

## 1. The Oakland Table

Almost a decade ago, Jerry Brown decided to settle in Oakland, a city Gertrude Stein described as a place where "there is no there there when you get there." His new home also became the headquarters of *We the People*, a foundation that fosters the recovery of civic virtues: the renewal of mutual trust, neighborly aid, respect for the law, learning to dwell, hospitality offered to those of different lifestyles, and friendship in a spirit of celebration. Jerry and his friends started to create a "there," rooting themselves in downtown Oakland. From his experiences as a politician, he knew that it was necessary to rethink the possibility of politics. Politics requires place.

In 1999, Jerry was elected mayor of Oakland. He has now invited an old friend, Ivan Illich, together with his circle of friends and long-time collaborators, to be his guests each year. With Jerry, they have investigated the history of friendship through successive epochs of civic relatedness. In our time, the sense and space for this relatedness have disappeared. Unusual kinds of historically unprecedented obstacles undermine the foundations for politics and civic virtue.

During six weeks, twice a year, *We the People* will host Ivan Illich and his friends. They will preside a series of public lectures, seminars, reading groups, and conversations where people have the opportunity to discuss their concrete Oakland experiences in light of the lectures. The program, *The Oakland Table*, will explore the generating principles under which the devolution of authority to face-to-face intercourse among citizens can become feasible in an age of runaway economic polarization, global controls, and systems management of people. The aim of the program is the recovery of common sense, understood as an innate faculty that enables neighbors to recognize what is fitting, appropriate, mutually desirable and, therefore, good.

The historical roots for the loss of civic relatedness and a sense for fit are the underlying themes of these reflections on the good. Civic relatedness grows out of perception. True perception for what is fitting depends on what is in proportion. To determine this, one must study the history of sense perception. Such a history reveals how citizens traditionally spoke and listened to one another. Politics calls for

this living relationship with both feet on the ground.

How is it possible to live in neighborly aid and friendship when the city is separated into either administered and controlled public space, or privileged and protected private space? Traditionally, every city had commons: streets and places were inhabited by citizens, including the old, crippled, and children. Hospitality meant leading another over the threshold that separated home from commons, in order to welcome that person into one's place. How can hospitality survive when surveillance cameras and gated communities transform neighbors into potential threats?

The hegemony of experts and service industries disables both neighbor and citizen. Formerly, one depended on good will; today, who can do without paid and professional services? How will I care for my old neighbor or handicapped friend when dependency on services has blurred the distinction between institutions and kin? Families and citizens are transformed into clients of diagnosis, risk assessment, and professional management.

In the year 2000, *The Oakland Table* will explore pathways out of an inhospitable space. In the following years, lectures and discussions will be centered on themes such as the service mentality, the pursuit of health, speed, education, and the engineered society.

## **2. City Space/The City as a Place**

The first session of *The Oakland Table* deals with the clash between felt and calculated space. Citizens want to dwell, play and work in a convivial place. However, city officials develop planned space, the distraction industries offer virtual space, and the market sells space as a commodity. The ambience of opportunities and hazards, prospects and pits among which people relate to one another require disciplined thought and a tender heart.

The first series of *The Oakland Table* invites participants to stretch their imaginations into the spaces of ancient, medieval, and modern town experiences, recognizing both the distance and closeness between Oakland and very different places. An anthropological and historical evocation of past places need not foster romantic

illusions; rather, it can serve to distance us from contemporary certainties. It aims to inspire a flowering of disobedience to the flat measurements and managerial functions that corrupt city revival in the hands of experts.

### **3. The Program of *The Oakland Table* on City Space during the Fall of 2000.**

The group conducting this session will be in residence at Mayor Jerry Brown's home at 200 Harrison Street in Oakland from the last week of August to the second week of October. Starting with September 2nd for six successive Saturdays, a different keynote-lecture will set the tone for the week. Each Sunday, Samar Farage presiding the group will host a colloquy to give those who attend the key lecture an opportunity to relate it to concrete issues under discussion in Oakland. The colloquy will begin with a short comment by an invited guest. This two-hour colloquy will be interrupted by a coffee break.

During the summer months a Reader will be made available in each of the forty-two public libraries of Oakland. It will contain essays by the speakers, some further texts they judge significant to their theme, a short bio-bibliographies, and a suggestion for the more thorough study of the issues raised. Some of these texts are meant to be discussed with their author in a seminar setting. Only those who have read the assignment are invited to these special seminars that will be arranged, Monday through Thursday, in the evenings.

*David Cayley*, who has published his wide-ranging conversations with Illich, offers his commentary on the key themes of Illich's thought and work. *Jean Robert*, author of a major study on the "History of City Space," invites the public to six sessions. *Lee Hoinacki* is available to those interested in place-related questions he has raised in his recent books on walking and on dwelling. *Antje Menk*, a linguist dedicated to Turkish immigrants in Germany, explores the different status of minority language here and there. *Rafaella Lamberti*, the founder and for twenty years president of the Women's Civic Center of Bologna, has the unusual experience of making the Palazzo Notariale -- right next to City Hall -- the second hinge of city politics. *Kostas Hatzikiriakou*, a logician from Crete, has chosen as his theme, "What remains of sensual space after Turing?"

Among the keynote speakers also participating in colloquies for readers of their texts are the following:

**Gustavo Esteva**, a grassroots political activist and deprofessionalized intellectual, lives in a small Indian village in Oaxaca, Mexico. For the last two decades he has worked with Indian groups, peasants, and urban fringe-dwellers, to find alternatives to development and the market economy.

**Terrance Galvin**, a Canadian architect from Montreal, has participated in the dwelling activities of communities in India, Thailand, the Middle East and El Salvador. He examines the historical loss of proportionality and the emergence of the 'empty space' that architects design.

**Douglas Lummis**, an American academic who left for Japan during the Vietnam war, teaches political philosophy in Tokyo. In "Radical Democracy," he argues that true democracy is an art requiring spaces that are not planned and managed, but whose shape and style are brought forth by the inhabitants of concrete places.

**John Turner**, a British architect and participant observer of the demographic explosion in Lima, Peru, introduced the distinction between housing "by" and housing "for" people. For him, dwelling does not mean being garaged in comfortable square feet of housing; rather, it is a fundamental popular art of creating lived-in space in a community that convivially responds to the specific social and physical circumstances of a place.

**Joseph Rykwert**, a historian of ideas that underlie space, distance and proportionality, profoundly influenced the thinking of Illich. His "The Idea of a Town," which introduces the reader to the Etruscan, Greek and Roman ceremonial foundations and celebrations of space, finds its completion in "City of the 20th Century," to be published in August 2000.