



The Public Realm: Exploring the City's Quintessential Social Territory (Communication and Social Order)

By Lyn H. Lofland

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This book is about the "public realm," defined as a particular kind of social territory that is found almost exclusively in large settlements. This particular form of social-psychological space comes into being whenever a piece of actual physical space is dominated by relationships between and among persons who are strangers to one another, as often occurs in urban bars, buses, plazas, parks, coffee houses, streets, and so forth. More specifically, the book is about the social life that occurs in such social-psychological spaces (the normative patterns and principles that shape it, the relationships that characterize it, the aesthetic and interactional pleasures that enliven it) and the forces (anti-urbanism, privatism, post-war planning and architecture) that threaten it. The data upon which the book's analysis is based are diverse: direct observation; interviews; contemporary photographs, historic etchings, prints and photographs, and historical maps; histories of specific urban public spaces or spatial types; and the relevant scholarly literature from sociology, environmental psychology, geography, history, anthropology, and architecture and urban planning and design. Its central argument is that while the existing body of accomplished work in the social sciences can be reinterpreted to make it relevant to an understanding of the public realm, this quintessential feature of city life deserves much more û it deserves to be the object of direct scholarly interest in its own right. *Choice* noted that: "The author's writing style is unusually accessible, and the often fascinating narrative is generously supported by well-chosen photos."

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Review

“Outstanding Title!... In this wide-ranging contribution to the literature of urban studies, Lofland (sociology, Univ. of California, Davis) impressively synthesizes knowledge from the behavioral sciences, geography, history, architecture, and urban planning and design... The author's writing style is unusually accessible, and the often fascinating narrative is generously supported by well-chosen photos and other illustrations... Recommended for collections in sociology, psychology, and anthropology as well as such interdisciplinary fields as urban studies and urban planning. All levels.”

—P. O. Muller, *Choice*

“After reading Lyn H. Lofland's rich, intelligent, and comprehensive book *The Public Realm*, Lofland's intellectual fan club can only solidify and grow. This “view from Lofland” supplies the unifying brilliance for which the sociology of public places has been waiting.... Withal, Lofland has managed to create a work that can, like Goffman's, exist as a legacy to inspire students of public places as well as students of other areas, and as a fount for such students to draw on when creating their own work. Her book can be read profitably by sociologists of community, urban life, social interaction, and space, for Lofland has mastered all these areas. A major virtue of *The Public Realm*, then, is its scholarly balance. Yet another virtue is Lofland's lively style of scholarly thought—and this particularly makes Lofland's book useful to the teacher as well as the researcher.”

—Carol Brooks Gardner, *Contemporary Sociology*

“If the challenge for sociology is to uncover the taken-for-granted, then the examination of public behavior should properly be at the core of the discipline. The writings of Georg Simmel and Erving Goffman remind us that the existence of subtle social organization within interaction scenes is an impressive, yet routine, feat.... [T]his volume takes the social psychological analysis of urban life to a higher, deeper level: a reading of the environment as it is lived as and it is seen.”

—Gary Alan Fine, *Social Forces*

About the Author

Lyn H. Lofland is professor and chair, Department of Sociology, University of California, Davis. She is the author of many works, including *A World of Strangers: Order and Action in Urban Public Space*.

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