THE
GREAT
GOOD
PLACE

CAFÉS, COFFEE SHOPS, BOOKSTORES, BARS, HAIR SALONS AND OTHER HANGOUTS AT THE HEART OF A COMMUNITY

RAY OLDENBURG

"Well-written, informative, and often entertaining."
—*Newark Star-Ledger*

"Ray Oldenburg salons, and other hangouts and articulate the importance of the greeting place (third place) for the well-being of the individual and society at large."

> —Ron Sher, President, Terranomics Development
> and founder, Third Place Books, Seattle, Washington

"A day doesn't go by that I don't refer to Ray Oldenburg's *The Great Good Place*. At a time when all great, good independent bookstores everywhere are under siege, we're fortunate that Mr. Oldenburg has articulated our message so clearly."

> —Mitchell Kaplan, owner, Books & Books, Miami, Florida

"*The Great Good Place* has put into words and focus what I've been doing all my life, from the barbershop I remember as a child to the bookstore I now own. My goal at Horizon Books is to provide that third place in which people can "hang out." Ray Oldenburg has defined those good places while still recognizing the magical chemistry they require. *The Great Good Place* is a book to read, to recommend, and to quote."

> —Victor W. Herman, owner, Horizon Books, with locations
> in Traverse City, Petoskey, and Cadillac, Michigan

"The great value of this book is that Mr. Oldenburg has given us an insightful and extremely useful new lens through which to look at a familiar problem..."

> —*New York Times Book Review*

"This wonderful and utterly important book verifies our need for fun through conversation in "great good places." Oldenburg writes passionately of our country's current and urgent problems resulting from our ever-increasing social isolation and provides us with a very simple solution. America must read and react to this rational common-sense solution to salving our stressed lives. And our government needs to promote, permit, and zone responsible neighborhood hospitality, recognizing the value of "a vital informal life.""

> —Lynne Breaux, owner, Tunnicliff's Tavern, Washington, D.C.

"Well-written, informative, and often entertaining."

> —*Newark Star-Ledger*

"Examines gathering places and reminds us how important they are. People need the "third place" to nourish sociability."

—Parade

"Oldenburg believes that the powerful need in humans to associate with one another will inevitably lead to the revival of places where, as the theme song to *Cheers*, the TV show, so aptly puts it, 'everyone knows your name.' We'll drink to that."

—Booklist

"A book that should be read by everyone in North America over the age of 16."

—The World of Beer

"Shows how informal gathering places are essential to the vitality of a city and its people and it also includes a social history of informal life throughout the world."

—Florida Architect

"*The Great Good Place* is a great good book. As a fellow defender of neighborhoods and all they stand for, I salute you on it.

—Andrew M. Greeley

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RAY OLDENBURG

AVALON

To Judith and our
children Jennie, Maren, and Carl

The pleasure of our lives, for which the pain of our births and our deaths is acceptable, is in the ways of other men and our association with them: not always in their whole souls, their whole hearts, their whole minds, but in their own everyday corrections of the turbulence of their human existences. Can these not also be the subject of our art and our literature?

HENRY FAIRLEE

But aside from friends, there must also be a Place. I suppose that this is the Great Good Place that every man carries in his heart. . . .

PETE HAMILL

A community life exists when one can go daily to a given location at a given time and see many of the people one knows.

PHILIP SLATER

George Dane: I know what I call it . . ."The Great Good Place."
The Brother: I've put it myself a little differently . . . "The Great Want Met."
George Dane: Ah, yes—that's it!

from "The Great Good Place" by HENRY JAMES

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Preface

MY INTEREST IN those happy gathering places that a community may contain, those "homes away from home" where unrelated people relate, is almost as old as I am. Children, I suspect, are instinctively attuned to the climate of human relations around them and experience an inner joy and serenity, a feeling that all is well when the adults in their lives relax and laugh in one another's company. That, at least, was my reaction. Perhaps it was that winter evening during my fifth year, when the older cousins took me along to our town's skating rink and deposited me amid the joyful and animated little crowd in its warming shack, that I first drank the joys of blissful public congregation. I have never since lost my appetite for it.

Subsequent training in sociology helped me to understand that when the good citizens of a community find places to spend pleasurable hours with one another for no specific or obvious purpose, there *is* purpose to such association. Further, the most important of the purposes or functions served by informal public gathering places cannot be supplied by any other agencies in the society. All great cultures have had a vital informal public life and, necessarily, they evolved their own popular versions of those places that played host to it.

To comprehend the importance of the informal public life of our society is to become concerned for its future. Currently and for some time now, the course of urban growth and development in the United States has been hostile to an informal public life; we are failing to provide either suitable or sufficient gathering places necessary for it. The grass roots of our democracy are correspondingly weaker than in

the past, and our individual lives are not as rich. Thus, it is always with a sense of urgency that I write and speak on this subject.

I began to take an active professional interest in the topic about ten years ago. I first aired my perspective at a regional sociology convention in 1977. In 1980, a colleague and I collaborated on an article written in the popular vein that was subsequently reprinted in at least nine other periodicals and books. In 1983, we published a longer, more scholarly version in a professional journal. Audience responses were gratifying, but there was also frustration in attempting to make the case within the brief space that articles permit. For the past six years, I've wrestled with a book-length treatment, which this topic surely deserves. After a series of abortive beginnings, it became clear to me that I would not be content to write only for other sociologists nor would I wish to offer solely a description, which good sociology often is.

I wanted to make the case for the informal public life and the Great Good Places essential to it. There is an urgency implicit in the broad-scale destruction of these kinds of places in the United States; we are inadequately equipped even to defend the *idea* of them. The importance of informal meeting places is not deeply ingrained in our young culture, nor is the citizen suitably fortified for a rational argument in their behalf. Even those who would intuitively understand and endorse everything I have to say (and they are many) have too little verbal ammunition. In a world increasingly rationalized and managed, there must be an effective vocabulary and set of rationales to promote anything that is to survive. I can but hope that this effort will contribute to what will have to become a popular understanding of the necessity of a vital informal public life.

I have declined the pose and language of scientific reporting and mean to promote the Great Good Places of society as much as analyze them. Like an attorney-at-law, I am defending a most worthy client who may be facing oblivion and doing so in a language the jury can understand. The jury is middle class, educated, and possessed of choices as to where and how to live. It is capable of making judgments on the matter here put before it and of acting on those judgments. Like the crafty lawyer, I've tried to tailor my anecdotes and illustrations so as to strike chords of response among this panel.

Only the truth will serve my client's interests, and my decision to forego a scientific report assumes no license to play fast and loose with

the facts. Several measures were employed in the attempt to represent the phenomena under discussion as they appear in the real world. In identifying the essential characteristics of informal public gathering places and their effect upon the individual and society, I made certain that each conclusion corresponded with my own considerable field experiences; that each of them had been observed and reported by others; and that each had been held up to criticism in the lecture hall. Also, a decision was made to add six chapters of "real life" illustration (Chapters 5 through 10), all of which confirm the basic constructions within the earlier chapters. Finally, time was on my side. In the early years of effort on the subject, many facts seem incompatible with my emerging impression of third places. It is a human tendency to want to discard or discredit, or simply "forget" uncomfortable facts. They are, however, friends in disguise. They are clues to a deeper understanding of the problem that confronts an investigator, but it takes time to fit the stubborn pieces into the puzzle. By current standards of scholarly production, I spent too much time on this project. Such was the nature of my subject, however, that the extra time turned out to be my best methodological technique.

Social scientists who choose to make use of this volume may recognize a familiar structure beneath its plain English and special pleading. The first section of the book is devoted to the creation of an ideal typical core setting of informal public life against which concrete examples may be compared. The second section offers a variety of cultural and historical (real) examples based on the best and, at times, the only accounts available to us. These afford some, and I think significant, substantiation and testing of the ideal type. The final section is devoted to issues relating to informal public life and, though my colleagues are likely to disagree with my positions or the fact that I took positions, they are not likely to dispute the relevance of the issues I've raised.

The considerable amount of fieldwork associated with this effort followed procedures associated with comparative analysis or those used to generate grounded theory. In keeping with that approach, I made use of supplemental data wherever I could find it.

Those wishing to read another author's version of the third place thesis are directed to Phillipe Ariès' paper entitled "The Family and the City," which appeared in *Daedalus* in the spring issue of 1977. Therein, one need only interpret the Frenchman Ariès' café in a generic sense. I

stumbled across Ariès' essay toward the end of my own work and reflected on that timing. Though an early reading of his paper would have hastened the development of my own broader perspective, I was spared the inherent pessimism in his analysis.

The bulk of social scientific writing in the area of informal public gathering places consists of ethnographic descriptions that await integration into more abstract and analytical efforts addressing the place and function of these centers of the informal public life of the society. Sociologists may ask themselves why so little has been done in this area since Georg Simmel's brief essay on sociability over half a century ago.

Finally, I would suggest to colleagues that the possibilities for cross-cultural research into the quality of informal public life seem exciting. The most useful and pertinent data are always within the public domain, and the invitation to foreign travel should require little encouragement. Whether the present effort serves to guide such efforts or merely encourage them makes no difference. The important thing is that this research be conducted, if only to help our nation reinstitute the kind of human association essential to all democracies.

Preface to the Second Edition

AS THE ORIGINAL preface accomplishes the usual purpose of such prolusions, the second affords the author the luxury of choice. Though it is tempting to recount the many and varied experiences, the rich flow of correspondence, and the kindred spirits met as a result of the publication of *The Great Good Place* six years ago, the space allotted here may be more usefully employed.

This second preface is devoted to those readers who have more than a passing interest in the concerns this book addresses. It is primarily for those who wish to learn more and do more in behalf of community, public conversation, and civicism. It is for those who believe in a public life and the need to restore it.

Two brief additions will be developed here, both of which should enhance the utility of the book. First, I will make suggestions for additional reading. Second, I will offer a checklist of the various community-building functions of "great good places" which may be quickly reviewed and assessed against the strengths and deficiencies of any particular neighborhood or municipality. Some of these are developed at greater length in the text proper; some are introduced here for the first time.

In the brief period since *The Great Good Place* was published, many books have appeared with similar themes. America seems to be undergoing a massive reassessment. In the simplest terms, we got where we wanted to go but now we aren't happy about where we are. We have

become a suburban nation—the only one in the world. Our migration from both the inner cities and the rural hinterland was, as Lewis Mumford once put it, "a collective effort to live a private life." We aimed for comfort and well-stocked homes and freedom from uncomfortable interaction and the obligations of citizenship. We succeeded.

As if to seal our fate, zoning ordinances were copied and enforced all over the land, prohibiting the stuff of community from intrusion into residential areas. In the subdivisions of post-World War II America, there is nothing to walk to and no place to gather. The physical staging virtually ensures immunity from community.

The preferred and ubiquitous mode of urban development is hostile to both walking and talking. In walking, people become part of their terrain; they meet others; they become custodians of their neighborhoods. In talking, people get to know one another; they find and create their common interests and realize the collective abilities essential to community and democracy.

It is from this perspective, this sense of the terrible costs of suburban development as we've managed it, that much of my reading and writing takes direction. Before publication of this book, I found my kindred spirits almost entirely in the books they wrote, and I am pleased to report that the present decade is witness to an increasing number of volumes having to do with our subject.

My recommendations for additional reading are subjective and incomplete. They consist of the men and women who have had most influence on me and whose books, regardless of publication date, seem to me to have great contemporary relevance.

I could start with none other than Jane Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities.* For all the consternation she caused within architectural and planning circles, she has done a tremendous service for us all. One marvels at both the depth and quantity of her insights. Well within the Jacobs' tradition and appearing the same year as my contribution was Roberta Gratz's *The Living City.* Gratz's book contrasts grass roots successes at rebuilding neighborhoods with the disasters wrought by "urban renewal."

Victor Gruen's *The Heart of Our Cities* is still a book worth not only owning but using as a reference work for all aspects of urban and neighborhood development. Gruen is the man who conceived and planned our nation's first covered shopping mall. He came to reject the desig-

nation, "father of malling" because his plan was stripped down to commercialism only. He had envisioned a true community center.

Another volume I've nearly worn out is a brief and very readable little book by Wolf Von Eckardt entitled *Back to the Drawing Board*. Like Gruen, Von Eckardt is an advocate of citizen participation in planning and well understands that that can happen only at the neighborhood level.

The best description I've found on what we can learn from the old world is Bernard Rudofsky's *Streets for People*; a richly illustrated and detailed volume on the architectural requirements of a thriving public life. It is fittingly dedicated to "The Unknown Pedestrian" and not one of its scores of illustrations bears any resemblance to our subdivisions.

What almost amounts to a new genre of books are those appearing in response to the "places rated" volumes appearing in the 1980s. Those earlier books ranked cities according to comparative numerical data on health, crime, education, etc. Recognizing that strict adherence to such criteria could lead one to take up residence in "Anywhere, USA," more recent authors have intruded a most relevant question: But is it an interesting place to live?

Mark Cramer's *Funkytowns USA* and Terry Pindell's *A Good Place to Live* are welcome conrasts to the census-based, scoresheet analyses. Pindell treats the dozen or so best places in the U.S. that he's ever heard about in considerable depth. And he writes well; one almost feels as though he or she has been along on the trips. Cramer's "Funkytowns" covers many more towns and cities and, as one reviewer suggested, it should be placed in the glove compartments of all rental cars.

Philip Langdon's *A Better Place to Live* is a painstaking examination of how to "retrofit" American suburbs and when we come to the necessary matter of re-writing the building and zoning codes, this book should be one of the primers. Peter Katz's *The New Urbanism* details and illustrates two dozen developments and re-developments. It represents our architects' best attempts at recreating community. A closing essay (an Afterword) by Vince Scully deserves careful attention.

Recently appearing and already in its second printing is Richard Sexton's *Parallel Utopias* which looks deeply into the thinking behind, and execution of, two notable attempts at creating community today. Seaside, Florida (based on an urban model despite its location) and Sea Ranch, California (based on the model of a rural community) are closely

examined. Sexton is a first-rate photographer who illustrates as well as he explains in this book.

A volume which catches everyone's attention when, on my trips, I show it around is David Sucher's *City Comforts*. Contained herein are many suggestions, all photographically-illustrated, as to "minor surgery" and modest additions which combine to make life out in the public domain more enticing, more comfortable, and more livable.

The expert in this sort of thing, of course, is William H. Whyte, and if his larger tome *City* seems a bit formidable, the small and highly illustrated *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* will certainly seduce the reader into more of Whyte's research which has been done with exceeding care. Many urban centers have been revitalized in adherence to what Whyte has been able to report.

The political importance of "great good places" is wonderfully documented in a book by Sara Evans and Harry Boyte entitled *Free Spaces*. The writers argue convincingly that such places became much more important after industrialization separated home and the workplace and that they serve to preserve the peoples' democracy against the growing control of both government and the corporations.

Christopher Lasch's *The Revolt of the Elites* discusses the "civic arts" and the art of argument in addition to its main theme—that America's professional and managerial elites have little interest in the broad middle class of our society and have weak ties to nation and place. Their interest in a global economy and their "tourist's attitude" toward place give us cause to both regret and combat the control they have over the rest of us.

As public life is populated with strangers more than ever before; as strangers frighten us more than ever before; and as communities nonetheless depend upon the successful integration of strangers, books about them are also recommended. Lyn Lofland's *A World of Strangers* has become a modern classic. Michael Ignatieff's *The Needs of Strangers* is thought-provoking, and Parker Palmer's *The Company of Strangers* is a pleasure to read.

Before moving to the second part of this preface, there is another kind of reading, just now gathering momentum, that will be of special interest to those concerned with public life. I refer to "civic journalism," or "community journalism," or "citizen journalism," as it is variously called. Though its precise goals and *modus operandi* are still being

debated, there is a general consensus that greater citizen involvment is the *desideratum*.

Readers may expect that newspapers will encourage citizen participation in most aspects of community development; that more "level" heads will be invited to present more rational and moderate discussion; that reporting will go beyond mere events and present developments against a background of trends and patterns. Developments and proposals will increasingly be presented in context. Newspapers are expected to be less in league with politicians and the business community than in the past, and more with a citizenry which is trying to "live good lives in good cities."

The reasons for this shift in print journalism are many. Suffice it to note here that there is reason to rejoice in the fact that one of our institutions is moving away from the professional elitism which ill-serves the citizens of a democracy. As newspapers begin to speak more to ordinary citizens, so also will they more often listen to them.

As indicated, the remainder of this discussion will be devoted to the community-building functions which "great good places" typically perform. Most often I refer to such places as "third places" (after home, first, and workplace, second) and these are informal public gathering places. These places serve community best to the extent that they are *inclusive* and *local*.

The first and most important function of third places is that of uniting the neighborhood. In many communities, the post office served this function well when everyone had a mailbox there; when everybody had to walk or drive to it; and it was kept open, by law, twenty-four hours a day. Though there was no seating, it was a place where people met and conversed, at least briefly, with one another.

Drug stores also brought nearly everyone into contact with everyone else in the course of the average week or month. They did this because they offered so many things, beyond pharmaceuticals, that people needed. Also, they typically enjoyed a good (central) location in the town or neighborhood.

Places such as these, which serve virtually everybody, soon create an environment in which everybody knows just about everybody. In most cases, it cannot be said that everyone, or even a majority, will *like* everybody else. It is, however, important to know everyone, to know how they variously add to and subtract from the general welfare; to know

what they can contribute in the face of various problems or crises, and to learn to be at ease with everyone in the neighborhood irrespective of how one *feels* about them. A third place is a "mixer."

Assimilation is a function to which third places are well-suited. They serve as "Ports of Entry" for visitors and as places where newcomers may be introduced to many of their predecessors. Andres Duany jokes about the man who spent two days trying to find the resident of a subdivision. His anecdote points up the fact that our postwar residential areas are extremely hostile to strangers, outsiders, and new residents of the area. The streets are typically vacant and there are no local commercial establishments where one might stop to get directions.

There is considerable irony here. Once America became the high mobility society it now is, with about twenty percent of the population changing residence every year, one might have thought that neighborhoods would have been designed so that people could be integrated quickly and easily. What actually happened, however, was quite the opposite. The more people moved about, or were moved about by the companies that employed them, the more difficult it became to penetrate the nation's residential areas.

The hardships involved, and they are many, are not incurred by the newcomers alone. The city and the neighborhood suffer as well when there is a failure to integrate newcomers and enlist their good services to the betterment of community life.

A one-visit Welcome Wagon is a poor substitute for the friendly tavern or coffee-counter where one is *always* welcome. The "neutral ground" (space upon which one is not burdened by the role of host or guest) of third places offers the great ease of association so important to community life. People may come and go just when they please and are beholden to no one. Eventually one meets or otherwise learns about everyone in the neighborhood.

In this respect, third places also serve as "sorting areas." The broad scale association which they provide ultimately leads to the stuff of "sociometrics." That is, people find that they very much like certain people and dislike others. They find people with similar interests, and they find people whose interests aren't similar but are interesting nonetheless. Third places often serve to bring together for the first time, people who will create other forms of association later on.

In true communities there are collective accomplishments. People work together and cooperate with one another to do things which individuals cannot do alone. Though much of this kind of effort is informal, it nonetheless requires a general understanding of who can do what; of the skills, abilities and attitudes of those in the neighborhood. Third places serve to sort people according to their potential usefullness in collective undertakings.

Related to this is the third place's function as a staging area. In time of local crisis, people typically find it necessary to help themselves as much or more than they are helped by municipal agencies. Severe storms and other crises often require a gathering and mobilization of local citizens for the purpose of helping one another. But where? In the aftermath of hurricane Andrew in South Florida not long ago, many people emerged from the destruction feeling that need to gather with others to find out how severe and extensive the damage; to find out what was being done; to see how they could help and/or get help—but for most there was no place to assemble. Careful zoning had denied these people their "third places."

Third places also provide those whom Jane Jacobs called "public characters." These are people who know everybody in the neighborhood and who care about the neighborhood. These are usually store owners or operators who "keep an eye" on what's happening in the neighborhood. These are the people who alert parents about what their kids sometimes "get into" before it is necessary for the police to do so. These are also the people likely to give newcomers their first welcome to the area.

Suburban zoning has replaced "public characters" with the retailers and their employees in the malls and out on the strips. The chains in which these people work thrive by killing off local commercial establishments, and the people who operate the chains do nothing for the community in the way that "public characters" do.

In the negatively-zoned subdivision, there rarely emerges a "public character," for the means by which people might come to know everyone are absent. If the developer's habit of calling a house a "home" is something of a stretch, it doesn't compare with that of calling a subdivision a "community," for that is precisely what it is *not*.

Among the noblest of third place functions, rarely realized anywhere anymore, is that of bringing youth and adults together in relaxed en-

joyment. The rampant hostility and misunderstanding between the generations, adult estrangement from and fear of youth, the increasing violence among youth—these and youth-related problems all have a common genesis and it is the increasing segregation of youth from adults in American society.

Raising children was easier when the parents got a lot of help from others in the neighborhood who knew the kids and not only kept an eye on them but generally enjoyed having them around. The ways in which older and younger generations teased, cajoled, chided and amused one another have almost passed from memory now, as have the lessons learned, the examples set, and the local figures admired.

With so many mothers now absent from the home, it is all the more regrettable that the family is so weakly connected (if connected at all) to the other people in the neighborhood. Where third places exist within residential neighborhoods, and are claimed by all, they remain among the very few places where the generations still enjoy one another's company.

Third places serve the elderly as well. It is unfortunate that so many old and retired people find it desireable to make a final migration to some "senior citizen community." It is regrettable that the areas in which they worked and raised children have so little to offer them, so few means of keeping them connected to neighborhood and community.

This book has no chapter on the elderly and the retired. There was the constraint of length and I opted for a chapter on children based on my reasoning that children are ill-equipped and weakly positioned to speak for themselves.

There should be a chapter on the older generation, of course, and not just for their sake. Third places are typically places of business and their slow periods benefit from retired people who can fill the booths and chairs when others are at work or in school. Furthermore, retired people are generally more sociable and more civilized. No longer grubbing for a living, they come to place more value on good conversation, on enjoying people just for the company they offer.

It escapes me right now, who first wrote that urban planning which meets the needs of children and the elderly will be nice for everybody, but truer words are rarely written. Several years ago, I participated in an "Evaluation Study" of a program for retired people in a Minnesota

town of barely 7,000 people. The program was contained, for the most part, in the basements of two of the town's larger churches.

Participation was modest in this program and enthusiasm was not high. I was there a full three days and couldn't figure out the purpose, though everyone I talked with insisted that something important was being done "for the elderly." The fourth day began with a meeting in the conference room of the town's largest bank. When the meeting adjourned, I held back and stepped in front of our host as he was about to leave. With just the two of us present, I confronted him with, "What the heck is this all about?" Taken off guard, he blurted, "Well, we had to get them off the street." The important thing being done "for" the elderly was getting them out of the way much as they did with the homeless when Atlanta hosted the Olympics.

These older folks, of course, had looked forward to sitting along the sidewalks in fair weather and to lingering at the lunch and coffee shops and taverns. Here were people most intent upon enjoying community; who now had time to enjoy communal association. The "boosters" however, were intent on denying them these rewards. There was no appreciation of that which the oldest generation contributes to communities which provide a place for them.

Third places provide a means for retired people to remain in contact with those still working and, in the best instances, for the oldest generation to associate with the youngest.

The plight of the elderly and those on fixed incomes generally, points up another important function of third places and it is that performed by all "mutual aid societies." In the convivial atmosphere of third places, people get to know one another and to like one another and then to care for one another. When people care for one another, they take an interest in their welfare; and this is a vastly superior form of welfare than that obtained by governmental programs. It is based on mutual consent, genuine empathy, and real understanding of peoples' situations. Nobody is a "case."

Third place regulars "do for one another," as they would for blood relatives and old friends. They give things they no longer need; they loan items they still want; they do what they can to relieve hardship when it befalls "one of the gang." When someone doesn't "show" for a couple of days, somebody goes around to check on them.

The financial benefits in all of this are considerable. Somebody in

the group fixes lawn-mowers. Someone else can handle plumbing and appliances, or knows who does it at considerable savings. Money-saving advice is forthcoming from somebody in the group who has confronted a given problem earlier on. Sometimes, alas, when the group's collective resources are found wanting, the individual is advised, "Get out your pocketbook." Often, however, that is not necessary.

It was in the first "Crocodile Dundee" movie, I believe, that our protagonist was surprised to hear that somebody paid a psychiatrist to listen to his or her troubles. "That's what mates are for!" was, I think, his response. The group support inherent in third place camaraderie, I'm convinced, also saves many people the expense of a "professional caregiver."

This union of friends suggests another function of the third place. An individual can have many friends and engage them often *only* if there is a place he or she can visit daily and which plays host to their meetings.

Friends met in numbers create something of a festive mood for all. Interaction is relatively easy as one is required to contribute only his or her "share" of the time. Laughter is frequent where many friends gather. In their company, the competitive successes and the enervating stresses of the mundane world are "put on hold."

Amid this lengthy enumeration of third place functions, it may be well to point out that the fundamental motivation for this kind of belonging is neither personal advantage nor civic duty. The basic motivation; that which draws people back time and again is *fun*. It is a lamentable fact that so many Americans, when they see the "gang" heavily engaged in "solving the problems of the world" consider them merely to be frivolously wasting time.

The "fun" function of third places is better seen, perhaps, as the entertainment function. That entertainment has deteriorated almost entirely into an industry in the United States is a great pity. We take it passively; we take it in isolation; and we frequently find it boring.

In third places, the entertainment is provided by the people themselves. The sustaining activity is conversation which is variously passionate and light-hearted, serious and witty, informative and silly. And in the course of it, acquaintances become personalities and personalities become true characters—unique in the whole world and each adding richness to our lives.

The major alternative to participatory entertainment is television which really isn't interesting enough to garner all the blame heaped upon it. The critics usually overlook the lack of alternatives to this medium. How many Americans having "surfed" all the channels and, bored by it all, wouldn't like to slip on a jacket and walk down to the corner and have a cold one with the neighbors? Ah, but we've made sure there's nothing on the corner but another private residence . . . indeed, nothing at all within easy walking distance.

We might remind ourselves of the essence of the so-called *joie de vivre* ("joy in living") cultures. That essence is their ability to entertain themselves in an abundance of public places where they may do so daily and at little cost and no discomfort. We may sneer at their simple ways; at their lack of technological gadgetry; and at the fact that their dwellings are more humble than ours. But when all is said and done—they enjoyed life and gave human relationships higher priority than making a buck.

America's growing problem of automobile congestion suggests a related function of third places—where *locally* situated. A third place to which one may walk allows people to "get out of the house" without getting into a car and contributing to traffic congestion. Unfortunately, our census takers log only the commuting use of our roadways. Even casual attention to local driving conditions will reveal that our roads are crowded during most daylight hours and not just at "rush" hours.

Though we live in as large and as well-stocked houses as we can afford, there is frequent need to escape from them. The only real means for most is by car and the only realistic escapes for most is the malls and the strips where they are expected to spend their consumer dollars. Americans spend three to four times as much time shopping as Europeans and much, if not most, of the difference has to do with a lack of alternatives. We have denied ourselves the means of friendly and cost-free association in our neighborhoods. In any total analysis, Walmart and McDonalds are much more expensive than we might imagine.

At the risk of sounding mystical, I will contend that nothing contributes as much to one's sense of belonging to a community as much as "membership" in a third place. It does more than membership in a dozen formal organizations. Why this should be so is not entirely mysterious. It has to do with surviving and, indeed, *thriving* in a "fair game" atmosphere.

Whereas formal organizations typically bring together the like-minded and similarly-interested, third places are highly inclusive by comparison. By "fair game," we mean that in such places the individual may be approached by anyone and is expected to give-and-take in conversation with civility and good humor. Many people find this daunting and many fans of the internet are those who find the communication it affords much "safer."

Those who manage to "get on with one and all" count it a matter of pride, both for themselves and for the group itself. They often marvel at the "strange collection" of people with whom they have found a joyful place. This feeling of belonging probably impresses itself upon those who have third places more so now than in the past. Not only is postwar housing more privatized, it is also more segregated than earlier. Most people these days don't grow up in a "vertical community" but in one narrowly segregated by income and demographics. Their residential experience is based on a thin, horizontal slice of society. Third places, for those who have them nowadays, must seem wonderfully inclusive indeed.

Three more functions of third places seem to me worthy of introduction here, and these are not less important as might be indicated by their late mention. Third places are political fora of great importance. In many countries the emergent solidarity of labor owed strictly to the profusion of cafés in which the workers discussed their common problems, realized their collective strength, and planned their strikes and other strategies. Though many credit an "enlightened" congress with the anti-segregation laws of the sixties, none of it would have happened but for prior assembly in black churches all over the South.

It is not difficult to understand why coffeehouses came under attack by government leaders in England, in Scandinavia, and in Saudi Arabia at various points in history. It was in the coffeehouses where people congregated and often, in their discussions, found fault with the countries' rulers.

Survey after survey finds political literacy low in America. People don't know who serves in the president's cabinet; they don't know who their representatives are; they wouldn't sign our Bill of Rights if presented to them as a petition, etc., etc. As Christopher Lasch recently remarked: Why should they know these things? Why should anyone gather information they never get to use? At a more basic level what

these surveys show is a lack of involving discussion and that, in turn, suggests that we've lost many, if not most, of our third places—the political forum of the common man.

Third places also serve as intellectual fora. Politics is not the only important subject discussed in third places. Philosophy, geography, urban development, psychology, history and a great many others are entertained. Everyone is, to some degree, an intellectual and third place regulars more so than most because they air their notions in front of critics.

Unfortunately, we too often think of intellectualism in bookish terms or as belonging to those with credentials. Almost everyone, however, reflects upon life and society's problems. Self-appointed elites may deride "cracker barrel philosophy" but the very term suggests that "ordinary" people think and that they do so in company with their fellow man.

To the outsider, the notion that third place regulars "think alike" is often a tempting summary, but it is wrong. "Membership" in third place groups depends upon coming to terms with people who, on certain subjects, are "out of their minds"—which is to say one doesn't agree with them. Membership also means that sometimes, one's pet ideas don't go over with the group. They don't agree. Unlike that association based on ideology or "political correctness," or scapegoating, one's ideas don't "cost you" in third place gatherings. One's acceptance in such circles depends one's character and one's ability to liven the group—but not on specific notions. One intrudes an idea and the others may nod, or groan, or frown, or laugh but nothing is lost. It's all rather like a good classroom.

Finally, third places may serve as offices. In some kinds of transactions, it is better that neither party be on his or her "home ground" but in some neutral corner, preferably a comfortable and informal one. I was amused, a few years ago, that some of the teachers in a school system resented the fact that the principal spent a portion of almost every day at a local restaurant. He seemed, in their eyes, to be taking advantage of his office. In fact, however, he met a good many parents in that restaurant; parents who didn't have to dress up and spend time waiting in his outer office. He met parents whom he might not have seen otherwise.

Some people are most "locatable" in their third places. It's the only place they are certain to visit on any given day and consequently, it's

the best place to "catch" them. I have noticed in the academic world, that many of us maintain contact with those who've retired from the system, not on the campus, but in those third places we both visit.

The third place as "office" is more popular in many other cultures than in the United States where a bureaucratic mentality is more pervasive. In the near and far east, many entrepreneurs are too poor to own offices of their own and use public eating or drinking places, even stating so on their business cards. In Ireland, where everybody deemed to have good sense frequents the pubs, pubs quite naturally are often used as informal offices. It is a practice to be encouraged if for no other reason than the equality it establishes between the parties.

That concludes this account of third place functions which I have offered to enhance the reader's understanding of their potential for community building and which groups may use in considering which of these functions seem important to their neighborhoods and where said functions might be performed.

I should like to close with a nod to those who disagree with that which I seem to be promoting, and indeed am. There are those who "like their privacy" and who consider neighborhoods in which people know one another to be something of an anachronism.

The breed is not new. Even before shopping became a way of life and long before television and other modes of home entertainment became popular, there were people who felt the same way. In my hometown, back in the forties and fifties, when Main Street was lively and filled with people all day long; when we had an abundance of places, both indoors and out, to enjoy one another's company, there were those who never did. And when our little town of about 700 played host to some 10,000 a day during festival time, those same people never took part—not in the preparation, nor the enjoyment.

This, we must understand, is as it should be. The first requirement of a good community is that one need not be a member of it. Public life, civicism, a vital community—these concepts are lost on many and it is surprising that they are not lost on more of us. As I indicated at the outset, this escape from community has been our collective goal for the past several decades.

The response to such people should be polite but firm. They have the right not to assume the responsibilities of a community life; the option not to expend the time and energy that the restoration of public

life will require. But it ill behooves them to attempt to frustrate the rest of us in the name of "progress" or whatever rationale they embrace in defense of their life style preferences. Those who choose not to participate always have that choice but those of us who yearn for a public life and for life on the streets of our neighborhoods have been deprived. And we, I think, have the better case.

Ray Oldenburg
Pensacola, Florida
October 1, 1996

Introduction

GREAT CIVILIZATIONS, like great cities, share a common feature. Evolving within them and crucial to their growth and refinement are distinctive informal public gathering places. These become as much a part of the urban landscape as of the citizen's daily life and, invariably, they come to dominate the image of the city. Thus, its profusion of sidewalk cafés seems to *be* Paris, just as the forum dominates one's mental picture of classic Rome. The soul of London resides in her many pubs; that of Florence in its teeming *piazzas*. Vienna's presence is seen and felt most within those eternal coffeehouses encircled within her *Ringstrasse*. The grocery store-become-pub at which the Irish family does its entertaining, the *bier garten* that is father to more formal German organizations, and the Japanese teahouse whose ceremonies are the model for an entire way of life, all represent fundamental institutions of mediation between the individual and the larger society.

In cities blessed with their own characteristic form of these Great Good Places, the stranger feels at home—nay, *is* at home—whereas in cities without them, even the native does not feel at home. Where urban growth proceeds with no indigenous version of a public gathering place proliferated along the way and integral in the lives of the people, the promise of the city is denied. Without such places, the urban area fails to nourish the kinds of relationships and the diversity of human contact that are the essence of the city. Deprived of these settings, people remain lonely within their crowds. The only predictable social consequence of technological advancement is that they will grow ever more apart from one another.

America does not rank well on the dimension of her informal public

life and less well now than in the past. Increasingly, her citizens are encouraged to find their relaxation, entertainment, companionship, even safety, almost entirely within the privacy of homes that have become more a retreat from society than a connection to it.

In their kind and number, there has been a marked decline in gathering places near enough to people's homes to afford the easy access and familiar faces necessary to a vital informal public life. The course of urban development in America is pushing the individual toward that line separating proud independence from pitiable isolation, for it affords insufficient opportunity and encouragement to voluntary human contact. Daily life amid the new urban sprawl is like a grammar school without its recess periods, like incurring the aches and pains of a softball game without the fun of getting together for a few beers afterward. Both the joys of relaxing with people and the social solidarity that results from it are disappearing for want of settings that make them possible.

In its organization, as in its style, this book is intended to make a case for those core settings of the informal public life that are essential to good towns and great cities. The initial chapter elaborates the problem of a deficient informal public life and argues for the cultivation of third places as the solution to that problem. The discussion beyond is divided into three major sections devoted, respectively, to the *essence* of the third place, then to *examples* of it, and finally, to *issues* surrounding this failing and forgotten institution.

In the first section, effort is devoted to an intriguing and rewarding task. I've simply asked what the culturally and historically different versions of popular and numerous informal public gathering places *have in common*. Proceeding from the stage to the action that takes place upon it, I describe the social, psychological, and political consequences attaching to regular involvement in the informal public life of the society. Again, I am struck by the similarities that persist across time and culture and am fortified in the conviction that the core settings of informal public life are as uniformly essential as they are outwardly variable.

The second part offers examples of the third place as it has evolved in our culture and in others. I look first at the German-American lager beer garden of the last century, that model of peaceful coexistence and happy association that America needed but ultimately rejected. "Main

Street" describes the energetic informal public life of small-town America in prewar days, our most successful homegrown example. Also included in this section are detailed descriptions of the English pub, the French bistro, the American tavern, and the coffeehouses of England and Vienna. Each concrete example confirms the third place model and offers lessons of its own.

The final section is devoted to issues that impinge upon the character and fate of the informal public life of our society. Chapter 11 examines the urban environment in which an informal public life takes hold or is thwarted. It reveals many of the factors responsible for the paradoxical condition that frustrates us: urban development is currently ruinous to the city. Chapter 12 begins with recognition of the fact that third places are and always have been in the sexist tradition and examines the informal public life in the context of the relations between the sexes. The thirteenth chapter focuses on children, who may ultimately suffer most in a world lacking the experiences and amenities associated with a safe, rich, colorful, and interesting informal public life.

The final chapter bases its optimism on certain lessons that urban Americans are learning as they try to adapt to an environment as grossly unsuited to the good life as it is to good relations among those who share that environment. Hope lies not with the expert or the official but with those who use the environment built for them and find it wanting.

Ray Oldenburg
Pensacola, Florida

Acknowledgments

OVER THE COURSE of this project's development, I've incurred debts to many generous and helpful individuals. Apart from those identified here, I'm indebted to many who read portions of early manuscripts and encouraged the effort and to many more with whom I've discussed aspects of the general subject.

The following people have had a direct hand in contributing to or otherwise shaping the content of this effort, and I am pleased to acknowledge their help. Janice Autenrieth, Audrey Cleland, Frank DeMoss, Kitty Elliott, Michael Galley, Danielle Malone, and George Neal supplied firsthand illustrative material. Mr. and Mrs. Don McGuire helped me reconstruct Main Street in River Park as it was constituted in 1940. Tom Richey and John Jarvis supplied me with useful items extracted from the broad range of their reading.

The staff of the John C. Pace Library was helpful and congenial beyond the call of duty throughout the frequent and varied use I made of that institution's facilities. My dear friend and colleague, Dennis Brissett, with whom I collaborated on earlier efforts, made helpful suggestions in structuring the second and third chapters. Dr. Bernadette Grant offered useful comments on those portions of the manuscript dealing with women's reactions to various aspects of informal public life.

Special thanks are owed to those who labored over the emerging text. Jim Servies, in his final months as director of the John C. Pace Library, found time—much of it on airplanes and in waiting rooms—to do a stylistic editing of most of the book's chapters. Thanks to his efforts, a better flow of words is contained within fewer pages. Seymour Kurtz,

in his role as the publisher's reader, made useful suggestions throughout, and most of them have been incorporated into the final product.

Final shaping of the manuscript was greatly simplified by the efforts of Connie Works, a fine lady and virtuoso on the word processor. My association with the publisher was as pleasant as it was professional, thanks to Laura Greeney, the development editor assigned to this project.

Finally, I must acknowledge one who is no longer among us. Don Martindale passed away while the project was in progress. He was mentor and friend, a renowned and prolific scholar, and a gentleman within an academic world that contains far too few of them. It was his encouragement, more than anyone else's, that sustained my efforts at research outside the mainstream.

PART I

CHAPTER I

The Problem of Place in America

A number of recent American writings indicate that the nostalgia for the small town need not be construed as directed toward the town itself: it is rather a "quest for community" (as Robert Nisbet puts it)—a nostalgia for a compassable and integral living unit. The critical question is not whether the small town can be rehabilitated in the image of its earlier strength and growth—for clearly it cannot—but whether American life will be able to evolve any other integral community to replace it. This is what I call the problem of place in America, and unless it is somehow resolved, American life will become more jangled and fragmented than it is, and American personality will continue to be unquiet and unfulfilled.

MAX LERNER
America as a Civilization
1957

THE ENSUING YEARS have confirmed Lerner's diagnosis. The problem of place in America has not been resolved and life *has* become more jangled and fragmented. No new form of integral community has been found; the small town has yet to greet its replacement. And Americans are not a contented people.

What may have seemed like the new form of community—the automobile suburb—multiplied rapidly after World War II. Thirteen million plus returning veterans qualified for single-family dwellings requiring no down payments in the new developments. In building and equipping these millions of new private domains, American industry found a major alternative to military production and companionate

marriages appeared to have found ideal nesting places. But we did not live happily ever after.

Life in the subdivision may have satisfied the combat veteran's longing for a safe, orderly, and quiet haven, but it rarely offered the sense of place and belonging that had rooted his parents and grandparents. Houses alone do not a community make, and the typical subdivision proved hostile to the emergence of any structure or space utilization beyond the uniform houses and streets that characterized it.

Like all-residential city blocks, observed one student of the American condition, the suburb is "merely a base from which the individual reaches out to the scattered components of social existence."[1] Though proclaimed as offering the best of both rural and urban life, the automobile suburb had the effect of fragmenting the individual's world. As one observer wrote: "A man works in one place, sleeps in another, shops somewhere else, finds pleasure or companionship where he can, and cares about none of these places."

The typical suburban home is easy to leave behind as its occupants move to another. What people cherish most in them can be taken along in the move. There are no sad farewells at the local taverns or the corner store because there are no local taverns or corner stores. Indeed, there is often more encouragement to leave a given subdivision than to stay in it, for neither the homes nor the neighborhoods are equipped to see families or individuals through the cycle of life. Each is designed for families of particular sizes, incomes, and ages. There is little sense of place and even less opportunity to put down roots.

Transplanted Europeans are acutely aware of the lack of a community life in our residential areas. We recently talked with an outgoing lady who had lived in many countries and was used to adapting to local ways. The problem of place in America had become her problem as well:

> After four years here, I still feel more of a foreigner than in any other place in the world I have been. People here are proud to live in a "good" area, but to us these so-called desirable areas are like prisons. There is no contact between the various households, we rarely see the neighbors and certainly do not know any of them. In Luxembourg, however, we would frequently stroll down to one of the local cafés in the evening, and there pass a very congenial few hours in the company of the local fireman, dentist, bank employee or whoever happened to be there at the time.

> There is no pleasure to be had in driving to a sleazy, dark bar where one keeps strictly to one's self and becomes fearful if approached by some drunk.

Sounding the same note, Kenneth Harris has commented on one of the things British people miss most in the United States. It is some reasonable approximation of the village inn or local pub; our neighborhoods do not have it. Harris comments: "The American does not walk around to the local two or three times a week with his wife or with his son, to have his pint, chat with the neighbors, and then walk home. He does not take out the dog last thing every night, and break his journey with a quick one at the Crown."[2]

The contrast in cultures is keenly felt by those who enjoy a dual residence in Europe and America. Victor Gruen and his wife have a large place in Los Angeles and a small one in Vienna. He finds that: "In Los Angeles we are hesitant to leave our sheltered home in order to visit friends or to participate in cultural or entertainment events because every such outing involves a major investment of time and nervous strain in driving long distances."[3] But, he says, the European experience is much different: "In Vienna, we are persuaded to go out often because we are within easy walking distance of two concert halls, the opera, a number of theatres, and a variety of restaurants, cafés, and shops. Seeing old friends does not have to be a prearranged affair as in Los Angeles, and more often than not, one bumps into them on the street or in a café." The Gruens have a hundred times more residential space in America but give the impression that they don't enjoy it half as much as their little corner of Vienna.

But one needn't call upon foreign visitors to point up the shortcomings of the suburban experiment. As a setting for marriage and family life, it has given those institutions a bad name. By the 1960s, a picture had emerged of the suburban housewife as "bored, isolated, and preoccupied with material things."[4] The suburban wife without a car to escape in epitomized the experience of being alone in America.[5] Those who could afford it compensated for the loneliness, isolation, and lack of community with the "frantic scheduling syndrome" as described by a counselor in the northeastern region of the United States:

> The loneliness I'm most familiar with in my job is that of wives and mothers of small children who are dumped in the suburbs and whose

husbands are commuters . . . I see a lot of generalized loneliness, but I think that in well-to-do communities they cover it up with a wealth of frantic activity. That's the reason tennis has gotten so big. They all go out and play tennis.[6]

A majority of the former stay-at-home wives are now in the labor force. As both father and mother gain some semblance of a community life via their daily escapes from the subdivision, children are even more cut off from ties with adults. Home offers less and the neighborhood offers nothing for the typical suburban adolescent. The situation in the early seventies as described by Richard Sennett is worsening:

In the past ten years, many middle-class children have tried to break out of the communities, the schools and the homes that their parents have spent so much of their own lives creating. If any one feeling can be said to run through the diverse groups and life-styles of the youth movements, it is a feeling that these middle-class communities of the parents were like pens, like cages keeping the youth from being free and alive. The source of the feeling lies in the perception that while these middle-class environments are secure and orderly regimes, people suffocate there for lack of the new, the unexpected, the diverse in their lives.[7]

The adolescent houseguest, I would suggest, is probably the best and quickest test of the vitality of a neighborhood; the visiting teenager in the subdivision soon acts like an animal in a cage. He or she paces, looks unhappy and uncomfortable, and by the second day is putting heavy pressure on the parents to leave. There is no place to which they can escape and join their own kind. There is nothing for them to do on their own. There is nothing in the surroundings but the houses of strangers and nobody on the streets. Adults make a more successful adjustment, largely because they demand less. But few at any age find vitality in the housing developments. David Riesman, an esteemed elder statesman among social scientists, once attempted to describe the import of suburbia upon most of those who live there. "There would seem," he wrote, "to be an aimlessness, a pervasive low-keyed unplea-sure."[8] The word he seemed averse to using is *boring*. A teenager would not have had to struggle for the right phrasing.

Their failure to solve the problem of place in America and to provide a community life for their inhabitants has not effectively discouraged

the growth of the postwar suburbs. To the contrary, there have emerged new generations of suburban development in which there is even less life outside the houses than before. Why does failure succeed? Dolores Hayden supplies part of the answer when she observes that Americans have substituted the vision of the ideal home for that of the ideal city.[9] The purchase of the even larger home on the even larger lot in the even more lifeless neighborhood is not so much a matter of joining community as retreating from it. Encouraged by a continuing decline in the civilities and amenities of the public or shared environment, people invest more hopes in their private acreage. They proceed as though a house can substitute for a community if only it is spacious enough, entertaining enough, comfortable enough, splendid enough— and suitably isolated from that common horde that politicians still refer to as our "fellow Americans."

Observers disagree about the reasons for the growing estrangement between the family and the city in American society.[10] Richard Sennett, whose research spans several generations, argues that as soon as an American family became middle class and could afford to do something about its fear of the outside world and its confusions, it drew in upon itself, and "in America, unlike France or Germany, the urban middle-class shunned public forms of social life like cafés and banquet halls."[11] Philippe Ariès, who also knows his history, counters with the argument that modern urban development has killed the essential relationships that once made a city and, as a consequence, "the role of the family overexpanded like a hypertrophied cell" trying to take up the slack.[12]

In some countries, television broadcasting is suspended one night a week so that people will not abandon the habit of getting out of their homes and maintaining contact with one another. This tactic would probably not work in America. Sennett would argue that the middle-class family, given its assessment of the public domain, would stay at home anyway. Ariès would argue that most would stay home for want of places to get together with their friends and neighbors. As Richard Goodwin declared, "there is virtually no place where neighbors can anticipate unplanned meetings—no pub or corner store or park."[13] The bright spot in this dispute is that the same set of remedies would cure both the family and the city of major ills.

Meantime, new generations are encouraged to shun a community

life in favor of a highly privatized one and to set personal aggrandizement above public good. The attitudes may be learned from parents but they are also learned in each generation's experiences. The modest housing developments, those *un*exclusive suburbs from which middle-class people graduate as they grow older and more affluent, teach their residents that future hopes for a good life are pretty much confined to one's house and yard. Community life amid tract housing is a disappointing experience. The space within the development has been equipped and staged for isolated family living and little else. The processes by which potential friends might find one another and by which friendships not suited to the home might be nurtured outside it are severely thwarted by the limited features and facilities of the modern suburb.

The housing development's lack of informal social centers or informal public gathering places puts people too much at the mercy of their closest neighbors. The small town taught us that people's best friends and favorite companions rarely lived right next door to one another. Why should it be any different in the automobile suburbs? What are the odds, given that a hundred households are within easy walking distance, that one is most likely to hit it off with the people next door? Small! Yet, the closest neighbors are the ones with whom friendships are most likely to be attempted, for how does one even find out enough about someone a block and a half away to justify an introduction?

What opportunity is there for two men who both enjoy shooting, fishing, or flying to get together and gab if their families are not compatible? Where do people entertain and enjoy one another if, for whatever reason, they are not comfortable in one another's homes? Where do people have a chance to get to know one another casually and without commitment before deciding whether to involve other family members in their relationship? Tract housing offers no such places.

Getting together with neighbors in the development entails considerable hosting efforts, and it depends upon continuing good relationships between households and their members. In the usual course of things, these relationships are easily strained or ruptured. Having been lately formed and built on little, they are not easy to mend. Worse, some of the few good friends will move and are not easily replaced. In time, the overtures toward friendship, neighborliness, and a semblance of community hardly seem worth the effort.

In the Absence of an Informal Public Life

We have noted Sennett's observation that middle-class Americans are not like their French or German counterparts. Americans do not make daily visits to sidewalk cafés or banquet halls. We do not have that third realm of satisfaction and social cohesion beyond the portals of home and work that for others is an essential element of the good life. Our comings and goings are more restricted to the home and work settings, and those two spheres have become preemptive. Multitudes shuttle back and forth between the "womb" and the "rat race" in a constricted pattern of daily life that easily generates the familiar desire to "get away from it all."

A two-stop model of daily routine is becoming fixed in our habits as the urban environment affords less opportunity for public relaxation. Our most familiar gathering centers are disappearing rapidly. The proportion of beer and spirits consumed in public places has declined from about 90 percent of the total in the late 1940s to about 30 percent today.[14] There's been a similar decline in the number of neighborhood taverns in which those beverages are sold. For those who avoid alcoholic refreshments and prefer the drugstore soda fountain across the street, the situation has gotten even worse. By the 1960s, it was clear that the soda fountain and the lunch counter no longer had a place in "the balanced drug store."[15] "In this day of heavy unionization and rising minimum wages for unskilled help, the traditional soda fountain should be thrown out," advised an expert on drugstore management. And so it has been. The new kinds of places emphasize fast service, not slow and easy relaxation.

In the absence of an informal public life, people's expectations toward work and family life have escalated beyond the capacity of those institutions to meet them. Domestic and work relationships are pressed to supply all that is wanting and much that is missing in the constricted life-styles of those without community. The resulting strain on work and family institutions is glaringly evident. In the measure of its disorganization and deterioration, the middle-class family of today resembles the low-income family of the 1960s.[16] The United States now leads the world in the rate of divorce among its population. Fatherless children comprise the fastest-growing segment of the infant population. The strains that have eroded the traditional family configu-

ration have given rise to alternate life-styles, and though their appearance suggests the luxury of choice, none are as satisfactory as was the traditional family when embedded in a supporting community.

It is estimated that American industry loses from $50 billion to $75 billion annually due to absenteeism, company-paid medical expenses, and lost productivity.[17] Stress in the lives of the workers is a major cause of these industrial losses. Two-thirds of the visits to family physicians in the United States are prompted by stress-related problems.[18] "Our mode of life," says one medical practitioner, "is emerging as today's principal cause of illness."[19] Writes Claudia Wallis, "It is a sorry sign of the times that the three best-selling drugs in the country are an ulcer medication (Tagamet), a hypertension drug (Inderal), and a tranquilizer (Valium)."[20]

In the absence of an informal public life, Americans are denied those means of relieving stress that serve other cultures so effectively. We seem not to realize that the means of relieving stress can just as easily be built into an urban environment as those features which produce stress. To our considerable misfortune, the pleasures of the city have been largely reduced to consumerism. We don't much enjoy our cities because they're not very enjoyable. The mode of urban life that has become our principal cause of illness resembles a pressure cooker without its essential safety valve. Our urban environment is like an engine that runs hot because it was designed without a cooling system.

Unfortunately, opinion leans toward the view that the causes of stress are social but the cures are individual. It is widely assumed that high levels of stress are an unavoidable condition of modern life, that these are built into the social system, and that one must get outside the system in order to gain relief. Even our efforts at entertaining and being entertained tend toward the competitive and stressful. We come dangerously close to the notion that one "gets sick" in the world beyond one's domicile and one "gets well" by retreating from it. Thus, while Germans relax amid the rousing company of the *bier garten* or the French recuperate in their animated little bistros, Americans turn to massaging, meditating, jogging, hot-tubbing, or escape fiction. While others take full advantage of their freedom to associate, we glorify our freedom *not* to associate.

In the absence of an informal public life, living becomes more expen-

sive. Where the means and facilities for relaxation and leisure are not publicly shared, they become the objects of private ownership and consumption. In the United States, about two-thirds of the GNP is based on personal consumption expenditures. That category, observes Goodwin, contains "the alienated substance of mankind."[21] Some four *trillion* dollars spent for individual aggrandizement represents a powerful divisive force indeed. In our society, insists one expert on the subject, leisure has been perverted into consumption.[22] An aggressive, driving force behind this perversion is advertising, which conditions "our drive to consume and to own whatever industry produces."[23]

Paragons of self-righteousness, advertisers promulgate the notion that society would languish in a state of inertia but for their efforts. "Nothing happens until somebody sells something," they love to say. That may be true enough within a strictly commercial world (and for them, what else is there?) but the development of an informal public life depends upon people finding and enjoying one another outside the cash nexus. Advertising, in its ideology and effects, is the enemy of an informal public life. It breeds alienation. It convinces people that the good life can be individually purchased. In the place of the shared camaraderie of people who see themselves as equals, the ideology of advertising substitutes competitive acquisition. It is the difference between loving people for what they are and envying them for what they own. It is no coincidence that cultures with a highly developed informal public life have a disdain for advertising.[24]

The tremendous advantage enjoyed by societies with a well-developed informal public life is that, within them, poverty carries few burdens other than that of having to live a rather Spartan existence. But there is no stigma and little deprivation of experience. There is an engaging and sustaining public life to supplement and complement home and work routines. For those on tight budgets who live in some degree of austerity, it compensates for the lack of things owned privately. For the affluent, it offers much that money can't buy.

The American middle-class life-style is an exceedingly expensive one—especially when measured against the satisfaction it yields. The paucity of collective rituals and unplanned social gatherings puts a formidable burden upon the individual to overcome the social isolation that threatens. Where there are homes without a connection to commu-

nity, where houses are located in areas devoid of congenial meeting places, the enemy called boredom is ever at the gate. Much money must be spent to compensate for the sterility of the surrounding environment. Home decoration and redecoration becomes a never-ending process as people depend upon new wallpaper or furniture arrangements to add zest to their lives. Like the bored and idle rich, they look to new clothing fashions for the same purpose and buy new wardrobes well before the old ones are past service. A lively round of after-dinner conversation isn't as simple as a walk to the corner pub—one has to host the dinner.

The home entertainment industry thrives in the dearth of the informal public life among the American middle class. Demand for all manner of electronic gadgetry to substitute vicarious watching and listening for more direct involvement is high. Little expense is spared in the installation of sound and video systems, VCRs, cable connections, or that current version of heaven on earth for the socially exiled—the satellite dish. So great is the demand for electronic entertainment that it cannot be met with quality programming. Those who create for this insatiable demand must rely on formula and imitation.

Everyone old enough to drive finds it necessary to make frequent escapes from the private compound located amid hundreds of other private compounds. To do so, each needs a car, and that car is a means of conveyance as privatized and antisocial as the neighborhoods themselves. Fords and "Chevys" now cost from ten to fifteen thousand dollars, and the additional expenses of maintaining, insuring, and fueling them constitute major expenditures for most families. Worse, each drives his or her own car. About the only need that suburbanites can satisfy by means of an easy walk is that which impels them toward their bathroom.

In the absence of an informal public life, industry must also compensate for the missing opportunity for social relaxation. When the settings for casual socializing are not provided in the neighborhoods, people compensate in the workplace. Coffee breaks are more than mere rest periods; they are depended upon more for sociable human contact than physical relaxation. These and other "time-outs" are extended. Lunch hours often afford a sufficient amount of reveling to render the remainder of the working day ineffectual. The distinction between work-

related communications and "shooting the breeze" becomes blurred. Once-clear parameters separating work from play become confused. The individual finds that neither work nor play are as satisfying as they should be.

The problem of place in America manifests itself in a sorely deficient informal public life. The structure of shared experience beyond that offered by family, job, and passive consumerism is small and dwindling. The essential group experience is being replaced by the exaggerated self-consciousness of individuals. American life-styles, for all the material acquisition and the seeking after comforts and pleasures, are plagued by boredom, loneliness, alienation, and a high price tag. America can point to many areas where she has made progress, but in the area of informal public life she has lost ground and continues to lose it.

Unlike many frontiers, that of the informal public life does not remain benign as it awaits development. It does not become easier to tame as technology evolves, as governmental bureaus and agencies multiply, or as population grows. It does not yield to the mere passage of time and a policy of letting the chips fall where they may as development proceeds in other realms of urban life. To the contrary, neglect of the informal public life can make a jungle of what had been a garden while, at the same time, diminishing the ability of people to cultivate it.

In the sustained absence of a healthy and vigorous informal public life, the citizenry may quite literally forget how to create one. A facilitating public etiquette consisting of rituals necessary to the meeting, greeting, and enjoyment of strangers is not much in evidence in the United States. It is replaced by a set of strategies designed to avoid contact with people in public, by devices intended to preserve the individual's circle of privacy against any stranger who might violate it. Urban sophistication is deteriorating into such matters as knowing who is safe on whose "turf," learning to minimize expression and bodily contact when in public, and other survival skills required in a world devoid of the amenities. Lyn Lofland notes that the 1962 edition of Amy Vanderbilt's *New Complete Book of Etiquette* "contains not a single reference to proper behavior in the world of strangers."[25] The cosmopolitan promise of our cities is diminished. Its ecumenic spirit fades with our ever-increasing retreat into privacy.

Toward a Solution: The Third Place

Though none can prescribe the total solution to the problem of place in America, it is possible to describe some important elements that any solution will have to include. Certain basic requirements of an informal public life do not change, nor does a healthy society advance beyond them. To the extent that a thriving informal public life belongs to a society's past, so do the best of its days, and prospects for the future should be cause for considerable concern.

Towns and cities that afford their populations an engaging public life are easy to identify. What urban sociologists refer to as their interstitial spaces are filled with people. The streets and sidewalks, parks and squares, parkways and boulevards are being used by people sitting, standing, and walking. Prominent public space is not reserved for that well-dressed, middle-class crowd that is welcomed at today's shopping malls. The elderly and poor, the ragged and infirm, are interspersed among those looking and doing well. The full spectrum of local humanity is represented. Most of the streets are as much the domain of the pedestrian as of the motorist. The typical street can still accommodate a full-sized perambulator and still encourages a new mother's outing with her baby. Places to sit are abundant. Children play in the streets. The general scene is much as the set director for a movie would arrange it to show life in a wholesome and thriving town or city neighborhood.

Beyond the impression that a human scale has been preserved in the architecture, however, or that the cars haven't defeated the pedestrians in the battle for the streets, or that the pace of life suggests gentler and less complicated times, the picture doesn't reveal the *dynamics* needed to produce an engaging informal public life. The secret of a society at peace with itself is not revealed in the panoramic view but in examination of the average citizen's situation.

The examples set by societies that have solved the problem of place and those set by the small towns and vital neighborhoods of our past suggest that daily life, in order to be relaxed and fulfilling, must find its balance in three realms of experience. One is domestic, a second is gainful or productive, and the third is inclusively sociable, offering both the basis of community and the celebration of it. Each of these realms of human experience is built on associations and relationships

appropriate to it; each has its own physically separate and distinct places; each must have its measure of autonomy from the others.

What the panoramic view of the vital city fails to reveal is that the third realm of experience is as distinct a place as home or office. The informal public life only seems amorphous and scattered; in reality, it is highly focused. It emerges and is sustained in *core settings*. Where the problem of place has been solved, a generous proliferation of core settings of informal public life is sufficient to the needs of the people.

Pierre Salinger was asked how he liked living in France and how he would compare it with life in the United States. His response was that he likes France where, he said, everyone is more relaxed. In America, there's a lot of pressure. The French, of course, have solved the problem of place. The Frenchman's daily life sits firmly on a tripod consisting of home, place of work, and another setting where friends are engaged during the midday and evening *aperitif* hours, if not earlier and later. In the United States, the middle classes particularly are attempting a balancing act on a bipod consisting of home and work. That alienation, boredom, and stress are endemic among us is not surprising. For most of us, a third of life is either deficient or absent altogether, and the other two-thirds cannot be successfully integrated into a whole.

Before the core settings of an informal public life can be restored to the urban landscape and reestablished in daily life, it will be necessary to articulate their nature and benefit. It will not suffice to describe them in a mystical or romanticized way such as might warm the hearts of those already convinced. Rather, the core settings of the informal public life must be analyzed and discussed in terms comprehensible to these rational and individualistic outlooks dominant in American thought. We must dissect, talk in terms of specific payoffs, and reduce special experiences to common labels. We must, urgently, begin to defend these Great Good Places against the unbelieving and the antagonistic and do so in terms clear to all.

The object of our focus—the core settings of the informal public life—begs for a simpler label. Common parlance offers few possibilities and none that combine brevity with objectivity and an appeal to common sense. There is the term *hangout*, but its connotation is negative and the word conjures up images of the joint or dive. Though we refer to the meeting places of the lowly as hangouts, we rarely apply the term to yacht clubs or oak-paneled bars, the "hangouts" of the "better

people." We have nothing as respectable as the French *rendez-vous* to refer to a public meeting place or a setting in which friends get together away from the confines of home and work. The American language reflects the American reality—in vocabulary as in fact the core settings of an informal public life are underdeveloped.

For want of a suitable existing term, we introduce our own: the third place will hereafter be used to signify what we have called "the core settings of informal public life." The third place is a generic designation for a great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work. The term will serve well. It is neutral, brief, and facile. It underscores the significance of the tripod and the relative importance of its three legs. Thus, the first place is the home—the most important place of all. It is the first regular and predictable environment of the growing child and the one that will have greater effect upon his or her development. It will harbor individuals long before the workplace is interested in them and well after the world of work casts them aside. The second place is the work setting, which reduces the individual to a single, productive role. It fosters competition and motivates people to rise above their fellow creatures. But it also provides the means to a living, improves the material quality of life, and structures endless hours of time for a majority who could not structure it on their own.

Before industrialization, the first and second places were one. Industrialization separated the place of work from the place of residence, removing productive work from the home and making it remote in distance, morality, and spirit from family life. What we now call the third place existed long before this separation, and so our term is a concession to the sweeping effects of the Industrial Revolution and its division of life into private and public spheres.

The ranking of the three places corresponds with individual dependence upon them. We need a home even though we may not work, and most of us need to work more than we need to gather with our friends and neighbors. The ranking holds, also, with respect to the demands upon the individual's time. Typically, the individual spends more time at home than at work and more at work than in a third place. In importance, in claims on time and loyalty, in space allocated, and in social recognition, the ranking is appropriate.

In some countries, the third place is more closely ranked with the others. In Ireland, France, or Greece, the core settings of informal public life rank a *strong* third in the lives of the people. In the United States, third places rank a weak third with perhaps the majority lacking a third place and denying that it has any real importance.

The prominence of third places varies with cultural setting and historical era. In preliterate societies, the third place was actually foremost, being the grandest structure in the village and commanding the central location. They were the men's houses, the earliest ancestors of those grand, elegant, and pretentious clubs eventually to appear along London's Pall Mall. In both Greek and Roman society, prevailing values dictated that the *agora* and the *forum* should be great, central institutions; that homes should be simple and unpretentious; that the architecture of cities should assert the worth of the public and civic individual over the private and domestic one. Few means to lure and invite citizens into public gatherings were overlooked. The forums, colosseums, theaters, and ampitheaters were grand structures, and admission to them was free.

Third places have never since been as prominent. Attempts at elegance and grand scale continued to be made but with far less impact. Many cultures evolved public baths on a grand scale. Victorian gin palaces were elegant (especially when contrasted to the squalor that surrounded them). The winter gardens and palm gardens built in some of our northern cities in the previous century included many large and imposing structures. In modern times, however, third places survive without much prominence or elegance.

Where third places remain vital in the lives of people today, it is far more because they are prolific than prominent. The geographic expansion of the cities and their growing diversity of quarters, or distinct neighborhoods, necessitated the shift. The proliferation of smaller establishments kept them at the human scale and available to all in the face of increasing urbanization.

In the newer American communities, however, third places are neither prominent nor prolific. They are largely prohibited. Upon an urban landscape increasingly hostile to and devoid of informal gathering places, one may encounter people rather pathetically trying to find some spot in which to relax and enjoy each other's company.

Sometimes three or four pickups are parked under the shade near a

convenience store as their owners drink beers that may be purchased but not consumed inside. If the habit ever really catches on, laws will be passed to stop it. Along the strips, youths sometimes gather in or near their cars in the parking lots of hamburger franchises. It's the best they can manage, for they aren't allowed to loiter inside. One may encounter a group of women in a laundromat, socializing while doing the laundry chores. One encounters parents who have assumed the expense of adding a room to the house or converting the garage to a recreation room so that, within neighborhoods that offer them nothing, their children might have a decent place to spend time with their friends. Sometimes too, youth will develop a special attachment to a patch of woods not yet bulldozed away in the relentless spread of the suburbs. In such a place they enjoy relief from the confining over-familiarity of their tract houses and the monotonous streets.

American planners and developers have shown a great disdain for those earlier arrangements in which there was life beyond home and work. They have condemned the neighborhood tavern and disallowed a suburban version. They have failed to provide modern counterparts of once-familiar gathering places. The gristmill or grain elevator, soda fountains, malt shops, candy stores, and cigar stores—places that did not reduce a human being to a mere customer, have not been replaced. Meantime, the planners and developers continue to add to the rows of regimented loneliness in neighborhoods so sterile as to cry out for something as modest as a central mail drop or a little coffee counter at which those in the area might discover one another.

Americans are now confronted with that condition about which the crusty old arch-conservative Edmund Burke warned us when he said that the bonds of community are broken at great peril for they are not easily replaced. Indeed, we face the enormous task of making "the mess that is urban America" suitably hospitable to the requirements of gregarious, social animals.[26] Before motivation or wisdom is adequate to the task, however, we shall need to understand exactly what it is that an informal public life can contribute to both national and individual life. Therein lies the purpose of this book.

Successful exposition demands that some statement of a problem precede a discussion of its solution. Hence, I've begun on sour and unpleasant notes and will find it necessary to sound them again. I would have preferred it otherwise. It is the solution that intrigues and

delights. It is my hope that the discussion of life in the third place will have a similar effect upon the reader, just as I hope that the reader will allow the bias that now and then prompts me to substitute Great Good Place for third place. I am confident that those readers who have a third place will not object.

CHAPTER 2

The Character
of Third Places

THIRD PLACES the world over share common and essential features. As one's investigations cross the boundaries of time and culture, the kinship of the Arabian coffeehouse, the German *bierstube*, the Italian *taberna*, the old country store of the American frontier, and the ghetto bar reveals itself. As one approaches each example, determined to describe it in its own right, an increasingly familiar pattern emerges. The eternal sameness of the third place overshadows the variations in its outward appearance and seems unaffected by the wide differences in cultural attitudes toward the typical gathering places of informal public life. The beer joint in which the middle-class American takes no pride can be as much a third place as the proud Viennese coffeehouse. It is a fortunate aspect of the third place that its capacity to serve the human need for communion does not much depend upon the capacity of a nation to comprehend its virtues.

The wonder is that so little attention has been paid to the benefits attaching to the third place. It is curious that its features and inner workings have remained virtually undescribed in this present age when they are so sorely needed and when any number of lesser substitutes are described in tiresome detail. Volumes are written on sensitivity and encounter groups, on meditation and exotic rituals for attaining states of relaxation and transcendence, on jogging and massaging. But the third place, the people's own remedy for stress, loneliness, and alienation, seems easy to ignore.

With few exceptions, however, it has always been thus. Rare is the chronicler who has done justice to those gathering places where community is most alive and people are most themselves. The tradition is