Home and Near-Home Territories

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ORIENTATION

Home does not end at the front door but rather extends beyond. This chapter is about that region beyond, those exterior spaces adjoining the home: porches, steps, front yards, back yards, driveways, sidewalks, and alleys. These spaces are of crucial interest for two reasons. First, they immediately adjoin the home; consequently, what happens in these outside spaces strongly influences the quality of life in the home. Second, they represent spaces where the two major types of settings in residential life—the private, personal, and owned versus the public, shared, and open to the community—interpenetrate. Consequently, these settings are of considerable interest for understanding the dialectic between individuals and local society.

To expand on this point for a moment we would encourage the reader to recall a time when he or she dropped two stones, simultaneously, and fairly close together, into a still pond. As ripples went
out from each point of entry, the two ripple patterns reached a point when they began to intersect (Figure 1). Imagine that with a very high-speed camera, one could “freeze” the action at the previously mentioned moment, when two patterns of ripples have begun to interpenetrate. The points of origin are the public–community versus the private–personal domains of everyday life. Surrounding each domain are expectations and norms, which decrease in strength as we move away from the point source, that tell us how to regard that space and how to act when we are in it. Where these two spheres of influence overlap, in the residential environment, is in the home and near-home outside territories that surround and buffer the home. This interpenetration is well expressed in Thomas Hardy’s (1886/1962) *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (pp. 66–67). Elizabeth, newly come to the city, is walking down the street on market day, on her way to see Henchard.

The front doors of the private houses were mostly left open at this warm autumn time, no thought of umbrella stealers disturbing the minds of the placid burgesses. Hence, through the long straight entrance passages thus unclosed could be seen, as through tunnels, the mossy gardens at the back. . . . The old fashioned fronts, rose sheer from the pavement, into which the bow-windows protruded like bastions . . . every shop pitched out half its contents upon trestles and boxes at the kerb, extending the display each week a little further into the roadway, despite the expostulations of the two feeble old constables. . . . And any inviting recess in front of a house that had been modestly kept back from the general line was utilized by pig dealers as a pen for their stock.

This quote suggests in several ways how public and private domains flow into one another. Vistas into private houses and yards become part of the public scene, and private entrepreneurs encroach onto the street.