

2008

Chalking the Borders

Claire Potter

Wesleyan University, cpotter01@wesleyan.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://wescholar.wesleyan.edu/div2facpubs>



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), and the [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Potter, Claire, "Chalking the Borders" (2008). *Division II Faculty Publications*. Paper 20.
<http://wescholar.wesleyan.edu/div2facpubs/20>

This Contribution to Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Social Sciences at WesScholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Division II Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of WesScholar. For more information, please contact dschneider@wesleyan.edu, ljohnson@wesleyan.edu.

Chalking the Borders

CLAIRE POTTER

"Sidewalks, their bordering uses, and their users, are active participants in the drama of civilization versus barbarism in the city."

—Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*

"I Love my Gay-Ass Major and This Gay-Ass University with my Gay-Ass Friends and my Gay-Ass Profs!"

"I had anal sex with specific members of a specific frat."

"What the Fuck are Comfortably Integrated Halls? Comfortable for Who?"

—Selected sidewalk chalkings, Wesleyan University, 4/23/03¹

In the spring of 2003, I taught a class on post-Stonewall sexual politics in the United States. It met at 9:00 a.m., a tough hour for students given nightlife on the Wesleyan University campus. It was particularly difficult for queer activists, who organized after 10:00 p.m. so that those participating in other activities and political groups could also organize as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ)? Students often showed up in my classroom punchy from lack of

sleep, but animated by fierce debates they had finished only a few hours earlier.

As I came to teach one morning in late April, my class was milling around angrily in front of the Public Affairs Center (PAC), a central building that houses classrooms and four social science departments. I also recognized several university employees: a dean, the affirmative action officer, and a maintenance supervisor. All were scrutinizing drawings and phrases written on the ground in thick, brightly colored chalk. Dozens of "chalkings" radiated across the network of sidewalks that carried students to their classes, dormitories, meals, parties, libraries and advisors. Student organizations on other campuses used chalking as cheap advertising, but at Wesleyan, queer students in particular used it for anonymous political protests that were campy, sometimes angry, and often sexually explicit.

Between 2002 and 2003, when Wesleyan banned the practice, the struggle over chalking was bitter, producing debates about whether the university is a public space where freedom of expression should trump the desire to suppress offensive speech, or a private space where civil rights as they are understood in the public sphere are superseded by the university's special responsibility to civilized discourse. Students fought each other, and some faculty and administrators, for the right to define what "Wesleyan" is and what its community norms would be. Queer students' chalking campaigns initially raised the practical issue of whether university sidewalks are neutral territory, or a space where questions of power and discrimination can be articulated and negotiated. By the time the practice was banned, however, the struggle had revealed that the campus itself was a borderland—not public, not private—where the limits to, and uses of, speech are constantly negotiated.

54 What can make student revolts distressing is that they reveal the undemocratic structure of universities, a

Intersection

characteristic that is usually concealed by their apparent zeal for heterogeneity. The university is not, as my students would say, "the real world," in one other important respect—its campus is not "public" in the same sense that open metropolitan spaces are public. Like a shopping mall, it is private space in drag. But as in the urban villages Jane Jacobs described 50 years ago, university citizens silently agree to guarantee one another's well-being by alerting one another to the presence of strangers, calling public safety, or responding to another's distress, as they would on any public sidewalk. At Wesleyan, students who chalked revoked their part of this agreement because, as it turned out, many LGBTQ students and students of color did not feel "safe"—a word that they use to denote both spiritual and physical integrity. In their contacts with strangers they said they often felt watched and judged. Chalking the sidewalks thus became a way to retaliate, to reverse surveillance and disrupt what they perceived as the complacent "safety" of others. Initially, many faculty members emphasized the fact that freedom of speech was at stake in the chalking controversy, but I now know that this was only *our* view. For the chalkers, it was also about taking ownership of space. In reframing this student revolt as a conflict over space rather than speech, I understood that Jacobs' theories about the organic quality of neighborhoods had great relevance for elucidating the more daily "drama of civilization versus barbarism" in a learning community defined by its social diversity.

I began to ask different questions about how students, faculty, and administrators in a university governed by the liberal arts ideal navigated the spaces between the rooms where we exchange ideas. How do sidewalks structure the social and intellectual life of a campus? How, and when, can jarring sidewalk encounters be mediated, explained or resolved without invoking formal rules and procedures that create or solidify opposing campus constituencies?

55

CHALKING THE BORDERS

Writing in the midst of urban redevelopment after World War II, Jacobs observed that communities of strangers could unconsciously organize into villages, accepting a stake in one another's well-being without needing to "know" one another. Universities organize themselves in a similar, if less tacit, way. Schools are structured around ritual gain and loss, as students graduate and new ones are instructed by example in the local customs, uses, and geography of the campus. Instead of commerce along the sidewalks, universities have classrooms that "trade" in ideas; instead of apartment buildings, there are dormitories and offices. The glue of an intellectual community is not law but intellectual exchange: an ideally mutual project of instruction, argument, coming to agreement and establishing terms for disagreement. Intellectual, political and social order is normally maintained by mutual consent; regulations come into force when that consent is breached. Like Jacobs' urban village, a well-run university may appear to run itself.

Queer students who chalked anonymously challenged this tacit consensus for making community in several ways. Anonymous speech, as Wesleyan President Douglas Bennett has argued, precludes exchange, allowing chalkers to make critical—sometimes cruel—observations about others, but rescinds the community's right to respond. Furthermore, a recent insistence on substituting crude sexual expression for a more traditional language of liberation—for example, drawing cartoon genitals and labeling them with the name of an administrator or professor—was disturbing even to many of us who supported the students' desire to choose their political strategies freely. By reinventing what sociologist Charles Tilly would call their "political repertoire," chalkers incited the university to forceful acts of policing that were then identified by the many students and faculty as homophobic and intolerant.

But the chalkers' insistence on expressing themselves in

uncivil, or uncivilized, terms illuminated conflicts bubbling under Wesleyan's surface. The promise (and premise) of liberal education did not necessarily create a community where guarantees of spiritual, or perhaps even physical, safety could be met. Some, but not all, of the problem was connected to Wesleyan's ideal—too often read as a promise—that the university could encourage social and cultural diversity without replicating hierarchies and their accompanying antagonisms. Unlike the chalkers, with whom I agreed about some things (for example, that students are subject to thoughtless and casual discrimination on campus), I believe that Wesleyan's dedication to heterogeneity is sincere, even if the results are imperfect. It dates back to the college's nineteenth-century Methodist commitment to educating ambitious working men, and was given new energy in the post-Civil Rights era, when social movements transformed higher education more generally. Wesleyan's historical embrace of identity movements and their politics has been a source of richness and of interesting, if sometimes frustrating, turmoil. It has also been attractive enough to many potential students that Wesleyan was colloquially known for a time as "diversity university," an unfortunate phrase that was never embraced by the university administration and which was often invoked as a broken promise during the chalking wars.

LGBTQ students are part of Wesleyan's diversity, one that crosscuts race, gender, nation and class. By the 1980s, the campus became informally famous for being "queer friendly" because LGBTQ students, while difficult to count, maintained visible political institutions and a vibrant social life. Even if sexual identity were a category friendly to normal accounting procedures, the ecumenical and left-of-center quality of much of the student body blurs numbers. For example, for many years, the men's rowing team, which to the best of my knowledge was not a queer organization,

threw an annual spring dance as a fundraiser for what was then called the Gay Alliance. Wesleyan students are usually able to muster large numbers of supporters for LGBTQ and other progressive causes, and have a flair for producing media events, in part because many of them are the children of academics, organizers, and media workers. Creative protests by queer students on campus not only make the national headlines, they recruit LGBTQ applicants—something the admissions office does only informally by hiring openly queer student interviewers.

In addition to making LGBTQ students visible as a community, queer demonstrations on campus are intended to appeal to and support students who might want to come out but fear possible repercussions. Because of this, until recently, chalkings appeared primarily on National Coming Out Day, Parents' Day and WeFest, a week when newly admitted students visit with their parents. These messages invited LGBTQ students to come out as part of a supportive community. When I came to Wesleyan in 1991, students "poster'd" rather than chalked, Xeroxing slogans and taping them on buildings, faculty office doors, and sidewalks. This practice was not only expensive and time-consuming, it was also, students decided, ecologically unsound and politically oppressive to the maintenance staff. Faculty and staff also protested that the signs were invasive and messy. When students made the shift to chalking in public spaces in the mid-1990s, this was initially viewed as progress.

Chalk may also have had symbolic and emotional value for students, allowing them to simultaneously protest like adults while clinging to a comforting symbol of their childhoods. I say this both because students were so viscerally determined not to alter the medium for protest, and because it is also not unusual to see college students cope with test anxiety by eating animal crackers, gummy bears, and other childish comfort foods during exams—or

wearing SpongeBob, Sesame Street, or Hello Kitty items to class. And chalk is, after all, the first thing we learn to write with. Fact: In one phase of the chalking wars, students took to playing defiant games of hopscotch in front of the PAC. Chalk also has practical advantages. It is bright, colorful, and allows individuals to perform politics for one another, creating unique slogans rather than disseminating a standard message for the group. Chalk is portable, making it easy to spruce up messages that become defaced or smudged. Chalking is coyly strategic; it invents "a crisis," reveals it to a captive audience, and takes no responsibility for resolving, or proposing a resolution, for it. If the task is protesting homophobia, racism or social inequality, under what conditions might one declare the political action complete? Answer: When it rains, or when passing feet (presumably with heads, eyes and brains attached) have made the chalkings—and the "crisis"—invisible again.

I would argue that chalking was not initially conceived as a method of protest. Rather, by commanding an audience, it called a queer community into being. It mapped the campus so that "straights" could see Wesleyan as queers saw it and feel the critical scrutiny LGBTQ students imagined they endure. Initially, chalkings included: coming-out statements and affirmations of identity ("Hi Mom! I'm Gay!"); critiques of campus closeting ("Come Out, Come Out, Wherever You Are!"); and the labeling of sites thought to be either queer-friendly or homophobic. "We Love Queer American Studies!" signified that the Center for the Americas (CAMS), where my program is housed and which hosts a concentration in Queer Studies, is a "safe space." The PAC, on the other hand, (home to the social science departments, where many faculty members are by reputation more conservative) has historically been viewed by the campus Left as Wesleyan's Bastille. Therefore, the very same words that were a friendly chalking outside CAMS became

a hostile chalking when written outside the PAC.

What eventually came to dominate chalking events was a strategy commonly described as “in your face,” which, to the LGBTQ students meant, “We are going to test the tolerance of the ‘straight’ community by being out most sexual selves in public.” On that beautiful April day when I came to the PAC to teach, one chalking perfectly represented this genre. It read, “Eric Takes It Up The Ass.” Readers who were not well versed in the recent history of queer politics (and some who were) would have had little sense of why this chalking was not just gross. Responses ranged from giggling or ignoring it to getting mad and fulminating. Fulmination took the form of heated argument and—at its worst—violent, anonymous counter-chalkings, like “Fags Should Get AIDS and Die” (a response so simultaneously trite and cruel that it is as if the writer has been rendered speechless by the mere appearance of homosexuality and seeks only to make the queer tormenter disappear). Such counter-chalkings fall under the term “hate speech,” and are actionable under the university’s regulations. They were usually followed by more chalkings—“See! Homophobia!”—and demands for justice from an “indifferent” administration that “tolerates” the hatred of LGBTQ students.

Chalking was always controversial on some level, but by 2002, chalking contests had become particularly vicious. One theory as to why this shift occurred came to me from a progressive student activist who pointed out that in the spring of that year, the Queer Alliance dissolved in the midst of a bitter factional struggle that was at least partly racial. White students assumed leadership positions, insisting that they could fairly represent queers of color who—because students of color are underrepresented at Wesleyan—could never muster the votes to elect leaders from their own caucus. Interestingly, the queers-of-color group, Spectrum,

still exists and organizes campus events, but as of this writing no organization has taken the place of the Queer Alliance.

One outcome of this organization’s demise is that a critical mass of radical students came to perceive leadership and hierarchy as corrosive and reorganized as 1970s-style political cadres. Chalking became the perfect strategy for these disbanded, and now invisible, activists. Through hermetic ideological debates, they came to perceive themselves as occupying the cutting edge of campus-Left politics. Simultaneously, without more heterogeneous debate and an identifiable leadership interested in preserving credibility, extreme acts went unchecked. Every chalker was a revolutionary, and no one was accountable; that students would act on personal grudges, consciously or unconsciously, now seems predictable. For example, chalkers previously content to slam the entire history department as homophobic singled out the chair in a way noxious to old Left feminists like myself—conveying personal contempt by reducing her to the sum of her sexual parts. Subsequently, she was spanned with graphic pornography sent from anonymous, free email accounts.

In the name of radicalism, the new chalking ethic now permitted acts of discriminatory aggression that, had they been aimed at the chalkers themselves, would have been understood as harassment. In addition to the attack on my colleague, I observed drawings of genitalia that were identified as belonging to administrators and faculty, an Op-Ed in the student newspaper describing President Benne’s wife as a sex worker, and sidewalk descriptions of sexual acts allegedly performed on “you,” “your” mom or dad, an administrator, that administrator’s parent or spouse, etc.

Ironically, as chalkers drew more community attention, they became less and less legible as political activists. Even those who were committed to protecting them on First Amendment grounds increasingly perceived them as

emotionally and politically immature. But the chalkers saw themselves as connecting to a radical past—shock-and-mock 1970s guerrilla feminists, Yippies, Gay Liberation street theater troupes, or more recent organizers of ACT-UP and Queer Nation “zaps.” Thus, they viewed their acts as being *more* political, and so more justifiable, than previous chalking campaigns that were based on the liberal desire to be seen, tolerated, and incorporated. However, because this debate was a private one, members of the community and campus visitors largely missed the political points the chalkers felt they were making.

Chalkers were unwilling to address their role in a more general, and lasting, demise of campus civility (complicated by the fact that they refused to identify themselves—and when they did—refused to speak for “the group”). This made a variety of public encounters, including classes, flashpoints where damaging behavior raised new issues about “safety.” Did the political urgency LGBTQ chalkers claimed mean that any utterance was justified, no matter how hurtful or damaging to others? Were chalkers perpetrating harm on individuals who had a history of being sexually abused? Were those who argued that they were made to feel like strangers justified in perpetuating that through antagonism? Finally, as President Bennet noted repeatedly, was the university’s duty toward those who wished to articulate unpopular or radical ideas not matched by an obligation to protect rational and civil dialogue as a core university value? Jacobs’ observation about the “bordering uses” of sidewalks in the ongoing “drama of civilization versus barbarism” becomes particularly illuminating at a moment when unspoken guarantees of safety failed at our university and formerly neutral sidewalks became a battleground. Jacobs asks us to temporarily put aside questions of language in public space, and address whether the sidewalk constitutes public space at all. Wesleyan students, whether for or against

chalking, believed the sidewalks were public space because they had a stake in believing that Wesleyan was a sheltered microcosm of the “real world” they would enter after graduation. Opponents of chalking, however, understood the university as a simulacrum of the real world, a private domain sometimes shared with others—visitors, parents—but governed by ethical and legal principles that prioritized the production of knowledge—not politics.

These perspectives on what defines a public space complicate Jacobs’ notion of the voluntary urban village. They remind us that “borders” are also frontiers where different interests collide, which can reflect preexisting tensions in the village itself. Chalkers viewed the sidewalks as a vital sphere for university citizenship where the right for any constituency to refuse scrutiny and criticism was non-negotiable. However, President Bennet argued that it was precisely a mutual commitment to scrutiny on the sidewalk that ensured access to university citizenship through a civil dialogue free from harassment. Sidewalks, he suggested, carried university citizens to locations where free speech was uncontested: classrooms, dormitories, the offices of student media, and dining halls. In his view, students had sufficient means of expressing themselves in other forums, though not anonymously; accountability, civility, and dialogue were fundamental values for an educational community. Chalkers, however, insisted on anonymity and refused these less visible spaces, arguing that in their daily encounters with “normal” students and faculty, they were subject to unanswerable contempt and harm for being too butch, too brown, too sissy—too wrong.

It was a standoff of principles that suddenly acquired concrete meaning when several unionized staff complained that the chalkings created a “hostile environment.” Predictably, this phrase threw the conflict into an anxious register for the administration, which imagined attorneys

descending to file workplace harassment claims. Queer students were surprisingly dismissive of this development, given that they were making similar claims about their own vulnerability to cruelty. Instead of empathizing, they urged those who felt harmed by words to rethink their discomfort as evidence of unconscious homophobia, which was to the point and, well, not. Whatever else one might say about chalking, it wasn't "only words," as Catherine Mackinnon has famously phrased it, if the words were *intended* to hurt and offend.

On the April day with which I began this essay, the university had begun to respond to the staff's complaints by examining all chalkings and erasing those that violated sexual harassment codes. This explained the deployment of the affirmative action officer. Her presence was highly offensive to my students, many of whom, I knew, were chalkers.

It was a teaching opportunity not to be missed. So I discarded my lecture and taught on the sidewalk, asking students to discuss the day's predicament. We contemplated the nature of surveillance, of sexual danger, and of the many forms that censorship might take in a university, while the administrators moved from chalking to chalking, flipping through the book and conferring. When a phrase met the criteria for harassment, a maintenance supervisor would lift a fire extinguisher, spray the offending words and scrub them with a broom until they were illegible.

A fun fact: The entire group of censors was bisexual or gay.

So it went like this: I taught, the students debated, and the LGBTQ university employees parsed words. Erasable chalkings included any that named someone, that were racist or that referenced sexual violence. In other words, chalkings that we *could all agree were bad*. Or could we? "Kim Eas Big

Black Dick." Racist? Hmmm. Maybe... is Kim white or black? Male or female? Is s/he chalked there by choice? "Come on!" I urged my students. "Decide! Freedoms are at stake!" Oops—too late: PSSSSST! *Scrub, scrub*. The words were now—a puddle.

Imagine my students debating whether *saying* what kind of dick a stranger prefers is racist, size-ist, and so on. This was either cutting-edge pedagogy or a parody of conservative nightmares about the post-modern academy—take your pick. With this in mind, we came to that fatal phrase, "Eric Takes It Up The Ass." We all scrutinized it. Was there a rape threat? Homophobia? You couldn't be too careful. As the maintenance supervisor headed toward the chalking with her broom and fire extinguisher, a student strode over. "Wait!" he commanded. Everyone fell silent.

"My name is Eric," he announced. "And I do take it up the ass. Leave that chalking." The stunned group of censors stared at him and then moved on down the sidewalk. A little patter of applause accompanied Eric as he rejoined our discussion.

It was inspired street theater, and despite its slide into political incoherence, this moment captured the isolated moments of brilliance that kept chalking going longer than it should have. Significantly, the students' fight to overturn the ban has produced a far larger record than explanations of what students actually thought they were doing. The archive would show at least one senior honors thesis, articles in the *Westlyan Argus*, *Hermes*, a university literary magazine, and several in the *New York Times*; and a National Public Radio feature. In one creative protest, several members of the class of 2003, instead of shaking the president's hand as is traditional upon receiving a diploma, handed him chalk. Faculty meeting minutes from 2003 show a resolution passed 44–8 that asked President Bennet to rescind the ban. In addition, well over 100 colleagues were absent from

the meeting, perhaps signaling their displeasure with the chalking controversy by their failure to attend. Drawing on my own subsequent disengagement with the defense of chalking, despite my ongoing concern about free speech and academic freedom at Wesleyan, I suspect some were also dismayed by the students' increased use of personal humiliation as a central chalking tactic.

And yet I think that student concerns about our community should not be dismissed. The contest over the sidewalks has revealed that the university the students inhabit may overlap with, but easily detaches from, the "village" that administrators and faculty imagine we all inhabit together (think about this the next time you catch a student emailing during class). It is significant, I think, that good proposals to create or differently utilize spaces where students could address what they called "invisibility" or "silencing" were refused out of hand. These included other venues for speaking out or chalking, as well as the campus newspaper, the campus radio station, and university websites. The chalkers refused all alternatives: only writing on campus sidewalks—their invention—would do. Jacobs might rewrite this observation differently: asked to come into a "civilized" inside space, the chalkers preferred a barbaric "outside" where their expressions of love, difference and rage were explicitly at odds with other people's rules.

Jacobs' model does not explain the emergence of an insistent "barbarian citizenship" among the chalkers. For Jacobs, people in cities are by nature heterogeneous and always moving toward assimilation. At an elite college, however, heterogeneity is carefully constructed as each class is admitted, and is only maintained through a process of resisting assimilation. And yet, her theory about how safety is maintained emerged in an exchange I observed between students at a meeting convened by President Bennett that was intended to bring strangers into dialogue. A few days

earlier, a shouting match had erupted in front of a fraternity because chalkers had written "Gay Fraternity" on the sidewalk (a city sidewalk), with an arrow pointing to the frat house. Fraternities at Wesleyan have been the places queer students love to hate, although their influence at Wesleyan has dramatically diminished. When notified that "Gay Fraternity →" had been chalked outside their front door, members had emerged, jostling and shouting at the chalkers. At the subsequent meeting, two fraternity brothers, dressed in slacks and button-down shirts, explained their position to the chalkers (who were dressed mostly in ripped East Village-chic combat gear.) The brothers said they understood that the sidewalk did not belong to them, but insisted that their reputations did. They did not think that free speech or the public nature of the sidewalk entitled someone to describe them as "gay." A heated exchange ended with one of the frat men insisting desperately, "But we're NOT a gay fraternity."

"Okay," one spiky-haired activist said patiently. "But what if—what if someone had written on the sidewalk 'Good-Looking Fraternity →'?" And what if you weren't all good looking? Would it still make you mad?"

Both young men stared at her blankly. Then one began to nod his head. "Okay," he said.

What I like about this moment in retrospect is not that it was civil, because that alone does not produce learning (though it might foster it in the end). What I liked was that the fear of scrutiny was well understood by the fraternity brothers, and that the chalkers demonstrated a real desire to nurture conscious change. To me, it illustrated why the preservation of civilized space is critical to community, and why a mutual apprehension of what occurs on the sidewalk is more important than who owns it. By offering an explanation rather than asserting her rights, the chalkers made a point that could not be made through the act of

chalking alone. Political acts require interpretation to have meaning to a heterogeneous community. This is a distinction chalkers themselves do not seem to fully grasp, even though their analysis of how surveillance designed by "normal" people works to the detriment of "differently" embodied people is quite insightful.

Here is the act of interpretation chalkers might make about their ongoing campaign, were they so inclined: for the majority of Wesleyan's citizens, sidewalks are presumed to be a site for positive scrutiny, where strangers guarantee one another's safety in a community animated by civility and critique. For queers and students of color, however, scrutiny is unsafe; being watched does not always correspond to being *watched out for*. The ideal of university citizenship presumes that most people who pass each other on the sidewalks are not strangers because they are engaged in a common purpose. And yet, students of color, queers, transsexual, and transgendered students are self-consciously strange to that community, partly because it is their very presence that allows the university to demonstrate its tolerance and civility. The important question is, who profits from their perpetual status as strangers?

Wesleyan's "different" students are part of its appeal, becoming the "value added" that makes a Wesleyan degree different than a B.A. from another liberal arts college. Chalkers demonstrate that the effects on young people of making the transition from "buying into" Wesleyan as an accepted applicant, to being "sold" to the next generation of applicants as part of a diverse student body may be more unsettling than any guarantee "safety" could address. The justifiable pride in the heterogeneous community Wesleyan creates every year as an elite institution may nonetheless contrast too sharply with the daily realities of living as a stranger under the surveillance of "normal" people. Such contrasts can be vivid and heartbreaking, and become more

so as the society from which Wesleyan draws its students becomes more race-segregated and class-stratified.

For example, any image that Wesleyan makes itself with will show a student of color or two comfortably integrated among white students at play or at work—an image that does not misrepresent the university's integrated public spaces at the university. And yet, students of color persistently talk about being "the only one" in a class, tell stories about white peers asking to touch their hair, and relate encounters with faculty who assume they are from the ghetto or speak English as a second language.

It's hard to know where this story begins and ends, even as it is hard to know where a sidewalk will go as it dead-ends, flows into another path, or picks up again across the street. But there are several important ideas that I might close with. As Jacobs argues, one characteristic of modern communities is that citizens can together create safe space despite a lack of connection to each other. "The bedrock attribute of a successful city district," she notes, "is that a person must feel personally safe and secure on the street among all these strangers." And yet by this standard, universities that care deeply about safety are not safe for everyone. As the chalking controversy at Wesleyan demonstrates, campus sidewalks are perhaps better understood as a frontier where a kind of spiritual violence occurs—unseen by many of us—that some students cannot integrate with the university's ideal that legitimate exchanges are characterized by civility and tolerance.

Rules do not touch this problem. But teaching might. What might it mean to teach gentle and ethical forms of scrutiny in the university—in our classes, in our orientations, in our co-curricular activities? Instead of creating rules that tell students what they must do and think regardless of what they bring to the table, we might ask all students to watch out for others, as they would like to be watched out for.

This, I think, was the lesson of the encounter between the queer students and the fraternity. Couldn't that exchange help us imagine a school where queer students really do chalk "Good-Looking Fraternity →" and the frat boys respond by inviting the chalkers inside?

Teaching civility, expecting that it will be violated, and teaching it again may be the price of the heterogeneous campus that is so critical to liberal education. If I and others entered the controversy confident that the principles of academic and free speech were a widely-apprehended feature of the university community, I left it knowing that free speech—even when followed, as William O. Douglas famously said, with "more speech"—has a price that a university must pay if it is to leave itself open to the kinds of change that occur when embracing "difference" is critical to its mission. Making space for the contest between civilization and barbarism is exactly the point. Although Jacobs could not have imagined the scenarios I have described in this essay, her theories about the lively, messy process of securing human communities may be as critical to our existence on a college campus as they are in the urban village.

Notes

I am grateful to everyone who took the time to read and comment on this piece: I would like to thank Nancy Barnes, Barbara Baller, and the editors for thoughtful comments and editorial suggestions. At Wesleyan, Judith Brown, Douglas Bennett, Nancy Meislahn, Gregory Pyke and Barbara Jan Wilson all offered comments and several important clarifications.

¹ A partial list of chalkings is at <http://www.wesleyan.edu/hermes/chalking> (last accessed on January 21, 2008).

² Wesleyan students also identify as asexual, transsexual,

polymorous, "questioning," and polymorphous perverse. "Queer" can be shorthand for all "non-heteronormative sexualities," but it is more accurately an epistemological stance that opposes regimes of the normal rather than heterosexuality *per se*.