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*City of Rhetoric: Revitalizing the Public Sphere in  
Metropolitan America* (review)

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*City of Rhetoric: Revitalizing the Public Sphere in Metropolitan America.* By David Fleming. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008; pp. xx + 348. \$85.00 cloth; \$29.95 paper.

David Fleming makes good use of the notion that social theory has taken a “spatial turn” in recent decades (28). Following Edward Soja’s 1989 book *Postmodern Geographies*, Fleming means that the late twenty-first century environment profoundly affects social life in ways that are too often obscured in public dialogue, and that the changing geographic patterns in the postmodern world are increasingly reflected in a “new spatial ontology” that is beginning to pervade academic discourse. Meanwhile, urban scholarship has become increasingly interdisciplinary as philosophers, English scholars, and even musicologists have taken seriously the role of cities in making sense of human conduct. It is in this context that we find Fleming, trained in English and composition, claiming, “I am a committed ‘urbanist’” (95). But the questions facing this book, and thus the onus of Fleming’s commitment, are: Why does the city matter for rhetoric? What does a rhetorical lens offer us in thinking about the built environment? What impact might the city have on civic participation and political argument?

*City of Rhetoric* attempts to forge a new terrain by combining “three traditions of thought not usually linked: political philosophy, urban design, and rhetorical theory” (xii). Interestingly, it does so by taking us to a very familiar place, the City of Chicago, perhaps the most studied city on Earth. The problem facing us this time is the Cabrini-Green public housing project—“Death Corner,” also the title of the introductory chapter—where extreme poverty, unemployment, crime, and physical blight are the consequences of racial segregation, the evacuation of accessible jobs, and state devalorization in the postindustrial era. Cabrini-Green represents for Fleming a deracinated environment, but it is also a scene in which effective civic participation is undercut by geographic fragmentation. It is one particularly troubled space in a city made up of politically homogenous and isolated enclaves, all overlaid by a dominant political discourse that is effectively “despatialized.”

Fleming wants to confront the problem of ghetto marginality, but more to the point he wants to address the political discourse that has developed around it. He wants to demonstrate the impact of exclusionary politics on the built environment and thus the impact of space on our political and rhetorical thinking. Most of the book, then, is concerned with the intersection of political discourse and urban design in exploring three proposed solutions for the

remaking of an equitable urban system. They are: (1) dispersing the inner-city black poor to the city's suburbs, thereby alleviating the negative effects of concentrated poverty; (2) revitalizing the inner city by bringing back both private market investment and middle and upper class "role models" in the form of mixed-income housing developments; and (3) inducing increased political participation in the inner city by shifting ownership to the hands of its residents, by transforming housing projects into democratically governed, nonprofit cooperatives.

But although each solution promises to alleviate social marginality, in each we find contradictions that are simultaneously rhetorical and spatial. For example, the dispersal of African American poor to the suburbs requires uprooting these residents' ties to place and undercuts any hope of black solidarity. The suburbs are historically spaces of racial exclusion to begin with, and they are not exactly conducive to public life either. The problem with mixed-income housing developments is that they end up privileging the politics and interests of wealthier (and whiter) residents. In other words, housing cooperatives end up reproducing homogenous and isolated enclaves.

All of this is to suggest that there is something wrong with the way we put together politics and space. Or rather, there is something wrong with the way our political discourse neglects the importance of space. Fleming asserts that politics are absolutely spatial, and a healthy democratic society must be built on healthy spatial arrangements. He argues that our political discourse must be rooted in stability, not mobility, in group life, not individuality. We need to design spaces that privilege civic engagement, and we need a political discourse that celebrates and privileges "conflict over harmony," or diversity over homogeneity.

For all the new terrain that *City of Rhetoric* succeeds in paving, however, a central thesis remains difficult to pin down. By the time we arrive at the penultimate chapter, "Toward a New Sociospatial Dialectic," Fleming is still asking, "Do the different human environments of the contemporary North American metropolis affect the *rhetorical* 'inventiveness' of their inhabitants?" (186). It is a question that comes up again and again throughout the chapter. And yet perhaps it is a question this study alone cannot answer. Fleming "believes" the answer is yes (190), but quickly informs us that he has not exactly provided proof one way or the other (191). However, Fleming does succeed in thinking dialectically, even if modestly: "Physical marginalization is both cause and effect of social, economic and political marginalization" (189).

Fleming may succeed in his goal of combining various academic traditions of thought, but other committed urbanists, including sociologists such as myself, might wonder if there is anything new about Fleming's "new socio-spatial dialectic." Indeed, this term itself is borrowed from Soja, an admission given in a footnote with no further elaboration of Soja's work. Regardless, Fleming's strongest contribution may be in bringing a "new spatial ontology" closer to the realm of public discourse, where pragmatic approaches to social problems such as racial segregation must learn to contend with space and rhetoric simultaneously.

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*Trust in Texts: A Different History of Rhetoric.* By Susan Miller. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008; pp. xiv + 203. \$35.00 paper.

**T***rust in Texts* contributes to multiple ongoing conversations about rhetorical pedagogy, the traditional canon, and the role of emotion in rhetoric. Miller's driving thesis is that the Athenian oratorically based rhetoric that constitutes the canon should not receive a privileged and authoritative claim to the title "Rhetoric" but instead should be thought of as *a* rhetoric, one of an infinite number. *Trust in Texts* places myriad contemporary rhetorical scholars in dialogue both with one another and with canonical and noncanonical historic rhetorical texts, creating a nonlinear, new history of rhetoric. By creating this "different history," Miller supports her thesis that there are multiple, plural histories and rhetorics, and brings noncanonical texts to the center, rather than approaching them as "other" or "peripheral" to the traditional canon. In addition to questioning the coherence of the rhetorical canon, another pivotal goal of Miller's text is to [re]instill emotion into the study of rhetoric. She argues that in upholding a post-Cartesian tradition, rhetorical studies still consider emotion and reason as a dichotomy, valuing reason and logic above emotion. Miller does not view emotion and reason as two separate ends of a single spectrum and advocates recognizing the role and importance of each in the study of rhetoric.

*Trust in Texts* is comprised of a preface; an introduction entitled "Rhetoric, Emotion, and Places of Persuasion"; three chapters called, respectively,