

## EVERYDAY PRACTICES AND PUBLIC PLACES

Michael R. Curry  
Department of Geography  
University of California, Los Angeles  
Los Angeles, CA 90095

curry@geog.ucla.edu

<http://www.geog.ucla.edu/~curry/>

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It is commonly claimed that a series of new technologies, some already in place and some poised to enter the marketplace, will help to redefine the nature of everyday life in public places. First closed-circuit television (CCTV) (Norris and Armstrong 1999) and now a wide range of location based services (LBS) will potentially reveal the location of individuals, track their movements and actions, and capture on tape or other media their images, perhaps for use in image-recognition systems. In the United States, descriptions of these systems have been met with mixed responses. Some have asserted that the systems involve violations of individuals' rights to privacy, even the end of privacy.

Yet in the legal regime that governs these issues--and individual complaints are almost inevitably translated into legal matters--it is not easy to envision a means of regulating these systems. Granted, some states have passed legislation banning the use in public places of what are termed "up-skirt" and "down-blouse" video cameras, on the grounds that they are in clear violation of the moral standards of that large group of people who prefer to remain modestly clothed when outside of their homes.

But more typically, attempts to regulate such activities collide head-on with the view, formalized in the second restatement of the law of torts (American Law Institute 1965), as earlier in Dean Prosser's analysis (Prosser 1960), that individuals cannot claim that anything that occurs while they are in a public place can properly be viewed as an intrusion on their solitude, and hence as a privacy violation.

The implementation of this portion of tort law is clearly problematic, and in a number of ways. And it is more so in the America of 2002 than it was in the America of 1965, when the restatement was published, or in 1960 when Prosser declaimed upon the subject. But in dealing with the matter of intrusions in public places I think it a mistake to focus upon the failings of privacy law; indeed, the appeal to the concept of "privacy" in cases of "intrusion upon one's solitude" is misleading. It is misleading because it encourages the focus of attention upon physical

or physicalized places. But in fact, physical places, whether public or private, only become places through the actions that create and maintain them. If the courts have sometimes recognized this, claiming that a person engaging in drug dealing from his home has turned that place into a place of business, they have as often failed to recognize this fact. Nowhere is this more clear than in the second restatement, where the term “public place” is seen as referring unproblematically to an area carved out through institutional means, but very often carved out with disregard for the nature of the activities that take place there.

It seems to me a far better strategy to begin by turning attention away from places that are routinely deemed public or private; instead, we ought to look to the activities and practices that create places, and thereby to the ways in which places are supportive of the construction and maintenance of human identity. In that way we can begin to see the extent to which it may be possible to conceive of a “public place” as one in which solitary activities are sought, and ought to be recognized and supported.

In what follows I shall begin with a comment on the ontology of places. I shall describe two important forms of places. Each is created in a different way, but there are important connections between the two. Moreover, each has roots both well before the invention of modern means of information storage--such as writing--and well before the invention of the concepts of the private and the public. So each can be seen as broadly relevant to the lives not just of literate people, but also of nonliterate people, including, for example, children.

In the second section of the paper, I shall turn briefly to a central issue in the construction of identity, that of memory. There I shall point to the intimate connections between routine human activities and the narratives and symbols that they associate with places, and through which they establish places as normative underpinnings of everyday life.

Third I shall point to the invention of the ideas of the private and the public. There I shall note the way in which a fundamental ambiguity, between “private” and “public” as referring to places and as referring to the activities that take place within those places, emerged early in the discourses about both the private and the public. It is this discourse that today hobbles the legal analysis of changes in everyday activity.

Finally, I shall turn to two current technologies. Within the direct-marketing industry we shall see that the representation of people and places appeals to the very conceptions of place that I described earlier. And in a different way, location-based services intersect with the everyday practices of place making that existed prior to the invention of the private and the public. Both technologies, though, appeal to sets of images, practices, and narratives, interconnected in ways that seem narrowly to emplot the everyday lives of their subjects. Both raise what today are termed privacy issues, issues that are seen as paradoxically calling for a recognition of the possibility of acting privately in public. I shall conclude, though, that there is no paradox here, once we recognize that this paradoxical formulation rests on a misunderstanding, on a misidentification of the public and the private.

## **I. A WORLD WITHOUT MAPS**

One common way of looking at the world imagines that it consists of places, that exist

within regions, that in turn exist within wholes or within something that might be called “space.” A version of this view was of course formalized within classical geography, where it was asserted that there are three modes of geographical inquiry. The topographic, on the view articulated by Ptolemy and others, was the study of places; the chorographic was the study of regions, and the geographic was the study of the earth as a whole. Or, ontologically, we had topos, choros, and geos (Ptolemy 1948). I shall focus for the moment on the concepts of topos and choros, because both developed among and are able to exist in the absence of modern technologies for the storage and representation of knowledge.

Although the meanings of the two terms in classical Greece was fluid (Walter 1988), one can point to two very different senses of place and region that emerge from the use of the terms. The simpler and more straightforward of the two is that associated with choros, conventionally translated as “region.”

Chorography began its formal existence as a branch of astrology (Barton 1994). Astrology was an ordering system that allowed one to read the surface of the earth by looking above; in the relative absence of writing it was possible to use the heavens as a sort of information storage device. And it is not at all far from this use in astrology to the later geographic use of the heavens, as a means for dividing the earth into the series of horizontal bands, or klimata, that defined what were termed the torrid, temperate, and frigid zones.

And this points to a central feature of the chorographic, that it sees the region as having a character. When it is summer in a place it is simply summer; a person from El Paso is as much a Texan as someone from San Antonio, or even Austin. Putting the matter in another way, when one looks at a map of the earth divided into klimata, the map is not a simplification of a more finely detailed grid of latitude and longitude; it is simply a representation of a set of regions, each in some way homogeneous.

This in turn suggests a central feature of regions when seen within the chorographic tradition, that they very often are characterized symbolically, in term of names or signs, where the symbol in some important way stands for the whole.

If we turn to the second way of thinking about places, the topographic, things are rather murkier. I would suggest, though, that from a number of elements, each suggestive but not historically decisive, one can synthesize a conception of the topographic that is a clear alternative to the chorographic, but that like the chorographic resonates with certain elements of contemporary life.

We find a hint of the nature of the topographic in an analysis by Fred Lukermann. In classical geography, he suggests,

“Topography” was defined as the order of discrete units one to another.  
“Topographical location” was referent solely to the contiguity of places  
(Lukermann 1961, p. 194).

If we take as a model of the topographic a map on the wall this surely seems obscure. If though we think about the map not as a finished product, but rather as an object in the process of being created through a set of activities, we see that that activity, the drawing of rivers and roads and

the like, is precisely a matter of tracing “the order of discrete units.”

And if we turn to nonliterate societies, or to the actions of literate people operating in the absence of maps, as for example in giving directions, we find a similar phenomenon. But there the “order of discrete activities” becomes displaced from the spatialized form that it displays on a map to a temporalized form, and especially to the form of the narrative, the key question in which is, “what happens next?”

Hence, we can characterize the topographic as a second, and alternative, way of describing places. In contrast to the static chorographic, it is fundamentally organized temporally, as an account of what there is--or what one sees--as one moves from place to place.

## **II. THE TOPOGRAPHIC, THE CHOROGRAPHIC, AND THE ART OF MEMORY**

What accounts for the existence of these two rather different ways of conceptualizing places? Here we need to turn to an aspect of nonliterate societies and of nonliterate elements of our own experience, the way in which people maintain a store of knowledge.

It has long been recognized that while users of Western languages are notoriously bad at holding lists of unrelated things in memory, when embedded in a narrative those things become far easier to remember. This fact was the basis for the codified “art of memory,” described by Cicero (1964), and analyzed by a number of recent historians (Yates 1966; Carruthers 1992).

The user of the art of memory first mentally constructs a set of places, which will be a permanent part of that individual’s system. The places are typically rooms within a mansion; the important thing is for the user to have a clear sense of how it is laid out, and of how to get from one room to another.

When confronted with a set of items to be memorized, one figuratively places the items, sequentially, within the rooms, in a way that creates memorable associations. If the first name on the list is “Smith,” one might place a horseshoe on a hall table, with the idea that horseshoes remind one of blacksmiths, that in turn remind one of the name “Smith.” And so on. Then in order to recover the list the user imaginatively recreates the experience of moving from room to room. In a sense, this appeals to the well-known gambit, in trying to find a lost item, of placing oneself in the place where one last remembered seeing it, and then retracing one’s steps. And finally, in each room the user appeals to the associations that the objects have, such as the association between horseshoe and blacksmith, and blacksmith and smith.

It should be clear that the first two elements of the art of memory, the use of narrative in order to construct an account of a place and the appeal to the experience of moving between locations, are closely connected to what I have termed the topographic. If the topographic aims to describe places by describing what one sees as one moves around within a place, the art of memory draws upon that same experience, and those same narratives, and relies upon the possibility of imaginatively recreating that movement.

At the same time, within the art of memory a central matter is the association with their referents of objects placed figuratively within a memory palace. Within a particular room, and as in the chorographic, the recalling of an object from memory is a matter of its being symboli-

cally associated with some item within the room.<sup>1</sup>

### III. ON IDENTITY

Memory systems need not, in fact, be built upon the experience within a house or palace, within a place that is putatively private. In The mind of a mnemonist, psychologist A. R. Luria described a twentieth century Russian journalist's use of just such a system:

Frequently he would take a mental walk along that [Gorky] street... beginning at Mayakovsky Square, and slowly make his way down, 'distributing' his images at houses, gates, and store windows. At times, without realizing how it had happened, he would suddenly find himself back in his home town... where he would wind up his trip in the house he had lived in as a child (Luriëiia, 1968 #14574, p. 32. The quotation is as in Carruthers 1992, p. 76).

Here the journalist, Shereshevski, is in effect treating some part of his everyday world as if it is a memory palace.

But here we can turn the art of memory around, and notice that it shows the way in which the carrying out of actions in given locations, described within narratives that define the practice of moving, and appealing to symbols that encompass one's place in the world, is an important means for the creation of identity.

This identity formation in part involves the use of association, and in On memory and reminiscence (1941b), Aristotle notes that association may work in three ways, through contiguity, or similarity, or conflict. In fact, his model--and as a number of scholars including Foucault (1973,) have pointed out--operates more generally, in the construction of the world, a world of personal identity and of places. Created in this way, the elements of the world, and of personal identity, are not causally nor contingently linked, but rather are interconnected through a system of similitudes that focuses on what are taken to be necessary and essential elements of a person's identity, or of a place

After the seventeenth century this model fell into disrepute within the sciences. And one element of its decline was the rise of those modern notions of space that have seemed to displace the topographic and the chorographic. Gradually, at least on the conventional view, the universe has come to be re-seen, as simply a large, homogeneous container.

On this model objects in a homogeneous space are classified in terms of sets of attributes. And it is this model that has over the last several hundred years become institutionalized, as a way in which governments keep track of land and people (Heller and Brooke-Rose 1986; Hacking 1990; Caplan and Torpey 2001), as in the move from population registers to censuses

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<sup>1</sup> This is in fact one source of what I would take to be a fundamental instability in the ontology of places, where places defined topographically come to be re-seen chorographically, and vice versa.

(Anderson 1988; Beniger 1986) and from traditional, topographic, metes-and-bounds systems to modern land survey systems (Johnson 1976).

The apparent ubiquity of this new model within contemporary institutions, alongside the seeming omnipresence of supporting technological innovations such as writing, print, and mapping, seems to have suggested that the topographic and chorographic have been displaced from everyday life. Yet in fact, these claims about the irrelevance of the chorographic and the topographic, claims that are simply false, have in turn functioned to make it increasingly difficult to mount a convincing account of the nature of everyday life.

#### IV. THE PRIVATE AND THE PUBLIC

As I suggested at the outset, we can see much in the case of certain new technologies, such as location based services, that seems to vex discussions of the public and the private. But in order better to make sense of that vexing, we need first to look to some features of the private and the public.

There is no doubt that there are many possible histories of the emergence of both concepts. But in the context of Western theorizing about both the public and the private, there has been a strong tendency to see both concepts as emerging, in recognizable form, in classical Greece. Both, too, are seen as having been theorized by Aristotle, and particularly in his Politics (1941c) and Nichomachean Ethics (1941a).

To take a single example--here I use that of Barrington Moore (1984) on the history of privacy, but do so not to single him out, but rather because his work is so typical--we see the following. Moore begins his discussion with a long analysis of the nature of private activity and of public activity. Like others, he points to the gendered nature of this pairing, where public activity was a male activity and private activity more a female activity.

But he then claims that

For the Athenians the distinction between public and private coincided between the distinction between the realm of politics and the realm of household affairs and domestic life (Moore 1984, p. 133) [Emphasis added].

And then, “within the Athenian household there were clear rules to secure privacy (Moore 1984, p. 140) [Emphasis added].”

The critical point here is that Moore has moved--and quickly--from a discussion of everyday activities and practices--the topographic--to a discussion of the private “realm”--the chorographic--and then to a physical place, the household itself. As I say, he is not alone here, and following the classic work of Hannah Arendt (1958), many have taken this same tack.

Yet as Judith Swanson (1992) has persuasively argued, this was not Aristotle’s view. Rather, his discussion of the private and the public was in terms of activities and not places. In his teleological metaphysics, private activities were those that supported everyday life, eating, having children, and the like, while public activities were agonistic, means by which men

showed themselves to be human in the fullest sense. Any connection between the activities and the places was merely contingent. And it certainly would be inaccurate to say that there was a separate, isolable “private realm,” characterizable in chorographic terms as having some symbolic unity.

So here there has been a process that I term “discursive displacement,” where a discourse based in the topographic shifts to one about the chorographic, and then to one about physical places {Curry, 2002 #14316}. It is this process that has rendered an understanding of the challenge of new technologies so difficult to achieve.

### V. ON GEODEMOGRAPHIC SYSTEMS

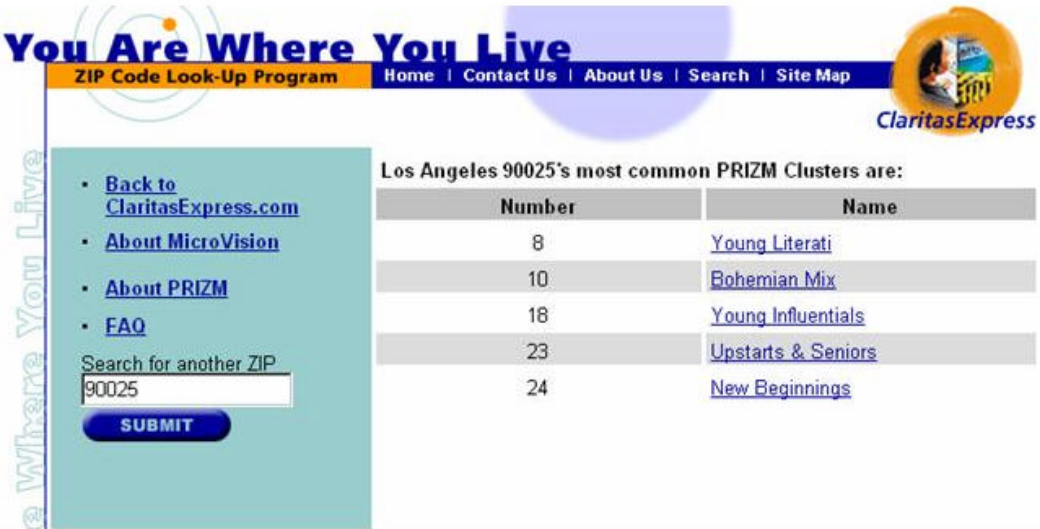
How this is the case will be more clear in light of two examples. The first is geodemographic systems. Geodemographic systems are commercial, computer-based information systems, that consist of data about individuals and households, as well as means for analyzing those data and cartographically representing the results of those analyses [Figure 1].



Figure 1

Central to the systems has been the claim that, as Claritas, one of the largest producers put it, “You are where you live.” The world can be broken down into a collection of regions; and within each, people are more or less alike.

Figure 2 shows a summary of the groups that according to Claritas Prizm live in ZIP Code 90025, south of UCLA in Los Angeles.



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Figure 2

And Figure 3 shows Prizm’s characterization of one of the five groups of residents there, those termed “Bohemian Mix.”

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**10 Bohemian Mix**  
 Bohemian Singles & Couples  
 Age group: 25-44  
 Professional  
 Household income: 38,500  
 1.47% of U.S. households belong to this PRIZM Cluster.

**This PRIZM Cluster is most likely to...**

- Use call answering
- Shop at The Gap
- Have a rollover IRA
- Watch Face The Nation
- Read Elle

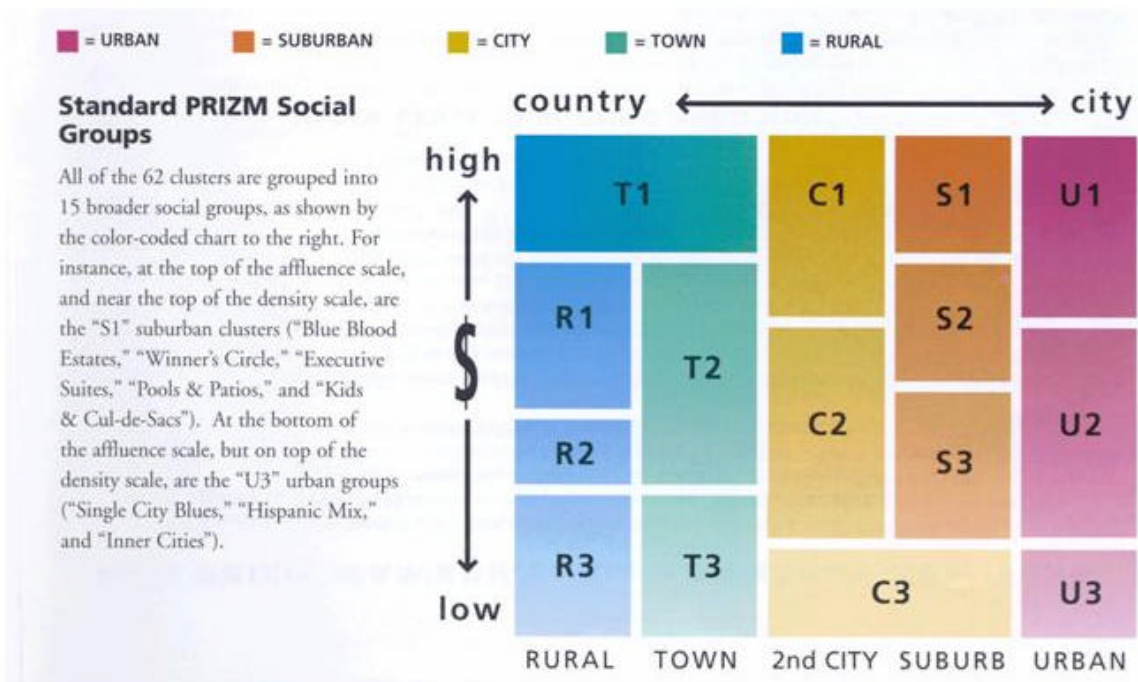
**This PRIZM Cluster lives in neighborhoods like...**

- West Hollywood, CA
- Dupont Circle, DC
- Greenwich Village, NY

3

**Figure 3**

They are single and married professionals, 25-44 years of age, with a household income that places them seventeenth out of Prizm’s sixty-two categories, high enough that they are in the top-most group of city dwellers, Group U1 [Figure 4], but still considered to be “middle income.”



4

**Figure 4**

The initial reaction that many people have upon looking at “their own” cluster is that it is at once quite wrong and uncannily close to the truth. And some see their being “close to the truth” as raising privacy concerns. Yet to the extent that the systems merely generalize, providing profiles of areas of perhaps several hundred, and more recently perhaps as few as five households, they are not engaging in the American tort of “public disclosure of private facts.” So in what way does this have to do with the issue of privacy?

If we think of what is being represented here as a matter of a simple geographical representation, where each household is “matched up” with a location, and then with a set of socio-economic characteristics, it is a little hard to see where and why one might be concerned. Certainly if I am represented as living within a ZIP Code that consists of five-thousand households there seems little about which to complain. But it is misleading to view the matter in this way, and that is because the claim is not a geographical one, but in part a chorographic one. It is not simply a claim about “attributes” that a member of a group is purported to have. Rather, it is a claim about the ways in which a person carries on his or her life.

That this is the case is more clear if we move to **Figure 5**, another Claritas representation of residents of 90025, this from their Microvision system.

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MicroVision Segment 4: *Mid-Life Success*



**Demographics:** Very high income married adults, age 45-59, with children

**Lifestyle & Retail:** Eat at casual dining Mexican restaurants, own a sports watch and downhill skis/boots, and shop at Nordstrom's department store

**Communications & Technology:** Have an extra phone line for a second phone number, use an on-line service on the home PC to read on-line publications and access e-mail

**Financial:** Save or invest \$20,000 annually, 20% have more than \$200,000 in investable assets, and use credit card more than 10 times a month

**Media:** Read National Geographic, Money, Golf Digest, and Time magazines, and listen to classical format radio

**Geography:** Suburbs along the East and West coast

5

**Figure 5**

Here there is the beginning of a richer picture of a household, illustrated with a photograph. There are two boys and (presumably) a mother and father. The adults are smiling; all are touching. They are outside, “in nature.” All are looking off to the side, and the wife is pointing out of the picture, as if to the future.

Compare the image in **Figure 5** with the following **Figure 6**.

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MacroVision Segment 40: *Trying Metro Times*



**Demographics:** Very low income young single adults with young children, age 25-34, and seniors, over 75 years, one to six people

**Lifestyle & Retail:** Eat at fast food hamburger restaurants, and drive less than 5,000 miles per year

**Communications & Technology:** Very likely to purchase low cost cordless phone, have cable channels discontinued in past year, and pay a fee for inside wire maintenance service

**Financial:** Do not seek financial advice, have credit card credit insurance, and don't know the amount of money needed to retire comfortably

**Media:** Watch Disney Channel, Read National Enquirer, and have multiple pay channels (2+)

**Geography:** Urban and suburban areas, generally the Midwest and Central areas of the country

6

**Figure 6**

This is from Hot Springs, Arkansas, the hometown of former President Bill Clinton. “Trying Metro Times” is represented by a line of women doing factory work. Each is working at a separate bench, with identical video monitors. They wear identical laboratory coats. Their faces are obscure; there is no way to tell whether they are smiling, but one assumes not. No one is talking; no one is touching.

In **Figure 7**, from NDL’s Cohorts<sup>®</sup>. With Cohorts<sup>®</sup> we have something more.

## Margot & Elliott

**Married Households**  
**Homeowners**  
**Median Age = 56**  
**Median Income = \$73,366**  
**% U.S. Households = 8.1**

The second largest group of the population, this segment is comprised of **established, affluent, empty-nest** households. Over 40% of all U.S. households reporting an income over \$75,000 are found in this segment. The vast majority are still in the work force (almost exclusively in **white-collar occupations**), and over half are **dual income** households. Their lifestyles have a distinctly **urban** character (over 80% of these households appear in large metropolitan areas). They are not averse to using credit to support their sophisticated interests, which include **foreign travel, wine connoisseurship, cultural activities, and gourmet cooking**. They are active investors in **stocks, bonds, and real estate**. While they are not especially active in the great outdoors, they do pursue **physical fitness**. Their sporting activities tend toward club sports like **golf and tennis**, and over half of them **walk for their health**, making them the top segment for that activity. **Avid book readers**, they also find time for **TV sports** and visiting with their **grandchildren**. They are the leading segment for both foreign and domestic **luxury car** ownership. They are most over-represented on the west coast and in the **northeast**.

Coborts® Segment 1

### Vignette

*Margot checks the clasp on her heavy gold necklace one last time and smooths it so it lies flat. This is their third fund raiser this month, but for the first time she's ready before Elliott, thanks to his late tee-off. She glances at the clock. He'd better get out of that shower soon. It won't look good if the chairman of the board is late for the symphony benefit.*

*She reads the day's mail while she waits. A letter from their daughter, half crazed with midterms. Margot chuckles at her rantings—you'd think she was the first person to endure the rigors of med school. She puts the letter aside. Credit card bills, a catalog, a postcard from their son on winter break in Costa Rica. She checks the postmark. Only took three months to get here.*

*Elliott walks into the room, taking a final tug on a perfect bow tie. "Have you seen my cummerbund? Wow, you look great, hon." He bends to kiss her cheek.*

*Margot smiles. "The red one's on the bed, the black one's on the chair. Take your pick."*

*"Thanks."*  
*Smoothing his wet hair, Elliott heads back to the bedroom. Margot picks up a magazine. In a minute he'll be back for help with his cuff links.*

Figure 7

We have bumbling Elliot, who brings home the bacon but is unable to manage his cufflinks; we have his condescending wife Margot; and we have their daughter, suffering through medical school, having no doubt made the choice under the guidance of her parents. Here we have a biography, a story.

Each of these successive figures represents a geodemographic cluster, a group of people in a particular place. We begin with a name, then a set of socioeconomic characteristics, then a profile of consumption habits, a picture of a typical cluster member, and finally a narrative. The accounts increasingly place individuals and families within a set of similitudes. They increasingly express the lives of their subjects in terms of plots, in terms of sets of possibilities.

Still, what might be the privacy implications of such a system? If we think of geodemographic systems as essentially information systems, the picture is in fact rather murky. Since the 1970s, the accepted view of the privacy implications of information systems has been one derived from medicine, and from the legal fallout of the Nuremberg trials. Codified in the Fair Information Principles, it sees individuals as having a set of rights with respect to information collected about them: They have the right to know what is collected and the purpose of the collec-

tion; and they have the right to correct inaccurate information.

If the set of procedures laid out in the Fair Information Principles may work fairly well in cases such as credit or video-rental records, it is in fact far less clear how they might work in the case where based upon its location a household is claimed to belong to this or that cluster. Is my “right to privacy” really being violated if Claritas claims that I belong to “Bohemian Mix,” and not “Young Influentials”?

One seemingly promising response has been to argue that insofar as the systems place people within classification schemes, they are creating abstract entities that in a sense have agency, that act independently of the “real” individuals. There is the Cohorts’<sup>®</sup> ‘Margot and Elliot’, and the Equifax ‘Margot and Elliot’, and so on. Here, it is argued, the real Margot and Elliot ought to be able to speak for themselves.

To this suggestion one hears a double rejoinder. First, the description of the cluster is constructed from public or freely given information, from census data, from survey research, and from consumer responses. And second, much of what makes up such a profile is simply, and obviously, a generalization. Of course each household varies, and there obviously is no real Margot and no real Elliot.

This rejoinder might make sense if this were an informational issue, and it does seem difficult to see how geodemographic systems violate the fair information principles. But what both advocates and critics of the systems miss is that this is not an informational issue. In fact, it makes much more sense to see geodemographic systems as in a way pre-informational, as operating within the chorographic tradition. They do so to the extent that they attempt to characterize a place by associating it with a set of narratives and symbols, here: the happy family in the outdoors, the struggling female factory worker relaxing with the National Enquirer, and Elliot’s competing cummerbunds.

By being used within geodemographic systems, what began as socioeconomic categories have become symbols. They now operate not in a Linnaean classification scheme, but rather within a system of Foucauldian similitudes. To live in “Trying Metro Times” is to be seen as someone who lives life in a particular way, as someone about whom certain stories may not be true, but may as well be. And when I say that this is not an informational issue I mean just that. This way of thinking about people and the places that they inhabit predates the invention of the technologies that convert symbols and associations into information. To see geodemographic systems as raising informational problems that require informational solutions is to miss the point.

## VI. THE NEW TOPOGRAPHY

A second and final example will bring us back to the initial issue, of how to make sense of intrusions in public. Here again, an understanding of the issue will require that we see the extent to which the conceptualization of the private and the public have been subject to a process of discursive displacement.

Here I begin with a common example:

I am walking down the street, carrying my cellular telephone. As a result of a recent FCC ruling, my telephone has the ability to track my location, and to make it known to officials at a Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP). But this information may also be made available, through my wireless provider, to advertisers. So, my telephone beeps, I look at the screen, and it displays a coupon for a discount on a café latte if I go into the Starbucks on this block rather than the one on the next block.

Confronted with this scenario, many people feel a sense of unease. Some suggest that the concern here is an informational one, that someone seems to have information about my whereabouts. Others appeal to an older idea, that surrounding me is a kind of metaphorical bubble, that has been violated. But in a noisy, information-filled world neither of these seems very compelling.

I think it useful here to look back to Aristotle. On his view, if I am walking from my house to the grocery store in order to purchase food for supper I am engaging in a private activity, just as if I engage in a political discussion over supper, within my dining room, I am engaging in a public activity.

But when I walk to the store, what is the status of the place where I am walking? Is it private or public? The law of torts seems in one sense to have seen it as a public place, as a container within which all that occurs is public. Yet the simple example of a walk to the store calls that analysis into question. There seems, in fact, to be a second sense of space involved here, and that is one in which a walk to the store is simply a matter of a traversing of some distance. Here a public space is less a container than a matter of extension, of a distance to be overcome. The space here has been emptied.

But in fact, the history of public space indicates that even over a period as short as the last three-hundred years there have been a series of shifts in the activities that occur within what are termed public spaces or places, and that whatever the changes, an empty public place is the exception, and not the rule. If public places are sometimes arenas for commerce, they may also be the social equivalent of theatrical stages. The invention of the automobile ultimately led to substantial changes in both rural and urban life, and those changes, in part, involved activities that once occurred in the privacy of a home and now occur in the liminal space of an automobile (Rae 1971; Interrante 1979; Flink 1970).

And over the last twenty years, a series of economic, social, and political events have in parts of the United States occasioned changes in the nature of both public and private places. Here I have in mind on the one hand the increasing cost of housing, which has meant that in some areas larger numbers of people are sharing apartments and houses. At the same time, the courts in the United States have held that one's housemates can speak for one another in legal matters, allowing police to search a roommate's room.

On the other hand, technological changes, such as the development of cellular telephones, laptop computers, the Internet, and PDAs have allowed people to engage "in public" in activities that previously were carried out only within the walls of an apartment or house. Coffee houses and bookstores are these days full of people, doing things that they previously would have done

“in private,” yet by all appearances changing them very little.

In effect, the walls of the home have become more porous, and have come decreasingly to act as viable symbols of a separation between private and public activities.

As I have suggested, one important aspect of what I have termed the topographic is that it is a matter of the development of patterns of activities, practices and routines through which one carries out one's life and defines one's identity. These practices are narrativized, by the person carrying them out and by others. And they often come to be associated with locations, that in turn symbolize the actions, and the person. I am from Los Angeles; you are a New Yorker. And so on.

Some would bristle at the thought that these activities, carried out on sidewalks and streets bustling with people, should be termed “private.” But in a certain way, this is not an important matter. What is important is this. These are activities through which people carry on their everyday lives. And they are for that reason, in complex ways, means by which people define their identities. When these activities are subject to intrusion, or when new technological systems, such as CCTV or LBS begin to involve the characterization of people in ways that are potentially defamatory, or when those technologies seem to represent people in a false light, they are treating those people's actions in ways that undercut the possibility of maintaining an identity. Here one can profitably--and should--leave aside the question of whether these are private or public places, and instead attend to the more basic question, of whether they are improper.

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