

... Three, Two, One, Contact: Times Square Red

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As long as there is something like experience, it is not entirely mine.

—AVITAL RONELL, *Finitude's Score*

\$0. The primary thesis underlying my several arguments here is that, given the mode of capitalism under which we live, life is at its most rewarding, productive, and pleasant when large numbers of people understand, appreciate, and seek out interclass contact and communication conducted in a mode of good will.

My secondary thesis is, however, that the class war raging constantly and often silently in the comparatively stabilized societies of the developed world, though it is at times as hard to detect as Freud's unconscious or the structure of dis-

course, perpetually works for the erosion of the social practices through which interclass communication takes place and of the institutions holding those practices stable, so that new institutions must always be conceived and set in place to take over the jobs of those that are battered again and again till they are destroyed.

My tertiary thesis, to which now and again we shall return, is that, while the establishment and utilization of those institutions always involve specific social practices, the

§A. Among other things, this essay is an attempt to explain what is going on in the following anecdote: A group of friends entered a Soho gallery opening—some young painters and their acquaintances. At the group's center was a woman painter—we'll call her Jane Pharnim—who had a show up currently at a nearby gallery we'll call Quincunx.

As Jane and the group stood around talking and sipping from

plastic glasses of white wine, a man joined them, saying to Jane, "You're Jane Pharrim, aren't you? I saw your show just yesterday over at the Quincunx. I was very impressed. Probably, I shouldn't tell you this, but I'm going to be reviewing it for *Color and Form*. I don't think it'll be a problem though, since I was planning to give it a pretty good review anyway. But it's nice to get a chance to meet you and say hello. The only picture that somewhat puzzled me was that big gray and yellow one in the back. It seemed so different from all the others."

"It is, in many ways," replied Pharrim. "But in others—do you remember the little red one right beside the door . . . ?"

"One of my favorites—yes."

"Well, the big gray and yellow one has the identical structure, turned upside down and rotated left/right, as the little red one. I wanted to see if I could make it work like that, larger and with a cooler palette. That's why it's there with the others—even though, yeah, I know it doesn't *really* look like it belongs."

"Now, that's interesting. No, I didn't see that. I'll have to rethink that one before I hand in the review."

effects of my primary and secondary theses are regularly perceived at the level of discourse. Therefore, it is only by a constant renovation of the concept of discourse that society can maintain the most conscientious and informed field for both the establishment of such institutions and practices and, by extension, the necessary critique of those institutions and practices—a critique necessary if new institutions of any efficacy are to develop. At this level, in its largely stabilizing/destabilizing role, superstructure (and superstructure at its most oppositional) *can* impinge on infrastructure.

\$1.1. We are all aware that landlords and tenants exist in a fundamentally antagonistic relationship. Generally speaking, throughout most of what we might call the middle classes of our society, landlords tend to be somewhat better off financially than their tenants. Certainly the class war is as strong there as between any groups save, perhaps, workers and employers.

With that in mind, here is a tale:

A black woman born in Nottaway, Virginia, my maternal grandmother came from Petersburg to New York City at age eighteen in 1898 and moved to Harlem in 1902, when it was still a German neighborhood. With my grandfather, an elevator operator in a down-

The conversation drifted on. Soon—and separately—both the reviewer and Pharrim left.

But the next morning one of the painters who had been part of the group (and who, unlike Pharrim, hadn't yet had a gallery show but would very much have liked one) explained to a friend, "You know, today in the art world it's all who you know, who you meet, who you network with. Last night, I was at an opening with Jane, when this art reviewer came over to talk to her. She practically dictated her review to him, word for word . . ."

Now, despite the young man's somewhat over-glib analysis, certain things *did* go on in the encounter at the art opening and certain things *did not*.

We can clarify some points right away: The encounter did not bring about the writing of the review. (The reviewer had been assigned the review before he met Pharrim.) The encounter did not change a bad review into a good one. (If the reviewer had already decided to write a bad one, it's unlikely he would have introduced himself—or at least would have avoided letting Pharrim know who he was.) Most obviously, the encounter did not acquire for Pharrim her show at the Quincunx.

town office building and later a Grand Central Terminal redcap, she took rooms in the first house in Harlem opened to blacks, on 132nd Street between Seventh and Lenox. Owned by a black man married to a white woman, the house rented to men and women working as servants in the neighborhood. My grandmother told of returning to her rooms after work, while the Germans sitting in front of their houses along Seventh Avenue played zithers through the evening.

A number of times in the sixties and seventies, Grandma spoke of the social practice in the twenties, thirties, and, in a few places, into the forties, of the landlord's annual or sometimes semiannual visit to her apartment. My sense is that these visits were notably different from the monthly visits to the landlord to pay the rent—in the days before universal banking.

Expected by both tenants and landlords, the visits allowed tenants to point out directly to the building's owner any breakages or repairs that were needed. The owner got a chance to see how the tenant was treating his or her property. By opening the door for less formal ones, these scheduled visits established an arena for social interchange. From them, landlords gained a sense of the tenants as individuals and tenants took a sense of the landlord as a person.

Taken out of context, however, what the young male artist, who hustls after just such a show himself ("... today in the art world it's all who you know, who you meet, who you network with..."), could easily be taken to mean is that such encounters might well lead to such shows, such reviews.

Gallery openings and art gatherings are typical fields for networking. The exchange was typical of those that easily and often occur in networking venues. What *did* happen at the gallery opening was an exchange of specialized information about one somewhat problematic canvas in Phamim's show—information that may or may not find its way into an already favorable review; and, yes, it is information that might not have been available to the reviewer had there been no networking venue to bring him, even so briefly, together with the artist.

By the end of this essay, I hope we shall have an even clearer idea not only of what went on and what did not go on in this networking situation, but also some understanding of what the young man who witnessed the encounter *thought* he was seeing and what he felt his stake was in drawing the conclusion that he did about the necessity of networking.

Yes, there might be a spate of cleaning in the apartment in the days before the landlord came. Certainly there might be a rush of painters and plumbers in that same month—so that during the visit itself everyone might come off at his or her best. But the visits meant that in those situations in which there were problems on either side that could be resolved only by the greater forces of the class war itself (an eviction, a suit against a landlord for a major dereliction of necessary repairs), there was nevertheless a social field in which either side could ask for leniency or at least understanding from the other; and often it could be granted. Similarly, either side could personally entreat the other to straighten up and fly right, and many times this was enough to avert any litigious confrontation.

In no way did the social practice obviate the socioeconomic antagonism between the classes. But it tended to stabilize relationships at the personal level and restrict conflict to the economic level itself—keeping it from spilling over into other, personal situations. What eroded this practice of landlord visits was, first, the economic forces of the Depression. Pressures on tenants (from the exhaustion of having two or three jobs to the anomie of having no job at all) became such that tenants began

housing extra materials or extra people in their apartment to the point that a good day's cleaning could not cover over the evidence. Models for bourgeois living standards became less available, as did the time and the energy to implement them. Landlords found themselves unable to afford keeping the facilities in the first-class condition tenants expected.

Tenants began to see the visits as prying. Landlords began to see the visits as a formal responsibility empty of content and—finally—an unnecessary nuisance, in which they had to listen to demands they could not afford to meet. Repair work was now delegated to a superintendent whose job was to carry out those repairs as inexpensively as possible. While more stringent rules were instituted to restrict property-damaging wear and tear, in practice tenants were now allowed greater leeway in what they might do to the house. Older tenants saw the failure of the landlord to visit as a dereliction of responsibility. But younger tenants cited the "privilege" of better-off tenants in more lavish properties, often paying far higher rents, to forgo such visits. Why shouldn't the privilege of the better-off be a right—the right of privacy—for all?

\$1.2. For the last twenty-one years, I have lived in a five-floor walk-up, rent-stabilized apartment at the corner of Amsterdam and Eighty-second Street. In that time, the owner of the building has *never* been through my apartment door. Once, in

1992, he shouted threats of legal action against me from the landing below—threats that came to nothing when, in retaliation, I hired a lawyer. This past February 1997, when what became a four-alarm fire broke out in the building at five in the morning, he visited his property for a brief half hour at seven-thirty A.M. Standing out on the street among the fire engines, he declared how grateful he was that no

\$8. During tight times the landlord's visit facilitated a comparatively humane prioritizing of repairs—allowing tenant complaints to be looked at somewhat more holistically in terms of how much discomfort each involved. A loose window sash in the bathroom of a twenty-year-old student, spending weekends with his family and who

is willing to wait till March to have it fixed is not necessarily the same complaint as a loose window sash of the bathroom of an seventy-year-old couple, more sensitive to cold and temperature change. A family with two working adult incomes may be amenable to the suggestion, "Have the window repaired at your own expense, give me the receipt, and I'll subtract half the cost of the repairs from this coming December's rent and the other half from January's, giving you a monetary break for the holidays."

By exploiting such prioritizing strategies the landlord could sometimes stabilize and smooth out his or her cash flow problems and the seasonal crunches that invariably fell to such a business.

Of course, such prioritizing could be abused—repairs might be put off indefinitely. It is as frustrating for tenants to have to ask for the same repair month after month as it is for landlords month after month to have to nag their tenants for the rent. In cases of landlord abuse, however, tenants sought refuge in a system in which a loose sash was a loose sash, no matter who had it. They wanted, as well, a time limit for when it would be fixed. Nevertheless, when a land-

one had been hurt; then—in his shako and (the only man in three decades I've ever seen wear one) fur-collared overcoat—he left. But those are the only two times I have seen him in person—or has he, I assume, seen me.

On the one hand, when repairs have been needed, and even more so after that brief shouting match in the hall, occasionally I've thought that the more personal relations my grandmother maintained with her landlord during the early decades of this century might well have made things go more easily. Were my landlord someone with whom, twice a year, I sat over a cup of coffee in my kitchen, I might have been able to negotiate speedier and better-quality repairs—repairs for which, often, I would have been willing to share the financial weight, repairs that would have benefited the property itself. And certainly we both might have bypassed the emotional strain of the aforementioned shouting match.

On the other hand, I try to imagine my landlord's response if he had visited during the first ten months after I had to collapse my Amherst apartment with my New York digs (when I was under precisely the same sort of socioeconomic pressures that had eroded away the practice of visits in the first place) and my apartment's back three rooms looked more like

lord used prioritizing intelligently and responsibly, it could work as a social gift to everyone.

In the situation where a loose sash is a loose sash, to be fixed within a given time, general repair quality tends to be lower, with poorer-grade materials. Though the tenants benefit as a group, more inconvenience. ("The repairman is coming at 10:00 A.M. on Tuesday. You'll just have to take a day off from work.")

The visit from the landlord recalls another sort of visit, the charity visit, which goes back at least (in England) to the 1840s, and continues to this day with the social worker's visit.

The particular aspect of the visits I am interested in, however, is when the visitor him- or herself has the money and the authority to instigate repairs and effect material changes. When a visitor functions precisely as a mediator between the tenant and whoever authorizes (and pays for) the changes, we have a situation that I will designate as the linear chain model. Such chains function largely to filter out the specific, social, idiosyncratic information that made prioritizing possible. Such chains—even of two or three people—become a major

an overfull Jersey warehouse space than a home with people living in it. What if he had come during the previous five years, when regularly I let friends use the place, two and three times a month, as an Upper West Side party space? (More than half a dozen years after the fact, I still meet people who tell me they have been to "great parties" at "my" house, when I wasn't in attendance.) During the same period, I let a succession of friends and acquaintances stay there during the 130-odd days a year I was in Amherst, teaching at the University of Massachusetts. Landlord visits would have curtailed such practices severely, though in neither case, on my side nor on his, was the letter of the law violated.

§1.3. At the rhetorical level, the trace of the social practice my decade-and-a-half dead grandmother spoke about still lingers in the language, as tenants on the Upper West Side speak about our landlords' "seeing to" certain repairs, even though the landlord will not and does not intend to set eyes on anything within the front door of the building—just as the term "landlord" is itself a rhetorical holdover from a time and set of social practices when the important things the owner was "lord" over were, indeed, "land" and the

mechanism to ensure not only that a loose sash is a loose sash, but that a broken pane, a loose sash, and a window frame pried out and shattered by an organized gang of apartment thieves are, all of them, just a "window repair."

transformation from a homosexual discourse to a gay discourse may be signaled by the appearance in the 1969 fall issues of the *Village Voice* of the locution "coming out to" one's (straight) friends, coworkers, and family (a verbal act directed toward straights) and its subsequent displacement of the demotic locution "coming out into" (gay) society—a metaphor for one's first major gay sexual act. Between the two locutions lie Stonewall and the post-Stonewall activities of the gay liberation movement. Equally such a sign might be seen to lie at another moment, at another location, in the changeover from "that's such a camp" to "that's camp." The intervening event there is Susan Sontag's 1964 *Partisan Review* essay, "Notes on Camp." I have written of how a shift in postal discourse may be signed by the rhetorical shift between "she would not receive his letters" and "she would not open his letter." What intervened here was the 1840 introduction of the postage stamp, which changed letter writing from an art and entertainment paid for by the receiver to a form of vanity publishing paid for by the sender. (There was no junk mail before 1840.) One might detect a shift in the discourse of literature by the changeover from "George is in literature" (when literature was a profession) to "George's library contains mostly history and literature" (when literature became a class of texts). The explosion of print in the 1880s, occasioned by the typewriter and the linotype, intervened. The shift from landlord visits to superintendents in charge of repairs is signaled by the rhetorical shift between "the landlord saw to the repairs" as a literal statement and "the landlord saw to the repairs" as a metaphor. I say "shifts," but these rhetorical pairings are much better looked at, on the level of dis-

course, as rhetorical collisions. The sign that a discursive collision has occurred is that the former meaning has been forgotten and the careless reader, not alert to the details of the changed social context, reads the older rhetorical figure as if it were the newer.

As are the space of the unconscious and the space of discourse, the space where the class war occurs as such is, in its pure form, imaginary—imaginary *not* in the Lacanian sense but rather in the mathematical sense. (In the Lacanian sense, those spaces are specifically Symbolic.) Imaginary numbers—those involved with *i*, the square root of minus-one—do not exist. But they have measurable and demonstrable effects on the real (i.e., political) materiality of science and technology. Similarly, the structures, conflicts, and displacements that occur in the unconscious, the class war, and the space of discourse are simply too useful to ignore in explaining what goes on in the world we live in, unto two men yelling in the hall, one a landlord and one a tenant, if not mayhem out on the streets themselves, or the visible changes in a neighborhood, like Times Square or, indeed, the Upper West Side, over a decade or so, and the specificities of rhetorical shift.

(Repeatedly Foucault described discourse, or at least a part of it, as "an" unconscious. In a 1968 interview ["Interview with Michel Foucault" (*Dits et écrits*, 654)] he said, "In a positive manner we can say that structuralism investigates an unconscious. It is the unconscious structure of language, of the literary work, and of knowledge that one is trying at this moment to illuminate." In his 1970 preface to the English edition of *Les Mots et les choses*, he wrote that his work intended to "bring to light a *positive unconscious* of knowledge: a level that eludes the consciousness of the scientist and yet is part of scientific discourse"; italics in original.)

Often, like many contemporary theorists, I have wondered whether the fundamental spaces of all three aren't one, as the death of God, the Author, and Man each has clarified another of the axes describing that space.

§1.5. Starting in 1985 for the first time, in the name of "safe sex," New York City began specifically to criminalize every individual sex act by name, from masturbation to vaginal intercourse, whether performed with a condom or not—a legal situation that has catastrophic ramifications we may not crawl out from under for a long, long time. This is a legal move that arguably puts gay liberation, for example, back to a point notably before Stonewall—and doesn't do much for heterosexual freedom either.

This is a rhetorical change that may well adhere to an extremely important discursive intervention in the legal contouring of social practices whose ramifications, depending on the development and the establishment of new social practices that promote communication between the classes (specifically sexual and sex-related), are hard to foresee in any detail.

§1.6. An important point: I do not think it is in any way nostalgic to say that under such a social practice as my grandmother knew, both landlord and tenant maintained better relations than I do with my landlord today. The practice of landlord visits was a social arena of communication, which, when utilized fully, meant that both landlord and tenant had to expend more time, energy, and money in order to maintain a generally higher standard of living for the tenant and a generally higher level of property upkeep, which restricted the abuse of that property for the landlord. On both tenant and landlord, greater restrictions obtained as to what was expected and what was not. The practice eroded when the money was no longer there, when the time and energy had to be turned, by both, to other things, and when practices formerly unacceptable to both had, now, to be accepted, so that the visits became a futile annoyance to both sides and were dropped.

But the establishment of, say, tenant associations—at which landlords are occasionally invited to speak and meet with their tenants—begins to fill the vacuum in the array of social practices that erosion leaves.

At the same time, they do not fill it in the same way.

The fact that such relations may have been more pleasant does not, however, mean that those relations were somehow more authentic than mine to Mr. Buchbinder. All that relative pleasantness suggests is a confirmation of my primary and secondary theses, which *are* about pleasure, after all—pleasure in its most generalized form (though pleasure no less important or social for that): the pleasant.

§1.7. A recapitulation.

Given the mode of capitalism under which we live, life is at its most rewarding, productive, and pleasant when large numbers of people understand, appreciate, and seek out interclass contact and communication conducted in a mode of good will.

The class war raging constantly and often silently in the comparatively stabilized societies of the developed world perpetually works for the erosion of the social practices through which interclass communication takes place and of the institutions holding those practices stable, so that new institutions must always be conceived and set in place to take over the jobs of those that are battered again and again till they are destroyed.

While the establishment and utilization of those institutions always involve social practices, the effects of my primary and secondary theses are regularly perceived at the level of discourse. Therefore, it is only by a constant renovation of the concept of discourse that society can maintain the most conscientious and informed field for both the establishment of such institutions and practices and, by extension, the necessary critique of those institutions and practices—a critique necessary if new institutions of any efficacy are to be established. At this level, in its largely stabilizing/destabilizing role, superstructure (and superstructure at its most oppositional) *can* impinge on infrastructure.

§1.8. So stated, these points appear harmless enough. Over the last decade and a half, however, a notion of safety has arisen, a notion that runs from safe sex (once

it becomes anything more than making sure your partner uses a condom when you are anally penetrated by males of unknown HIV status, whether you are male or female) to safe neighborhoods, safe cities, and committed (i.e., safe) relationships, a notion that currently functions much the way the notion of "security" and "conformity" did in the fifties. As, in the name of "safety," society dismantles the various institutions that promote interclass communication, attempts to critique the way such institutions functioned in the past to promote their happier sides are often seen as, at best, nostalgia for an outmoded past and, at worst, a pernicious glorification of everything dangerous: unsafe sex, neighborhoods filled with undesirables (read "unsafe characters"), promiscuity, an attack on the family and the stable social structure, and dangerous, noncommitted, "unsafe" relationships—that is, psychologically "dangerous" relations, though the danger is rarely specified in any way other than to suggest its failure to conform to the ideal bourgeois marriage.

Such critiques are imperative, however, if we are ever to establish new institutions that will promote similar ends.

\$2. The linear chain linkage into which the earlier practice of landlord visits with tenants might be said to have degenerated reminds us that the linear chain as an information conduit is a relatively artificial social form. Most social interchanges of information and material occur in various forms of social nets (as opposed to chains).

Generally speaking, in a net situation information comes from several directions and crosses various power boundaries, so that various processes—modulating, revisionary, additive, recursive, and corrective (all of them critical, each of them highlighting different aspects)—can compensate for the inevitable reductions that occur along the constitutive chains. Considered as information dispersal processes, nets are far more efficient than chains. Not all nets are, however, the same.

Social nets can be of more or less complexity, of greater or lesser density. When the net density is comparatively low, we find ourselves focusing on the contacts between individual net members and often ignoring the net-like structure in which the individual contacts occur. When the net density is high, we find ourselves more likely to focus on the overall network.

Starting from the above as the most arbitrary and provisional of observations, I will go on to discuss two modes of social net practice (and the discourses around them that allow them to be visible as such) that I designate as "contact" and "net-working." Like all social practices they make/generate/create/sediment discourses, even as discourses create, individuate, and inform with value the material and social objects that facilitate and form the institutions that both support and contour these practices.

\$2.1. Contact is the conversation that starts in the line at the grocery counter with the person behind you while the clerk is changing the paper roll in the cash register. It is the pleasantries exchanged with a neighbor who has brought her chair out to take some air on the stoop. It is the discussion that begins with the person next to you at a bar. It can be the conversation that starts with any number of semiofficials or service persons—mailman, policeman, librarian, store clerk or counter person. As well, it can be two men watching each other masturbating together in adjacent urinals of a public john—an encounter that, later, may or may not become a conversation. Very importantly, contact is also the intercourse—physical and conversational—that blooms in and as "casual sex" in public rest rooms, sex movies, public parks, singles bars, and sex clubs, on street corners with heavy hustling traffic, and in the adjoining motels or the apartments of one or another participant, from which nonsexual friendships and/or acquaintances lasting for decades or a lifetime may spring, not to mention the conversation of a john with a prostitute or hustler encountered on one or another street corner or in a bar—a relation that, a decade later, has devolved into a smile or a nod, even when (to quote Swinburne)

"You have forgotten my kisses, / And I have forgotten your name." Mostly, these contact encounters are merely pleasant chats, adding a voice to a face now and again encountered in the neighborhood. But I recall one such supermarket-line conversation with a woman who turned out to have done graduate work on the Russian poet Zinaida Hippus, just when I happened to be teaching Dmitri Merezhkovsky's Christ and Anti-Christ trilogy in a graduate seminar at the University of Massachusetts: Merezhkovsky was Hippus's husband, and I was able to get some interesting and pertinent information about the couple's wanderings in the early years of the century.

I have at least one straight male friend who on half a dozen occasions has gotten editorial jobs for women he first met and befriended while they were working as topless dancers in various strip clubs that put them on the fringe of the sex workers' service profession.

A young street hustler in the Forty-second Street area whom I knew (but was not a client of) introduced me to a new client of his once—a twenty-six-year-old lapsed Jesuit priest—for whom I shortly secured a job at a paperback publishing house, in much the same manner.

Another supermarket-line conversation was with a young man who was an aspiring director, looking for some science fiction stories to turn into brief teleplays. I was able to jot down for him a quick bibliography of young SF writers and short stories that he might pursue. Whether or not it came to anything, I have no way of knowing. But it was easy and fun.

Still another time, it was a young woman casting director who needed someone to play the small part of a fisherman in a film she was working on. She decided I would be perfect for it, and I found myself with a weekend acting job.

One Saturday morning in January '98, my vacuum cleaner shorted out and an hour later I set it on the street by the gate before the garbage cans for my building, after making a mental note to shop for a replacement that weekend. Forty

minutes on, at my local copy center, I was getting a set of photocopies for an earlier draft of this very piece, when a broad-faced, gray-eyed Italian American in his late thirties, wearing a shiny red and blue jacket, wandered in: "Anyone wanna buy a wet-dry vacuum cleaner? Ten bucks." My first suspicion was that he was reselling the one I'd just abandoned. My second was that the one he was selling didn't work. A look disproved the first. Plugging his machine into an outlet in the shop's baseboard for a minute disproved the second. So I went home once more with a vacuum cleaner:

Contact.

Contact encounters so dramatic are rare—but real. The more ordinary sorts of contact yield *their* payoff in moments of crisis: When there is a fire in your building (of the sort I mentioned above), it may be the people who have been exchanging pleasantries with you for years who take you into their home for an hour or a day, or even overnight. Contact includes the good Samaritans at traffic accidents (the two women who picked me up and got me a cab when my cane gave way and I fell on the street, dislocating a finger), or even the neighbor who, when you've forgotten your keys at the office and are locked out of your apartment, invites you in for coffee and lets you use her phone to call a locksmith; or, as once happened to me in the mid-sixties when my then-neighborhood, the Lower East Side, was at its most neighborly and under the influence of the counterculture, a London guest arrived on Wednesday when I was out of town and expecting him on Thursday. Someone living across the street, who didn't know me at all, saw a stranger with two suitcases on my apartment stoop looking bewildered, invited him in to wait for me, then eventually put him up for a night until I returned.

A final example: My current lover of eight years and I first met when he was homeless and selling books from a blanket spread out on Seventy-second Street. Our two best friends for many years now are a male couple, one of whom I first

met in an encounter, perhaps a decade ago, at the back of the now closed-down Variety Photoplays Movie Theater on Third Avenue just below Fourteenth Street. Outside my family, these are among the two most rewarding relationships I have: both began as cross-class contacts in a public space.

Visitors to New York might be surprised that such occurrences are central to my vision of the city at its healthiest.

Lifetime residents won't be.

Watching the metamorphosis of such vigil and concern into considered and helpful action is what gives one a faithful and loving attitude toward one's neighborhood, one's city, one's nation, the world.

I have taken "contact," both term and concept, from Jane Jacobs's instructive 1961 study, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Jacobs describes contact as a fundamentally urban phenomenon and finds it necessary for everything from neighborhood safety to a general sense of social well-being. She sees it supported by a strong sense of private and public in a field of socioeconomic diversity that mixes living spaces with a variety of commercial spaces, which in turn must provide a variety of human services if contact is to function in a pleasant and rewarding manner. Jacobs mentions neither casual sex nor public sexual relations as part of contact—presumably because she was writing at a time when such things were not talked of or analyzed as elements contributing to an overall pleasurable social fabric. Today we can.

When social forces menace the distinction between private and public, people are most likely to start distrusting contact relations. In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (98–111), Jacobs analyzes how limited socioeconomic resources in the area around a public park (lack of restaurants, bathrooms, drugstores, and small shops) can make the mothers who use the playground and live near it feel that their privacy within their home is threatened—thus markedly changing their public attitude to interclass contact. Briefly, a park with no public eating spaces, restaurants, or small item shopping on its borders forces mothers

who live adjacent to it and who thus use it the most to "share everything or nothing" in terms of offering facilities of bathroom use and the occasional cup of coffee to other mothers and their children who use the park but do not live so near. Because the local mothers feel they must offer these favors to whomever they are even civil with (since such services are not publicly available), they soon become extremely choosy and cliquish about whom they will even speak to. The feel of the park becomes exclusive and snobbish—and uncomfortable (and inconvenient) for mothers who, in carriage, dress, race, or class, do not fit a rigid social pattern.

Similarly, if every sexual encounter involves bringing someone back to your house, the general sexual activity in a city becomes anxiety-filled, class-bound, and choosy. This is precisely why public rest rooms, peep shows, sex movies, bars with grope rooms, and parks with enough greenery are necessary for a relaxed and friendly sexual atmosphere in a democratic metropolis.

Jacobs's analysis stops short of contact as a specifically stabilizing practice in interclass relations. She dismisses "pervert parks" as necessarily social blights (largely understandable in the pre-Stonewall 1950s when she was collecting material for her book, but nevertheless unfortunate), though she was ready to acknowledge the positive roles winos and destitute alcoholics played in stabilizing the quality of neighborhood life at a higher level than the neighborhood would maintain without them.

I would recommend her analysis, though I would add that, like so much American thinking on the left, it lacks not so much a class analysis as an *interclass* analysis.¹

Eventually we shall touch on—though we shall by no means exhaust—the topic of the menace of violence in some of these urban venues.

. . .

1. Astute as her analysis is, Jacobs still confuses contact with community. Urban contact is often at its most spectacularly beneficial when it occurs between members of *different* communities. That is why I maintain that interclass contact is even more important than intraclass contact.