

Alexander on the Loss of Daytime “Hangouts” in the Pandemic

Audio Transcript

How does it affect the underclass in general? Because we’ve lost our main hangouts, the drop-in center. The winter shelter shut down, and no more hypothermia-related all-day shelter-in-place situations. So, they’re out of the shelters.

The *libraries*, main source of hanging out, where— People have email accounts at the library! They have access. Everyone’s got their own niche, or they *did* at that point anyway, when the world was functioning, and the infrastructure was fully intact. And McDonald’s! Good old McDonald’s, where you could hang out and refill your soda continuously, you know. So there was a cluster there. So all these places emptied out, people that ordinarily were ensconced somewhere for the day.

Our hangout, the culturally interested and also high-class shelter, which the museums give you, got— lost our shelter also! My main dependency on keeping myself active, my hangout, has been the Smithsonian and the National Gallery system, you know. Without that external escape, I’d be in a constant state of vanity, vapidness, emptiness, futility, melancholy, ennui, uselessness, and sloth. That’s what I say to comfort myself when I feel depressed, you know. *[laughs]* Which was my basic state when I was holed up in SROs [single-room occupancy hotels] for three years, you know. So my life on the streets— I’m infinitely more active and socialized than I was in a hotel room.