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RESEARCH ARTICLE
Lawnscape: semiotics of space, spectacle, and ownership
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While seemingly straightforward, the boundaries of ownership can be confusing. Take the front lawn, for instance. Some local ordinances prohibit such things as parking on one’s front lawn or displaying celebratory storks, “For Sale” signs, or political displays out of concern for the neighbours. However, what happens when the front lawn is taken over by an unstoppable lava flow? On the Big Island of Hawai‘i, countless front lawns are now vast expanses of hardened black lava. These lawns exist now under changed jurisdiction as legal spaces. No longer are these lava-ed lawns now simply purely private property as state authorities now control the area. On front lawns with or without lava, the notion of ownership is confused by two competing rights: the rights of those who inhabit the property versus the rights of those who view the property. Here, the context of rights expands traditional claims and lines of ownership according to the activity of spectaclizing. This paper will examine the tension of ownership and pursuant competing rights that challenge the construction of traditional boundaries and their enforcement within the framework of the semiotics of space. In this paper, the semiotics of space found in front lawns challenges the standard faculties of law to remedy conflicting rights.

Keywords: legal semiotics; legal geography; property; rights; ownership

Introduction
Front lawns are often viewed as an extension of private property. We can picture the neighbourhood curmudgeon yelling to the neighbourhood children to “get off my lawn”. We may envision the front lawn to stereotypically include a trimmed green, well-fertilized, and sufficiently watered grassy area, perhaps even with that proverbial white picket fence as a border. However, we could also envision a weedy, overgrown front lawn and the judgemental retort of passers-by who retort “well, who must live there?” Not until the late eighteenth century did the first commonplace image of the lawn exist in the United States. Prior to this, this image was reserved for the wealthy elite who could afford the luxury of hiring a groundskeeper. The rest of us would have had the typical front lawn consisting of “typically packed dirt or perhaps a cottage garden that contained a mix of flowers, herbs, and vegetables” (American-Lawns 2010). Indeed, dirt seems easier to upkeep than grass.

Today, the front lawn is a ubiquitous, nearly banal aspect of American life. Presently, the front lawn contributes to a multi-million dollar industrial base including but not limited to fertilizing agents, lawncare and maintenance, and grass-based agricultural development. It seems as though the front lawn is everywhere,
in suburbia, in urban centres, as well as out in the rural countryside. Front lawns have become so “everyday” that grass takes a backseat to how those front lawns are used as sites of cultural, social, and legal meaning. Take, for example, Michele Obama’s use of the White House’s front lawn. As First Lady, or rather “First Locavore”, Obama has planted an extensive vegetable garden in order to promote a national agenda of healthier eating through locally sustainable agriculture (Spyros 2009). This garden, however, is not just for eating as Obama uses it as a type of “soapbox” in order to speak about the nation’s childhood obesity epidemic (Superville 2010). In the words of White House aides, the garden has “ex-seeded’ expectations” (Superville 2010). However, Obama is not the first to use the front lawn of the White House for political purposes. Woodrow Wilson used sheep rather than manpower for the lawn’s upkeep in order to ease the shortages of manpower and wool during World War I (American-Lawns 2010). Eleanor Roosevelt planted Victory Gardens in order to ease the nation’s food shortage during World War II; an estimated 20 million followed her example (Economist 2009).

With the White House front lawn as just one example of how front lawns represent social, cultural, and political meaning, grassy and not-so-grassy front lawns across America represent a host of expressions. From the cut-out of the stork delivering a new baby with details of the birth, to the yellow ribbon tied around a tree to symbolize support for soldiers in a war, to the much less benign, overtly hostile burning cross representing racial hatred, the front lawn is a site in which the owner of the front lawn can convey a message to those who are subject to its presence and message. Election signs, parked cars, “Keep Out” or “For Sale” signs convey this message. This message is a source of socio-legal tension in which the rights to use the front lawn abutt the rights of those not to be subject to that usage. This tension is what I refer to as the rights of spectacle in which the space of the front lawn engenders a semiotic jurisdiction of portrayal and perception in terms between property owner and spectator.

The rights of spectacle involve two aspects. First, when a homeowner uses a front lawn for his/her own purposes in order to convey a message; and second, when a spectator receives or rejects that message. The rights of spectacle ask the fundamental question of whether or not the rights of ownership trump the rights of those affected by that ownership. By examining this tension, we can see that the boundaries of jurisdiction are not cleanly drawn according to either side. Additionally, this tension shows us how legality is constructed through signs and symbols as well as geographically according to the centrally located, often visible position of the front yard. The front lawn becomes a screen if considering the spatiality inherent to social relations. Additionally, it is virtually impossible to take the “law” out of lawn, particularly if we consider that “the law both structures our understanding of certain spaces, while at the same time those spaces themselves radically transform the experience, application, and effect of the law” (Manderson 2005, 1). The semiotics of space becomes the semiotics of law as spaces codify and translate meaning as well as legality. By taking a constitutive approach to seeing how law works, we can see conflicting interpretations of jurisdiction that take place over what is on the front lawn. Jurisdiction, or the authority over a space, can be visualized (Brigham 2009) as “a set of practices” (Ford 2001, 203). In his work on the territorialization of jurisdiction, Richard Ford (2001, 216) reminds us that “a failure to study the politics and legalities of space is a failure to map law’s territory.”
Therefore, the semiotics of space articulate the construction of law as it works and is represented in everyday places.

While the map may not be the territory, the mapping of space represents a dyad of jurisdictional meaning including the site as well as its interpretive construction. In this paper, the front lawn represents a study of spatial semiosis according to the cultural power of law and the aesthetics of legality. Dvora Yanow (2005, 3–11) tells us that “the role of built space and its uses in communication and shaping meaning” is important in terms of “constructing cultural meaning, power through place, and the interpretations [of meanings of space] between designers and users of space, or between authored and constructed meaning”. Foucault (2004, 50) tells us that “Law is not pacification, for beneath the law, war continues to rage in all the mechanisms of power, even in the most regular. War is the motor behind institutions and order.”

The recognition of this duality of interpretation contributes to my notion of the rights of spectacle, since the author or designer of what the front lawn represents often conflicts with the users of the front lawn through the tension of constructed meaning and its reception. The front lawn is a landscape or better, a lawnscape, as property rights become fluid when considering the areas of communication, ownership, and usage from the perspectives of designer and audience. Whether or not property is individually or communally owned helps us to see the front lawn as a place where law happens on the constitutive, the geographic, and the semiotic levels (Sax 2001).

So, is your front lawn really “your” front lawn? Does it instead belong to your neighbour or to a community organization that sets the parameters of its usage? Turf wars are fought in rural locations, in urban neighbourhoods, even in areas of natural disaster. What happens, for example, when a front lawn is taken over by a volcanic lava flow? Who now owns that lava-covered property? To answer these questions, the rights of spectacle that transform the front lawn from banal to a mappable site of socio-legal contestation will be examined in two ways. The first considers the boundaries of jurisdiction as an extension of the self, the neighbourhood, and the state according to how some front lawns are used. The second examines the semiosis of “spectaclizing” according to the speech elements of some front lawns that serve as venues ripe for communication (and miscommunication). The paper will conclude with a discussion regarding the creation and perceptions of the rights of spectacle as the ongoing expansion of what law is.

The mapping of space and the boundaries of jurisdiction

As has been implicit thus far, front lawns are spatial constructions that shape our notions of belonging and legitimate usage. Through the designation of this construction, we conceive of a particular notion of rights that are generated through ownership. Foucault (1984, 246) tells us: “It is arbitrary to try to dissociate the effective practice of freedom by people, the practice of social relations, and the spatial distributions in which they find themselves. If they are separated, they become impossible to understand.” However, that which is owned may not always be so clearly defined. Trespass and transgression of social mores are two ideas that contribute to the social policing of front lawns. That which is considered public is often expansively interpreted with regard to private property. In the following two cases,
this tension is expressed through the assertion of where the boundaries of jurisdiction lie according to how the front lawn is used.

The first case involves a municipal trespass ordinance that “explicitly require[d] United States Postal letter carriers to obtain express consent from resident before crossing their lawns in the course of mail delivery”. The ordinance was declared unconstitutional as it violated the Supremacy Clause and the Congressional purview of the postal service. The conclusion of the US Court of Appeals Ninth Circuit was simply: “if a postal customer objects in any manner to having his lawn crossed, postal carriers will not cross the lawn.” Here, private property owners could not collectively fortify the boundaries of their lawns against government services except by means of individualized request.

The second case involves the local anger over residents electing to park on their own lawn in Virginia Beach, Virginia. According to one resident who opposed the presence of vehicularized lawns, “if there isn’t an ordinance against it, there ought to be” (Warren 2006). Another resident complained about such improper use of the front lawn of the “people across the street who do it all the time, and their grass is gone. It’s an ugly sight” (Warren 2006). The unsightliness of a car parked on a front lawn rather than green grass reflects the assertion of a type of jurisdiction that creates boundaries based upon the visibility of space.

In each of these cases, the contested usage of space reveals tensions about prescriptive boundaries of usage in which jurisdiction is premised upon social norms of mail carriers using the sidewalk and of cars parking in the driveway and not on the lawn. In each of these, the front lawn is a space that is mapped according to social expectations of belonging and usage. The transgression of those boundaries represents a culture of ownership in which individuals police one another. After all, is grass not supposed to be walked on? And why must we park only on pavement?

In her pivotal essay “How Built Spaces Mean”, Dvora Yanow (2005, 351) speaks of the meaning of constructed spaces that inform how we act towards one another. She describes space as a “contextualizing element” in which built space is not limited to merely buildings or space, but the “kinds of spaces that communicate social–political–cultural meanings”. Yanow (2005) offers us an expansive notion of where power lies, for power lies not only in the construction of space and its myriad usages, but also in its reaction, reception, and engagement with that space where meaning is conveyed and contested. Power lies in ordinances and their creation, but also in their rejection.

John Brigham’s expansive view of jurisdiction compliments Yanow’s perspective on space, by seeing law in places where it is not readily apparent. He tells us that seeing law in society is “to seek to bring law to the forefront of our visual field so that we actually observe social phenomenon as law” (Brigham 2009, 382). Law that happens in society is not divorced from law that happens in courts. The social policing evident in these two cases is a function of law that happens through attempts at jurisdiction. Here, the boundaries of such jurisdiction depend upon a spectator’s perception of what legitimate usage is or should be.

As stated earlier in this paper, grassy front lawns are a relatively recent invention. Grass must be watered either by hand or by nature. Grass grows quickly but responds well to frequent mowing to keep it under control. A well-groomed grassy front lawn takes a lot of time, labour, and attention. For some, it just is not worth all the trouble. Additionally, the environmental resources that are required for that
pristine lawn may be more harmful than banal. Take the example of the Southern California couple Quan and Angelina Ha, who got rid of their grassy front lawn in favour of planting drought-tolerant greenery such as shrubs and herbs in order to conserve water, a scarce resource in Southern California. However, according to the city ordinance where they lived, 40% of the yard must be “landscaped predominantly with live plants” (Khan 2010). The couple were charged with a misdemeanour and ordered to appear in Orange County Superior Court. Quan Ha reasoned that “We’ve got a newborn, so we want to start worrying about her future” (Khan 2010). Interestingly, their water usage decreased dramatically with the elimination of their lawn from 299,221 gallons in 2007 to 58,348 gallons in 2009 (Khan 2010).

In his analysis of *Lucas v. South Carolina* (1992), Joseph Sax (2001) analyses the meaning of the decision on property rights. He distinguishes between two views of property rights – “transformative economy” and the “economy of nature” – on the basis of environmental approaches to who uses land for which type of purpose and who that use impacts. In the transformative economy, land is used to advance economic prosperity; in the economy of nature, land is used for purposes of environmental conservation. This distinction is particularly relevant to the rights of spectacle given Sax’s attention to how property law adapts to social changes. Historically, he points out, there was “nuisance law” that “originally imposed unprecedented duties of neighbourliness on owners’ rights” (Sax 2001, 231). These “duties of neighbourliness” are what Sax argues to be the foundation for reframing the divide created in *Lucas* between land development and land reserve. We can use Sax’s framework of rights to think further about the divide between owner and spectator that is often at the foci of debates over how front lawns should be used from the perspectives of the developer/owner and the spectator/neighbour. Each has a stake in its usage as each is impacted in a different, and often competing, way.

In this contest between the private and public ownership of land via the rights of ownership and usage, a novel situation arises when the contest over property rights is at the mercy of an active volcano and pits private homeowners against public safety officials against tourists. Each party has a stake in the property that is in question: homeowners face burned-out homes and devalued property; public safety officials face unheeded evacuations and the subsequent need to keep people out of the dangerous area; tourists arrive to see molten lava as spectators. On the Big Island of Hawai’i, the rights of homeowners whose lawns have been lava-ed over by recent eruptions of Kilaeua attract many a gawking tourist, eager to see what lava looks like and the havoc it wreaks. The contest over viewing these lava-ed front lawns has been mitigated by the Hawaiian Civil Defense Authority, which tries to protect both the homeowners’ privacy rights as well as the tourists’ desire to witness during limited hours each day.

In this place, a natural phenomenon/disaster adds to the divide that Sax discusses between a transformative economy and an economy of nature by channelling the effects of now volcanic property through public safety officials. The boundaries of jurisdiction are no longer really within human control, only human reaction. Lava creates new mapping of space as well as a new sense of place and its meaning according to the rights of visibility and usages. We can see what used to be a front lawn and is now a blackened lava field and see its changed jurisdiction in which the public spectatorship takes on a whole new meaning. Rights of viewing are tethered to the taking of the private first by Pele, the Goddess of the Volcano, and second by the
State of Hawai‘i’s disaster management agencies. What was private is now made public by virtue of an altered jurisdiction in which the signs for tourists to keep a reasonable distance out of respect for the homeowner conflict with the rights of spectacle with, in turn, conflict with the original rights of ownership asserted by property owners. The lava field presents a spectacle for the outsider to behold and the homeowner to deal with as a place in which law may be present in the form of policing authorities, but also as a place in which the homeowner asserts rights by erecting fences, displaying “Keep Out” signage, or even simply issuing dirty looks to visitors that convey the message of wished-for privacy.

Neal Milner (1993) considers the rights discourse that exists according to the rights of ownership. In addressing the question “What does it mean to own something”, Milner (1993, 227) examines property narratives that reveal the “social practices, myths and beliefs” which develop the transition from possession to ownership existing in “rites of identity, rites of settlement, and rites of struggle”. He examines land and property in Hawai‘i as a place rich in both historical and contemporary narratives of belonging, authenticity, and entitlement. Milner’s framework of the property narrative in explaining structures of power provides a useful way to see the rights of spectacle that occur when the boundaries of jurisdiction are altered by Pele. One particular narrative that contributes to the contestation of ownership is that provided by Jack Thompson.

Jack Thompson owns the last house standing in the Royal Gardens subdivision that has been nearly subsumed by recent lava flows from Kilauea Volcano. Originally a subdivision of over 1500 purchased lots, fewer than 75 houses had ever been built (US Geological Survey: Hawaiian Volcano Observatory 2008a). In a 2010 interview with Hawai‘i News Now (David 2010), Thompson humbly commented “Oh, I’m just in the way. I hope I can stay in the way for a while. I don’t feel anything malicious, it’s just Pele doing her thing” (David 2010). Thompson has lived in his house for 35 years, with the last 10 years affected by nearby lava flows. He has turned his house into a Bed and Breakfast called “Lava House”. After hosting Food Travelogue Anthony Bourdain, Thompson responded to Bourdain’s statement that his house had finally been taken by Pele. On the contrary:

Everything’s fine up here in lava land. I consider this to be a very safe place. We don’t have a lot of problems up here the rest of the world has. There’s never been a forest fire up here. There’s never been a mudslide or a flood. (Paiva 2008)

As a guest speaker in my Political Science Seminar at the University of Hawai‘i at Hilo, Thompson reiterated this nonchalant sentiment about living near lava as he was instead more “leary of hurricanes” than of volcanic dangers. During his talk-story with my class, Thompson constructed a property narrative that, when analysed according to Milner’s (1993) work, offers a way of seeing the rights of spectacle through the boundaries of jurisdiction. Thompson begins by saying that “land-ownership is meaningless”, especially as “you don’t really own anything because it can be taken away from you”. Thompson, who remembers when Royal Gardens was “still green”, is not referring to lava taking away his property as one might presume, but rather the state government, the county government, the local Planning Department, even neighbourhood wars involving pets. He grumbles: “the system doesn’t work” as “what you deserve isn’t what you get”. His biggest complaint
pertains to the devaluation of his house and property, despite having worked so hard and so long to pay off the mortgage and “get to zero”. However, he does say that “Madame Pele could take my house, but they couldn’t” (because he had paid his mortgage in full). Although his taxes are now extremely low, Thompson is at odds with local government, particularly public safety offices who restricted his ability to use his property as a helicopter landing area to bring tourists directly to see the lava flows as unsafe. He does mention that all is not lost, however, as “there are no [invasive] coqui frogs down there”. He says that if he had to do it all over, he would “build a shack just like those surfers did (and walk away)”. The surfers he is referring to are people who camped out on the beach; he had earlier derided their presence in contrast to his own as an upstanding and responsible homeowner paying a mortgage. Thompson concludes: “I’m kinda fed up with owning stuff”.

Milner (1993, 240) tells us that “narratives about settlement hint at the association between rites of settlement and rites of struggle”. Thompson’s narrative describes a struggle involving property rights and the struggle to fully take advantage of the settlement rights associated with paying off his mortgage in the face of public safety procedures and offices that consider his rights in the after-effects of a natural calamity. He constructs his narrative as someone who is tired of owning property, yet also conflicted because of his investment in being a property-owner. He feels that he deserves better treatment by government in particular as he had played the game of paying a mortgage only to have that property devalued not by lava, but by the policies surrounding lava’s encroachment. Through his narrative, Thompson constructs the right of ownership through rites of settlement and homeownership as well as the rites of struggle to maintain that which he is entitled to as a homeowner.

Semiosis of spectaclizing

As we have seen, the mapping of space according to the boundaries of jurisdiction produce competing notions of rights relating to the usages of property from the perspectives of the property owner to the spectator. In this section of the paper, we will look at the semiosis of how the rights of spectacle are visually represented. I call this act of representation the “semiosis of spectaclizing”, in which the spectacle has been framed as a verb rather than a noun in order to represent both the action in creating and receiving the spectacle. Two main areas develop this idea: political speech and the tourist zones around an active lava flow.

To begin, political speech is the communication of voices about the nature of power. One example of such communication happens every other year at least, with the campaigning of candidates for political office. A visible outlet for this type of communication is the front lawn, where campaign posters and signs are posted. The US Supreme Court has recognized the front lawns as an important venue in this regard in the case City of Ladue v. Gilleo (1994). In this case, the Court writes that “residential yard signs” were a “venerable means of communication that are both unique and important” for purposes of political engagement (Hudson 2009). They elaborate:

Displaying a sign from one’s own residence often carries a message quite distinct from placing the sign someplace else... Residential signs are an unusually cheap and convenient form of communication/ Especially for persons of modest means or limited mobility, a yard or window sign may have no practical substitute. (Hudson 2009)
Yard signs during campaign season are commonplace and actually quite a profitable business for those who make these signs. Steve and Kelli Grubbs, co-owners of VictoryStore.com, a business specializing in political products, expect to bring in $20 million dollars in 2010, including five million campaign signs that will go on American front lawns (Klein 2010). These signs can include the traditional rectangular sign, life-size cardboard cut-outs of politicians, as well as signs “in the shape of symbols commonly associated with certain political officers, such as stars for county sheriffs” (Needleman 2010). The signs of political office that appear on front lawns provide a political voice for the homeowner and a means of participating, albeit silently, in the campaign debates. Likewise, for the audience of such signage, seeing such signage may either lend support to a particular candidate or foster opposition to that person.

However, the display of such political communication is not always seen as so benign. Signs may conflict with local ordinances that restrict their usage (American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania 2008) or may simply conflict with neighbours or other disagreeable passers-by. After her Barack Obama campaign sign was stolen from her front yard, Shannon Bennett of Austin, Texas spray-painted her front lawn instead: “I just wanted to be able to say who I support, without being censored, which is how I felt when my sign was taken” (Shiff 2008). Bennett’s front lawn is itself a sign that has been crafted for purposes of self-representation as an Obama supporter, but also so that anyone passing by her lawn can see exactly how much she supports Obama as a political candidate.

In her book *Law as a System of Signs*, Roberta Kevelson (1988, 4) suggests that “law is a prototype of intersubjective social exchange of value as a whole”. She reminds us that “all communication is a process of exchange of meaningful signs, and signs and sign systems such as natural language mediate between communicating persons and those objects in the phenomenal, physical world of experience to which they refer” (Kevelson 1988, 4). In the semiotic analysis provided by Mariana Valverde (2006, 56), “context analysis has two dimensions, or parts: (a) the context of production and (b) the context of reception or consumption”. Both Kevelson and Valverde speak about the meaning that is created through the context of signs. In both cases, the distinction between author and viewer is emphasized for its constructive purposes that describe the logistics of both seeing and ingesting this type of communication. This distinction is particularly useful when describing the semiotic aspects of the rights of spectacle in which both creating and viewing meaning perform the action of the sign and what it represents in the social exchange that happens when passing by a front lawn.

However, within the context of ownership, authorship changes. In the case of land created from new lava flows in Hawai‘i, the question of ownership creates new contexts for social exchange. When lava flows onto lawns and solidifies, this creates what are called “lava extensions”. This resulting new land legally belongs to the State of Hawai‘i, according to Hawai‘i State Supreme Court Chief Justice William Richardson. In turn, the state has the responsibility to make sure that the land is available for the “use and enjoyment of all the people” (US Geological Survey: Hawaiian Volcano Observatory 2008b). Here, lava is a sign that is publicly owned and kept in trust by the state government. In the County of Hawai‘i, where Pele resides in the Kilauea Volcano, the action of lava is harnessed by the Civil Defense...
Authority and the Department of Land and Natural Resources for purposes of public safety and tourist management. According to Laura H. Thielen, Department of Land and Natural Resources chairperson:

The State has the utmost concern for the safety and welfare of the people wishing to view the lava flow and therefore feels it is in the best interest of the public to close these areas. We are directing people to the Hawai‘i County’s new lava viewing area at the end of Kalapana Road. (Big Island Video News 2010)

However, the management of lava viewing areas for the visiting public is also a boon to local residents impacted by the lava flows, such as Jack Thompson. Near the most active lava flow in Kalapana, homemade signs are placed on the front “lawns” of residents who live in the subdivisions that are affected by the lava viewing roads. The dominant message is one of “Keep Out” and “Respect for the Local Landowner” – or in other words, “Stay off my lawn”.

Lava has also been managed in terms of mapping the risk for real estate and insurance purposes. First prepared by the US Geological Survey in 1974 and revised in 1987, this Lava Hazard Zone Map shows the volcanic hazard zones that exist on the Big Island of Hawai‘i where there are five volcanoes (one is considered dormant): “Hazard zones from lava flows are based chiefly on the location and frequency of both historic and prehistoric eruption” (US Geological Survey: Hawaiian Volcano Observatory 2011). The mapping of risk provides a sign that contributes to the framework of rights of spectacle, as non-local insurance companies will often refuse to insure homeowners who live in Lava Zones 1–2. As one of the nation’s mortgage giants, Fannie Mae declared in 2009 that it would no longer back home mortgages in these two zones, citing an increased risk in the destruction of property (Sample 2009). Residents of these zones living in the Puna District were outraged not only by the unwillingness of insurance providers such as Fannie Mae, but at the expensive alternatives provided by the Hawaii Property Insurance Association or Lloyd’s of London as two examples. According to one local real-estate agent, the Lava Hazard Zone Map has “become the Bible, so to speak, there’s no way to get rid of it. It’s being used for purposes it was never intended for” (Sample 2009).

There are many ways to see the Lava Hazard Zone Map as a sign that contributes to the right of spectacle. The semiosis of risk is viewed as reality by those not local and as fiction by those who are local. Francois Ewald (1991, 199) reminds us that “Nothing is a risk in itself; there is not risk in reality. But on the other hand, anything can be a risk; it all depends on how one analyzes the danger, considers the event”. These maps are the penultimate sign of the rights of spectacle as they exist on a transnational plane, where the spectator is so distanced from the spectacle itself (the actual lava flows) that the creation of the spectacle (the Lava Hazard Zone Map) is actually misrepresentative of the risk that Kilauea Volcano creates. After all, in the words of Jack Thompson, “With lava, you can just step out of the way” (Paiva 2008).

Conclusion

John Brigham (2009, 385) tells us: “We can see law in relationships, artefacts, images, scenes, or landscapes”. When considering how law works, we should consider it from
visual and geographic perspectives. Images and places show us how are rights are created and received in ways that expand what our understanding of law is. Our understanding of law as a binary construction of remedy in which wrongs are righted and justice is served through fixing adversary is confused by what happens on the front lawns. On the lawnscape that is the front lawn, adversarial institutions of law (courts, lawyers, judges, juries) play little role in the configuration and exercise of rights that flourish and are contested on those green, grassy areas of conflict. On front lawns, law happens in a different type of binary, where the author of a message maps the lawn or the receiver of that message acts via spectacizing. Therefore, the mapping of the front lawn for the meaning of ownership and purposes of property is a means for communication representative by the ability to view law according to spectacle. Here, the rights of spectacle involve the perspectives of enabling as well as limiting as ways that law itself is challenged, adapted, manipulated, and changed. In this way, law moves outside traditional venues into the hybridized public/private space of the front lawn where the boundaries of jurisdiction characterize this space as a site of contestation where the tension over authorship and reception create a notion of right that is reflexive and responsive to both sides of the fence. Whether as a screen, a spectacle, or as the extension of the political self, the front lawn is a site that richly contributes to our understanding of how law works in our everyday lives.

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Notes
2. I had the pleasure of meeting Jack Thompson in February 2011 as he graciously accepted my invitation as a Guest Speaker for my Political Science Seminar on “Law and Identity”.

Notes on contributor
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