

For centuries in American society, the average middle class citizen has moved through each day in three main places. The first place is the place where you sleep; the second place is where you work; and the third place is where you hang out socially. The evolution of “the third place” in society is what I decided to focus on in this work.

I looked at the origins of the third place to early primitive societies which, in many cases, are very similar to the indigenous societies of today—one large place in which home, work, and a gathering spot all merge together. The glue holding these societies together is music. Music goes hand in hand with our basic primal need for human interaction. However, if there is no glue to hold the places together, the places become disparate. As we move farther away from our musically inclined indigenous ancestors, we rapidly lose that critical third place, a place that fosters conversation, friendship, and a sense of belonging.

I made three drums and three prints—one of a defunct café and another of a defunct bar, both representing two popular establishments of a third place now dead. I then did a large copper-plate etching that depicts three people floating together. This image is meant to represent the disconnection between online third places and real human interaction; the figures are meant to be reaching for what is missing in their lives.

I want the viewer to understand the importance of human interaction and the role third places play in our well-being as a society and as individuals. I hope to inspire people to think about their own third place; or, if it is lost, to create one.

Nate

In my hometown of Chico, California, there was a fly shop, perched along a busy suburban avenue. It stood unimposing, yet welcoming. The shop was called, rather simply, “The Chico Fly Shop.” There weren't that many people in it ever but did serve as sort of a gathering place for fishers of all shapes and sizes. My father was a regular here. You knew if he was going to “grab some flies,” then although it was only a 5-minute drive from my house, he would be gone for a couple hours. I went with him sometimes. Occasionally, when we were out running errands, he would stop at the shop and once I was in there, like I was really stuck in there, caught in an seemingly never ending eddy in the river of conversation. My dad went there to talk first, purchase second. There was always someone he knew there, someone he could talk to about whatever, though the conversations consisted mainly of various forms of fisherman banter. The shop, it seems to me now, was a little form of escape for him. He would stop off whenever he could, sometimes seeking a pick-me-up after a long day, or just going to converse with some likeminded people.

The Chico Fly Shop is an example of a *third place* in America. “The third place” is a term coined by Ray Oldenburg, an urban sociologist, and author of the book The Great Good Place, he chose to explain it with the first place being where you live, the second place is where you work, and the third place is the place where you hang out and mingle with the community and with friends. These places can be anywhere but are usually places like neighborhood pubs, corner cafes, community centers, beauty parlors, general stores, or bars. However, in America, these places seem to be close to dying out from American society permanently if we don't try to resurrect them.

The Chico Fly Shop closed down just this past year. It closed down, among other reasons, because people stopped coming into the shop as a gathering place for like-minded souls and, instead, came for its advertised purpose: to supply fly-fishing equipment. Just that on its own couldn't keep the business afloat; there needed to be regulars popping in and out periodically throughout the day and people coming to converse with the regulars. Because once you're in the shop that serves as your gathering place then you feel obligated to buy stuff to keep your clubhouse functional. But even my dad stopped going in regularly after a while because the friends he was used to seeing came in less frequently as well.

This is an example of the death of a third place in America. Local establishments, like The Chico Fly Shop are dying everywhere throughout America, because the idea of a third place and our need for a third place in America is very close to dead. In his book, The Great Good Place, Oldenburg references a passage from Max Lerner's book, America As a Civilization, about American society if we don't evolve to create a communities like third places “American life will become more jangled and fragmented than it is, and American personality will continue to be unquiet and unfulfilled.” American life, as it stands today, is very fragmented and impersonal, as much of America lives in housing developments. The typical American housing development is very easy to leave behind. There are no quirky, unique things about your house or your neighborhood, and there is no neighborhood pub or cafe because the neighborhood was built exclusively for living. Oldenburg sums up the situation very well: “A man works in one place, sleeps in another, shops somewhere else, find pleasure or companionship where he can, and cares about none of these places.” There is no sense of pride, no sense of home. A driving force behind this disjunction is the factor of technology, computers, phones, tablets, television, and all the other forms of technological interaction. It seems humanity need some sort of human interaction in their lives, be it through music, or be it through new forms of interaction. It has long been a part of who we are.

There is a similar situation of place and loss of interaction going on in countries that are fairly recently transitioning from indigenous ways of life to a more modern, Western ways of living. In these countries, music and dance have played a huge role in the way of life for centuries, often having a place in the first, second and third place. For instance, for the Ewe people from regions of both Ghana and Nigeria, there is no activity in their daily lives that isn't accompanied by some sort of music. Some experts say that these tribes are an almost direct glimpse into the origins of music and sound. That music may have developed from primitive communications like the Ewe's tribal drums, as well as being almost instinctively associated with emotional expression. The Ewe grow up surrounded by rhythm, song and dance. They have work songs, work rhythms, and music that accompanies every activity in their daily

routine. This includes social music, music that accompanies religious, festive, and ceremonial occasions. These ceremonies and traditions are the Ewes version of a third place. These ancient traditions, traditions that have been cultivated since the beginning of man, are being lost. A big reason for this is the fairly recent factor of western influence. As a whole, Africans are a collective people, meaning whatever it is they're doing, they do it as a group. Westerners, on the other hand, are very individualistic: they tend to not cooperate, but compete. The clash of these two ways of life is taking its toll, and not only in Africa.

Indigenous populations around the globe are feeling the pressures of individualistic Western cultural influence. One place in particular is just starting to realize what it's losing by abandoning the old for the new. The indigenous aboriginal tribes of Australia have been almost completely assimilated into modern Australian culture. They have lost 98% of what used to be a vast array of musical traditions and ceremonies spread throughout the different tribes of the area. These traditions have a very unique way of showing what it is to be human, and more important, gives these tribal people a sense of identity, community, and place. A senior woman from the Tiwi tribe summed up the situation well: "If all the songs are lost, then we don't remember who we are." The same could be said for every other indigenous population out there. These traditions are the heart and soul of each community of people who practices them, and they epitomize who they are as people as well as teaches them lessons from ancestors long past about what it is to be human. One of the best parts about these ceremonies is that they breed human interaction. Communities are built on a foundation of interactions that traditions like these produce. If the traditions are lost, the community becomes unglued, and each member is forced to build their own confused, broken foundations out of the pieces left by the grand community that used to help guide them through life.

In America, we are taught that an individual foundation is the best foundation and we grow up idolizing people that have become successful through their own hard work and determination. We balk at the idea of needing help until we really need it. We are a nation of people trying to one up each other and not a nation trying to be "one with" each other. This is part of the reason why third places have a hard time thriving here. Our society is so disjointed and fragmented that it is hard to see people moving back to that way of life, where you have a home, a place where you work, and third place where a community foundation is built. The further we move into the future, the further it seems we get from everyday human interaction. As this happens it is easy to look around and come to the conclusion that a third place based society will never again take root in America. However, we all evolved from primitive societies, much like the indigenous societies I referenced earlier, where they had a first, second, and third place all closely knit within the community. As we moved on, the places separated themselves until we reached a point where each was a separate entity. Until fairly recently this was how life in Western society was, with the three places separated but working together to create a community, the glue of the community being the third place. But in our quest for individual glory, we, in America, have all but abandoned the third place, and thus, it seems, community life all together. But we evolve quickly; to fill the void we left ourselves, we created the Internet.

Technology before the Internet was a sort of transition. The time when we started losing our third places coincided with the invention of technologies such as the television. Our lifestyle made it very easy for us to forget about daily interaction and just plug in to whatever device was nearest. In Ray Oldenburg's book, The Great Good Place, he says that, "In some countries television broadcasting is suspended one night a week so that people won't abandon the habit of getting out of their homes and maintaining contact with one another." In countries with well-established neighborhood third places this is a great idea, something that should work. But in America a solution like this wouldn't work because there are very few third places left. Instead, people would stay at home anyway, just without TV. We can see that the home entertainment gadgets and electronics take away from seeing people face to face. However, the need for human interaction is so great that we have almost subconsciously created a way around this block we've set up for ourselves.

What we have created are online equivalents of third places, social media being the community that has been given a foundation by chat rooms, online games, and other various forms online communication. Ray Oldenburg's book was written before the invention of these outlets and outlined the

essential parts that make a third place a “third place.” What I did was take this outline and apply it to both an online chat room and an online game within a chat room.

First, everyone in the third place must be on neutral ground, ground on which people can come and go as they please. Otherwise everything is personal. This could be both a chat room or an online game or anyplace multiple people can chime in on a conversation online.

Second, the third place acts as a leveler, or as Oldenburg puts it, “A place that by its nature is an inclusive place. It is accessible to the general public and does not set formal criteria of membership and exclusion.” In a game you might have to win the respect of the other players, but that should be easily gained. A chat room has almost no restrictions and can be accessed by anyone with a computer. However in traditional third places the people are able to easily gain a better understanding of who someone really is through their personality when it comes to such a loose environment. With the Internet, however, you are forced to trust that people are who they say they are, because many times you haven't actually met anyone face to face.

Third, conversation is the main activity. The conversations are usually joyful and lively, enriched with the excitement of being in your third place. Chat rooms are usually like this because there are very few other reasons to be in a chat room. But for games, it doesn't fit as well because for many online gamers, the game is the main activity not the chat room conversation.

The fourth standard is the accessibility and accommodation of the third place. The best third places are the ones that can be accessed at almost any time and, consequently, a community life exists when one can go daily to a given location and see many of the people he or she knows. The online third places I am talking about are both very accessible as well as accommodating. When you are bored or down then you can always go to your favorite game, just like you would your favorite pub.

Fifth, for a third place to be a third place you must have regulars; regulars are the people who are always at the gathering spot to assure that at any given time one of the regulars will be there. They are, when it comes down to it, the people who decide if you will be able to join their small community club. For chat rooms you should know that at least one other person will be bored enough to get online and talk. The same goes for gaming, except there is an even better chance there will be someone online because there are those regular hardcore gamers who are online all the time and, just like described, they are the ones who ultimately decide whether you can be accepted into their gaming club.

Sixth, the third place usually keeps a low profile, meaning the place is not a place someone might seek out; instead, it's a little shabby. The place is buoyed by the interactions of the people inside, not the building. Online it is hard to give sites a low profile but also where the public can easily access it. This is a difficult comparison to make because of the differences between the real world and the online landscape. Within this landscape, it seems we have found a substitute for our dead third places, but as we move further into the frontier of this online world, what we are leaving behind will become more apparent. What we are losing are the benefits of that come with raw, face to face human interaction. According to Dr. Jeff Thompson's article in [Psychology Today](#), he says that around 90% of how we communicate is through non-verbal cues, with the belief that 55% of communication is body language, 38% is the tone of voice, and 7% is the actual words spoken. On the Internet all of the nonverbal interaction is eliminated. If one looks at the third place more closely you realize that speech and conversation are just a small part of the third place. It is the feeling it gives you as you walk inside your favorite pub at the end of a long day, and the real tangible friends you are to meet. With face-to-face interaction you are able to greatly understand the ins and outs of each member in your group of friends and community, learn their stories, and overall gain a sense of perspective about where you are in the world. Words can be easily twisted and manipulated, especially in a situation where there is no social context. Also, in real world third places people say things without thinking, this adds a whole other element of spontaneity that can't really be recreated in an online format. Additionally, social cues like when to stop talking are not transferred online, unless someone tells you directly. In all the combination of speech and social cues that make up real human interaction, without one or the other we end up fairly lost. For example, if you listened to a stand up comedy routine, without visuals, then watched the same routine after, whole jokes would change, it would be almost a completely different experience because

now you could see the facial expressions and emotions of the comic. With online chat rooms, it's like listening to the comic minus the expressions conveyed through speech. It is like taking away your ability to listen, and your ability to see, thus making you blind.

I have come to the conclusion that we need face to face interaction, so though we are blind now, in the future I believe that we will continue our progression into the new age. This new age could progress into online third places where you can see each member's face while they talk. Then further down the line possibly move into another world all together, a virtual world, a world where people can meet and talk like the real world in virtual third places. We also must not forget about the power of music; music has the power to substitute for some of the raw human emotion we lose with the loss of third places. Since the beginning of man, music has played a large part in gluing communities together. Even if we don't evolve past our basic chat rooms we still have that deep human connection with music. I feel as we grow and evolve, the void the loss of third places leaves us with will eventually be filled even if our three facets of life get split into ten.