

**The
DEATH
and LIFE of
GREAT
AMERICAN
CITIES**

Jane Jacobs



VINTAGE BOOKS
A DIVISION OF RANDOM HOUSE, INC.
NEW YORK

VINTAGE BOOKS EDITION, DECEMBER 1992

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Acknowledgment is made to the following publications for permission to reprint portions of this book which first appeared in their pages: *Architectural Forum*, the *Columbia University Forum*, *Harper's Magazine*, *The Reporter*.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Jacobs, Jane, 1916-

The death and life of great American cities / Jane Jacobs.—1st Vintage Books ed.
p. cm.

Originally published: New York: Random House, [1961].

Includes index.

ISBN 0-679-74195-X

1. City planning—United States. 2. Urban renewal—United States.

3. Urban policy—United States. 1. Title.

HT167.J33 1992

307.76'0973—dc20 92-50082

CIP

Manufactured in the United States of America

3579B864

TO NEW YORK CITY
where I came to seek my fortune
and found it by finding
Bob, Jimmy, Ned and Mary
for whom this book is written too

3

The uses of sidewalks: contact

Reformers have long observed city people loitering on busy corners, hanging around in candy stores and bars and drinking soda pop on stoops, and have passed a judgment, the gist of which is: "This is deplorable! If these people had decent homes and a more private or bosky outdoor place, they wouldn't be on the street!"

This judgment represents a profound misunderstanding of cities. It makes no more sense than to drop in at a testimonial banquet in a hotel and conclude that if these people had wives who could cook, they would give their parties at home.

The point of both the testimonial banquet and the social life of city sidewalks is precisely that they are public. They bring together people who do not know each other in an intimate, private social fashion and in most cases do not care to know each other in that fashion.

Nobody can keep open house in a great city. Nobody wants

to. And yet if interesting, useful and significant contacts among the people of cities are confined to acquaintanceships suitable for private life, the city becomes stultified. Cities are full of people with whom, from your viewpoint, or mine, or any other individual's, a certain degree of contact is useful or enjoyable; but you do not want them in your hair. And they do not want you in theirs either.

In speaking about city sidewalk safety, I mentioned how necessary it is that there should be, in the brains behind the eyes on the street, an almost unconscious assumption of general street support when the chips are down—when a citizen has to choose, for instance, whether he will take responsibility, or abdicate it, in combating barbarism or protecting strangers. There is a short word for this assumption of support: trust. The trust of a city street is formed over time from many, many little public sidewalk contacts. It grows out of people stopping by at the bar for a beer, getting advice from the grocer and giving advice to the newsstand man, comparing opinions with other customers at the bakery and nodding hello to the two boys drinking pop on the stoop, eying the girls while waiting to be called for dinner, admonishing the children, hearing about a job from the hardware man and borrowing a dollar from the druggist, admiring the new babies and sympathizing over the way a coat faded. Customs vary: in some neighborhoods people compare notes on their dogs; in others they compare notes on their landlords.

Most of it is ostensibly utterly trivial but the sum is not trivial at all. The sum of such casual, public contact at a local level—most of it fortuitous, most of it associated with errands, all of it metered by the person concerned and not thrust upon him by anyone—is a feeling for the public identity of people, a web of public respect and trust, and a resource in time of personal or neighborhood need. The absence of this trust is a disaster to a city street. Its cultivation cannot be institutionalized. And above all, *it implies no private commitments.*

I have seen a striking difference between presence and absence of casual public trust on two sides of the same wide street in East Harlem, composed of residents of roughly the same in-

comes and same races. On the old-city side, which was full of public places and the sidewalk loitering so deplored by Utopian minders of other people's leisure, the children were being kept well in hand. On the project side of the street across the way, the children, who had a fire hydrant open beside their play area, were behaving destructively, drenching the open windows of houses with water, squirting it on adults who ignorantly walked on the project side of the street, throwing it into the windows of cars as they went by. Nobody dared to stop them. These were anonymous children, and the identities behind them were an unknown. What if you scolded or stopped them? Who would back you up over there in the blind-eyed Turf? Would you get, instead, revenge? Better to keep out of it. Impersonal city streets make anonymous people, and this is not a matter of esthetic quality nor of a mystical emotional effect in architectural scale. It is a matter of what kinds of tangible enterprises sidewalks have, and therefore of how people use the sidewalks in practical, everyday life.

The casual public sidewalk life of cities ties directly into other types of public life, of which I shall mention one as illustrative, although there is no end to their variety.

Formal types of local city organizations are frequently assumed by planners and even by some social workers to grow in direct, common-sense fashion out of announcements of meetings, the presence of meeting rooms, and the existence of problems of obvious public concern. Perhaps they grow so in suburbs and towns. They do not grow so in cities.

Formal public organizations in cities require an informal public life underlying them, mediating between them and the privacy of the people of the city. We catch a hint of what happens by contrasting, again, a city area possessing a public sidewalk life with a city area lacking it, as told about in the report of a settlement-house social researcher who was studying problems relating to public schools in a section of New York City:

Mr. W—— [principal of an elementary school] was questioned on the effect of J—— Houses on the school, and the uprooting of the community around the school. He felt that there

had been many effects and of these most were negative. He mentioned that the project had torn out numerous institutions for socializing. The present atmosphere of the project was in no way similar to the gaiety of the streets before the project was built. He noted that in general there seemed fewer people on the streets because there were fewer places for people to gather. He also contended that before the projects were built, the Parents Association had been very strong, and now there were only very few active members.

Mr. W— was wrong in one respect. There were not fewer places (or at any rate there was not less space) for people to gather in the project, if we count places deliberately planned for constructive socializing. Of course there were no bars, no candy stores, no hole-in-the-wall *bodegas*, no restaurants in the project. But the project under discussion was equipped with a model complement of meeting rooms, craft, art and game rooms, outdoor benches, malls, etc., enough to gladden the heart of even the Garden City advocates.

Why are such places dead and useless without the most determined efforts and expense to inveigle users—and then to maintain control over the users? What services do the public sidewalk and its enterprises fulfill that these planned gathering places do not? And why? How does an informal public sidewalk life bolster a more formal, organizational public life?

To understand such problems—to understand why drinking pop on the stoop differs from drinking pop in the game room, and why getting advice from the grocer or the bartender differs from getting advice from either your next-door neighbor or from an institutional lady who may be hand-in-glove with an institutional landlord—we must look into the matter of city privacy.

Privacy is precious in cities. It is indispensable. Perhaps it is precious and indispensable everywhere, but most places you cannot get it. In small settlements everyone knows your affairs. In the city everyone does not—only those you choose to tell will know much about you. This is one of the attributes of cities that is precious to most city people, whether their incomes are high or their incomes are low, whether they are white or colored,

whether they are old inhabitants or new, and it is a gift of great-city life deeply cherished and jealously guarded.

Architectural and planning literature deals with privacy in terms of windows, overlooks, sight lines. The idea is that if no one from outside can peek into where you live—behold, privacy. This is simple-minded. Window privacy is the easiest commodity in the world to get. You just pull down the shades or adjust the blinds. The privacy of keeping one's personal affairs to those selected to know them, and the privacy of having reasonable control over who shall make inroads on your time and when, are rare commodities in most of this world, however, and they have nothing to do with the orientation of windows.

Anthropologist Elena Padilla, author of *Up from Puerto Rico*, describing Puerto Rican life in a poor and squalid district of New York, tells how much people know about each other—who is to be trusted and who not, who is defiant of the law and who upholds it, who is competent and well informed and who is inept and ignorant—and how these things are known from the public life of the sidewalk and its associated enterprises. These are matters of public character. But she also tells how select are those permitted to drop into the kitchen for a cup of coffee, how strong are the ties, and how limited the number of a person's genuine confidants, those who share in a person's private life and private affairs. She tells how it is not considered dignified for everyone to know one's affairs. Nor is it considered dignified to snoop on others beyond the face presented in public. It does violence to a person's privacy and rights. In this, the people she describes are essentially the same as the people of the mixed, Americanized city street on which I live, and essentially the same as the people who live in high-income apartments or fine town houses, too.

A good city street neighborhood achieves a marvel of balance between its people's determination to have essential privacy and their simultaneous wishes for differing degrees of contact, enjoyment or help from the people around. This balance is largely made up of small, sensitively managed details, practiced and accepted so casually that they are normally taken for granted.

Perhaps I can best explain this subtle but all-important balance in terms of the stores where people leave keys for their friends, a

common custom in New York. In our family, for example, when a friend wants to use our place while we are away for a week end or everyone happens to be out during the day, or a visitor for whom we do not wish to wait up is spending the night, we tell such a friend that he can pick up the key at the delicatessen across the street. Joe Cornacchia, who keeps the delicatessen, usually has a dozen or so keys at a time for handing out like this. He has a special drawer for them.

Now why do I, and many others, select Joe as a logical custodian for keys? Because we trust him, first, to be a responsible custodian, but equally important because we know that he combines a feeling of good will with a feeling of no personal responsibility about our private affairs. Joe considers it no concern of his whom we choose to permit in our places and why.

Around on the other side of our block, people leave their keys at a Spanish grocery. On the other side of Joe's block, people leave them at the candy store. Down a block they leave them at the coffee shop, and a few hundred feet around the corner from that, in a barber shop. Around one corner from two fashionable blocks of town houses and apartments in the Upper East Side, people leave their keys in a butcher shop and a bookshop; around another corner they leave them in a cleaner's and a drug store. In unfashionable East Harlem keys are left with at least one florist, in bakeries, in luncheonettes, in Spanish and Italian groceries.

The point, wherever they are left, is not the kind of ostensible service that the enterprise offers, but the kind of proprietor it has.

A service like this cannot be formalized. Identifications . . . questions . . . insurance against mishaps. The all-essential line between public service and privacy would be transgressed by institutionalization. Nobody in his right mind would leave his key in such a place. The service must be given as a favor by someone with an unshakable understanding of the difference between a person's key and a person's private life, or it cannot be given at all.

Or consider the line drawn by Mr. Jaffe at the candy store around our corner—a line so well understood by his customers

and by other storekeepers too that they can spend their whole lives in its presence and never think about it consciously. One ordinary morning last winter, Mr. Jaffe, whose formal business name is Bernie, and his wife, whose formal business name is Ann, supervised the small children crossing at the corner on the way to P.S. 41, as Bernie always does because he sees the need; lent an umbrella to one customer and a dollar to another; took custody of two keys; took in some packages for people in the next building who were away; lectured two youngsters who asked for cigarettes; gave street directions; took custody of a watch to give the repair man across the street when he opened later; gave out information on the range of rents in the neighborhood to an apartment seeker; listened to a tale of domestic difficulty and offered reassurance; told some rowdies they could not come in unless they behaved and then defined (and got) good behavior; provided an incidental forum for half a dozen conversations among customers who dropped in for oddments; set aside certain newly arrived papers and magazines for regular customers who would depend on getting them; advised a mother who came for a birthday present not to get the ship-model kit because another child going to the same birthday party was giving that; and got a back copy (this was for me) of the previous day's newspaper out of the deliverer's surplus returns when he came by.

After considering this multiplicity of extra-merchandising services I asked Bernie, "Do you ever introduce your customers to each other?"

He looked startled at the idea, even dismayed. "No," he said thoughtfully. "That would just not be advisable. Sometimes, if I know two customers who are in at the same time have an interest in common, I bring up the subject in conversation and let them carry it on from there if they want to. But oh no, I wouldn't introduce them."

When I told this to an acquaintance in a suburb, she promptly assumed that Mr. Jaffe felt that to make an introduction would be to step above his social class. Not at all. In our neighborhood, storekeepers like the Jaffes enjoy an excellent social status, that of businessmen. In income they are apt to be the peers of the general run of customers and in independence they are the

superiors. Their advice, as men or women of common sense and experience, is sought and respected. They are well known as individuals, rather than unknown as class symbols. No; this is that almost unconsciously enforced, well-balanced line showing, the line between the city public world and the world of privacy.

This line can be maintained, without awkwardness to anyone, because of the great plenty of opportunities for public contact in the enterprises along the sidewalks, or on the sidewalks themselves as people move to and fro or deliberately loiter when they feel like it, and also because of the presence of many public hosts, so to speak, proprietors of meeting places like Bernie's where one is free either to hang around or dash in and out, no strings attached.

Under this system, it is possible in a city street neighborhood to know all kinds of people without unwelcome entanglements, without boredom, necessity for excuses, explanations, fears of giving offense, embarrassments respecting impositions or commitments, and all such paraphernalia of obligations which can accompany less limited relationships. It is possible to be on excellent sidewalk terms with people who are very different from oneself, and even, as time passes, on familiar public terms with them. Such relationships can, and do, endure for many years, for decades; they could never have formed without that line, much less endured. They form precisely because they are by-the-way to people's normal public sorties.

"Togetherness" is a fittingly nauseating name for an old ideal in planning theory. This ideal is that if anything is shared among people, much should be shared. "Togetherness," apparently a spiritual resource of the new suburbs, works destructively in cities. The requirement that much shall be shared drives city people apart.

When an area of a city lacks a sidewalk life, the people of the place must enlarge their private lives if they are to have anything approaching equivalent contact with their neighbors. They must settle for some form of "togetherness," in which more is shared with one another than in the life of the sidewalks, or else they

must settle for lack of contact. Inevitably the outcome is one or the other; it has to be; and either has distressing results.

In the case of the first outcome, where people do share much, they become exceedingly choosy as to who their neighbors are, or with whom they associate at all. They have to become so. A friend of mine, Penny Kostritsky, is unwittingly and unwillingly in this fix on a street in Baltimore. Her street of nothing but residences, embedded in an area of almost nothing but residences, has been experimentally equipped with a charming sidewalk park. The sidewalk has been widened and attractively paved, wheeled traffic discouraged from the narrow street roadbed, trees and flowers planted, and a piece of play sculpture is to go in. All these are splendid ideas so far as they go.

However, there are no stores. The mothers from nearby blocks who bring small children here, and come here to find some contact with others themselves, perforce go into the houses of acquaintances along the street to warm up in winter, to make telephone calls, to take their children in emergencies to the bathroom. Their hostesses offer them coffee, for there is no other place to get coffee, and naturally considerable social life of this kind has arisen around the park. Much is shared.

Mrs. Kostritsky, who lives in one of the conveniently located houses, and who has two small children, is in the thick of this narrow and accidental social life. "I have lost the advantage of living in the city," she says, "without getting the advantages of living in the suburbs." Still more distressing, when mothers of different income or color or educational background bring their children to the street park, they and their children are rudely and pointedly ostracized. They fit awkwardly into the suburbanlike sharing of private lives that has grown in default of city sidewalk life. The park lacks benches purposely; the "togetherness" people ruled them out because they might be interpreted as an invitation to people who cannot fit in.

"If only we had a couple of stores on the street," Mrs. Kostritsky laments. "If only there were a grocery store or a drug store or a snack joint. Then the telephone calls and the warming up and the gathering could be done naturally in public, and then people

would act more decent to each other because everybody would have a right to be here."

Much the same thing that happens in this sidewalk park without a city public life happens sometimes in middle-class projects and colonies, such as Chatham Village in Pittsburgh for example, a famous model of Garden City planning.

The houses here are grouped in colonies around shared interior lawns and play yards, and the whole development is equipped with other devices for close sharing, such as a residents' club which holds parties, dances, reunions, has ladies' activities like bridge and sewing parties, and holds dances and parties for the children. There is no public life here, in any city sense. There are differing degrees of extended private life.

Chatham Village's success as a "model" neighborhood where much is shared has required that the residents be similar to one another in their standards, interests and backgrounds. In the main they are middle-class professionals and their families.* It has also required that residents set themselves distinctly apart from the different people in the surrounding city; these are in the main also middle class, but lower middle class, and this is too different for the degree of chumminess that neighborliness in Chatham Village entails.

The inevitable insularity (and homogeneity) of Chatham Village has practical consequences. As one illustration, the junior high school serving the area has problems, as all schools do. Chatham Village is large enough to dominate the elementary school to which its children go, and therefore to work at helping solve this school's problems. To deal with the junior high, however, Chatham Village's people must cooperate with entirely different neighborhoods. But there is no public acquaintanceship, no foundation of casual public trust, no cross-connections with the necessary people—and no practice or ease in applying the most ordinary techniques of city public life at lowly levels. Feeling helpless, as indeed they are, some Chatham Village families move away when their children reach junior high age; others contrive

* One representative court, for example, contains as this is written four lawyers, two doctors, two engineers, a dentist, a salesman, a banker, a railroad executive, a planning executive.

to send them to private high schools. Ironically, just such neighborhood islands as Chatham Village are encouraged in orthodox planning on the specific grounds that cities need the talents and stabilizing influence of the middle class. Presumably these qualities are to seep out by osmosis.

People who do not fit happily into such colonies eventually get out, and in time managements become sophisticated in knowing who among applicants will fit in. Along with basic similarities of standards, values and backgrounds, the arrangement seems to demand a formidable amount of forbearance and tact.

City residential planning that depends, for contact among neighbors, on personal sharing of this sort, and that cultivates it, often does work well socially, if rather narrowly, *for self-selected upper-middle-class people.* It solves easy problems for an easy kind of population. So far as I have been able to discover, it fails to work, however, even on its own terms, *with any other kind of population.*

The more common outcome in cities, where people are faced with the choice of sharing much or nothing, is nothing. In city areas that lack a natural and casual public life, it is common for residents to isolate themselves from each other to a fantastic degree. If mere contact with your neighbors threatens to entangle you in their private lives, or entangle them in yours, and if you cannot be so careful who your neighbors are as self-selected upper-middle-class people can be, the logical solution is absolutely to avoid friendliness or casual offers of help. Better to stay thoroughly distant. As a practical result, the ordinary public jobs—like keeping children in hand—for which people must take a little personal initiative, or those for which they must band together in limited common purposes, go undone. The abysses this opens up can be almost unbelievable.

For example, in one New York City project which is designed—like all orthodox residential city planning—for sharing much or nothing, a remarkably outgoing woman prided herself that she had become acquainted, by making a deliberate effort, with the mothers of every one of the ninety families in her building. She called on them. She buttonholed them at the door or in the hall. She struck up conversations if she sat beside them on a bench.

It so happened that her eight-year-old son, one day, got stuck in the elevator and was left there without help for more than two hours, although he screamed, cried and pounded. The next day the mother expressed her dismay to one of her ninety acquaintances. "Oh, was that *your* son?" said the other woman. "I didn't know whose boy he was. If I had realized he was *your* son I would have helped him."

This woman, who had not behaved in any such insanely caloused fashion on her old public street—to which she constantly returned, by the way, for public life—was afraid of a possible entanglement that might not be kept easily on a public plane.

Dozens of illustrations of this defense can be found wherever the choice is sharing much or nothing. A thorough and detailed report by Ellen Lurie, a social worker in East Harlem, on life in a low-income project there, has this to say:

It is . . . extremely important to recognize that for considerably complicated reasons, many adults either don't want to become involved in any friendship-relationships at all with their neighbors, or, if they do succumb to the need for some form of society, they strictly limit themselves to one or two friends, and no more. Over and over again, wives repeated their husband's warning:

"I'm not to get too friendly with anyone. My husband doesn't believe in it."

"People are too gossipy and they could get us in a lot of trouble."

"It's best to mind your own business."

One woman, Mrs. Abraham, always goes out the back door of the building because she doesn't want to interfere with the people standing around in the front. Another man, Mr. Colan . . . won't let his wife make any friends in the project; because he doesn't trust the people here. They have four children, ranging from 8 years to 14, but they are not allowed downstairs alone, because the parents are afraid someone will hurt them.* What happens then is that all sorts of barriers to insure self-protection are being constructed by many families. To protect their children from a neighborhood they aren't sure of, they keep them upstairs

* This is very common in public projects in New York.

in the apartment. To protect themselves, they make few, if any, friends. Some are afraid that friends will become angry or envious and make up a story to report to management, causing them great trouble. If the husband gets a bonus (which he decides not to report) and the wife buys new curtains, the visiting friends will see and might tell the management, who, in turn, investigates and issues a rent increase. Suspicion and fear of trouble often outweigh any need for neighborly advice and help. For these families the sense of privacy has already been extensively violated. The deepest secrets, all the family skeletons, are well known not only to management but often to other public agencies, such as the Welfare Department. To preserve any last remnants of privacy, they choose to avoid close relationships with others. This same phenomenon may be found to a much lesser degree in non-planned slum housing, for there too it is often necessary for other reasons to build up these forms of self-protection. But, it is surely true that this withdrawing from the society of others is much more extensive in planned housing. Even in England, this suspicion of the neighbors and the ensuing aloofness was found in studies of planned towns. Perhaps this pattern is nothing more than an elaborate group mechanism to protect and preserve inner dignity in the face of so many outside pressures to conform.

Along with nothingness, considerable "togetherness" can be found in such places, however. Mrs. Lurie reports on this type of relationship:

Often two women from two different buildings will meet in the laundry room, recognize each other; although they may never have spoken a single word to each other back on 99th Street, suddenly here they become "best friends." If one of these two already has a friend or two in her own building, the other is likely to be drawn into that circle and begins to make her friendships, not with women on her floor, but rather on her friend's floor.

These friendships do not go into an ever-widening circle. There are certain definite well-traveled paths in the project, and after a while no new people are met.

Mrs. Lurie, who works at community organization in East Harlem, with remarkable success, has looked into the history of many past attempts at project tenant organization. She has told

me that "togetherness," itself, is one of the factors that make this kind of organization so difficult. "These projects are not lacking in natural leaders," she says. "They contain people with real ability, wonderful people many of them, but the typical sequence is that in the course of organization leaders have found each other, gotten all involved in each others' social lives, and have ended up talking to nobody but each other. They have not found their followers. Everything tends to degenerate into ineffective cliques, as a natural course. There is no normal public life. Just the mechanics of people learning what is going on is so difficult. It all makes the simplest social gain extra hard for these people."

Residents of unplanned city residential areas that lack neighborhood commerce and sidewalk life seem sometimes to follow the same course as residents of public projects when faced with the choice of sharing much or nothing. Thus researchers hunting the secrets of the social structure in a dull gray-area district of Detroit came to the unexpected conclusion there was no social structure.

The social structure of sidewalk life hangs partly on what can be called self-appointed public characters. A public character is anyone who is in frequent contact with a wide circle of people and who is sufficiently interested to make himself a public character. A public character need have no special talents or wisdom to fulfill his function—although he often does. He just needs to be present, and there need to be enough of his counterparts. His main qualification is that he *is* public, that he talks to lots of different people. In this way, news travels that is of sidewalk interest.

Most public sidewalk characters are steadily stationed in public places. They are storekeepers or barkeepers or the like. These are the basic public characters. All other public characters of city sidewalks depend on them—if only indirectly because of the presence of sidewalk routes to such enterprises and their proprietors.

Settlement-house workers and pastors, two more formalized kinds of public characters, typically depend on the street grapevine news systems that have their ganglia in the stores. The director of a settlement on New York's Lower East Side, as an

example, makes a regular round of stores. He learns from the cleaner who does his suits about the presence of dope pushers in the neighborhood. He learns from the grocer that the Dragons are working up to something and need attention. He learns from the candy store that two girls are agitating the Sportsmen toward a rumble. One of his most important information spots is an unused breadbox on Rivington Street. That is, it is not used for bread. It stands outside a grocery and is used for sitting on and lounging beside, between the settlement house, a candy store and a pool parlor. A message spoken there for any teen-ager within many blocks will reach his ears unerringly and surprisingly quickly, and the opposite flow along the grapevine similarly brings news quickly in to the breadbox.

Blake Hobbs, the head of the Union Settlement music school in East Harlem, notes that when he gets a first student from one block of the old busy street neighborhoods, he rapidly gets at least three or four more and sometimes almost every child on the block. But when he gets a child from the nearby projects—perhaps through the public school or a playground conversation he has initiated—he almost never gets another as a direct sequence. Word does not move around where public characters and sidewalk life are lacking.

Besides the anchored public characters of the sidewalk, and the well-recognized roving public characters, there are apt to be various more specialized public characters on a city sidewalk. In a curious way, some of these help establish an identity not only for themselves but for others. Describing the everyday life of a retired tenor at such sidewalk establishments as the restaurant and the *bocce* court, a San Francisco news story notes, "It is said of Meloni that because of his intensity, his dramatic manner and his lifelong interest in music, he transmits a feeling of vicarious importance to his many friends." Precisely.

One need not have either the artistry or the personality of such a man to become a specialized sidewalk character—but only a pertinent specialty of some sort. It is easy. I am a specialized public character of sorts along our street, owing of course to the fundamental presence of the basic, anchored public characters. The way I became one started with the fact that Greenwich Village,

where I live, was waging an interminable and horrendous battle to save its main park from being bisected by a highway. During the course of battle I undertook, at the behest of a committee organizer away over on the other side of Greenwich Village, to deposit in stores on a few blocks of our street supplies of petition cards protesting the proposed roadway. Customers would sign the cards while in the stores, and from time to time I would make my pickups.* As a result of engaging in this messenger work, I have since become automatically the sidewalk public character on petition strategy. Before long, for instance, Mr. Fox at the liquor store was consulting me, as he wrapped up my bottle, on how we could get the city to remove a long abandoned and dangerous eyesore, a closed-up comfort station near his corner. If I would undertake to compose the petitions and find the effective way of presenting them to City Hall, he proposed, he and his partners would undertake to have them printed, circulated and picked up. Soon the stores round about had comfort station removal petitions. Our street by now has many public experts on petition tactics, including the children.

Not only do public characters spread the news and learn the news at retail, so to speak. They connect with each other and thus spread word wholesale, in effect.

A sidewalk life, so far as I can observe, arises out of no mysterious qualities or talents for it in this or that type of population. It arises only when the concrete, tangible facilities it requires are present. These happen to be the same facilities, in the same abundance and ubiquity, that are required for cultivating sidewalk safety. If they are absent, public sidewalk contacts are absent too.

The well-off have many ways of assuaging needs for which poorer people may depend much on sidewalk life—from hearing of jobs to being recognized by the headwaiter. But nevertheless, many of the rich or near-rich in cities appear to appreciate sidewalk life as much as anybody. At any rate, they pay enormous rents to move into areas with an exuberant and varied sidewalk life. They actually crowd out the middle class and the poor in

* This, by the way, is an efficient device, accomplishing with a fraction of the effort what would be a mountainous task door to door. It also makes more public conversation and opinion than door-to-door visits.

lively areas like Yorkville or Greenwich Village in New York, or Telegraph Hill just off the North Beach streets of San Francisco. They capriciously desert, after only a few decades of fashion at most, the monotonous streets of "quiet residential areas" and leave them to the less fortunate. Talk to residents of Georgetown in the District of Columbia and by the second or third sentence at least you will begin to hear rhapsodies about the charming restaurants, "more good restaurants than in all the rest of the city put together," the uniqueness and friendliness of the stores, the pleasures of running into people when doing errands at the next corner—and nothing but pride over the fact that Georgetown has become a specialty shopping district for its whole metropolitan area. The city area, rich or poor or in between, harmed by an interesting sidewalk life and plentiful sidewalk contacts has yet to be found.

Efficiency of public sidewalk characters declines drastically if too much burden is put upon them. A store, for example, can reach a turnover in its contacts, or potential contacts, which is so large and so superficial that it is socially useless. An example of this can be seen at the candy and newspaper store owned by the housing cooperative of Corlears Hook on New York's Lower East Side. This planned project store replaces perhaps forty superficially similar stores which were wiped out (without compensation to their proprietors) on that project site and the adjoining sites. The place is a mill. Its clerks are so busy making change and screaming ineffectual imprecations at rowdies that they never hear anything except "I want that." This, or utter disinterest, is the usual atmosphere where shopping center planning or repressive zoning artificially contrives commercial monopolies for city neighborhoods. A store like this would fail economically if it had competition. Meantime, although monopoly insures the financial success planned for it, it fails the city socially.

Sidewalk public contact and sidewalk public safety, taken together, bear directly on our country's most serious social problem—segregation and racial discrimination.

I do not mean to imply that a city's planning and design, or its types of streets and street life, can automatically overcome segre-

gation and discrimination. Too many other kinds of effort are also required to right these injustices.

But I do mean to say that to build and to rebuild big cities whose sidewalks are unsafe and whose people must settle for sharing much or nothing, *can* make it *much harder* for American cities to overcome discrimination no matter how much effort is expended.

Considering the amount of prejudice and fear that accompany discrimination and bolster it, overcoming residential discrimination is just that much harder if people feel unsafe on their sidewalks anyway. Overcoming residential discrimination comes hard where people have no means of keeping a civilized public life on a basically dignified public footing, and their private lives on a private footing.

To be sure, token model housing integration schemes here and there can be achieved in city areas handicapped by danger and by lack of public life—achieved by applying great effort and settling for abnormal (abnormal for cities) choosiness among new neighbors. This is an evasion of the size of the task and its urgency.

The tolerance, the room for great differences among neighbors—differences that often go far deeper than differences in color—which are possible and normal in intensely urban life, but which are so foreign to suburbs and pseudosuburbs, are possible and normal only when streets of great cities have built-in equipment allowing strangers to dwell in peace together on civilized but essentially dignified and reserved terms.

Lowly, unpurposeful and random as they may appear, sidewalk contacts are the small change from which a city's wealth of public life may grow.

Los Angeles is an extreme example of a metropolis with little public life, depending mainly instead on contacts of a more private social nature.

On one plane, for instance, an acquaintance there comments that although she has lived in the city for ten years and knows it contains Mexicans, she has never laid eyes on a Mexican or an item of Mexican culture, much less ever exchanged any words with a Mexican.

On another plane, Orson Welles has written that Hollywood is the only theatrical center in the world that has failed to develop a theatrical bistro.

And on still another plane, one of Los Angeles' most powerful businessmen comes upon a blank in public relationships which would be inconceivable in other cities of this size. This businessman, volunteering that the city is "culturally behind," as he put it, told me that he for one was at work to remedy this. He was heading a committee to raise funds for a first-rate art museum. Later in our conversation, after he had told me about the businessmen's club life of Los Angeles, a life with which he is involved as one of its leaders, I asked him how or where Hollywood people gathered in corresponding fashion. He was unable to answer this. He then added that he knew no one at all connected with the film industry, nor did he know anyone who did have such acquaintanceship. "I know that must sound strange," he reflected. "We are glad to have the film industry here, but those connected with it are just not people one would know socially."

Here again is "togetherness" or nothing. Consider this man's handicap in his attempts to get a metropolitan art museum established. He has no way of reaching with any ease, practice or trust some of his committee's potentially best prospects.

In its upper economic, political and cultural echelons, Los Angeles operates according to the same provincial premises of social insularity as the street with the sidewalk park in Baltimore or as Chatham Village in Pittsburgh. Such a metropolis lacks means for bringing together necessary ideas, necessary enthusiasms, necessary money. Los Angeles is embarked on a strange experiment: trying to run not just projects, not just gray areas, but a whole metropolis, by dint of "togetherness" or nothing. I think this is an inevitable outcome for great cities whose people lack city public life in ordinary living and working.

9

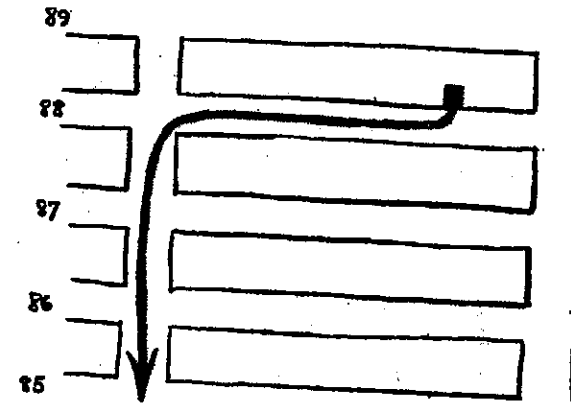
The need for small blocks

CONDITION 2: *Most blocks must be short; that is, streets and opportunities to turn corners must be frequent.*

The advantages of short blocks are simple.

Consider, for instance, the situation of a man living on a long street block, such as West Eighty-eighth Street in Manhattan, between Central Park West and Columbus Avenue. He goes westward along his 800-foot block to reach the stores on Columbus Avenue or take the bus, and he goes eastward to reach the park, take the subway or another bus. He may very well never enter the adjacent blocks on Eighty-seventh Street and Eighty-ninth Street for years.

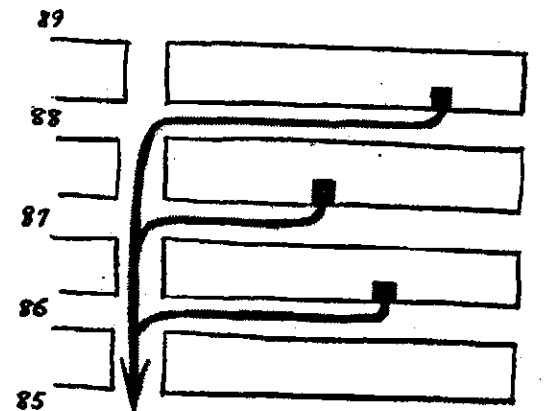
This brings grave trouble. We have already seen that isolated, discrete street neighborhoods are apt to be helpless socially. This man would have every justification for disbelieving that Eighty-seventh and Eighty-ninth streets or their people have anything to



do with him. To believe it, he has to go beyond the ordinary evidence of his everyday life.

So far as his neighborhood is concerned, the *economic* effect of these self-isolating streets is equally constricting. The people on this street, and the people on the adjacent streets can form a pool of economic use only where their long, separated paths meet and come together in one stream. In this case, the nearest place where that can happen is Columbus Avenue.

And because Columbus Avenue is the only nearby place where tens of thousands of people from these stagnant, long, backwater



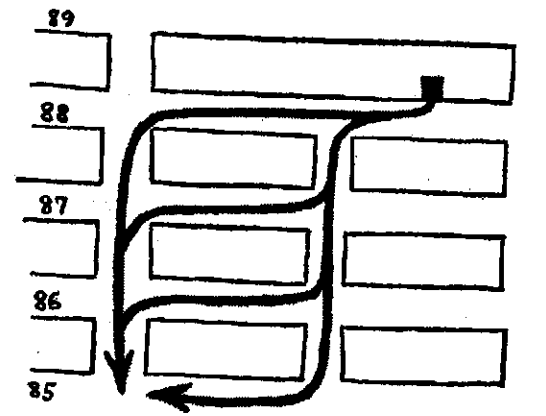
blocks meet and form a pool of use, Columbus Avenue has its own kind of monotony—endless stores and a depressing predominance of commercial standardization. In this neighborhood there is geographically so little street frontage on which commerce can live, that it must all be consolidated, regardless of its type or the scale of support it needs or the scale of convenience (distance from users) that is natural to it. Around about stretch the dimly long strips of monotony and darkness—the Great Blight of Dullness, with an abrupt garish gash at long intervals. This is a typical arrangement for areas of city failure.

This stringent physical segregation of the regular users of one street from the regular users of the next holds, of course, for visitors too. For instance, I have been going to a dentist on West Eighty-sixth Street just off Columbus Avenue for more than fifteen years. In all that time, although I have ranged north and south on Columbus, and north and south on Central Park West, I have never used West Eighty-fifth Street or West Eighty-seventh Street. It would be both inconvenient and pointless to do so. If I take the children, after the dentist, to the planetarium on West Eighty-first Street between Columbus and Central Park West, there is only one possible direct route: down Columbus and then into Eighty-first.

Let us consider, instead, the situation if these long east-west blocks had an extra street cut across them—not a sterile “promenade” of the kind in which super-block projects abound, but a street containing buildings where things could start up and grow at spots economically viable: places for buying, eating, seeing things, getting a drink. With the extra street, the Eighty-eighth Street man would no longer need to walk a monotonous, always-the-same path to a given point. He would have various alternative routes to choose. The neighborhood would literally have opened up to him.

The same would be true of people living on other streets, and for those nearer Columbus heading toward a point in the park or toward the subway. Instead of mutual isolation of paths, these paths would now be mixed and mingled with one another.

The supply of feasible spots for commerce would increase considerably, and so could the distribution and convenience of their

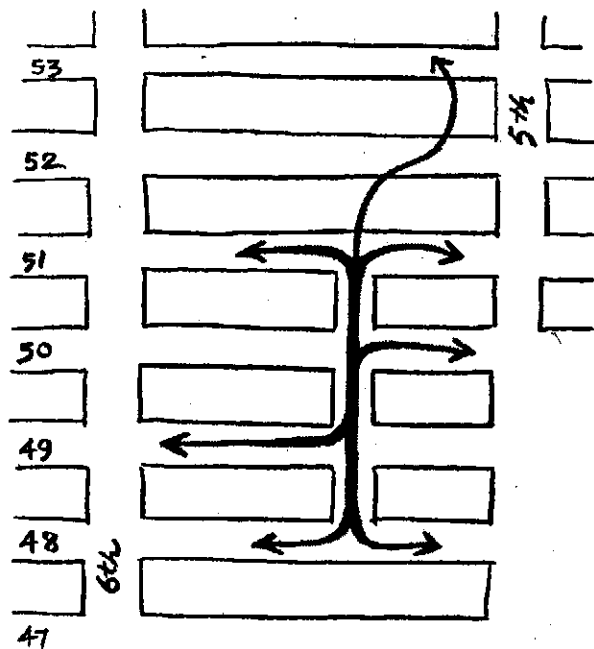


placement. If among the people on West Eighty-eighth there are a third enough people to support a newspaper and neighborhood oddment place somewhat like Bernie's around the corner from us, and the same might be said of Eighty-seventh and Eighty-ninth, now there would be a possibility that they might do so around one of their additional corners. As long as these people can never pool their support nearby except in one stream only, such distribution of services, economic opportunity and public life is an impossibility.

In the case of these long blocks, even people who are present in the neighborhood for the same primary reasons are kept too much apart to permit them to form reasonably intricate pools of city cross-use. Where differing primary uses are involved, long blocks are apt to thwart effective mixture in exactly the same way. They automatically sort people into paths that meet too infrequently, so that different uses very near each other geographically are, in practical effect, literally blocked off from one another.

To contrast the stagnation of these long blocks with the fluidity of use that an extra street could bring is not a far-fetched supposition. An example of such a transformation can be seen at Rockefeller Center, which occupies three of the long blocks between Fifth and Sixth avenues. Rockefeller Center has that extra street.

I ask those readers who are familiar with it to imagine it with-



out its extra north-south street, Rockefeller Plaza. If the center's buildings were continuous along each of its side streets all the way from Fifth to Sixth Avenue, it would no longer be a center of use. It could not be. It would be a group of self-isolated streets pooling only at Fifth and Sixth avenues. The most artful design in other respects could not tie it together, because it is fluidity of use, and the mixing of paths, not homogeneity of architecture, that ties together city neighborhoods into pools of city use, whether those neighborhoods are predominately for work or predominately for residence.

To the north, Rockefeller Center's street fluidity extends in diminished form, as far as Fifty-third Street, because of a block-through lobby and an arcade that people use as a further extension of the street. To the south, its fluidity as a pool of use ends abruptly along Forty-eighth Street. The next street down, Forty-seventh, is self-isolated. It is largely a wholesaling street (the center of gem wholesaling), a surprisingly marginal use for a

street that lies geographically next to one of the city's greatest attractions. But just like the users of Eighty-seventh and Eighty-eighth streets, the users of Forty-seventh and Forty-eighth streets can go for years without ever mixing into one another's streets.

Long blocks, in their nature, thwart the potential advantages that cities offer to incubation, experimentation, and many small or special enterprises, insofar as these depend upon drawing their customers or clients from among much larger cross-sections of passing public. Long blocks also thwart the principle that if city mixtures of use are to be more than a fiction on maps, they must result in different people, bent on different purposes, appearing at different times, but using the *same* streets.

Of all the hundreds of long blocks in Manhattan, a bare eight or ten are spontaneously enlivening with time or exerting magnetism.

It is instructive to watch where the overflow of diversity and popularity from Greenwich Village has spilled and where it has halted. Rents have steadily gone up in Greenwich Village, and predictors have regularly been predicting, for at least twenty-five years now, a renaissance of once fashionable Chelsea directly to the north. This prediction may seem logical because of Chelsea's location, because its mixtures and types of buildings and densities of dwelling units per acre are almost identical with those of Greenwich Village, and also because it even has a mixture of work with its dwellings. But the renaissance has never happened. Instead, Chelsea languishes behind its barriers of long, self-isolating blocks, decaying in most of them faster than it is rehabilitated in others. Today it is being extensively slum-cleared, and in the process endowed with even bigger and more monotonous blocks. (The pseudoscience of planning seems almost neurotic in its determination to imitate empiric failure and ignore empiric success.) Meantime, Greenwich Village has extended itself and its diversity and popularity far to the east, working outward through a little neck between industrial concentrations, following unerringly the direction of short blocks and fluid street use—even though the buildings in that direction are not so attractive or seemingly suitable as those in Chelsea. This movement in one direction and halt in another is neither capricious nor mysterious nor “a chaotic ac-

cident." It is a down-to-earth response to what works well economically for city diversity and what does not.

Another perennial "mystery" raised in New York is why the removal of the elevated railway along Sixth Avenue on the West Side stimulated so little change and added so little to popularity, and why the removal of the elevated railway along Third Avenue on the East Side stimulated so much change and added so greatly to popularity. But long blocks have made an economic monstrosity of the West Side, the more so because they occur toward the center of the island, precisely where the West Side's most effective pools of use would and should form, had they a chance. Short blocks occur on the East Side toward the center of the island, exactly where the most effective pools of use have had the best chance of forming and extending themselves.*

Theoretically, almost all the short side streets of the East Side in the Sixties, Seventies and Eighties are residential only. It is instructive to notice how frequently and how nicely special shops like bookstores or dressmakers or restaurants have inserted themselves, usually, but not always, near the corners. The equivalent West Side does not support bookstores and never did. This is not because its successive discontented and deserting populations all had an aversion to reading nor because they were too poor to buy books. On the contrary the West Side is full of intellectuals and always has been. It is probably as good a "natural" market for books as Greenwich Village and possibly a better "natural" market than the East Side. Because of its long blocks, the West Side has never been physically capable of forming the intricate pools of fluid street use necessary to support urban diversity.

* Going west from Fifth Avenue, the first three blocks, and in some places four, are 800 feet long, except where Broadway, on a diagonal, intersects. Going east from Fifth Avenue, the first four blocks vary between 400 and 420 feet in length. At Seventieth Street, to pick a random point where the two sides of the island are divided by Central Park, the 2,400 linear feet of building line between Central Park West and West End Avenue are intersected by *only two* avenues. On the east side, an equivalent length of building line extends from Fifth Avenue to a little beyond Second Avenue and is intersected by *five* avenues. The stretch of East Side with its five intersecting avenues is immensely more popular than the West Side with its two.

A reporter for the *New Yorker*, observing that people try to find an extra north-south passage in the too-long blocks between Fifth and Sixth avenues, once attempted to see if he could amalgamate a makeshift mid-block trail from Thirty-third Street to Rockefeller Center. He discovered reasonable, if erratic, means for short-cutting through nine of the blocks, owing to block-through stores and lobbies and Bryant Park behind the Forty-second Street Library. But he was reduced to wiggling under fences or clambering through windows or coaxing superintendents, to get through four of the blocks, and had to evade the issue by going into subway passages for two.

In city districts that become successful or magnetic, streets are virtually never made to disappear. Quite the contrary. Where it is possible, they multiply. Thus in the Rittenhouse Square district of Philadelphia and in Georgetown in the District of Columbia, what were once back alleys down the centers of blocks have become streets with buildings fronting on them, and users using them like streets. In Philadelphia, they often include commerce.

Nor do long blocks possess more virtue in other cities than they do in New York. In Philadelphia there is a neighborhood in which buildings are simply being let fall down by their owners, in an area between the downtown and the city's major belt of public housing projects. There are many reasons for this neighborhood's hopelessness, including the nearness of the rebuilt city with its social disintegration and danger, but obviously the neighborhood has not been helped by its own physical structure. The standard Philadelphia block is 400 feet square (halved by the alleys-become-streets where the city is most successful). In this falling-down neighborhood some of that "street waste" was eliminated in the original street layout; its blocks are 700 feet long. It stagnated, of course, beginning from the time it was built up. In Boston, the North End, which is a marvel of "wasteful" streets and fluidity of cross-use, has been heroically unslumming itself against official apathy and financial opposition.

The myth that plentiful city streets are "wasteful," one of the verities of orthodox planning, comes of course from the Garden City and Radiant City theorists who decried the use of land for streets because they wanted that land consolidated instead into

project prairies. This myth is especially destructive because it interferes intellectually with our ability to see one of the simplest, most unnecessary, and most easily corrected reasons for much stagnation and failure.

Super-block projects are apt to have all the disabilities of long blocks, frequently in exaggerated form, and this is true even when they are laced with promenades and malls, and thus, in theory, possess streets at reasonable intervals through which people can make their way. These streets are meaningless because there is seldom any active reason for a good cross-section of people to use them. Even in passive terms, simply as various alternative changes of scene in getting from here to yonder, these paths are meaningless because all their scenes are essentially the same. The situation is the opposite from that the *New Yorker* reporter noticed in the blocks between Fifth and Sixth avenues. There people try to hunt out streets which they need but which are missing. In projects, people are apt to avoid malls and cross-malls which are there, but are pointless.

I bring up this problem not merely to berate the anomalies of project planning again, but to indicate that frequent streets and short blocks are valuable because of the fabric of intricate cross-use that they permit among the users of a city neighborhood. Frequent streets are not an end in themselves. They are a means toward an end. If that end—generating diversity and catalyzing the plans of many people besides planners—is thwarted by too repressive zoning, or by regimented construction that precludes the flexible growth of diversity, nothing significant can be accomplished by short blocks. Like mixtures of primary use, frequent streets are effective in helping to generate diversity *only because of the way they perform*. The means by which they work (attracting mixtures of users along them) and the results they can help accomplish (the growth of diversity) are inextricably related. The relationship is reciprocal.

10

The need for aged buildings

CONDITION 3: *The district must mingle buildings that vary in age and condition, including a good proportion of old ones.*

Cities need old buildings so badly it is probably impossible for vigorous streets and districts to grow without them. By old buildings I mean not museum-piece, old buildings, not old buildings in an excellent and expensive state of rehabilitation—although these make fine ingredients—but also a good lot of plain, ordinary, low-value old buildings, including some rundown old buildings.

If a city area has only new buildings, the enterprises that can exist there are automatically limited to those that can support the high costs of new construction. These high costs of occupying new buildings may be levied in the form of rent, or they may be levied in the form of an owner's interest and amortization payments on the capital costs of the construction. However the