

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.

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.

Notes

1. Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 311.
2. Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961), 55.
3. *Ibid.*
4. O.E.D. Noun definition no. 2.
5. Robert J. Allen, *The Clubs of Augustan London* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1967), 14.
6. Georg Simmel, in *On Individual and Social Forms*, ed. Donald N. Levine (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), Chapter 9.
7. Tibor Scitovsky, *The Joyless Economy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), Chapter 11.
8. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays and Journals* (New York: Doubleday, 1968), 158.
9. Richard Goodwin, "The American Condition," *The New Yorker* (28 January 1974), 36.
10. William Wordsworth, "The Art of Conversation," in *Wordsworthian and Other Studies*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt. (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), 181–206.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Henry Sedgwick, *The Art of Happiness* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1930), Chapter 17.
13. Brian Jackson, *Working Class Community* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968) Chapter 4.
14. Slater, Philip E. 'Must marriage cheat today's young women' *Redbook Magazine* (February 1971).

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This chapter was published in its original form as:

Oldenburg, R. (1999), "The Character of Third Places", in Oldenburg, R. (1999), *The Great Good Place: Cafés, coffee shops, bookstores, bars, hair salons and the other great hangouts at the heart of a community*, second edition, Marlowe & Company, New York, 2–42. (First edition published 1989.)

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