

INVITATION TO THE SECOND OAKLAND TABLE

At

200 HARRISON STREET

Between

APRIL 21ST - MAY 26TH 2001

HOSPITALITY IN THE SPACE AGE

Last September, a group of Ivan Illich's friends gathered around Jerry Brown's Oakland Table to reflect on the conflicts arising for those who want to find a place in the space age. Recent historical scholarship provided the evidence for the point of departure in that six weeks conversation: the traditional sense of belonging to a place, of knowing one's place has withered if not vanished as a result of life in space. Space as a global, homogenous, orthogonal container within which things as well as people move is a critter coeval with modern western society. "Space" of this kind does not appear in Euclid's Geometry or medieval mapmaking.

Shakespeare uses the work for a 'span of time' but never for that container without which we cannot do. Electric grids, telephone lines, hotel chains and highways lanes; homes, garages, cars and desks; job, vacation, sports and politics today are all framed by space. So, for example in City Hall the Mayor oversees the creation, design, management of urban space.

In contrast to space, places emerge from dwelling, and by living together people lend them their distinctive configuration and unique atmosphere. Even though it is possible to identify characteristics that distinguish all places from contemporary space, each place is singular in its taste and smell. For this reason, you can speak of this place or refer to several such places. You could never speak in the abstract of 'place' in the way one can say "space" *tout court*. Space is conceptually universal. It does not have to be created. Also, space is not oriented by an upper and lower realm, by the right and left; it has no inside or horizon; it has no center. Place is exquisitely human: only people can bring it forth by facing each other. Jerry Brown's place, close to Jack London Square, springs from the well-crafted table between the library and the kitchen. The conversation around it led to the confrontation between places in Oakland and Oakland's' space.

This spring, Mayor Brown has invited his friends to continue the conversation. This time it will focus on the most fundamental element in the art of dwelling, hospitality. Hospitality calls for a place with a door that opens to the outside. At its threshold the host invites the stranger to step in and to turn into a guest by taking his place. In no two places the ceremony was the same, there were no people without their own kind of behaving at the threshold. None anywhere, with just one exception: the only people to survive the withering and vanishing of hospitality are those of the late industrial society. The conversation in Oakland aims to answer the question: how can place be celebrated in the space age?

Today electronic scanners open the door and a doorman checks your identity, a plastic card that gives you access to a professionally guarded domain: a hospital, school, jail or hotel. Their institutionalized provision of services masks the absence of a gratuitous, arbitrary, personal invitation to a hospitable place. It seems important to examine how the institutional provision of professional services undermined hospitality by equipping people to inhabit space that is unfit for dwelling. How did the offer of services elicit professionally defined but personally felt basic needs? By what means do professionals, experts and administrative agencies gain their disabling powers? How were modern people convinced to expel the infirm, the anguished and exceptional, the old and the dying to professional agencies and fancy that this is done for their own good?

Pat answers abound to such questions about the homeless societies that have emerged in global space, in India and Brazil as in California and North Africa. Their analysis will require considerable mutual patience from the participants at the second Oakland table. On six Saturdays starting 21st April about 7.00pm, the general public is invited to a discussion led by one of the participants. The person in charge of the evening will not act as a reporter on the trend of the conversation but examine personal experience in the distanced perspective gained in historical studies.

Ivan Illich opens the second Oakland Table on **April 21st**, delving into the

history of hospitality in Western Europe. He knows about the first hospices for the homeless and the appearance of the first sick-houses in which people with the first signs of ergotism dedicated themselves to the consolation of those in later stages of this now unknown endemic. His emphasis rests on the ever institutionalization of charitable hospitality. He explains the rise of service professions in terms of a transmogrification of the good into values that can be guaranteed, normalized and managed.

On **April 28th**, **Silja Samerski** is in charge. She just finished a study on the facilitation of management-like decision-making in every day life under the guidance of Barbara Duden. She explores a very recent and barely noticed threat to hospitality: she argues that the spread of "informed decision-making" and "autonomous self-management" makes *beherzten Beistand* (a committed stance towards another) impossible. Referring to the example of so-called "pregnancy care" where woman are forced to decide on possible tests and finally on the coming child, Samerski shows how the proliferation of pre-established options that call for decision-making destroy the readiness to be surprised by the unknown.

On **May 5th**, **Sajay Samuel**, who studies the recent history of accounting and administrative practices, invites **Jean Robert**, a longstanding collaborator of Illich to jointly review and extend Illich's critique on services. They focus on transportation to explore the counterproductive effects of services in general and examine: the technical, structural and symbolic fallouts from roadways designed primarily for transport; how the perception of space results from being inserted in fast moving machines; and why professional associations like administrative agencies may be understood as the undemocratic consequence of disabling tools and services.

Matthias Rieger, working on a study on loss of proportionality and harmony in music, invited the Norwegian criminologist **Nils Christie** for **May 12th** to talk about his experiences of hospitality in the little village "*Vidarasen*". Due to the mutual commitment of its inhabitants, Vidarasen is a very special place. Those ones who would be classified as "normal" in the

outside world do not render a service to those who generally are categorized as “handicapped” and “needy”. They all share their homes, their work, their meals, and their friends. Christie’s stories show: As soon as people are ready to be surprised and share their lives with each other, they realize that the distinction between normal and needy does not make the slightest sense anymore.

On **May 19th**, **Samar Farage**, studying the history of the *krasis*-- the harmonious humoral proportions in Galenic medicine—invites two outstanding Islamicists, **Sachiko Murata** and **William Chittick** to introduce us to Eastern traditions of hospitality. In contrast to the Christian history of hospitalization, the Islamic world was slow to institutionalize the care for strangers, the ill and the dying. Murata and Chittick reveal the enormous gulf between non-western and modern practices of treating one’s family, friends, and neighbors. They highlight how a sense for place remains awake to this day in Islamic society as exemplified by the millions of praying people, whether prince or pauper, facing Mecca five times a day.

On the **26th May**, the host of the Oakland Table, **Jerry Brown** will close the second six weeks’ gathering. Brown reviews the preceding meetings and discussions to draw both philosophical and practical conclusions. As a politician who knows the art of bi-location; of standing with one foot in managed “space” and with the other in his “place”, he explores the possibilities today of carving out and preserving the conditions for place and hospitality.

Further events may be scheduled during Saturday nights in the case people want to continue discussions with guests at the Oakland Table. For additional information please see our homepage **<http://www.pudel.uni-bremen.de/>** or call **We the People** at (510)-836-3272.