

# The Sociology of Space: A Use-Centered View

Herbert J. Gans\*  
*Columbia University*

The revival of spatial sociology justifies a renewed exploration of the various connections between “space” and “society.” I argue that sociologists must avoid both the reification of space and studies that mainly demonstrate that all social life exists in space. Instead, researchers should focus on the causal relations between space and society: (1) on the few but important ways in which natural space affects social life and collectivities; and (2) on the innumerable ways in which these collectivities turn natural space into social space and shape its uses. Treating use, users, and effects as primary concepts, the paper discusses a variety of topics in spatial sociology to illustrate my causal point and to suggest research and other questions that deserve answers.

Back in the 1960s, I was once asked to speak to a meeting of young architects about planning for societal betterment, only to discover that my audience was solely interested in how they could reform America through architecture and design. I should not have been surprised. Being in the space business, they were spatial determinists who believed that by redesigning space, they could change society.<sup>1</sup>

Sociologists who study space are not architects, but now that spatial sociology is reemerging from a long hibernation, the field needs to think about where it stands on the relation between space and society. This is important for two reasons. First, since all social life is “emplaced” as Thomas Gieryn (2000, p. 466) puts it in his pioneering essay, spatial sociologists must protect against the danger of reconceptualizing the obvious: doing studies to show that all social life exists in space. Second, they must resist the temptation of reifying space, a danger for any new field that seeks to call attention to itself and the concepts it wants to introduce.

Because humans are attached by gravity to the surface of the planet, they exist on natural space. Natural space is a presocial notion, so that sociologically, at least, it is literally air over dirt, or as Gieryn (2000, p. 465) calls it, “stuff.”<sup>2</sup> Natural space becomes a social phenomenon, or social space, once people begin to use it, boundaries are put on it, and meanings (including ownership, price, etc.) are attached to it. Then the air-over-dirt becomes a lot or a plot, and if residential users obtain control over the bounded space, it becomes their place.<sup>3</sup>

Spatial sociologists study how society, i.e., individuals and collectivities, transform natural into social space, how they use and exchange it, what social, economic, and other processes and forces come into play in these uses and exchanges, and how both kinds of space affect individuals, collectivities, and social processes and forces.

\*Correspondence should be addressed to Herbert J. Gans, Department of Sociology, Columbia University, 404 Fayerweather Hall, 1180 Amsterdam Ave., New York, NY 10027. E-mail: Hjgl@columbia.edu.

I find it helpful to look at space and society through a causal lens, asking two questions. First, do both natural and social space have causal power, creating social effects, and if so when, how, and why? The second question reverses the causal arrow: Do individuals and collectivities exert causal power, creating effects on both kinds of space, and if so, when, how, and why?

Although the answer to both questions is yes, the second is the most important for the sociology of space. I would argue that individuals and collectivities shape natural and social space by how they use these, although each kind of space, and particularly the social, will also have effects on them.

Spatial determinists may believe that space always has social effects, but such effects are not automatic and are indirect. The presence of gold “under” natural space has considerable economic effects, but only in societies in which gold is valued. Similarly, when homeless people must raise families in a dilapidated motel room, the social space they live in has behavioral effects, but only because welfare agency benefits are too meager to enable recipients to afford livable dwellings. Thus, space almost never has total and direct causal power, and then functions as an intervening causal variable.

In the above, I emphasize the term “use” intentionally, for I believe that a central concept of spatial sociology should be land use. *Use* is defined broadly here, meaning not only how individuals and organizations live and work in space, but what else they do to and with it. Elaborating the traditional dichotomy of use value and exchange value (Logan and Molotch, 1987), use also covers production and reproduction, buying and selling, speculation, allocation, distribution, competition, as well as control, exploitation, theft, and destruction of space. Indeed, use is about everything that emplaced humans do as space users.

#### THE USE-CENTERED APPROACH TO SPACE

This causally flavored use- and user-centered way of looking at space and spatial sociology can be illustrated by applying it to several concepts and issues that are relevant to the field, including land use, location, density, propinquity, public space, neighborhood, community, and political economy. In each case, my intent is to show that the users and uses involved determine what happens to the natural or social space, and that its effects on them are brought about by social agents and their actions. Consequently, the direct effects of space on society are limited.

##### LAND USE

Land use is, as already noted, a central concept because all social life is emplaced. Although I have defined use very broadly indeed, how people use the social spaces they build on (or dig in) and occupy has received surprisingly little study. A half century ago, the sociology of housing appeared to take off as a research field, but it never did. Today, little is known about how people live in their homes, for example, how parents and children compete for the available space, or what neighbors fight over. We know as little about what affluent people do with all the interior space in today’s “McMansions” as about whether poor people are endangered by living in deteriorated houses. In a period in which drastic housing shortages and zero vacancy rates in some cities force not only the poor but many others to spend half their incomes on rent, the question of how space indirectly shapes family budgets and thus life styles—including the decision not to have children—becomes relevant.

Journalists periodically provide data on how the White House pecking order is reflected in office assignments but we do not know whether and how workplace hierarchies are expressed in office and other workplace design. Organizational sociologists have not yet done enough work on how offices with windows and other spatial perks are assigned—and fought over.

Governments usually have the power to regulate land uses. How and why planning and zoning agencies, building inspectors, landmark preservationists, and others affect land uses the way they do and on what grounds deserves further study than it has received from sociologists.

Many other interesting research questions could be asked about land use, beginning with those studied earlier by the so-called Chicago School ecologists and ethnographers. Some of their questions deserve restudy because of the drastic changes in cities, suburbs, and metropolitan areas over the last 75 years. Ernest Burgess's concentric zones model (Burgess, 1925) and Homer Hoyt's sector theory (Hoyt, 1939) may be obsolete, but class hierarchies and racial exclusion still structure residential land use.<sup>4</sup>

With tourism becoming a major industry in many American cities, the question of which land uses are added to the existing supply of tourist locations, and who chooses and rejects them, is also a way of looking at the social construction of cities. In New York, tourist demand for gospel music has helped turn some Harlem churches into tourist attractions, and I have a hunch that as European whites have to learn to live with people of darker skin color, American ghettos themselves have become a more popular tourist destination.

#### LAND VALUES

Land use (and exchange) give value to land, and that value in turn helps to determine literal use. Social stratification structures land use, but land values play a major role in determining which classes choose and are chosen to go where they do. How land use determines land prices and rents and vice versa is still worth studying, as are the roles different users play in land value determination: not only renters and owners, but also builders, realtors, bankers, and speculators, as well as other spatial venture capitalists and growth machine operators. Indeed, land speculation is a significant activity in many communities but the subject is rarely even mentioned in the sociological literature.

Economists attached to the Chicago School looked at land values as indicators of urban growth and that analysis is still useful. Their land value "gradients" (Hoyt, 1933) were developed when mass transit largely determined where people lived and worked, but gradients (or other models) based on the dominance of the automobile should be developed.

#### LOCATION

In one of its meanings, location is a relational concept; it refers to social spaces that make connections between users or uses. All other things being equal, the most highly valued connections obtain the most convenient locations, and studying which users decide what uses are most valuable, as well as who or what determines convenience, will tell us a lot about location. In presuburban American cities, central location as defined by the convergence of transportation lines was the indicator of convenience, and students of land values and realtors identified "100 percent blocks" where values were highest. More often than not, department stores could be found on these blocks. Evidently, shopping was as

central in land value determination as in people's communal lives. It would be useful to find the equivalents of the old 100 percent blocks; they are probably the most popular sections of the most popular malls in suburban and exurban areas. Political centrality may have changed less than economic; city halls usually remain where they are when central business districts move or disappear—and palaces stay in use when monarchies become republics.

#### DENSITY

Density is a particularly important concept in spatial sociology, for how much actual and potential social space is available per capita helps determine how much living space people can afford and the dwelling unit density at which they live, just as employers decide at what densities their various employees will work, and restaurant owners at what densities their diners will eat. How people with disposable income decide how much living space they want deserves more study; as does my previously asked question of how they cope with the shortage of living space in high rent cities.<sup>5</sup>

A related subject is whether and how governments decide the square footage at which people are crowded in their dwelling unit (dwelling unit density) and how much of its lot a residential building can cover, which helps determine areal density. Even so, the most urgent density questions are still those about social and other effects, i.e., if and when densities become harmful.

A half century ago, a good deal of housing research was devoted to “crowding studies” (e.g., Freedman, 1975). However, the researchers often failed to find the expected negative effects of crowding. For example, no one was ever able to prove that the school difficulties of poor children could be explained by insufficient space and insulation from noise for doing homework, and negative health effects were often much smaller than expected (e.g., Wilner et al., 1962).

Some of the harmful effects of crowding were eliminated when public health measures were instituted starting in the 19th century. Before then, high areal and dwelling unit density almost guaranteed epidemics among the poor, which then often spread to the more affluent. Today, however, poverty and inequality, as well as the stresses accompanying them, are thought to be more significant causes of ill health (Wilkinson, 1996). True, crowding has declined significantly even among the poor, but the children of the affluent seem able to bring their school sicknesses home to their parents even at the lowest densities. However, in agricultural societies, areal density can become critical; land shortages can lead to starvation and emigration.

Questions about the social and emotional effects of high density could not be answered in part because the effects were hard to discover, but also because societies varied in what dwelling unit densities people considered desirable and tolerable. Some people seem to need—or even want—less privacy than others, and in all cultures, people have mechanisms for maintaining personal privacy even when space is at a minimum. New Yorkers regularly apply these mechanisms when they ride the subways during rush hours.<sup>6</sup>

Areal density is different from dwelling unit density. New York's Park Avenue apartment dwellers live at higher areal densities than most poor New Yorkers, but they live at low dwelling unit density and many also own weekend and summer homes on large lots. Poor people, who cannot “go away” on weekends, therefore live more of their lives in the streets, and in parks when these are available. However, they also inhabit darker and less airy

buildings, although not much is known about the effects of these conditions on health and morale.

#### PROPINQUITY

Students of propinquity and neighboring look at the effects of residential adjacency; the classic studies are Festinger, Schachter, and Back (1950) and Merton (1947). While it was once believed that the low amount of space between houses encourages friendly social contact or conflict, neighboring skills, as well as the demographic homogeneities in a population that spell compatibility, are more important than the lack of space between dwelling units (Gans, 1968, ch. 12). Neighbors with children of the same age may establish social relations; incompatible neighbors usually learn how to ignore each other if only to avoid conflict. To be sure, to some extent the problem is solved by the organization of the housing market. The fact that neighborhoods, and thus adjacent dwelling units, are usually similar in price encourages some homogeneity among neighbors.

However, lack of physical space between neighbors can have negative effects on felt personal and familial privacy. Occupants of rowhouses and apartments with thin walls, or with between-dwelling unit vents that let in conversation or noise, or single-family houses close enough to each other to make family fights public often experience such intrusions. Even five feet of space between houses seems to be enough to minimize such intrusion, one reason why the preference for the detached single-family house remains as strong as ever even if fewer and fewer home buyers can afford it.

Nonresidential propinquity has not received much attention, other than from zoning experts and planners who try to prevent what they deem to be incompatible land users from becoming next door neighbors. Definitions of and judgments about incompatibility have not been studied sufficiently, however. Whether adjacent office buildings, and the people in them, are even neighbors is worth asking, if only to find out if any kind of neighboring takes place.

#### PUBLIC SPACE

Public space is an almost sacred concept in some left and liberal circles, as if places that are open for public meetings had built-in political advantages. Totalitarian polities may deny people the opportunity to meet, but the availability of public space does not guarantee democratic politics. Hitler was a master at using public space, and other dictators of the right and the left have likewise created attention-getting political spectacles. The attention resulted from the spectacles themselves, however, not from having the space, except that their ability to command huge spaces once in power also enabled them to put on humongous spectacles that attracted attention in part because of their size.

Dictators can force people to come to their meetings, but in democratic societies, public space obtains political significance only when people are willing to attend.<sup>7</sup> Sometimes, they are attracted by causes; sometimes, by free food and drink or by entertainment provided with the politics. Whatever the motives of the attenders, however, public-space-using organizations may obtain visibility, attract some new supporters, and create a mobilizing bond among existing members if people respond to what is happening. Still, the public space itself has only limited causal power, and nothing is more debilitating organizationally than a small attendance in a large public space.

Actually, most public space is used for recreational purposes most of the time, and who uses various kinds of public space how much for these and other purposes is an important research topic. Whether and how people use parks, playgrounds, pools, and beaches is not only relevant to the sociology of leisure but it is also of importance to government, particularly since budgets for such spaces are usually the first to be cut when tax receipts decline. In low density communities, the major users of public recreational space are probably people who cannot afford to buy or rent homes with private outdoor space.

#### NEIGHBORHOOD EFFECTS

The notion of the spatially bounded neighborhood has had a powerful effect in American intellectual life. For much of the last century, city planners have laid out new communities with clearly defined and bounded neighborhoods, in part to instill a “sense of community” in and encourage social life among their residents.

Among sociologists, somewhat the same spatial notion has taken the form of looking for “neighborhood effects.” In this field of study, the neighborhood is conceived to have good or bad effects because of what it does for or to people, particularly the poor (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, and Aber, 1997). Neighborhood effects studies tend to be quantitative and therefore able to produce correlations; consequently, they can also identify neighborhoods in which particularly negative or positive social patterns can be found. Although neighborhood effects researchers are working with a spatial concept, they do not always define neighborhood or report who and what in the neighborhood actually produces effects.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, quantitative researchers too often use census tracts as proxies, as if a Bureau of the Census statistical artifact could have good or bad effects.

Even if neighborhood is properly defined, it is still only a bounded area, not a collectivity—such as a political district—with resources, power, or even neighborhoodwide support systems that can influence what people do or what happens to them.<sup>9</sup> Neighborhood agencies may do something to help or hurt the poor, but then the cause is the agencies and their staffs, not the neighborhood. Similarly, the number of slum buildings, drug dealers, taverns, or whorehouses in the neighborhood may correlate with the residents’ level of poverty, but what goes on in these land uses will affect people’s welfare or their behavior. Even if it were possible to prove that the combined efforts of all agencies and facilities inside a neighborhood had an effect on the residents, the cause remains in the agencies and whatever political and other efforts made their combination effective.

The shortcomings of the neighborhood concept do not apply to neighbors, i.e., fellow residents, if, for example, they are able and willing to help jobless neighbors get jobs. Poor people rarely have access to extra jobs, however, and, like their more fortunate peers, may not want to be helpful to strangers or to people unlike themselves. If large numbers of people in a bounded area helped each other in important ways and did so because of feelings about the area itself, one could perhaps consider this phenomenon as a neighborhood effect. Still, even then, the effects must be ascribed to the people involved and their relations, and not to the neighborhood.

#### COMMUNITY MODELS

A use-centered approach to space will be useful in the understanding of what actually happens in and distinguishes cities from suburbs and other community types, enriching

and transcending the ideal types and models used to understand for the standard forms of settlements. Many American cities are surprisingly similar and not very different from typical suburbs; both are primarily homeownership communities in which density levels are approximately the same, and by now many suburbs are virtually as heterogeneous in age and socioeconomic distribution of residents as cities.

If researchers look at what land users actually do in and with space in both kinds of places, they will find a considerable degree of similarity. Poor suburbs are obviously far more like poor urban neighborhoods than like rich suburbs, density differences notwithstanding. Probably the major difference between cities and suburbs is population skin color, there being no completely lily white cities, and that variation has some significant class and other consequences.

Suburbs now also have industry, and since heavy industry has either left America or resettled in rural areas, an old cause of urban-suburban variation has also been eroded. Shopping malls may already be bigger than cities' central business districts. Although urban housing is generally older than suburban, age of housing often does not affect housing use. Of course, very large cities and global cities differ in many respects from smaller ones, although even they have many areas in which land users and use patterns are quite similar. The truly global sections of New York or London are ultimately not very large.

On the whole, cities still have a greater variety of land uses, but partly because their citizens lack the power to exclude land uses they do not want. In addition, cities remain at the center of older transportation networks, thus attracting a variety of land uses that need to be central to as many urban neighborhoods, suburbs, and other communities as possible. Whether still-vital cities will lose their monopoly on centrality depends in part on the future amount of highway building and congestion.

Looking directly at what spacers users do with space should enhance the understanding of how communities actually function. For example, empirical studies should be able to clear up the disagreement generated by surveys about what has actually happened to voluntary associational life, organizational participation, and civic engagement.

A user-centered approach will also shed a somewhat different light on sociology's models of urban form. These models look at cities from hypothetical and outside standpoints, similar to views from the air, but the users of cities do not see concentric or polycentric models and, besides, they often ignore the boundaries that researchers see and draw. Even when the Chicago sociologists were writing, many of the city's residents never got to the Loop. They stayed in the shopping streets and satellite business districts that supplied the stores they could afford and the goods they preferred, as well as storekeepers who spoke their language, literally and figuratively. Indeed, urban theorists need to ask themselves for whom the central business district was and is central.

When one looks at what I think of as the lived city as mapped by its users who do the living, the differences between cities seen by model makers begin to shrink a bit. To be sure, 1920s Chicago is not 2000s Los Angeles, but if one were to hold time constant and flatten out Los Angeles to make it comparable to Chicago, the lived Chicago region is much the same jumble of land uses and oddly placed satellite shopping and other districts as is Dear's Los Angeles region (Dear, 2002).

In the urban part of Chicago, land users must reach their destinations via a grid system and in Los Angeles, they have to cope with canyons, but the suburban counties of Chicago and of every large American city do not look very different from the Los Angeles area anymore. Still, the question to study is how significant spatial differences between Chicago

and Los Angeles are for their users. Most likely, the economies and politics of the two areas, not to mention the locations of relatives, friends, and often-used facilities, are of far more significance than the features observed by spatial researchers.

Moreover, once language and concept variations are set aside, the two models are not as different as they have been depicted. Indeed, Daphne Spain pointed out how comprehensively both models ignored genders other than male (Spain, 2002). Chicago's huge immigrant population brought globalization to the city in the 19th century, and constant economic restructuring took place in Chicago as well, making it as dual, hybrid, and now cyber (Dear, 2002, p. 24) as any other big city, even if the Chicago School sociologists never used or heard such words. Although the Los Angeles model is labeled postmodern and postindustrial, the region has ethnic areas of first and second settlement and experiences "invasion and succession" just like older cities, even if the old Chicago terminology is no longer in use. Racial steering takes place whatever the model, and I am not sure tipping points vary drastically either between the two kinds of cities or between cities and suburbs when all other relevant variables are held constant.

I do not mean here to quarrel with either the Los Angeles or Chicago model, but to urge some hesitation in objectifying and reifying any model, to put more weight on street-level empirical findings, and to understand from what angles and with what agendas the models and their makers view the city. Every model focuses on some features of the city and ignores others; and all model makers come at their analysis with ideologies. Dear's analysis is of and on the left, while the Chicagoans, apparently unaware of their politics, clearly saw government as an unnatural intervener in ecological processes. In addition, they analyzed the city as if they were in the real estate business on the side.

#### POLITICAL ECONOMY

An important chapter in postecological sociological thinking about space was the emergence of the neo-Marxian combination of spatial analysis and political economy that was begun by Henri Lefebvre (1991). (The development of neo-Marxist urban sociology by Manuel Castells, David Harvey, and others was a further but, in significant respects, a separate chapter in this story.) Although Lefebvre also analyzed cities, he used spatial analysis for his critical analysis of modern capitalism.

Rereading this analysis after the demise of the state socialism (or was it state capitalism?) of Eastern Europe and China, as well as the currently virtual quiescence of socialist thought, obviously invalidates some old issues and raises some new ones in the spatial analysis of the political economy. For example, is the Lefebvrian spatial analysis still relevant to the analysis and critique of capitalism? Does any kind of spatial analysis draw attention away from more urgent problems of and with capitalism?

Despite the insights that Lefebvre contributed, he defined space so all inclusively that he sometimes framed capitalism as an evil form of land use. Moreover, he could not anticipate modern global varieties of capitalism, both in core and peripheral parts of the planet. For example, the development and continued spread of giant conglomerate and multinational corporations calls for new critical analyses. These firms are so large that their major decisionmakers limit their spatial decisions to countries or regions; local managers or subcontractors are given responsibility for smaller-area spatial decisions.

In addition, organizational structures and actual manufacturing or service-providing facilities are rarely in the same place. American corporations incorporate in Delaware or

Bermuda, put their headquarters elsewhere, and operate in yet other places. The places in which they make their money can be all over the world. The economic power and the political influence that go with increased organizational size and multinational or global scope may also enable firms to evade government regulations about space use, even if a small firm can bribe politicians more easily than a larger and therefore more visible one. But when jobs are scarce, governments, and especially elected officials, may relax land use regulations in order to attract employers, especially big employers.

The industrial firms that dominated the American economy when Lefebvre wrote have been supplemented by various kinds of service firms. Also, firms must now be distinguished by whether they are capital or labor intensive, and with hospitals, universities, and other nonprofits becoming privatized, capitalism is constantly diversifying.

Outside the United States there are formerly state socialist economies—and capitalist ones too—in which state control over the economy is nonetheless still prominent. The ease with which the managers of state-owned socialist firms became capitalist entrepreneurs is a sign that broad comparisons may be useful. Whether all the kinds of capitalist organizations use space in significantly different ways remains to be seen, but capitalism can no longer be analyzed as an ideal type.

Furthermore, many firms, even those that are not part of a conglomerate or multinational, are now so footloose that they can go where they choose or where they receive the most subsidy from competing communities. Footlooseness also forces a whole new set of questions on spatial studies and plays havoc with traditional location theory; even so, the location decisions of footloose firms are more structured than the term implies.

#### THE POWER OF SPACE

I do not want to downplay the economic, emotional, health, and other effects of space on people. Social space often has such effects, and a great deal of research must be done because the same space does not always have similar effects on everyone. The same building can impact people in various ways, and it may have no effect at all on others. When Mies van der Rohe's Lake Shore Drive apartments in Chicago were unveiled in the early 1950s, their floor-to-ceiling windows facing Lake Michigan thrilled many visitors but generated enough suicidal panic among others that ceiling-to-floor curtains had to be hung on all the windows. However, if the cost of a new city hall vastly exceeds the original budget, all poor taxpayers will be penalized proportionally more than affluent ones. Despite the ambiguous findings of crowding studies, sheer lack of space can have major harmful effects, particularly in agrarian societies. If family plots are too small, people will starve, but if the plots are too small because land is unequally distributed, the cause is to be found in the class hierarchy, not in spatial factors.

In modern and affluent societies, industrial agriculture can cope with space shortages—as well as other spatial problems, such as soil inadequacies, flooding, or drought. The corporations that carry on such agriculture have the political clout, which family farmers lack, to ameliorate flooding and drought and to protect their land and its productivity.

Natural space produces effects less often than social space, but these effects are more likely to touch everyone. When a volcano blows, it may kill everyone in the immediate vicinity. There are other examples of the power of natural space to shape and, especially, to damage, society, but increasingly, the final stages of the process are caused by individuals

and collectivities. A large part of southern Louisiana, including New Orleans, is slowly sinking beneath sea level thanks in part to industrial and other institutional decisions made without attention to long-range negative effects.

Once upon a time, hills were used by countries, communities, and elites to defend themselves against their enemies. Now, rich people will pay large amounts of money for such space.<sup>10</sup> In poor countries, the same hills may be relegated to the poor, as in South and Central American favelas. Once upon a time, low lying and swampy shores were also left to the poor, but now the rich are more likely to claim such space, with governments protecting their shorelines against flooding.

The most easily demonstrated causal power of natural space in our day is the aforementioned volcano or the earthquake-prone fault that can destroy entire communities. Of course, people who live near them often come back and rebuild, thus overcoming the limits of natural space. Indeed, spatial sociologists could do more studies of why communities are so often rebuilt in dangerous locations.

The other form of causally significant natural space is land with valuable subsurface material, such as coal, oil, natural gas, and precious and other metals. Economic institutions and forces determine which subsurface resources will be exploited, while political ones now have to look for unpoliticized sites in which to bury nuclear and other toxic wastes.

#### SPATIAL RESEARCH AND POLICY

My focus on uses and effects is well suited to future research. Studies of the uses and effects of social space offer another framework for virtually all the topics that sociologists study. Equally important, both kinds of research are relevant to policy research and policy itself. Knowing how people use space can contribute to user-friendly architectural design and spatial planning. Despite the difficulties of effects research, understanding how and why spatial decisions result in harmful effects can guide remedial public policy. Searching for the causes of spatial effects helps identify the responsible agents and forces, as well as policy that can change or redirect them.

Spatial sociology can also be useful to show when spatial policy is not appropriate. Tearing down buildings in which poor people live in order to eliminate street crime, or designing new neighborhoods to enhance social life and civic activity, are only two examples of misguided spatial policy. Persuasive researchers in possession of the relevant spatial research might have helped the New Urbanism movement actually be both new and urbanistic.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The written version of the talk can be found in Gans, 1991.

<sup>2</sup> Needless to say, natural space also includes what is under the dirt, whether it is a coal mine or a volcano. Indeed, without water somewhere under the dirt, natural space may never become social.

<sup>3</sup> Like all dichotomies, the natural-social space distinction is imperfect, but I think of the former as space that individuals and collectivities are unwilling or unable to control. There are still areas of the planet that no human being has ever seen or visited; likewise, there is inaccessible space in American wildernesses that no one can visit or even see, except perhaps by flyover.

The side of Mount Everest that professionals and now tourists in large numbers are climbing is clearly social space, but whenever snow and windstorms, avalanches, and other disasters occur, humans lose control, and Everest temporarily becomes natural space once more.

<sup>4</sup> Informal zones now develop in many American cities in which middle-class interracial (black-white) families feel comfortable. Not coincidentally, these zones are frequently located in or near university campuses.

<sup>5</sup> Knowing how people who live in crowded circumstances, by American standards, would rank having more space in comparison with other goods and services of equal cost would be useful, but the same question ought to be asked in other countries where all dwelling units are smaller.

<sup>6</sup> I trust that at least one spatial sociologist is doing empirical work on the practices of cell phone users, and on the current debates and conflicts over how much they can invade the aural privacy of others.

<sup>7</sup> Actually, having to use public space is sometimes a sign of political weakness; powerful groups can afford to meet in private space.

<sup>8</sup> This is made more complicated by the fact that people tend to define their own neighborhood for themselves, and their definitions may vary from those of their neighbors. People with limited mobility construct and use very small neighborhoods; adolescents may define the neighborhood as that area from which they escape to obtain privacy for their peer-group activities. People who can jump easily into cars may not even be able to identify the spatial boundaries of their neighborhood.

<sup>9</sup> In some cities, neighborhood boundaries are also the boundaries of political districts. If the local districts have any political say over the allocation of resources, they can literally have neighborhood effects, although these are apt to support first and foremost the politically connected residents.

<sup>10</sup> This article was written on a hill that was once a Revolutionary War battle site but is now the location of an Ivy League university.

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