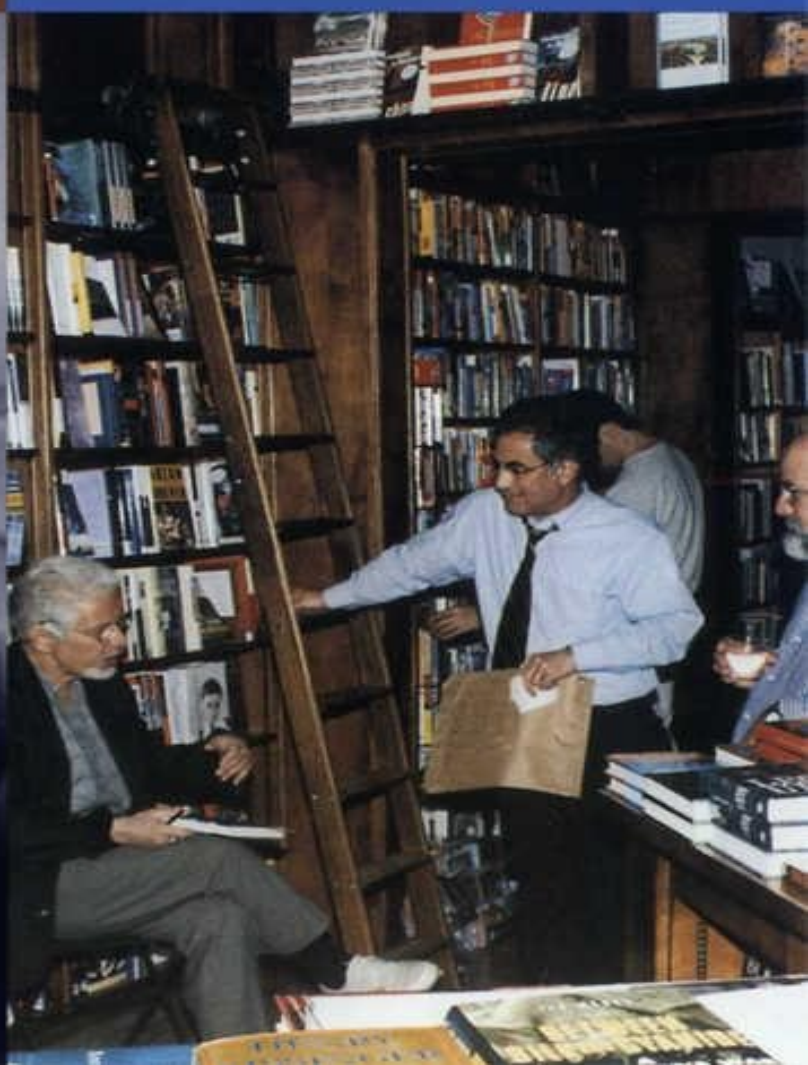
THE GREAT GOOD PLACE

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*



Acclaim for Ray Oldenburg and *The Great Good Place*

"Ray Oldenburg is inspirational. He is the first to recognize 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

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"*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."

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"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. . ."

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"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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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 designation, "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 enjoyment. 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
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PART I

CHAPTER 1

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 unpleasure."[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 configuration 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 expensive. 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 community, 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 lifestyles, 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 the opposite; it is one of understatement and oversight. Joseph Addison, the great essayist, gave the faintest praise to the third places of his time and seems to have set an example for doing so. London's eighteenth-century coffeehouses provided the stage and forum for Addison's efforts and fired the greatest era of letters England would ever see. And there was far more to them than suggested by Addison's remarks: "When men are thus knit together, by a Love of Society, not a Spirit of Faction, and don't meet to censure or annoy those that are absent, but to enjoy one another: When they are thus combined for their own

improvement, or for the Good of others, or at least to relax themselves from the Business of the Day, by an innocent and cheerful conversation, there may be something very useful in these little Institutions and Establishments."[1]

The only "useful something" that the typical observer seems able to report consists of the escape or time out from life's duties and drudgeries that third places are said to offer. Joseph Wechsberg, for example, suggests that the coffeehouses of Vienna afford the common man "his haven and island of tranquility, his reading room and gambling hall, his sounding board and grumbling hall. There at least he is safe from nagging wife and unruly children, monotonous radios and barking dogs, tough bosses and impatient creditors."[2] H. L. Mencken offered the same limited view of the places on our side of the Atlantic, describing the respectable Baltimore tavern of his day as "a quiet refuge" and a "hospital asylum from life and its cares."[3]

But there is far more than escape and relief from stress involved in regular visits to a third place. There is more than shelter against the raindrops of life's tedium and more than a breather on the sidelines of the rat race to be had amid the company of a third place. Its real merits do not depend upon being harried by life, afflicted by stress, or needing time out from gainful activities. The escape theme is not erroneous in substance but in emphasis; it focuses too much upon conditions external to the third place and too little upon experiences and relationships afforded there and nowhere else.

Though characterizations of the third place as a mere haven of escape from home and work are inadequate, they do possess a virtue—they invite *comparison.* The escape theme suggests a world of difference between the corner tavern and the family apartment a block away, between morning coffee in the bungalow and that with the gang at the local bakery. The contrast is sharp and will be revealed. The *raison d'etre* of the third place rests upon its differences from the other settings of daily life and can best be understood by comparison with them. In examining these differences, it will not serve to misrepresent the home, shop, or office in order to put a better light on public gathering places. But, if at times I might lapse in my objectivity, I take solace in the fact that public opinion in America and the weight of our myths and prejudices have never done justice to third places and the kind of association so essential to our freedom and contentment.

On Neutral Ground

The individual may have many friends, a rich variety among them, and opportunity to engage many of them daily *only* if people do not get uncomfortably tangled in one another's lives. Friends can be numerous and often met only if they may easily join and depart one another's company. This otherwise obvious fact of

social life is often obscured by the seeming contradiction that surrounds it—we need a good deal of immunity from those whose company we like best. Or, as the sociologist Richard Sennett put it, "people can be sociable only when they have some protection from each other."[4]

In a book showing how to bring life back to American cities, Jane Jacobs stresses the contradiction surrounding most friendships and the consequent need to provide places for them. Cities, she observed, are full of people with whom contact is significant, useful, and enjoyable, but "you don't want them in your hair and they do not want you in theirs either."[5] If friendships and other informal acquaintances are limited to those suitable for private life, she says, the city becomes stultified. So, one might add, does the social life of the individual.

In order for the city and its neighborhoods to offer the rich and varied association that is their promise and their potential, there must be *neutral ground* upon which people may gather. There must be places where individuals may come and go as they please, in which none are required to play host, and in which all feel at home and comfortable. If there is no neutral ground in the neighborhoods where people live, association outside the home will be impoverished. Many, perhaps most, neighbors will never meet, to say nothing of associate, for there is no place for them to do so. Where neutral ground is available it makes possible far more informal, even intimate, relations among people than could be entertained in the home.

Social reformers as a rule, and planners all too commonly, ignore the importance of neutral ground and the kinds of relationships, interactions, and activities to which it plays host. Reformers have never liked seeing people hanging around on street corners, store porches, front stoops, bars, candy stores, or other public areas. They find loitering deplorable and assume that if people had better private areas they would not waste time in public ones. It would make as much sense, as Jane Jacobs points out, to argue that people wouldn't show up at testimonial banquets if they had wives who could cook for them at home.[6] The banquet table and coffee counter bring people together in an intimate and private social fashion—people who would not otherwise meet in that way. Both settings (street corner and banquet hall) are public and neutral, and both are important to the unity of neighborhoods, cities, and societies.

If we valued fraternity as much as independence, and democracy as much as free enterprise, our zoning codes would not enforce the social isolation that plagues our modern neighborhoods, but would require some form of public gathering place every block or two. We may one day rediscover the wisdom of James Oglethorpe who laid out Savannah such that her citizens lived close to public gathering areas. Indeed, he did so with such compelling effect that Sherman, in his destructive march to the sea, spared Savannah alone.

The Third Place Is a Leveler

Levelers was the name given to an extreme left-wing political party that emerged under Charles I and expired shortly afterward under Cromwell. The goal of the party was the abolition of all differences of position or rank that existed among men. By the middle of the seventeenth century, the term came to be applied much more broadly in England, referring to anything "which reduces men to an equality."[7] For example, the newly established coffeehouses of that period, one of unprecedented democracy among the English, were commonly referred to as levelers, as were the people who frequented them and who relished the new intimacy made possible by the decay of the old feudal order.

Precursors of the renowned English clubs, those early coffeehouses were enthusiastically democratic in the conduct and composition of their habitués. As one of the more articulate among them recorded, "As you have a hodge-podge of Drinks, such too is your company, for each man seems a Leveller, and ranks and files himself as he lists, without regard to degrees or order; so that oft you may see a silly Fop, and a wonder Justice, a griping-Rock, and a grave Citizen, a worthy Lawyer, and an errant Pickpocket, a Reverend Noncomformist, and a canting Mountebank; all blended together, to compose an Oglio of Impertinence."[8] Quite suddenly, each man had become an agent of England's newfound unity. His territory was the coffeehouse, which provided the neutral ground upon which men discovered one another apart from the classes and ranks that had earlier divided them.

A place that is a leveler is, by its nature, an inclusive place. It is accessible to the general public and does not set formal criteria of membership and exclusion. There is a tendency for individuals to select their associates, friends, and intimates from among those closest to them in social rank. Third places, however, serve to *expand* possibilities, whereas formal associations tend to narrow and restrict them. Third places counter the tendency to be restrictive in the enjoyment of others by being open to all and by laying emphasis on qualities not confined to status distinctions current in the society. Within third places, the charm and flavor of one's personality, irrespective of his or her station in life, is what counts. In the third place, people may make blissful substitutions in the rosters of their associations, adding those they genuinely enjoy and admire to those less-preferred individuals that fate has put at their side in the workplace or even, perhaps, in their family.

Further, a place that is a leveler also permits the individual to know workmates in a different and fuller aspect than is possible in the workplace. The great bulk of human association finds individuals related to one another for some objective purpose. It casts them, as sociologists say, in roles, and though the roles we play provide us with our more sustaining matrices of human association, these tend to submerge personality and the inherent joys of being together with others to some

external purpose. In contrast, what Georg Simmel referred to as “pure sociability” is precisely the occasion in which people get together for no other purpose, higher or lower, than for the “joy, vivacity, and relief” of engaging their personalities beyond the contexts of purpose, duty, or role.[9] As Simmel insisted, this unique occasion provides the most democratic experience people can have and allows them to be more fully themselves, for it is salutary in such situations that all shed their social uniforms and insignia and reveal more of what lies beneath or beyond them.

Necessarily, a transformation must occur as one passes through the portals of a third place. Worldly status claims must be checked at the door in order that all within may be equals. The surrender of outward status, or leveling, that transforms those who own delivery trucks and those who drive them into equals, is rewarded by acceptance on more humane and less transitory grounds. Leveling is a joy and relief to those of higher and lower status in the mundane world. Those who, on the outside, command deference and attention by the sheer weight of their position find themselves in the third place enjoined, embraced, accepted, and enjoyed where conventional status counts for little. They are accepted just for themselves and on terms not subject to the vicissitudes of political or economic life.

Similarly, those not high on the totems of accomplishment or popularity are enjoined, accepted, embraced, and enjoyed despite their “failings” in their career or the marketplace. There is more to the individual than his or her status indicates, and to have recognition of that fact shared by persons beyond the small circle of the family is indeed a joy and relief. It is the best of all anodynes for soothing the irritation of material deprivation. Even poverty loses much of its sting when communities can offer the settings and occasions where the disadvantaged can be accepted as equals. Pure sociability confirms the more and the less successful and is surely a comfort to both. Unlike the status-guarding of the family and the czarist mentality of those who control corporations, the third place recognizes and implements the value of “downward” association in an uplifting manner.

Worldly status is not the only aspect of the individual that must not intrude into third place association. Personal problems and moodiness must be set aside as well. Just as others in such settings claim immunity from the personal worries and fears of individuals, so may they, for the time being at least, relegate them to a blessed state of irrelevance. The temper and tenor of the third place is upbeat; it is cheerful. The purpose is to enjoy the company of one’s fellow human beings and to delight in the novelty of their character—not to wallow in pity over misfortunes.

The transformations in passing from the world of mundane care to the magic of the third place is often visibly manifest in the individual. Within the space of a few hours, individuals may drag themselves into their homes—frowning, fatigued, hunched over—only to stride into their favorite club or tavern a few hours later with a broad grin and an erect posture. Richard West followed one of New York’s

"pretty people" from his limousine on the street, up the steps, and into the interior of Club 21, observing that "by the time Marvin had walked through the opened set of doors and stood in the lobby, his features softened. The frown was gone, the bluster of importance had ebbed away and had been left at the curb. He felt the old magic welling up."[10]

In Michael Daly's tragic account of young Peter MacPartland (a "perfect" son from a "perfect" family) who was accused of murdering his father, there is mention of a place, perhaps the only place, in which MacPartland ever found relief from the constant struggling and competition that characterized his life. On Monday evenings, a friend would go with him to Rudy's, a working-class tavern, to watch "Monday Night Football." "It was Yale invading a working-class bar," said the friend. "It was like his first freedom of any kind. He thought it was the neatest place in the world."[11] Mere escape can be found in many forms and does not begin to account for transformations such as these.

Conversation Is the Main Activity

Neutral ground provides the place, and leveling sets the stage for the cardinal and sustaining activity of third places everywhere. That activity is conversation. Nothing more clearly indicates a third place than that the talk there is good; that it is lively, scintillating, colorful, and engaging. The joys of association in third places may initially be marked by smiles and twinkling eyes, by hand-shaking and back-slapping, but they proceed and are maintained in pleasurable and entertaining conversation.

A comparison of cultures readily reveals that the popularity of conversation in a society is closely related to the popularity of third places. In the 1970s, the economist Tibor Scitovsky introduced statistical data confirming what others had observed casually.[12] The rate of pub visitation in England or café visitation in France is high and corresponds to an obvious fondness for sociable conversation. American tourists, Scitovsky notes, "are usually struck and often morally shocked by the much more leisurely and frivolous attitude toward life of just about all foreigners, manifest by the tremendous amount of idle talk they engage in, on promenades and park benches, in cafés, sandwich shops, lobbies, doorways, and wherever people congregate." And, in the pubs and cafés, Scitovsky goes on to report, "socializing rather than drinking is clearly most people's main occupation."

American men of letters often reveal an envy of those societies in which conversation is more highly regarded than here, and usually recognize the link between activity and setting. Emerson, in his essay on "Table Talk," discussed the importance of great cities in representing the power and genius of a nation.[13] He focused on Paris, which dominated for so long and to such an extent as to influence

the whole of Europe. After listing the many areas in which that city had become the "social center of the world," he concluded that its "supreme merit is that it is the city of conversation and cafés."

In a popular essay on "The American Condition," Richard Goodwin invited readers to contrast the rush hour in our major cities with the close of the working day in Renaissance Italy: "Now at Florence, when the air is red with the summer sunset and the campaniles begin to sound vespers and the day's work is done, everyone collects in the piazzas. The steps of Santa Maria del Fiore swarm with men of every rank and every class; artisans, merchants, teachers, artists, doctors, technicians, poets, scholars. A thousand minds, a thousand arguments; a lively intermingling of questions, problems, news of the latest happening, jokes; an inexhaustible play of language and thought, a vibrant curiosity; the changeable temper of a thousand spirits by whom every object of discussion is broken into an infinity of sense and significations—all these spring into being, and then are spent. And this is the pleasure of the Florentine public."[14]

The judgment regarding conversation in our society is usually twofold: we don't value it and we're not good at it. "If it has not value," complained Wordsworth, "good, lively talk is often contemptuously dismissed as talking for talking's sake."[15] As to our skills, Tibor Scitovsky noted that our gambit for a chat is "halfhearted and . . . we have failed to develop the locale and the facilities for idle talk. We lack the stuff of which conversations are made."[16] In our low estimation of idle talk, we Americans have correctly assessed the worth of much of what we hear. It is witless, trite, self-centered, and unreflective.

If conversation is not just the main attraction but the sine qua non of the third place, it must be better there and, indeed, it is. Within its circles, the art of conversation is preserved against its decline in the larger spheres, and evidence of this claim is abundant.

Initially, one may note a remarkable compliance with the rules of conversation as compared to their abuse almost everywhere else. Many champions of the art of conversation have stated its simple rules. Henry Sedgwick does so in a straightforward manner.[17] In essence, his rules are: 1) Remain silent your share of the time (more rather than less). 2) Be attentive while others are talking. 3) Say what you think but be careful not to hurt others' feelings. 4) Avoid topics not of general interest. 5) Say little or nothing about yourself personally, but talk about others there assembled. 6) Avoid trying to instruct. 7) Speak in as low a voice as will allow others to hear.

The rules, it will be seen, fit the democratic order, or the leveling, that prevails in third places. Everyone seems to talk just the right amount, and all are expected to contribute. Pure sociability is as much subject to good and proper form as any other kind of association, and this conversational style embodies that form. Quite unlike

those corporate realms wherein status dictates who may speak, and when and how much, and who may use levity and against which targets, the third place draws in like manner from everyone there assembled. Even the sharper wits must refrain from dominating conversation, for all are there to hold forth as well as to listen.

By emphasizing style over vocabulary, third place conversation also complements the leveling process. In the course of his investigations into English working-class club life, Brian Jackson was struck by the eloquence of common working people when they spoke in familiar and comfortable environments.[18] He was surprised to hear working people speak with the "verve and panache" of Shakespearian actors. I observed much the same artistry among farmers and other workers in Midwestern communities who could recite, dramatically, verse after verse of poetry, reduce local cockalorums to their just proportions, or argue against school consolidation in a moving and eloquent style.

In Santa Barbara there is a tavern called The English Department, which is operated by a man who was banished from the English department at the local university for reasons that august body never saw fit to share with him. He'd spent most of his adult life listening to talk. He had listened in seminars, classrooms, offices, and hallways of various English departments. But the tavern, he found, was better; it was *living.* "Listen to these people," he said of his customers. "Have you ever heard a place filled like this? . . . And they're all interested in what they're saying. There's genuine inquiry here."[19] In a moment of candor, a past president of a professional association in one of the social sciences told an audience that it had been his experience that most academic departments effectively "rob their students of their Mother wit." The owner of The English Department had made the same discovery. In contrast, third places are veritable gymnasiums of Mother wit.

The conversational superiority of the third place is also evident in the harm that the bore can there inflict. Those who carry the despicable reputation of being a bore have not earned it at home or in the work setting proper, but almost exclusively in those places and occasions given to sociability. Where people expect more of conversation they are accordingly repulsed by those who abuse it, whether by killing a topic with inappropriate remarks or by talking more than their share of the time. Characteristically, bores talk more loudly than others, substituting both volume and verbosity for wit and substance. Their failure at getting the effect they desire only serves to increase their demands upon the patience of the group. Conversation is a lively game, but the bore hogs the ball, unable to score but unwilling to pass it to others.

Bores are the scourge of sociability and a curse upon the "clubbable." In regard to them, John Timbs, a prolific chronicler of English club life, once cited the advice of a seasoned and knowledgeable member: "Above all, a club should be large. Every club must have its bores; but in a large club you can get out of their way."[20]

To have one or more bores as "official brothers" is a grizzly prospect, and one suggesting an additional advantage of inclusive and informal places over the formal and exclusive club. Escape is so much easier.

Conversation's improved quality within the third place is also suggested by its temper. It is more spirited than elsewhere, less inhibited and more eagerly pursued. Compared to the speech in other realms, it is more dramatic and more often attended by laughter and the exercise of wit. The character of the talk has a transcending effect, which Emerson once illustrated by an episode involving two companies of stagecoach riders *en route* to Paris. One group failed to strike up any conversation, while the other quickly became engrossed in it. "The first, on their arrival, had rueful accidents to relate, a terrific thunderstorm, danger, and fear and gloom, to the whole company. The others heard these particulars with surprise—the storm, the mud, the danger. They knew nothing of these; they had forgotten earth; they had breathed a higher air. "[21] Third place conversation is typically engrossing. Consciousness of conditions and time often slips away amid its lively flow.

Whatever interrupts conversation's lively flow is ruinous to a third place, be it the bore, a horde of barbaric college students, or mechanical or electronic gadgetry. Most common among these is the noise that passes for music, though it must be understood that when conversation is to be savored, even Mozart is noise if played too loudly. In America, particularly, many public establishments reverberate with music played so loudly that enjoyable conversation is impossible. Why the management chooses to override normal conversation by twenty decibels is not always obvious. It may be to lend the illusion of life among a listless and fragmented assembly, to attract a particular kind of clientele, because management has learned that people tend to drink more and faster when subjected to loud noise, or simply because the one in charge likes it that way. In any case, the potential for a third place can be eliminated with the flip of a switch, for whatever inhibits conversation will drive those who delight in it to search for another setting.

As there are agencies and activities that interfere with conversation, so there are those that aid and encourage it. Third places often incorporate these activities and may even emerge around them. To be more precise, conversation is a *game* that mixes well with many other games according to the manner in which they are played. In the clubs where I watch others play gin rummy, for example, it is a rare card that is played without comment and rarer still is the hand dealt without some terrible judgment being leveled at the dealer. The game and conversation move along in lively fashion, the talk enhancing the card game, the card game giving eternal stimulation to the talk. Jackson's observations in the clubs of the working-class English confirm this. "Much time," he recorded, "is given over to playing games. Cribbage and dominoes mean endless conversation and by-the-way evaluation of personalities. Spectators are never quiet, and every stage of the game

stimulates comment—mostly on the characteristics of the players rather than the play; their slyness, slowness, quickness, meanness, allusions to long-remembered incidents in club history."[22]

Not all games stimulate conversation and kibitizing; hence, not all games complement third place association. A room full of individuals intent upon video games is not a third place, nor is a subdued lounge in which couples are quietly staring at backgammon boards. Amateur pool blends well into third place activity generally, providing that personality is not entirely sacrificed to technical skill or the game reduced to the singular matter of who wins. Above all, it is the latitude that personality enjoys at each and every turn that makes the difference.

The social potential of games was nicely illustrated in Laurence Wylie's account of life in the little French village of Peyranne. Wylie had noted the various ways in which the popular game of *boules* was played in front of the local café. "The wit, humor, sarcasm, the insults, the oaths, the logic, the experimental demonstration, and the ability to dramatize a situation gave the game its essential interest."[23] When those features of play are present, the game of *boules*—a relatively simple one—becomes a full-fledged and spirited social as well as sporting event. On the other hand, "Spectators will ignore a game being played by men who are physically skilled but who are unable to dramatize their game, and they will crowd around a game played by men who do not play very well but who are witty, dramatic, shrewd, in their ability to outwit their opponents. Those most popular players, of course, are those who combine skill with such wit."

To comprehend the nature of the third place is to recognize that though the cue stick may be put up or the pasteboards returned to their box, the game goes on. It is a game that, as Sedgwick observed, "requires two and gains in richness and variety if there are four or five more . . . it exercises the intelligence and the heart, it calls on memory and the imagination, it has all the interest derived from uncertainty and unexpectedness, it demands self-restraint, self-mastery, effort, quickness—in short, all the qualities that make a game exciting."[24] The game is conversation and the third place is its home court.

Accessibility and Accommodation

Third places that render the best and fullest service are those to which one may go alone at almost any time of the day or evening with assurance that acquaintances will be there. To have such a place available whenever the demons of loneliness or boredom strike or when the pressures and frustrations of the day call for relaxation amid good company is a powerful resource. Where they exist, such places attest to the bonds between people. "A community life exists," says the sociologist Philip Slater, "when one can go daily to a given location and see many of the people he

knows."[25]

That seemingly simple requirement of community has become elusive. Beyond the workplace (which, presumably, Slater did not mean to include), only a modest proportion of middle-class Americans can lay claim to such a place. Our evolving habitat has become increasingly hostile to them. Their dwindling number at home, seen against their profusion in many other countries, points up the importance of the accessibility of third places. Access to them must be *easy* if they are to survive and serve, and the ease with which one may visit a third place is a matter of both time and location.

Traditionally, third places have kept long hours. England's early coffeehouses were open sixteen hours a day, and most of our coffee-and-doughnut places are open around the clock. Taverns typically serve from about nine in the morning until the wee hours of the following morning, unless the law decrees otherwise. In many retail stores, the coffee counters are open well before the rest of the store. Most establishments that serve as third places are accessible during both the on and off hours of the day.

It must be thus, for the third place accommodates people only when they are released from their responsibilities elsewhere. The basic institutions—home, work, school—make prior claims that cannot be ignored. Third places must stand ready to serve people's needs for sociability and relaxation in the intervals before, between, and after their mandatory appearances elsewhere.

Those who have third places exhibit regularity in their visits to them, but it is not that punctual and unfailing kind shown in deference to the job or family. The timing is loose, days are missed, some visits are brief, etc. Viewed from the vantage point of the establishment, there is a fluidity in arrivals and departures and an inconsistency of membership at any given hour or day. Correspondingly, the activity that goes on in third places is largely unplanned, unscheduled, unorganized, and unstructured. Here, however, is the charm. It is just these deviations from the middle-class penchant for organization that give the third place much of its character and allure and that allow it to offer a radical departure from the routines of home and work.

As important as timing, and closely related to it, is the location of third places. Where informal gathering places are far removed from one's residence, their appeal fades, for two reasons. Getting there is inconvenient, and one is not likely to know the patrons.

The importance of proximate locations is illustrated by the typical English pub. Though in the one instance its accessibility has been sharply curtailed by laws that cut its normal hours of operation in half, it has nonetheless thrived because of its physical accessibility. The clue is in the name; pubs are called locals and every one of them is somebody's local. Because so many pubs are situated among the homes

of those who use them, people are there frequently, both because they are accessible and because their patrons are guaranteed the company of friendly and familiar faces. Across the English Channel sociable use of the public domain is also high, as is the availability of gathering places. Each neighborhood, if not each block, has its café and, as in England, these have served to bring the residents into frequent and friendly contact with one another.

Where third places are prolific across the urban topography, people may indulge their social instincts as they prefer. Some will never frequent these places. Others will do so rarely. Some will go only in the company of others. Many will come and go as individuals.

The Regulars

The lure of a third place depends only secondarily upon seating capacity, variety of beverages served, availability of parking, prices, or other features. What attracts the regular visitor to a third place is supplied not by management but by the fellow customers. The third place is just so much space unless the right people are there to make it come alive, and they are the regulars. It is the regulars who give the place its character and who assure that on any given visit some of the gang will be there.

Third places are dominated by their regulars but not necessarily in a numerical sense. It is the regulars, whatever their number on any given occasion, who feel at home in a place and set the tone of conviviality. It is the regulars whose mood and manner provide the infectious and contagious style of interaction and whose acceptance of new faces is crucial. The host's welcome, though important, is not the one that really matters; the welcome and acceptance extended on the other side of the bar-counter invites the newcomer to the world of third place association.

The importance of a regular crowd is demonstrated every day throughout America in licensed drinking establishments that *don't* have a loyal patronage. The patrons sit spaced apart from one another. Many appear to be hunching over some invisible lead ball of misery sitting on their laps. They peel labels off beer bottles. They study advertising messages on matchbooks. They watch afternoon television as though it were of compelling interest. The scene is reminiscent of the "end of the world ambience" described by Henry Miller in his depressing description of American "joints."[26] There is an atmosphere of lethargy, if not genuine despair. Most of the hapless patrons, one may be sure, enter not only to have a drink but also to find the cheer that ought to be drink's companion. Seeking to gain respite from loneliness or boredom, they manage only to intensify those feelings by their inability to get anything going with one another. They are doomed, almost always, for if silence is not immediately broken by strangers, it is rarely broken at all. This dismal scene is not found in third places or among those who have third places.

Those who become regulars need never confront it.

Every regular was once a newcomer, and the acceptance of newcomers is essential to the sustained vitality of the third place. Acceptance into the circle is not difficult, but it is not automatic either. Much of what is involved may be learned by observing the order of welcome to third places. Most enthusiastically greeted is the returning prodigal, the individual who had earlier been a loyal and accepted regular but whom circumstances had, in more recent months, kept away. This individual is perhaps the only one likely to get more than his democratic share of attention. After all, he's been away and there is much to ask and tell him. Next in order of welcome is the regular making his anticipated appearance. The gang was counting on his arrival and greets him accordingly. He is followed by the stranger or newcomer who enters in the company of another regular. Then come strangers in pairs and, at the bottom of the order, is the lone stranger, whose acceptance will take the longest.

Yet, it is the lone stranger who is most apt to become a regular. What he must do is establish trust. More than anything else, it is the element of trust that dictates the strength of the welcome. Strangers accompanied by regulars are vouched for. Strangers in pairs seem all right to one another at least and usually engage in such talk as will further attest to their acceptability. The lone stranger, however, has little to back him up. Though it is in the nature of inclusive groups to welcome new players to the game of conversation, it is also in their nature to want to know and trust those with whom they are talking. Since public life in America is relatively devoid of those connecting rituals that in other cultures serve to ensure the introductions of strangers, the order of welcome is doubly important.

How, then, does the lone stranger become a part of the group? It is not difficult, but it takes time because of the kind of trust that must be established. It is not the kind of trust on which banks base credit ratings or that between combat soldiers whose lives depend on each other. It's more like the trust among youngsters playing unsupervised sandlot baseball. Those who show up regularly and play a fairly decent game become the regulars. Similarly, the third place gang need only know that the newcomer is a decent sort, capable of giving and taking in conversation according to the modes of civility and mutual respect that hold sway among them, and the group needs some assurance that the new face is going to become a familiar one. This kind of trust grows with each visit. Mainly, one simply keeps reappearing and tries not to be obnoxious. Of these two requirements for admission or acceptance, regularity of attendance is clearly the more important.

Viewed from the newcomer's vantage point, third place groups often seem more homogeneous and closed to outsiders than they are. Those not yet a part of them seldom suspect their abundant capacity to accept variety into their ranks. Elijah Anderson was able to write a penetrating analysis of a black third place because this middle-class university student was accepted by the regular and relatively

uneducated company of a lower-class ghetto bar.[27] In England, the public bar within the multiroomed public house is reserved for working-class patrons and is off limits to the well-dressed who can afford the fancier rooms. But, as one observer reports, "Once you have been in a few times you can go whenever you like."[28] Such examples are indicative of the character of inclusive places where the membership takes as much delight in admitting unlikely members as exclusive places do in making certain that newcomers meet proper and narrow qualifications.

A Low Profile

As a physical structure, the third place is typically plain. In some cases, it falls a bit short of plain. One of the reasons it is difficult to convince some people of the importance of the third place is that so many of them have an appearance that suggests otherwise. Third places are unimpressive looking for the most part. They are not, with few exceptions, advertised; they are not elegant. In cultures where mass advertising prevails and appearance is valued over substance, the third place is all the more likely *not* to impress the uninitiated.

Several factors contribute to the characteristic homeliness of third places. First, and recalling Emerson's observation, there are no temples built to friendship. Third places, that is, are not constructed as such. Rather, establishments built for other purposes are commandeered by those seeking a place where they can linger in good company. Usually, it is the older place that invites this kind of takeover. Newer places are more wedded to the purposes for which they were built. Maximum profits are expected and not from a group of hangers-on. Newer places also tend to emerge in prime locations with the expectation of capitalizing on a high volume of transient customers. Newer places are also more likely to be chain establishments with policies and personnel that discourage hanging out. Even the new tavern is not nearly as likely to become a third place as an older one, suggesting that there is more involved than the purpose for which such places are built.

Plainness, or homeliness, is also the "protective coloration" of many third places. Not having that shiny bright appearance of the franchise establishment, third places do not attract a high volume of strangers or transient customers. They fall short of the middle-class preference for cleanliness and modernity. A place that looks a bit seedy will usually repel the transient middle-class customer away from home and protect those inside from numerous intrusions by one-time visitors. And, if it's a male third place in which women are not welcome, a definite seediness still goes a long way toward repelling the female customer. Many otherwise worn and aging structures, I should point out, are kept meticulously clean by owners devoted to the comfort and pleasure of their customers. It is the first impression of the place that is at issue here.

Plainness, especially on the inside of third places, also serves to discourage pretention among those who gather there. A nonpretentious decor corresponds with and encourages leveling and the abandonment of social pretense. It is part of a broader fabric of nonpretention, which also includes the manner of dress. Regulars of third places do not go home and dress up. Rather, they come as they are. If one of them should arrive overdressed, a good bit of ribbing, not admiration or envy, will be his desert. In the third place, the "visuals" that surround individuals do not upstage them.

The plainness and modesty surrounding the third place is entirely fitting and probably could not be otherwise. Where there is the slightest bit of fanfare, people become self-conscious. Some will be inhibited by shyness; others will succumb to pretention. When people consider the establishment the "in" place to be seen, commercialism will reign. When that happens, an establishment may survive; it may even thrive, but it will cease to be a third place.

Finally, the low visual profile typical of third places parallels the low profile they have in the minds of those who frequent them. To the regular, though he or she may draw full benefit from them, third places are an ordinary part of a daily routine. The best attitude toward the third place is that it merely be an expected part of life. The contributions that third places make in the lives of people depend upon their incorporation into the everyday stream of existence.

The Mood Is Playful

The persistent mood of the third place is a playful one. Those who would keep conversation serious for more than a minute are almost certainly doomed to failure. Every topic and speaker is a potential trapeze for the exercise and display of wit. Sometimes the playful spirit is obvious, as when the group is laughing and boisterous; other times it will be subtle. Whether pronounced or low key, however, the playful spirit is of utmost importance. Here joy and acceptance reign over anxiety and alienation. This is the magical element that warms the insider and reminds the outsider that he or she is not part of the magic circle, even though seated but a few feet away. When the regulars are at play, the outsider may certainly know neither the characters nor the rules by which they take one another lightly. The unmistakable mark of acceptance into the company of third place regulars is not that of being taken seriously, but that of being included in the play forms of their association.

Johan Huizinga, grand scholar of play, would have recognized the playground character of the third place, for it was clear to him that play occurs in a place apart. Play has its playgrounds—"forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules obtain. All are temporary worlds within the ordinary

world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart."[29]

The magic of playgrounds is seductive. Having been part of the play, the individual is drawn to where it took place. Not every game of marbles, Huizinga conceded, leads to the founding of a club, but the tendency is there. Why? Because the "feeling of being 'apart together' in an exceptional situation, of sharing something important, or mutually withdrawing from the rest of the world and rejecting the usual norms, retains its magic beyond the duration of the individual game. The club pertains to play as the hat to the head."[30] Many couples are certain to have known the feeling to which Huizinga alludes. They experience it when, in the course of many social events that are duller than they should be, a magic time occurs. It may be an impromptu gathering with no set activity at which everyone stays longer than intended because they are enjoying themselves and hate to leave. The urge to return, recreate, and recapture the experience is there. Invariably the suggestion is made, "Let's do this again!" The third place exists because of that urge.

A Home Away from Home

If such establishments as the neighborhood tavern were nearly as bad as generations of wives have claimed them to be, few of the ladies should have found much reason to be concerned. The evil houses would have fallen of their own foul and unredeeming character. In fact, however, third places compete with the home on many of its own terms and often emerge the winner. One suspects that it is the similarity that a third place bears to a comfortable home and not its differences that poses the greater threat. Aye, there's the rub—the third place is often more homelike than home.

Using the first and second definitions of *home* (according to my Webster's), the third place does not qualify, being neither 1) the "family's place of residence" or 2) that "social unit formed by a family living together." But the third definition of home as offering "a congenial environment" is more apt to apply to the average third place than the average family residence. The domestic circle can endure without congeniality, but a third place cannot. Indeed, many family nests are brutish places where intimacy exists without even a smattering of civility.

Obviously, there is a great deal of difference between the private residence and the third place. Homes are private settings; third places are public. Homes are mostly characterized by heterosocial relations; third places most often host people of the same sex. Homes provide for a great variety of activities, third places far fewer. Largely, the third place is what the home is not, yet, there clearly exists enough similarity to invite comparison.

Seeking traits of "homeness," I chanced upon a volume by the psychologist David

Seamon. He set forth five criteria against which "homes away from home" can be assessed. Seamon's illustrative comments are confined to the private residence. Clearly, he did not anticipate a comparison such as this; that makes his criteria particularly useful and not biased toward public places.[31]

The home *roots* us, begins Seamon; it provides a physical center around which we organize our comings and goings. Those who have a third place will find the criterion applies. As a self-employed individual once told me with regard to his coffeeshop, "Other than home, this is the only place where I know I'm going to be every day at about the same time." If the individual has a third place, the place also "has him." In America, the third place does not root individuals as tightly as, say, in France, but it roots them nonetheless. Those who regularly visit third places expect to see familiar faces. Absences are quickly noted, and those present query one another about an absent member.

The third place cannot enforce the regularity of appearance of the individual, as can home or work. A woman from Arizona related to me an account of her third place while she was a single working woman in Chicago. It illustrates the expectations that emerge among third place regulars. She and several others had become friends out of the mutual accessibility and appeal offered by a corner drugstore and its short-order food service. "The store was more home than where we all lived," she said, "in the resident hotels, apartments, YWCA, or whatever. If one of the group missed a day, that was all right. If we didn't see someone for two days, someone went to check to make sure the person was all right."[32]

For most Americans, third places do not substitute for home to the extent that hers had. In some cases, however, they root them even more so. Matthew Dumont, an East Coast psychiatrist, once went "underground" to study a place he dubbed the Star Tavern, in a blighted area of his city. There he found that the bartender and his tavern were meeting the needs of homeless men far better than the local health and welfare agencies. The Star was not a home away from home for those men. It *was* home.[33]

Seamon's second criterion of "at-homeness" is appropriation, or a sense of possession and control over a setting that need not entail actual ownership. Those who claim a third place typically refer to it in the first person possessive ("Rudy's is our hangout"), and they behave there much as if they did own the place.

When visiting another's home, one is bound to feel a bit like an intruder no matter how cordial the host, whereas the third place engenders a different feeling. The latter setting is a public place, and the regular is not an outsider. Further, just as a mother realizes her contribution to the family, regulars realize their contributions to the sociable group. They are members in good and full standing, a part of the group that *makes* the place.

Often, the regular is extended privileges and proprietary rights denied transient

or casual customers. A special place may be reserved, formally or informally, for the "friends of the house." Access through doors not normally used by the public may be granted. Free use of the house phone may be permitted. But whether tangible benefits and privileges accrue or not, appropriation increases with familiarity. The more people visit a place, use it, and become, themselves, a part of it, the more it is theirs.

Third, contends Seamon, homes are places where individuals are regenerated or restored. Here, one must readily concede that third places are not recommended for the physically ill or exhausted. The home, if not the hospital, is required for them. But, in terms of the regeneration of the spirit, of unwinding, or of "letting one's hair down"—in terms of *social* regeneration—the third place is ideally suited. Many a dutiful wife and mother will confess that she feels most at home with her close friends at some comfortable snuggery apart from her home and family.

The fourth theme of "at-homeness" is the feeling of being at ease or the "freedom to be." It involves the active expression of personality, the assertion of oneself within an environment. In the home, observes Seamon, this freedom is manifest in the choice and arrangement of furniture and other decor. In the third place, it is exhibited in conversation, joking, teasing, horseplay, and other expressive behaviors. In either case, it is a matter of leaving one's mark, of being associated with a place even when one is not there.

Finally, there is *warmth.* It is the least tangible of the five qualities Seamon associates with "at-homeness," and it is not found in all homes. Warmth emerges out of friendliness, support, and mutual concern. It radiates from the combination of cheerfulness and companionship, and it enhances the sense of being alive. On this account, the score is lopsided in favor of the third place for, although homes can exist without warmth, the third place cannot. While homes provide much that is necessary apart from warmth and friendliness, these are central to third place association that would quickly dissolve without them.

Seamon makes much of the relationship between the warmth of a room or other space and the use it gets. Unused places feel cold and unshared places lack warmth. Seamon is also aware of the sharp rise in "primary" or one-person households in the United States and wonders what impact the loss of warmth has on those individuals and on society. I share a similar concern over the decline of warmth-radiating third places in America's towns and cities, and I'd hazard a guess at the effect of this loss. Colder people!

Summary

Third places exist on neutral ground and serve to level their guests to a condition of social equality. Within these places, conversation is the primary activity and the

major vehicle for the display and appreciation of human personality and individuality. Third places are taken for granted and most have a low profile. Since the formal institutions of society make stronger claims on the individual, third places are normally open in the off hours, as well as at other times. The character of a third place is determined most of all by its regular clientele and is marked by a playful mood, which contrasts with people's more serious involvement in other spheres. Though a radically different kind of setting from the home, the third place is remarkably similar to a good home in the psychological comfort and support that it extends.

Such are the characteristics of third places that appear to be universal and essential to a vital informal public life. I've noted each of them in turn without attempting to describe any net effects that these several characteristics may combine to produce. I turn my attention now to such effects.