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7

SLOTHS IN THE STREETS

Loitering and Public Life

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It took 2 minutes for me to move my right arm from a natural hanging position to a raised position straight up in the air. Imagine a pitcher in slow motion. That was me. But I wasn't throwing a ball. In the same time it took me to raise my arm I completed one step with my right foot. People were in motion all around me while I was doing this. *Mooooooo*. And they weren't very happy about my actions. *Meow*. I thought there was plenty of room for them to maneuver; they, however, did not. "What are you doing, dude?" one guy asked. I didn't respond to his statement phrased as a question, choosing to begin another step (this time with my left foot). "C'mon," a woman said to me, before she rolled her eyes and swung her clasped hands that were supposed to be an elephant trunk. I was enrolled in an Introduction to Theater class and we were given an assignment to act like animals. I chose the three-toed sloth, a friendless three-toed sloth. I could not understand why my classmates were so upset. It would have been one thing if they had stayed in character (a leopard trying to eat me, an elephant squashing me, or a cobra trying to bite me), but they were breaking character to give me shit.

Perhaps my confusion about the students' reactions stemmed from my limited understanding of sloth at that time. I was only thinking about performing an animal, failing to consider the ways in which sloth-like behavior can function as a direct challenge to a more general quest for rapid mobility that is treated as a norm in contemporary society.¹ Many of our technological inventions have been motivated by a perceived need for greater speed, and that rapid movement has facilitated even more invention and change. For example, money can be transferred around the world in seconds, automotive speed limits have increased on U.S. highways, and the Internet allows us to travel anywhere we want with the click of a mouse. When these devices fail, we are usually pushed to our limits. We feel cheated when the ATM is out of service. A range of news stories are presented each year about drivers with road rage, screaming at the top of their lungs at self-appointed speedometer monitors. When a web page takes more than a minute to load, we grit our teeth and curse at the screen. These moments of no motion stir something in our bodies; the external world produces unsettling physiological effects when we cannot move fast enough.

Then there are the times when no motion is viewed as deviant and criminal, which is my focus in this chapter. I begin with a discussion of the street as a site for public life, then focus on loitering as a mode of being-in-public that challenges prevailing scholarly notions that public spaces are failing as sites of public life. The failures, I argue, grow from official agendas by city planners, public officials, and the police about the proper use of public space. Instead of viewing loitering as one way to enact a public sphere, loitering is generally regarded as a type of social deviance. I challenge this articulation of loitering; however, as it privileges production, consumption, and speed in a socioeconomic order. Finally, I assert that loitering is a tactic for resisting dominant modes of existing in contemporary society.

TALKING IN THE STREETS

Jane Jacobs's (1961) portrayal of interaction in the streets of Greenwich Village in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* is an important touchstone for scholars studying a range of urban cultural practices and transformations. Her descriptions of everyday life in her West Village neighborhood in the late 1950s are so attractive because people displayed concern and compassion for each another, demonstrating that social relationships in a large urban district can be more than cold and calculating.² Interactions that occurred on her streets (e.g., local shop owners receiving packages and keeping spare keys for residents and people flooding the streets at the first sign of a problem, such as a woman who is yelling) are the very stuff of social

capital, which, according to Robert Putnam (1995), "refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (p. 67). Because the image of the city as a lawless urban jungle settled in the public consciousness during the late 1960s and through the early 1990s (and into the new millennium in some cases), it is no wonder that Jacobs's neighborhood has remained an ideal in certain discourses about the possibilities for social connection in public spaces. Similarly, as the quantity of eligible voters who actually vote in US elections seemingly decreases with each election, and polling replaces public conversation (Carey, 1987; Hauser, 1999), it is easy to see why Putnam's analysis has attracted people across the political spectrum and working in a variety of sociopolitical occupations (e.g., politicians, academics, and those involved with community building).

Jacobs' and Putnam's focus on civic engagement and social institutions complements a much broader body of literature on public life and the street. "Streets are as old as civilization, and more than any other human artifact, have come to symbolize public life, with all its human contact, conflict, and tolerance," observed architectural historian and theorist Trevor Boddy (1992). The streets have historically been a space where people could gather to express hopes and concerns, to protest injustices, and to encounter new ideas, and Boddy's portrayal of the street foregrounds one of its main uses: a place where issues can be discussed and public opinion can be formed. This formation of public opinion, often discussed by theorists in the context of a public sphere (e.g., Habermas, 1973/1991), is shaped by quantity and quality of talk. It requires opportunities for individuals to come together to reflect on and debate ideas.³

We can assess the qualities of an active public sphere by examining relationships between the streets and public life. If people use the streets to discuss issues that pertain to the public then the public sphere can be said to be relatively healthy.⁴ When people strictly move from one destination to the next because they are afraid to walk the streets, choose to avoid contact with others in public spaces, or are hindered in their ability to connect with others in those spaces, then the public sphere is in need of repair. There are a range of opinions about the current state of street life as a site for social connection and the formation of public opinion. For example, former New York City mayor Rudolph Giuliani often argued that the abundance of pedestrians in spaces like Times Square provided evidence (in addition to statistics about decreased crime in the city) that public life was in fine form, yet his critics were quick to point out how many civil liberties had been lost during his tenure as mayor, liberties that were central to the creation and maintenance of an active public sphere (see Makagon, 2004). Of course problems with public space and public life are not unique to New York City. "You're really talking about the progressive deterioration of American pub-

lic space because of the lack of true public life," claims artist and environmental designer James Wines in a *Harper's* magazine discussion forum on public space ("Whatever Became," 1990, p. 51).

Again, this is why Jacobs' neighborhood has continued to resurface as a model for public space and public life and why Putnam's explorations of social capital have attracted so much attention. They offer a vision of what was and what could, in theory, re-emerge if individuals are open to possibilities for social connection, if government policies address broader segments of the public, and if public spaces do not continue to be transformed into private spaces. With that said, it is important to note that there are limitations to these models. Jacobs' neighborhood was more homogeneous than other parts of New York City. And Putnam treats social capital as if it can shield citizens from broader social and political inequities. Even with these problems, their approaches to public life are worth holding onto because these ways of seeing public life run counter to more general claims that civic life is waning. Assertions that civic life is in trouble rely too heavily on a particular vision of a public sphere; one that considers rational conversation to be the basis of political life, but fails to account for a variety of ways, such as loitering, in which people gather together in public to discuss and debate issues. Moreover, responses to loitering in public spaces by public officials show that age, race, and class have a tremendous influence on what is deemed appropriate when it comes to forming public opinion in a public sphere.

NO STANDING AROUND

The street is an important site for exploring the dialectical tensions between so-called productive and unproductive modes of socializing in public places. The former represents an ideal in discourses about public life (explicit in William H. Whyte's, 1988, claim that the street "is the river of life of the city" [p. 7]), and the latter, at times referred to as "hanging out" or loitering, is often deemed to be inappropriate public behavior. "[T]he term *hangout*," claimed Ray Oldenburg (1989), has a negative connotation and "the word conjures up images of the joint or dive. Though we refer to the meeting places of the lowly as hangouts, we rarely apply the term to yacht clubs or oak-paneled bars, the 'hangouts' of the 'better people'" (pp. 15-16). The act of hanging out is, like the hangout, associated with particular kinds of people (the masses) and specific types of low cultural behaviors. And public officials treat loitering as the illegal equivalent of hanging out. These officials decide what will be accepted as satisfactory participation while people who have traditionally lacked power (e.g., youths, ghetto dwellers, and the work-

ing class) are often subjected to anti-loitering efforts. Ultimately, street corners are transformed from legitimate sites of public interaction to illegitimate places of criminal activity through a designation of loitering. Of course, standing around and talking (i.e., forming public opinion) can be central to both civic uses of public space and loitering.

Loitering is viewed as an action that involves plotting crimes or waiting to commit crimes. In certain instances loitering itself is the crime. For example, California cites Huntington Beach, Inglewood, Long Beach, and Redondo Beach use loitering laws to keep large groups of youths from congregating ("Santa Monica Staff Report," 1992).⁵ Loitering and anti-loitering laws have taken on new meaning in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Standing around can be a very suspicious activity, raising concerns and heightening fears (see Wilson, 2003).

When it comes to policing youths, one of the groups of people that loiter a lot, adults often believe that certain behaviors can be "brought back into line," as Dick Hebdige (1979) noted (e.g., "boys in lipstick are 'just dressing up'" and "girls in rubber dresses are 'daughters just like yours'" (p. 94). However, a fine line exists between hope that behaviors will change and a push for greater control. If the boys in lipstick also start hanging out on the streets or in the parks with other boys in lipstick, talking loudly with one another and disturbing the peace (as adults will call it), then the kids have gone too far. These fears bring about curfews, surveillance, and loitering laws even though the anxieties rarely can be connected to actual crime and violence.⁶ Adult panic is also reflected in and furthers city planning efforts. Spaces are not designed for youths. Instead, teens tend to be a factor in official decisions regarding design when politicians, police officers, and city planners want to eliminate certain behaviors. For example, in his assessment of a downtown shopping district in West Palm Beach, Florida, Robert Gibbs singled out a space where benches are placed next to each other. This is a problem, claimed Gibbs, because a pedestrian might need to squeeze between the benches to get to a particular store. "And if a teenager or some street person happens to be there, you would have to touch them, because you're so close together. That is like a sign saying DON'T ENTER" (cited in Lagerfeld, 1995, p. 114). Gibbs' statement is loaded with fear. Avoiding contact with teens and the homeless reflects a drive toward purity and cleanliness.

We see this push in Lulu the Local's (2003) description of official responses to loiterers who congregate at a wall on Finlandia University's downtown campus in Hancock, Michigan. "On this wall, area youth sit and gather usually to figure out what's going on.' But what is usually going on is sitting at The Wall. From this location, kids can watch cars go down the main drag and kids cruising the main drag can see who is at The Wall," writes Lulu in an electronic fanzine. "In order to occupy themselves, Wall

'sitters' have been known to pull some crazy stunts. People have pushed each other down the sidewalk in a stolen K-Mart cart and have thrown impromptu dance parties on The Wall, just to name a few. But all of this fun can be spoiled quite quickly if any of the local police decide to stop and tell the 'sitters' to disperse. Wall attendance has also waned in the past couple of years due to complaints by some that the Wall has become 'dirty.'⁷ Although some teenagers are going to be a little obnoxious, when we consider the alternatives (e.g., breaking into houses, drag racing, or shooting heroin), teenagers loitering in a shopping district or at a wall should not be viewed as a major problem. But it is also important to note that hanging out is really one of the few things to do that does not involve spending money or socializing under the watchful gaze of one's parents. Loitering does not remove the teenager from the gaze of adults more generally, but it does exist outside the parent's home. It is a mode of being-in-public that emerges, in part, because youths do not have their own spaces. School isn't theirs and the house belongs to the parents, and they run up against city planning that mostly caters to middle-class adults.⁸

Elijah Anderson (1990) noted in *Streetwise* that those who do not understand street life are quick to assume the worst about people who hang out there. For example, teenagers who gather in the streets of the ghetto are often grouped with "pimps, hustlers, prostitutes, destitute single mothers, and anonymous street corner men" (p. 68). The young Black male who lives in the ghetto and hangs out on the street corner just might be the ultimate symbol of the loiterer as deviant or criminal. His image is loaded with menacing stereotypes that come to us in films and the nightly news or in more celebratory displays via the scenes that play out in rap songs and videos.

Clearly, public officials consider loitering to be a problem (a view that is internalized by many adults), especially when the loiterers are young and Black or Hispanic. In the minds of some city officials and police officers, loiterers would not be standing around if they were productive individuals; they would be at work or with their families. "Reformers have long observed city people loitering on busy corners . . . and have passed judgment, the gist of which is: 'This is deplorable!'" (Jacobs, 1961, p. 55). Concerns about this "deplorable" use of public space ultimately fail to account for the variety of reasons that people hang out on the streets.

Reading teenagers' activities through the lens of the streets as a public sphere shows us something more nuanced than simply standing around. Loitering represents a mode of being-in-public that offers individuals an opportunity to socialize with others, to observe what's happening where they live, and to learn from one another. "Most of it is ostensibly utterly trivial but the sum is not trivial at all," said Jacobs (1961) about the interactions that can occur between people on a city's streets. "The sum of such casual, public contact at a local level . . . is a feeling for the public identity of

people, a web of public respect and trust, and a resource in time of personal or neighborhood need" (p. 56). Teenagers talk about everyday life, they make friends, they learn how to negotiate problems, and they acquire and debate opinions about larger issues that concern them as citizens (even if they aren't old enough to vote on those issues). "Young people's growth and development depends upon environments that provide stimulation, allow autonomy, offer possibilities for exploration, and promote independent learning and peer socializing," argued Cindi Katz (1998). "These criteria are important in all settings, not just those designed specifically for teens such as schools, leisure environments and teen centers" (p. 141).

If the street can be a classroom without walls for the teens (and in a broader context, a public sphere), that classroom can also be extended to include opportunities to learn from adults, as we see in Anderson's (1990) description of the "old head." The old head is a man who teaches boys and young men about morality, social responsibility, and the importance of a work ethic.⁹ He does not necessarily need to hold a position of moral power (e.g., a priest or minister), although he might. Instead, he must exemplify the kind of ethical habits that he preaches. The old head uses the street corner to tell his stories to the boys he mentors. But this use of the street corner makes him an ironic figure. On one hand, his status as a public character helps facilitate the maintenance of social capital.¹⁰ He reflects the kind of participation in public life that is desired by those scholars who claim that trust is waning, and his actions are representative of the civic responsibility that is urged in the discourse of politicians and local activists, especially when neighborhood watch programs are being advocated. On the other hand, those people who do not know the particular man or lack knowledge of the role the old head plays in African-American neighborhoods likely view the old head as an anonymous street corner man (linked with the pimps, prostitutes, and other criminals that round out Anderson's list). The outsider is not privy to the old head's topics of conversation, perhaps viewing him as lazy, unemployed, or a roughneck (all of which have become synonymous with the loiterer). Although the old head preaches about hard work, his mode of communication (conversation on the street corner) places him in the realm of a lethargic and unproductive problem. It doesn't matter what he says; the problem is what his body does. Even if he works hard, proving that what he says and does is one in the same, that effort is erased when people see him standing around on the street corner, loitering. And of course his race influences his status as a loiterer rather than participant in building and/or strengthening the neighborhood's social capital. Lingering on a street corner might be viewed differently if he was a middle-aged, White businessman.

The old head exemplifies one way that the streets can be used to create social networks, or to build social capital. However, the socializing that

occurs there does not meet two separate but overlapping images of the streets desired by public officials and business leaders (and we might say internalized by some scholars theorizing the public sphere). First, the kind of talk that occurs on the street corner seems to violate beliefs that effective communication is rational and takes place in more controlled (or proper) environments. So-called legitimate political talk occurs in official environments (e.g., city council meeting) or via the newspaper.¹¹ Second, the potential for heated debate undermines hopes for an ordered and pristine streetscape. Michael Schudson (1997) noted in his analysis of relationships between conversation and democracy that conversation is "important in uncomfortable settings where we risk embarrassment if we do not know or cannot articulate what we believe. Indeed uncomfortable settings predominate in the institutions of public discussion. Democracy is deeply uncomfortable" (p. 304). Anti-loitering ordinances display an antagonism to this sentiment that democracy is uncomfortable, and hence social interactions in the streets might be as well. It's as if public officials are willing to control any unexpected interactions in an effort to ensure that the streets appear to be safe.

Although one might argue that the image of the loiterer could be transferred from deviant and unproductive to virtuous and productive if the loiterer uses the street corner in a way that is encouraged by officials (e.g., incorporating the old head into some official mentoring program), I want to warn against a clear path from troublesome to productive modes of lingering. As Heather Courtney's (2002) documentary *Los Trabajadores* shows, the connections between racism and loitering are so strong in some places that this transformation from troublesome to valuable is not likely to take place. Her film is about legal and illegal Mexican and Central American day laborers in Austin, Texas. The men were deemed a problem by many of the citizens of Austin because they stood around on street corners waiting for work. (The designation of troublemaker is ironic given the fact that the men were looking for work, a virtuous activity in the United States.) A building was found that functioned as a clearinghouse, ensuring that the laborers would not be mistreated or scammed, while also serving to move the laborers off the streets. However, people living in the neighborhoods in and around the center attempted to persuade the city council to close this new space. The center solved concerns about laborers on the streets but the continued public outcry demonstrated that the true motivation was the removal of the laborers from Austin.¹²

The racialization of anti-loitering efforts is also explicit in Chicago's 1992 loitering law. Chicago's law was designed to eliminate gang activity. However, by 1995 the police had arrested 42,000 people, many of whom were not gang members. The law was ruled unconstitutional in 1999 because it did not address specific criminal activities, appearing rather as a catchall to

move youths, African Americans, and Hispanics off the streets. Reflecting the kind of attitude that has become too prevalent among citizens who buy into middle class urban revitalization schemes, Justice Antonin Scalia noted in his dissenting opinion that he would gladly forgo rights to loiter in exchange for a safe neighborhood (*City of Chicago v. Morales et al.*, 1999).

Acceptable participation is ultimately a concept defined by those in power. People with less power are often targets of anti-loitering efforts. Attempts to remove the loiterers from public spaces signal the lack of respect given to these groups by public officials, who desire the preservation of aesthetically clean streets, or at the very least the appearance of cleanliness. And, as I discuss in the next section, policies to eliminate loitering display official desires to maintain an image of society as productive while encouraging consumerism.

WASTING TIME

There is an intriguing scene at the beginning of the film *About Schmidt* (Payne, 2002) where Ray Nichols, friend and former colleague of Warren Schmidt, speaks at Schmidt's retirement dinner. During the speech Nichols claims that one can measure the quality of one's life by assessing one's productivity. Even though his statement does not refer directly to loitering, he speaks to a central reason for loitering's designation as deviant: loitering teenagers and anonymous street corner men are unproductive. As Mark Neumann and Timothy Simpson (1997) noted in their study of music bootleggers, "[D]eviance is not inherent in a social practice nor is it a character flaw. Instead, what are often labeled 'deviant' practices are sites of politicized and symbolic social struggle where the conventions and legitimacy of institutionalized and consensual forms of cultural production are contested by alternative and marginalized practices on the part of social collectives and individuals" (p. 321). Loiterers challenge the virtues of production, consumption, and mobility. "For classical capitalism, wasted time was time that was not devoted to production, accumulation, saving," wrote Guy Debord (1961/1995, p. 73). The popular phrase "time is money" speaks to this sentiment. But the phrase also reflects a desire for efficiency, which is ultimately antithetical to loitering. Efficiency facilitates profit and is supposed to save us time (as if time can be stored in a bank and drawn from at a later date). Lingering on the street corner is an embodied statement to those passing by that time is not money. Hanging out on the street corner also implies that the production-oriented opportunities are not satisfactory, including the quantity of time that is demanded of the employee.¹³ "Loiterers ignore rush hour; rather than getting somewhere, they hang around," said Susan

Buck-Morss (1986). "Their practice 'is a demonstration against the division of labor'" (p. 136).¹⁴

Loitering as a political act can be viewed as an extension of modernist explorations of individual and social dissatisfaction, including the role of boredom as a feature of everyday life that grows from and responds to a new form of discontentment. "With the rise of visual culture, mass society, mass production, and consumerism, boredom came to describe the modern experience of time as both empty and full, concentrated and distracted (the experience of temporal disruption in the sense of 'dead time' as well as temporal duration in the sense of 'killing time')." wrote Patrice Petro (1996, p. 193). For Siegfried Kracauer (1963/1995), boredom is synonymous with leisure time; it is the ultimate freedom. Boredom is a relief from the drudgery of work, which requires great quantities of time just to afford life's necessities. And boredom liberates people from the demands of modern life. "[These] unhappily they no longer know where their head is, and the extraordinary, radically boring that might be able to unite them with their heads remains eternally distant from them" (p. 331). The individual who can achieve boredom is provided with "a kind of guarantee that one is, so to speak, in control of one's own existence" (p. 334).

Kracauer's description of boredom differs from contemporary usage. Today, the term usually stands in for anything that doesn't hold one's interest. However, both versions reflect opportunities and limitations. In the modernist schema, we see an opportunity for liberation from a potentially overwhelming feeling that one must constantly work in an effort to accumulate social status and money. Boredom is an opportunity to live a more relaxed and fulfilling life. The vision is limited because it fails to account for the ways in which leisure time is also tied to production. Somebody has to work while we are relaxing (e.g., the stewardess, the waiter, or the cabana boy). In more recent treatments of boredom, escape from burdensome responsibilities remains possible. However, boredom is ultimately something to overcome; it is not fulfilling in any way. "Doing nothing on the streets must be compared with the alternatives: for example, knowing that nothing will happen with Mum and Dad in the front room; being almost certain that the youth club will be full of boredom," observed Paul Corrigan (1976/1996) in his study of teenagers in Sunderland, England. "This makes the street the place where something just might happen, if not this Saturday, then surely next" (p. 104).

Gill Valentine, Tracey Skelton, and Deborah Chambers (1998) would ask us to view these youths' actions in the context of larger questions about adolescence and public space. The teens, whether they know it or not, are challenging normative views of productive uses of time and space. "[T]he space of the street is often the only autonomous space that young people are

able to carve out for themselves and that hanging around, and larking about, on the streets . . . is one form of youth resistance (conscious and unconscious) to adult power" (p. 7). Whether the teens are simply doing nothing, gathering together to discuss issues in ways that maintain social norms (perhaps when they congregate they talk about homeless people "polluting" the youths' street corner hangout), or congregating to explicitly challenge spatial norms, the act of loitering itself can appear to be resistance. Again, the tarrying body is the challenge because loitering is deviant and/or criminal. The individual's intent is often unknown and not really considered by many adults.¹⁵

Although the loiterers' motives may not be known in some instances, we can say that challenging the privileged status of production is not the only form of resistance that is reflected in loitering. The loiterer also refrains from consuming goods during times when she or he is hanging out. This is possibly an even greater challenge in a consumer society. Consumerism is treated as a right in the United States today, perhaps more so than the freedom to speak or to assemble. (I qualify this with an acknowledgment that there are certainly times when people are denied goods and services, such as racial profiling with home loans.) In general, the people who do not take advantage of this right are seen as being behind the times or some kind of radical kooks. This is especially true now that political and business leaders have constructed consumption as patriotic. The U.S. economy began to dip after George W. Bush took office. He, and other leaders, responded to this economic downturn by encouraging people to spend their money, which took on new meaning after the terrorist attacks in 2001. Greater degrees of spending would show terrorists that the United States is strong (Bush, 2001). Here again we see the relationship between time and money. Spending needed to happen immediately.

A closer examination of this appeal for instantaneous consumption reveals interesting tensions when it comes to a broader relationship between consumption and time. "[T]he consumer's satisfaction ought to be instant: and this in a double sense," wrote Zygmunt Bauman (1998). "Obviously, consumed goods should satisfy immediately, requiring no learning of skills and no lengthy groundwork; but the satisfaction should also end—"in no time", that is in the moment the time needed for consumption is up" (p. 81). As with production, consumption is tied to speed. We must consume quickly and efficiently. Slow motion is to be avoided. And loitering (as a form of slow motion) undermines efficient consumption. Therefore, by putting the loiterer into strategic motion officials potentially achieve a number of goals. First, those who loiter but possess some financial means might be encouraged to fill their time consuming goods. Similarly, people without physical disabilities will be pushed toward employment, making them productive citizens (and, perhaps, consumers once the paycheck is received). Finally, those

who are deemed to be a problem (e.g., the homeless, ethnic minorities, and deviant teenagers) are not allowed to settle in one place long enough to ruin the pristine spaces in which they loiter and subsequently deter White middle-class shoppers.¹⁶

Production, consumption, and speed are three of capitalism's central virtues, and they are linked together under a broader umbrella of progress. The loiterer, who does not seem to understand the value of work or the joys of consuming, appears to stand in the way of progress. Lingering on the street corner is simply wasting time and reflects a lazy spirit. Ultimately, I want us to treat that so-called laziness as an occasion for contemplation and critique as well as an opportunity to make social connections while teaching and learning from others.

In his children's book, *Slowly, Slowly, Slowly*, "Said the Sloth, Eric Carle (2002) presented a sloth that is asked why it is so slow by a monkey, and asked why it is so quiet by a caiman, asked why it is so boring by an anteater, and asked why it is so lazy by a jaguar. "It is true that I am slow, quiet, and boring. I am lackadaisical, I dawdle, and I dilly-dally. I am also unflappable, languid, stoic, impassive, sluggish, lethargic, placid, calm, mellow, laid back, and, well, slothful!" says the sloth at the end of the book. "I am tranquil, and I like to live in peace. But I am not lazy." The sloth concludes: "That's just how I am. I just do things slowly, slowly, slowly" (p. 23). This is a nice portrait of the sloth; it is, perhaps, the kind of imagery that attracted me to the sloth as an undergraduate in Introduction to Theater. But it is also easy to lose the politics in this vision of sloth, to twist this sloth's remarks into a business catch phrase (e.g., "Don't sweat the small stuff"). Instead, we should read Carle's sloth as representative of the pedagogical functions of slowing down, and, by extension, loitering. Loitering is an act that can teach us something about ourselves, including our uses of space and relationship to time. It also can offer us a way to contemplate using the streets to connect with others. Loiterers are not in a hurry. Although they are not immune to temporal and social pressures, they have chosen to negotiate those pressures in ways that privilege the moment.

Loitering also teaches us something about the politics of spatial practices. It is an act that presents an embodied challenge to public officials, who tend to focus on controlling the streets via law enforcement while catering to commercial interests. Images of who and what belongs on the street are projected in official decisions. People internalize that imagery, using it to monitor their own actions and to assess the behaviors of others. There is a difference "between feeling totally at home on the streets, and being exposed and vulnerable there," claimed Buck-Morss (1986). "The rulers feel public space to be an extension of their own personal one: They belong there because it belongs to them. For the politically oppressed (a term which this century has learned is not limited to class) existence in public space is more

likely to be synonymous with state surveillance, public censure, and political restraint" (p. 118). I argue that loitering is a move that seeks to reclaim the streets as a home. The loiterer can be someone who does not feel exposed or vulnerable there. Instead, the individual treats the streets as a place to see and be seen and to mingle with friends and strangers. This use of public space helps extend our understanding of the streets as a public sphere to incorporate so-called unproductive modes of socializing, while explicitly and implicitly challenging the virtues of production, consumption, and mobility. For an act that appears to represent doing nothing, there is so much going on. Police chase loiterers off the streets, middle-class adults panic, and business leaders view loiterers as hindering profits. But loiterers simply continue to tell us via their embodied public performances that lingering on the street should be treated as an opportunity to live a more complex and fulfilling life.

ENDNOTES

1. Of course this general sense that slow motion should be avoided was expressed most explicitly in the deadly sin sloth. "[T]he history of attitudes toward sloth indicates that it has enjoyed a cyclical career in the Occident—considered a disease among the ancients, elevated to a sin by the early medieval theologians, reassigned to disease status (or to being a general tendency in [humans]) in the later medieval period, and then rediscovered as the deadliest sin tempting those who subscribed to the Protestant ethic," claimed Lyman (1978, p. 21).
2. This vision of society as cold and calculating tended to be advanced in early sociological studies of community. Community was associated with agrarian societies and the family. Society was associated with urban living and its relationships were based on economic and judicial interactions (Schmalenbach, 1961).
3. As I discuss throughout this chapter, one's ability to use the streets as a public sphere is either furthered or hindered depending on one's race and class. It is also important to note that one's sex also shapes the kinds of experiences that one can have, including a general feeling of safety and belonging (see McRobbie, 1980).
4. The term *public* often fluctuates in its representative status, at times referring to everyone who lives in a city, or a certain section of a city, and at other times standing in for a group of people who are interested in a specific issue. As Michael Warner (2002) argued, publics often come into being in relation to particular texts.
5. The cities cited use loitering laws to prevent loitering but other cities in the same state use curfew laws to achieve the same effects at night and/or laws that combine language about loitering and curfew.
6. For a summary of one survey conducted among homeowners in Boston and their fears about crime and youth, see William Menking (2001). However, as Barry Krisberg, president of the National Council on Crime and Delinquency, stated,

- "juveniles represent a small and declining part of serious crime in America" (cited in Lucas, 1998, pp. 151-152).
7. I have focused on metropolitan streets to this point but it is important to note that the options for young people in rural locales are equally restricted (if not more so) (see Johnson, 1994; Kirn, 2000).
 8. Creating a "cool city" for career oriented 20- and 30-somethings is the new fashionable city planning scheme. The cool city designation grows from Richard Florida's theories about the emergence of a new creative class (see Eakin, 2002; Florida, 2002; Lelan, 2003). For a summary of how this drive toward luring 20- and 30-somethings has affected youth (especially children) in the city, see Egan (2005).
 9. Anderson (1990) noted that the term *old head* usually refers to a male. A woman serving in a similar capacity is often referred to as "Mama," "Big Mama," "Moms," or by name (e.g., "Mis' Lu" or "Mis' Dawson"). Although she can offer advice in public, most of the examples Anderson used to explain the female *old head* are drawn from private spaces, such as the church, the home, or the beauty shop (pp. 73-76).
 10. "A public character is anyone who is in frequent contact with a wide circle of people," claimed Jacobs (1961). "His main qualification is that he is public, that he talks to lots of different people" (p. 68). Mitchell Dunneier (1999) brings together the public character and the *old head* in his study of African-American street vendors in New York City.
 11. For critiques of these attitudes, see Calhoun (1992).
 12. Unlike the day laborer who will never be welcomed by the middle class more generally, some youths who hang out on the street corner can be viewed as valuable if the youths facilitate marketing and sales efforts (see Gladwell, 1997; Grossman, 2003).
 13. "[S]ometimes you just have to fess up," said Steven Rubio (1997). "So I'm confessing. I fuck off, I've been doing it for years, and the main reason I continue my sinful ways is simple: I hate work."
 14. Buck-Morss quoted Walter Benjamin at the end of her passage.
 15. I do need to add some qualifiers here. Teenagers, drug dealers, gang members, and the homeless are the impetus for nearly every loitering law. As I noted previously, the Supreme Court's response to Chicago's loitering law signals that not all loitering is the same. There is a difference between loitering with intent to sell drugs (in the case of the drug dealer), asking for spare change (in the case of the homeless person who panhandles), or merely hanging out. These differences should be clear to most everyone who comes into contact with a loiterer, demonstrating that intent can be deciphered. At the same time, as the quantity of people arrested in Chicago illustrates, the loiterer's intent is not always a factor for the police and city officials; the act of loitering is the problem.
 16. Aurora, Colorado city council member John Paroske is explicit about the deterrence of middle-class shoppers. The city "spent a lot of money to revitalize that area [East Colfax Avenue] and yet we have people sleeping in flower planters," he said at one meeting. "People hesitate to shop there when there are people lying on the sidewalks" (cited in Brovsky, 1998).

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