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A City "Garden of Earthly Delights"
Eathetic and Interactional Pleasures

INTRODUCTION: PLEASURES IN PUBLIC?

Within Anglo-American thought, there exists a very strong and persistent theme of antiurbanism (to be discussed in Chapter 5) and nested within that theme is a subtheme expressing a particular animus toward public space. Anticipating the argument of the following chapter just a bit, let me suggest that among people who "buy into" the long-standing Western tradition of antiurbanism, the coupling of the words "pleasures" and "public" is oxymoronic—unless, of course, by "pleasures" we refer exclusively to those that are "sinful" and "depraved" or unless, as some do, we simply define all public pleasures as sinful and depraved. Nonetheless, whether because they are oblivious to or because they take added pleasure from the disapproving stares of the critics, many people do, in fact, find the city—especially the city’s public realm—to be a "garden of earthly delights." We have already seen some of this in preceding chapters. When people "use" the legal system of the public realm to initiate sociable interactions, they presumably do so because they find those interactions pleasurable. Similarly, many quasi-primary relationships and all intimate-secondary connections of which we have knowledge would simply not exist if they were experienced as painful or distasteful or disgusting. And, of course, spaces that become places are mostly, though admittedly not exclusively, associated with enjoyment, with satisfaction, with gratification—associated, in short, with pleasure. The goal of this chapter, then, is to build upon what has been said in preceding chapters, but to explore this matter of public realm pleasures more directly and in greater detail than I have done up until now.

Just as relational forms that are actually native to other realms can be found within the public realm, so can forms of pleasure. But our interest here is not in exogenous pleasures; rather we shall concentrate on forms for which the public realm seems to provide an especially favorable environment. Five of these—(1) perceptual immersion, (2) unexpectedness, (3) whimsy, (4) historical layering/physical juxtaposition, and (5)
crowding/stimulus diversity/spectacle—are best understood as forms or sources of aesthetic pleasure. Four others—(1) public solitude, (2) people watching, (3) public sociability, and (4) playfulness/fantasy—are forms or sources of interactional pleasure. After reviewing these forms, I conclude with some remarks about links between such pleasures and the character of the built environment.

 SOURCES OF ESTHETIC PLEASURE

By esthetic pleasure, I am referring to the experience of enjoyment occasioned by certain (mostly) visual qualities of the built environment. It is hardly unexplored terrain. Designers, architects, landscape architects, urban planners, environmental psychologists have all sought to understand why some human-made landscapes seem to attract while others seem to repel. What is it about modernist architecture, for example, that causes so many people to describe it as "bleak," "inhuman," "boring," "unfriendly"? Conversely, as another example, what is it about extant pre-twentieth-century, especially pre-nineteenth-century, urban forms that accounts for so many people describing them as "warm," "inviting," "human-scale," "interesting"? Why are Paris and Rome tourist meccas, while Brasilia (see Illustration 7.6) is not? Why do the hard surfaces of medieval towns and cities strike many of us as "softer" (see Illustration 4.1) than the hard surfaces of contemporary megastuctures (see Illustrations 7.4 and 7.11)? Are these differences in esthetic perception historically and culturally shaped and, if so, what is the character and extent of the shaping? Given the range of scholars asking such questions, we should not be surprised to find that the literature that attempts to answer them is enormous. Some of that literature is highly technical and prescriptive and some of it starts with assumptions about the pan-human applicability of esthetic principles that those of us attuned to cultural and historical variation find troubling, to say the least. Much of it is also deductive in character. Prescribed designs are simply applications of the "universal esthetic principles."

Happily for those discomforted by space- and time-transcendent claims, within the latter genre there is also a considerable body of work that begins not with assumptions about universal esthetics but by observing pieces of the built environment that people seem to enjoy and then attempting to infer esthetic principles from those observations. Given its grounding in specific times and spaces, it is not surprising that this work tends also to be relatively humble about the time-space reach of its inferred principles. Two exemplars of this latter approach are Jane Jacobs and William H. Whyte. Jacobs, as many will recall, suggested in The Death and
space (sections of North America and northern Europe) and limited to a specific set of persons (the ones I saw), so my hypotheses be.

Perceptual Innuendo

By "perceptual innuendo," I refer to the pleasure that arises from glimpsing a small piece of the built environment, a glimpse that suggests that an interesting, exotic, weird, enticing, possibly enchanting social world exists just outside one's range of vision. Illustration 4.2 suggests one kind of architectural feature that may encourage the experience, in this case a tunnel-like walkway leading from the street into a more private world. Illustration 4.3 suggests another: a fence and shrubbery shielding most of a private garden from the eyes of those passing by on the street. The presence of alleyways and of narrow streets leading away from major thoroughfares also seems to encourage the experience, especially if the built environment of the alley or side street is sufficiently complex to be only partially graspable when seen from a distance.

I can imagine that sometimes passersby are dissatisfied with mere glimpses and, if they can, penetrate into the "beckoning space," but I have recorded no such instances in my notes. The people I observed simply

stopped, looked, expressed pleasure over the scene (by facial expression or other quiet signs), alone, in words when with a companion, and then walked on. For some people, at least, perceptual innuendo seems to be the esthetic equivalent of people-watching (see below); one takes pleasure in the very incompleteness of the information one is able to gather exactly because incompleteness gives reign to imagination.

Unexpectedness

There is research suggesting a fairly strong preference for urban places that are "familiar"—if not a familiarity that emerges out of firsthand knowing, at least that which comes from "knowing about" (see, for example, Herzog, Kaplan, and Kaplan 1976). Without in any way challenging the validity of such findings, I want to suggest that, for some individuals at least, the opposite of the quality of familiarity—unexpectedness—seems also to appeal. There is nothing startling in this assertion. As many commentators have pointed out (e.g., Fischer 1976), in discussions of values or preferred qualities it is not always accurate to depict paired opposites as being in opposition. Rather, it may be that both are seen as desirable—community and individuality, for example—and the issue becomes not one or the other, but how much of one, how much of the other, and in
what contexts. In any event, unexpectedness does seem to please. Of course, what is surprising to one person is "old hat" to another, so we must recognize that while all five of the esthetic pleasure sources discussed here exist primarily in the eye of the beholder, this seems especially true of the quality of unexpectedness. And that means that the range of physical objects and arrangements that can seem pleasurably unexpected is enormous. Let me mention just a few that I have encountered: a large and extremely fat cat (named "Fiddly") who resided full time in the "ladies loo" in London's Paddington Station; bush rooftop gardens glimpsed from street level in Manhattan and London; a small mews, just off a busy London traffic artery, which was literally erupting in flowers; prostitutes visible through the "picture" windows of their brothels in Amsterdam (especially astonishing to tourists who just "happened upon" an outer edge of the famous red-light district); and the arrival of a cruise boat at a dock outside a restaurant on the Sacramento River.

Whimsy

My _Webster's Seventh Collegiate Dictionary_ (Morris 1971) defines whimsy as "whim, caprice, a fanciful or fantastic device, object, or creation especially in writing or art." That begins to get at what I mean by the term, but Redfield's _The Synonym Finder_ (1978) comes even closer. It suggests that appropriate synonyms for whimsy include frivolity, eccentricity, kookiness, nuttiness, capriciousness, oddness. Those words seem to capture the idea pretty well. In my observations, sometimes the whimsical object or arrangement was merely fanciful or frivolous, as in Bend, Oregon's wonderful "street furniture," depicted in Illustration 4.4. But sometimes the terms eccentricity, fanciful, kookiness seemed more apropos, or at least that
Another, as when buildings of one era are to be seen cheek-by-jowl with buildings of a very different era and form a kind of panorama of overlapping architectural styles (see Illustration 4.6). One of the most interesting instances of this kind of jumbling that I have ever seen (impossible to convey by photograph) is to be found in the City of London, where a fifteenth- or sixteenth-century (possibly even earlier) church and its burial ground has been almost completely surrounded by twentieth-century office buildings—it can be reached only via a narrow alleyway between two of the modern structures. Jumbling is also to be found whenever physical objects of one sort—those composing the natural environment, say—are juxtaposed with physical objects of another sort—those composing the built environment. I once had the pleasure of touring the waterway system of Stockholm by boat and was struck by the responses of tourists to one "scene" along the way. I assumed at the time (and it still seems reasonable at this writing) that it was the pairing of a very rural-like river, river bank, and bridge with the implicit knowledge that we were, in fact, in the middle of a major and quite high-density city that caused the "ohes" and "ahhs." The "things" jumbled do not have to have the strong physicality suggested by these prior examples, however. In Illustration 4.7, for example, what is juxtaposed is not simply the accoutrements of a London city square with the seemingly out-of-place tombstones. My notes suggest, rather, that what many people found pleasurable in scenes of this sort (and
there are many such scenes in London, was the juxtaposing of the world of living, as it were, with the world of the dead.

Crowding/Stimulus Diversity/Spectacle

Finally, some parts of the built environment seem to evoke pleasure because in their crowding together of people and things and elements and in the diversity of stimuli and the spectacle that are created by this crowding, there is to be found—at least by some unknown number of persons—a kind of visual excitement, a quality of electric invigoration. The range of scenes with this quality is, as you might expect, numerous and the components that go to make up the scenes are, also as you might expect, varied, as Illustrations 4.8 and 4.9 attempt to convey. What I find especially interesting about these scenes is their commonplaces. There is nothing exquisite, nothing grand, nothing monumental about them; they are the products of ordinary people going about their ordinary lives in ordinary settings. Despite their ordinariness, however, my notes record that some persons respond to such scenes with expressions reflecting pleasurable excitement. Of course, the exquisite, the magnificent, the monumental (e.g., Moscow’s ornate subway stations, Paris’s Eiffel Tower, London’s Westminster Abbey, Agra’s Taj Mahal) may also evoke visual excitement. Presumably they actually do so or the “wonders of the world” would not be as widely visited by tourists. But the point here is that pleasure is not the exclusive province of grandeur: it resides as well in humble spaces. It also resides in the commonplaces of everyday interaction. And those commonplaces are our next topic.
Sources of Interactional Pleasures

SOCRES OF INTERACTIONAL PLEASURES

Some of the pleasures of the public realm, as we have just seen, are aesthetic. They derive from a primarily visual apprehension of both the built environment and those who are populating it. These latter also provide another kind of pleasure that derives from human interaction. We will here consider four forms or sources of interactional pleasures: public solitude, people-watching, public sociability, and the clustering of playfulness/triviality/fantasy.

Public Solitude

Writing of the Los Angeles freeway system, David Brodsky points to an interesting feature of the experience of driving:

While it may appear far-fetched to compare a peak-hour commute with a stroll down a country road, the freeway has a certain quality that makes driving it the nearest equivalent to such an experience. The average Angeleno is likely to have on a typical day. For him, rather than in Griffith Park or along the beach, one receives a daily guarantee of privacy. Safe from all direct communication with other individuals, on the freeway one is alone in the world. You can smoke, manipulate the radio dial at will, sing off key, belch, fart or pick your nose. A car on the freeway is more private than one's home. (Brodsky 1981:42-43)

Automobiles most certainly provide cocoons of privacy—private realms bubbles with a hard shell—but it is not quite true, I think, to suggest that "a car on the freeway [or any high-speed street] is more private than one's home." As we saw in Chapter 2, even solitary drivers are interacting with other drivers—total strangers to them—to create cooperative motility. It is true, however, that it is quite possible to find solitude in public. More importantly, it is also true that it is not necessary to be encased in a steel and glass container in order to do so. As we also saw in Chapter 2, one of the things strangers produce in their interactions with one another is privacy. Give off the right "signals" and you can come close to guaranteeing that, however public the setting, however dense the body of surrounding bodies, you can be "alone." What is relevant to our purposes here is the fact that some people appear to take pleasure in this.

I do not know of any study that provides definitive data on people's reasons for choosing to be alone in public but I do know that many observers judge such activity to be "pathetic." A judgment of this sort bears a remarkable similarity to Gregory Stone's assumption that his "per-

socializing consumer" wouldn't be so if she had any "real" social life (see Chapter 3) and to the views of the urban citizen Jane Jacobs describes, who assume people are "on the street" only because they don't have "decent homes" to go to (see Chapter 5). But if we grant that there are real pleasures to be had in creating intimate-secondary relationships out of routinized ones and that there are aesthetic pleasures available on the street that are not to be found at home, then it seems reasonable to allow for the possibility that people seek public solitude because for one or another of a variety of reasons they find it enjoyable.

The pleasure may reside in the comfort of being surrounded by the hum of conversation. This is certainly one of the reasons I like to be alone in public and it might very well be the reason some people go to such highly sociable public settings as cafes and bars but remain aloof from the spoken interaction. For example, some years ago two of my undergraduate students did an observational study of a local twenty-four-hour restaurant. They chose this locale for their (course-required) research because they were already in the habit of frequenting it in the late evening (after 10:00 p.m.) to "study." In fact, the place was quite a hangout for students who came there most every night to drink coffee, "study," and socialize. The scene they depicted in the report of their research was a lively one—much calling back and forth between booths, much banter between student-customers and waitresses, much stopping at tables for chats. But there was one behavior pattern in the setting that they found to be anomalous: lone individuals who come to the restaurant every evening, who sat by themselves, and who ignored or turned away all interactional overtures. "Why," they inquired rhetorically, "did such people bother to come in?" After all, they suggested, "If they wanted to be alone, they could simply stay home." Unfortunately, my students did not take this opportunity to ask, but it is not unreasonable to speculate that in this instance, these individuals "bothered" because when one is home alone one cannot be awash in waves of human voices.

Pleasure may also be derived from a sense of oneness with the other inhabitants of a setting. The "joy" that is to be found in some collective behavior episodes or crowd experiences (Lofland 1982) seems linked to such a sense and it was clearly a motivation for customers of a Tel Aviv cafe studied by Rina Shapira and David Navon:

A special group atmosphere pervades the cafe on Israeli Memorial Day. The particular significance of this day stems from the tragic suffering that has fallen upon many families in Israel since the Jewish people renewed its settlement in the area and began its struggle for independence. On Memorial Day streets are sounded for the public to rise in silent tribute to the fallen.
There are customers who come to Aaracoome especially to be there when the siren sounds. As one of them explained:

That’s great, I managed to get here right on time, before the siren is sounded. I come here every year. Here I have a feeling of togetherness. At home I am alone, and the same happens in the street. It’s very important for me to be with other people and to stand with them [when the siren is sounded]. It gives me a feeling of being part of the entire country (Shpira and Navon 1991:13).

A third reason for finding pleasure in public solitude is that when one is alone, one can concentrate all one’s attention on another source of pleasure: people-watching (or listening). It is, for example, much easier to engage in undistractive eavesdropping (by pretending to be reading a newspaper or book) if there is no companion to provide distracting conversation, as is suggested by one of Thaddeus Muller’s Amsterdam informants:

I like to listen to arguments and predict the way they react. I can be totally involved. I try to move as close as possible to hear everything. Sometimes a sentence will stick with me for a long time. I heard a young man say to his girlfriend: “I do my best, but I can only act the way I feel, follow my instincts.” And I thought that makes some sense. (1992:6)

Let us look at this form of “voyeurism” in more detail.

People-Watching

Being alone may facilitate more concentrated people-watching, but one does not have to be alone to enjoy it. For example, in her study of the Lovejoy and Forecourt fountains in Portland, Oregon, Ruth Love found that 54 percent of those who came to the fountains alone and 56 percent who came with others reported “people-watching” as a major activity (1973:191). Similarly, Dutch sociologist Jan Oosterman reports:

Apart from drinking, relaxing and enjoying the sunshine, people in sidewalk-cafés [in Utrecht] are involved in a lot of activities that have to do with the public character of the setting. The first and by far most important favorite activity of people in the sidewalk-cafés is to watch people go by, to be entertained by street life and to inhale the atmosphere of the city. The chairs are always placed toward the street, like the chairs in a theatre are placed toward the stage. Some respondents in my research themselves even compared the street with a theatre. Most users of the cafés are accompanied by a friend and practically all of them like to discuss the appearances of other people who pass by. Generally speaking, one doesn’t want to get involved

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with anybody passing by. It’s mainly the spectacle in front of the eye that people come for. (Oosterman 1992:11, emphasis in the original; see also 1993)

The theater metaphor, as we saw in Chapter 2’s discussion of the principle of “audience role prominence,” is widely used. And it is an apt metaphor. In fact, some locals seem designed to create “audience” and “performers” (see Campbell 1980; Gehr [1980] 1987; Leonard and Leonard 1984, 1987, 1989). The long balcony outside London’s National Portrait Gallery, for example, looks down on Trafalgar Square, and in the summer the balcony is thronged with observers keeping a close eye on the horses of tourists who, gathered together on the “stage” below, are feeding the square’s ever-present pigeons.

Some of what seems to be involved in the pleasure of people-watching was suggested above in my discussion of perceptual immundo and again in the words of Thaddeus Muller’s informant. We overhear or oversee just enough to catch a glimpse of enticing real-life dramas; the filling out of the drama is a work of the imagination. Recently a companion and I shared an evening restaurant meal sitting by a window that looked out directly on the sidewalk and street. During our meal, we watched two young people, a male and a female, repeatedly exit and enter a parked car, apparently search portions of the car’s interior and trunk, and stand on the sidewalk looking “odd.” We amused ourselves that evening by weaving an elaborate story involving drug sales and other nefarious activities that “explained” to our happy satisfaction all the behaviors we had witnessed. Our conversation even attracted diners at another table, who added their own embellishment to the drama. Of course, we were probably 100 percent wrong in our interpretations, but that too is part of the pleasure. These loops of imagination engendered by people-watching seem to be quite common. One of the difficulties I have when I send my students out to observe in public is that many of them are not content to record what they see. They tend also to record what they “see” with the mind’s eye.

Given the widely shared principle of “audience role prominence” and given the ubiquity of people-watching as an activity, it is hardly surprising that for some people, the pleasure of seeing is intensified by the pleasure of being seen. Thus, the social occasion known as the promenade, Penelope Corfield describes its operation in eighteenth-century England:

Walking… was not only a utilitarian necessity but an agreeable form of informal entertainment in its own right. The urban promenade was the occasion for the citizens to sally forth to view the sights and each other; "to see and be seen," in the famous phrase. It was an integral part of city social life. Indeed, it remains so in many urban cultures today. [In eighteenth-century [English] towns… the main occasions for social walking were on Sun-
People-watching—seeing and being seen—may be a ubiquitous activity but it is not, as my somewhat ironic use of the term voyeurism was intended to convey, universally approved. The Parian flaneur as a social type, for example, that loitner, observer, and people-watcher par excellence, generated criticism in the nineteenth century and continues to do so today. And he is the object of criticism exactly because he is the detached observer, the rootless outsider who watches the scene but does not participate, the voyeur window-dropping on other people’s lives (Wilson 1991). Or, as another example, when the people-watching is “girl-watching, it can be and increasingly seems to be interpreted as harassment. William H. Whyte’s depiction of a common New York street scene involving female office workers and men for whom watching them is their “main luncheon recreation” (1979:28) is, for many feminists, simply one more piece of evidence of women’s ill-treatment in public space (e.g., Guthrie 1995). Fortunately or unfortunately, depending upon one’s social location and consequent point of view, criticisms do not seem to have much effect. As I suggested at the outset, not only does the reproachful stare of the critic not dissuade public realm pleasure-seekers, it may even add to their enjoyment.

Public Sociability

Public solitude is, by definition, a lone pleasure. People-watching may be. But public sociability—by definition—involves spoken interaction between and among persons in dyads, triads, and even larger groupings. It is one of the pleasures of the public realm that has been written about extensively. In fact, much of the literature cited in Chapter 3 dealing with quasi-primary and intimate-secondary relationships is about the topic of public sociability. Most studies of drinking establishments, for example, whether written from a disapproving, approving, or dispassionate point of view, spend a great deal of time documenting the sociability that permeates these locales. One such study, Louis Erenberg’s Steps Out (1981), provides a particularly rich portrait of New York City’s extensive nightlife scene between the years 1890 and 1930. In this scene, the cabaret, in particular, seemed to encourage interaction among strangers to a degree that middle-class Americans found both new and exciting:

Dining, drinking, talking, and fliting at their seats with members of their own party or with those at other tables, patrons were relaxed and could see

good performance in a more informal way. . . . The dance floor, the absence of large proscenium arch stages, and the closeness of the audience seated at tables made the room a scene of expressive activity. The entire restaurant became the setting for performance, and customers themselves could not escape becoming involved in the action and spontaneity of the moment. . . . Under these conditions, the definition of the cabaret slowly and subtly expanded from a group of entertainers who worked close to an audience to being a distinctive environment different from a theatrical one. The setting became, as one columnist wrote of a particular establishment, “a friendly environment” where “there isn’t a sense of feeling dull or gauche” (ibid:124).

Similarly, Ray Oldenburg has argued that one of the major pleasures—perhaps the major pleasure—of the “third place” is verbal interaction. Although, as I have noted earlier, he tends to focus on parochial realm locations like neighborhood taverns and small-town coffee shops, Oldenburg’s analysis of that pleasure is equally applicable to locales:

The cardinal and sustaining activity of third places everywhere is conversation. Nothing more clearly indicates a third place than that the talk there is good; that it is lively, scintillating, colorful, and engaging. The joys of association in third places may initially be marked by smiling and twinkle-covered eyes, by hand-shaking and back-slapping, but they proceed and are maintained in pleasurable and entertaining conversation. A comparison of cultural readiness reveals that the popularity of conversation in a society is closely related to the popularity of third places. . . . The rate of pub visitation in England or cafe visitation in France is high and corresponds to an obvious readiness for sociable conversation. American tourists (economic, literal) Scitozovskys, “are usually struck and often most betray the frivous attitude toward life of just about all foreigners, manifest by the tremendous amount of idle talk they engage in, on pleasantries and park benches, in cafes, sandwich shops, lobbies, doorways, and wherever people congregate.” And, in the pubs and cafes, Scitozovskys goes on to report, “socializing rather than drinking is clearly most people’s main occupation.” (Oldenburg 1989:26-27)

Whether Oldenburg and Scitozovskys are correct about cultural variation in public sociability—or at least about the way in which they have phrased their assertions—is certainly subject to debate. But that many people do, in fact, find it pleasurable seems beyond question.

Playfulness/Froth/Fantasy

I suggested above that people-watching, what many would see as that most innocent of human pleasures, is not without its critics. To make the
same statement about the triple package of playfulness/frivolity/fantasy is to be guilty of a massive understatement. As we will see in Chapter 5, the play, frivolity, the fantasy available to inhabitants of the public realm strike many moralists as downright sacrilegious. If I understand these moralists correctly, it strikes them in this way, at least in part, because in their view such pleasures involve a release from "real" identities and responsibilities—from the serious stuff of everyday social life. Now the human tendency to program in such release through carnivals, festivals, fairs, spectacles, spectator-oriented sporting events, and so forth has been extensively studied by anthropologists, social historians, folklorists, and others. Certainly, these out-of-the-ordinary events constitute a segment of the playfulness/frivolity/fantasy pleasures to be found in the public realm. And most certainly, critics have had much to say about the decade they encourage. But what is of special interest to us here is not the out-of-the-ordinary, but the commonplace. Not the wondrous but infrequent pleasures, but the wondrous and constant ones.

We must grant the critics their due. Even commonplace pleasures—perhaps especially commonplace pleasures—do involve release from everyday selves and everyday duties. For example, given the stranger-filled character of the public realm, it is quite possible to "play" with who one is; quite possible to be involved in relationships in which one or both (or more) parties are not "really" what they seem. For example:

To play the game (of pretending), one may or may not plan to do so ahead of time... Often, the opportunity to play "just happens" but even when it does, the individual is under no particular obligation to take advantage of it. And since the game is always played with strangers and always in public space, one can often, if things go poorly, simply leave the scene. The essence of the game is a kind of "Walter Mitty" wish-fulfillment: The individual expresses in public for the ratification of surrounding strangers an identity or an aspect of identity that he or she feels cannot be expressed among personally known others. Thus, for example, the individual may "pretend" to belong to some admired occupational group...

In the friendly darkness of the anonymous bar, how safely does the teaching assistant become a professor; the clerk an ex-cop; the lowly private out of uniform a man of substance. One informant told me that during his stint as an enlisted man in the air force, he would wait in the bar until the speaker system announced that the "doctor's" table was ready and then walk into the dining room, the oppression of his "actual" status momentarily lifted. Sometimes the game is played in a more subtle, a more inward manner. I refer here to the expression of identity that accompanies being present in the appropriate location and/or dressing for the part. Here the individual makes no verbal claim to the identity in question... The shy young man, ill at ease and unsuccessful with women, can, at least for a moment, "be" the swinger of his secret dreams by the simple expedient of standing about in a body bar "looking cool." The adolescent female, in the 1960s, don her "hippie" outfit on a Saturday afternoon and parade the streets of San Francisco's Haight Ashbury, with the certain knowledge that the gawking tourists would take her to be one of the area's exotic inhabitants. (Lofland 1973:195; see also Probyn 1976)

Beyond the possibility and the reality that the public realm will lure otherwise sober citizens into being someone they are not, critics criticize it for tempting otherwise responsible citizens into activities that distract them from doing things they ought to be doing. And again, the critics are right. Exactly because it is full of diverse people doing diverse things, the public realm can and does offer the pleasure of playing when one "ought" to be working, of being frivolous when one "ought" to be serious, of engaging in fantasy and daydreams when the workaday world beckons. No wonder adults, as we shall see in Chapter 5, are so anxious to keep children "off the streets." Writing of the play of poor children in the United States at the turn of the century, David Nasaw does not romanticize their playgrounds—but he also appreciates the lure of those playgrounds:

The streets... were the true homes of small Indians, Irish, and Jews. The children shared these "homes" with others. The street was their playground, but it was also a marketplace, meeting ground, social club, place of assignation, political forum, sports arena, parade grounds, open-air tavern, coffee-house and thoroughfare. The life on the street was the life of the city... The streets provided constant fun, games, and companions. There was always something to do or watch. Just when it was getting a bit dull, a horse might drop dead in the gutter; fire engines and ambulances appear from nowhere, boxers and detectives fight the right-of-way, a stray cat creeps out of the back of the basement to be tortured. (Nasaw 1984:20; see also Darger and Zeitlin 1990; Lynch 1977)

Adults, of course, may and do enjoy some of the same playful and frivolous and fantasy-inducing scenes and activities as small children. They may also, as may older children, find a physiologically more "mature" pleasure there as well. In 1963, Kevin Lynch characterized the urban environment as having a "sensuous" impact (p. 193) but he did not go on to spell out the implications of that characterization. Of course, since then, scholars (as well as fiction writers) have documented the reality of physical sexual activity in public (e.g., Davis 1983; Delph 1978; Humphreys 1970) but this particular pleasure, while undoubtedly occurring more frequently than most of us realize, also probably occurs far less frequently that fiction writers might lead us to believe. More ubiquitous, as the Dar-
ich sociologist Henriking Bech has persuasively argued—and he is, to my knowledge, one of the first social scientists to make this specific argument—are the indirect pleasures of sexual playfulness and sexual fantasy.

It is misleading to place too much emphasis on relations of an immediately tactile character (i.e., involving direct physical activity). Although such things do happen once in a while, and particularly in some spaces of the city, I believe that they should be seen in relation to a more basic and universal form of urban tactile sexuality. This is characterized by the simultaneous presence of closeness and distance. (The importance of the visual in the sexuality of the city is connected with the fact that in the social world of strangers people are only surfaces to one another, and that therefore the surface becomes an object to be evaluated and judged according to aesthetic criteria. Now, the gaze which sees the surfaces of others, and which is active in the design of one’s own, sees and evaluates on sexual criteria as well. Thus, surfaces are stylized with a view of their potential signification of sexuality; and gazes are attracted to them for that very reason. (1994:9–10; see also Muller 1992).

We know from social histories that this sort of sexual enjoyment played an important part in the attractiveness of such locales as pleasure gardens (e.g., Conan and Margheri 1980). We also know that it has evolved and continues to evolve a kind of checked fury among moralists of various stripes—but that is another story. And that is the story we go to next, a story about all the various reasons for hating and disclaiming cities and, most especially, for hating and disclaiming their public realms. But before we shift to a detailed discussion of the opposites of the public realm, and as a partial transition to that shift, we should note the link between pleasures of the public realm and characteristics of public space.

DESIGNING FOR PLEASURE

Some locales, as I have already noted, seem to have been designed specifically for people-watching, though we know from the historical record that their creators did not, in fact, have such a use in mind. The locale formed by the balcony of London’s National Portrait Gallery and Trafalgar Square is a case in point. Similarly, a pleasure like public sociability can be encouraged by quite intentional design, as Lewis Eer sport (1981) detailing the architecture of the “cabaret” (discussed again in Chapter 7) makes clear. Conversely, environments that will ensure aesthetic pleasures may not be all that easy to fabricate. Granted that the pleasure of crowding, stimulus diversity, and spectacle is probably the exception

h ere—witness any Nevada gambling casino or recently constructed megamall—other aesthetic pleasures seem beyond the abilities of designers-developers. Few historical laying is within their ken, of course, but incorporating the “real” thing into a large-scale project is not. What is easy to create, as a stroll through any city in the world will quickly inform you, are environments that make aesthetic pleasures impossible. What such a stroll will also inform you is that many environments appear (whatever the actual intention of their creators) to have been built to discourage pleasures of an interactive sort as well.

The question, then, is why. Granted that some pleasures may be beyond the direct control of the people who create the built environment, why do so many pieces of that environment exclude even those aesthetic pleasures that can be designed for? Why are so many pieces of public space empty of the people or empty of the diversity of people that give rise to interactive pleasures? And even if developers cannot ensure that we will, for example, encounter the unexpected, why do so many places seem to be designed to ensure that the unexpected cannot intrude even unexpectedly? One answer, I believe—as I have suggested repeatedly in all that I have already said—is lies in a widespread animus toward the public realm and, by implication, toward any pleasures it might induce. It is to the subject of that animus that we now turn.

NOTES

1. As will become apparent in the next chapter, I selected this phrase for its irony.

2. It is important to emphasize at this early juncture that historical laying or physical juxtaposition, for example, may create scenes that are pleasurable not simply because of those characteristics but also or alternatively because they are "unexpected" or "whimsical." Similarly, one person's scene of perceptual issuance may be another's scene of whimsy and a third's scene of both. That is, some scenes may cause pleasure to pile upon pleasure or may be viewed as pleasurable by differing people for very different reasons.

3. It seems highly likely that olfactory and auditory qualities of a given setting may also provide the occasion for esthetic pleasure, but I have no observational data dealing with this possibility. But see Sommer 1973.