

## *Curitiba*

### **Bill McKibben**

The first time I went there, I had never heard of Curitiba. I had no idea that its bus system was the best on earth, that it had largely solved the problem of street children that plagues the rest of South America, or that a municipal shepherd and his flock of thirty sheep trimmed the grass in its vast parks. It was just a midsize Brazilian city where an airline schedule forced me to spend the night midway through a long South American reporting trip. I reached my hotel, took a nap, and then went out in the early evening for a walk - warily, because I had just come from crime-soaked Rio. But the street in front of the hotel was cobbled, closed to cars, and strung with lights. It opened onto another such street, which in turn opened into a broad and leafy plaza, with more shop-lined streets stretching off in all directions. Though the night was frosty - Brazil stretches well south of the tropics, and Curitiba is in the mountains - people strolled and shopped, butcher to baker to bookstore. There were almost no cars, but at one of the squares a steady line of buses rolled off, full, every few seconds. I walked for an hour, and then another; I felt my shoulders, hunched from the tension of Rio (and probably New York as well) straightening. Though I flew out the next day as scheduled, I never forgot the city. From time to time over the next few years, I would see Curitiba mentioned in planning magazines or come across a short newspaper account of it winning various awards from the United Nations. Its success seemed demographically unlikely. For one thing, it's relatively poor - average per capita income is about twenty-five hundred dollars. Worse, a flood of displaced peasants has tripled its population to a million and a half in the last twenty-five years. It should resemble a small-scale version of urban nightmares like Sao Paulo or Mexico City. But I knew, from my evening's stroll, it wasn't like that, and I wondered why.

It was more than idle curiosity. The longer I thought about my home place, the more I knew that its natural recovery was mostly a matter of luck and timing - that it could easily deteriorate again because people had not changed the economic habits or attitudes of mind that laid it waste in the first place. We still cherish notions of extreme individualism; if anything, our sense of community weakens more each year. Our politics is ever more firmly in the hands of those who exalt the private, those who write off whole swaths of people and places.

Although I no longer live an urban life, I knew that the key to many of these mysteries involved cities - and not simply because of their potential for environmental efficiency. More because they had long been the places where we worked out our most important

accommodations. Where we built our most important links, however tenuously, between different kinds of people. Where sheer crowdedness made compromise essential. The erosion of the sense of community in the cities I knew - most especially New York, but in fact any place ringed with suburbs - seems to me to have signaled the erosion of politics as something useful, to have turned it from a source of togetherness and common feeling into a reflection of apartness and self-interest.

If any of my hopes for the small and lonely places I love best are ever to bear fruit, that cynical divisiveness has to be reversed. Maybe an effort to convince myself that such a decay in public life was not inevitable was why I went back to Curitiba to spend some real time, to see if its charms extend beyond the lovely downtown. For a month my wife and baby and I lived in a small apartment near the city center. Morning after morning I interviewed cops, merchants, urban foresters, civil engineers, novelists, planners; in the afternoons we pushed the stroller around the town, learning its rhythms and habits.

And we decided, with great delight, that Curitiba is among the world's great cities.

Not for its physical location: there are no beaches, no broad bridge-spanned rivers. Not in terms of culture or glamour: it's a fairly provincial place. But measured for "livability" - a weak coinage expressing some optimum mix of pleasures provided and drawbacks avoided - I have never been any place like it. In a recent survey 60 percent of New Yorkers wanted to leave their rich and cosmopolitan city; 99 percent of Curitibaans told pollsters that they were happy with their town; and 70 percent of Paulistas, residents of the mobbed megalopolis to the north, said they thought life would be better in Curitiba. It has slums: some of the same shantytown favelas that dominate most Third World cities have sprouted on the 'edge of town as the population has rocketed. But even they are different, hopeful in palpable ways. They are clean, for instance - under a city program a slumdweller who collects a sack of garbage gets a sack of food from the city in return.

And Curitiba is the classic example of decent lives helping produce a decent environment. One statistic should underline the importance of this place to the world. Because of its fine transit system, and because its inhabitants are attracted toward the city center instead of repelled out to a sprawl of suburbs, Curitibaans use 25 percent less fuel per capita than other Brazilians, even though they are actually more likely to own cars. Twenty five percent is a large enough number to matter; in the United States we are battling, unsuccessfully, merely to hold our much-higher fossil fuel use steady. And this 25 percent came before anyone redesigned cars or changed energy prices or did any of the other things only a federal government or an

international treaty can do. It came not from preaching at folks about waste or ranting about global warming. It came from designing a city that actually meets people's desires, a city that is as much an example for the sprawling, decaying cities of the First World as for the crowded, booming cities of the Third World. A place that, at the very least, undercuts the despair that dominates every discussion of the world's cities, where half of human souls now reside.

It is a place, most of all, that helps redeem the idea of politics. If there's one lesson that Ronald Reagan and now Newt Gingrich have successfully hammered home to Americans, it's that "public"- education or transit or broadcasting or health care-is necessarily shabby and cumbersome, while "private" is shiny and efficient. Until that notion (which all too often reflects the present truth) changes, nothing will alter the basic momentum of our predicament. If Curitiba seems at first far removed from the forests and villages and suburbs of the rural East, it came to seem an absolutely essential first stop on my journey.

The Portuguese arrived on the Planalto, the first plateau above the Atlantic, in the middle of the seventeenth century. They were looking for gold, which was gone by 1660; a few stayed on to found a backwater town, Curitiba, which was known as the "sleeping city," a good stopover on the route to Sao Paulo. But the tea farms of Parana state drew a steady stream of European immigrants - especially Italians, Poles, and Germans - many of whom eventually settled in Curitiba, the state's capital. By 1940 there were 125,000 residents. By 1950 the number had jumped to 180,000, and by 1960 doubled to 361,000 - the explosive, confident growth that marked the entire country was underway in Curitiba as well. And with many of the same effects: traffic downtown started to snarl, and the air was growing thick with exhaust. It was clear that the time had come to plan; and as in almost every other city, planning meant planning for automobiles.

Curitiba's official scheme called for widening the main streets of the city to add more lanes, which would have meant knocking down the turn-of-the-century buildings that lined the downtown, and for building an overpass that would link two of the city's main squares by going over the top of Rua Quinze de Novembro, the main shopping street. Any American living in a city that has undergone urban renewal or been cut off from its waterfront by a belt of highway would recognize the plan in an instant; in one form or another, it's how urban areas around the globe have been reconfigured for the auto age.

But in Curitiba, resistance to the plan was unexpectedly fierce. Opposition was centered in the architecture and planning departments of the local branch of the federal university, and the loudest voice belonged to Jaime Lerner.

Jaime Lerner is a chubby man with a large, friendly, and open face. He looks like Norm, the guy at the end of the bar in *Cheers*. He also looks silly stuffed into a suit; so even though he's been mayor of Curitiba on and off for the last two decades, he normally wears a blue polo shirt. He has an abiding interest in almost everything. His press secretary says that quite often, answering a question on television, Lerner "starts in about this city here that he's just visited, and this movie he was thinking about, and this book he just read. And I tell him, 'No, No, No -you need shock asterisks,' " the local translation of sound bite.

In the late 1960s, however, he was just a young planner and architect who had grown up in the city, working in his Polish father's dry goods store. And he organized the drive against the overpass, out of what might almost be called nostalgia. "They were trying to throw away the story of the city," he recalls; they were trying to emulate, on a much smaller scale, the tabula rasa "miracle" of Brasilia - the capital city that was still being completed in the country's interior - perhaps the grandest stab at designing a city from the ground up in the world's history. Brasilia was the buzz of architects and planners everywhere, and the country's greatest claim to modernity. Its site was chosen from aerial photographs of various scrublands and turned over to Oscar Niemeyer, the foremost Brazilian disciple of Le Corbusier; as Alex Shoumatoff, in his history of the city, writes: "Most of the young intellectuals in Latin America at that time were eager to break with the past and take a long leap forward." Their plan was for a rational grid of buildings precisely the same size, with a giant "Sector of Diversion" in the center. Functions were strictly separated - work in one area, shop in another, play in a third - and the regions were linked mainly by road. It was a "speedway city," to be built entirely without intersections; anyone walking between the monumental buildings would have to use overpasses. Construction drowned the richest forest on the central plateau, and the glass buildings baked like ovens in the sun - it is a city inconceivable without the air conditioner and the car. But never mind. Yuri Gagarin visited. "I feel as if I have just disembarked on another planet, not earth," he said, meaning it as a compliment. Malraux, speaking for European modernity, told a crowd that "a murmur of glory accompanies the pounding of the anvils that salute your audacity, your faith, and the destiny of Brazil, as the Capital of Hope surges on." Frank Capra thought it was the eighth wonder of the world.

With all that exaltation in the air, it was a good thing that Jaime Lerner had visited Paris as a young student and especially that he had grown up loving the mix of people in Curitiba. Because Lerner, through a chain of political flukes, found himself the mayor of Curitiba at the age of thirty-three. Brazil in the early 1970s was ruled by the military, and the local governor was not interested in appointing anyone who might turn out to be a political rival. He picked Lerner, who took the job despite his

repugnance for the army. All of a sudden his friends and colleagues were pulling their plans out of the cupboards. All of a sudden they were going to get their chance to remake Curitiba - not for cars but for people. "I was born on the street of the central railroad station," says Lerner. "My father - he had a shop in this street, and we lived in the back of the business. I used, since six, to play in the street. Since my childhood I had everything from the street. Peasants, they came each day. We had big factories so I knew all kind of workers. We had the state assembly. The old streetcars. We had circus, newspapers. The whole life - hotels. So I could have an idea about the whole society. I was playing, and just watching. I never could forget this street, which was a street like other streets that everyone has in his, life. But a street is the synthesis of the whole city, the whole society."

And so the story of Curitiba begins with its central street, Rua Quinze - the one that the old plan wanted to obliterate with an overpass. Lerner insisted instead that it should become a pedestrian mall, an emblem of his drive for a human-scale city. "I knew we'd have a big fight," he says. "I had no way to convince the storeowners a pedestrian mall would be good for them, because there was no other pedestrian mall in Brazil. No other in the world, really, except maybe Munich. But I knew if they had a chance to actually see it, everyone would love it." To prevent opposition, he planned carefully. "I told my staff, 'This is like a war.' My secretary of public works said the job would take two months. I got him down to one month. Maybe one week, he said, but that's final. I said, 'Let's start Friday night, and we have to finish by Monday morning.'" And they did - jackhammering up the pavement, putting down cobblestones, erecting streetlights and kiosks, and putting in tens of thousands of flowers.

"It was a horrible risk - he could easily have been fired," says Oswaldo Alves, who helped with the work. But by midday Monday the same storeowners who had been threatening legal action were petitioning the mayor to extend the mall. The next weekend, when offended members of the local automobile club threatened to "reclaim" the street by driving their cars down it, Lerner didn't call out the police. Instead, he had city workers lay down strips of paper the length of the mall. When the auto club arrived, its members found dozens of children sitting in the former street painting pictures. The transformation of Curitiba had begun.

But this was not some romantic revolution, a cultural protest of the sort so common in the wake of the sixties and so evanescent. Even this small victory was possible only because Lerner and his architect friends had thought so carefully about the future of the city. They had, among other things, carefully replotted the city's traffic flow, not only to make the downtown function without cars on its main street, but also to direct growth throughout the city. Instead of buying up buildings and tearing them down to widen streets, planners stared at the maps long enough to see that the existing streets

would do just fine - as long as they were considered in groups of three parallel avenues. Traffic on the first avenue would flow one way, into town. The middle street would be devoted to buses, driving in dedicated lanes so they could move more quickly. A block over you'd find motorists heading out of town. No highways in the city - three streets still scaled to human beings. And more important, once the planners had designated five of these "structural axes" leading out from the center of town like spokes in a wheel, they could begin to tinker with zoning. Along these main routes, high-density buildings were permitted - the apartments that would hold the commuters eager to ride the buses. Farther from the main roads, density decreases.

From the observation deck on the top of the city's television tower, you can see the results spread out below you: not a ring of high-rises choking the downtown, but orderly lines of big buildings shading off into neighborhoods along each of the axes; a city growing on linear lines that removed congestion from the center, and kept a mix of housing - and hence, of incomes - throughout the city. "Every city has its hidden designs - old roads, old streetcar ways," says Lerner. "You're not going to invent a new city. Instead, you're doing a strange archaeology, trying to enhance the old, hidden design. You can't go wrong if the city is growing along the trail of memory and of transport. Memory is the identity of the city, and transport is the future." Transport in the case of Curitiba means buses. Though larger Brazilian cities were investing in subways and though "there were always people trying to sell them to us as the modern way," Lerner and his team decided the subways were too expensive - that they were stuck with buses. They also decided that buses needn't be stuck in traffic.

They quickly designed the system of express lanes that sped travel to and from the downtown, and ridership began to take off. In 1974 the system carried 25,000 passengers a day; by 1993 the number was 1.5 million - or more than ride the buses in New York City each day. The route network looks like a model of the human brain. Orange feeder buses and green buses traveling in constant loops through the outer neighborhoods deliver passengers to terminals, where they catch red express buses heading downtown or out to the factories on the city's edge.

In an effort to increase speed even further, the red express buses were replaced in the late 1980s by silver "direct line" buses on the busiest streets. The buses move faster not because they have bigger motors but because they were designed by smarter people. Sitting at a bus stop one day, Lerner noticed that the biggest time drag on his fleet was how long it took passengers to climb the stairs and pay the fare. He sketched a plan for a glass "tube station," a bus shelter raised off the ground and with an attendant to collect fares. When the bus pulls in, its doors open like a subway's, and people walk right on (or, in the case of wheelchairs, roll right on). A year after the "speedybuses" went into service, the city did a survey: 28 percent of the passengers were new to the system,

commuters who had parked their cars because of the new convenience. In 1993 Curitiba added another Lerner innovation - extra-long buses, hinged in two spots to snake around corners and able to accommodate three hundred passengers. Five doors open and close at each stop, and on busy routes at rush hour one of these behemoths arrives every minute or so; twenty thousand passengers an hour can move in one direction. There is a word for this kind of service: subway.

Amazingly, the city doesn't need to subsidize its bus service. The fleet is purchased and owned by private companies; the government assigns routes, sets fares, and pays each contractor by kilometer traveled. For about thirty cents, you can transfer as often as you want; and the whole network turns a profit. A few years ago, to help celebrate Earth Day, Curitiba lent New York several of its loading tubes and special buses. Brazilians installed the system in five days, and for a couple of months the buses plied a loop from the Battery to South Street Seaport and back. The *Daily News* reported "looks of bewilderment" at the "space age pod" donated by the Third World to the absolute epicenter of world finance, but by all accounts passengers loved the system.

Still, it seems to have disappeared into some bureaucratic maw. The New York City bus system has seen ridership fall 42 percent in the last twenty years and is only now beginning to experiment with "innovations" like stopping every third block instead of every second one. The "realistic hope," according to a recent Transit Authority report, is that ridership will fall only 7 percent this decade. I understand why; I never rode the buses when I lived in New York. I could walk faster than a rush-hour bus in midtown, and the rest of the day they rarely came; the windows were so scratched that once you were on board you had to peer owl-eyed to see if your stop was approaching. But in Curitiba I rode every day, pushing my daughter's stroller onto the bus, finding my way more easily than in Manhattan despite my pidgin Portuguese. *The bus serves you, and not the other way around; you feel in control of the city, not a victim of its tie-ups and bottlenecks and ancient every-day-repeated traffic jams.*

The public relations man for the transit system, Norberto Staviski, was showing me a video made in the early 1980s about the evolution of the buses. At one point, the film's narrator explains that traffic is growing too dense for the buses along the busiest routes and that they will soon be replaced by an electric tramway. Staviski leaped up and stopped the tape - "we *did* consider a tramway," he said. "But it just turned out to be too expensive." Hence, the brainstorming that led to the tube

stations and the triplelength buses, which carry four times as many passengers each day as Rio's subway system and cost one-half of one percent as much per kilometer.

Cheapness is one of the three cardinal dictates of Curitiba planning. Many of the city's buildings are "recycled." The planning headquarters is in an old furniture factory; the gunpowder depot became a furniture factory; a glue plant was turned into the children's center. An old trolley stationed on the Rua Quinze has become a free babysitting center where shoppers can park their kids for a few hours.

The city's parks provide the best example of brilliance on the cheap. When Lerner took office for the first time in '971, the only park in Curitiba was smack downtown - the Passeio Publico, a cozy zoo and playground with a moat for paddleboats and a canopy of old and beautiful ipe trees, which blossom blue in the spring. "In that first term, we wanted to develop a lot of squares and plazas," recalls Alves. "We picked one plot, we built a lot of walls, and we planted a lot of trees. And then we realized this was very expensive."

At the same time, as luck would have it, most Brazilian cities were installing elaborate flood-control projects. Curitiba had federal money to "channelize" the five rivers flowing through town, putting them in concrete viaducts so that they wouldn't flood the city with every heavy summer rain and endanger the buildings starting to spring up in the floodplain. "The bankers wanted all the rivers enclosed," says Alves; instead, city hall took the same loan and spent it - on land. At a number of sites throughout the city, engineers built small dams and backed up the rivers into lakes. Each of these became the center of a park; and if the rains were heavy, the lake might rise a foot or two - perhaps the jogging track would get a little soggy or the duck in the big new zoo would find itself swimming a few feet higher than usual. "Every river has a right to overflow," insists parks chief Nicolau Klupel, who became known as "Nicolago."

Mostly because of its flood-control scheme, in twenty years - *even as it tripled in population* - the city went from two square feet of green area per inhabitant to more than a hundred and fifty square feet per inhabitant. The official literature always

points out, with understandable pride, that this figure is four times the World Health Organization standard of twelve square meters. From every single window in Curitiba, I could see as much green as I could concrete. And green begets green; land values around the new parks have risen sharply, and with them tax revenues.

The entire city government runs on a \$250 million budget, or about \$156 per capita, compared with, say, \$807 per person in Dallas or \$1279 per person in Detroit. The municipal obsession with parsimony would amaze anyone used to traveling in the developing world, where visitors are invariably taken to huge and ostentatious showplace buildings in an attempt to prove the modernity and power of the government - in an attempt to show that they're as good as anyone else. In Curitiba, by contrast, I spent a typically dusty day with two of the local public housing authority officials, who were busy setting up a program that allowed newly arrived peasants to build tiny houses of their own for the price of two packs of cigarettes a month. After we looked over dozens of these new homes, the officials took me by a grand edifice that I'd noticed on the horizon - it turned out to be a school, built by Brazil's, *federal* government (a government that may lead the world in corruption and inefficiency). Perched above a *favela*, the school had a lovely basketball court, just like you might find in a prosperous suburban high school in the United States. But dust was an inch thick on the parquet floor, and none of the classrooms were in use, either - in part because there were no desks, chairs, or other furnishings. "Someone ate up the in-between money," says one of the housing guys. "When I think of what we could do if we had the cash that went into this place . . ."

Simple is brother to cheap, and it's another of the mantras Curitiba's builders chant regularly. "The cities of the future will not be scenarios from Flash Gordon, as some people imagine," says Lerner. ("Nor scenarios from Blade Runner, as others, tied to an over-pessimistic view, may fear.") Instead of supermen, their heroes will likely be people like Joao "Janguinho" Jorge, who was sitting on a sprung desk chair in a cluttered room off the bus repair station on the outskirts of the city when I interviewed him. He began his transit career in 1967 as a fare collector; by the time that Lerner's fancy new express buses came along, he was a top driver, one of those selected to train on the new equipment that Volvo was producing. On a regular bus, it doesn't make much difference where you stop - the passengers will just walk a few steps to board. But with the tube stations, the bus has to be in just the right place, or the openings on the tube won't align with the bus doors. Volvo was planning on installing an elaborate optical computer system.

"I said, 'Let's try a stripe painted on the pavement,'" recalls Janguinho. "And they said it wouldn't work. But I said, 'Let me try it once, I'll *see* if it works.' And it did." It's the

kind of solution that gets you noticed in Curitiba; everyone kept telling me I had to go interview Janguinho, who was promoted to driving instructor and is now working on the one defect of superlong double-hinged buses: "If there's an accident ahead of you and you have to back up to get around it, it's kind of like driving a serpent."

"It's very hard to understand simplicity," says Lerner. "Simplicity needs a kind of commitment. You have to be sure of yourself. If you're not, you'll listen to the complexity-sellers, and the city is not as complex as they would like you to believe."

New York provides an apt illustration. Six years ago the city's Legal Action Center for the Homeless issued a report on public toilets in the city. Volunteers checked bathrooms in subways and parks and found that almost none were open; in those that were, "urine, feces, newspaper, and stagnant water covered the floors, sinks, urinals, and toilets." They also collected affidavits from homeless men and women: "I have a diuretic condition, so I have to move my bowels every two hours," one reported. "If I try to hold it in, I get terrible cramps. These cramps feel like a hot poker in my gut.... At least once a month or so I can't find any place at all to go before it's too late. Usually there are people around. What I do then is soil myself." The Legal Action Center even came up with a solution, sidewalk stalls of a sort already in use in Europe. They would have cost the city nothing - the company puts them up in return for the advertising space. A small trial went quite well. But then the process ground to a halt. For a year disability advocates demanded that *every* toilet accommodate the handicapped; their demand was granted. Then the whole proposal disappeared into some bureaucratic purgatory. At the moment, a two-year study is underway to determine how much advertising should be allowed on the stalls. Complexity has overwhelmed common sense, and so more people - tired of pools of urine - will move their families to Scarsdale. It would not have happened that way in Curitiba.

Along with frugality and simplicity, Curitiba stresses speed. When Lerner ripped up the main street and reassembled it as a pedestrian mall over a single weekend, he set a precedent his administrations have followed ever since. "Public work is always linked to easygoing work in people's minds," he says. "With speed comes credibility." The city's showcase Opera House, a steel-and-glass birdcage set dramatically in an abandoned stone quarry next to a spectacularly lit waterfall, was built in a month; one big park was carved out in twenty days because officials feared it was about to be invaded by slums.

"Jaime has a saying," explains his director of job training, Ester Proveller. "Don't wait until all your pumpkins are in the truck to start your journey to market. They'll accumulate along the way." (For the same reason, she adds, many of the city's most important officials are women. "He says if women get two good cards, they'll start to

play. Men sit and wait for a whole hand. We're not as afraid of failure - in that way we're more brave.")

Christine Braga helped implement the city's voluntary, and highly successful, recycling program within a matter of months after it was first suggested. "It was like during a war," she says fondly. "We didn't have any time to make researches then. We had to establish it and implement. It's been going since 1989, and we only started to finally collect the data last year."

Lerner "pushes very much," adds Proveller, who is also his sister-in-law. "If you say, 'I'll need three months for this part, and three months for this part, and three months for this,' he says, 'Okay, you have three months. Total.' We used to say he consulted with oracles to set the dates, but to tell you the truth, everything comes out finished."

Part of the emphasis on speed stems from Brazil's system of term limits. Mayors can serve only one term and then have to step aside for four years - Lerner has been hop-scotching in and out of office since the early 1970s. In the words of a former president, Juscelino Kubitschek, "it is an ancient tradition in Brazil that no administration has ever brought to a successful conclusion any work initiated by its antecedent." But Lerner's commitment to quickness is more than tactical; he has an ideology of speed as well. Only local governments can move nimbly, he insists, and it's one of the reasons he thinks cities will be more important than nations in solving environmental problems. "More and more we have resentments against central governments," he says. "More and more we're used to quick answers. Technology has given this to us. Credit cards give us goods quickly, the fax machine gives us the message quickly - the only thing left in our Stone Age is the central governments."

Everywhere I went in official Curitiba, I met architects - architects designing bus systems, sewer networks, housing programs. Occasionally I'd come across a civil engineer, but almost everyone would sooner or later take out a piece of paper and start drawing a diagram. "I like to work with journalists, too," says Lerner, when I point this out to him. "You know why? Because journalists have to finish their work every day." When he can, he avoids working with experts. "Transport is so important, you can't leave it to experts," he told me one day. "They will solve the problem of transportation, but they won't link it to the problem of the city. When you realize how many cities

were killed by traffic engineers, well, we should beat them with slippers, we really should." Similarly, he says, "we have a lot of mayors who are very good at budgets. But it isn't ultimately a problem of budgets." Or of laws or sociology, to name the two other lenses American politicians tend to look through.

What's useful about architects, I decided after a month in Curitiba, is that they're used to solving problems. They don't come back to you and say, "There's no way to put a house on that lot." They come back with ideas. They see the world visually, physically; they see not despair and difficulty, but simply constraints around which to work. "In many cities a lot of people are specialists in proving it's impossible to do things," says Lerner. "I try to work with professionals who think it's possible." His method is the method of architectural schools everywhere: "We use the charette, always the charette," he says, referring to the exercises in which students are given a challenge and then a few hours to sketch out some solutions.

Out of these skull sessions come innovations large and small. Curitiba now has a "twenty-four-hour street," a block-long covered arcade near the city center with shops and restaurants that never close. It grew out of Lerner's realization that "million-dollar structures remain vacant in off-peak hours, while the pressure for space is a major factor in urban tension." And the creativity is contagious. Planners from other cities spent a few days in the city last year for an exercise. For a while they stayed stiff and formal, more interested in speechifying than in sketching. Eventually, though, they met the mayor, who told them his secret of creativity: "You have to have fun. All my work, all my life, we have fun. We're laughing all the time. We're working on things that make us happy." Before they went home, one team of visitors designed a "toy factory," a big canvas tent that can move from one poor neighborhood to another, where children could be taught to make toys from recycled trash. The favorite toy? A plastic mineral, water bottle laid on its side and decorated to look like a tube station for the speedybus.

The fact that the toy factory was quickly set up and still travels about the city helps explain another of the reasons Lerner has such dedicated colleagues. There are bright designers and architects the world over, but most of them labor in university departments; they have to scratch for years to get their best projects built. It's true that a

senior architect in Curitiba's planning department may make three or four hundred dollars a month, which doesn't go much further than three or four hundred dollars in America. "Sometimes we are down because of the money," says city planner Liana Vallicelli. "But then along comes some beautiful project. It's possible to see these things actually get done."

And what makes for high morale, says Lerner, makes for effective government as well. "You have to begin the game. You don't have to have all the answers before you start - you can't be such smart guys. To start is important."

Lerner lives in a small house, which he designed for himself when he was still an architecture student. "When I was having it built, we came to the fireplace, which was very hard to build. And I had an old guy, who was a master bricklayer, working on it. He said to me, 'This is hard. But I'll make it. There are two types of master bricklayers: a master to make it happen, or a master to tell you it can't be done. I'm one of the ones who make it happen.' Many years later, when I was mayor, I went down to see the Third Age members off on their trip. [Curitiba, needless to say, has a massive municipal senior citizens program.] There were thousands of people there - a kilometer-long convoy of buses. But I saw that old bricklayer, and I said to him, 'I remember you. You don't have any idea how important you were to my life.'"

Lerner - and Curitiba - seems to have shed ideology in the name of constructive pragmatism. Building things to human scale may be an ideology of sorts, but it's outside of the political dialogue. In the argument between private and public that occupies center stage in America, for instance, Curitiba persists in choosing from column A and column B, entirely according to success. It gave buses priority over cars, which sounds vaguely liberal, but it let private companies run the buses - when the speedybus system was installed, the city spent \$4.5 million putting up tube stations, and the private companies spent \$45 million buying buses. On the other hand, it told the bus companies what fare they could charge.

Life without political fetishes seems necessary to the freewheeling creativity of the place. Consider trees, for instance. The city began from the position that it liked them, liked them a lot. It planted trees all over town: one of Lerner's first slogans was, "We provide the shade, you provide the water." But the government did not stop there, with a "normal" public role. It also decreed strict limits on people's ability to cut down their own trees on their own land. I spent an instructive day with Edison Reva and Damaris Da Silva Seraphim, two of Curitiba's urban foresters. Their office was piled high with folders from recent cases: a man who'd been fined 136,500 cruzeiros (\$800) for cutting fifteen trees without a license, a man granted permission to take down a diseased maple. "It's impossible to cut a tree without a license," says

Damaris. "You ask for the license, and we go analyze the situation. There has to be a cause - the risk of damage, disease, it's in the way of construction. Not just because you're tired of looking at it." If you do cut a tree, you have to plant two more to take its place. Oh, and don't cut a flowering ipe or an auracaria, the native Parana pine, or the fine is doubled. Edison put on his official vest and took out his ticket pad, and we set off on the day's rounds, checking out some of the new complaints phoned in overnight on the tree hotline and following up on old offenders to make sure trees had been replanted. We stopped at one small plot where a wealthy man had illegally cut down perhaps a half-acre to use as a vegetable garden. It was slowly reverting to woods, but Edison saw several evergreens that had died; he made a note to call the man and have him plant some more.

It sounds vaguely authoritarian, and yet from any high spot in town you see puffs of trees everywhere you look. Many streets are totally canopied, tunnels of green. And as the trees have grown, so has their popularity. We stopped to look at some sidewalk trees - *Coorticaeria*, gorgeous trees but the wrong ones to have planted along the street, since they have begun to drop branches on the power lines, and their roots are cracking the pavement. "But we can't just take them down," Edison says. "People would go crazy." In a solution that seemed to me very Curitiba, they had planted other trees all up and down the street. In seven or eight years they would be high enough to really shade the sidewalk, and only then would the chainsaw crew be sent out for the problem trees.

In a world of cities, states, and nations increasingly whipsawed by the demands of business, perhaps the best example of the value of Curitiba's independence is its Industrial City. When Lerner took over as mayor for the first time, he realized that the city needed industry: its traditional role as a governmental and financial center couldn't support the population boom that was clearly coming, and also couldn't underwrite the aggressive programs he had in mind. He could have simply offered huge tax breaks to anyone who promised jobs. Instead, acting quickly before speculators could run up the price, the city used eminent domain to purchase about forty square kilometers of land seven miles from downtown - seven miles *downwind* of downtown. The government put in streets and services, housing and schools, and linked the area solidly to the bus system, building a special "worker's line" that ran to the biggest poor neighborhood. It also enacted a series of regulations - stiff laws on air and water pollution and on the conservation of green space. (Only six square miles are actually available for building factories, and almost as large an area has remained planted in trees.) "What we've found is that regulation attracts good industries, the kind we want," says Oswaldo Alves. Foreign corporations were among the first to see the advantages; Volvo built a factory, lured in part by the chance to work out improved bus designs with city planners. And new businesses

continued to arrive throughout the 1980s, drawn as much by the quality of life for executives fleeing Sao Paulo as by the ease of doing business with the nearby Southern Cone countries of Argentina and Paraguay. Even in the teeth of Brazil's endless recession and inflation, the number of jobs continued to increase. By 1990 there were 346 factories in the Industrial City, generating fifty thousand direct jobs and one hundred and fifty thousand indirect ones - and 17 percent of the entire state's tax revenue.

The boom in business, the constant rezoning, the speed with which decisions are made - anywhere else in Brazil, and most places in the world, these conditions would have led to corruption on a massive scale. Influence undoubtedly carries some weight in Curitiba: groups of businessmen keep the pressure on to rezone the streets where they have buildings, for instance. But by all accounts the problem is relatively small, as far as I could tell because most people have bought into Lerner's image of the city as a whole. "People do come in to complain," says Liana Vellicelli, the city planner, when asked about it. "A neighborhood politician may say, 'This street is really important. Can you do something for it?' Or someone may say, 'You've put an express bus down my street. I can't live there anymore.' And we say, 'It's for the city.'" The attitude feeds on itself; companies out in the Industrial City, for instance, have begun to fund hundreds of slots in the municipal day-care centers near their plants. And in turn the companies have begun to thrive, Vermont-style, on the city's image, even though that image has been created only in the last two decades. "Our best marketing is to say that we are from Curitiba," one executive told the Brazilian newsmagazine *Veja* last year. "The fact that our product is Curitiba gives it a certain charisma to consumers from other regions," said another.

Jaime Lerner is widely and affectionately described as a political naïf; indeed, in 1984, at the end of military rule, he ran in the first democratic elections and was beaten, a victim of vote fraud. Disgusted, he more or less renounced electoral politics and moved to Rio, where he worked as a consultant. (It was in Rio that he dreamed up the tube stations for the buses.) In 1988, however, he decided to run once more for mayor of his hometown. The only problem was, he'd switched his residence to Rio and forgotten to switch it back. He was almost prohibited from running and was not allowed to campaign until ten days before the vote. His sister-in-law, Ester Proveller, remembers that stretch run: "We did almost nothing. It was like Carnival in those days: everyone brought their old T-shirts out of the closet, made new ones, put up signs. All we did was organize for election day so they wouldn't rob us again. You'd walk through the street in your Jaime shirt and everyone was thumbs up. People would stop their cars and ask, 'Do you have any kind of paper from Mr. Lerner so I can put it in my windshield?'" He won 60 percent of the vote in a crowded field, and his term lasted until 1993; when he left office, his popularity rating was 92 percent.

For all his popularity, though, Lerner's third term was by far the hardest of his career, for it involved a different set of problems - almost a different city. Curitiba had nearly doubled in size since his previous administration; and though some of the growth came from executives arriving to work in Industrial City, most of it came from peasants unable to survive in the countryside. Labor-intensive coffee plantations had been all but replaced by crops like soybeans, which needed only one man on a tractor to cultivate them; one byproduct of this change, as nearly everywhere on earth, was a flood of people to the cities. Curitiba was a natural destination, not just because of proximity but because its reputation as a decent place had begun to spread; as a result, by the early 1990s there were 209 separate slum areas in the city, containing about 176,000 people, or roughly one in nine Curitiba residents. Because the city is fairly flat, the *favelas* do not stand out like they do in Rio, where they cling to every hillside. Still, the poverty was real enough. One community settled on an old industrial waste site and left, reluctantly, only after municipal officials sank a pipe into the ground and demonstrated that they could fry an egg with the methane that spewed out. The city's morbidity statistics, always a mix of First and Third World diseases, began to show - more and more of the infections associated with bad water and rats.

More starkly than in the past, Mayor Lerner, who had created a magnificent city for a poor but by no means destitute population, was facing the kind of challenge faced in cities from New York to Nairobi. He kept his old modus operandi - mornings in street clothes running charettes at his log cabin office on the grounds of a city park, afternoons at city hall dealing with day-to-day needs - but all of a sudden more was riding on the outcome. "The job, it's a job of balancing needs and potentials. If you only work on the big issues, you're far from the people. If you only work on the daily needs, you don't do anything fundamental. You *have to understand you are responsible for the hope of people, their hope for change*. If your city isn't changing, then you're frustrating their hope." In 1989 he was facing quite a bit of frustration and a hell of a lot of hope, which is a scary place for a politician to find himself.

He waded right in, of course. One of the first new programs was called "Tudo Limpo," or "All Clean"; it employs teams of fifteen local residents to clean up their *favelas*. Most of the employees are women, often the single mothers who predominate in the slums. They work for eighty-nine days - under Brazilian law they'd become government employees on the ninetieth day - cutting brush and digging out the ditches that line the unpaved roads. Ester Proveller, who runs the program, took me to visit Vila California, a mixed neighborhood of the sort common to Curitiba, where a small brick-walled house with a car in the driveway might abut a tarpaper shack. The occasional goat grazed along the edge of the road. After a few wrong turns we found the workers, wearing the straw sun hats and the green vests that come with the job,

raking and weeding at the top of a hilly section. "Eighteen months ago my husband went out to pay a bill and he didn't come back," says Jeda Silva, hoe in hand. Of her three children, one is mentally retarded. In the last big rains their shack was wrecked; the city program was giving her enough money to eat and to buy wood for her next home. Once a week a social worker comes and sits with the women and talks for an hour or two about problems they're having, about avoiding alcohol, maybe about birth control - though every official winces when I bring up the topic, wary that the Church might take offense. "The classes are a help," says Jeda. Last time she told the social worker that she slept in one bed with her two girls, who are twelve and five. "She told me that wasn't so good, that I should buy a new bed. So that's what I'll do with my next payment." The paternalism in such programs is undeniable. When a newly arrived peasant gets a mortgage for a low-income house, for instance, the housing authority insists on a counseling session. "We tell them, 'Don't spend your money on liquor,'" a spokesman explains. What makes it seem all right is that it's an *effective* paternalism, not a sham.

That is to say, when Lerner's wife, Fanny, who heads the city's children's programs, says, "We try to do for them like we would for our own children," she actually means it. In 1990 the number of street-children in Curitiba had increased to about five hundred - nothing like the tens of thousands that roam the larger cities of Brazil, but clearly heading in that direction. She opened a shelter with activities ongoing all day in an effort to keep the children off the streets. "Not like school, because they won't go to school," she says. "They need a lot of love." And if they don't find it at the shelter, they can go to one of thirteen "support houses," where a pair of houseparents raises eight or ten of the streetchildren. If you want to call them orphanages, I suppose you could; it goes to show that intent and attitude are what really matter. Many boys from the street have been enrolled in the newsvendor program; you see them piling out of trucks at dawn, selling newspapers supplied at a discount by the publisher. They have a dormitory of their own, and half their earnings are saved for them till they are old enough to leave. Other kids, wearing special vests, carry bags for shoppers at the roving street markets that the city sponsors. When the new Botanic Garden was inaugurated a couple of years ago, boys from nearby slums tore up most of the flowerbeds. Instead of posting police, the city hired the children as assistant gardeners. Two years later the number of streetchildren had dropped to about two hundred. "We know them all by name, and we talk to them constantly, trying to find a program they'll join," says Mrs. Lerner. "The most important thing in the programs is food," she adds - important not just because the kids are hungry, but because all over Brazil children will sniff glue to ward off hunger pangs. "My office spends more on food than on anything else. I remember once my husband came by, and he asked the children, 'What do you like best about the program? Your teacher? The games?' And he was very surprised when they all started shouting, 'The snacks, the snacks.'" When kids

are lacking parents, or they're afraid to go home and get beaten again, paternalism is what they need. Food is what they need. Love is what they need. They come out differently if they get it.

The city doesn't wait for kids to become homeless, either. Lerner said from the start of his career that his two priorities were the environment and children, and a large percentage of the municipal budget goes to education, beginning with the city's day-care centers, which are free to children three months or older. The centers run eleven hours a day, allowing parents to get to and from work, and serve three meals and a snack. The federal government runs the elementary and high schools, but in Brazil school lasts only half a day; and even if there were jobs, federal law prohibits Brazilians from working until they're fourteen. So there are long hours to be filled each day. Upper-class kids take music lessons or go to the sports center. Poor kids hang out, or they did until the city inaugurated a system of "PIA" centers - *pia is* Indian slang for small child and also stands for Childhood and Adolescence Integration Program. Christine Braga took me to one of them in a *favela* called Sabara near the Industrial City.

It occupied a typical plot of *favela* land - a steep patch of bare dirt leading to a sour drainage ditch. The slope, however, wasn't eroding away: the twelve- and thirteen-year-old boys in the program, under the leadership of a grizzled older man named Oswaldo, had planted bed after bed of vegetable crops in the soil. Onions, lettuce, parsley, tomato, spinach, cabbage, broccoli, pumpkin, popcorn. Orange trees, tangerine trees. Oswaldo had grown up a peasant farmer and was passing on to the gang of skinny boys his pleasure in the work. "They come spontaneously," he says - attendance at the PIA is voluntary. "But when I explain the importance of the vegetables, the flowers, and when they see the plants growing, they can know the importance of their jobs." Sidney, Gilberto, Claudio, Willmar, Marcio, another Marcio, Allesandro, Lindomar, Fabio, and Gilmar clustered around me, insisting I take down their names. "They fight sometimes, especially Lindomar," notes Oswaldo. "I tell them they have to go home for the day, and that stops it right there." In one corner of the plot, row after row of potted marigolds sat under black mesh screening to protect them from the sun. The PIA gets the seed from the city and in turn sells the flowers back for use in the parks - the boys make a small amount of money. "My mother is sick and I want to help support the house," says Claudio. "My grandmother is trying to build a house," adds Fabio, "and I want to buy some bricks." Every one of them wore his orange PIA cap,

the brims so tattered they were peeling back. Everyone but Willmar. "Mine's at home - my mother's washing it today," he explains.

I have been in plenty of places that felt degraded, but this - though just as poor - felt precisely the opposite. Actively undegraded. Respected. Cared for. The three-year-olds from the day-care center came out for a walk, trailing their teacher elephant-style, hand on the belt of the child in front. Oswaldo started quizzing them about vegetables. "What kind of onion is this? A red onion. Who eats onions? All of you!"

A couple of blocks away, a line of women waited outside a tiny community center. A garbage truck had just pulled up, but it wasn't carrying garbage; it was carrying food. For three years now the city has been buying surplus food from farmers in the surrounding countryside and trading it for bags of garbage - six kilos of trash bought a sack of rice, potatoes, beans, and bananas. For a kilo more, some eggs. The program began in 1989 when an outbreak of leptospirosis, a rat-borne disease, was noted in the slums. Because the streets are narrow and unpaved, the garbage trucks hired by the city couldn't get up them to collect trash, which was piling up in the *favelas*. Lerner's team made a few quick calculations: how much would it cost to pay the garbage haulers (a private concern) to collect the trash from the crowded slums? When they had a figure, they determined how much food they could buy for that sum and then let the slum dwellers collect the trash themselves and bring it down out of the *favelas* to the trucks. Along the way, the program manages to support small farmers who might otherwise have to abandon their fields and migrate to town.

The community center in this *favela* - and the 774 families it serves - is run by a shy man named Odair, a shoemaker who had been elected by his neighbors three years in a row. ("I don't say anything at all before the election. People just see the job I've done.") "It's completely changed here from when I arrived in 1989," he says, as we watch people wait for the food to be distributed. It wasn't charity: it was food they'd earned, and it was even nice to hear one woman complain that there hadn't been any honey or garlic in the shipment for weeks. But it was clear that the ticket books, meticulously filled in by Odair when the people brought their garbage to the collection site, were precious possessions. "You are responsible for this program," reads the text on the ticket book. "Keep on cooperating and we will get a cleaner Curitiba, cleaner and more human. You are an example to Brazil and even to the rest of the world."

Since many of these people have been evicted from their homes in the countryside, a house is an urgent need. Not just shelter - a house they own, on a lot they own. "The most important thing is the land," says the president of COHAB, the municipal

housing corporation. "When they have the land, it begins to give them ... validity," he explains. "They never had any stability before."

Until the mid-1980s, Curitiba had a fairly standard public housing program. It built more units per capita than any other Brazilian city and did a good job of scattering them around in small pockets so that they blended in with neighborhoods. But the main source of funding, the national housing bank, collapsed in 1985. "It went extinct," says one official: the victim of another of the enormous scandals that periodically rock the country. At the same time, the demand for housing skyrocketed as the countryside poured into the favelas. By 1993 COHAB's waiting list had swelled to fifty-four thousand families; and having very little money, Curitiba had to change its strategy. Abandoning the policy of small, scattered sites, the city bought one of the few large plots of land left within its limits, a swath of farmland bounded by several rivers.

We stood on a rise in this neighborhood - Novo Bairro, or New Neighborhood, is what it's called - and watched as bulldozers scraped and contoured the hills. Though city planners had done their best to leave trees in place, it still looked pretty barren, as if it was waiting for a few hundred suburban tract homes to go in around pointlessly looping lanes. In fact, though, this cleared field would soon be home to fifty thousand families, perhaps two hundred thousand people. When we turned around on the hilltop, we could see parts of Novo Bairro that had already been sold and occupied; small houses crept like a tidemark across the land, avoiding only the soccer fields around the schools. The city was not building the homes - the landowners were building them, sometimes with the aid of a city mortgage on a small pile of bricks and windows. Every third house seemed to be doubling as a building supply store; and everywhere people plastered, framed, roofed. "Sixty percent of the lower-income people are involved in the construction industry anyhow," says one COHAB executive. "They know how to build."

And here is the moving part. With your plot of land comes not only a deed and a pair of trees (one fruitbearing and one ornamental), but also an hour downtown with an architect. "The person explains what's important to him - a big window out front, or room in the kitchen. They tell how many kids they have, and so on. And then we help draw up a plan," says one architect, who has more than three thousand of "his" homes scattered around the city. "Once we had a plumber who wanted a house that would rotate so it would always be in the sun." That request they couldn't handle, but the day I was there clients lined up clutching magazine pictures of Swiss chalets and suburban-style ranches. The architects did their best to come up with simple designs - and then they numbered the rooms. "Most people can only afford to build one room at a time, so we show them the logical order to go in," one designer explains. At the moment, in the center of Novo Bairro, COHAB is building

"Technology Street," an avenue of twenty-four homes, each built using some different construction technique - bamboo covered with plaster, say - so that people can get ideas for the kind of house they might want. Already you drive through acre after acre of public housing, which is actually private housing, and not one house looks like any of its neighbors. They are all *really* small, smaller than most Americans would want to live in, but they all say something about the people who built them. "It's a house built out of love," says the housing chief. "And because of that, people won't leave it behind. They're going to consolidate their lives there, become part of the city."

One of the first structures to go up at Novo Bairro was a glass tube bus station, linking this enclave to the rest of the city. "Integration" is a word one hears constantly from official Curitiba, another of its mantras. To American ears it conjures up our national horror, race, but here it means much more. It means knitting together the entire city, rich, poor, and in-between - knitting it together culturally and economically and physically. Hitoshi Nakamura, a native of Osaka, is the city parks commissioner and one of Lerner's longtime collaborators. "We have to have communication with the people of the slums," he said one day as we were talking about the problems posed by settlers invading fragile bottomlands along the rivers. "If we don't, if they start to feel like *favelados*, then they will go against the city. Before they feel like *favelados*, we must get there and implant these programs. If we give them attention, they don't feel abandoned. They feel like citizens." The truth of his diagnosis can be seen in Curitiba's largest and oldest *favela*, Vila Pinto, a dense knot of perhaps five thousand people along one of the main highways. It grew for many years without anyone really doing anything to help it, and now it has a different feel from the more recent slums along the periphery - it has acquired its own culture, sullen and insular. I drove through one day in an unmarked police car with two narcotics detectives; though it was mid-afternoon, all the young men who saw us coming ducked away into alleys. "If you read the tabloid papers, every day there's a story from Vila Pinto -something with a knife," says one Curitiba resident.

More than most places, though, Curitiba has managed to follow Mayor Lerner's dictum: "When you have a city with ghettos - ghettos of poor or of rich - then it's not a city." Housing is surprisingly mixed: there are a few gated condominium communities, but there are also expensive new homes going up not far from hovels. Partly it's self-interest. "If you're rich, you need that type of people - they're your domestics, maybe," says one housing planner, trying to explain why there was little not-in-my-backyard outcry when the city began new public housing developments.

Still, in the early 1980s (the same years when American cities began to notice an upsurge in homelessness), signs of a backlash began to emerge. The new arrivals to Curitiba often tried to earn a living selling from small pushcarts. "It was a problem for the merchants, and a problem for the streets," says Liana Vellicelli, the planner. "We thought about it - we couldn't just say, 'Go away.' This is their job. If the city can't offer them other jobs, we have to do what we can to make this work." The government asked the vendors to form an association and began discussions with the leaders. They selected spots where they were interested in selling - plazas, say, where business was good, or particular bus terminals. And then their joint committee set up a schedule, so that a street market could rotate through each of these spots every week or two. "Instead of ceding permanent areas for street markets - which would have to be a long way from prime zones - why not concede better areas during specified days and hours?" asks Lerner. "It's an invasion, but controlled, consented, and regular. We integrate not only by the administration of physical space but through the administration of time." And it works. The city designed simple, portable stalls for vendors and gave them licenses. "People used to be afraid of these sellers," says Vellicelli. "Now they have a number, they're a part of the city."

Over the long run, real integration will require real education, giving newer, poorer residents a shot at the jobs being created in the Industrial City. "We found when we talked to the executives, that they were hiring labor from Sao Paulo," says Ester Proveller, who oversees the job training program. "They said Curitiba residents weren't well trained. We were surprised at first, because it's supposed to be a very modern city. But because of that, it attracts a lot of people who don't have any skills - people who are used to planting." Around the same time that Proveller was doing her survey, she noticed that Curitiba had decided to modernize its bus fleet. "I had the idea to turn the old ones into classrooms," she says. "Jaime said yes right away, and he came up with the name: *Linha do Oficio*," Or Line to Work. She began with six buses, which were gutted and refitted as classrooms for small-motor repair, typing, hairdressing, and other skills businesses said they needed. The buses were driven to various poor neighborhoods and parked for three months, the length of a course. "We tried to make the classrooms look nice, to attract people - the ones we deal with are ones who don't want to be going to school, so it helps that it's in a bus," she explains. The courses aren't completely free: three months tuition is two bus tokens, or about seventy cents: "we understand that if you pay for something you value it more."

We stopped at one location in the Boa Vista neighborhood, where a classroom bus sat a block from the bus terminal. Its destination sign read "*Datilografia*" (typing), and inside there were fifteen students hunched over manual typewriters learning the keyboard. One young man, his hands covered with a cloth to keep him from peeking, typed a lesson from the municipal textbook:

When you feel like crying, call me  
So I can cry with you  
When you feel like smiling, tell me  
So we can smile together  
But when you don't need me, tell me so

So I can look for someone else.

At the next machine, a fourteen-year-old girl worked on a business letter: "Senhor Prefeito: We have the satisfaction to say we received your letter from his Excellency . . ." A list of rules was posted at the front of the bus: they had been drawn up by the class at its first session and included warnings that anyone who came late twice or missed two classes would be kicked out. "In some neighborhoods they say, 'Don't bring your knife' and 'You can't smoke marijuana on the bus,'" says Ester cheerfully. Beneath the list of rules stood a few brooms, and when class ends the students used them to clean up before vacating the bus to the next group of would-be typists, who were already sitting on the curb next to the bus.

Curitiba sponsors a kind of higher education designed to integrate the city, too. In 1990 Lerner announced plans for an Open University of the Environment. Three months later it was complete, a string of classrooms spiraling up out of an abandoned stone quarry and built almost entirely out of old telephone poles. "It was awful, this place," says Cleon Santos, the university's rector; it was a dangerous sinkhole dragging down an entire neighborhood. Now people flock there on weekends to feed the swans and walk up the ramp for a peek out of the quarry's crater at the surrounding city. (Needless to say, the surrounding land has gone up in value.) During the week smaller crowds arrive to take a free, basic course about the thinking behind the city's evolution - about how the parks came into being and why the zoning map looks the way it does. Though anyone can come, the city seeks out "opinion-makers" to invite and modifies the course for their needs. "With teachers, we talk about the historical aspects; we talk about the scientific fundamentals of ecology; we talk about where they might take their classes around the city," says Santos. "With taxi drivers, we emphasize the reasons for our transit system. They're upset by the good buses because they lose customers, so we have a section about the historical sites where they could take tourists."

Santos's faculty is also establishing a database about Curitiba: information on air quality, on income levels, on the thousand other facts that together compose the profile of a city. The information is hard to come by at the moment; the planning institute, for instance, works with ten-year-old data on disease and morbidity because the federal government ran out of money for censuses. "Once we've got a baseline, we'll be able to make sure things aren't getting worse," he says. A stack of leaflets from the latest city improvement campaign sat on Santos's desk. This crusade encouraged people not to blow their car horns so much. I asked him what big issues are left to deal with here. "The quality of life is good here," he said thoughtfully. "If you ask me what to do this very moment to make it better, I don't know what to say."

It's indeed possible that Curitiba may have broken the back of its social problems. Though the population will continue to grow steadily - by 2020, according to one estimate, the city will add another million people - the pace should slow. "There just aren't that many people left to come from the countryside," maintains the director of the city's housing authority. "It's pretty empty out there now."

But the American experience would indicate that growth and poverty are not the only problems cities face, that affluence can sap a society as well. Urban areas can turn stale and uninteresting: at best neutral ground for making money, not attractive enough to counteract the gravitational force of the suburbs. That seems unlikely to happen in Curitiba, as long as officials continue to ask the two questions we Westerners feel constrained from asking: What is a community for? And what is a person for?

We can't bring ourselves to ask them because the answer is supposed to be that people will decide for themselves what is best for them. Out of this cacophony of individual choices a sweet symphony is supposed to emerge, but in fact much of North America is silent: people kept a hundred yards apart by the size of their suburban estates, watching TV (often in separate rooms), almost afraid to mix. One survey found three-quarters of Americans did not know their next-door neighbors. Almost inevitably, this kind of society consumes to excess. Unable to take our pleasure in community, in contact with other people, we seek our solace in things. Not concerts but compact discs, not football in the park but football on TV

"I know it's the right of people to live where they want," says Lerner. "If you want to live in a condominium of wealthy people, that's okay." And indeed some Curitibaans do, building big houses behind gates with guards. But government - democracy - needn't stop there. "You can also offer an option for people who want to live more ... gregariously," says Lerner.

"You have to have a certain kind of complicity with people when you're trying to understand what are their problems, what are their dreams. People, they are not living in the city just for survival. You have to love the city. They have to have this *relationship* that has to do with identity, with a sense of belonging." Sometimes even great bus service or nice schools are not the key. "There are some *bairros* that don't have those facilities, and the people are happy. Why? Because their father lived there; their grandfather lived there. There's a sense of belonging to a place."

Creating that kind of identity, instilling whatever it is that keeps people from giving their lives over to gangs or to shopping malls, in a city that's tripling in size over two decades is far from easy. It's one reason Lerner has focused so intently on children, whose relation to the world is still unformed, still up for grabs. "In the place where children are happy, you can understand you're in a good way. They have to feel safe; they have to have a certain opportunity; they have to have a sense of equality, of being the equal of everyone - it doesn't matter if their parents are migrants." He begins to speak again of his own childhood in his father's store, helping peasants without socks try on pairs of shoes. "When I was at university, I would wake up at 5:00 A.M. and have coffee in the same shop with the workers of the railroad. I came to understand what people wanted, I think. Trying to interpret a collective dream, a collective desire - it's very difficult."

So difficult that in our country (and in most of Brazil and much of the world) we've simply given up, accepted that life will take place in an ever more private realm. Mike Davis, in *City of Quartz*, his sweeping history of Los Angeles, describes the "destruction of public space"- the transformation of a "once-upon-a-time demi-paradise of free beaches, luxurious parks," and other "genuinely democratic spaces" into a pay-as-you-go world of malls where bathrooms are for patrons only, neighborhoods are isolated against criminals (and everyone else) by concrete barriers, and "security guard" is the fastest-growing occupation. Libraries close at midday, replaced by access to the information superhighway for those who can afford it. Not long ago, visiting friends in a Massachusetts suburb, our host took our daughter to the playground -which turned out to be an elaborate jungle gym installed in a mall and charging five bucks a head. (It doesn't take much political insight to figure out how much longer the city where it is located will maintain its public playgrounds.) In such a world, "politician" becomes a curseword; trained by the Reagan years to despise things public and to worship the "private sector," we cannot begin to grapple with problems, including almost every environmental challenge, that clearly require government to be a major player.

But scolding people, or hectoring them with slogans, can't redeem politics. Telling citizens to ride the bus for the sake of the environment only works if the bus works.

The only slogan I saw painted on a wall in Curitiba was not a slogan at all, but a poem, by Paolo Leminski, one of the city's great literary figures. It was three stories up, near the center of town, directly above the small municipal poetry store. Inelegantly translated, it reads: "Let the pleasure of the sheer perception of your senses be the critic of reason."

I set out one day on the bike path that ran by my apartment, intent on compiling a sensory catalogue of a little of the urban pleasure Curitiba offered. (The 150-kilometer *ciclovía* network, inaugurated during the second administration, was Oswaldo Alves's idea. "Riding bikes was still in the memory of the city, but people had given it up because it was too dangerous," he explained.) On this sunny afternoon, the path was crowded with cyclists, but most were just noodling along; and it was no problem to push my baby daughter in her stroller. The path ran beside the Rio Belem; the water was dirty and carried some trash, but even two blocks from downtown, flowering trees were growing wild out over the banks. We walked by a sandy soccer field jammed with eight-year-old boys (not a parent in sight) and then across a street and into the Bosque de Papa, a small park dedicated to Pope John Paul II, who visited Curitiba on his last trip to Brazil. Cobble paths wound through the park to a small cluster of wood-plank buildings: a replica of a Polish immigrant village that was moved here when the park was commissioned. One building, a chapel with four rows of pews, holds a beautiful icon of the black virgin of Czechostowa. Outside, older women sat on benches watching their grandchildren play. The path left the park and moved into a residential neighborhood of big and small houses, running past a concrete municipal skateboard ramp that would shake the heart of any city attorney in the United States. Young trees grew all along the edge of the sidewalk, carefully staked out by city workers - it's easy to see there will be a corridor of shade in another decade. Past a Bavarian beer house and a bike-rental stand, the path reached the Parque Sao Lourenco, whose big lake was one of the original flood-control projects. On the right a municipal go-cart ramp plummeted down from the highest hill. On the left a shepherd gathered the municipal herd of sheep, which were done trimming the grass for the day. Swans and geese floated on the lake; at its head sat the former glue factory, now the municipal Creativity Center, with a ceramics studio, a sculpture garden, and a giant chess set with pieces the size of children. The *ciclovía* connects eventually with the other parks - Parque Barrigui, for instance, where today Ziggy Marley was giving an outdoor concert, the Third Age center (for seniors) was holding quiet yoga sessions, and remote-control planes were whizzing around the municipal remote-control airplane range.

The next morning I headed downtown toward the pedestrian mall, stopping at the Passeio Publico, the city's original park, to eat a big meal for a couple of dollars at the outdoor restaurant. This is no Tavern-on-the-Green: a raucous samba band was

performing at one end of the open restaurant, and I could hear its music even after I'd finished my lunch and left on a stroll down the middle of the Rua Quinze. Ritz stores sit next to cheap and crowded *lanchonetes* on this pedestrian mall, and hardware stores with a thousand pots hanging from the ceiling stand next to booksellers. A parade of chanting Evangelicals suddenly appeared at one end of the street; they had dressed one of their number as Jesus and were carrying him on a sedan chair down the street. There was a volleyball court in one of the central plazas, half a dozen playgrounds, and lottery salesmen bellowing on every corner. One of the roving markets had taken root near a bus terminal, and I recognized many of the handicrafts from my tour of the adult education centers. People wandering out of the main cathedral after noontime mass blinked to be back in the sun. A man dressed as a giant molar gave a lecture on oral hygiene from a stage while dozens of dental assistants in their white uniforms handed out leaflets and demonstrated proper brushing: In a military tent set up under some flowering ipe trees, an army doctor showed a video about AIDS. Waiters in uniforms - old men - served lunch at the Scheffer deli, an establishment so beloved that when it burned a few years ago the city subsidized its restoration. Card tables from several political parties offered competing anticorruption publications; around every news kiosk, knots of people stood reading the posted front pages. The jacarandas shaded the toucans in the small zoo, and off on one corner a little amusement park offered a Ferris wheel and a merry-go-round.

It is a true place, a place full of serendipity. It is not dangerous or dirty; if it was, people would go to the shopping mall instead. It is as alive as any urban district in the world; poems pasted on telephone poles, babies everywhere. The downtown, though a shopping district, is not a moneymaking machine. It is a habitat, a place for *living* - the exact and exciting opposite of a mall. A rich and diverse and *actual* place that makes the American imitations - the South Street Seaports and Faneuil Hall Marketplaces - seem like the wan and controlled re-creations that they are.

I had to remind myself, wandering through Curitiba, that all this spontaneity didn't happen by itself - that without the planning and the risky gambles that created the conditions for it to evolve, the center would likely be dangerous and dying. There is one subtle reminder every Saturday morning. Municipal workers roll out huge sheets of paper down the middle of one of the central blocks of the pedestrian mall and set out pots of paint so that hundreds of kids can - without knowing what they're doing - recreate the sit-in that drove away the cars and launched this pleasure-filled street at the beginning of Lerner's first term. Some of these children are undoubtedly the offspring of children who were brought here that first dramatic Saturday, and their presence raises a question of the first importance: Can you, by changing the conditions under which people live, slowly change the character of the people? It's a key question; any long-term hope for dealing with the massive problems of the environment involves

changing people around the world. Or no - not *changing* them. Bringing out the *part* of them that responds to nonmaterial pleasures like painting on the sidewalk and walking in a crowd and gossiping on a bench and drinking a beer at a bar. And slowly deemphasizing the side that we know all too well: the private, muffled grabbiness, the devotion to comfort, the fear of contact that resides in each of us, side by side with the qualities we need to muster.

Curitiba is an interesting test case, for its people, by all accounts, are not naturally gregarious. Lerner is the exception; the rule, says novelist Cristavao Tezza, who moved to Curitiba at the age of six, is a certain timidity and introversion. "Carnaval is never much of a success here," he says. "It's sort of something forced on us. If you had a classical music festival, it would be much closer to our sense of being." The European influence - especially the lingering mark of the Germans, who were Curitiba's earliest masters - outweighs any Latin tug, he maintains; and it is clearly true that unlike the rest of Brazil, which sways, Curitiba walks in a straight line.

"Curitiba has always been a very tight city," adds another writer, Valencio Xavier. "When someone invites you to his house, you know he wasn't born here. When we were living in Sao Paulo, we had people in the house constantly. When we moved back here, my wife was shocked - no one invited us over. My neighbor came up to me and said 'You have all these guests in your house, this is very expensive.' He wouldn't let his daughter come visit here because he thought some of our friends were hippies."

Changing something as stubborn as the character of a town takes more than one mayor, even if he serves three terms. But everyone I talk to agrees that Lerner has made a start. "In the last few years this place is different," says Xavier. "Lerner did things that had never happened here before: he put people on the street. In Curitiba things had always happened within four walls. He obliged us to walk. He had these street fairs; he made parks. Before we were like oysters that crack open just a little bit to get the world passing by. Now we are opening up."

Not totally, of course. "In some ways we remain spectators of the town," says Tezza. "I went to a rock show in the old part of town. It was an amazing spectacle - lights, lasers, stroboscopes. But people were just standing and watching. They didn't know if it was okay to dance." Still, says Tezza, it is strange to see how popular Lerner had become. "One of our characteristics was always that we were very critical. We even have a place - the Boca Maldita - where the men just sit all day saying nasty things about people. So Lerner's a phenomenon."

Simply coming to take the pleasures of the city for granted may be the most important change - coming to believe that they will be there, that it is possible to plan your life around the essential decency of a place. One small but telling example: Oswaldo Alves, Lerner's longtime colleague, said that when they were doing the blitzkrieg makeover of the Rua Quinze, they knew people would pick the flowers they were planting all over the street. "We had a huge supply on hand; and the second someone picked them, we'd plant some new ones. We did it day after day, and it wasn't long before people figured out the best place for the flowers was the street." Indeed, Rua Quinze is now better known as Rua das Flores.

Anibal Tacla, a fabric merchant with two stores along the pedestrian mall, remembers the day the new street went in; his father was one of the storeowners sure that the plan would bankrupt him, "that the quality of the people who came to walk here would decrease, that pickpockets would take the place over." Instead, of course, business boomed. With the streets crowded, there was relatively little crime. "All of this is possible because the people of Curitiba now think they live in a First World city," he says. "This message was inbred in us by Jaime Lerner. We're proud to live in Curitiba, and we want to show we can live like grownups." The shopkeepers along the mall had recently formed a trade association, collecting dues so they could advertise jointly and sponsor activities. "In any other part of Brazil, if you talk to a merchant and ask him to pay three hundred dollars a month for an association, he will give you a big four letter word. Here, eighty percent joined up. Everything's like that here now - if you talk to Curitibaans about separating their garbage, they will do it, because they know they live in a different city. This mind-condition - it's very important, and it's the exact reverse of what happened in Rio."

But the most impressive transformation may be the willingness of people to support social programs. In a city widely described as conservative, I met no one who thought the city was spending too much money helping the poor: the mixing and contact spurred by all of Lerner's various schemes, and the fact that the schemes work, seems to have lessened the fear and contempt that hobbles such work in other places. "Last Christmas I went out to the lines where people exchange trash for food," recalls Lerner. "And I noticed, out of the corner of my eye, a guy I knew from architecture school, carrying a sack of garbage. I didn't say anything, but pretty soon he called me over. And he said, 'I know what you're thinking, I'm not in a bad situation. I'm here with my kids because I want them to understand the importance of this.'"

When Melani Krishnankutty, a Berkeley graduate student researching the city, arrived in 1993 to intern at IPPUC, the city's planning institute, she found that many of the city's top planners couldn't tell her what bus to take home: "they wouldn't

dream of coming to work without their cars. They love the car, and they talk about what a great driving city it is, since there are so few cars on the street." Not every Curitiba has been transformed; this is a success story, but it takes place in the real world.

Krishnankutty distributed questionnaires to junior planners throughout the city, and many of them responded with complaints: too much of the character of the city was concentrated downtown, and the neighborhoods of the periphery have not been as carefully thought out; changing traffic patterns have rerouted cars through residential neighborhoods; many people still worked a great distance from their houses. Other respondents, especially among the younger planners who had joined the city in recent years, thought Curitiba paid too much attention to marketing: several dismissed as "propaganda" the current slogan, "The Ecological City." "Sometimes they laugh when they see people coming from outside to visit Curitiba," says Krishnankutty. "They say, 'Wow, the hype is incredible.'" Some of the problems are more than skin-deep, insoluble with the usual mix of cleverness and frugality because they involve human greed and hopelessness. When the city began recycling, the assumption was that it would help Curitiba's poorest of the poor, the "cartpeople" who tow their loads of scrap paper and glass around town like human donkeys. The plan was to let them pick up most of the recyclables left by the curb: the city installed only a token separation plant of its own - thinking that, with all the publicity about recycling, the junkmen would find a higher volume of scrap on the street and that now they'd be able to get at the paper and tin without rummaging through the coffee grounds, because it would be in separate bags. Even more important, there was a plan to form them into an association that would allow them to deal from a position of strength with the private companies that bought the scrap. Indeed, several people I spoke to in Curitiba assured me that this had happened, and one of the many booklets I was given, "Curitiba: Toward an Environmentally Correct City," announced that these cooperatives had allowed the cartpeople to triple their income.

In reality, the Association of Small Pushcarts is run from a narrow fenced lot across the highway from the Vila Pinto slum, a lot strewn with mounds of mineral water bottles and drifts of broken glass. Rubens Ferraira, a powerfully built man in a baseball cap, led us to a small office with a couple of battered chairs, sat down, and with some prodding began to tell the real story of this cooperative. Vila Pinto has plenty of cartpeople, he said - six or eight hundred people in the slum earn their living pulling the carts.

But very few of them come to his lot with their trash; virtually all continue to sell their findings to six big entrepreneurs on the edge of town, who form a monopoly able to manipulate prices. One cart might gather three hundred kilos of paper a day, Ferraira

said. If he could sell it at its real value - about eight cruzeiros per kilo - he could clear twenty-four hundred cruzeiros a day, or the equivalent of about ten dollars. Not much, but a life. Instead, the big entrepreneurs offer about three cruzeiros, the equivalent of four dollars a day, which is poverty of the abject kind.

So why do they sell to the private companies? "They know they're being ripped off," says Ferraira. "But the entrepreneur provides the cart, which the man has to have. And he lives in a small shelter provided by the entrepreneur." It may not be much of a house - "there might be seven families living in ten meters by twenty," says Ferraira - but it's a house. The cartpeople live so close to the edge that they have no way to survive a month or two until higher profits accumulate and they can find a new home. "You have to pay him tonight so he can eat tomorrow," says Ferraira. And the city has also failed to find the money for modern equipment for Ferraira's scrap lot. His old paper press can handle a ton a day, compared with ten tons an hour at the big private plants. He spends half an hour showing me the various scams the private companies run to take money from the carters. Computer paper is worth twice the price of regular stock, for instance, but the entrepreneurs will simply announce there's no market for it and pay the regular price. A kind name for the whole arrangement would be "involuntary servitude"; "slavery" is not as obvious a hyperbole as it should be. But it would take more than the city's brand of everyone's-a-winner optimism to raise up these poorest of the poor: it would take cash, and it would take a willingness to confront powerful men. For the moment, the carters remain a constant visible reminder that this shining city on a hill still casts a shadow.

Nevertheless, as the cloth merchant Anibal Tacla points out, Curitiba suffers from high aspirations. "It's true we have some people asking for dollars in the street. But this is similar in the First World, too. I went to Germany recently, and it was much worse. No economy can absorb all the misery around it," especially an economy as terminal as Brazil's.

When I lived in New York City, I spent much of my time writing about homelessness and helped open a small shelter for the homeless. It was the beginning of that crisis - a crisis long since ended, not because there are any fewer homeless people, but because everyone got used to them and would be amazed if there *were*'t families huddled in half the subway stations in the city. By any comparison, Curitiba has worked miracles. "It rains a lot, the streets are slippery, and drivers still go through red lights," reported *Veja*, the Brazilian newsweekly, in its big story on Curitiba's three hundredth anniversary. "Its virtues, however, are unbeatable."

The transit system provides a midterm exam for the city, a snapshot of how far it's come in changing the nature of the city. Not just the efficiency of the transit system,

which is world class, but the respect in which it's held - a respect that can be measured in several concrete ways. The bus system relies on terminals, for instance, that allow passengers to switch easily from one line to another. The terminals are open at either end so that the buses can drive in and out; it would be a simple matter to walk in and out without paying, since there's only one guard in a booth and since even the thirty-cent fare represents a hefty share of the minimum wage. Having lived in an infinitely richer city that needed to experiment with pepper sprays to keep young people from sucking up tokens with their mouths after they'd been placed in the fare box, a city where the change clerk sits inside a bulletproof booth and speaks through a microphone, a city where no bus driver would even consider carrying change - having lived in Manhattan, I of course asked about farebeaters. "When you respect the people, they respect you," says Oswaldo Alves, the planner. "The people *saw* that the municipality was doing a lot for them, and began to take some responsibility."

In 1990, twenty years after Lerner's first inauguration, the speedybus was about to go into service; and the architects sat down to draw the final designs for the tube stations. They eventually decided to build them out of glass, the cheapest and most beautiful material. "They are fragile," says Alves. "But by now people are used to respecting the city. We knew they had that level of respect." Traveling around the city by bus, I saw only one station with broken windows. It was in one of the richest parts of town, right across from the offices of the governor; several people told me the vandalism was a political trick by his forces, designed to make the mayor look bad. Everywhere else the tube stations gleamed clean and unbroken, busy with people on their way out to see the city.

When mayors and city planners gathered in Curitiba for an urban conference the week before Rio's 1992 Earth Summit, they produced a document called the Curitiba Commitment. It was full of the usual boilerplate, beloved by the UN, vague calls to solve all the problems of all the cities as soon as possible. And it raised the nagging question of whether the city's success is replicable - either in Brazil or in the rest of the world - or whether it's the product of a unique combination of historical circumstance, civic character, and the boundless imagination of Jaime Lerner.

Lerner's years in Rio, where he served as a consultant to the local government, were an education in frustration - even though much of the nation was already aware of his abilities. "You understand how anxious I would get, knowing we had these ideas and no ways to make the decisions," he says. It would be hard to pick a more frustrating country to try and reform: the corruption is so endemic that barely a year after President Fernando Collor de Mello was thrown out of office, thirty of the senators who threw him out were under investigation. (One contended that he had acquired an enormous bank account on his legislator's salary by winning the lottery 250 times, a feat he attributed to the intervention of the Blessed Virgin.) Local leaders are just as out of control. In one state the governor shot another politician point-blank in the head - but since the legislature refused to lift his immunity, he was not arrested. In another the wife of the strongman takes Imelda-style shopping trips to Miami and tells the press "the poor have just as much right to see me looking pretty as anyone else."

The explosion of attention on the grand and petty corruption may be set to shake Brazilian politics in ways that could boost Lerner's career and spread his ideas. Says Cristavao Tezza, the Curitiba novelist, a decade of declining living standards is finally taking its toll. "There's a certain social awareness growing on the part of the intelligent elite. We're starting to realize that Brazil is becoming unsustainable, that there's a growing risk of something occurring by force. So part of the political elite is now geared toward solving real problems." Probably as a result, Lerner's stock is soaring. He's been elected governor of Parana state, and his phone rings regularly with calls from Brasilia, the nation's capital. "There are a lot of people looking for a third way, a way around the traditional parties," says one political aide. Lerner, for his part, would relish the chance if it ever came. His thinking is not confined to cities: he whipped out a pen one day and drew me some sketches of his RURBANS - way stations between the fields and the cities for migrating peasants, where they could spend a generation working in an urban area but still tending a few acres of land. "Being integrated more slowly, so they are not overwhelmed, nor the city," he explains.

To learn from Curitiba, the rest of the world would have to break some long-standing habits - the habit of finding answers in the rich countries, for instance. "People can't imagine there's a city in Brazil with all the facilities," says the director of the city's housing authority. "When I visit America, people are convinced that when I come

home, I have to take a jeep from the airport through the jungle, like Tarzan." Residents of the First World "say, 'Curitiba is a Third World city, what can it teach us?' " sighs Lerner. "People in the Third World say, 'We're a First World city.' "

The hardest habit to break, in fact, may be what Lerner calls the "syndrome of tragedy, of feeling like we're terminal patients." Many cities have "a lot of people who are specialists in proving change is not possible. What I try to explain to them when I go to visit is that it takes the same energy to say why something can't be done as to figure out how to do it." Curitiba, he says, is "not a model but a reference," more important as a reservoir of directions and of hope. "I'm sure of one thing. When people come to visit, they won't forget. Because it's a very strong place. I realize there's very few examples in the world. It's hard to make it happen, and that's why it's so strong. For those who make their living selling complexity, it's very strong. For those who want a small sign that it's possible, it's very strong, too."

I was rushing to catch a flight back home when I talked with Lerner for the last time, and I thought to myself that I would miss this city greatly - not only because of its buses and parks, but because in weeks of doing interviews I'd met very few cynics. The resigned weariness of Westerners about government, which leaves only fanatics and hustlers running for office, had lifted from this place. I came of age during Watergate, and so I needed a reminder that politics in its largest sense can actually be a noble and useful profession, can actually change a place and its people. I needed a reminder that "public" is not a notion consigned to the trash heap of history. I needed this month in the middle of a city to think clearly about the villages and forests of my home.

As I was gathering up my papers to leave for the airport, Lerner talked about his most recent trip to New York, where his daughter is a dancer. Though he was attending a conference, he managed to go to ten movies in ten days, not to mention concerts, bars, restaurants. He behaves, apparently, as if every city was a Curitiba; and it is hard not to think that he might be able to create them wholesale by sheer force of exuberant

personality. He is, among other things, a passionate devotee of klezmer music, and spent several hours at an outdoor bandshell on the Lower East Side waiting through rock bands to hear a performance by the Klezmatics. (He later invited them to Curitiba, where they were a big hit.) I asked him again about the example Curitiba offers the rest of the world. "The more you study your own condition, the deeper you get in your own reality, the more universal you are," he answered. "Tolstoy said, 'If you want to be universal, sing your village.' This is true in literature, it's true in music - if you know klezmer, you know all of music. And it's true in cities, too. You have to know your village and you have to love it."

*Hope, Human, and Wild* by Bill McKibben