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reforms of Paris in the late-nineteenth century, remodeled some of the central areas of their nations' capitals. San José's Plaza Central was given a facelift, and a new Victorian kiosk crowned the space. Military bands offered concerts of classical and popular music for the public, and young couples used the park as a site for courting. In the post-World War II era upper class families moved away from the city's center, and the elegant polish to the park faded. Yet the rhythms of everyday life continued to pulsate through the plaza as friends met there to socialize in the midst of growing urban decay. San José's Plaza de la Cultura, on the other hand, is a recent invention, a modernist construction of stark concrete with little vegetation that has become the province of teenagers, tourists, sexual cruising and solicitation. In contrast to the intimate familiarity that characterized the Parque Central, the Plaza de la Cultura proclaims itself as an open forum for less personal and more temporal social and commercial interactions.

Municipal governments have remodeled and rebuilt these sites in recent years as a part of urban renewal. Users of these spaces have responded in various ways. The author documents some of the public debates and controversies regarding alternative plans for park renovations to reveal how important these places remain for urban residents, arguing that "public spaces, such as the Costa Rican plaza, are one of the last democratic forums for public dissent in a civil society (p. 240)." This is certainly true, as social movements in Latin America continue to occupy central plazas for protest demonstrations and public parks still offer an open forum for political debate. Yet, as Low points out, the massive influx of foreign capital and consumerism have restructured urban life. MacDonald's fast food restaurants have begun to replace traditional leisurely lunchtime eating establishments, and new pedestrian shopping promenades channel thousands of consumers along narrow paved-over streets overflowing with commercial establishments. Urban planning and spatial renovations can also erase sites of social contestation. One dramatic example is the Praça da Sé in central São Paulo, Brazil. When architects designed the new Metro station during the military regime, they created a renovated multi-layered plaza in front of the cathedral that diminished the possibilities for holding traditional mass rallies at that location. As politicians and bureaucrats manipulate public spaces for an array of purposes, the democratic power of these open expanses can dissipate. Ultimately, *One the Plaza: The Politics of Public Space and Culture* is an appeal to save those public parks and plazas that have historically facilitated social interactions and political engagement, not only in Latin America, but in other parts of the world as well.

Hardest Times: The Trauma of Long Term Unemployment. by Thomas J. Cottle. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers (2001), 311 pp.

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Hardest Times reports conversations with 13 unemployed men. It also provides chapters on shame and trauma and discussion of the psychology of male identity to connect the narratives to the theoretical literature in psychology. Cottle's focus is on personal portraits of individual men in their own words, rather than illustrating particular attitudes or opinions (p. 6). Early in the book (p. 8) he acknowledges that the stories may cause discomfort to some readers because "we too dread the possibility of unemployment . . ." In the epilogue he suggests that unemployment is a consequence of a public policy that requires a portion of Americans to be kept unemployed and in poverty (pp. 283-284). One of his informants says, "The government bails the S and L boys out of trouble with our money, but don't bail us out when we didn't break a single law, how do you explain that one?" (p. 228). That's the question I'm left with. My problem with this book is that nowhere does Cottle connect these three points.

Some of the problems with the book are technical, and the lack of thorough copyediting suggests that the book was rushed into production. Some might wonder how and why Cottle put together these stories of an unemployed white construction worker, white engineer, immigrant Jewish Hungarian and an American Jew, two black manual laborers, white insurance salesman, two black teenagers, a housing project dweller in his sixties who prepares to die when his wife dies as he watches without the choices resources or insurance would allow, a West Indian immigrant in London, and a suburban-dwelling unemployed corporate computer guy who finally found some work. The one thing they have in common is long periods of unemployment. That is the topic of the book, but there is some reason to think that responses to unemployment differ by class, nationality, and ethnicity. The pattern that

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emerges seems forced — unemployment unmans men and makes their lives worthless to the point that some kill themselves. There is some talk of sampling, but I don't think it addresses the issue of why the author presents these stories. He does say that he is interested in the lethal aspects of unemployment (p. 191) and in extreme cases. But readers might benefit from knowing the range of responses.

Nor does he discuss how the material in the book relates to the interviews. How did he edit the interviews? Sometimes he tells us he had talked with a person of a period of years, sometimes he tells us the setting of the interview, but nowhere does he discuss an editorial policy that relates the narrative to the interviews. Some of the language of the narratives is so repetitive that I began to wonder if the author weren't reporting responses to leading questions rather than constructions of individual informants. Part of the argument, though, is that all of these people are in the same situation and respond in the same way. Cottle could have strengthened the case by discussing his editorial policy.

Social scientists who discuss identity could benefit from reading Chapter 8, which focuses on the psychology of identity. The problem with his treatment here is that it shows no awareness of cultural variability. He writes of "Western culture" and of "traditional society" as if these are meaningful entities. There are no ethnographic references to the just-so stories about traditional society. Like an economist, Cottle is filling in the blanks in psychological theory with assumptions. Nor will it do to point to what we all know by experience, our own folk models. Such cultural models mislead as often as they enlighten, and they should all be the objective of scientific treatment rather than folklore.

To discuss variable responses in terms of competencies, coping skills, social supports, and sense of control or power (pp. 201-205) is just to assert again that people's responses differ, without explaining why. Why would they differ on these dimensions? It might be related to class, or geography, or ethnicity or religion, but the author does not develop these questions. If responses differ on these dimensions, what guarantees that what we are witnessing in the narratives is a result of unemployment and not one or more of these variables? The fact of unemployment as well as suicidal feelings might both be related to some third variable such as one of these. The author could have addressed such issues so that readers do not draw such conclusions and blame the victims, a stance that is all too easy to take from middle class vantage points of merit and responsibility.

Finally, I was bothered by contradictions in the work, some of which seem to me to be based on stereotypes. If the communal orientation of support groups and gatherings is "feminine" (p. 271), what about the communal orientation of armed forces, fraternities, unions, lodges, old boys networks and other such "traditionally" male domains? If creating projects creates identity and work is at their center, and if men focus on contributing to family and communities, where they represent stability (p. 256), why is a job so central in the equation? Why not any kind of project? Cottle shows us that this is not the case, but does not explain why. If "the male worldview" contains elements of purpose, rationality, sanity, goal oriented-behavior, agency, instrumentality, intentionality, personal integrity (p. 271), why isn't unemployment liberating? Jobs, from the menial to the elevated, often assault all of these as surely as unemployment. Domineering supervisors, irrational procedures, insane management practices, self-defeating policies, irrational evaluation procedures — these are characteristics of employment celebrated in the extreme sample narratives of the comic strip Dilbert — characteristics that ring true because they echo shared experience of employment. Why is unemployment not freeing? If his job binds a man to family and community (p. 272), then it also separates him from them. There's the saying that no dying man ever said he wished he'd spent more time at the office.

This looks like a book made of a lot of pieces of interview transcripts and a review of the psychological literature. The latter is interesting to one who doesn't know it, but the former lack any pattern except that losing the job causes men to lose their lives, metaphorically and physically.

It is a pity that Cottle did not make better use of his experience and his materials to discuss the function of unemployment suggested at the beginning of the book and of this review — that the reason it is necessary is to keep the middle class worried. Whatever the intention of the policies that create unemployment and homelessness, one of their functions is to keep working people, especially those who are hanging over those pits by one paycheck, worried. People who are worried for their health insurance, their car and house payments are easy to manage, will accept the irrationalities of Dilbert-like jobs without protest. The genius of the American system is that our ruling class hires half of the working class to manage the other half of the working class. Unemployment and the ideologies of individuality and merit are ways to keep the middle class worried enough to be loyal to their employers. But such an analysis would take more than a string of first-person narratives, moving and tragic though they may be, and a review of the psychological literature. It would take an awareness of the operation of a political and economic system, a political ecology, that defines unemployment, poverty, and worry as parts of its operation.