela and the other workshop participants.

In addition, Pamela discusses how, in the workshop, each of the youth writers are addressed and treated “as writers”. She explains how getting the youth to “recogniz[e] themselves as writers” is one of the benefits she hopes her participants get out of the workshop, going on to say,

You know, some people, they’ll come in and they don’t really know what to write, or they wouldn’t necessarily call themselves writers, but by putting pen to page or sitting with us for an hour, or some of [the other] workshops go on for two hours, by sitting and just writing, you’re a writer. And I think that adds a different perspective to one’s identity. You know, you’re not just a homeless person or you’re not just a person who used to be incarcerated or you’re not just a kid; you’re a writer. And I think that can be really powerful.

Karen, the Futures founder and director, views the youth primarily as homeless youth in need of service to become self-sustaining adults and at times simply to survive. This is appropriate, given her job and relationship to the youth. As a drop-in center director, she knows that being independent and capable of supporting themselves will likely benefit

the youth. Pamela also acknowledges the need for the youth to establish some sort of stability, but in the context of her workshop, she additionally promotes less concrete benefits. In the *Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau discusses how tactics can make preset orders “function in another register” by changing or diverting them (32). By emphasizing the identify of writer, Pamela has the opportunity to invert the order, or levels, of identity as they are associated with the youth to make them more comfortable and confident writers within the space. This creates a Secondspace conducive to writing. But, as Pamela notes, this is only “for an hour,” perhaps quickly disappearing when the writers return to their identities as homeless youth in need of the food served at the dinner following workshop.

Nicole, the facilitator for the New Beginnings Poetry workshop at Next Step Drop-In Center, also discusses the importance of creating a safe space for her workshop. This safety is, like in the Poets Inc. workshop, tied to the writers’ identities and lives. In the New Beginnings workshop, the writers are encouraged to write uncensored, speaking and writing freely of their experiences with drugs, abuse or gang activity. Unlike in the Poets Incorporated workshop, these experiences are recognized as the personal experiences of the writers. Both of the workshops include empowerment through self-expression as part of their mission; however, New Beginnings lists this as its primary purpose and so focuses more on telling and acknowledging the true experiences of the youth writers the organization serves. Kuribayashi and Tharp, in the introduction to their 1998 work, *Creating Safe Space: Violence and Women’s Writing*, state, “creation of safe space occurs simultaneously as the telling/writing of the story. When women write about their experiences of violence, then, safe space is not a

prerequisite, but something that comes out of the writing process” (1). The authors tie their statement directly to women and violence because those are the subjects of their book, but this statement can arguably be extended to other groups and experiences, such as drug use, sexual assault, and abuse, which are common causes and consequences of youth homelessness and which come up in the stories and poems of the workshop participants (National Network; Nicole).

This focus on self-expression over helping the youth writers improve their craft means that the New Beginnings feedback is less extensive. Nicole explains the workshop practices around sharing work, “at the beginning, they have to say their name, and we’ll have the whole room applaud for them, and then they’ll read [their poem] and then everyone applauds again.” Any verbal feedback is intentionally affirming, thanking the writer for sharing and making simple statements such as “good job” or “that’s exactly right,” and it is often in response to a writer’s self-doubt about his or her work. The creation of this supportive Secondspace, along with the fact that the New Beginnings workshop has two hours each week as opposed to Poets Incorporated’s one hour means Nicole has more time to allow for personal experiences to be addressed as personal experiences. Nicole speaks of how these personal experiences are handled in the workshop.

We’ve had situations where, you know, that’s just where they are. I mean usually, they’ll just express their struggles and journey with things like drugs and we’ve had instances where some people would term it as glorifying it, but that’s just where the youth is. And we might insert a comment like, you know, if someone’s glorifying like, “Yeah, I smoke pot, and it’s so good” and all this stuff we might, you know, throw in, “but you know, all that’s doing is just slowing your brain down, which you’re already doing”. And so, we don’t *judge* them, but we might see if we can give them a little tidbit of information to help them maybe think about it a little bit. But we never tell them they’re wrong. I mean it’s kind of

wherever they are. We don't *encourage* it, but we're not gonna criticize them as a user.

The freedom to express themselves, without censorship and without fear of judgment by their peers or facilitators, in Nicole's opinion creates "a safe space for the youth to be able to feel empowered and like they matter, their feelings and their thoughts". The additional time allows for a temporary realization of Thirdspace in which "everything comes together" as the conflict between physical and mental spaces is momentarily removed.

Keith, the site-supervisor, also believes that the youth should have the opportunity to express themselves on whatever issues they may be dealing with, but he also, as an employee of Next Step, has an obligation to intervene in certain instances. He explains,

I think it's really important for youth to be able to express themselves without a lot of, you know, restriction. Where we [Next Step] do kind of draw the line is anything that questions safety, which includes any sort of, well I don't think it really excludes it from their art, but I think it turns into a conversation with staff. Heavy mention of dangerous drug use, things like that, I mean, self-harm, those are all things that play into it. And I don't think it necessarily restricts the art, but I think it offers a chance for conversation and for intervention.

Several scholars, particularly of education have embraced the notion of "safe space". And many have also questioned it, suggesting that while teachers and facilitators may *imagine* safe spaces in which students can speak and write freely, actually creating these spaces is difficult and perhaps even impossible. Barbara Stengal and Lisa Weems raise the questions of how safety can be measured and what spaces might be kept safe from. The space of the New Beginnings workshop may be safe from censorship, but perhaps not safe from other consequences of speaking freely. Nicole and Keith have different perspectives on how to address issues of glorifying drug use or



violence because of their different positions within the space and the differing purposes they serve for the youth. Keith and other Next Step staff may not interfere directly with the “safe space” of the workshop that is created by allowing the youth to write what and how they wish, but the “safety” is limited, as Keith and Next Step do not have the same opinion that “that’s just where the youth is,” which is the sentiment expressed by Nicole. If the youth are aware of the potential intervention that could be held as a result of their uncensored writing, they may be reluctant to share certain experiences. The fear could work against the establishment of safe space within the workshop. If the youth do write freely, the potentially safe space may be violated if Keith feels that there is a threat to the physical safety of the youth writers or others. And even in cases where Next Step does not need to step in, the moment of empowerment achieved through self-expression, as Paula Mathieu points out, does not mean that the youth are no longer homeless, or that they are healed of their emotional traumas (*Tactics*). It is a small victory gained through the tactics upon which community literacy work depends.

Another factor contributing to the safe space of the New Beginnings workshop comes from the workshop being relocated from a large room downstairs to a different room in the center. The arts center previously housed in the building now belonging to Next Step served homeless and other high-risk youth. The center allowed its youth attendants to paint graffiti murals on the walls. Next Step purchased the building and renovated it. The change, which made space for shower areas and clothing storage, also involved the painting over of the graffiti murals on the interior walls of the building with a “white-beige” colored paint (Nicole). Graffiti artists often refer to themselves as writers (Bowen). They see their work as a way of writing on the world, marking their

territory. As Halsey and Yough argue, “Specifically and critically, graffiti connects the writer to the city through the very act of writing” (278). Graffiti writers use their work to make it known that they exist or that loved ones who have passed on once existed (Ganz and Manco; Bowen; Cooper and Sciorra). In mainstream society, and particularly by law enforcement and government, graffiti art has been considered vandalism, the work of criminals, gang members, and teenage nuisances (Bowen; Halsey and Young) However, some contemporary graffiti, particularly mural graffiti, seen as more artistic than tag graffiti in which the writer inscribes his or her name onto a public space, is acknowledged and appreciated as art, the work of some artists even being featured in art museums. Cooper and Sciorra have studied how graffiti writers are commissioned to construct murals as reminders of “civil society’s inability or unwillingness to address the systemic poverty and the pervasive racism that promote the rampant flow of drugs and guns into inner-city communities” (7). Other, amateur, writers also produce murals for those they love who died of violence or from less traumatic causes such as heart attack.

In discussing the painting over of the graffiti, Keith, the drop-in supervisor of the Next Step Drop-in Center, laments the loss of the artwork, describing it as “unfortunate”. He also explains that Next Step is making efforts to re-incorporate artwork into the space. He states “we are trying to gain a lot of that back with the current youth to start hanging their art, start displaying it, and getting back to some of those things that were here before.” Keith, then, realizes the connection that the youth feel to artwork, and his narrative implies a relationship between Firstspace and Secondspace. Yet, Next Step only allows the youth to “hang” their artwork in frames, not paint it directly on the walls,

which is a less permanent and perhaps less radical way for the youth to make a mark on and in the physical space of the center. Nicole's perspective implies that the loss of the artwork made a more significant impact than is acknowledged in Keith's account. She states that painting over the graffiti "sanitized" the space and made it less personal. This indicates that Nicole and her workshop participants felt a connection to the graffiti painted by youth facing similar circumstances as the workshop participants. This, also, is viewed differently from the perspective of Keith, who states that his youth feel connected to graffiti art, but did not feel much connection to that particular art because they did not know the youth who had completed the work. Again, Nicole's perspective offers a different opinion as she states that, although the new room is smaller, it "is the one room left where there's still graffiti on some on the walls from some of the youth that used to attend there." The presence of the graffiti, art work done by youth facing the same challenges as those participating in the workshop, and which represents an uncensored and intentional expression of self is an aspect of Firstspace that helps promote the sort of safe space Nicole feels conducive to the New Beginnings workshop purpose. This achieves again a temporary breakdown in the Firstspace-Secondspace binary and produces a tactical form of Soja's Thirdspace.

#### *Relocated Tactics*

Tactics, as de Certeau emphasizes, do not have their "own place" (38). This lack of connections to a particular space provides those who make use of tactics with a certain mobility. De Certeau writes, "This nowhere gives a tactic mobility, to be sure, but a mobility that must accept the chance offerings of the moment, and seize on the

wing the possibilities that offer themselves at any given moment” (37). The narratives of both Pamela and Nicole include accounts of this mobility in their respective workshops.

Sometimes the other services and activities that the drop-in center provides are in more direct conflict with the writing workshop in that they take place not directly before or after the workshop, but during. Next Step, the drop-in center in the western city, offers a weekly barbeque that partially overlaps with the time slot in which New Beginnings holds its workshops. The facilitator informant from New Beginnings, Nicole, explains how the double scheduling sometimes prevented youth from attending. To help resolve this issue, the site supervisor, Keith, relocated the workshop to a new room, as discussed in the previous section. The move relocated the New Beginnings workshop from downstairs, in what Nicole describes as “a big open space” to a much smaller room with brick walls. Keith provides his account of this decision and the factors leading up to it.

Yeah, basically, what was happening was we serve homeless and at-risk youth, so a lot of the youth that we serve day-to-day are living on the streets, literally, not in shelters, but on the streets sleeping in camps and sleeping bags and stuff. So, what happened is, we have a barbeque from about 4:00 until about 6:00, and New beginnings ran from 6:00 to 8:00, and [. . .] we find that [the youth] are having to find where they’re gonna sleep much earlier in the afternoon and evening time. So I think the numbers were dwindling for New Beginnings, so what we decided to do was move it to 5:00, an hour earlier. So people were around eating dinner so the numbers have been pretty good for them, and that means we had to change the room.

This excerpt can be viewed in several ways. Keith demonstrates respect and appreciation for the New Beginnings workshop in his efforts to help the workshop keep as many participants as possible. He also implies a prioritization of the barbeque over the workshop, since he moved the workshop location so that it would not interfere with the barbeque. In Nicole’s case, however, this move can be viewed as a tactical

maneuver around and within the Firstspace of the Next Step center. The move did require a change to a smaller room, an act of literal mobility from one Firstspace setting to another, but as discussed previously, the New Beginnings workshop now meets in the art room, which still features some of the graffiti artwork by other homeless and high-risk youth. This change of physical location can then be seen as a tactic in which Nicole and the New Beginnings workshop take advantage of a chance to position themselves in a space that, while still belonging to and controlled by Next Step, has not been “sanitized” in the same way (Nicole). The new location better allows for the empowerment and expression of self that the New Beginnings workshop so emphasizes (Ganz and Manco; Cooper and Sciorra). Furthermore, as both Nicole and Keith explain, this move to a different location that was not in direct conflict with the weekly barbeque led to a more consistent attendance from the youth. The move then demonstrates a willingness to give up more physical space for a more productive space, and also for the sake of keeping the time Nicole needs for her workshop and perhaps even for keeping the workshop operating as it had, since it allowed the writers to attend more regularly. In the previous section I noted that this relocation allowed for a temporary breakdown in the Firstspace-Secondspace binary. I argue that this breakdown is temporary because as Paula Mathieu states in *Tactics of Hope* and Keith notes in his narrative, despite participation in community literacy programs, the homeless remain homeless. Next Step must physically close its doors at 8:00 pm. The youth writers of New Beginnings leave this space and return to the city streets in search of shelter for the night.

While the New Beginnings workshop relocated to another room in the same building, the Poets Inc. workshop experienced a complete relocation when Futures to

Come, operating out of a local church, moved its services from one church to another in a different part of the city. Pamela speaks of the how her workshop was affected by each of the two locations.

[The previous church] was a huge space and the, we basically had the workshop on the second floor and it was a really small [writing] space and it didn't accommodate that many people and it was kind of out of the way. And sometimes [the distance from other activities] made it easy to have the workshop, or not easy, but it was easy to have a little more focus, but strangely it was difficult to have the workshop, too, because we were so far away from the larger group that often times folks involved in the workshop were distracted and wondering what they were missing downstairs kind of thing.

Unlike in the New Beginnings workshop where distance from other drop-in center activities created an environment more conducive for the workshop, being far away from other Futures activities created a problem for the Poets Inc. workshop because the youth were thinking about other opportunities and services they could be missing by participating in the workshop. This difference could be in part due to the frequency of services offered at these two different sites. Next Step operates five days a week, Monday through Friday, while Futures, because its funding comes only from private donors, can only offer services twice a week, meaning that the youth participating in the Poets Inc. workshop have fewer opportunities to receive services and fewer opportunities to enjoy activities with their friends. A strategic decision by Futures to Come in order to continue operating creates an additional challenge for Pamela and her workshop.

Futures changed locations in April of 2011. This moved placed the Poets Inc. workshop in a new building and also directly in Karen's office. Pamela says of this change in location,

The overall space [of the new building] is smaller, but the writing space was bigger . . . and where we are now is closer to the larger Futures group, so people, the participants, kind of feel like they're not too far away from their friends if they decide to do something different, like write, you know, they're not missing too much, from the larger group.

According to de Certeau, a tactic “manipulate[s] events in order to turn them into ‘opportunities’” (xix). In this example as well as in that provided by Nicole the physical relocation of the writing workshop into a different space becomes an opportunity for the facilitator to maintain the time allotted to the workshop and make as efficient use of that time as possible by keeping the writers focused and engaged with their writing and the workshop process.

There are times, de Certeau writes, when those of weaker powers are capable of repurposing space for their own needs, in defiance of the powerful institutions that own or dominate the space, a practice he refers to as “la perruque.” He provides examples such as an office secretary taking a few moments to write a love letter during the time she is being paid to perform her secretarial duties or a cabinetmaker “‘borrowing’ a lathe to make a piece of furniture for his home” (25). De Certeau emphasizes that these tactics make no impact on the overall structure of the institution that controls the space, but instead is a brief appropriation of space for the weak’s own purposes. Pamela’s accounts of her workshop demonstrates how, in the moments when the workshop is not interrupted, the change in the workshop location allowed a partial appropriation of the physical space of Karen’s office.

[In the new space] we have a table and chairs, and we also have couches and there was definitely this really welcoming feel to the room, like a loungey [sic] hangout . . . And that’s all to say, you know, people need a lot of freedom, to kind of spread out and do what they want with their writing, both physically and mentally. You know, sometimes people would want to lounge and stretch out on the couch, and they write their best pieces that way. Sometimes people were

really focused and wanted to be sitting up at the chair and wrote their best pieces that way. And it really helped to have that flexibility, in the space, not only because it accommodated more people, but it also gave people a little more freedom to write in the ways that were most comfortable to them.

Walker, Brooks, and Paepler's 2011 article "Pedagogy and Space: Empirical Research on New Learning Environments" accounts how physical arrangement of furniture can have an impact on not just learning, but also engagement and feelings of inclusion. Round tables with sturdy, upright chairs may help writers focus, while couches provide more comfort and also help remove stresses about writing that are often associated with classroom settings (Walker et al., Jim et al). Karen's office is not a space intended or designed for writing. However, the physical space of the workshop, with the variation of sitting areas and more physical space, still provides an environment that Pamela takes advantage of for her workshop. The workshop was placed in Karen's office so that Pamela and the writers could make use of the table, but they spread out for a more extensive use of the space.

This appropriation is a tactical maneuver in that it is temporary and incomplete. As de Certeau also states, tactical victories are temporary, "whatever [a tactic] wins, it does not keep" (xix). The workshop is still temporally impacted by the intake process that takes place before the workshop and the dinner that takes place afterwards. It is spatially, and perhaps mentally, changed when Futures staff "barge" into the room to retrieve napkins and forks and paperwork. Still, Pamela manages to, with the flexible nature of her workshop structure, create an environment in which the physical space of the office becomes one that can accommodate and at times encourage writing.



## Insufficient Tactics

Paula Mathieu, in her essay “Not Your Mama’s Bus Tour,” discusses how community literacy efforts, because of their tactical nature and lack of institutional power, are most often “radically insufficient” for initiating institutional change and overcoming power structures. The drop-in centers, because of their higher levels of power in the partnerships with the writing workshop can make decisions concerning both the physical and mental space of their centers that may prevent the workshop from happening. These actions are not intended to disadvantage or end the workshop, but rather are the consequences of the center’s strategic policies that they create in order to stay in operation and continue to serve their purpose of meeting the immediate needs of the youth and keeping the youth physically safe. As discussed earlier, Futures to Come does intake before letting the youth into the center. Another condition for the youth to be let in is that there is enough security on the premises on Tuesdays and Sundays when the center is open. Pamela speaks of how the Poets Incorporated workshop has been impacted by this policy.

There have been times where we’ve had to cancel the workshop because, you know, policies that Futures has, but then also that whatever facility we’re working at has. For instance, a couple of times in the summer if we were short a security person we couldn’t open the door for the kids to come in because you have to have “x” number of security on site before opening the doors. And you know, in those instances we would just have to cancel the workshop that week.

The drop-in center, again is not working to intentionally disadvantage the Poets Incorporated workshop. Rather, they are working strategically to meet the immediate and pressing needs of the youth. Part of this need is physical safety. Without enough security guards, Karen and Futures cannot provide the level of safety they need. Furthermore, the Poets Incorporated workshop serves around five youth writers each

week, while between 40 and 50 youth attend the Sunday dinners. So Futures will find a way to get the appropriate number of security guards there prior to the start of dinner at 6:00, so that the youth can eat. But, focused on meeting the basic need of hunger for the youth, Karen and the staff may be less concerned about canceling the workshop for that week, as long as they can still use the space to provide their meal service. This is an example when tactics prove inadequate for overcoming institutional constraints that come with working in spaces such as youth drop-in centers, and perhaps for overcoming Firstspace challenges such as access, physical resources, and physical safety in general.

Tactics, as shown, have been a useful way for Pamela and Nicole to approach and navigate the Firstspace of drop-in centers for homeless youth. Occasionally their tactics worked overcome the Firstspace-Secondspace binary. However, tactics are, by definition, limited, achieving only momentary victories. As de Certeau writes frequently in his work, what a tactic achieves, “it does not keep” (xix). The realizations of Thirdspace are incomplete or fragmented, tactical. This *tactical* Thirdspace allows for both the facilitators and drop-in center staff to work towards their purposes within the same space. The facilitators make use of space by taking advantage of changes made in their locations, and they make conscious decisions about how to produce spaces conducive to their writing workshops. Their efforts are complicated and indirectly challenged by the more strategic efforts of Karen and Keith, who also have obligations to the youth. The cross-purposes of the informants in this study create tension that they communicate through their stories. Through their use of tactical maneuvers, Pamela and Nicole alleviate some of this tension to produce a Thirdspace in which their writers

can read, write, and speak comfortably. But this Thirdspace, the openness and possibility it allows, is momentary and limited by its tactical production, as other practices and policies of the space interfere, such as interruptions by Futures staff during the Poets Incorporated workshop or an intervention for a New Beginnings writer who shared desires to harm herself in a poem. These are conditions that come with working in spaces that we do not control, but which we can work around. What Pamela and Nicole's narratives demonstrate are specific ways how to produce *tactical* Thirdspace, insufficient for resolving all of the challenges, but useful for the purpose of a community literacy writing workshop.

In this chapter I have examined literacy facilitators tactical maneuvering of the Firstspace of youth drop-in centers. I have also demonstrated how this tactical maneuvering is complicated by the social practices and policies, or Secondspace, of the drop-in centers and their directors, resulting in a *tactical* Thirdspace that does not fully breakdown the binary between First- and Secondspace. In the following chapter, I will shift focus from physical spaces to virtual ones through an examination of the literacy organizations' online spaces as additional sites of community literacy work in which the facilitators, their organizations, and the writers they serve go public and "bring wreck" to the public sphere.

## Chapter 4

### Bringing Wreck: Tactics in the Online Spaces of Community Literacy Programs

a rebel is my mind when I write and recite I . . .  
am the truth in my own way

.....  
let me reach into your heart  
with my words and do  
very emotional damage so you  
can feel what is real

- A, a New Beginnings workshop participant

The epigraph above is an excerpt from an untitled poem by one of the New Beginnings writers. It is a poem that the writer, A, and New Beginnings published online and which characterizes the primary purpose of the online spaces examined in this study: to connect with their audiences emotionally, and deliberately, in ways that present the “real” that will challenge the audience’s preconceived notions and negative orientations towards marginalized populations, including homeless youth. A makes it clear that she resists these notions and presents the “truth” in response to them. She intends to figuratively reach out to her audience, and by doing so, she can assert her humanness and her validity. She has an opportunity to “emotionally damage” her audience by making them uncomfortable and shaking their preconceived notions through her poetry. She, the literacy organizations, and the other writers shake these notions through the process of what Gwendolyn Pough calls “bringing wreck,” a concept Pough borrows from Hip-Hop culture in her 2004 book *Check It While I Wreck It: Black Womanhood, Hip-Hop Culture, and the Public Sphere*. The websites of these literacy organizations attempt to serve as Thirdspaces in which the literacy organizations and the writers they serve can “go public” (Long, *Community*). By going public, New

Beginnings, Poets Incorporated, and their writers can participate in rhetorical discourse, tactically interjecting the voices of marginalized populations into mainstream discourses and thereby working to challenge the social stigma attached to homeless youth.

However, the organizations must also represent themselves in ways that encourage support and legitimize their work. They also strive to achieve these other purposes within their online spaces. Just as in the physical spaces, the tactical nature of community literacy limits the production and sustainment of Thirdspace as it is conceived of and defined by Soja. In this chapter I will provide an overview of Soja's Thirdspace as it applies to online spaces before offering an analysis of the online presences of Poets Incorporated and New Beginnings, with an emphasis on the online space of the latter, as examples of how and why homeless youth and their sponsoring organizations bring wreck to the public sphere.

### **Soja's Thirdspace**

The notion of Thirdspace is a useful way of conceptualizing online spaces, their vastness and "infinite complexity" (Soja 57). Cyberspace scholars have discussed online spaces as Thirdspaces in efforts to understand interactions in online spaces and how online spaces function in relation to real-world spaces (Elund; Zalis; Goquin et al.). In defining Thirdspace, Soja writes,

*Everything* comes together in Thirdspace: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimagined, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, the everyday life and unending history. (57 his emphasis)

In the online spaces of New Beginnings and Poets Incorporated, the subjectivity of human voice and experience meets with the objectivity of institutions that stigmatize and

marginalize homeless individuals. Abstract notions of social justice and “voice,” while still disembodied, are made more concrete through the presentation of the workshop participants’ poetry and assertion of the value of their voices. The real everyday experiences confront imagined ideas of who homeless youth are in ways that attempt to bring wreck to conscious and unconscious stereotypes that may be held by mainstream society. In addition, Soja describes Thirdspaces as being “guided by some form of potentially emancipatory *praxis*, the translation of knowledge into action in a conscious [ . . . ] effort to improve the world in some significant way” (107, 22). The websites examined in this chapter contain a vast amount of information, including mission statements, volunteer applications, statistics on success of program, information on nonprofit status, announcements for upcoming events, workshop descriptions, and poetry by workshop participants. Figures 3 and 4 provide an overview of the various sections included on the website.

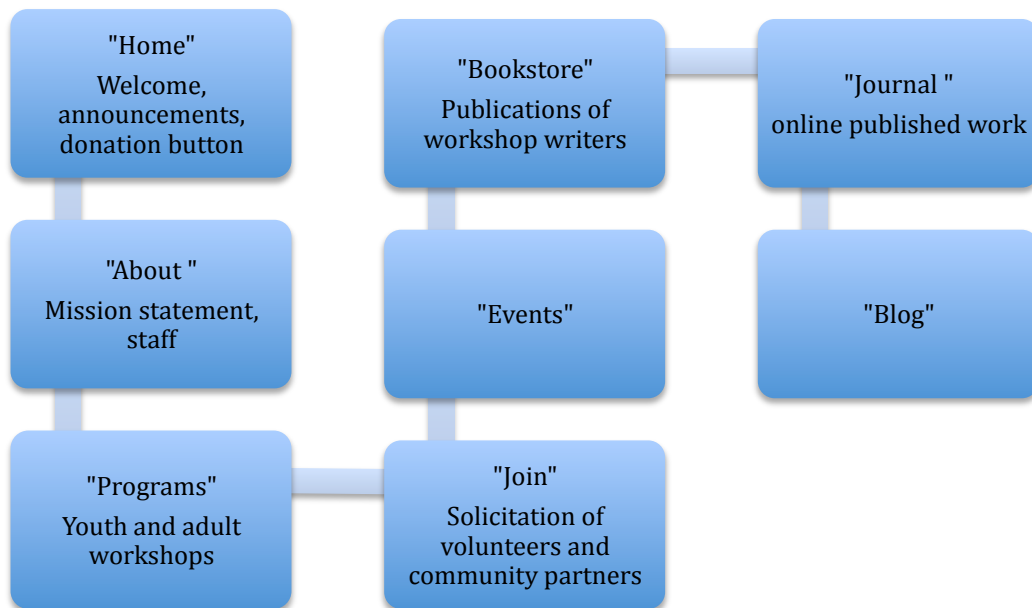


Figure 3. Poets Incorporated Website Features



Figure 4. New Beginnings Website Features

For the purposes of this study, I limit my analysis to the mission statements and “about” pages, volunteer pages, and poetry published on the website. These three website components represent the clearest sense of the organizations and their needs and purposes overall. They provide examples of the ways in which community literacy web spaces can be used to bring wreck to the public sphere and challenge stereotypes and social stigma, and also the ways in which the emancipatory potential of these spaces, as well as the ability to influence significant change on and in the public sphere, is complicated by the tactical nature of online discourse.

## Rhetorical Activism in Cyberspace

Gwendolyn Pough, in her book *Check it While I Wreck it*, offers a critical reexamination of Habermas's concept of the public sphere. She does so by taking up the Hip-Hop notion of "wreck" to demonstrate how African Americans have worked to make space for themselves in the public sphere, from which they have historically been excluded, to confront stereotypes and negative images of Black people in the United States. She explains, "The Hip-Hop concept of wreck sheds new light on the things Blacks have had to do in order to obtain and maintain a presence in the larger public sphere, namely, fight hard and bring attention to their skill and right to be in the public sphere" (17). Combating stereotypes and asserting their rights and individual value are actions in which homeless youth might also engage as they face social stigma and dehumanizing and dismissive attitudes from many members of mainstream society. Pough goes on to say, "Bringing wreck, for Black participants in the public sphere historically, has meant reshaping the public gaze in a such a way as to be recognized as human beings-- as functioning and worthwhile members of society-- and not be shut out of or pushed away from the public sphere" (17). The literacy organizations' work is based upon the belief that homeless youth are "functioning and worthwhile members of society" (Pough 17). They engage in the work they do in order to assert this belief to a wider public and to facilitate the youth's own public assertions of self. Pough writes, "For Habermas, representative publicity . . . is something that is placed before the people, a form of spectatorship that lacks political possibilities because there is no participation." But as she also points out, spectacle functions differently for those who do not already have access to and representation in the public sphere (21). Homeless



youth are certainly a population lacking the power to access and represent themselves in the public sphere. Those who do not have access, such as homeless youth, must work harder to attain it. They must also be more intentional about making an impact on the public sphere when they do gain access.

Pough interrogates wreck as a distinctly rhetorical act that can expand on Habermas's ideas. Just as Pough calls for a reexamination of Habermas, Barbara Warnick, a leading scholar on rhetoric activity and movements in virtual spaces, calls for further investigation of Habermas's conception of the public sphere in the context of web spaces. She argues that while Habermas's public sphere was appropriate for a time period in which newspaper were the primary means of disseminating information and served as a primary tool for promoting capitalism, new technologies, such as the internet, allow for public communication in ways newspapers do not, by encouraging conversation and "public discourse in the forms of social activism and resistance" (3). To Warnick, the internet can be seen as an extension of public sphere productive for rhetorical discursive action. The online spaces of these two literacy organizations serve as spaces of rhetorical action that attempt to bring wreck through intentional language geared towards a specific purpose and audience. Lloyd Bitzer, in his essay "The Rhetorical Situation," writes,

the work of rhetoric is pragmatic; it comes into existence for the sake of something beyond itself; it functions ultimately to produce action or change in the world; it performs some task. In short, rhetoric is a mode of altering reality, not by the direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action. The rhetor alters reality by bringing into existence a discourse of such a character that the audience, in thought and action, is so engaged that it becomes mediator of change. (3-4)

The rhetoric that occurs in online spaces can serve similar functions. Warnick explains, “Discourse on [online] sites often makes explicit or implicit arguments concerning public policy, human welfare, social justice, government corruption, and other matters of social import” (45). The discourse presented on the websites of New Beginnings and Poets Incorporated create rhetorical spaces in which the organizations and writers can go public, calling to light and speak out against prejudice and other social injustices towards homeless youth, bringing wreck to the public sphere.

### **Creating Public Spaces for Wreck**

One of the challenges that homeless individuals face is that of being shut out from the public sphere not just socially, but also physically. The homeless are actively, intentionally and strategically excluded from physical public spaces, creating a need for alternative public spaces such as the New Beginnings and Poets Incorporated websites. The websites foster inclusivity in ways not currently offered for many homeless individuals in physical public spaces. For example, Randall Amster’s 2004 book *Street People and the Contested Realms of Public Space*, details the processes of exclusion and criminalization of the homeless in Tempe, Arizona and other parts of the United States. Amster discusses the increasing anti-homeless legislation designed to criminalize homelessness and the homeless. He provides numerous accounts of homeless individuals being repeatedly arrested for trespassing, urban camping, and panhandling. The city presents its legislation as a “new crusade” to make the city “a safer and more friendly place” (138). To achieve this goal, the “crusade” also includes an “Order Out” condition, which mandates that people arrested for panhandling are “ordered out” of the district (downtown Tempe), literally removing them from particular

physical spaces. These examples provide insight into the discrimination that the websites try to work against. Because of physical exclusion, before they can bring wreck, homeless individuals and their stories must have access to a public outlet where their voices can reach and potentially impact the public sphere. Pamela of Poets Incorporated notes the lack of access in her interview, stating, we “provide opportunities for people who don’t typically get an opportunity to express themselves to larger audiences . . . [we] give those people an outlet and a voice in the world around them.” One of the additional ways in which Soja characterizes Thirdspace is as a space created by and for difference. He points to bell hooks’s extension of Thirdspace and how this leads to “a re-visioned spatiality that creates from difference new sites for struggle and for the construction of interconnected and non-exclusionary communities of resistance” (96). The Internet has been cited as a space of social inclusion (Warschauer; Atkinson et al.). Poets Incorporated and New Beginnings include working toward social inclusion as part of their missions. They extend this mission to their websites by opening up a space to proclaim the value of individual lives and stories and to talk about the challenges faced by the homeless and the other populations they serve. They use wreck to engage in a struggle for inclusivity online and in the city outside of the drop-in centers where they have their workshops. They also attempt to wreck the disparaging attitudes and views toward the homeless in several places within their web spaces.

### *Missions of Wreck*

Marianne Talbot, in *Make Your Mission Statement Work: Identify your Organisation’s Values and Live Them Everyday*, writes,

A mission statement is an explicit statement of the values of an organisation. It generates:

- The principles in accordance with which the organisation acts.
- The standards against which it is willing to be judged. (9)

The values of Poets Incorporated, as articulated in the facilitators' narratives, center on serving marginalized populations by fostering self-expression and asserting the value and humanness of these populations. Part of their need to do this arises from the lack of value and humanness with which the homeless are frequently treated. Ruth Morris and Colleen Heffren's book *Street People Speak* presents homeless individuals' responses to the reactions of those who see them on the streets of Toronto. Many of the participants remarked on the coldness, contempt and lack of social justice they face. A number also discussed the disparaging nature of their encounters, stating, "I get to feeling aggressive with the way people sneer at me, like I was a bug out of the sewer" and "I feel like a piece of garbage when I'm on the street among average people" (104). The prejudice that the homeless face daily provides the "imperfection marked by urgency" which Lloyd Bitzer describes as a characteristic of exigence. Bitzer goes on to say that this imperfection "is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than what it should be" (6). Richard Vatz, in his article "The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation," critiques Bitzer's notion of exigence, claiming that it assumes that events and "situations" exist independently, apart from the ways in which humans and their language construct them. Vatz's argument is compelling, and calls attention to the ways in which the homeless are treated, as in the personal accounts above, as well as the misrepresentations frequently perpetuated in the media. For example, R. Barri

Flowers discusses how homeless and runaway youth are frequently depicted in television and film as unruly, defiant and evasive of authority or simply seeking adventure, and Randall Amster comments on the frequency with which homeless individuals are associated with “images of dirt, filth, decay, disease, disgust, pests, and vermin” (110). These are the situations and stereotypes to which Poets Incorporated, New Beginnings and their writers must bring wreck. They are also the human aspects of the discourse on homelessness that Vatz calls attention to and feels is missing from Bitzer’s definition of exigence. The humanness of the writers who participate in Poets Incorporated and New Beginnings workshops is essential to the mission of the programs, as well as to the purpose of bringing wreck.

Community literacy responds to the exigence created by social injustice. The two programs examined in this study respond to social injustices towards several populations, homeless youth being one of them. Before presenting the voices of the homeless youth, Poets Incorporated and New Beginnings must establish the exigence, the urgency, of their work and the need to provide an outlet for frequently silenced voices. They do this in part through their mission statements. The mission statement for Poets Incorporated states,

We provide free workshops “for people from groups that have been historically deprived of voice in our society. We also publish our workshop participants’ writing and organize public readings of their work. Writing with others in an atmosphere of respect and acceptance, participants discover the value of their own stories, gain confidence and a stronger sense of self and become less isolated from themselves and from society. By creating a community of writers and leaders from diverse backgrounds, we galvanize the voices of the marginalized and create opportunities for all writers to connect with the larger community.

Commonly, acts of bringing wreck are direct, aggressive even. Poets Incorporated takes a more subtle approach with its statement, “Writing with others in an atmosphere of respect and acceptance, participants discover the value of their own stories.” Still assertive, this statement brings wreck to the negative stereotypes, judgments, and social ignorance that assume that the homeless are not worthy of respect and their stories are not important. As made evident from the statements from homeless individuals in Toronto cited above, the homeless are often “deprived of voice in our society”. The Poets Incorporated mission statement comments on this lack of voice as well as the isolation that the homeless often feel from others (Morris and Heffren; Passaro; Murphy and Tobin). The organization asserts its workshops as a way to create “a community of writers and leaders” that can help resolve those feelings of isolation that constitute part of its exigence.

On its “About” page, New Beginnings Poetry Group lists its mission simply as “empower[ing] struggling youth by providing creative programs that facilitate health and hope through expression and transformation”. This statement similarly brings wreck to dehumanizing perceptions of homeless and other high-risk youth populations by asserting that these youth can and should possess power. In addition, the organization promotes hope. Hope, within the context of community literacy work, is tactically oriented, requiring facilitators to “continually seek new ways to listen to the community around them” (Mathieu, *Tactics*, 20). Immediately following, the organization states that, “Every day in America, children face enormous events that people of any age would find difficult to endure. For young people the emotional toil is heavy, and often suffered throughout their lives.” New Beginnings goes on to ask, “What is our obligation

to children who lose family members to violence, alcoholism, or drug addiction? What can we offer those whose lives are fractured by emotional or sexual abuse?" The questions assume that there is an obligation to these children who may be in need of what New Beginnings can offer. They point to the "thing which is other than it should be" that Bitzer identifies as a marker of exigence. New Beginnings answers its questions by explaining how it has been providing these writing workshops and, with hope, listening to youth writers' stories since 2003. These intentionally rhetorical questions suggest that the audiences of potential donors and volunteers, as well as mainstream publics, may also have an obligation to the youth, bringing wreck to dismissive attitudes towards the youth populations. The impact of these questions for most readers will be short-lived. However, if individuals who may be dismissive of or prejudice towards homeless youth read these questions and as a result momentarily consider how they might be obligated to help the youth, then there has been a tactical victory that involves a heightened awareness of the conditions facing homeless and other vulnerable youth populations. New Beginnings's emphasis on the "emotional toil" presses the audience to consider factors that may have led to homelessness, such as abuse, neglect or death of caretakers. This has the potential to disrupt ideas that homeless youth are only homeless because they are seeking adventure or resisting authority.

Alongside these emotional struggles that homeless youth deal with there exists a need to assert the identities and individual experiences of the youth writers. These individual experiences address the prevailing stereotypes of the homeless and draw attention to the ways in which the homeless have been socially disparaged in ways

demonstrated previously as well as the ways in which they have been physically excluded from the public sphere.

Bitzer also writes that, “In any rhetorical situation there will be at least one controlling exigence which functions as the organizing principle: it specifies the audience to be addressed and the change to be effected” (7). In asserting the value of their workshops for the youth writers, the organizations address the exigence behind providing the workshops and the need for others to support them. While several of the website pages include information of interest to potential volunteers, the volunteer pages are the primary spaces in which this audience is addressed for the purpose of seeking support for the organizations and their writers.

#### *The Wreck of Seeking Support*

Poets Incorporated and New Beginnings use their volunteer pages to encourage current and potential volunteers are the addressed to stay or become involved in the literacy organizations’ cause or in the organizations themselves, with more effort extended towards potential volunteers. Both websites include information for potential volunteers that construct stories depicting volunteering as helpful for both the writers and the volunteers themselves. For example, New Beginnings’ volunteer page opens with a “Cool Fact” that “People who regularly help others are significantly happier and less likely to become depressed as they get older.” New Beginnings then provides quotes from Gandhi, Aesop, and the Bible that promote concepts such as service, love, and kindness. These concepts align with New Beginnings’ presentation of self on its “About” page, which presented the organization’s work as part of its “obligation” to the



youth writers. New Beginnings brings another subtle form of wreck to dismissive attitudes towards vulnerable youth populations. The volunteer page also affirms that,

Volunteers and interns are the lifeblood of our organization . . . . Many volunteers, including youth from the workshops, have been with us for years and are now staff members, workshop facilitators, board members and guest artists. As the organization grows, so does our need for people in the community who care about youth and the arts.

New Beginnings provides an implicit call to action to readers and invoke feelings of compassion and support, feelings which extend to how the organization regards both the writers and the volunteers.

Poets Incorporated takes a similar approach in its recruitment of volunteers, stating that becoming a volunteer is “a great way to give back to others and be part of a friendly, positive and creative community” and that the organization is full of “people passionate about the power of creative writing and the idea that everyone has a voice and an important story to tell.” The organization, as it does with its mission statement, asserts the value of their writers’ voices and stories. So while both organizations hope to draw more volunteers, they also make it clear that their work has a purpose, and interested volunteers should have a vested interest in writing and in working, long-term, with the populations that the organizations serve. As in its mission statement, Poets Incorporated’s volunteer page makes efforts to disrupt potentially harmful approaches to the organization’s work based on conscious or unconscious devaluing of the populations it serves. Pamela’s narrative in the previous chapter made it clear that Poets’ Incorporated services are intended to complement the existing programming at Futures to Come. She is conscious of the additional struggles of her writers and the high level of instability they face each day. Given this amount of instability, commitment

from the facilitators at Poets Incorporated, and at New Beginnings as well, is necessary for establishing the trust and confidence necessary for the youth writers to participate in the workshops and then bring wreck by telling their stories publicly.

For the Poets Incorporated website, volunteers and other interested publics serve as the primary audience, as indicated by the majority of the information presented, which includes descriptions of the organization and its workshops and announcements for public readings or volunteer informational sessions. New Beginnings, while providing information for volunteers and potential donors, makes more space within its website for the youth voices and publishes much more of their work. The following section analyzing some of the poems of writers at Next Step drop-in center included in a collection published on the New Beginnings website.

#### *Poetry of Wreck*

As discussed earlier, Pough borrows the concept of wreck from Hip-Hop culture. In her analysis, she points out several aspects of Hip-Hop culture and music that communicate the experiences of United States Blacks and have provided a way for the musicians to interject their voices into the public sphere where they can be heard and challenge stereotypes. Pough also draws connections between Hip-Hop music and poetry, particularly slam poetry, which is a genre that writers with both New Beginnings and Poets Incorporated produce in the workshops and publish online. Pough provides the examples of two female poets, Jessica Care Moore and Sarah Jones, who use slam poetry to critique sexist images of Black women. Slam poetry as a form of storytelling for critiquing dominant social structures, presenting and performing identity, responding to stigma and stereotypes and working for social change is well documented in

scholarship (Somers-Willett; Brawley; Bruce and Davis; Melo; Smith). Other forms of poetry and creative writing have similarly been pointed to and used as a means of self-expression (Wright; Wright and Man; Mazza). Lisa Brawley, in her article “The Virtual Slam: Performance Poetry on the Net,” provides examples of how slam and other forms of poetry began to be published online and connected people across the vast distances that separated them physically. By publishing their work online, through their participation with New Beginnings or Poets Incorporated, the youth writers are entering a public space to which they may otherwise not have access.

One of the challenges for African Americans that Pough discusses is that of invisibility. She writes,

For Black people in the United States specifically, their role has historically been one of invisibility. This invisibility in the eyes of the governing body and the society at large . . . This invisibility is one reason Habermas needs to be reread to fit Black experiences in the U.S. public sphere. The spectacle becomes the key; one has to be seen before one can be heard. (21)

De Certeau argues frequently that tactics must be invisible in order to be effective. If those in power can perceive or notice the tactics, they can then put an end to them. However, just as Habermas can be reread to address minorities and other marginalized populations, de Certeau can and should also be reconsidered for the particular contexts of groups such as homeless youth. For homeless youth, who lack systemic or strategic power, remaining invisible means that their needs, concerns, and voices also remain invisible, or at least unacknowledged. While it is true that some homeless individuals choose to be “invisible,” hiding their homelessness in order to escape social prejudice and seek job opportunities, others are made invisible by public policy and lack of public concern for the homeless and their well-being (Ropers; Harter et al.; Amster; Marcus;

Karabanow and Celent). As Pough claims above, for groups whose actions are already invisible, becoming visible is necessary to create any sort of change. Homeless youth, such as the youth writers who participate in the New Beginnings and Poets Incorporated workshops, have to make themselves visible before they can call attention to their circumstances and assert their value: “Spectacle and cultural representation . . . are the first steps in creating a disruption, the first steps in bringing wreck” (Pough 21). In his book *Stigma: Notes of the Management of Spoiled Identity*, Erving Goffman talks of the “human” aspect of representing identity. He suggests that when “normals,” or those who have not been assigned with a stigma, mistakenly devalue the worth of the stigmatized, the stigmatized should “make an effort at sympathetic re-education of the normal, showing [them], point for point, quietly, and with delicacy, that in spite of appearances the stigmatized individual is, underneath it all, a fully-human being” (116). Since New Beginnings encourages its writers to write about and reflect on their personal experiences, the writers can use their online poetry to tell their stories and bring wreck to the negative images and preconceived notions of homeless individuals that influence their encounters with their audience of the housed public. For example, in one poem by a writer named G, the writer describes himself as,

One who is unique and wise  
one who has been hurt inside.  
One who makes mistakes,  
one who accepts others regardless  
of origin, sex, religion, or race.  
One who is understanding,  
one who is disciplined but undemanding.  
One who is nothing but a human being,  
one who sees him/her has being everything.  
One who helps others combine,  
and last but not least,  
One who provides.

This is who I am.

Homeless individuals frequently experience encounters in which they are treated or looked at as inferior. They report being made to feel like “dirt” and “insects” by others who judge them based on their status as homeless, with no knowledge of who they are or how they came to be homeless (Morris and Heffren; Amster). In response to these dehumanization, G states, quietly but clearly, that he is “a human being.” He has “been hurt inside,” and he “makes mistakes.” Despite this, he can accept others without judgment, something many members of his audience do not do, and provide for others. G’s poem complicates perspectives of the homeless as emotionally and intellectually inferior and challenges his audience to understand him as not simply homeless, but as someone as human as they are.

The New Beginnings writers make use of emotional appeals intended to express the similar and distinctly human emotions that both they and their audience experience. One of the primary functions of Thirdspace, as described by Soja, is to break down binaries (Soja 5; Kostogriz qtd. in Janks 123). By drawing connections between themselves and their audiences, within the Thirdspace of the New Beginnings web space, the writers break down the binary between homeless and housed individuals. B

writes of the guilt he feels about missing his mother’s funeral,

Mama,  
I really tried to be there.  
.....  
At the last moment  
I mustered up the confidence to see you,  
but it was just too late.  
.....  
I did the best I could . . .  
I considering the situation.  
I just wanted to have the last memory of you

be the time when I was a kid,  
and you showed me how to ride a bike,  
or fly a kite,  
and not . . . well you know . . .  
seeing you not moving or talking to me anymore  
.....

You know that you were my best friend.  
You know that even though I wasn't there in body-  
I was there in your heart.

Another writer, *K*, writes in her poem "A Letter to my Parents,"

What is it that a child can do  
to be dismissed, and disowned by both of  
their parents? Was it that I didn't try hard  
enough? Did I not clean good enough?  
Or was it that you just stopped loving me?  
When you left me I felt lost, alone and  
abandoned. I wish I knew what it was that  
I did. I would change, I can change, I will change  
Just to hear you say you love me once more.  
So what is it that a child can possibly do  
to make both of their parents do something  
like this to them? Well I will let you know  
when they let me know.

Both of these writers express the pain of losing a parent, one through death and the other because she is a "throwaway," a youth put out of her home and turned away by her parents (Flowers). The guilt of which *B* writes is an emotion not uncommon to the human experience. Readers of *B*'s poem may be reminded of losses they have experienced or decisions they have regretted. *B*'s attempt to ease this guilt by justifying his actions to his deceased mother indicates his ongoing struggle and grief that identify him as, as Goffman states, "a fully human-being." In *K*'s poem, she questions her parents' actions and motivations in a way that communicates the pain and confusion she feels from having her parents deny her. Her use of pathos is particularly pointed when she changes her audience from her parents throughout the majority of the poem

to a broader audience in the last two lines with her statement, “Well I will let you know / when they let me know.” It is a subtle shift that prompts her audience, if only momentarily, to also consider how and why parents could make such a decision and assumes that her audience will be similarly perplexed and perhaps even sympathetic to K’s experiences. The apparent lack of consideration with which K’s parents turned her away complicates the idea that homeless youth choose to be homeless because they seek adventure or object the authority imposed by their parents (Flowers).

Some of the New Beginnings writers, however, respond less subtly to their audience’s perspectives of them. In her book, Pough includes a chapter entitled “I Bring Wreck to Those Who Disrespect Me Like a Dame.” In this chapter, Pough discusses the “rhetoric of wreck” and how outspokenness has worked to challenge dominant structures and perceptions (75, 77). Some of the New Beginnings writers respond aggressively, openly expressing their frustration and indignation with how they are treated and perceived by others. Amster points out the unreasonableness of these perceptions in his book, questioning,

What is it really about the homeless that so inspires overt antipathy from mainstream society? What is so special about their particular variety of deviance that elicits so vehement and violent a response to their presence? After all, the homeless as a class lack almost all indicia of societal power, posing no viable political, economic, or military threat to the dominant culture. (109)

The New Beginnings writers have the same questions, and use their poetry to respond to the hostility they face. R begins her poem by citing some of the characterizations of her,

She’s a criminal.  
She’s a convict.  
She’s a really bad mom, too.  
.....

And oh shit . . . she's sittin' next to you!

R demonstrates an awareness of the ways in which others view her, which allows her to openly and directly dismiss those misperceptions.

But you know what she's not . . .  
She's not deaf you fool.  
That's right, I'm not . . .  
I hear what you say, but I'm short on words.  
All I can think of is . . .  
take your opinions and shove 'em!  
I am giving an eviction notice to the anger that runs through my veins.  
It runs hate through my heart  
creating barriers for little else to come through.  
I'm reclaiming my being . . .  
my blood, my heart, and my beings.

Lacking strategic power to control images of homeless youth perpetuated by the media, R uses her poem as a tactical maneuver to bring wreck. Her shift from third person to first is also a shift from an emphasis on others' perspectives to an assertion and "reclaiming" of her own identity that denies the stigmatized labels that are produced and assigned by others (Goffman).

J's poem "Judgment of Me?" similarly dismisses labels he feels mistakenly assigned to him. He writes,

Why did that little girl say that I had worms in my head?  
My spirit is not dead.  
How could you look at my black and not look any further-  
that's murder.  
.....  
Because I am young, I am dumb?  
Unwise, inexperienced, not knowing peace.  
As you judge me in your over-extravagant car.

J points out the limitations of perspectives of him based solely on physical characteristics, "How could you look at my black and not look any further-" and "Because I am young, I am dumb?" These are inadequate for assessing his character



and intelligence. He provides a counter-critique of his audience, who rides around in an “over-extravagant car.” This audience participates in a form of spectacle Habermas associates with the privileged and which is intended as a presentation of power. J continues in his poem,

Come along for a ride and you will see  
that there is oh so much more to me.

.....

I am Black and White,  
Country and Hood  
Business and Street  
Poor and Rich  
Beaten by the world  
But still blessed.  
I am not a victim

Again, New Beginnings writers use their poetry to bring wreck and rhetorically enact the Thirdspace function of breaking down binaries. J does so aggressively. According to Pough, aggression is often part of the concept of wreck. Pough notes that Hip-Hop artists are frequently criticized in the media for the explicit manner in which they discuss issues of poverty and violence in their music. She writes,

The fact is, some of the most humanizing and accurate accounts of life in impoverished ghettos come from rap songs and not the network news. Thus rappers bring wreck: they disrupt their way into and make themselves visible in the public sphere with the goal of not only speaking for disenfranchised Black people but also claiming a voice and a living for themselves in a society bereft of opportunity for them. (27)

The poetry of these writers are direct in their treatment of prejudice and injustice. The inaccurate portrayals of the homeless in the media and public policy, in addition to the daily challenges of the homeless youth create an exigence demanding that they speak out for themselves and others, bringing wreck to public perception of the homeless as criminal, lazy, or otherwise deviant.

## The Possibilities and Limits of Wreck

Despite her conviction in the power of language and of bringing wreck, Pough concedes what can be viewed as the tactical nature of their efforts, stating, “Bringing wreck does not always change the world, but it is capable of making small and meaningful differences” (77). The words of these youth are powerful, and they hold meaning to the youth who write them as well as the organizations who support and encourage the youth’s efforts. Still, the poems published online are not likely to have a significant impact on systemic, and strategic, structures that marginalize the homeless youth and produce the negative images to which they respond. Pough claims in the conclusion of her book that, “in order to realize true freedom in the United States we will have to do more than control the images. After all the years of trying, maybe it’s time to realize that we *cannot* control the way we are seen” (218 her emphasis). This admission echoes de Certeau’s statement that “Nothing can be said in a place where nothing more can be done” (190). It invites literacy workers to consider what our work cannot do, for example, resolving widespread homelessness and the social stigma attached to it, in addition to what our work can do, impact the lives of individual writers and of individual witnesses to the writers’ stories.

A second limitation to this rhetorical activity comes from the nature of the Internet and its vastness. The websites for Poets Incorporated and New Beginnings are public spaces for the youth to make use of in ways that may not be possible in physical spaces, however, their voices are only heard if their audience, members of mainstream society and in particular members of their local physical environments, with whom the youth interact in the course of their daily lives, find and visit the websites and read the

poetry. Just like “a newspaper that people might or might not read,” a website is a medium that people can avoid, intentionally or unintentionally (Mathieu, *Tactics*, 33). In the chapter “Writing in the Streets” from *Tactics of Hope*, Mathieu describes “Not Your Mama’s Bus Tour,” a theater project put on by homeless men and women in Chicago. The men and women wrote and performed a play critiquing the strategic powers that kept them disempowered. Local newspapers and news stations covered the tour; each performance of the show sold out, and immediately following each performance audience members asked questions and were genuinely interested in the issues brought to light by the play. And then they were not. Mathieu writes, “After the performances . . . even the most well-intentioned audience members returned to their comfortable homes, while Anaya [one of the homeless performers struggling to pay off student loans] still faced her debts” (46). She continues, “As a tactical project, this tour created flurries of press and moments of energy. But as de Certeau suggests, the effects of tactics are not clear or permanent” (46). The works of Poets Incorporated and New Beginnings writers are similarly limited by their tactical nature. Just as audiences were energized about issues of homelessness after seeing Not Your Mama’s Bus Tour, following a public performance of their work, audiences may be temporarily interested in hearing more stories from these youth and seek out those stories in the online spaces of the literacy organizations. And just like the audiences Mathieu describes, New Beginnings and Poets Incorporated’s audiences may soon lose interest or be distracted by the comfort of their own lives.

Finally, the creation of these virtual spaces, as discussed previously, allows for a public space for the youth writers to inhabit and express themselves. This is necessary

since they are excluded from physical spaces, but need access to the public sphere before they can bring wreck to it. However, the public sphere, as acknowledged by Pough and indicated by Mathieu, is controlled by those in power. So while the youth can access the public sphere, their lack of power requires a tactical approach to wreck, which limits the websites' potential for the "emancipatory praxis" for which Soja calls. Again, the tactical nature of community literacy programs inhibits the production of a genuine Thirdspace. Instead, the websites constitute another *tactical* Thirdspace that allows the literacy organizations and their writers to bring wreck to the public sphere, although in limited ways. The writers can make assertions and redefine themselves, which holds meaning in itself, but they cannot guarantee that their messages are received in the way they intend. New Beginnings and Poets Incorporated can encourage people to volunteer, but the commitment they demand from volunteers may also be discouraging. Thirdspace is characterized by openness and possibility. The websites of these two organizations offer the possibility of self-expression and even a tactical form of social justice, in which individual visitors may be changed or at least be made to reflect on their beliefs about homeless youth. But the possibilities of this tactical social justice are still lacking strategic power. If we view the changes implied or demanded in on the websites as imaginations of a Secondspace, we might also consider the virtual spaces of the websites as alternative forms of Firstspace, built of computer codes, networks, and electronic texts rather than walls and streets and tangible objects. However, we would then be required to consider matters of traditional Firstspace that present themselves when the youth inhabit the physical world of cities streets and cold nights, which occurs when they leave the writing workshops. Any

achievements of Thirdspace are temporary, tactical. They are valuable in the opportunities they offer the youth to find value in their voice, access public spaces and assert themselves in ways that may bring wreck. But they are difficult to sustain in times when mainstream audiences do not visit the websites and engage with the *tactical* Thirdspace they compose.

In this chapter I have provided a dialogic analysis of the online spaces of two community literacy organizations, demonstrating the multiple ways in which the organizations and their writers bring wreck to the public sphere. I have also pointed out the tactical nature of these actions and their limitations for impacting strategic structures and fully achieving Soja's Thirdspace. In the following concluding chapter, I will provide an overview of the arguments presented in this study, including the study's limits as well as ways in which it contributes to the subdiscipline of community literacy studies.

## Chapter 5

### Tactical Wreck: Going Public in Other Physical and Virtual Spaces

“To hope, then, is to look critically at one’s present condition, assess what is missing, and then long for and work for a not-yet reality, a future anticipated. It is grounded in imaginative acts and projects, including art and writing, as vehicles for invoking a better future”

-Paula Mathieu, *Tactics of Hope*

In her 2008 book, *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Local Publics*, Elenore Long investigates the notion of local publics in which ordinary people “go public.” Homeless youth, while ordinary people in that they are not politicians, celebrities, or some other public figure, face extraordinary challenges on a daily basis, circumstances such as sleeping, literally, on the streets, food insecurity, and social prejudice and injustice. These are often the motivators for going public and sharing their stories. It is an act of hope and “invoking a better future” for themselves (Mathieu, *Tactics*,19). *Tactical* Thirdspaces present themselves as useful spaces of hope, and have much in common with local publics. Long defines local publics as located between situated literacy studies and “more abstract theories of public discourse.” Both local publics and *tactical* Thirdspaces are products of community literacy efforts. They are both “located in time and place” and “important sites for [public] rhetorical inquiry” (Long, *Community*, 5). Long goes on to say “more than any other entity, local publics constitute the community of community literacy” (*Community* 5). In *tactical* Thirdspace, a sense of community is similarly present, either through the specific actions of facilitators or in online spaces designed to promote inclusivity. A final connection to draw between local publics and *tactical* Thirdspace is that local publics may be created in opposition to public institutions or alongside public institutions. Long notes that at times, public

institutions are necessary and serve as sponsors for individuals and groups to go public, writing,

Some local publics depend on institutional sponsors and use these institutional affiliations to create “inspired contexts” for literacy learning that operate in locations of stress and scarcity (Willinsky 153). As inspired contexts, these local publics employ democratic practices to nurture participants within their walls and to prepare them for literate social action outside them. (*Community* 65)

The two literacy programs I have examined in this study serve as sponsoring organizations for their writers’ literacy practices and development. The facilitators enter into the spaces of “stress and scarcity” that characterize youth drop-in centers, tactically negotiating the conflict between Firstspace and Secondspace and offering opportunities for the writers to express themselves through writing stories and poems, which the writers can then share through public performances and publication opportunities offered by the organizations. They can also share their work on the organizations’ websites. These websites become sponsored local publics that stand in opposition to broader, more strategic public institutions, such as mass media and public policy, which as I discussed in chapter four, frequently play a large role in perpetuating stereotypes against the homeless. Within their web spaces New Beginnings and Poets Incorporated attempt to represent their writers and organizations in a way that appeals to audiences of potential volunteers as well as interested publics. They constitute *tactical* Thirdspaces in which the writers can go public and bring wreck by engaging in critical literate action. In the remainder of this chapter, I will provide a summary of my findings before suggesting ways in which these findings might be applied to community literacy studies. I end with suggestions for further research that might build on the work done here.

### **What I've Found: Spaces Filled In**

In the first part of this study I used Edward Soja's triple-dialectic of Firstspace, Secondspace, and Thirdspace and Michel de Certeau's *Strategies and Tactics* to provide a spatial reading of the narratives of literacy facilitators and drop-in center directors working within the same physical space to serve homeless youth in different ways and for different purposes. The narratives of the literacy informants reveal the tactical nature of their community literacy work in these spaces, as they contest issues of inadequate physical spaces that serve multiple purposes and attempt to appropriate physical spaces for the purpose of writing. Pamela and Nicole's supportive and "safe" spaces are frequently interrupted by these Firstspace challenges, but they are also at times successfully achieved. The narratives of all four informants call attention to the challenges and successes of specific spatial practices. They also call attention to differing levels of power within space, and the unintended tension the difference in power, and purpose, creates. The varied purposes of the workshops and drop-in centers require the literacy facilitators to use tactics in order to navigate the physical space of, and create mental space within, youth drop-in centers. This tactical navigation allows them to facilitate their workshop in a way that achieves their purposes of empowering and providing an outlet for voice and expression for homeless youth writers in two cities in the United States. Tactical efforts are by definition limited in what they can achieve. The temporary nature of tactical victories means that, as the literacy facilitators navigate and construct space, their successes are incomplete or non-sustained, resulting in a Tactical Thirdspace. A Tactical Thirdspace does not fully break down the binary between Firstspace and Secondspace, and therefore falls short of



Soja's idea and definition of Thirdspace, yet it provides a way for the literacy work to still happen in the drop-in centers, despite the differences in power and purpose within the space.

In the second part of my study I analyzed the online spaces of New Beginnings and Poets Incorporated, pointing out the exigences behind providing the writing workshops, as well as those contributing for the need for online spaces in addition to physical spaces. I pointed out the various ways in which the websites "About," "Volunteer" and "Poetry" pages bring wreck to the public sphere by challenging dehumanizing and dismissive attitudes towards homeless youth and the other populations that New Beginnings and Poets Incorporated serve. I again used Soja's triple-dialectic as an overarching framework to discuss the organizations' and writers' specific rhetorical actions of wreck. I discussed the possibilities of these actions as well as their limitations. Like the real-world spatial efforts of Pamela and Nicole, the community literacy activities that takes place in the online spaces of Poets Incorporated and New Beginnings are tactical in nature, meaning they are restricted in the widespread social change they can create. They are further limited by websites' dependence on others to access them and their content, which leaves the possibility of the discourse not reaching its audience. Because of these factors, the web spaces also constitute a tactical formation of what Soja describes as Thirdspace. In the context of these websites, Tactical Thirdspace is a space of specific, if limited, rhetorical action in which writers and their literacy sponsor advocates, can bring a form of tactical wreck to the public sphere.

## What This Study Tells Us: Spaces of Application

Community literacy work, as stated frequently throughout the previous chapters, works to call light to the significance of traditionally marginalized and silenced voices. Homeless youth are one of the populations with whom literacy workers engage. Others include African-American women (Cushman *Struggle*; Moss), urban youth (Flower; Morrell; Kinloch) low-income women (Bowen), incarcerated writers (Jacobi; Wilson), Native American populations (Cushman “Praxis”; Long “No More”) and many others. Elenore Long points out that despite the different populations with whom community literacy scholars engage, and despite ongoing debates about how to approach, carry out and sustain our work, the common thread across community literacy as a subdiscipline is a vested interest in how these populations “go public” and a vested interest in helping them to do so (*Community* 26). In addition, our interest in helping these groups go public involves entering in the spaces they inhabit or make use of. What I have done in this study is, through the narratives of literacy facilitators and homeless drop-in center directors, shed light on some of the complications that come with entering physical spaces which have pre-established purposes that may not align with our own. I have also shown how, even with these complications, the work can still happen. Even if we might be interrupted, as in the case of Poets Incorporated workshop when Futures does not have proper security, we can pick up the following week and continue to make tactical efforts within space to facilitate our literacy work.

The literacy facilitators examined in this study are part of organizations that do not have institutional ties to colleges and universities. And yet, their narratives speak to the shared public work both they and we as researchers do. And our institutional ties,

with their obligations for teaching and research, require us to take even more fully into account *why* we do our work and *how* we can work and research with groups such as homeless youth in ways that diminish our disruptions of their daily lives and do not interfere with their pursuit of the resources they require. Community Literacy scholars come from institutions of privilege and also institutions of strategic power. Tierney and Hallett, in discussing literacy workers' research with homeless youth, write, "If the aims of qualitative research are to be more than doing research for research's sake, then as a research community we need to develop more robust ways to consider how to protect those with whom we conduct research" (20). One of the ways in which compositionists can better protect those with whom we conduct research is by taking greater consideration of the spatial implications of our work. What happens when we enter a space of scarcity, carrying our privilege and power and frequently our lack of mutual experience with us? What happens when we leave our various campuses and enter into a space where homeless youth go for food and clothing, and we ask them to write? What happens when ask them to set aside, just momentarily, their need to find food and a place to sleep for the night, and we ask them to *write* about those needs, needs which we do not share in the same way. And what happens when we tell them that we will be writing articles and giving presentations over their lives and experiences as they share them with us in our community literacy programs? When we tell them that we will be taking their stories, with their permission, out of this particular space to spaces they do not know or have access to, and sharing those stories with others who do similar work? These are questions that as researchers we should and must ask ourselves before and while we engage in community literacy work if we are to serve writers in the way we

desire. If we are to serve community partners we must also ask questions that remind us to be aware and considerate of the difference in power and purpose between ourselves and our community partners. Some of these questions are the same, such as what to do with our institutional power and privilege. We cannot simply “leave them at the door.” They are part of our identities as academics and as social justice advocates. Frequently they provide us with the ethos necessary to form partnerships. How do we make use of our expertise, without overstepping boundaries? How do we take advantage of our power in public spaces dominated by mainstream discourse, while diminishing our power in the context of community partnerships and within the spaces of their organizations. One way to begin this process is to be tactical not simply in our approach to community literacy work but in our actions and our daily interactions with writers and community partners. Tactics, in their intentionally flexible nature, may be the key to sustaining the ongoing reciprocal partnerships for which community literacy work calls.

The efforts of New Beginnings and Poets Incorporated did not result a Thirdspace in which “Everything comes together” (Soja 57). And yet, the programs continue to offer their services and writers continue to attend the workshops and publish their work online. Poets Incorporated has been offering weekly writing workshops at Futures to Come for five years, since the drop-in center opened in 2008, and New Beginnings has been partnered with Next Step for over nine years. Perhaps the lack of institutional ties contributes to this sustainability. Thomas Deans writes in his article, “Sustainability Deferred: The Conflicting Logics of Career Advancement and Community Engagement,” published in the 2013 collection *Unsustainable: Re-*

*imagining Community Literacy, Public Writing, Service-Learning, and the University*, how his desire, and ultimately his *need* to teach courses and produce scholarship conflicted with his desire to establish ongoing partnerships with the community partners who participated in his service-learning classes. The professional goals, along with personal concerns about providing for and staying with his family, won out. The facilitator informants in this study do not have the obligation to produce scholarship based on their work with the drop-in centers. However, I do not think that their different institutional ties is what creates the opportunity for sustained partnerships. Rather, I think it is in the deliberately flexible, and tactical, nature of their approach to the work. Here I feel the need to comment again on the tactics/strategies binary, which I mentioned briefly in chapter three. Many scholars have called attention to this binary and opened it up for more useful gray areas between the two ways of designing and carrying out community literacy work, several of them in the pages of the *Unsustainable* collection mentioned previously. I argue, too, for a revised notion of the tactics/strategies split. Tactical community literacy work has previously referred to temporary community literacy work: projects with a sort of grassroots beginning that are allowed to end without efforts to continue them in a formalized manner. However, the programs of New Beginnings and Poets Incorporated are tactical, and they are also sustained. Tactical is a mindset with which to perform our regular activities as they involve our work within the spaces of our community partners, much in the way de Certeau writes about in his book. These literacy programs serve as examples of tactical efforts that can meet the strategic goal of sustainability and fosters ongoing relationships with partner organizations. Additionally, the programs encourage literacy workers to look to

additional sites such as online spaces, which many university-affiliated programs already have, as an extension of these efforts and as sites of prolonged rhetorical activity that constitutes a local public or a *tactical* Thirdspace. We should also view virtual spaces as sites that may be less limited by material constraints than the specific rooms and buildings in which we engage in community writing. Pamela, the facilitator informant from Poets Incorporated, stated several times that Poets Incorporated approaches community partnerships intending to “fit” its services in with those already offered by their community partners. If this is necessary for public, nonprofit literacy workers, then certainly it is also necessary for literacy workers who have additional demands to produce and publish research based on their work with community partners and who come, to some degree, attached to the strategic power of our institutions that could displace the power relations within the spaces of our community partners.

### *Tactical Wreck*

Wreck describes the ways in which the literacy organizations and their writers worked to counter stereotypes of and dismissive attitudes towards homeless youth. In this study I have examined wreck in the context of community literacy web spaces. However, we might also imagine wreck in other spaces. Wreck in many ways is about disruption. Perhaps, rather than relying on web spaces, we move community literacy efforts more directly into the streets, in the way Paula Mathieu describes with the Not Your Mama’s Bus Tour, or through other means, to intentionally disrupt other spaces. This is not an invitation to engage in illegal activities, but rather to think more broadly. Photographs or artwork capturing scenes of injustice might be posted to buildings such public libraries or campus buildings: spaces of learning, but also spaces associated with

particular discursive actions and behaviors that could be challenged by assertions of tactical power. Graffiti work offers a more permanent way to mark on the world. I mentioned in chapter four how graffiti writers are often contracted to produce murals. We might consider securing a public space for our writers to literally write on public space and in the public sphere. The restricted space to which the graffiti would be legally confined make the writing tactical in its reach. As community literacy scholars we might make tactical use of the resources available through our various institutions of higher learning to produce short documentaries and show them on campus, or at local art galleries or libraries. Just as we often make efforts to publish either in print or online the work of our writers, we might produce DVDs to hand out or sell featuring writers performing their poetry of wreck. And while our ability to do so could potentially be limited when working with underage populations, for many groups it is possible to gain parental consent, and adults could participate freely. Like newspapers and other print publications, the potential of DVDs is limited. If people do not view them, then the writers have lost that opportunity to bring wreck. But if audiences do view the disks, the presence of an actual person on screen, delivering a thoughtful and intentional poem, may have more effect than a poem published on a website.

Within web spaces, community literacy workers should continue to take advantage of the benefits of websites. If the image of a writer on a TV screen makes it harder to deny that writer's presence, the same can be achieved on a computer screen. For example New Beginnings includes images of its writers on its website. New Beginnings features rotating images of writers on its homepage.



In each image, the viewer's eyes are drawn to the youth's face, and in each case, the presentation of youth faces makes it more difficult for audiences to ignore or dismiss the youth and their struggles. The images bring wreck by "reshaping the public gaze in a such a way as to be recognized as human beings" (Pough17). Other community literacy programs might take a similar approach.

Web videos and blogs also contain immense potential. Blogs and YouTube pages can be created for free, and while there is still no way to ensure that people will read the blog or view the videos we post, blogs gain significant followings and videos go viral each day. Kevin Allocca, the trends manager for YouTube, lists three reasons why videos gain popularity: they are supported by a community of participators, they are unexpected, and they are promoted by a "tastemaker," or someone with a large following, such as celebrity. Community literacy programs have already established communities of participators made up by writers, teachers, facilitators, volunteers, community partners and other scholars. Allocca's criterion of unexpectedness is also easily met if initiatives are designed as opportunities to bring wreck, to disrupt stereotypes and combat social injustice. The tastemaker criterion is perhaps a bit



harder to manage, but perhaps not. If we expand our notions of who tastemakers can be, we might consider ourselves, as highly educated persons affiliated with institutions of power and privilege, as tastemakers capable of generating interest within our local communities as well as in our community of scholars at regional and national conferences or on our own blogs and web pages. Sites other than those designated to us, such as particular rooms in the buildings of our community partners and our web domains, might, through actions of tactical wreck, be turned into additional sites of public Tactical Thirdspace that offer outcomes that are limited, but still valuable.

#### *More on (Tactical) Thirdspace*

In my analysis, I concluded that the efforts of these two literacy programs did not fully achieve Soja's Thirdspace. This may call into question what the concept of Thirdspace can offer to community literacy studies. The use of Thirdspace as a theoretical lens requires literacy teachers and facilitators to pay more attention to space and its policies as they impact our own literacy work and the literacy work of those with whom we engage in our community partnerships. For example, at the site of my own community literacy work, lack of proper material resources such as computers make it difficult to show videos that provide examples of the genre of writing we are working on. The building has a poor wireless connection, so it would not help to bring in my own personal laptop. Writers occasionally arrive late to the workshop because they are finishing up mandatory chores. Several weeks ago, the organization scheduled another group for most of the writers that caused them to miss the first half of the workshop. After a few weeks of this, the organization decided our writing workshop should move to another night, and so we did. Pamela and Nicole experienced similar changes in

location and/or time that required them to be flexible. Since we could not show the videos we wanted, the other facilitators and I brought in DVDs of other performances to show on the residence's television. When writers come in late, we give them a handout and help them catch up so that they can still participate. The double-scheduling experience was more challenging, and the other facilitators and I felt that our literacy program should have been consulted or informed about the change, but partnerships are imperfect, and like the facilitators in this study we had to consider the purpose of the treatment program, which met the more immediate needs of our writers. And we had to be flexible, tactical, with our schedules so that as many writers as possible could attend the workshop.

In many ways adopting the lens of Thirdspace takes up the call put forth by Nedra Reynolds in *Geographies of Writing*. Reynolds holds strong to “the belief that writing should inquire into ‘the relationships between writers, writing, and all places, spaces, sites, and locations’” (Dobrin qtd. in Reynolds 4). According to Reynolds, attention to this relationship brings to light the “everyday realities of material conditions and physical spaces” and allows compositionists to “attend to the politics of space as they intersect with teaching and research practices” (7). However, the concept of Thirdspace, the triple-dialectic is abstract. Nedra Reynolds describes it as “leav[ing] binary concepts, like insider-outsider, floating in the middle or bouncing from one spot to another,” yet even this description, while reinforcing the breaking down of binaries that Thirdspace is intended to accomplish, seems almost unsuitable for a field in which context, situatedness and localness are so important (16). Making use of this framework may seem to require a broader look at community literacy studies. It may

suggest a move away from specific communities and language practices. However, with the use of additional tools, such as de Certeau's *Strategies and Tactics* or Pough's *Wreck*, it is possible to analyze and understand specific community literacy settings and practices.

Additionally, Thirdspace offers community literacy studies, and composition studies more broadly, a unique lens for considering aspects of space, particularly physical space, in ways that may otherwise go unacknowledged or unexamined. For example, Nicole calls attention to the significance of the graffiti in the writing space of her workshop, and Pamela openly acknowledges the difference that physical space had on the environment of her workshop. Looking at these examples through Soja's triple-dialect of space requires us to discuss these features of space as features of space. More importantly, it requires us to consider more specifically the ways in which furniture, artwork, decorations, and other Firstspace matters may impact our writing environments and even writing itself. We can then take steps toward identifying or designing more fruitful and encouraging spaces, or, if this is not possible, minimizing characteristics of space that are unfavorable to our writing and purposes, whatever they may be, and produce a *tactical* Thirdspace suitable for our writing efforts.

*Tactical* Thirdspace is more specific and perhaps more relevant to community literacy. In examining *tactical* Thirdspace we examine how sites of rhetorical activism, of tactical wreck, might be produced or appropriated for our own purposes. As a theory, *tactical* Thirdspace reminds community literacy workers that our work is imperfect, messy even, but still valuable and capable of achieving the purposes we seek to accomplish for ourselves, our programs, and our writers. In the case of the literacy

programs included in this study, *tactical* Thirdspaces allowed for writing workshops in which the youth feel validated, at least in the eyes of the facilitators, themselves, and each other. It allowed for workshops in which the youth could write freely, potentially with hesitation or worry about an intervention, but without fear of judgment or ridicule. Within the websites, *tactical* Thirdspace enabled Poets Incorporated and New Beginnings to both reach out to possible volunteers interested in supporting their programs while also asserting the value of their writers' voices and even provide an opportunity for the youth's poetry to reach wider audiences, potentially even audiences who perpetuate the marginalized status of homeless youth such as policy makers and the local individuals with whom the youth interact. While the websites are limited in their ability to foster widespread social change, they still provided public spaces for the youth to represent themselves to broader audiences. And in those moments when the discourse presented on the websites actually reaches those audiences, there is the potential for a more complete realization of Soja's Thirdspace in which binaries are diminished and imagined spaces of freedom and expression become real. In those moments, the youth writing has the opportunity to reach, in a very real way, its audience and do "emotional damage," as A intended to do in the epigraph to chapter four. *tactical* Thirdspace shows literacy workers that we can reach, if only momentarily, a Thirdspace in which the physical and mental cease to be in conflict with one another, but instead work together for our and our writers' needs. Additionally, it encourages us to maintain our efforts, even if this Thirdspace is disrupted, as in the drop-in centers, or limited in its reach or potential for social justice, as with the websites. It urges us to still go public. It encourages us to still Hope, in the way Paula Mathieu promotes in the epigraph to this

chapter. The imperfection of *tactical* Thirdspace invokes hope that “seeks to move out of abstractions about a better world toward actions devised to change the current world” (Mathieu, *Tactics*, 18).

### **What Next?: Spaces to be Filled**

In this study I have examined the implications of Firstspace for two specific literacy organizations and homeless youth drop-in centers. I have also examined online spaces as additional sites for community literacy efforts. In doing so, I hope to have pointed out the complexities that may come with other, similar, sites of community literacy work and how online spaces can serve as alternatives to or extensions of physical spaces for community literacy purposes. Further work might take up additional physical and virtual spaces, such as those I discuss above, as *tactical* Thirdspaces of activism. Identifying *tactical* Thirdspaces may allow for further consideration of their usefulness and inspire new ways to call attention to social injustice. The research should continue to examine literacy work online, drawing on the work of scholars such as Barbara Warnick and investigating the potential for web spaces as sites of rhetorical action aimed towards fostering collective and individual voices. As part of this work, literacy scholars should help to *create* these spaces by creating blogs or Tumblr accounts for writers.

Research should also examine other youth drop-in centers and homeless shelters, as well as in other spaces in which community literacy scholars work, such as prisons, churches, and community buildings. What material factors impact their ability to work in these spaces? How do scholars *imagine* these spaces as in the context of literacy practices? With what realities are scholars faced upon entering the spaces?

Where do space and power intersect? Who holds power, where, and under what conditions? These are questions that need to be answered and that can be answered by applying a distinctly spatial lens to community literacy work, similar to what Leander, Sheehy and other scholars have done for classroom contexts. As Soja argues in his book *Thirdspace* and in the epigraph to this study, “*There is no unspatialized social reality. There are no aspatial social processes*” (57, his emphasis). Composition as a field has recognized the social as inextricably linked to writing and literacy studies. If Soja’s statement is true, and all social processes are also spatial, then community literacy, and composition work in general, can take up issues of space more directly in efforts to achieve a more thorough understanding of the literacy practices of students, community writers, and even ourselves as writers and researchers.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Consent Form

Consent to Participate in a Research Study  
Colorado State University

TITLE OF STUDY: Locating the Purpose of Community Literacy: A Spatial Examination

Principal Investigator: Tobi Jacobi, Ph.D., Associate Professor, English Department,  
[Tobi.Jacobi@colostate.edu](mailto:Tobi.Jacobi@colostate.edu)

CO-Principal Investigator: Talisha Haltiwanger, Master's student, English Department;  
[talisha.haltiwanger@colostate.edu](mailto:talisha.haltiwanger@colostate.edu)

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH? You are being invited to participate in this study because of your involvement with either a writing program or as an employee of a homeless center for youth.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY? Talisha Haltiwanger will be conducting the study under the guidance of her advisor, Tobi Jacobi, Ph.D.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY? I am interested in learning about writing programs housed in homeless centers for youth and how these programs relate to the purposes of the homeless centers.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST? Participation will be one 45-60 minute telephone interview at a time that is convenient for you. The researchers may wish to re-contact you to follow-up on your comments. The interview will take place in January 2013.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO? You will be asked to participate in one telephone interview to discuss the writing program at the homeless center for youth that you are affiliated with. The interview will last about 45-60 minutes and will be audiotaped with your permission. The interview materials will be kept in a locked office in the English Department on the CSU campus. After the interview, the recording will be transcribed. Whenever possible, I will provide you with a copy of this transcription and invite your changes or additions. This will make your thoughts on the purpose of your program or center as clear as possible.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY? You should not take part in this research if you are not involved with either a writing program or as an employee of a homeless center for youth. You should also not take part in this study if you do not wish for your responses to be recorded.

#### WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

There are no known risks involved in this study. While it is not possible to identify all potential risks when conducting research procedures, I have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

**ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?** While there are no direct benefits to you, I hope to gain more knowledge on the purpose of writing programs and centers for homeless youth so that we can develop better ways to conduct literacy work within these and similar spaces. A secondary benefit to you might be the chance to reflect personally and collectively on the purpose of your program and/or center.

**DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?** Participation in these interviews is voluntary and you may opt out at any point in the research process.

**WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE?** We will keep private all research records that identify you, to the extent allowed by law.

The interview process will not ask you to reveal your identity; instead, we will work together to choose a pseudonym to represent your voice in any publication which might result from the research. As a researcher, I will do my best to make sure your confidentiality is maintained and will not use any information from the interview transcripts which might violate your confidential comments. Further, the interview transcripts will not be shared with anyone affiliated with the writing program or center.

Only the research team will have access to the link between you, your pseudonym, and your data. The only exceptions to this are if we are asked to share the research files for audit purposes with the CSU Institutional Review Board ethics committee, if necessary.

You should know, however, that there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. For example, the law may require us to show your information to a court OR to tell authorities if we believe you have abused a child, or you pose a danger to yourself or someone else.

**WHAT HAPPENS IF I AM INJURED BECAUSE OF THE RESEARCH?** The Colorado Governmental Immunity Act determines and may limit Colorado State University's legal responsibility if an injury happens because of this study. Claims against the University must be filed within 180 days of the injury.

#### WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the investigator, Talisha Haltiwanger at [talisha.haltiwanger@colostate.edu](mailto:talisha.haltiwanger@colostate.edu) or my advisor, Tobi Jacobi at [Tobi.Jacobi@colostate.edu](mailto:Tobi.Jacobi@colostate.edu); 970-491-3344. If you have any questions about your rights

as a volunteer in this research, contact Janell Barker, Human Research Administrator at 970-491-1655. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

#### WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW?

In order to most accurately record your ideas, I would like to tape record our interview. I will ask you as we begin the interview if you allow our conversation to be recorded.

I will review our conversation, and if I have additional questions after our interview, I would like your permission to re-contact you.

Sincerely,

Talisha Haltiwanger  
Co-Principal Investigator  
Investigator  
CSU English Master's Candidate  
[Talisha.Haltiwanger@colostate.edu](mailto:Talisha.Haltiwanger@colostate.edu)

Tobi Jacobi, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor and Principal  
CSU English Department  
[Tobi.Jacobi@colostate.edu](mailto:Tobi.Jacobi@colostate.edu)

This consent form was approved by the CSU Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects in research on (Approval Date).

## Appendix B: Interview Questionnaires

### Center Representative Questionnaire

1. Tell me about your center.
2. How long has the center been in operation?
3. How many youth do you serve on average each week?
4. What is the overall goal or purpose of your center?
5. What services does your center offer to homeless youth?
6. What is your role at the center?
  - a. How long have you been a part of the center?
7. How would you describe the space of your center, physically and/or otherwise?
8. Are there any spatial or material constraints that you deal with at your location?
  - a. How do you work around these constraints?
9. Does the space used for the writing program serve any other purposes?
  - a. What is the primary purpose of the space?
  - b. Has the multiple-use caused any issues or problems?
10. What do you know about the writing program at your site ?
11. Who approved the implementation of the program?
12. Why was it added to the services already in place?
13. What would you say is the purpose of the writing program?
14. How does this purpose relate to the purpose of the organization overall?
15. Have you noticed any benefit that writers receive from participating in the writing program?(why do you think the youth participate in this program? What do you think they get out of it?
16. Have you noticed any challenges or drawbacks to their participation?
17. Has the center had to put any regulations or restrictions on the writing program?
  - a. If so, why are these regulations necessary?
18. Is there anything else you would like to say about your center?

## Workshop Facilitator Questionnaire

1. Tell me about your program
2. When was the program established?
3. What led to its establishment?
4. How often does your program meet?
5. Describe a typical session at your location.
  - a. feedback on writing?
  - b. workshop model/ methods/process?
6. How many writers do you work with typically?
7. What would you say is the purpose or overall goal of your program?
8. What benefits do you think writers receive by participating in your program?
9. Have you noticed any challenges or issues that the youth deal with as a result of participating in your program?
10. What genres of writing are done most often in your program?
11. Who selects the forms of and topics for writing?
12. What is your role with the writing program?
  - a. How long have been involved with this program?
  - b. Why did you get involved with this program?
13. Where does your program meet?
14. Why was this location chosen?
15. How would you describe the space of your writing program, physically and/or otherwise?
16. How would you describe the purpose or goal of the center in which you hold your writing group?
17. How would you say this purpose relates to the purpose of your writing group?
18. Do you think that physical space or location can affect writing?
  - a. Why or why not?
  - b. If so, how have you seen the writing in your program affected by the physical space?
19. Homeless centers may place restrictions on those who reside in it, are there any rules or regulations that you and the writers have to follow?
  - a. If so, how do you work around these restrictions?
20. Is there anything else you want me to know about the program?