

Chapter 8

The Context of Cities

The Urban Experience



Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- 8.1** Analyze how people visualize their personal impressions of cities
- 8.2** Evaluate the ways to deal with *gesellschaft* characteristics of cities
- 8.3** Indicate that interpersonal bonds form the cornerstone of city life for most people
- 8.4** Recognize that every city has a unique characteristic
- 8.5** Examine how positive personal relationships are the lifeline for most in city life
- 8.6** Review group actions that occur in city life to initiate or resist social change
- 8.7** Recount different aspects of suburban life

What makes cities so stimulating? Why do they cause us to react with either high admiration or powerful aversion? Georg Simmel's answer was that the city is a tremendous concentration of buildings, images, and people that intensifies stimulation like no other form of human settlement. Everywhere you turn—around a corner, breaking through a crowd, entering the subway—the city demands a response.

How do we make sense of this coming-at-you-from-all-sides, sometimes in-your-face creation that is the city? Simmel answered that we learn to categorize the city's elements, paying attention to some things while ignoring others. Louis Wirth agreed, suggesting that we mentally "map" the city. Unfortunately, neither theorist said much about how this mapping process works. But, drawing on later research, this

chapter sketches the outlines of this process—the characteristic elements of the social context of the city.

8.1: The Physical Environment

8.1 Analyze how people visualize their personal impressions of cities

Residents may be more familiar with the built environment of their city than visitors, but all need to make sense of their physical surroundings to reach their destinations. This task is a bit easier in North American cities with the grid patterns of their parallel streets mostly laid out in north–south or east–west directions.

European cities, in contrast, have streets with irregular and seemingly random or arbitrary forms (Jiang 2013).

Regardless of the clarity or confusion of street design, owners of smartphones can more easily interact with their urban environment through numerous navigation apps, such as Google Maps or Hopstop (a city transit guide). Social networking apps like Foursquare, TripAdvisor, or Yelp further enhance interconnectivity with shared information about specific locations and activities. Although app choices may vary by city, today's technology certainly has enhanced the efficiency with which we find our way through the large-scale maze of streets and stimuli of the city.

Still, when we look up from our touchscreens, our eyes behold the actual cityscape created by architects and builders. As we travel from city to city, we soon discover that each one has its own distinctiveness—its unique “personality,” if you will. This is what we mean by the *image of the city*, the imprint it makes on our minds. We find ourselves liking certain cities more than others. Some people, for example, prefer San Francisco

over Los Angeles because of physical characteristics (Swearingen 2012).

What makes some cities more appealing over other cities? What physical features prompt that reaction? In the next section, we attempt to answer those questions.

8.1.1: The Image of the City

Before we explore this topic, take a moment and think of the city you know best. On a piece of paper, draw as detailed a map of it as you can, putting in everything of importance that you can recall. If you first do this little exercise, the following discussion will become far more meaningful.

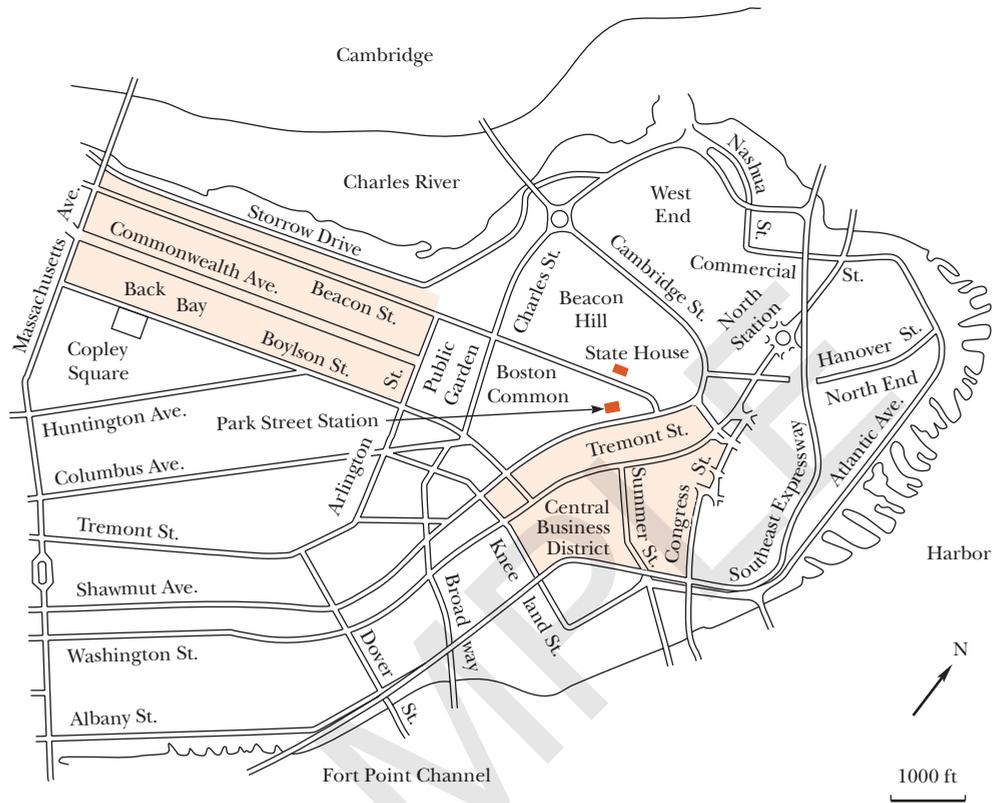
BUILDING AN IMAGE Most residents tend to develop their image of the city by making distinctions among the various physical parts of the city and organizing these parts in a personally meaningful way.

For example, Figure 8–1 shows downtown Boston, where the large park known as the Boston Common and Public Garden (center) separates various downtown districts from one another.



To a great many people around the world, the New York City skyline is not only easily recognizable but also a symbol of the power and lure of American life. To the residents of Jersey City, living on the opposite shore of the Hudson River, the skyline is such a looming, overpowering presence that many residents mentioned it to Lynch as one of their landmarks.

Figure 8-1 Downtown Boston



To the west of the park is the residential Back Bay area, with its characteristic three- and four-story apartment houses. To the north is the wealthier Beacon Hill district, where one finds the State House. To the east and south is most of Boston's central business district (downtown), full of high-rise office buildings, retail stores, restaurants, and entertainment facilities. To a person living, say, in a small apartment just west of the Garden and the Common, the park area may be the dominant element in an image of the city, because this person may go there frequently for walks, getting to know every bench, fountain, and footpath. This same individual, however, may know little about the rest of downtown.

On the other hand, to another Bostonian living nearby, the park may have little significance. Working in the high-rise offices on the east side of

the park, this person may have little desire to use the Garden. In this case, the distinct image might be of the downtown buildings, including where the good restaurants are, and of all the shortcuts for getting from one building or street to another.

COMMON ELEMENTS OF IMAGES In a now-classic study, Kevin Lynch (1982) interviewed residents in Boston, Jersey City, and Los Angeles about their images of their respective cities. He discovered that people built their urban images from five common elements. First were the **paths**—the streets, walkways, transit lines, canals, or railroads along which they traveled. **Edges** were the boundaries between two areas, including shorelines, walls, wide streets, or breaks between buildings and open space. **Districts** represent medium-to-large sections of the city. Examples in

Boston that people commonly noted were “Back Bay,” “Beacon Hill,” “the Common,” and “the shopping district.” **Nodes** stand as points of intense activity, such as a railroad terminal, a square, or a street-corner hangout. Nodes are often the places to which paths lead. Finally, Lynch’s subjects built their images around **landmarks**—physical reference points including buildings, signs, stores, domes, gas stations, or hills.

Now, look back at the map you drew a few minutes ago. How many of these five elements did you include?

Lynch also found that most people from the same city agreed on the same elements in their own images—that is, what was a path or edge to one person was a path or edge to many others. Looking back at Figure 8–1, virtually every Bostonian recognized the Charles River as a major edge, separating one large district of the city (“downtown”) from another (Cambridge). Similarly, most people also mentioned “Mass. Ave.” to the west and the Southeast Expressway to the east as key edges. Main paths were Beacon Street, “Comm. Ave.,” Boylston Street, and Tremont Street. Commonly mentioned nodes included Copley Square (site of the “BPL,” the Boston Public Library), North Station (a railroad and subway terminal), and Park Street Station. Although it is below ground, Park Street Station is a good example of an urban node, as this junction of Boston’s three main subway lines is constantly abuzz with activity.

Although Lynch discovered that people in all three cities used the same elements in constructing their images, some cities stimulated their residents to conceptualize more complex images than others. In Boston, virtually everyone could identify *numerous* paths, edges, nodes, districts, and landmarks. In Jersey City, by contrast, even long-term residents could identify only a few such elements, and they often admitted confusion and uncertainty about what existed in different parts of their own city. Unable to identify any

element of the city’s physical scene that possessed distinguishability, they did not think Jersey City had a center, but only a collection of various neighborhoods (Lynch 1982:29–31). Perhaps most illustrative of their weak image of their city was the residents’ frequent mention of the looming, overpowering New York City skyline to the east as a landmark.

In Los Angeles, Lynch found that residents had even less of a sharp image for their city because of the great sprawl and uniformity of cross streets, which made it difficult to locate anything with confidence. Those interviewed, most of whom worked in the central business district being discussed, could describe only a few landmarks in any specific detail, such as the “ugly” black and gold Richfield Building and the pyramid atop City Hall. The strongest element of all was Pershing Square in the heart of the downtown area. Its well-manicured central lawn—flanked by banana trees and enclosed by a stone wall on which people sat—was a welcome respite from the urban scene of heavily trafficked streets and office buildings surrounding it.

Even so, many Angelenos were uncertain of the precise location of Pershing Square. Moreover, most residents of the city could identify only paths, and they often confused one with another. When asked to describe or symbolize Los Angeles as a whole, residents found it hard to respond, simply describing their city as “spread out,” “spacious,” “formless,” or “without centers.” Residents’ lack of a sense of place aptly illustrates a famous quote of American writer Gertrude Stein (1874–1946), who once wrote, “There is no there there” (Stein 1937:289).

THE “IMAGABILITY” OF CITIES What we learn from these city-by-city respondents’ differences in detailing the center is that cities differ markedly in terms of *imagability*. A clear urban image not only gives people a working knowledge and sense of security about their city, but

also it makes acquiring additional knowledge of the city relatively easy. Second, a comprehensible urban environment invites us to experience more, to involve ourselves more in the life of the city. Imagability, Lynch concluded, is one of the essential features of a positive urban environment.

8.1.2: Cognitive Mapping

As illustrated earlier with Bostonians' different concepts of the importance of the Boston Common, people living in the same city construct different mental images of their surroundings. Their perceptions vary because of their individual relationships among space, place, and the physical—even social—features of the natural and built environment in various parts of the city. Essentially, researchers discover people's interpretations through sketch maps or hand-drawn renditions of features that are most familiar to them. What one person includes will differ from others. Such differing cognitive mapping occurs because one's interests and personal experiences affect awareness and recollection of some city features and not others. As a result, **mental maps**, as individualized constructs, will (1) mix accurate details with distortions, (2) contain large gaps about unfamiliar sections, and (3) not be fully representative of an area in its entirety.

THE INDIVIDUALITY OF MENTAL MAPS

Figures 8–2 and 8–3 on pages 204–205 present drawings of two people's mental maps of Manhattan. New Jersey suburbanite Beth, who only goes into Manhattan to visit museums or see shows, emphasizes details about the streets and locations of the artistic and cultural centers that draw her to the city's midtown (Figure 8–2). She offers only sketchy information about the Upper West Side or lower Manhattan. By contrast, physical therapist Cara's Manhattan, emphasizes the Upper West Side area where she lives (Figure 8–3). Featured prominently are restaurants, parks, and high-rise

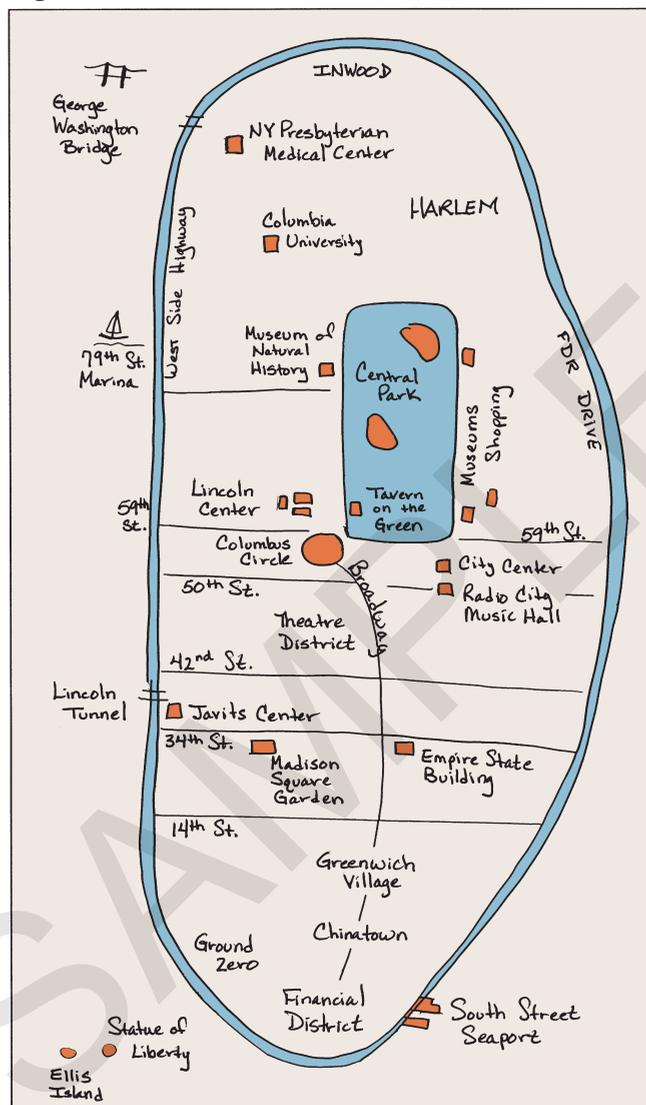
apartment buildings, without the need to list streets, given her familiarity with the area. Missing, save for one or two items, are midtown and lower Manhattan.

No one, as already suggested, can re-create the complexity of the whole city, as Cara's map demonstrates. Moreover, everyone's images constantly evolve as urban experiences deepen or as the city changes. A relative newcomer to a city, for example, will typically draw a map of the center city that contains prominent landmarks but almost no detail at all. Often, the few areas noted are misplaced and distorted in size. Yet, for that same person, after living there just a few more months, the city usually comes alive and she or he can offer far more detail as well as greater geographical accuracy. In short, with time, most people succeed in comprehending the city and using it effectively.

MULTIPLE URBAN REALITIES What all this suggests is that there are as many "New Yorks" or "Seattles," for example, as there are people living there. More broadly, each of these active mental maps contributes to the larger urban dynamic that is the full New York City or Seattle.

Mental maps, however, are not completely a matter of individual differences. Cultural and social class differences also affect what people include in their cognitive maps (Solesse et al. 2013). Race plays a key part in how residents understand the city as well. Researchers have found that blacks' perceptions of community undesirability differ from those of whites. Generally, blacks rate most communities as more desirable than whites do, often favoring communities in which they are the numerical minority. Whites often rate mixed-race communities as being less desirable, particularly those with higher proportions of blacks, even when blacks are the numerical minority (Bembry and Norris 2005; Krysan 2002; Charles 2000; Sigelman and Henig 2001).

Figure 8-2 Mental Maps of Manhattan: Beth's Map



The city is thus an ongoing mixture of perceptions and experiences, as Robert Park explained long ago:

The city . . . is something more than a congeries of individual men and of social conveniences—streets, buildings, electric lights, tramways, and telephones something more, also, than a mere constellation of institutions and administrative

devices—courts, hospitals, schools, police, and civil functionaries of various sorts. The city is . . . a state of mind. (1984:1; orig. 1916)

The *Cityscape* box on page 206 describes memories playing upon changes in Boston. Present in recollections of the city are many of Lynch's visual categories, some from the past and others of the present.

8.2: The Social Environment

Gesellschaft

8.2 Evaluate the ways to deal with *gesellschaft* characteristics of cities

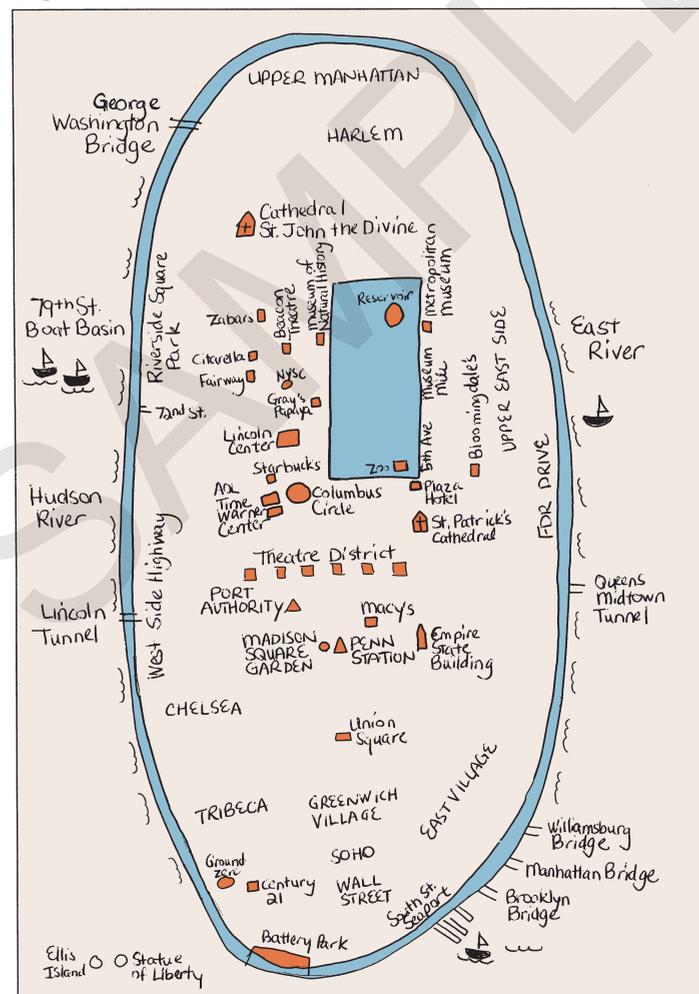
Living in the city demands that we deal with more than just the physical environment. We must also contend with large numbers of *people*, most of whom we don't know—and probably

don't want to know. How do we cope with what Ferdinand Tönnies (see Chapter 5) called the city's *gesellschaft* characteristics—its vast numbers and characteristic anonymity?

8.2.1: The Pedestrian: Watching Your Step

Standing on the sidewalk during rush hour along Boylston Street in Boston; State Street in Columbus, Ohio; or Kearny Street in San Francisco, anyone can observe the “faceless crowd” of urbanites

Figure 8–3 Mental Maps of Manhattan: Cara's Map



CITYSCAPE

Memories of an Older City in the New

Today, I'm thinking about memory as I walk through my city. Twice a week my commuting path takes me through Copley Square, the historic center of Boston, and I walk/jog briskly through traffic past some of the oldest buildings in the area, such as the grand Boston Public Library and the old church that face each other across the plaza. I remember visiting the rare books room of the library and seeing documents from the sixteen hundreds or even earlier, chronicling the journeys of the earliest European settlers here. At the same time, I'm crossing Boylston Street, which now has a plethora of other, starker memories demanding their room in my brain, demanding citywide remembrance.

That's the funny thing about living in a city with any kind of history; there are always so many layers of time and memory superimposed on each other, constantly layering on top of one another, blurring the lines of past and present. There is the circle memorializing the Boston massacre; and over there, a line of hip new clothing stores that seem to have sprung up just last week. The city keeps changing, but there are always signs of the old wherever you look. There's the line of hungry cannoli-eating customers in the North End, waiting at Mike's pastry shop; but the Italian immigrants that made up this neighborhood are largely gone. Where did they go?

I sometimes hear old Bostonians lamenting this change, the way all city dwellers hate change. A guy I worked with who had grown up in Somerville

remembered all those Irish Catholic kids he grew up with, the friendly cops who looked the other way when they were drinking out of paper bags, the saints' parades down the streets. Now, he complained, there's a Caribbean cultural parade every year instead, and the neighborhood is "all foreigners." It's always unpleasant to hear this kind of talk; after all, go back a generation or two and it was the Irish who were the foreigners. That, of course, is part of the way memory evolves in a city; the people who arrive as outsiders are quick to reject the next generation of newcomers. That's natural, I suppose. Things even out in the end.

It's amazing to me how fast cities change and how the old does endure side-by-side with the new. Buildings get torn down, but the beloved ones become shrines to memory, treasures of common repository. And we say, "That used to be —" and are stunned to see the city growing up around us, and it reminds us that time passes. If anything, the city marks time for us and reminds us that we grow older. But the memories of what was there before endure. Even on my small street in Cambridge, I see that one shop that seems to change its identity every six months, and already it has gone through three iterations. First it was an abandoned store front; then a trendy cafe with two chairs and only three items on the menu; now it's a pie shop. I like the pie shop and hope it stays, but I know the odds are small.

SOURCE: Blair Hurley. Reprinted with permission.

going about their daily business. Taking such a detached perspective, the city's people seem almost like sheep—an undifferentiated, robot-like herd.

Is this really so? As most urbanites know, city life is an orderly routine, one that allows people to meet their personal needs while surrounded by an unknown mass of others. Of course, people

are on the street for a reason. They move through the city to get to work, to enjoy a restaurant, to meet a friend, to catch a subway, or perhaps, just to take a walk. Simply because the observer cannot perceive such motives is no reason to think they don't exist. In addition, most people in a crowd, sometimes as much as 70 percent, are interacting as they walk together in groups

of two or more as couples, friends, or families (Moussaïd et al. 2010).

Moreover, pedestrians observe an intricate set of social rules. An unwritten traffic code exists for the sidewalks, just as a written code exists for automobiles using the streets. For example, pedestrian traffic in North American cities sorts itself into two opposing streams, with the dividing line somewhere near the middle of the sidewalk. Within each stream, people “watch their step” in a variety of ways: First, they keep themselves at least slightly aware of obstacles, such as mailboxes, lampposts, or groups stopped on the sidewalk. Second, they casually note the speed of people in front of or behind them, gauging their own speed accordingly in order to avoid collisions. Third, to move faster or slower than the stream, people move to the outside of the lane. Fourth, people utilize various strategies to avoid collisions, perhaps making coughing noises or shifting packages to alert a careless walker about impending contact. Fifth, people scold one another for breaking any of these rules. After someone brushes by, one pedestrian may loudly protest, “Why don’t ya look where you’re going?” Such reactions show us that people know the rules for pedestrian behavior and call others to task for any transgressions. In essence, a tacit contract exists among users of public space, who come to trust each other to act like competent pedestrians (Middleton 2010).

Rules of pedestrian traffic vary from culture to culture, of course. This variety can puzzle—and even intimidate—a traveler, as the next *Urban Living* box on page 208 explains.

Escalators represent another example of cultural variety. In the United States, passengers all pile on together, making passage by anybody behind almost impossible. In most European nations, however, escalator passengers ride on the right side, leaving a lane on the left for anyone wishing to pass. Taking their first ride on a European escalator, North Americans who place themselves on the left-hand side of a ramp are often a bit puzzled to hear people behind them asking



As Goffman suggested, pedestrians communally follow a sidewalk traffic code, creating two opposing streams with a dividing line somewhere in the middle of the sidewalk. Within these two streams, they share an intricate set of social rules that enables them to move easily at their own pace, without jostling or colliding with one another.

them to please move over. Conversely, Europeans riding a North American subway escalator can be quite puzzled at the “rudeness” of locals, who jam up the ramp so that no one can pass.

Finally, even in that most dense and anonymous of urban worlds, the subway, people evolve mechanisms for ordering and personalizing their experience. The second *Urban Living* box on page 209 offers a look at the changing subway rush hour.

Together, these examples reveal that street behavior is not nearly as chaotic as it might appear to be at first glance. City dwellers may have to deal with larger numbers of people, often in crowded conditions, but urban life is not necessarily difficult or dehumanizing.

8.2.2: A World of Strangers

Besides coping with the city's sheer numbers, urbanites must also learn to deal with anonymity, living in what Lyn Lofland (1985) called "a world of strangers." Lofland argues that we look for visual clues in order to classify strangers in much the same way as we make sense of the city's physical environment.

APPEARANCE AND LOCATION We usually identify strangers by their *appearance* and their *physical location* within the city. In other words, we give strangers "the once-over," noting their clothing, hairstyle, jewelry, what they're carrying, and how they're walking. We also let location speak for people. For example, in a district of office buildings and expensive restaurants, we expect to find different types of people than we would find in a district full of bars or all-night movie houses.

Such tactics are not uniquely urban. Even in small towns, people judge each other by appearance and by "which side of the tracks" they call *home*. The point is simply that, in big cities our reliance on clues like appearance and location becomes essential. After all, the odds of running into someone we know in midtown Manhattan or Chicago's downtown "loop" are rather small.

Using spatial location as a clue to people's identities is a modern practice. In preindustrial cities, public spaces, such as the town square, usually had mixed uses: schooling, religious services, parades, shopping, general loitering, and even executions. In short, because virtually *anybody* might be there, location provided few clues about who the strangers were. Consequently, citizens put great stock in appearance, as illustrated in the *Urban Living* box that follows.

URBAN LIVING

Learning to Cross the Street All Over Again

The first morning after we arrived in port, we left the ship early and made our way along the docks toward the center of Ho Chi Minh City—known to an earlier generation as Saigon. After looking us over—a family of U.S. visitors—the government security officers waved us through the security gates without so much as glancing at our papers. But we paused nonetheless, coming face to face with dozens of men crowded just beyond the gate, all operators of cyclos—bicycles with a small carriage attached to the front—which are the Vietnamese equivalent of taxicabs. "No, thanks," I stated firmly, breaking eye contact, and making a firm gesture with my arm. In New York, it is hard enough to find a cab; here, we spent the next 20 minutes fending off persistent drivers who cruised alongside us pleading for our business. The pressure was uncomfortable.

Let's cross the street, I suggested. We turned to the traffic and immediately realized that there were

no stop signs or signal lights. In fact, there was no break at all in the steady stream of bicycles, cyclos, motorbikes, and small trucks that rattled along the rough roadway. What to do? Then the answer came, in the form of a tiny woman who walked right next to us and plunged out into the traffic without so much as batting an eye. She simply walked at a steady pace across the street; drivers saw her coming and made room for her. To us, she appeared to part the waves of vehicles as if she had some mysterious power.

We took a deep breath. From several yards back, we walked right into the traffic keeping eyes straight ahead. Amazing! It worked. Such are the rules of the road in Vietnam.

SOURCE: Based on John Macionis's travel to Vietnam.

URBAN LIVING

The Subway at Rush Hour

The twenty-first century has witnessed a significant change in ridership on the New York City subways. No longer do the old 7 to 9 a.m. and 5 to 6 p.m. time slots constitute today's so-called "rush hour" periods. Now, an average of nearly 9 million people travel on the trains during an average weekday at all hours of the day.

According to the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority, ridership continues to rise, thanks to population growth and increased employment opportunities, but that increase has occurred mostly during off-peak hours. Even with the current expanded definition of "rush hour" as 6 to 10 a.m., travel in Manhattan's CBD is flattening while transit travel at other times is increasing.

The MTA attributes this new pattern to the impact of the Millennials (those born after 1980), who live a

"tech-savvy, 24-hour lifestyle," and to the changing economy. Dramatic growth in the tech, education, and health care sectors, as well as in tourism and hospitality services, has led to fewer traditional jobs from 9 to 5. The overall result has been the emergence of nontraditional work patterns, either through flex-time schedules or the increase in part-time, self-employment, and telecommuting-work.

As a consequence of its needs assessment survey, the MTA calls this spreading ridership of "24/7/365 travel patterns" the "new normal" and is planning to optimize its system accordingly.

SOURCE: Based on New York Metropolitan Transit Authority, *Looking Ahead: A Context for the Next Twenty Year Needs Assessment*, July 2013.

In modern societies, however, the guidelines are different. Dress still plays a part in identifying strangers, but "costume" is no longer the central clue. Dress codes have relaxed, and people from all walks of life, without fear of censure, wear almost any sort of clothing. Important historical reasons explain this change.

In the preindustrial city, only the wealthy could afford clothes of silk and satin or jewelry made from gold and silver. With the Industrial Revolution, however, mass production made many types of dress much more affordable. Furthermore, even as a rising standard of living allowed more and more people to purchase and display such goods, many affluent people began dressing more casually.

If dress means less to us in modern cities, then, location means more. We recognize that modern cities are composed of numerous distinct districts, such as for business, warehousing, residence, and entertainment. In business districts,

we expect to encounter businesspeople, and we expect them to act in a businesslike manner.

Of course, such patterns don't mean that some people can't "work the system." We all know that it is possible for us to pass ourselves off as something we are not by manipulating the ways that we dress and act. A narcotics agent may infiltrate a drug ring, for example, and a social scientist may live anonymously in an area, hoping to learn the inside story of people's lives. Sometimes, people intentionally "perform." A sighted person may don dark eyeglasses, hold a sign saying "blind," and beg, or dignified middle-class suburbanites may come into the city to "swing" at night, retiring at evening's end to their normal routine.

PRIVATIZING PUBLIC SPACE Another way we reduce the vastness and complexity of a city is to transform certain areas into private or semi-private space. People can claim a street corner

URBAN LIVING

Clothes Make the Man

To a degree unknown to moderns, the resident of the preindustrial city literally “donned” his identity. The Roman citizen, for example, expressed the fact of his citizenship by wearing as decreed by law, the white toga. A “gentleman” in the Colonial cities of America was known by his “periwig” . . .

Urban elites everywhere struggled to differentiate themselves from their “inferiors” not only by the design of their dress, but by the materials as well. The cap of the medieval Frenchman was made of velvet for the elites, rough cloth for the poor. In Elizabethan England, [Gideon Sjoberg reported that] “Commoners were prohibited by law from wearing clothing fashioned from gold or silver cloth, velvet, furs, and other ‘luxury’ materials.” Hair length also indicated status. Among the Franks, only the elite had long hair. . . .

The clothing of outcaste groups . . . was often regulated by law. . . . [T]he Parsi minority in the Persian

city of Yezd were forced, until the 1880s, “to twist their turbans instead of folding them, [were] denied various colors, and [were] prohibited rings, umbrellas, and other items.”

Occupation, too, was signaled by dress. The lawyers of medieval France, for example, were distinguished by their round caps . . . and the executioners of the period were forced to wear a special coat of red or gold so that they would be readily recognizable in a crowd. . . . Each of the various types of itinerant peddlers of Peking . . . wore a distinctive costume as did the clergy of twelfth century Europe and the members of religious sects in numerous preindustrial cities.

SOURCE: Lyn H. Lofland, *A World of Strangers: Order and Action in Urban Public Spaces* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1985), pp. 45–46.

as a hangout, a tavern can become a club to its regular patrons (as in the TV show *Cheers*), and musicians can transform a section of a park into an outdoor performance arena. Such “home territories” are rarely intentional; usually, they result from unplanned, uncoordinated actions that end up spatially segregating certain types of people. The city is full of such patterns: Yuppies appropriate plazas; skid row vagrants lay claim to benches and steam grates; and gay people may come to think of a particular neighborhood as “their own.” Outsiders entering such spaces soon pick up cues of dress and behavior that indicate they are on semiprivate ground.

On a larger scale, whole urban districts can become home territory—or “turf”—to a specific group. Most residential neighborhoods have a dominant character, perhaps based on class, race, ethnicity, and age. Although cities are

largely impersonal, they are also (in Robert Park’s phrase) “mosaics of small worlds.” A *gesellschaft* environment like the city also contains many *gemeinschaft*-like subsocieties.

8.2.3: The City as *Gesellschaft*: A Reassessment

Many early urban theorists feared that people could never cope with the city’s sheer physical size, its large population, and its anonymity. Yet, we *do* cope. We contend with physical size by creating our personal mental image of the city. We deal with the complexities of street life by observing codes of behavior and seeking out clues to the identity of strangers. And of course, our own social characteristics place us within some part of the city and make urban life more meaningful.



In a city, many people share public space. Whether in small groups or alone, on a lunch break, or resting from sightseeing, they often gather wherever there is some sun and a place to sit. Steps and low walls are popular choices, and there, they often engage in that favorite urban pastime of people-watching or enjoy some show, such as this street performer in Mauerpark, Berlin, Germany.

8.3: The Social Environment

Gemeinschaft

8.3 Indicate that interpersonal bonds form the cornerstone of city life for most people

Then, too, the city abounds with personal relationships. Only the most extreme of urban isolates—the alienated social outcasts perhaps—live according to the stereotype of *gesellschaft*. For most, interpersonal bonds provide a basis for social and psychological security in the city.

8.3.1: Urban Networks

The study of interpersonal ties is called network analysis. As we shall see, urban networks may or may not involve organized social groups or neighborhood roots.

CLASS DIFFERENCES Social class distinctions affect the type of in-person social networks

that urbanites develop. Although U.S. society is quite different in its diversity and lifestyle than it was four decades ago, sociability patterns have remained fairly persistent. Those in the lower social classes (skilled and unskilled workers) prefer informal social ties in mostly homogeneous groups connected to church, fraternal, or community relationships. In contrast, those in the upper classes (managers and professionals) are more likely to have a greater diversity of social ties, level of cultural engagement, and participation in formal organizations, including voluntary associations (Petev 2013).

Social class distinctions have an effect even among the closest of urban networks, those of people living together. One study of London couples found that working-class partners had a strict division of labor, each maintaining their own social networks and often spending their leisure time separately. In contrast, tasks among middle-class spouses were shared or interchangeable, and they typically spent their leisure time together and participated in a shared network (Spillius 2008).

Other studies show that strong urban networks form in stable neighborhoods and around local schools through parenthood. Close social relations also emerge from a shared sense of group identity, especially in immigrant neighborhoods (Blokland and Savage 2012; Butler 2008; Small 2007). In such settings another common touchstone is a shared social-class position.

NETWORK DYNAMICS Residents of high-poverty urban neighborhoods by necessity form network links to survive. Extended-kin networks serve a critical function in providing monetary gifts or loans, food items, food stamps, passed-down clothing, childcare, and other forms of instrumental coping strategies. These networks also provide emotional coping strategies through sympathetic listening and by offering advice, concern, comfort, and encouragement (Battle-Walters 2004; Domínguez and Watkins 2003). With a large concentration of impoverished families, resource

pooling or collective sharing of tangibles and non-tangibles is an important coping strategy.

Other network processes also help poor families endure. In neighborhoods marred by distrust and social estrangement, intensive socializing with relatives provides an important sense of belonging. In addition to providing guidance and informal social control over behavior, kinfolk also contribute services in the form of critical tasks to offset the missing, inaccessible, or poor-quality institutional services. Furthermore, network members shared and endorsed core values in the face of everyday harsh realities (Jarrett et al. 2010).

NEIGHBORHOODS Many urban relationships are thus set in neighborhoods. Distinguished by physical or social boundaries, neighborhoods contain people who share important social characteristics, such as social class, race, and ethnicity. In a study of Boston's predominantly Italian West

URBAN LIVING

The Networks of Street-Corner Men

[The most important people in a man's network are those] with whom he is "up tight": His "walking buddies," "good" or "best" friends, girlfriends, and sometimes real or putative kinsmen. These are the people with whom he is in more or less daily, face-to-face contact, and whom he turns to for emergency aid, comfort, or support in time of need or crisis. He gives them and receives from them goods and services in the name of friendship, ostensibly keeping no reckoning. Routinely, he seeks them out and is sought out by them. They serve his need to be with others of his kind and to be recognized as a discrete, distinctive personality, and he, in turn, serves them the same way. They are both his audience and his fellow actors.

It is with these men and women that he spends his waking, nonworking hours, drinking, dancing,

engaging in sex, playing the fool or the wise man, passing the time at the Carry-out or on the street-corner, talking about nothing and everything, about epistemology or . . . about the nature of numbers or how he would "have it made" if he could have a steady job that paid him \$60 a week with no layoffs.

So important a part of daily life are these relationships that it seems like no life at all without them. Old Mr. Jenkins climbed out of his sickbed to take up a seat on the Coca-Cola case at the Carry-out for a couple of hours. "I can't stay home and play dead," he explained, "I got to get out and see my friends."

SOURCE: Eliot Liebow, *Tally's Corner*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), pp. 163–64.

End neighborhood in the 1950s, Herbert Gans (1982) suggested that despite the many differences among residents of an urban neighborhood, many *gemeinschaft*-like relations exist. His findings are just pertinent today. Daily shopping in small grocery stores for fresh meats, fish, and produce provides an opportunity to meet with neighbors and share local news. On weekends and holidays, people strolling on the sidewalks, lolling about on porch steps or benches, and/or visiting friends and neighbors generate frequent social interactions.

At the time of Gans's research, the West End was a low-income, low-rent district adjacent to the elite Beacon Hill area. Traditionally home to immigrants, over the years the West End had been dominated by people of various categories—including Italians, Jews, Poles, and Irish, as well as some artists and bohemians.

Most casual observers of the West End concluded that it was a chaotic slum. Yet living in the area revealed a different—and more accurate—picture. There, Gans found as much *gemeinschaft* as might be found in many nonurban environments. Many had known one another

for years, not perhaps personally, but certainly as acquaintances in greeting each other on the street. Moreover, they typically knew something about everyone and that level of familiarity led to their willingness to help their neighbors whenever any kind of emergency occurred. For most residents, this forging of strong ties with family, neighbors, and friends resulted in a lifestyle resembling a small town or suburban community.

Other researchers reached similar conclusions after investigating other cities. For example, Gerald Suttles (1974) reported strong interpersonal ties among Italians in Chicago's Addams area, and Joseph Howell (1990) provided a similar description of life in an inner-city Washington, D.C., neighborhood. That old cliché about not judging a book by its cover equally applies to poverty-stricken neighborhoods. Personal relationships, though hidden to the casual observer, may be every bit as important to low-income urban residents as they are to people living elsewhere.

Urban ethnic neighborhoods are often places to find examples of what Lofland calls the privatizing of public space. Here, the street becomes a



Urban ethnic neighborhoods are often places to find examples of what Lofland calls the privatizing of public space. Here, the street becomes a place to play stickball or wash a parked car, and the sidewalk becomes a site for jump rope or hopscotch games, for stores or street vendors to display their wares, or for people to sit to socialize or watch passersby.

place to play stickball or wash a parked car, and the sidewalk becomes a site for jump rope or hopscotch games, for stores or street vendors to display their wares, or for people to sit to socialize or watch passersby.

FRIENDSHIPS Many urban relationships do not involve neighbors. More affluent urbanites especially—many who move from city to city to advance their careers—are not linked to neighborhoods in any traditional sense, but nonetheless have friends. Such people typically forge friendships involving co-workers, people with whom they have lunch or a drink and dinner, or friends they meet more casually—say, at a concert or in the park. The point is that people may not live near each other but they still maintain friendships with others who share similar interests (Gibbons and Olk 2003; Whitmeyer 2002).

Industrial technology once broke up the rural communities of old by offering new opportunities that pulled people away from the towns of their birth. Today's technology enables friends to remain in continual contact in many ways, although one may question the meaning of the word *friend*, when hundreds, even thousands,

of “friends” are listed as such on one's Facebook page. Despite the misuse of that word, today's usage of the term *social network* does accurately identify the relationships and linkage people enjoy with one another, no matter where they live.

SCENES One of the city's hallmarks is its many and diverse places, or **scenes**, where people gather to socialize with friends, meet new ones, and enjoy themselves. In fact, many people *invent* places where they get together, such as flash mobs. In a broad sense, scenes are locales where a theme predominates, such as the hippie scene in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco in the 1960s, the current music scene in Austin, Texas, or fashion scene in New York's Bryant Park in February and September of each year (Currid 2008).

Two well-known international examples are the techno music scene in Berlin and the Temple Bar scene in Dublin. Regardless of their location, scenes are organized sociability, part of the “theatricality of the city” in which people gather together to share in one expression of city culture (Straw 2005: 412). Personal theatricality is another possibility, as in to “make the scene,” such as at a biker bar or club. The suggestion in



Many cities are filled with young adults for whom one of the most popular “scenes” is a bar or club, where they can relax and enjoy themselves with friends, fellow students, or co-workers. Some places attract a particular lifestyle crowd, such as gays, musicians, or writers; others are more open, attracting a wide range of customers.

that expression is that participants are, in some sense, “on stage,” emphasizing only one particular aspect of themselves, perhaps through sub-cultural expression, like “Goth unconventionality or Club glam or Salsa authenticity” (Silver et al. 2010: 2296). Most scenes, though, are local places like bars, cafés, coffee shops, clubs, and fitness centers, where like-minded people gather voluntarily for a few hours.

Essentially, scenes contain a mix of people within some type of built environment enjoying a combination of amenities. Scenes are also settings of shared consumption by individuals who similarly define themselves expressively in terms of lifestyle and sensibility (Joas 2004). In these locales of sociable consumption, participants share in a certain mood, perhaps listening to a certain kind of music, wearing a particular style of clothes, or dining in the ambiance of a favorite restaurant.

Scenes often fall into four categories (Irwin 1977). Most cities have *lifestyle scenes* that attract writers, musicians, gays, political radicals, and other groups. On summer evenings in Toronto, for example, young people from all over the metropolitan area descend on Yonge Street, and they often remain until the wee hours of the morning. They eat, talk, yell, and generally hang out up and down a dozen city blocks. As Toronto’s main thoroughfare, the street is also often the place for sports celebrations, demonstrations, parades, and demonstrations.

The *local scene* is more exclusive. A local bar, for example, may attract a particular crowd, and it may even discourage “outsiders” from coming in. A neighborhood bar is a good example.

The *open scene* is more fluid in terms of clientele, yet it, too, provides the opportunity for personal relationships. Bars without a well-defined clientele fall into this category. Such public drinking places provide opportunities for those present, whether acquainted or not, to engage others in conversational interaction in a setting that promotes the near-obligation to accept these extended overtures of sociability.

Finally, the *specialized scene* involves activities, such as amateur theater, bingo, book clubs, card playing, chess, health spas, skateboarding, and countless others. Like the local scene, these specialized scenes provide a sense of in-group solidarity with others who share that particular interest. Specialized scenes, however, have a degree of openness and population fluidity that local scenes do not.

Perhaps one of the best-known specialized scenes among college students, especially those attending a city college or university, is the clubs. These typically crowded gathering places have a DJ or band, a dance floor, a bar, and room to sit or stand. For example, in Boston, some of the more popular clubs are Aria, Avalon, Liquor Store, Roxy, and Venu. Among the popular places for college students in Miami are the SandBar Grill, The Rathskeller, Titanic Brewery, Town Kitchen & Bar, and Tobacco Road. Other clubs in these and other cities cater to different types of clientele, such as African or Hispanic Americans, or gays. No matter which club, though, people come to hear and dance to the music and, of course, to enjoy some good times with old or new friends.

TEMPORARY NETWORKS Many urban dwellers use another type of network to make initial or short-term personal contact in the city. Examples of such networks include singles clubs, dating agencies, public ballrooms, and call-in radio talk shows.

Sometimes, such networks serve people who are extremely lonely or desperate. Just as frequently, however, they serve people who are quite happy with their lives. People who participate in late-night talk shows, for instance, need not be lonely, after all; they may just be working late, or simply be interested in speaking their mind.

8.3.2: Identifying with the City

The ability to know and identify with an entire city probably ended in the Middle Ages. With the dawning of the modern age, Western cities began

a relentless increase in population as well as an expanding division of labor, resulting in the large, diverse cities we find today.

Still, most people have some sense of “knowing” their city, although such knowledge often rests on clichés and stereotypical images that outsiders also may share. Thus, beer has made Milwaukee famous in the same way that sunshine defines Miami and the entertainment industry has elevated Los Angeles and Hollywood. St. Louis has its arch and Toronto its CN Tower (the tallest free-standing structure in the Western Hemisphere). And, while Stratford-on-Avon has its Shakespeare, Hannibal, Missouri, is proud to be the boyhood home of Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens).

In addition, sports teams foster identification with the modern city (“Minneapolis—St. Paul—Home of the Twins, Vikings, and North

Stars!”), as do important local events (the Boston Marathon, the Rose Parade in Pasadena, Inauguration Day in Washington, D.C., and Mardi Gras in New Orleans). The *Urban Living* titled “Great Urban Rituals” examines some of these “urban rituals.”

Historical events—both negative and positive—also help define the urban experience. The San Francisco earthquake (1906) and the devastating aftermath from Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans (2005) are examples of costly and tragic events that remain alive in people’s minds. The ride of Paul Revere through Boston, the signing of the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia, and the battle at the Alamo in San Antonio are major events still well known many generations later by most of those cities’ present-day inhabitants.

URBAN LIVING

Great Urban Rituals

Cities, both large and small, have annual events that involve large segments of the population and serve as a means of sharing in an urban experience and, thus, identifying with the city. Here are just a few examples.

Each New Year’s Day, weather permitting, about 1 million people line the streets of Philadelphia to watch the Mummers Parade. Thousands of marchers, members of many Mummers clubs—who are capped and caped, in speckled and sequined costumes—literally strut to the music of a distinctive string-band strum. They neither walk nor march; instead, they cakewalk in a distinctive style that is difficult to imitate. It’s a colorful, pleasant spectacle and a famous city tradition.

In Boston, the celebration of Patriot’s Day (the third Monday in April) commemorates the events in that city that led to the American Revolution (the rides of Paul Revere and William Dawes, the battles at Lexington and Concord). Aside from reenactments of the rides and a traditional parade, the main attraction that day is the Boston Marathon. This oldest race in

the United States, a marathon second only in age to the Olympics itself, attracts more than 26,000 runners and more than a half-million enthusiastic spectators along the 26.2-mile route.

Cinco de Mayo festivals celebrate Mexico’s victory over French forces in Puebla, Mexico, on May 5, 1862. Though celebrated in many major U.S. cities—including Austin, Chicago, Dallas, Houston, San Antonio, and St. Paul—it is in Los Angeles where hundreds of thousands of people gather in parks and on streets, decorated in the Mexican colors (red, white, and green), to enjoy the crafts, food, music, and dancing.

On Memorial Day weekend, Detroit hosts Movement, an electronic dance music festival. More than 100 artists perform on multiple stages in Hart Plaza in the city’s downtown. Held in the birthplace of techno music, the event integrates musical and visual artistry, creativity, diversity, and state-of-the-art technology.

From mid-July to early August, Toronto blazes with the excitement of calypso and elaborate masquerade costumes during the annual Scotiabank Caribbean Festival. This two-week festival is the largest Caribbean festival in North America, attracting over 1 million participants—including hundreds of thousands of American tourists.

Among the many ethnic festivals in New York City, its oldest, one that cuts across ethnic boundaries, is the San Gennaro Festival in Little Italy, which runs for two weeks in mid-September. The street festivities, which include parades, entertainment, food stands, and a cannoli-eating contest, attract more than 1 million people annually.

Of the thousands of Oktoberfest celebrations in North America, Cincinnati's German heritage

celebration is the largest, drawing over 500,000 people each year. Five downtown city blocks are transformed each September into Oktoberfest Zinzinnati, with seven stages showcasing continuous German music and nearly 100 booths serving German food, wine, and beer.

Mardi Gras in New Orleans, which dates back to the nineteenth century, is another popular celebration that attracts nearly 1 million visitors. For about two weeks, dozens of elaborate parades take place through Fat Tuesday, the day before the Christian season of Lent begins. From the parade floats, riders in outrageous costumes throw beads and other trinkets to hundreds of thousands of spectators, many also dressed in costume during this fun-filled time.

8.3.3: The City as *Gemeinschaft*: A Reassessment

A wealth of research supports the conclusion that the vast majority of urbanites are “well-connected” in their cities. Most are engaged in a variety of networks, such as families, neighborhoods, friendships, scenes, and even temporary contacts. Similarly, most city residents have a sense of identification with their city. Although they may not always be readily apparent, characteristics of Tönnies’s *gemeinschaft*—personal relationships and a sense of belonging—do flourish in the city.

or the “feel” of the city. New York is the “Big Apple,” a city of energy and hustle; Boston is relaxed, “cultural,” and intellectual; Los Angeles is “laid back,” the heart of the “new America”; and New Orleans is “The Big Easy,” where life is slower, simpler, and easygoing. These are stereotypical impressions, of course, but many people share them (see the *City Snapshot* box on page 220).

To what extent are such images real? Suttles argues that a city’s **texture** is grounded in its history, architecture, street names, and even the nicknames for certain parts of town. Together, these elements add up to an objective reality, not just one individual’s impression. A visitor to Hollywood, for example, can actually see the footprints and handprints of the stars in the cement in front of Grauman’s Chinese Theater, use a map to visit the homes of the stars, and see the huge “Hollywood” sign overlooking the city. And who knows? If you’re lucky, you might even end up face to face with a famed actor at a restaurant. Stars, money, and fame are all part of Hollywood’s texture as “Tinsel Town.”

8.4: The Texture of the City

8.4 Recognize that every city has a unique characteristic

Most cities convey a unique impression—a look and feel that Gerald Suttles (1984) termed a “texture” and that others call the “soul,” “personality,”

DETROIT A city’s texture can change. A sad example is Detroit, Michigan, that went from

CITY SNAPSHOT

Paris, France

When considering the “texture,” “personality,” and “feel” of a city, many people quickly think of Paris. Long celebrated in songs, movies, and books, this capital and most populous city on the Seine River in northern France has appealed to millions of people across the generations. A favorite destination of tourists, artists, writers, and students, Paris fires one’s imagination about a beautiful, romantic city filled with sights to see and experiences to enjoy.

Without question, Paris offers much to see: the Eiffel Tower, the Louvre Museum, the Notre Dame de Paris Cathedral, and the Arc de Triomphe Monument along the famous Champs-Élysées Boulevard lined with shops and cafés. Architectural delights, works of art from centuries past, fine dining, elegant parks and gardens, and an exciting nightlife in the “City of Lights” are other elements adding to the city’s allure. And yet, Paris is more than the sum of its parts, more than just landmarks to see and photograph.

What captivates visitors even more is the city’s mood or atmosphere that defies any detailed description. Paris has what the French call *je ne sais quoi* (I don’t know what) that makes it so special to so many people. They will speak of romantic walks at night along the flowing river, of strolls along idyllic streets or charming alleyways in the Montmartre district (*arrondissement*). Others will speak of the small shops; the artists’ booths on the Left Bank; the wrought-iron balcony railings; the street lamps; the 20 districts or villages that comprise the city, each with its own identity and “flavor.”

The many different answers to what makes Paris so special suggest that it is not just one or two reasons, but instead all of it—the city itself. In other words, it is the *texture* of Paris that, for hundreds of years, has fascinated so many people, including Europeans from other countries.

one of America’s most prosperous cities to one of its most distressed. In 1950, it was the fourth-largest U.S. city with a population of 1.8 million, as people moved to the “Motor City” to work at the Big Three auto companies: General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler. Well-paid auto workers and executives—along with a strong support network of parts manufacturers and white-collar services—enjoyed a good lifestyle. Because the assembly-line process required little training or education, the auto industry attracted African Americans from the South and immigrants, especially from Hungary, Italy, Mexico, and Poland.

Giving a new texture to the city in the 1960s was the Motown sound that captured the listening public with its popular blend of soul and pop music. Young artists from Detroit’s poor

and working-class neighborhoods—Smoky Robinson and the Miracles, Marvin Gaye and Mary Wells—were soon joined by Diana Ross and the Supremes, the Temptations, Four Tops, Jackson Five, and Stevie Wonder. Detroit became not only the center of auto manufacturing, but also the place that dominated the top ten music list for a decade. The success of Motown Records also gave employment to hundreds of technicians and office workers.

None of this would last. Major changes in the auto industry—automation, new plants in suburban locales and in Mexico, foreign competition, rising labor costs, and retiree health-care costs—spelled the end of Detroit as an auto manufacturing center. The city’s heavy reliance on a single industry as its economic base caused its decline more rapidly than other cities that were more

diversified. Perhaps the final insult was Motown Records moving to Los Angeles in 1972. Detroit went into a downward spiral as those who could, moved, and areas surrounding the central business district collapsed. More than 1 million people left, as the population plummeted to 689,000 and Detroit dropped to 18th in size (U.S. Census Bureau 2014a). In 2014, almost a third of its large housing stock sat vacant, with residential “neighborhoods” dominated by empty lots and boarded up, abandoned houses. Of Detroit’s 380,000 properties, more than 114,000 were razed and another 80,000 slated for probable demolition (Austen 2014:26).

Detroit is now an ugly shell of its former self. The city now has the highest unemployment rate of the 50 largest U.S. cities and one of the highest poverty levels. Consistently listed as one of the nation’s worst cities for serious crimes, the city’s texture is now decidedly negative, prompting one critic to call it “a violent cultural wasteland” (Barron 1985). In 2013, the state assumed financial control of the city.

How does a city overcome such a loss in both reputation and population? One attempt was to become a more inviting cultural center. A restored Opera House and exhibits at the Henry Ford Museum, Historical Museum, and Museum of African American History do attract many visitors, as does the Institute of Arts, one of the nation’s biggest art museums. Another re-urbanization effort, Live Midtown, provides aid to employees and students at Wayne State University, the Henry Ford Health System, or Detroit Medical Center to encourage them to live in Midtown Detroit through loans and rent allowances. Also, the city’s four professional sports teams (NBA Pistons, NFL Lions, NHL Red Wings, and MLB Tigers) attract many living outside the city limits.

Another recent innovation is the People Mover—an automated, elevated light-rail system that takes millions of riders on a 2.9-mile loop of downtown Detroit. For just 50 cents, one can easily reach the numerous casinos, offices,

restaurants, shops, nightlife, landmarks, and other attractions that are within walking distance of the system’s 13 stations and stops. Another light-rail project with 3.3 miles of track is scheduled to open in 2016 and extend from Detroit’s downtown riverfront to its uptown commercial and residential historic district.

Perhaps, though, the best indicator of Detroit’s change in its textural image is the symbol of its skyline, the Renaissance Center (nicknamed “RenCen”). One of the world’s largest office complexes (5.5 million square feet), it is not a street-friendly center, but rather one that suggests “come in and be safe.” The central tower (the Detroit Marriott) is the tallest all-hotel skyscraper in the Western Hemisphere, with the largest rooftop restaurant as well. This downtown complex of seven interconnected skyscrapers along the Detroit River houses the world headquarters of General Motors. Similarly, the \$180 million renovation of the city’s most famous grand hotel, the historic, 31-story, Neo-Renaissance-style Book–Cadillac Hotel, has resulted in an upscale, mixed-use Westin Hotel, offices, and luxury condominiums. In addition, Compuware’s recently built, \$350 million world headquarters houses 4,000 employees and is located only a few blocks from the hotel.

Yet, despite all these textural changes to Detroit, the city still suffers in its image, economic well-being, and quality of life for its residents. Even so, a group of shop owners, young and old residents, and the billionaire CEO of Quicken Loans headquartered in Detroit firmly believe the city has fallen as far as it can go. A new energy is evident in new ventures, the lowest office vacancy rate in decades, and redevelopment projects (Austen 2014). Will it be enough to turn the city around and re-create a positive texture? Only in the future will we know the answer.

PORTLAND Portland, Oregon—our case study in Chapter 4—has a strong positive textural

CITYSCAPE

The Personality of Cities

Author of the book that inspired the 1959 film *The Young Philadelphians*, Richard Powell gave this tongue-in-cheek, provocative commentary on his thoughts about the personalities (textures) of many U.S. cities, one that amuses some and offends others:

Of the major cities of the United States, only nine have distinct and individual personalities. These are New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, New Orleans, Charleston, and Savannah . . .

[Of these,] only San Francisco has a really nice one. The other eight cities often annoy people who have not had the good fortune of being born there. I hope I am not revealing anything top secret when I say that, to many outsiders, Philadelphia and Boston have highly irritating personalities. To many outsiders, these two cities are rather like a pair of sheltered maiden ladies who have become crotchety and eccentric but who happen to be awfully well-heeled.

New York, of course, has a very strong personality. Naturally, as a good Philadelphian, I dislike the place . . .

Here is a quick review of the personality or lack of personality of other major American cities:

Chicago—Yes, it has personality. It's the neighborhood big shot of the Midwest.

Detroit—No personality. It's just the hot-rod kid of American cities.

Los Angeles—Lots of personality, but of kinds that delight a psychiatrist.

Baltimore—No more personality than one of its own Chincoteague oysters and just about as retiring.

Cleveland, St. Louis, Cincinnati, Kansas City, Columbus, and Indianapolis—These are the great faceless cities of the Midwest, representing nothing more than the lowest common denominator of many rather interesting small towns.

Pittsburgh—It has no personality. It's merely a pro football player who struck it rich.

Washington—It's not really a city at all. It's just a big international motel whose guests only sign in for overnight.

Milwaukee—A freckle-faced kid peering wistfully through a knothole at the Milwaukee Braves.

Seattle, Rochester (New York), Portland (Oregon), Buffalo, and Minneapolis—All you can say about these is that the name is familiar but you can't place the face.

San Francisco—The most delightful personality of any American city: cultured without being snobbish, cosmopolitan without seeming foreign.

New Orleans—Like Paris, it is one of the few cities with sex appeal. It's a sort of Creole Marilyn Monroe.

Newark and Jersey City—These are nothing but a couple of dead-end kids.

Houston, Dallas, and Fort Worth—They merely pretend to have strong personalities, in the manner of cowboys whooping it up on Saturday night.

Charleston and Savannah—These are lovely old ladies, who sometimes get a bit tiresome in talking about the men who courted them when they were young.

Miami—Just a chromium-plated diner at a crossroads.

Atlanta—It has a split personality, because it can't decide whether to play the role of Scarlett O'Hara or that of Perle Mesta.

SOURCE: From Richard Powell, *The Philadelphian*, 50th Anniversary Edition (Medford, NJ: Plexus Publishing, Inc., www.plexuspublishing.com). Copyright © renewed 2006 by Dorothy Powell Quigley. Used by permission. All rights reserved.



Social researchers deflated the myth of urban alienation by documenting the pervasiveness of social networks among virtually all city dwellers, rich and poor alike. One does not need the formal trappings of social organizations to enjoy intimate ties with others. A street corner or public bench can easily serve to create a *gemeinschaft* environment.

image, based on its revitalized downtown, new housing and businesses, and rebuilt waterfront. Visitors take delight in strolling down tree-lined shopping streets, observing the many fountains, and traveling safely on the freely available bicycles. An important element of Portland's texture is its park system, which comprises 16 percent of the city's land. Named one of the best U.S. cities for parks, it has a park within a half-mile for 84 percent of its residents (ParkScore 2014).

STREETSCAPES The "concrete canyons" formed by the tall buildings in midtown Manhattan create a different sense of place in the minds of visitors than, say, the streets of Boston's central business district, where few tall buildings exist, or the streets of San Francisco, with its many steep hills and cable cars. Each of these physical attributes contribute to the cities' textures.

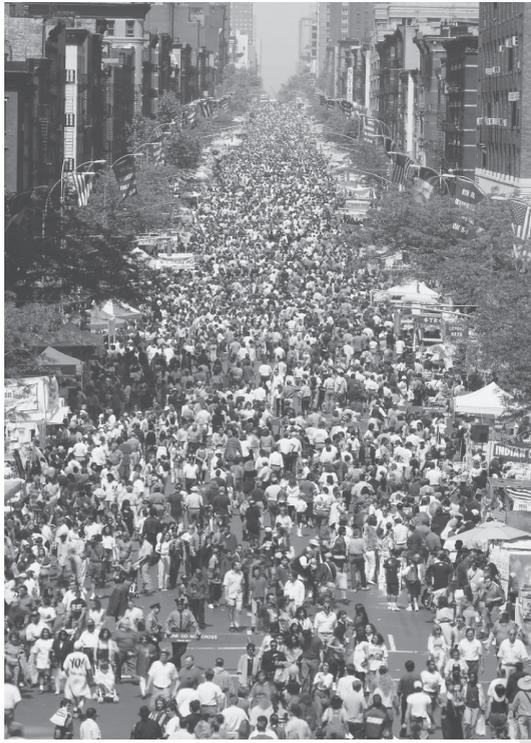
In short, our senses do not deceive us when we get a different feeling from one city than we get from another. Although urban areas share

many common elements, their individuality is quite real.

8.5: Humanizing the City

8.5 Examine how positive personal relationships are the lifeline for most in city life

As we have seen, people have devised ways to humanize life in today's urban environment, just as they did in the towns and villages of the past. Even when struggling with poverty, most people have found ways to maintain positive personal relationships (Curley 2012; Henly et al. 2005; Domínguez and Watkins 2003; Stack 1997; Schein 1995). Although some homeless people live on the margins in almost complete isolation, most of the urban poor generate a social network



Ethnic pride parades and street fairs, such as the International Food Festival on Ninth Avenue in New York City, are popular means by which a city not only celebrates its diversity but also provides a rich variety of activities not to be found in any other setting. Regardless of one's own background, such events are a source of interest and enjoyment.

to help themselves cope in their daily struggles to survive.

Family, friends, and sometimes neighbors provide both emotional support and resources, enabling parents to battle their fears and struggle onward for their children and themselves, despite the many hardships in their daily lives. Defying the odds, these poor people typically respond to their plight by constructing a diffuse, sometimes even non-kin, family structure that allows them to maintain a stable community and meet each other's basic needs.

This network is a means to respond to an immediate crisis—people share clothes, food, and

rent money. The helping families and individuals, realizing that they may need assistance themselves at some future point in time, expect that those they help will assist them in turn. As these mutually understood obligations spread, a cooperative, interdependent network evolves. This expanding network becomes one extended family, a fact suggested by the common practice of referring to neighbors in the community as “all our kin” (Stack 1997).

Sometimes, fathers of children live at home, and sometimes, when they cannot support their families, they do not. Even then, researchers determined, some fathers contribute what they can to the upbringing of their children. When mothers have to work, they turn to their own mothers or to neighbors for help with the children. Thus, an informal day-care system evolves that ensures children always have the attention of at least one caring adult. Through this reciprocal aid system, people give what is needed and expect that their kindness will be repaid later on.

Such a practical arrangement also has an emotional value. The large extended family provides family stability that might otherwise be lacking. Through this system of cooperation and mutual support, despite the conditions that hem them in, the people in study after study had invented ways to meet at least their basic needs and to soften the blow of their poverty. Such positive adaptation is a prime example of how people can make their urban experience, even under the harsh conditions of poverty, more humane.

8.6: Social Movements and City Life

8.6 Review group actions that occur in city life to initiate or resist social change

Social movements often begin as informal, though sometimes organized, group actions

to initiate or resist social change. Although these movements can begin anywhere—in eighteenth-century coffeehouses or modern universities, for example—they find the most fertile ground within cities. Here, the concentration of large numbers of people facilitates social interaction, enabling like-minded people to find one another, organize, and initiate a grassroots campaign. Indeed, whether we speak of the American and French Revolutions, the “Velvet Revolution” throughout Communist Europe in the late 1980s, or of reform social movements such as the suffragette, civil rights, and gay rights actions, the stage is almost always in cities (see Shiffman and Bell 2012).

Consider, for instance, the role played by cities in the 2011 Arab Spring demonstrations. Youthful protestors may have networked through cell phones and the Internet, but it was to the public spaces of major cities that they went to demonstrate. Brought together in those areas, they had face-to-face contact in Tunisia’s wide Avenue Habib Bourguiba or in Cairo’s Tahrir Square, and it stimulated them further and motivated others to join them despite the risks. Eventually, they succeeded in their quests, and the televised coverage of such large crowds defying their government inspired people in other Arab countries (Libya, Syria, and Yemen) to demonstrate in their cities and demand government changes.

Localized social movements typically involve such issues as traffic safety, elimination of crack houses, drug dealers, and prostitution. Here too, urban design and density enhance the potential strength of a public turnout. Aptly illustrating civic engagement, another form of urban social movements, is Seattle, where between 1988 and 2002 about 30,000 residents got involved in the development of 37 neighborhood plans. They participated in self-help projects for the common good and built new parks and playgrounds, renovated community facilities, recorded oral histories, created public art, and cultivated community gardens (Diers 2004:19).

8.7: Suburban Life

8.7 Recount different aspects of suburban life

Much of the discussion in this chapter has concerned those who live in the city or those who temporarily come to the city—whether as commuters, tourists, or patrons at cultural or sports events, or participants at scenes, or in some other capacity. Because the majority of people now live outside the city, however, we should also consider the social context of *suburban* life.

8.7.1: The Stereotypes

When suburban migration became a mass phenomenon in the 1950s, the growing popularity of this lifestyle generated much criticism and caricature. Using the physical homogeneity of the new, Levittown-style subdivisions as their model, sociologists, journalists, and authors—often reflecting their own urban bias—offered negative portraits of the supposed boredom and conformity to be found in the suburbs.

The title of David Riesman’s essay, “*The Suburban Sadness*” (1958), easily conveys his feelings. John Keats (not the English poet) blasted suburban developments in his best-selling book, *The Crack in the Picture Window* (1956), and he named his major characters John and Mary Drone (their neighbors included the Faints and the Amicables), thereby making it absolutely clear in his portrayals that the people of suburbia were as prefabricated as their two-car garages. Numerous other books conveyed similar images. Even William H. Whyte’s influential *The Organization Man* (2002; orig. 1966)—although a carefully documented study of rootless corporate executives living in Park Forest, Illinois—conveyed another image of suburbanites, ones who move every few years in their quest for success. Malvina Reynolds’ 1963 folk song, made popular by Pete Seeger, speaks of suburban homes as “little boxes” that are “ticky tacky” and “all look just the same,” as do their inhabitants.

The media helped spread this stereotypical image. TV shows like *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* (1952–1966) and *The Brady Bunch* (1969–1974) epitomized suburban family life. The film *Edward Scissorhands* (1990) satirized suburban conformity, with its depiction of the men simultaneously leaving for work from their look-alike houses in their similar-looking cars, while the film *Pleasantville* (1998) told of two modern teenagers sucked into their TV set and then forced to live in a 1950s sitcom filled with innocence and naïveté.

These and other books, films, TV shows, and commercials depicted suburbanites as young, with small children who ate crunchy breakfast cereals. They socialized with each other relentlessly (coffee klatches in the morning and barbecues in the evening), and they obsessively copied each other in tastes and styles in a continuing attempt to “keep up with the Joneses.” In these stereotypical depictions, suburbanites were portrayed as bland, shallow, and superficial.

Like all stereotypes, some elements of truth existed in these depictions, but they hardly revealed the suburban reality. First, they ignored the diversity of suburbs—the older ones, the industrial ones, and the working-class ones, a topic we will explore in greater depth in Chapter 10. Second, as Herbert Gans (1968) charged, many critics were more interested in exploiting a negative myth than in actually studying the suburbs (as he did for his 1967 participant–observer research in *The Levittowners*). Third, the social dynamics in a new development, with everyone of a comparable age moving in at the same time, change as the years pass. People age, some move out, and younger others move in (creating age diversity in the neighborhood), and the “frontier spirit” of the original “settlers” in new developments disappears.

Some of those old stereotypes remain, supplemented or even surpassed by new ones. The “soccer mom” transporting her children in her gas-guzzling SUV is a common image of today’s

young suburban mother. The media not only promote such a stereotype but sometimes imprint in the public mind a soap opera quality of lust and frustration in suburban life, such as the 1999 Academy Award–winning film *American Beauty* (1999) and the Emmy Award–winning TV show *Desperate Housewives* (2004–2012). While such plots make for good comedy-drama, most suburban fathers do not desire their teenage daughters’ girlfriends and most suburban wives are not desperate.

8.7.2: The Physical Environment

Just as cities have imagability, so, too, do suburbs. Of course, suburbs may differ from one another in their age of development, typical property values, lot size, and prestige, but they all convey some measure of open space, fresh air, trees, single-family homes, lawns, quiet streets, and neighborhoods. Front lawns are typically for display purposes only; except for mowing the grass, little other activity occurs there. Instead, the backyard is the personal outdoor playground for suburbanites; here, the barbecue and patio, porch deck, swings, gym sets, tree houses, and play area set the stage for leisure activities.

By looking at the physical environment of a suburb, with just a little insight we can actually answer the question, “What time is this place?” (Lynch 1976). Small houses—Cape Cods or bungalows—built on small lots, perhaps 50 by 75 feet, are likely to be from the 1950s. With subsequent gradations in lot size, you typically find newer and newer homes. As people’s tastes changed during the late twentieth century, the size of lots and houses increased and the inclusion of a family room, fireplace, and greater closet space were deemed to be essential.

More recently, the mass construction of **McMansions**—any supersized, large house exceeding 4,000 square feet on too small a lot, leaving little room for yard space—generated

much criticism and local resistance. Considered by critics as “tasteless” and “ostentatious,” McMansions nonetheless have been an increasing part of the suburban scene, either in new developments or as replacements for older houses torn down to make way for them (Miller 2012; Nasar et al. 2007; Gertner 2005).

Older suburbs, with their smaller lot sizes, are more likely to have sidewalks than newer suburbs. In fact, an inverse correlation exists between lot size and pedestrian traffic: The larger the former, the less the latter. Streets may be the “rivers of life” in the city, but in the suburbs, they are simply the means to get anywhere; people-watching holds little attraction. The impracticality of bus service in such low-density suburbs makes the car a necessity for adults and the bike a secondary means of transportation for preteens and teens. Parents spend much time and gas in chauffeuring children to school (if not on a school bus route), to after-school athletic programs, or to all kinds of lessons (dance, music, karate, religious).

Few, if any, landmarks exist in the suburbs, and residents rely heavily on mental route mapping to get from one locale to another. The visitor, on the other hand, requires specific directions and, even then, often gets confused in reaching that destination. Despite the diversity found

within and among suburbs, to the outsider they appear to be indistinctive from one another.

8.7.3: The Social Environment

Gemeinschaft and a comprehensive social network constitute the suburban milieu, not the anonymity and widespread presence of strangers, as in the *gesellschaft* environment of the city. A suburbanite might not know everyone’s name, but a shared sense of community marks most everyday interactions and ease in casual conversations. Moreover, especially in families with school-age children, organized activities (PTA, sports, scouting) abound, with parents expected to be active participants. Newest residents, with or without children, often find that a local “welcome wagon” or Newcomers Club initiates contact to integrate them into the community.

Joining a house of worship and participating in its many activities, getting involved in other local programs, and attending block or house parties and cookouts are all part of the interactive neighboring that is common in suburbia. Birthday parties and sleepovers for preteens and local high school events for teenagers are just a few of the many doings that weave young people into the suburban social fabric.

Summary

Living in cities alters our perceptions. The urban experience causes us to react to the city as a physical and social environment, and such reactions represent the context of the city in our minds.

We make sense of the city by ordering it. We trace the physical landscape, identifying paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks. Such distinctions arise from the physical form of the city itself (streets, after all, are “natural” paths). In part, they also arise from our personal needs and creativity (people invent “back street” paths

to get from one place to another more quickly). Our mental mapping of a city depends upon our growing familiarity of it and how we use it.

A similar ordering occurs as we respond to the city’s social aspects. On the one hand, we cope with the city’s *gesellschaft* characteristics (large numbers and high density) by inventing rules of behavior for riding the subway, standing in line, or walking in the street. We also size up strangers on the basis of their dress, demeanor, and location in the city. Nevertheless, despite many

common strategies, we all react individually to the city. Our social characteristics—whether we are rich or poor, immigrant or native, mainstream or marginal—have much to do with the nature of our urban experience.

On another level, we have developed complex ways of establishing meaningful relationships in the city. Urban networks are a prime example. Personal networks take many forms, including kinship, neighborhood, street-corner friendships, or people frequenting some “scene.” Most of us also identify with our city as a whole, merging traits of our particular city (a key industry, a winning sports team, or an important historical event) with our own personal urban experience. All these mechanisms lend a *gemeinschaft*-like character to the urban experience.

Next is the notion of urban texture or city personality. Recent research shows that much truth lies in people’s comments that—based on its history, architecture, location, and people—each city “feels” a little different.

Numerous investigations also reveal that people, even those facing the most desperate economic conditions, can humanize the city and turn it into a meaningful experience.

Taken together, all these elements of the urban experience provide us with a sense of order and security in this largest of human agglomerations, and they make the city meaningful, usable, and often enjoyable.

For many city dwellers, suburban life conjures up stereotypical images: first, as a bland locale of superficial conformists as portrayed by the media and biased observers and more recently, as a place for “soccer moms” or frustrated, desperate people. To be sure, some homogeneity does exist in the various physical elements of a suburb, even though widespread differences in lifestyle exist. A comprehensive network of interaction and organized activities involves youths and adults in numerous ways.

Conclusion

The city is a big place. It has more people, more buildings, more paths, more nodes, and more possibilities for interactions and relationships than any other form of settlement. As Georg Simmel argued many years ago, cities demand a great deal of mental work from anyone wanting to make sense of them. In the end, such extra mental effort may be the unique element that creates the sophistication attributed to urban

dwellers. Suburbs may vary in their demographics and lifestyles, but in the newer ones the low-density residence patterns deter pedestrian and bus traffic and cause a major dependency on the automobile. For visitors, what appears to be suburban physical homogeneity and lack of landmarks make moving about difficult because they lack the detailed mental mapping of suburbanites.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss how Lynch’s five image elements apply to your community.
2. What unwritten behavior codes as a pedestrian or driver have you encountered in the city?
3. How would you characterize the “personalities” of your nearby cities?

Internet Activities

1. You can learn more about mental mapping and have a virtual reality, flyover experience at <http://www.mentalmaps.info/>. Once there, click on each of the links on top.
2. A vivid example of urban apathy occurred in New York City in April 2010, when a man, stabbed while attempting to help a mugging victim, bled to death on the sidewalk as pedestrians walked past him. Watch the horrific incident and other examples of bystander apathy at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u5_h2v1Mj_M.
3. Richard Florida, an urban studies theorist, has written about the personalities of cities. At http://www.creativeclass.com/_v3/whos_your_city/maps/#Personality_Maps, you will find U.S. locations matched against five personality types. Links on top take you to other maps, including one on singles. The main site (whosyourcity.com) has information on both U.S. and Canadian cities.