

2. Marshall Berman

Take It to the Streets

Conflict and Community in Public Space

The Dialectics of Double Lives

KARL MARX, writing in the 1840s, developed a perspective that can help us see why modern men and women have a special need for public space, and also why the historical forces that create this need make it especially hard to fulfill. His 1844 essay “On the Jewish Question” tries to grasp the new liberal and democratic civilization that the French and American Revolutions have produced. In all states that have had successful bourgeois democratic revolutions, Marx argues, “man leads a double life.” The typical modern man or woman is “split into a public person and a private person,” or into an “egoistic individual” and a “communal being,” or—here Marx quotes the language of the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen—“into a man and a citizen.” Marx characterizes this double life as a life of “political emancipation.”

It takes no special wisdom to see that this form of freedom has severe defects. Marx portrays it as only part of the way toward full “human emancipation.” Nevertheless, it is “a necessary part.” It is only by going through this historical split that we can integrate ourselves into fully developed “species beings.” Full human emancipation will happen “only when the individual man [*Mensch*—human being] has taken back into himself the abstract citizen and, in his everyday life and his relations with other people, has recognized and organized his own powers as social powers.”

It is this modern, split, fragmented individ-

ual, living a double life, that is Marx’s subject—these individual people who must do the work of putting their lives together, together with their fellows. Without the experience of radical separation, modern men and women will lack the space they need to grow into people capable of full integration. This is why Marx (as opposed to some other socialists, then and now) supports civil rights, both for Jews (as he argues in the “Jewish Question”) and for everybody else. It is true, civil rights for an individual or a group involve “the right of separation.” But it is only by going through the most intense separation and individuation that modern men and women can develop the resources to create new forms of solidarity and community.

The paradigms that Marx developed in the 1840s can still be fruitful for understanding life in the democracies of today. We still lead double lives, split into men or women and citizens, torn between private and public; we still dream of resolving our inner contradictions and living in a more integrated way. We know, as Marx did, that this can’t happen without a radical transformation of our economy, state, and society; we also know that this can’t work if it’s imposed from above, but only if people come together freely to do it on their own.

In this political context, the idea of public space takes on a special urgency. A society of split men and women badly needs a terrain on which people can come together to heal their

inner wounds—or at least to treat them—and advance from political to human emancipation. Of course, there is no spatial form that in itself could make this happen. But we can imagine environments that could help it happen: environments open to everybody where, first of all, a society's inner contradictions could emerge freely and openly and, second, where people could begin to deal with these contradictions and try to work them out. Any society that takes the rights of man and citizen seriously has a responsibility to provide spaces where these rights can be expressed, tested, dramatized, played off against each other. Implicit in our basic democratic rights, then, is the right to public space.

Americans are faced with special difficulties in trying to secure this right. Our Republic inherited no splendid monuments and plazas, such as were built by the feudal and absolutist powers that dominated Europe's past. (I will have more to say later about those spaces.) Our built environments have been created almost entirely by private capital for private purposes and profits. Nevertheless, Americans are at least intermittently aware of what they are missing. Again and again, since the earliest days of the Republic, there have been popular demands and mobilizations for public space. Sometimes the people are lucky enough to get Central Parks and Washington Squares. But Americans haven't been so lucky for a long while.

Michael Walzer's distinction between "single-minded" and "open-minded" space is especially fruitful for understanding the politics of public space in the U.S.A. Walzer's "single-minded" metaphor can help explain what makes our post-World War II public spaces so sterile and empty, why they have been gold mines for owners and developers but ghost towns for the public. And his "open-minded" metaphor can help us imagine what kind of spaces we really need, so that we can fight for them effectively in the generation to come.

If I have an argument with Walzer, it is that he has not adequately thought through the consequences of his own values. Specifically, his vision of open-minded space isn't open enough. I want to open it up some more, to expand our vision of what public space should

be. I want to bring in all sorts of people, impulses, ideas, and modes of behavior that Walzer leaves out, to unfold dimensions of openness that he doesn't seem to see. My critique of Walzer and my own vision of open space will emerge in two parts: first, openness to modern individualism; second, openness to the urban poor. I will be promoting an ideal of open space that Montesquieu was the first to identify, and to celebrate, on the streets of Paris after the death of Louis XIV: an environment where

Dissimulation, that art so practiced and so necessary among us, is unknown. . . . Everything is said, everything is seen, everything can be heard. The heart shows itself as openly as the face.¹

A Place in the Sun: Modern Individualism

THERE IS A DISTINCTIVE STRAIN in Walzer's argument that seems to grow out of a paradoxical but persistent tradition in modern thought. This tradition professes an Olympian disdain for modern life as a whole, and dreams nostalgically of a golden age of Greek or Roman antiquity. When the nostalgia takes a political form, it often focuses on idealized, magnificent public spaces where ancient men are said to have lived on a lofty plane of civic virtue. (This tradition doesn't say much about where, or how, ancient women lived.) Moderns, by contrast, are seen as petty souls mired hopelessly in trivial pursuits.

When Walzer works in this tradition, his argument shifts from an indictment of capitalism for depriving the people of public space, and turns into an indictment of people for not wanting public space or caring about it. Thus, he says, modern men and women have been deformed by "the triumph of liberal individualism—which is not merely a creed but a state of mind, a . . . characterological formation." People with this character can imagine and pursue happiness only in narrowly private forms. They seek material comfort, intimacy, love, "personal and mutual exploration."

Walzer seems to write off all these needs as

¹ "A Persian on the Streets of Paris," in Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*, 1721.

exclusive private affairs. He sees his contemporaries as having fallen from the heights of “older republicanism,” which left us a noble heritage of “monuments and fellow-citizens.” The men of those monumental times could be at home in public space because they were supposedly free from the press of personal needs that obsess us. They understood that public life “requires impersonality and role-playing, civility, not sincerity, reticence and wit, not confession.” But we moderns are unable to leave our selves behind, and so public space is no place for us.

Walzer’s tone is uncertain and possibly ironic here. He may not believe all this. But there are plenty of people who do believe it. The pity is that their nostalgic vision of the past blinds them to the life that is unfolding abundantly in public spaces all around them right now. If they could only learn to look, they would see private and public life coming together and interfusing in fascinating and creative new ways.

To show briefly what I have in mind, I want to describe a song and an accompanying video that appeared and became a surprise hit in the winter of 1983–84. It is called *Girls Just Want to Have Fun*, featuring the previously unknown Cyndi Lauper, singing her own version of the song:

Some boys take a beautiful girl
and hide her away from the rest of the world.
I want to be the one to walk in the sun.
And girls just want to have fun.
Yes, girls just want to have fun.²

Lauper is a singer and comedian in the mold of Fanny Brice: a flamboyant “personality” whose extravagant mannerisms often disguise the range and expressiveness of her voice; a brilliant clown who has the dramatic power to suggest underlying depth and sadness without breaking the rhythm of the clowning. *Girls Just Want to Have Fun* is remarkable for the power with which it incarnates a collective dream of what life in public space might be.

This song begins as a story set in a distinctive social space. It is a space that is central in 20th-

century popular culture, but (apart from the music of Bruce Springsteen) almost wholly absent from the popular culture of the 1980s: the tenement flat of the urban ethnic working class. In this space, shot in closeup to emphasize its claustrophobic density and suffocating warmth, Lauper appears as a working girl in conflict with her family, fighting to break out of her parents’ stifling embrace and simultaneously out of the lower class she and they are in: “Oh, mommy dear, we’re not the fortunate ones, / but girls, they want to have fun.” She does this by talking on the phone (her parents vainly try to stop this), and by assembling a racially and ethnically integrated group of girls, who proceed to go dancing and singing through the streets of downtown Brooklyn.

As we follow the song and dance, we discover the distinctively public character of the fun that is at issue here. It springs from banter, flirtation, dress, theatrical display, extravagant gestures, stunning moves that are made to be seen. The heroine and her friends are not only starring in their own show, but—for a little while, at least—become their own *auteurs*. But it is only in public that such a show can go on. The protagonists must interact with strangers; some will rise to play along with them, or oppose them, while others crystallize into their audience. They must learn to depend on these reactions to give their actions a shared meaning, to incorporate them into public time.

As the girls dance through Brooklyn’s streets, they find themselves suddenly thrust into a gauntlet of construction workers. This is probably one of the primal scenes that the girls’ parents feared. But to our surprise and delight, the workers only smile genially and, even more surprising, some of them actually throw down their tools and join the dance. The parade descends into the underground, then emerges from the IRT in the neighborhood of Wall Street. Here they attract fellow travelers of a higher class, both aged stuffed shirts and yuppies. It appears that *everybody* can be accepted by this group and integrated into its dance. And now the video, which began as kitchen-sink naturalism, metamorphoses into magic realism. These girls are not only transforming their lives, but transforming the life of the street itself, using its structural openness to

² *Girls Just Want to Have Fun*, music and lyrics by Robert Hazard; copyright © 1979 by Heroic Music. Lyrics revised here by Cyndi Lauper.

break down barriers of race and class and age and sex, to bring radically different kinds of people together.

At the climax of the story, the heroine returns, along with her newly constituted popular front, to the tenement and the family that tried in vain to fence her in. She brings the street into the house, the public realm into her private space. Her parents find it horrifying, yet alluring: they are tempted to join their child, go public, and change their own drab lives.

Popular culture is worth paying attention to because of its power to dramatize collective dreams. The dream that gets acted out in *Girls Just Want to Have Fun* is a dream of bringing together our private and public lives, of uniting the rights of man and the rights of a citizen. By fulfilling the first commandment of liberal individualism—Express Yourself, Have Fun—we can create a beloved community, a community so radiant that even our parents will want to join. Karl Marx would have recognized this utopian vision: he placed it at the visionary climax of the *Communist Manifesto*, a society in which “the free development of each will be the condition for the free development of all.”³

LET ME TRY to approach this point from another direction. I have recently come back from Spain, where I spent several lovely afternoons in one of the world’s most magnificent public spaces, Madrid’s Plaza Mayor. This enormous late-Renaissance square can easily hold a couple of hundred thousand people, yet it feels comfortably contained. It is surrounded on all four sides by colonnaded arcades, and the arcades hold multitudes of shops; above the arcades a towered megastructure extends all the way around, containing a large assortment of municipal and national government offices. The visitor today sees the Plaza Mayor as a

³ Marx would also have admired Lauper’s sense of social reality. Her rendition of the Declaration of Rights at the song’s end is prefaced (and modified) by a repeated refrain: “When the working, when the working, when the working day is done. . . .” Conscious of her class, she knows that the golden coach will turn into a subway train at dawn, and that, whatever magic happens on the street at night, she is going to have to go back to work in the morning. Still, even during the working day—perhaps especially then—she is determined to dream.

marvelously rich human mix, full of government workers, petitioners, buyers and sellers of everything legal and illegal, religious pilgrims, foreign tourists, street musicians, political agitators, performing artists, and ordinary people of Madrid seizing time out to see and be seen in the sun. It is impossible for an American not to be smitten with envy here. This plaza looks and feels like the Platonic idea of all that an open-minded public space should be. Why can’t we have spaces like this at home?

The Plaza Mayor *is* all that it appears to be. But it is also a lot more. In its splendid openness, it has become something radically different from what it was meant to be. This square, built between 1590 and 1619, was designed as an arena for public spectacles that would dramatize the power and glory of an inquisitorial church and an absolutist state. The plaza’s visual focus was a grand balcony from which the king and queen, along with the princes of the church, could look down. What this place was made for, above all, was the *auto-da-fé*, a ceremony for torturing and killing people, and terrorizing the populace, with all the splendor that the Spanish baroque imagination could mobilize.

One special feature of these *autos* sheds some light on our theme of private faces in public places. Among the hundreds of victims condemned in the Plaza Mayor from the early 17th through the middle 18th centuries, the most prominent and notorious seem to have been Marranos: descendants of Spanish and Portuguese Jews who had been forcibly converted after 1492, and who professed orthodox Catholic beliefs but secretly kept up fragments of Jewish law and lore, worship and community. For more than two centuries, the Spanish church and state worked together obsessively to detect and destroy them.

Autos-da-fé were meant to show how effective the Inquisition could be in tearing these peoples’ masks away, stripping them naked, exposing their most secret selves, so as to annihilate private and public selves together. The Marranos who were present at those ceremonies (to stay away would have been to court instant suspicion) were forced to witness people being publicly destroyed for being what they privately knew themselves to be. In this cli-

mate of terror, reticence and insincerity had to be absolute, role-playing a desperate imperative. Even one slip, a slight trace of one's face beneath the facade, could mean a horrible death.

This grisly scenario may be a useful antidote to the nostalgia that often overcomes Americans in the great spaces of the Old World. It can remind us that public space has a dark and checkered past. These dreadful memories should help us to see how the most expansive public space can contract into a dungeon cell, and the most vibrant public life into a trial by ordeal, where people are not free to show themselves as they are. We should be able to see, too, how the liberal individualism that Walzer condemns is essential to the open-minded public space he loves. It is only when people are enjoying the rights of man that they are free to walk in the sun.

The people of Madrid are walking freely in the plaza's sun today. The breakthrough into the sunlight wasn't so long ago. Millions of Spaniards were forced to live like Marranos for 40 years, all through the Franco regime. It was only at the very end of the regime that the city's planners were allowed to ban vehicles from the Plaza Mayor and let people take over. After eight years of liberal democracy, the plaza today is full of people who would have been arrested yesterday: women in T-shirts and miniskirts, children climbing all over the equestrian statue of Philip II, adolescents playing cassettes and dancing to rock and roll, young couples (including some homosexual couples) necking torridly, graffitiists writing irreverent proclamations on arcade walls, agitators handing leaflets out (NO CHURCH NO STATE NO TRIBUNAL NO MISSILES NO THANKS), and God only knows how many more. Some of the people here are consciously engaging in politics (there was a huge anti-Reagan demonstration here in May, in honor of our president's state visit); others are just out to have fun. The people of Madrid love the Plaza Mayor today because it is a place where they can comfortably do both, and where both can blend and intertwine. They know that, in the realm of public space, the personal is political. The grand balcony is still there; but in a democratic Spain its meaning is purely orna-

mental. The people no longer focus vertically, on rulers above them, but horizontally, on each other. If they look up today, it is only to enjoy the sun.

A Walk on the Wild Side: The Urban Poor

THE MOST CRUCIAL form of openness we will need, if we really mean to have open-minded public space, is openness to the urban underclass. This class of people is as old as urban life itself, and a recurrent heartache to people who care about cities. Cities and metropolitan areas have frequently acted as magnets for many people whom they couldn't—or in any case didn't—assimilate. The people left out become residents of shantytowns, squatters in abandoned buildings, sleepers in the subways or the streets, dealers in illegal and dangerous commodities, victims and perpetrators of violence, potential recruits for mobs, cults, the underworld and, since the Age of Revolution, for radical movements of left and right. Many of them are immigrants and refugees, but others are long-time residents displaced by the city's changes. Anyone who wants to claim a share of public space in a modern city is forced to share it with some of the people of the underclass, and so to think about where he stands in relation to them.

The range of possible responses to this situation was delineated brilliantly a century ago by Baudelaire in a prose poem he wrote in the 1860s, "The Eyes of the Poor." The poem tells the story of a loving couple who are spreading their love along a newly completed Parisian boulevard, and who come to rest in a glittering new outdoor café. Actually, the boulevard is not quite finished: there is still a pile of rubble on the street. Suddenly a family in rags steps out from behind the rubble, and walks directly up to the lovers. (Baudelaire's audience knew that the rubble in the picture was probably all that was left of the family's neighborhood, one of the dozens of ancient, impoverished neighborhoods that Baron Haussmann's gigantic urban renewal projects destroyed.) As the poet presents these people, they are not asking for anything: they are just looking around, enjoying the bright lights. But the lovers are embar-

rassed by the immense social gulf between them and these ragged people who, thanks to the boulevard, are physically close enough to touch. "I felt a little ashamed of our glasses and decanters," the narrator says, "too big for our thirst." Baudelaire's middle-class protagonists have got to respond, not merely to the ragged people in their midst, but also to what these people make them feel about themselves.

Baudelaire's narrator responds in a way that will come to typify the urban left: he looks into their eyes, tries to express sympathy and empathy, conceives of them and himself as united in a human "family of eyes." His girlfriend responds in a radically different way that can be said to typify the urban right: "These people are unbearable with their big saucer eyes. Can't you call the *maître* to send them away?"

More than a century after Baudelaire's death, urban Americans are still living inside the parameters of his poem. We are faced with a very large underclass, and the people in this class don't want to go away; they, too, want a place in the bright light. And their presence in public space forces us to think not only about their place but about our own.

Walzer believes (as I do) that fear of the underclass is one of the main forces that has led America's urban middle class to flee the open-minded cities they have made, and to settle into (and settle for) a single-minded suburban environment that is less risky but a lot less alive. He also believes that many people who grew up in that closed world have grown sick of it, and are now "ready for the pleasures and willing to pay the costs of urbanity."

I hope he is right. But once again he undermines his long-range aims by getting entangled in the very middle-class anxieties and self-deceptions that he is trying to overcome. Thus he proclaims a dualism of successful versus unsuccessful streets. "A successful street," he said, "is self-policing." Policing is meant to fend off all the elements of "an unsuccessful street," which "by contrast always seems inadequately policed, dangerous, a place to avoid." What are these bad elements? Walzer casts his net very wide, and comes up with "social, sexual, and political deviance: derelicts, criminals, political and religious sectarians, adolescent gangs." Rather than subject themselves to

close encounters with these kinds, "ordinary men and women flee as soon as they can into private and controlled worlds."

Now, as an account of the way many people feel, this is undoubtedly accurate. The modern world is full of people who are terrified of other people, socially, sexually, or politically different from themselves. But Walzer seems to take their terrors at face value, to understand them as plain facts, or alternately as eternal laws of social physics, rather than as the historically relative and socially conditioned ideologies that they are.

Thus, when we encounter categories like success/failure or normal/deviant, we need to ask: By what criteria? By whose criteria? For what purposes? In whose interests? When we hear about successful public spaces, we should ask: Successful for what? Who benefits from a police definition of success, that is, success as absence of trouble? (By this definition, most of the great public spaces in history—Greek agoras, Italian piazzas, Parisian boulevards—would rate as failures, because all were turbulent places, and needed large police forces on hand to keep the seething forces from exploding. On the other hand, some of the world's most sterile shopping malls would rate as shining successes.) Walzer himself explains who benefits from this: the upscale merchants and real estate promoters who want public space to be nothing but an unending golden shower of big spenders. But these people and their interests are, as Walzer shows, the greatest menace to free public space today; optimal success for them would mean total destruction of public life for all of us. When Walzer accepts their image of successful space, he loses hold on his own critical perspective and his deepest beliefs.

Walzer gets caught up in his enemies' values once more when he adopts the dualism of "ordinary men and women" versus "deviants." Why should he accept an ideology that stigmatizes difference as "deviance," and that considers it normal to flee from anybody different from ourselves? After all, any idea of normality is a *norm*, and as such necessitates a choice of values. Why doesn't Walzer insist on standards of success and normality that square with his own values? Then he could see that the real failures in public space are not the streets full

of social, sexual, and political deviants, but rather the streets with no deviants at all. And he could fight for a truly open-minded idea of normality: the capacity to interact with people radically different from ourselves, to learn from them, to assimilate what they have to give, maybe even to change our lives, to grow, without ceasing to be our selves.

Walzer concedes grudgingly that his various “deviant” groups “belong, no doubt, to the urban mix.” But he warns that they had better not get “too prominent within it.” In other words, the people of the underclass (along with all the other deviants) can be tolerated, so long as they keep their place on the outer fringes of public space. I would argue, on the contrary, that there isn’t much point in having public space, unless these problematical people are free to come to the very center of the scene. The reason for this is not that they are so lovely to look at (though some of them are, just like some of us). The reason is that they are *there*, part of the same city and the same society as ourselves, linked with us in a thousand ways that would take a lifetime to fully understand. The glory of modern public space is that it can pull together all the different sorts of people who are there. It can both compel and empower all these people to *see* each other, not through a glass darkly but face to face.

One reason I get so persistent about the urban underclass is that I have spent my last 15 years working with students who come from that class, who have grown up looking at the life of the city through the eyes of the poor. On lucky days they were allowed to look, so long as they didn’t try to touch. On unlucky days—and any young black or Latin person, along with most poor whites, will have experienced plenty of these—they encountered middle-class or upper-class people who perceived them as assailants, saw their eyes as drawn weapons and, like the woman in Baudelaire’s poem, called guards to get rid of them fast. What they have had to face, in Northern cities’ public space, has been not so much overt racism—though, God knows, they have felt plenty of it—as a free-floating hysterical fear. They have found themselves in the bizarre position of having to convince a multitude of strangers that they have no criminal designs on them. If they fail in this

attempt—especially in encounters with police (often off-duty or in plainclothes) or, recently, with such free-lance vigilantes as Bernhard Goetz—they may well get killed.

Most of the young people I know have developed a repertory of dress and body language that manages to convince their social superiors of their innocence, and so enables them to move through the city in relative safety. On the other hand, it’s hard to see how they can possibly—to return to one of Walzer’s central ideas—be *urbane* in our urban space, if they are perpetually on trial in it.⁴ Their lot is depressingly similar to that of the Marranos in the Plaza Mayor 300 years ago: now, as then, only eternal vigilance can keep the subject alive, and any slip at any moment might be his last; even in the middle of the most spacious square, he is up against the wall.

A more contemporary kindred spirit would be Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*. It would be no surprise if many of these young people should come to feel, like Ellison’s hero, that it would make more sense to stay indoors or in a hole underground.

I hope they don’t stay away. If they do, it will diminish not only their lives—which already are constricted enough—but our own. In fact, poor people have taught us so much of what we know about being fully alive in public: about how to move rhythmically and melodically down a street; about how to use color and ornamentation to say new things about ourselves, and to make new connections with the world; about how to bring out the rhetorical and theatrical powers of the English language in our everyday talk.

Middle-class people often have no idea how much they have learned from underclasses, because they have picked it up at second- or third-hand. But our serious musicians and composers, our dancers and choreographers, our

⁴ Sometimes the trial, judgment, sentence, and execution are all over before the defendant even knows what hit him. In September 1983, Michael Stewart, a young black man, was arrested for peaceably writing graffiti in the Union Square subway station. A few minutes later, a whole crowd of white policemen beat, stomped, and strangled him into a coma, then delivered him to Bellevue to die. (In November 1985 an all-white jury found six of those policemen innocent on all counts.)

designers and painters and poets can tell us, if we ask, how much inspiration they have drawn from our underclasses' overflowing life. And they have come into contact with this life, for the most part, not by making expeditions into dark ghettos (though a few adventurous spirits have done this), but simply by paying attention to the rich sounds and rhythms and images and gestures that poor men and women and boys and girls pour out on the sidewalks and in the subways of New York, and in all the rest of urban America's shared and integrated public space.

Our underclasses are mostly black and Latin today, and the rappers, graffitiists, break dancers, B-boys, et al., who have done so much to animate contemporary culture, are drawn mainly from black and Latin youth. But imaginative middle-class WASPs at the turn of the century—like William Dean Howells, Hutchins Hapgood, Jane Addams—could learn similar lessons from Irish, Italians, Slavs, and Jews. All those underclassed people, crammed together in tenements, exploited at work, oppressed in all social relationships, still overflowed with life in their teeming and violent streets, because the public space of the streets was the only place where they could come to life at all. Out in the streets, they could walk in the sun—even in streets where the sun didn't shine. One thing that has made American culture so creative in the 20th century is that it has had the capacity to nourish itself on the life and energy that our underclasses have had to give. It would be an ominous sign for our future if we were to lose that capacity now.

The Narrow Open Spaces

LATE IN THE 1960s, a number of promoters and developers, the Rouse Corporation most prominent among them, recognized that the overwhelming suburbanization of American society was bound to generate a powerful undertow of mass nostalgia for city life. They understood that this emotion could be spectacularly profitable. The fruits of their insight have been a whole new generation of public spaces, lavishly funded (through various complex public-private mixes) and often beautifully designed, throughout America's cities. Houston's Galle-

ria, San Francisco's Ghiradelli Square, Boston's Quincy Market, New York's South Street Seaport are only a few, and more are emerging all the time. (There have been similar movements in Europe, most strikingly in London's recycled Covent Garden.) These developments have preserved parts of our 19th-century cities that would otherwise surely have been destroyed, and they have interwoven modern with traditional architecture in ingenious and occasionally inspired ways. They have come to constitute the reigning model for the public spaces of the future.

Americans who care about city life should be grateful for these spaces, especially since they supplanted a model of urban development that had no appreciation of public space at all. But it is hard to spend any length of time in them without feeling that something is missing. In fact, this something is the underclass, along with all our other "social, sexual, and political deviants." The human mix in these spaces is overwhelmingly white, affluent, and clean-cut. It isn't just that hardly anybody black, Latin, or poor is here; there isn't even anybody scruffy or ragged-looking around.

These plazas are a lot less racially and socially integrated than the busy streets around them. Although their designs are meant to suggest microcosms of the cities they are part of, what they really are is urban-theme parks, Disney Worlds-by-the-sea; except for the skyscrapers that form their backdrop, they could almost be in the middle of the Everglades. There isn't much menace in the air, but neither is there much flash or flair; not much to embarrass people or make them want to run, but even less to hold their attention and make them think. These plazas are too diverse to be single-minded, yet far too shallow to open up the depths in anybody's mind. It would be too strong an accusation, too suggestive of conscious intent, to call them closed-minded. Maybe the word should be *absent-minded*, in memory of all that is out of sight and out of mind.

There are many ironies in this situation. The heyday of public space in recent American history was the 1960s. All over the country, in those years, streets came to life. And not just streets, but public spaces of every kind—

squares, parks, malls, terminals, even highways—all filled up with people who were gathering, agitating, arguing, proclaiming, marching, stopping traffic, dancing, singing, waving flags, taking off their clothes or putting on strange new clothes, expressing themselves and making reasonable and outrageous demands on everyone else in flamboyantly theatrical but intensely serious ways; sometimes even burning things down, or getting themselves killed. Our streets were never so vibrant, so colorful, so sexy—but at the same time, and for some of the same reasons, they were never so violent or scary. By and by, more and more people began to fall prey to the pressures, including many people who had worked for years to lift those pressures. And our years of urban self-assertion and rebellion were followed by an era of wholesale deurbanization, demographic flight beyond the suburbs to remote rural areas (which of course became suburbs overnight), and great cities on the ropes.

The masses of people who moved far away from their cities may well have found the comfort and security they sought. But many of them seem to have felt a sense of emptiness amid the flowers and the freeways, and yearned for a world they had lost. These urban refugees and their children have been among the main markets courted by the entrepreneurs of the new public space. But although many of these new spaces are pretty places, suburbanites who come in search of something missing in their lives won't find it here. This is because what they really miss is not urban forms in themselves, noble as many of these forms are, but rather a thickness and intensity of human feelings, a clash and interfusion of needs and desires and ideas. For it is this clashing and fusing of human energies—as Baudelaire said it, “their luminous explosion in space”—that fills a city's forms with life.

Growing Up in Public

LET ME NOW PULL TOGETHER many of the strands of this argument by sketching briefly what my own vision of an open-minded space would be. It would be open, above all, to encounters between people of different classes, races, ages, religions, ideologies, cultures, and

stances toward life. It would be planned to attract all these different populations, to enable them to look each other in the face, to listen, maybe to talk. It would have to be exciting enough and accessible enough (by both mass transit and car) to attract them all, spacious enough to contain them all (so they wouldn't be forced to fight each other for breathing space), with plenty of exit routes (in case encounters get too strained), and adequate police (in case there's trouble) kept well in the background (so they don't themselves become a source of trouble).

One way to develop this kind of mix will be through shopping facilities: for instance, getting another Alexander's and a Bloomingdale's to locate next-door to each other. In order to maintain the mix, it will be essential to have some form of commercial rent control. Otherwise our space will be destroyed by its very success: its attractiveness will drive rents up beyond the means of all but the classiest and most exclusive stores, and gentrification will transform a resource for the public into a reservation for the rich, as has happened in London and Paris, and is happening now in New York.

Our open-minded space must be especially open to politics. We will want to design spaces within the larger space for unlimited speech-making and assembling. (New York's Union Square used to have this sort of subspace.) But we will want our public space to be sufficiently differentiated that people who don't want to listen or join in will also have places to go. We will try to design acoustic enclaves, such as already exist in some places (for instance, Washington Square Park), which enable many kinds of discourse—speech, music, song—to go on simultaneously, without drowning each other out.

No doubt there would be all sorts of dissonance and conflict and trouble in this space, but that would be exactly what we'd be after. In a genuinely open space, all of a city's loose ends can hang out, all of a society's inner contradictions can express and unfold themselves. Just as, within the protected space of a psychoanalytic session, an individual can open himself to everything he has repressed—so, maybe, in a protective enclave of public space,

a whole society might begin to confront its collective repressions to call up the specters that haunt it and look them in the face.

I worry as I write this. Is this the way to sell public space to tired businessmen and harried civil servants? My estimate of “the costs of urbanity” seems to be running a lot higher than Walzer’s; some of the people out there will surely conclude that the expense of spirit is too much, say thanks but no thanks, and stay home with their VCRs. Others will note darkly the echoes of the 1960s in my thinking, and argue that they have already gone through the ’60s, and once was enough. I agree: I loved the ’60s, but by the parade’s end it was enough for me. I doubt that anybody could sustain the decade’s implosive and explosive pressures—its insatiable demands for self-scrutiny and, simultaneously, for self-transformation, individual and collective, personal and political—for more than a little while. On the other hand, when an individual or a society totally represses its ’60s,

as Reagan’s America has managed to a remarkable extent, it becomes not just politically torpid but spiritually dead. Open-minded public space can be a place where we can remember and recreate the storms and dreams of the ’60s, and so bring ourselves a nourishment that, at all times, but especially now, we badly need.

I want to end this essay with Franz Kafka’s help. All along, I know, I have been trying to convince people to seek out suffering, conflict, trouble. Some readers will probably find this perverse, and wonder why they should bring more trouble on themselves. Kafka can suggest a reason why: “You can hold back from the suffering of this world,” he writes, “you have free permission to do so, and it is in accord with your nature, but perhaps this very holding back is the one suffering you could have avoided.” Open public space is a place where people can actively engage the suffering of this world together, and, as they do it, transform themselves into a public. □