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## Geocomposition in Public Rhetoric and Writing Pedagogy

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Geocomposition engages students in writing on the move in order to explore how such writing composes the multiple layers of public places. This article describes a collaborative, location-based composition project designed for students to rhetorically engage a responsive public through locative media: media that work in and through specific sites.

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*Social interaction is enhanced by location awareness, and location awareness is enhanced by social interaction.*

—Eric Gordon and Adriana de Souza e Silva, *Net Locality*

Writing moves (in) the world. As writing moves, it bumps into things, generating effects. Writing shapes and becomes a part of the environment. Writing composes connections: its agonism produces publics. In this way, the writing classroom becomes a public (or what Rosa Eberly calls a *protopublic*) wherein writing moves through space composing connections among people, places, and things.<sup>1</sup> Such a classroom can likewise push students into locales beyond itself where student writing engages others and invites feedback and evaluation.

In this article, I describe and reflect upon a collaborative composition project designed to explore how writing and rhetoric move and how this movement shapes both rhetorical activity and the locations it inhabits. Wo-

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ven throughout the body text are images, boxes containing text from course documents, sections containing student work, and pullouts sharing student reflections. Additionally, typeface shifts are used to signal content generated by students and their audiences. Permission was secured from students to share their work. Some paratextual elements are explicitly addressed, while others are left to produce unexpected results in relation to the body text. I use such design elements and layouts to present the course not as complete but to trace the course as a concatenation of various texts (see Warner).

I was eager to have students work together on a project exploring public rhetoric. In addition to the desire to make such a project collaborative, I wanted the project to physically move students into and through the public places around them in order to explore these places as a function of rhetorical activity and to cultivate such activity in return. How do movement, and writing tied to movement and location, afford, constrain, or otherwise shape the ways we relate to and communicate with one another? How are public places, which are more than inert containers, composed through such rhetorical action? Likewise, how do different media, digital and analog, factor into this rhetorical activity? To investigate these questions, the collaborative project was built around geocaching.<sup>2</sup> As “an outdoor recreational activity,” geocaching participants use Global Positioning System (GPS) devices (e.g., handheld receivers and GPS-enabled smart phones) to “hide and seek containers, called ‘geocaches’ or ‘caches’” (“geocaching”).

For example, early in the semester a group of students found a small geocache in the form of a magnetized container attached to the underside of a metallic trash can. Using a handheld GPS device, they navigated to the geographical coordinates (expressed as N 38° 38.327 W 090° 13.870) listed for the geocache. In addition to these coordinates, students used the geocache’s description, which included a hint to help locate the hidden container. This description was published on the official geocaching mobile application (and website) after having been approved by a volunteer within



Figure 1. Map, within the geocaching mobile application, showing all ten caches placed by the class.

**I eventually decided that not only is public rhetoric rooted in the idea of “community,” but it is also rooted in a certain physicality and location.**

**—Kevin**

the geocaching community. Inside the geocache container was a paper log that students dated and signed. Again using the official geocaching mobile application on their GPS-enabled smart phone or handheld GPS device, they then logged their find electronically, letting other geocachers know what they think about the cache or its location—in this case, adjacent to the Fabulous Fox Theater in midtown Saint Louis. The students also took a picture of the view of the theater from the trash can, which they chose not to post as it gave away the location of the container. “In finding the geocache,” the students collaboratively wrote in a short reflection, “the hunter is rewarded with a wide view of the Fox, helping them to get an idea of the surrounding buildings and streets, which provides another way to observe the environment.” This activity constitutes geocaching; it is likewise part and parcel of what I am calling *geocomposition*.

Geocaching, as my vignette demonstrates, relies on locative media: portable media designed both to function while moving and to work within the confines of physical locations. As media scholars Eric Gordon and Adriana de Souza e Silva write, locative media “are connecting us to the physical world and providing a framework for geographically located social interactions” (61). Their articulation of locative media induces geocaching to resonate with the goals of public rhetoric and writing pedagogy. Writing is itself a locative medium that moves through and works within places. As Bradley Smith has recently written, “Writing in transit speaks to a kind of layered journey of fits and starts, where texts are composed in many places with artifacts from the past carrying through to future drafts or moldering into dust” (223–24). Writing always moves. Making the connection between writing and locative media even stronger, Gordon and de Souza e Silva write, “Mobile phones have become writing utensils for net localities” (53).

### **Public Rhetoric: Course Introduction**

We build our world around the things we love—food, films, books, beer, motors, music—and the people with whom we share them. And we build these worlds by sharing the things we love through all means of communication: we take pictures of our food, write reviews of books online, and endlessly

debate our favorite songs in dorm rooms and at bars. In this course, that is exactly what you will do: write about the stuff you love. There is a catch, of course: you must write about the things you love in ways that will help others to love them as well—no mere diary entries or talk among aficionados, you must produce public texts for unfamiliar audiences who might not yet share your love of cheese, craft beer, Carmen Sandiego, or Death Cab for Cutie. To engage such audiences, you'll need to write persuasively and in media that will move them. Some students might produce podcasts, some might maintain a blog, and still others might film a series of video shorts. The goal of this course is for you to write in public so that your loves might become someone else's loves—so that your world can be shared with others. Sharing the things we love requires that we circulate them. We hope to move them around in public so that they might bump into and affect other people. While individually circulating the things you love, you will likewise work collaboratively to (re)circulate the city of Saint Louis. Plugged into handheld GPS devices, we will locate and lodge geocaches around the city.

A primary goal of geocomposition (or geocomp) is to have students write on the move in order to compose the multiple layers of a public place. As a public rhetoric and writing class, it was crucial that students moved beyond the walls of the classroom and out into the world around it. Furthermore, the collaborative nature of the project compels students to have this experience with others: an individual rarely moves through a public alone, but rather always with others. I saw my students developing an embodied situational awareness of public space while cultivating the rhetorical skills to navigate and negotiate that space with others. Finally, I wanted to tie such awareness and skill to locative media.

In what follows, I describe the basics of geocaching alongside the values and practices I sought to articulate through it. I likewise share and analyze student geocompositions before concluding with a brief reflection.

### **Geocaching in Rhetoric and Composition**

Before digging into the specifics of geocaching, I need to construct a framework that allows geocaching to be understood with/in rhetoric and composition. Brian McNely has shown the rhetorical potential of geocaching, using it to chart the intersections of knowledge work and knowledge play (“Knowledge” 15). Writing on the challenges of communication design, McNely employs geo-

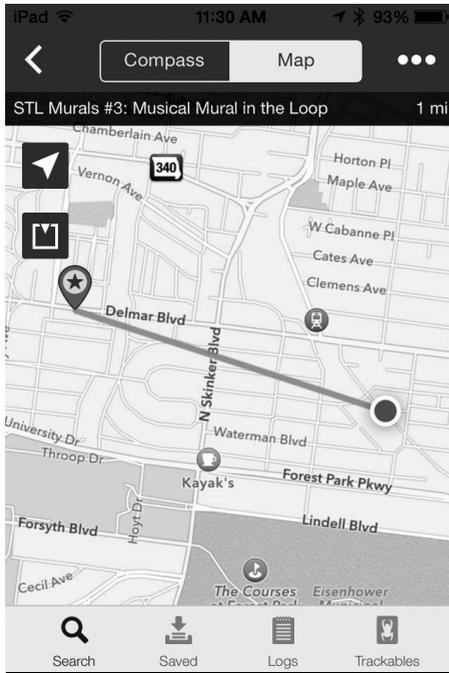


Figure 2. Navigating to a geocache using the map features of the official geocaching mobile application.

geocaching to demonstrate that “understanding complex communication flows” in both work and nonwork environments “is predicated on exploring [. . .] material and network spaces” (35). Given the resonance of my course goals with McNely’s task of understanding communication flows in particular environments, his preference for geocaching as an investigatory mechanism is pedagogically productive. Geocaching becomes an analogous practice through which students can understand how rhetoric and writing operate in particular environments.

Furthermore, and equally valuable, geocaching reorients participants to their environment, which the course treats as an inherently rhetorical activity. In his extended example of geocaching, McNely describes how Genevieve, looking for a geocache located near a culvert adjacent to her office building, learns from the geocache description that “the culvert was built to allow the underground movement of Tates Creek through this part of the city”

(“Knowledge” 38). “More to the point,” McNely continues, “when standing next to the fence it is not drainage that she hears and sees, but the flow of the creek that inspired the name Tates Creek Road, where her bank branch is located” (38–39). The meaning and significance of this location is changed (or better to say, layered) by virtue of the geocache as a networked object articulated discursively (through the written description) and materially (through its physical placement). Geocomp is marked by this imbrication of the discursive and the material.

Attending to how geocaching reorients individuals to nominally mundane locations, McNely implicitly points to the networked rhetoric described by Jeff Rice in *Digital Detroit: Rhetoric and Space in the Age of the Network*, part of which my class read. While Rice did not work with locative media such as GPS devices, his articulation of networks gave the course language with which to describe the practices and values of geocaching. It likewise clued us in to how

geocaching can be understood as rhetorical practice. “The emphasis [on networks,] in other words, is rhetorical as it teaches another perspective regarding how spaces are organized, arranged, and delivered” (Rice 44). Rice positions the pedagogical work of rethinking space as rhetorical. The sensations generated by a network (of, for instance, blogs, newspapers, and Google Maps) “allow a city [. . .] to be mapped in unique ways” (30). Each map as a network remains provisional but nonetheless generative of meaning and other rhetorical effects: a place becomes, Rice argues, “more than one set of data” (58).

My mapping, therefore, is a rhetorical project, for its concerns are with how information affects and produces information. My mappings and navigations of Detroit initially, though, were a combination of the conceptual (impressions left with me) and technological (use of actual online mapping services like Google Maps). (Rice 25–26)

That such networked activities are used to (re)map a city like Rice’s Detroit helps frame geocaching with/in rhetoric and composition.

The relevance of Rice’s work is never clearer than when he advocates for “a broader understanding of place that recognizes how various forces coming together (and, we might assume, breaking apart) lead to a place’s shifting and moving status [. . .] Place moves” (35). This is a generative way to position the locative practices of geocaching. The rhetoric of geocaching becomes clear when read as a networked practice employing digital, locative media. “I am interested in the complex interchanges of data that make up a given spatial relationship,” Rice writes, “and how we might engage with those exchanges for urban planning, rhetorical production, and technological applications” (54). The materiality of geocaching, as McNely suggests, allows these digital networks to be made manifest in the physical environment: the practice of networked rhetorics is fed back into its locations.<sup>3</sup> Rice’s networks resonate with more explicit treatments of locative media outside of rhetoric, to which I briefly turn. Locative media allows for the physical emplacement of networked rhetorics that I am calling geocomp.<sup>4</sup>

In *Net Locality: Why Location Matters in a Networked World*, Gordon and de Souza e Silva write, “Social interaction is enhanced by location awareness, and location awareness is enhanced by social interaction” (59). There’s an appeal to *kairos* in this seemingly tautological assertion. Being plugged into the moment, the situation, improves relations. It is with this implicitly rhetorical

**The geocache, although never found, was successful. I became aware of an ordinary, forgotten sight, and found fascination in it.**

—Erin



Figure 3. A student finds a geocache.

**The permanence of the construction  
of the city to separate classes of  
people mirrors the permanence of  
the attitudes of citizens.**

—Jenna

the physical world with hidden play pieces and provides a premise for which to travel through familiar and unfamiliar spaces” (67). With the implicit and explicit nods to rhetoric, Gordon and de Souza e Silva strengthen the framework I am building to articulate geocaching with/in rhetoric and composition.

This framework finds additional support in Jason Farman’s *Mobile Interface Theory: Embodied Space and Locative Media*. Farman’s work explores the intersections of locative media, embodiment, and spatial-temporal dynamics and the influence these imbricated elements have on the human experience. “The collaboration,” Farman writes, “between the mobile device and GPS satellites positions the

understanding that Gordon and de Souza e Silva explore place-based mobile games such as geocaching as models for how networked technologies make location matter. “Digital networks,” they argue, “are connecting us to the physical world and providing a framework for geographically located social interactions” (61). Gordon and de Souza e Silva use Ian Bogost’s *procedural rhetoric* to frame location-based mobile games such as geocaching. Of procedural rhetoric, they write, “participation is more about the procedure of participating than the content of any particular act of participation” (65). This aptly captures the appeal of geocaching. It is the procedural elements of the game, the pleasure of the hide, the thrill of the hunt, and the joy of the discovery that each generate the greatest impact, and these procedures are directly tied to locations, an awareness of which enhances the social interaction that is geocaching. It is this procedural rhetoric that makes possible the other effects geocaching can produce. These effects inhere across the various media. The logic of geocaching, to borrow from Gordon and de Souza e Silva “augments

the physical world with hidden play pieces and provides a premise for which

to travel through familiar and unfamiliar spaces” (67). With the implicit and explicit nods to rhetoric, Gordon and de Souza e Silva strengthen the framework I am building to articulate geocaching with/in rhetoric and composition.

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human body within space, yet it is the experience of the space coupled with a reading of location that imparts meaning to the space” (49). Our experience of place is generated at the intersection of bodies, media, and locations, which all influence one another. Indeed, Farman is adamant that locations are not simply containers for action but are themselves generated through action (44, 85–86). Locative media augments the places that come to be (re)constituted by the experiences made possible through that media. “Movement across the augmented landscape,” Farman writes, “is how gamers are able to successfully locate geocaches and log their visits” (83). The appeal of geocaching, Farman argues, is the “site-specificity” of the game as well as its hybrid status. Farman here cites Mary Flanagan, who argues, “the experience of play is intrinsically tied to *location and culture*” (3, emphasis added). Farman, alongside Gordon and de Souza e Silva, emphasizes the augmentation (and formation) of both place and its meanings through social interactions mediated by networked, digital technologies. McNely elsewhere reminds us that this is equally true for writing generally: “The significance of writing and rhetorics in these locations is palpable, for they embody [. . .] tangible practices for understanding intangible spirituality” (“Writing” 246). Geocaching works both because it is in place and because those places can be imbued with cultural significance. This work, folded into Rice’s and McNely’s (and a host of other resonant scholars in rhetoric: see Haas; McNely and Rivers; Pigg; Reynolds; Swartz), makes articulating geocaching with/in the practice of rhetoric and composition persuasive and pedagogically productive.

### **Geocache Project Description**

One chief virtue of geocaching is how it reimagines places from state parks to densely populated cities. Most days we move through cities without giving its mundane features a second thought. However, it is these many “invisible” features that give shape to city life: road medians, intersections, small parks and other green spaces, barriers such as fences and walls, bus shelters, and even recycling bins. Geocaching connects individuals with these mundane yet meaningful places. Geocachers must navigate everyday locations that become extraordinary by virtue of the hidden cache. Public places that are generally invisible suddenly become visible. Visibility, however, isn’t the chief goal, nor is it even the best metaphor. Geocaching makes places meaningful. The goal of geocaching is movement through and among the people, places, and things that together shaped collective, public life.

We will practice geocaching two ways. Early in the semester, we will search for caches in the areas around campus. We will log these finds and document them using video, still photography, and written text. Together, we will use the course Tumblr site to both track our geocaching work and reflect on how that activity reorients us to the city. Following these searches, we will create and hide geocaches of our own to shape how other geocachers will move through and experience the city. How can we practice geocaching as a form of public rhetoric that persuades people to encounter the city in a new way?

### **Geocomposition**

Geocaching is a tightly knit, volunteer-run community. Placing geocaches is no simple matter; for a cache to be recognized by the community on its official website ([www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com)), through which geocachers learn about and locate caches, it must be approved by volunteers who review the cache in terms of a set of rules and guidelines. Publishing the geocache itself already engages a public built explicitly around dialogue and negotiation. Community member Banjo-Boy includes the following boilerplate in his responses to geocaches submitted for review:

Most problems can be solved with good communication so reply back to the reviewer and we will do everything possible within the guidelines to get your cache published. It is best to give me as much information as possible instead of saying nothing at all. This will speed up the process and we can get your cache published.

Publishing a geocache, however, is also a function of already being a participant in geocaching: one does not simply show up and start hiding containers under park benches.

The first task of students, then, was to familiarize themselves with the principles and practices of the geocaching community who would become their audience and, eventually, a public of which they were a part. To prime the pump, as it were, students read two texts exploring urban places. These accessible and compelling texts proved an excellent way to introduce the principles I wanted to articulate through geocaching. The first was *War of Streets and Houses* by graphic novelist Sophie Yanow. This autobiographical work uses the 2012 student protests in Montreal to explore the history and implications of urban design: mainly, how public places are designed and built to constrain and

afford certain kinds of political activity and movement. For instance, Yanow discusses the Paris of Georges-Eugène Haussmann and the Algerian urban warfare tactics of Marshall Bugeaud.<sup>5</sup>

Reading Yanow, we discussed the material rootedness and consequences of particular values, particular arguments. Rhetoric as *persuasion*—as movement—is manifest in the grammar and usage of the city: it is embedded in roundabouts, red lights, cul-de-sacs, zoning regulations, and speed limits. Questions of where people go, how, and why become rhetorical. The practice of geocaching becomes a way of thinking through that. Yanow’s work oriented students to spatial relations, but also specifically oriented students to the concrete political, ethical, and moral implications of such grounded rhetorics of place. Rhetoric is in place and place matters.

In a less explicitly political, but no less rhetorical fashion, illustrator Wendy MacNaughton’s *Meanwhile in San Francisco* provided another way to address rhetoric tied to particular urban environments. Whereas Yanow looks at the arrangement of place, MacNaughton looks at the arrangement of human and nonhuman things in a place. Moving an audience in a location, how do we get them to attend and to what?

This book is by no means intended as a comprehensive portrayal of San Francisco. It’s only a small handful of the huge number of communities to be found in The City, on every steep street, behind every gated door, in every grassy park. These are the stories of San Francisco daily life. This is what happens in *the meanwhile*. (MacNaughton 7, emphasis added)

I was particularly invested in employing the logic of the “meanwhile” to describe our geocache locations. The “meanwhile” became important to me as it suggests that much of what is valuable and vibrant in a

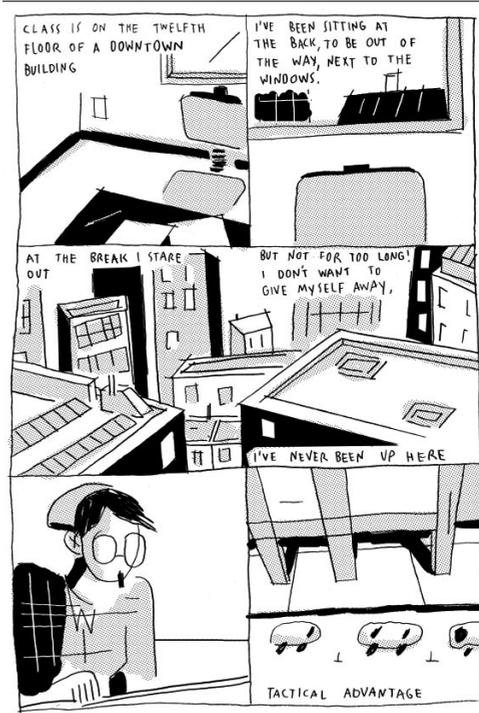
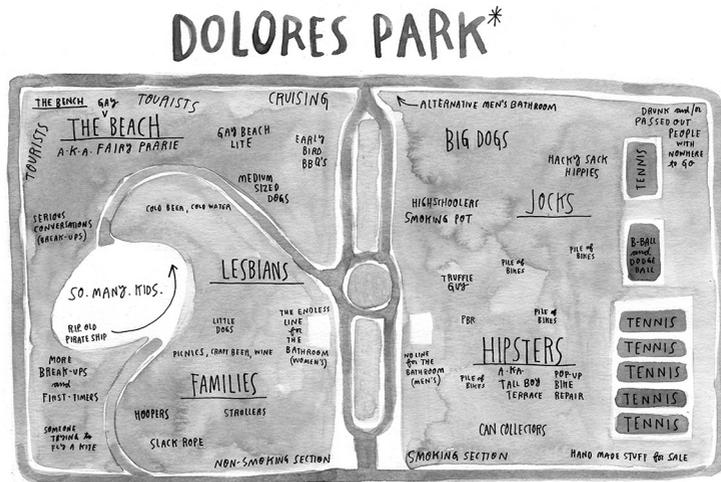


Figure 4. Panels from *War of Streets and Houses* by Sophie Yanow. This graphic novel attends to the politics and, therefore, the rhetoric of place. How we recognize and adapt to space is a function of discursive and nondiscursive persuasion. Reprinted with permission.

city is the stuff that happens under our feet or in our periphery. The mundane elements of a public are important but often overlooked (Rivers and Weber), and geocaching is frequently about attending to the unseen (McNely, “Knowledge Work”). We used *Meanwhile in San Francisco* to think through how rhetorical acts such as an illustrated exploration of a city or a geocache placed in a park compose a public.

Before the students placed geocaches themselves, they searched for geocaches around campus. I wanted students to understand the logistics and techniques of searching (using handheld GPS devices<sup>6</sup>) as well as how participants interact with caches: documenting, photographing, describing, and evaluating. Two groups successfully located traditional geocaches while another was unsuccessful with a puzzle-based one. The first time out, I had my students just find the caches and document that work. Later, I had them return to see what else a geocache might do beyond being an item to locate or a puzzle to solve. In a separate exercise, then, I asked the students to revisit the spot of the geocache:



\* PLEASE NOTE THIS IS AN APPROXIMATE, EVER EVOLVING MAP. IT'S HIGHLY LIKELY YOUR DOLORES PARK MAP MAY LOOK DIFFERENT. THAT'S COOL. FEEL FREE TO USE A PEN AND ALTER IT AS YOU SEE FIT. IN SF, WE'RE ALL RIGHT.

Figure 5. Panel from *Meanwhile in San Francisco* by Wendy MacNaughton. The panel is a map of Dolores Park with different populations mapped onto specific locations within the park. Note that MacNaughton acknowledges the provisional status of her map. Reprinted with permission.

Return to the site of your find. As a team, take five photographs (or five 10-second videos) from that site. Return to the classroom. As a group, select one of those images or videos and collaboratively compose an exactly 200-word narrative about it.

Geocaches reorient participants to place. One group of students was particularly eloquent in making the geocache say something compelling about the place it inhabited. The influence of Yanow and MacNaughton on their geocomp narrative is unmistakable. *War of Streets and Houses* provided students with a vocabulary for analyzing the effects of a median, which they were attending to as a result of a geocache placed there. The narrative they collaboratively composed reflects their awareness of themselves as bodies out of place as well as the rhetorical significance (the *meanwhile*) generated by the geocache and their interaction with it. As Farman writes, “By utilizing technologies that draw on a person’s location through GPS, a user is understood as being situated in relationship to technology and thus experiences the world as collaboration between digital and material interfaces” (44).

### Median

Medians were installed as safety measures—mainly as a measure to prevent head-on collisions between opposing lanes of traffic—attempting to maintain established channels of road traffic. Medians create and are spaces in the middle of the road. These spaces, however, are not themselves designed to be accessible (or particularly desirable) by any notion of traffic—pedestrian, automobile, or otherwise. Here, a group of young scholar-warriors intervene and re-create the space, charting a new understanding of the landscape within an already charted (and often neglected) space. Whereas the original recipe of the median called for safety via exclusion, these whipper-snappers whipped up danger via inclusion. To access the median, these potential martyrs of rhetoric were forced to interact with—and as a result become part of—traffic in ways discouraged by the design. In realizing what the lay of the land harbors beneath the surface, they are reminded of an excerpt of Mark Twain’s *Life on the Mississippi* as they experience life on Forest Park Parkway:

No, the romance and the beauty were all gone from the river.  
All the value any feature of it had for me now was the amount  
of usefulness it could furnish toward compassing the safe piloting  
of a steamboat . . . and doesn’t he sometimes wonder whether he has  
gained most or lost most by learning his trade?



Figure 6. Students find a geocache. This image was shared to the course Tumblr along with a short narrative simply titled "Median."

After familiarizing themselves with geocaching, students selected, pitched, and voted on themes around which to create a series of geocaches. While I originally planned on the entire class working on one project, there were two equally popular projects: weird, inexplicable statues and murals/graffiti, both of which the class saw as fitting together under the larger umbrella of public art. With themes in hands, students went scouting, using class meetings, emails, and text messaging to coordinate their efforts. Once the locations were selected, students researched the murals or statues and determined the best places to hide caches within the rules and guidelines: for instance, no caches can be placed on private property without permission, nor can they promote a business. Attention to rhetoric thus began early, being built into the game procedurally.

### Geocache Descriptions

Here are a few things I expect your descriptions to do. Remember, you aren't simply raising awareness; you want this geocache to move an audience, and a description is part of how you do this.

- Give participants a sense of what they will need in order to locate and interact with the geocache. Also, provide a sense of the location, i.e., "Cache located in secluded park. Bring a pen and flashlight," or "Cache located at a busy intersection: approach with caution and stealth."
- Instruct the geocachers on how to engage the art/mural/sculpture in front of them. What are its unique features? Does it have a history? Does it have a stated purpose? In short, help them make sense of what they are looking at.
- What else should a participant attend to? What is the environmental context of the art/mural/sculpture? You want them to take a moment and experience the city around them.

Use the description to create a portal through which fellow geocachers can reorient to the places around them.

My instructions for composing geocache descriptions reflect several elements of the course. First, they were a function of student experiences at that point in the semester. I had been impressed with their geocaching narratives, and my instructions build from their responses to the geocaches they found. Second, the advice resonates with the themes they chose for their geocaches and what their caches are attending to. Third, the guidelines reflect common geocaching practices. Finally, my instructions encourage students to compose descriptions that expressed their goals for the project: tell participants what to attend to, what to value, and why. In this way, geocache descriptions operate like folksonomy, which Thomas Vander Wal describes in the following way:

Folksonomy is created from the act of tagging by the person consuming the information[. . .] People are not so much categorizing, as providing a means to connect items (placing hooks) to provide their meaning in their own understanding. (n. pag.)

Folksonomy is crucial to Jeff Rice's practice of rhetorical networks. Indeed, it is Rice's employment of folksonomy that makes his work an excellent framework

for geocaching. Rice writes of his own networked practices, “I also assembled communal and proximal places of meaning, most of which built up like a never ending list of moments” (47). Folksonomy is at work in Figure 5, a page from MacNaughton’s *Meanwhile in San Francisco*, which unofficially tags Dolores Park. The labels on the map generate for the location. The labels are based on MacNaughton’s own experiences of the park, as she notes. In geocaching, folksonomy happens within places that are digitally as well as physically tagged. McNely’s description of the geocaching mobile application and the web-based version likewise captures geocaching’s folksomic virtues:

[T]he geocaching application itself carries a wealth of information. By scrutinizing the cache description and name, by viewing the logs of previous geocachers, and by viewing hints that are sometimes available, a stumped geocacher can often separate individual trees from the forest. (“Knowledge” 36)

Again, I introduced rhetoric and writing as a practice of moving people. Geocaching intensifies this practice and makes salient what scholars in rhetoric treat as vital to rhetorical interaction: community expectations and audience requirements; media and mediation; lived, embodied experience; the importance of temporal and spatial elements; and the ethical, responsive considerations



Figure 7. Students use Google Maps to scout possible hiding spots for a geocache. Here is another instrument of digital media shaping the composing process.

that exist across all of these. Composing a geocache confronts students with these facets of rhetoric. As I describe above, many of the experiences I wanted for my students are built into geocaching. The official requirements and guidelines for hiding containers gestures toward the rhetorical practices of doing so:

At times a geocache may meet the requirements for publication on the site but the reviewers, as experienced geocachers, may see additional concerns not listed in these guidelines that you as a geocache placer may not have noticed. The reviewer may bring these additional concerns to your attention and offer suggestions so that the geocache can be published. (“Geocache ”)

What follows is an exchange between students and the community volunteers who approve and publish their geocaches. The exchange focuses on the composition of the description. The volunteers do not simply enforce the rules; they work through the composition of the piece. This exchange shows students at work within the community of geocachers and exemplifies geocomp.<sup>7</sup>

**Hidden Artwork of Saint Louis #4: Mex-Rex (GC5GW78): Original Description**

The mission of this series is to expose geocachers to hidden artwork that are often overlooked and unknown by the general St. Louis population. Meet the Mex-Rex Dinos! Perching on of the roof of Diablito’s Cantana, they enjoy drinking their perpetual alcoholic beverage. Whether it is beer or tequila is unknown. Born in December 2011 (when Iggy’s evolved into Diablitos), these dinos have matured quickly (hopefully!) to the legal drinking age. As the name “Diablitos” indicates, perhaps these dinos are “little devils.” Who knows, they might not be legal age yet. No matter what, their sombreros demonstrate their endorsement of this Mexican/Tex-Mex restaurant. As many people walk in, past, or out of the restaurant, very few actually give a second thought to these dinos. They don’t draw a lot of attention because of their rusted color and location, yet they add something unique to the hidden artwork of Saint Louis.

**Hidden Artwork of Saint Louis #4: Mex-Rex (GC5GW78) has a new Log:**

Logged by: Banjo-Boy

Log Type: Post Reviewer Note

Date: 11/22/2014

Location: Missouri, United States

Type: Traditional Cache

*Log: Most problems can be solved with good communication so reply back to the reviewer and we will do everything possible within the guidelines to get your cache published. It is best to give me as much information as possible instead of saying nothing at all. This will speed up the process and we can get your cache published.*

Greetings fellow geocacher,  
Before I can publish this cache all mention of any business, or any reference of any type of interaction with that establishment will have to be removed from the cache description. Basically, this whole paragraph needs to be removed: [red] Perching on of the roof of Diablito's Cantina, they enjoy drinking their perpetual alcoholic beverage. Whether it is beer or tequila is unknown. Born in December 2011 (when Iggy's evolved into Diablitos), these dinos have matured quickly (hopefully!) to the legal drinking age. As the name "Diablitos" indicates, perhaps these dinos are "little devils." Who knows, they might not be legal age yet. No matter what, their sombreros demonstrate their endorsement of this Mexican/Tex-Mex restaurant[/red].

Please rewrite the paragraph above in red or just remove it and I hope you understand this request.

"Commercial Caches / Caches that Solicit" (Please see: <http://tinyurl.com/hl6q6>)

"A commercial cache is a geocache listing or geocache which is perceived by Groundspeak, Groundspeak's employees, or the Volunteer Geocache Reviewers as having been submitted to geocaching.com with the principal or substantial intent of soliciting customers or generating commercial gain. The geocache is presumed to be commercial if the finder is required to go inside a business, interact with employees, and/or purchase a product or service, or if the cache listing has overtones of advertising, marketing, or promotion."

Additionally, links to businesses, commercial advertisers, charities, political or social agendas, or the inclusion of their associated logos are not permitted on cache descriptions without prior permission from Groundspeak.

Thanks for your understanding,  
Banjo-Boy

**Hidden Artwork of Saint Louis #4: Mex-Rex (GC5GW78) has a new Log:**

Logged by: \*gln

Log Type: Post Reviewer Note

Date: 11/22/2014

Location: Missouri, United States

Type: Traditional Cache

Log: Good Evening,

It looks like we have caches 1 and 3 now, also 4 and 5 but 2 is still not here. This cache also mentions Diablito's Cantina a couple of times. You can mention "Meet the Mex-Rex Dinos! Perching on of the roof of the Cantina". People will know which one. Also, "(when Iggy's evolved into Diablitos)," could easily be, "(when Iggy's restaurant changed its name)".

"No matter what, their sombreros demonstrate their endorsement of this Mexican/Tex-Mex restaurant." We don't endorse any business. We could say something like, "No matter what, their sombreros demonstrate their liking of Mexican/Tex-Mex style"

I hope that removing "Diabiltos" does not change the objective of bringing people to this artwork.

Thanks,  
Glenn

**Hidden Artwork of Saint Louis #4: Mex-Rex (GC5GW78) has a new Log:**

Logged by: slupubrheth

Log Type: Post Reviewer Note

Date: 11/24/2014

Location: Missouri, United States

Type: Traditional Cache

Log: I removed all specific instances of the actual business. Also, #2 of the series will be posted either today or tomorrow. This is a group project and we are waiting on one person to finish his section. Thanks.

This feedback resulted in the following geocache description:

**Hidden Artwork of Saint Louis #4: Mex-Rex**

*This is a quick park-and-grab cache by SLU's Campus.*

The mission of this series is to expose geocachers to hidden artworks that are often overlooked and unknown by the general Saint Louis population.

**Geocache Description**

Meet the Mex-Rex Dinos! Perching on of the roof of the nearby cantina, they enjoy drinking their perpetually alcoholic beverages. Whether it is beer or tequila is unknown. Born in December 2011 (when Iggy's changed its name), these dinos have matured quickly (hopefully!) to the legal drinking age. Who knows, they might not be of legal age yet. No matter what, their sombreros demonstrate their preference for Tex/Mex style cuisine. As many people walk in, past, or out of the area, very few actually give a second thought to these dinos. They don't draw a lot of attention because of their rusted color and location, yet they add something unique to Saint Louis.

What comes next is a selection of some of the stronger geocache descriptions composed by students. I selected them because of their quality and fitness with the goals of the project, and because they represent the diversity of geocache descriptions that emerged. There is likewise a cleverness and depth to the descriptions that reflects the spirit of the geocaching series of which they are a part. These compositions paint compelling pictures of the places where the geocache and its object are located.

**STL Murals #2: Sheraton Hotel**

This geocache is the first installment of caches strategically hidden throughout the city of Saint Louis. The STL Murals series is dedicated to encouraging geocachers to explore the diverse works of street art that creatively interact with and transform city spaces.

This cache is easy to get to with Saint Louis's multiple modes of transportation. This mural's adjacent location to the Scottrade Center, Busch Stadium, the historic Peabody Opera House and a major downtown MetroLink station capitalizes on the Saint Louis downtown. Please be aware of the heavy traffic at the intersection, and bring a flashlight and writing utensil for the cache. To get the best look at this mural, stand close to the MetroLink's Civic Center platform.

**Geocache Description**

Constructed in 1929 by J.C. Penney, the Edison Brothers Warehouse has seen its share of victory and defeat. From its roots as a shoe store in Atlanta in 1922, Edison is a historic retail company known for its menswear chains such as Bakers/Leeds and large space entertainment centers including Dave & Busters. In the early 20th century, the company became a huge success, raking in a total of \$3 million in sales from its 17 stores in the south, and soon its headquarters moved to Saint Louis, MO.

The mural on this building was commissioned in 1984 to be painted by Richard Haas, an artist well known for his *trompe l'oeil*, which in French means "trick of the eye," a form of art used to make two dimensional objects stand out in three dimensions. The mural in Saint Louis covers three sides of the building.

All themes shown in Richard Haas' piece depict some aspect of the 1904 World's Fair in Saint Louis. The south elevation of the building (the biggest section of the mural) features the image of King Louis IX, based on the statue now located in front of the Saint Louis Art Museum. The late 1970s and early 1980s witnessed a brief trend of architectural mural painting. Critics hailed such building decorations as an antidote to the problems modern architecture had brought to cities. According to the general opinion at that time, modern buildings had become dull and predictable, unlike the whimsical character of Haas's murals. The mural in Saint Louis covers three sides of the building. The fourth side of the building is more or less obscured by surrounding structures.

What is unique in the Sheraton Hotel description is the attention to historical context, which gives depth to a mural often seen as simply superficial.

**Hidden Artwork of Saint Louis #5: Lounging Woman**

*A quick park and grab cache in Saint Louis's Midtown area.*

The mission of this series is to expose geocachers to hidden artworks that are often overlooked and unknown by the general Saint Louis population.

**Geocache Description**

The last piece of art in this series is somewhat controversial. A plaque at the site indicates that the statue was created by the artist Michael Atkinson and named Emmy, but other sources indicate that this is not the case. In fact, most research

points to the artist being David L. Phelps and the name of the statue as Nancy. Nancy was originally located on SLU's campus, but was removed shortly after installation due to Nancy's 'risque,' topless lounging pose. Many were divided on the issue: parents and students alike lodged complaints with the university, claiming it was inappropriate and unnecessary. On the other hand, some were concerned that removing it would be a sign of too much censorship.

According to one source, the statue was moved shortly before the Fall semester of 2001. Originally, it was to be added to a sculpture park owned by Saint Louis University in Louisiana, MO; however, the reason it was not is unknown. Today, Nancy (or Emmy) can be found in her new home, removed from campus, soaking up rays just a short distance from a frozen yogurt shop.

*To any parents geocaching with their children: keep in mind the woman in the statue is not wearing clothes.*

Like the Sheraton Hotel mural description, this one attends to history. However, given that the series of which it is a part tags inexplicable or otherwise unique sculptures, the description highlights the controversies surrounding the statue. This is a more provocative history.

#### **STL Murals #4: Groovin' through Grove**

*UPDATE: the coordinates for the final geocache have been placed in the first container.*

*USE STEALTH: these geocaches are located in a public area.*

This geocache is the fourth installment of caches strategically hidden throughout the city of Saint Louis. The STL Murals series is dedicated to encouraging geocachers to explore the diverse works of street art that creatively interact with and transform city spaces.

#### **Geocache Description**

Where can you find a rocket-riding cowgirl, a dragon, and a crouching naked lady? How about window washers, a St. Louis Wall-of-Fame, and jazz musicians? On the walls of buildings in The Grove, of course.

Between Vandeventer and Kingshighway, this section of Manchester is home to a yet another cultural treasure in Saint Louis. Restaurants, bars, and small businesses fill up The Grove and contribute to its welcoming atmosphere. Particularly unique is the abundance of murals commissioned by The Grove businesses and produced by Saint Louis artist Grace McCammond. While

Grace McCammond played the lead on these projects, the murals are the result of community-wide effort and engagement. With each mural, McCammond works with the community to both generate and execute the design: after each design is finalized on paper, McCammond outlines the mural on a wall space in The Grove, allowing members of the community to further participate in the mural through a “paint by numbers” approach. Individuals and community organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club of Adams Park engage in the painting process and, as a result, also engage with the artist and with their community.

Keep your eyes peeled—the two containers are each located in the general vicinity of a mural, but you may have to cross the street (also, squatting and/or bending may be necessary). As the containers are located on opposite ends of the mural district, you should be prepared to walk a number of blocks. The first container is located near the intersection of Manchester and Newstead, the coordinates for which are located above as the main cache. Inside the container you will find the coordinates for the second container.

If you’re conducting a search at night, you might want to bring along a flashlight or a similar source of light. Oh, and don’t forget your pens of course! If you want to leave your mark on the cache, you’ll be needing a writing utensil.

The above description is for a multicache—a type of geocache wherein locating one cache leads to the discovery of one or more additional caches. This multicache setup allows for a longer, more sustained engagement with a location. The description itself spends time with both the mural artist and the setting for her art. It helps geocachers move through the neighborhood that the murals take part in composing.

After the descriptions are composed, or more commonly, as the descriptions were being composed, students began to construct the containers they would hide. This work included scouting places to hide them, which in turn suggested what kind of cache to construct: there is wide variety of geocache container types (Figure 8). Here, my multimodal approach to writing is indebted to the work of Jody Shipka. Worrying that multimedia writing, and composition more so, generally has become unquestionably linked to “computer-based, digitized, screen-mediated texts” (7–8), Shipka argues that teachers must “create instead opportunities for students to examine the highly distributed and fundamentally multimodal aspects of all communicative practice” (84). In this vein, Shipka describes students working with found materials such as wood

or evocative, personal objects such as ballet slippers. Working across these as media, along with other screen-based compositions, increases the inventive potential we wish to cultivate in writing classrooms.

Read in the context of Shipka, the construction of geocache containers entails compositional considerations. For instance, the selection of materials (container sizes, electrical tape, and zip ties) to camouflage or otherwise conceal the cache and to fasten or secure the cache in place reflects a situational awareness of geocaching conventions (standard container sizes), audience expectations (typical geocache types), physical context (urban or rural, heavily trafficked or sparsely populated), and the goals of the series of which the cache is a component (renewed attention to unique urban features). The value of geocomp in the writing classroom, then, is the range of compositions it generates.

Another valuable feature of geocaching is that feedback and evaluation happen in concrete places and at specific times; they are never general. All logs are timed-stamped and tied to the GPS coordinates of the geocache. We know



Figure 8. Common geocaching container sizes. Given the largely urban setting of our caches, we went with all micro containers.

when and where the feedback was composed: what the weather was like and what time of day it was. All of these things bear on the quality of the participant's experience. Should we include in the description that geocachers will need to bring a flashlight if they go looking for the cache in the late afternoon or early morning? Do we need to move a container to a more accessible location? Issues of accessibility, terrain, and difficulty of the location of the container are tagged and so considered by students as they composed and revised their geocaches. In geocomp, the embodied experiences of an audience become important.

The final stage, which can last indefinitely once the caches are placed and geocachers begin finding them, is the posting of logs. Geocaches, for all intents and purposes, become relatively permanent, though hidden public features. Maintenance now and then—requested by other community members—is also involved. Revising geocaches is part of the game. At each stage of composing geocaches, students were confronted by an audience with definable and impossible expectations as well as the means to respond to and evaluate caches at several points in the process. Furthermore, the enthusiasm geocachers bring to the game results in nearly instantaneous responses such as the ones reproduced here.

This log posted by “The Grif” expresses the weirdness of the statue attended to by the geocache and its description:

**Hidden Artwork of Saint Louis #5: Lounging Woman (GC5GW8W) has a new log:**  
 Logged by: “The Grif”  
 Log Type: Found it  
 Date: 11/29/2014  
 Location: Missouri, United States  
 Type: Traditional Cache  
 Log: Really weird. Tftc [thanks for the cache]

Candyce54 celebrates how the geocache revealed something new about a once familiar location:

**Hidden Artwork of Saint Louis #3: Demo Man (GC5GW80) has a new log:**  
 Logged by: Candyce54  
 Log Type: Found it  
 Date: 12/10/2014  
 Location: Missouri, United States  
 Type: Traditional Cache

**The comment that hit me the most was a West Pine Angel comment that simply read: “Sat and contemplated.” That one person spent time contemplating merely because of our cache. Now that is moving people.**

—Holly

Log: Love it when you find something you drive by all the time but didn't notice or know the history of. Thanks. I really need to improve my observation skills. Candyce54

This log documents a unique though common urban experience (as well as a troubling response) generated by the location of the geocache:

**STL Murals #2: Sheraton Hotel (GC5H150) has a new log:**

Logged by: STÜBBIFIED

Log Type: Found it

Date: 12/5/2014

Location: Missouri, United States

Type: Traditional Cache

Log: Saw this one 3 days ago but didn't have time to look. Today training at MEPS, I had time to find. Took me a while to locate because GZ was in the middle of the street. I had some ideas but walked around a bit and just took in the sites. Watch for beggar's I had some change so I got them to leave quickly. But one more FTF [first to find] for me!

Veteran geocacher C3GPS describes the embodied experience cultivated by the placement of this geocache:

**STL Murals #4: Groovin' Through the Grove (GC5H1EK) has a new Log:**

Logged by: C3GPS

Log Type: Didn't find it

Date: 12/6/2014

Location: Missouri, United States

Type: Multi-cache

Log: Went down with C3KID and Yadi to try and find this one today. Having a dog, a kid and coords in the middle of the street made this one a bit much for today. Maybe later.

C3GPS, having now found the "Groovin' Through the Grove" geocache, provides critical feedback about the coordinates provided for this geocache:

**STL Murals #4: Groovin' Through the Grove (GC5H1EK) has a new log:**

Logged by: C3GPS

Log Type: Found it

Date: 12/9/2014

Location: Missouri, United States

Type: Multi-cache

Log: Still not a big fan of intentionally putting bogus coords in the middle of the street in a high muggle [non-geocacher] area but I finally found this one. Final took me longer than it should have. I was looking in the right spot, just had temporary blindness I guess. TFTC! Find number 8035

An example of community feedback and revision, bluedaisey finds and then re-places the cache with a more secure anchor point using his or her own tools:

**Hidden Artwork of Saint Louis #5: Lounging Woman (GC5GW8W) has a new log:**

Logged by: bluedaisey

Log Type: Found it

Date: 12/24/2014

Location: Missouri, United States

Type: Traditional Cache

Log: Container was jammed in it's hiding spot. Could not retrieve without tools from the truck. Finally got it out, signed the log and replaced it with a different type of anchor. CO [cache owner] may want to check on it and see if its ok like that. Great artwork. Thanks for placing it!

## Reflection

As of the final writing of this article, ten geocaches have been placed and published. Over 450 logs and around 30 images have been posted. The goal of both *STL Murals* and *Hidden Artwork of Saint Louis* was to move people to known locations in order to see new things and experience the city differently. Students reported being especially pleased with the number of logs explicitly mentioning these types of experiences, logs such as “never knew this was here,” “thanks for bringing me here,” “Really weird,” and “sat and contemplated.” The intensity of the geocaching community and resonance of the goals of our project with the practices and values of geocaching ensured that we received plenty of feedback, which helped us reflect on public rhetoric generally. Throughout this geocomp project, I was consistently impressed by the level of engagement I witnessed on the part of both my students and the community of which they became a part. Indeed, the biggest takeaway, to my mind, was the intensity and immediacy of community responsivity. Apart from working directly with clients in community or service-based projects, never have I had this amount of interaction with individuals outside of the classroom—all the better that it took place across writing and digital technologies. Locative media provided the channel through which this social interaction took place.

**Although she was a junior and has looked at all the buildings on campus numerous times, as she walked away, I noticed her scanning and thoroughly re-examining her surroundings.**

**—Audra**

**Found it**

11/25/2014

FTF - 2:40 p.m. This was truly an artwork we had never seen before. Didn't realize West Pine was so grand here. mta is still on Thanksgiving break, so we were able to pop out to the car as soon as the notification came in. A dog walker seemed to find our presence in the area a bit odd, but was friendly enough. Thanks for another fun cache in the City!

[View Log](#)

Figure 9. Log for a geocache articulating the success of the cache in terms of the goals of the series and of the course.

These results are encouraging. As with many class projects, particularly supplemental ones like this, I felt that more could have been done with and around it. For instance, placing the geocaches earlier in the semester would increase the amount of time spent interacting and responding to fellow geocachers. I would have liked to spend more time composing and revising descriptions, some of which were less well composed than others. That said, given the procedures of the community, the preexisting infrastructure, and the, generally speaking, low-cost entry, geocaching works well as a large collaborative project.<sup>8</sup> I am thus comfortable arguing that geocaching in a rhetoric and writing course—committed to public engagement—places students within a specific and responsive community using rhetoric, writing, and technology. As Michael Faris reminds us, “Rhetoric and writing studies asks us to attend to the particularities of writing: the moments and movements, the locations, the material objects, the networks” (23).

A telling moment, and one with which I conclude, is a log posted at 2:40 p.m. on November 25, 2014 (Figure 9). The log was composed in the explicit terms of the students’ project goals. I immediately shared this image to the course Tumblr ([slupubrh.tumblr.com](http://slupubrh.tumblr.com)) with the caption “Rhetoric is moving people to new places.” Students had moved someone through space in such a way as to show them something new and to reappraise and better appreciate a seemingly familiar part of the city. Such movement was achieved in part by rhetorically sensitive texts composed with and across digital and analog media. Rhetoric and composition tied to place through locative media—in short, *geocomposition*—can make writing classrooms particularly transformative.

### Acknowledgments

*My thanks to Jonathan Alexander and the two anonymous reviewers for their generous and insightful feedback. Additionally, I'd like to thank Casey Boyle both for the title of this article and his comments on and conversation about an early version of this article: in more ways than one, geocomposition exists because of*

him. Part of this project was supported by a generous grant from the Reinert Center for Transformation Teaching and Learning, which funded the purchase of the handheld GPS units. Finally, I am forever indebted to my students, those patient souls whose enthusiasm and creativity always exceeded my expectations; they are far better than I deserve.

## Notes

1. In addition to Rosa Eberly's term, what I am calling *geocomposition* emerges in part from ecological approaches to rhetoric and writing, particularly those engaging the more affective and material dimensions of rhetoric (see Coe; Cooper; Edbauer; Jenny Rice, *Distant Publics* and "Rhetoric's Mechanics"; Rivers; Rivers and Weber).
2. Individually, students in the course produced a series of texts (loosely defined) devoted to a topic or object of concern (local food, music, policy issues, scientific or technological developments). These serialized texts were composed for a particular public and released on a regular basis. Students had complete creative control over their productions in terms of medium, style, and content. The only requirement was that these texts be public and for an audience that needed to be persuaded.
3. Geocaching can likewise be understood as public rhetoric through the work of Jenny Edbauer. In her treatment of rhetorical ecologies, Edbauer writes, "The kinds of pedagogies I would like to pursue attune to this *mutuality* of material practice, embodied experience, and discursive representation that operate in public spaces every day" (21). Geocomp also fits well within the work of "inquiry as social action" that Jenny Rice subsequently promotes in *Distant Publics*: "inquiry is an endless survey of these networks within which a crisis is embedded" (168). It seeks not "resolution," but "to uncover the composition of a given scene (What are the relations that give it shape and form?)" (169). Indeed, geocomp as inquiry becomes a balance (or ballast) for the affective component of the individual project assigned to students, which asked them to share what they love online through blogs, videos, or podcasts. This aspect of the class risks activating the exceptional subject of feeling described by Rice: "the exceptional subject is one who is related to the public through a feeling of awyeness just as much as a towardness" (67). She goes on, "the exceptional subject is not opposed to public life but is a mode of public life" (67). In other words, sharing the love, creating feeling, does not necessarily produce the kinds of publics the course envisions. Moving people by causing them to feel things is just as often a way to keep them in place. The moving (and habitual) inquiry proposed by geocomposition hopes "to create alternative places for speaking and writing differently about problems" (198).
4. My twofold thanks to Casey Boyle both for moving me to consider locative media and for suggesting the term *geocomposition*, which proved to be a generative moniker during both the composition and revision of this article.

5. While it is beyond the scope of this article, I would here add that Yanow's work specifically and geocaching generally positioned the class well to work through the events in and around Ferguson, Missouri, which greatly affected the larger Saint Louis area as well as our campus, which saw several protests. For more on how discussions of race manifested themselves in this course see my "Ecologies of Race in the Public Rhetoric Classroom."

6. The operation of the locative media was equally important for the project. Using the handheld GPS units and the mobile application took students time to master or at least feel comfortable with. Several geocaches had to be revised because of inaccurate coordinates. Such mechanical deftness is vital to geocomp, which here builds on Jenny Rice's assertion that "[r]ather than shrinking back or separating our work from the materiality of production means, we have the opportunity to expand our own engagements with the modes of invention and means of circulation" ("Rhetoric's Mechanics" 368). Geocomp intersects with Rice's *logomechanics* in its employment of locative media devices. For an additional treatment of GPS technology in terms of rhetoric, see Amy D. Proppen's *Locating Visual-Material Rhetorics: The Map, the Mill, and the GPS*. I would also recommend Jordan Frith's recently published *Smartphones as Locative Media*. Brian McNely's recently published "Instagram, Geocaching and the *When* of Rhetorical Literacies," which arrived on the scene after this article was already in press, is another example of how geocaching can be articulated within rhetorical studies.

I choose the Magellan eXplorist 310 Waterproof Hiking GPS, which provided all the functionality I needed without the unnecessarily advanced features found on the 410 and 510 models. The particular feature of the eXplorist 310 that I needed most is the ability to preload the geocaches I want my students to explore early in the semester. This feature allowed me to quickly focus and easily guide student work at the beginning of the project. These handheld devices were paid for with a generous grant from the Reinert Center for Transformative Teaching and Learning at Saint Louis University.

7. The logs reproduced here are all publicly available online at [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com).

8. The goal here is to maintain the project for use in subsequent courses as an ongoing source for community engagement working through rhetoric, writing, and technology.

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### **Nathaniel A. Rivers**

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