

Stair Seats

People watching crowds inevitably gravitate to high spots.

1. On the one hand, they seek a vantage point from which they can take in the action as a whole.
2. On the other hand, they still want to be part of the action; they do not want to be mere onlookers.

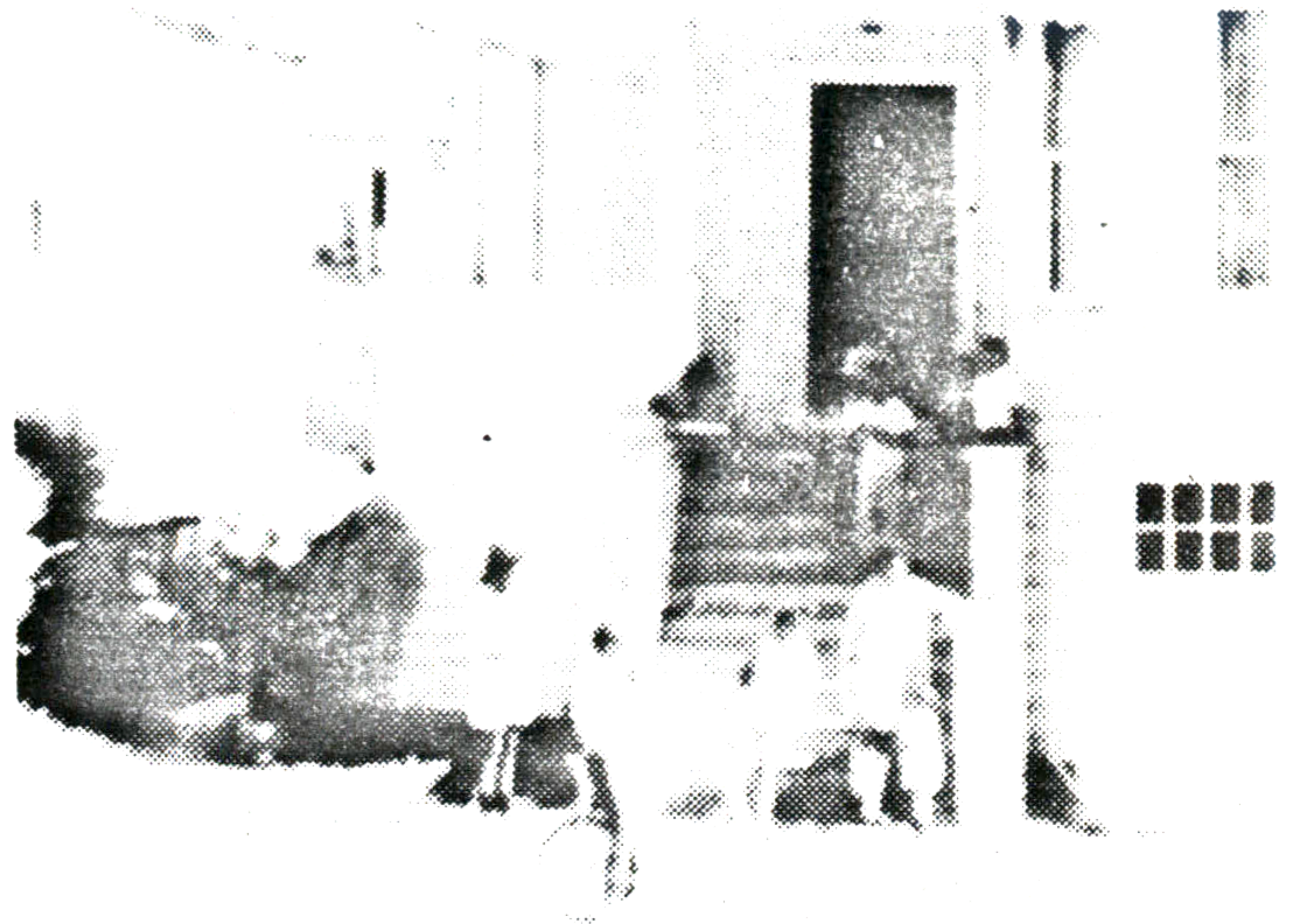
Of course, these tendencies do not hold for everybody; but they do hold for a substantial number of people in any crowd.

For a person looking at the horizon, the visual field is far larger below the horizon than above it. It is therefore clear that anybody who is "people-watching" will naturally try to take up a position a few feet above the action.

The trouble is that this position will usually have the effect of removing a person from the action. Most people want to be able to take it in, and also want simultaneously, to be part of it. This means that any places which are slightly elevated to meet tendency 1, must also be within easy reach of the action, hence on circulation paths, and directly accessible from below, to meet tendency 2.

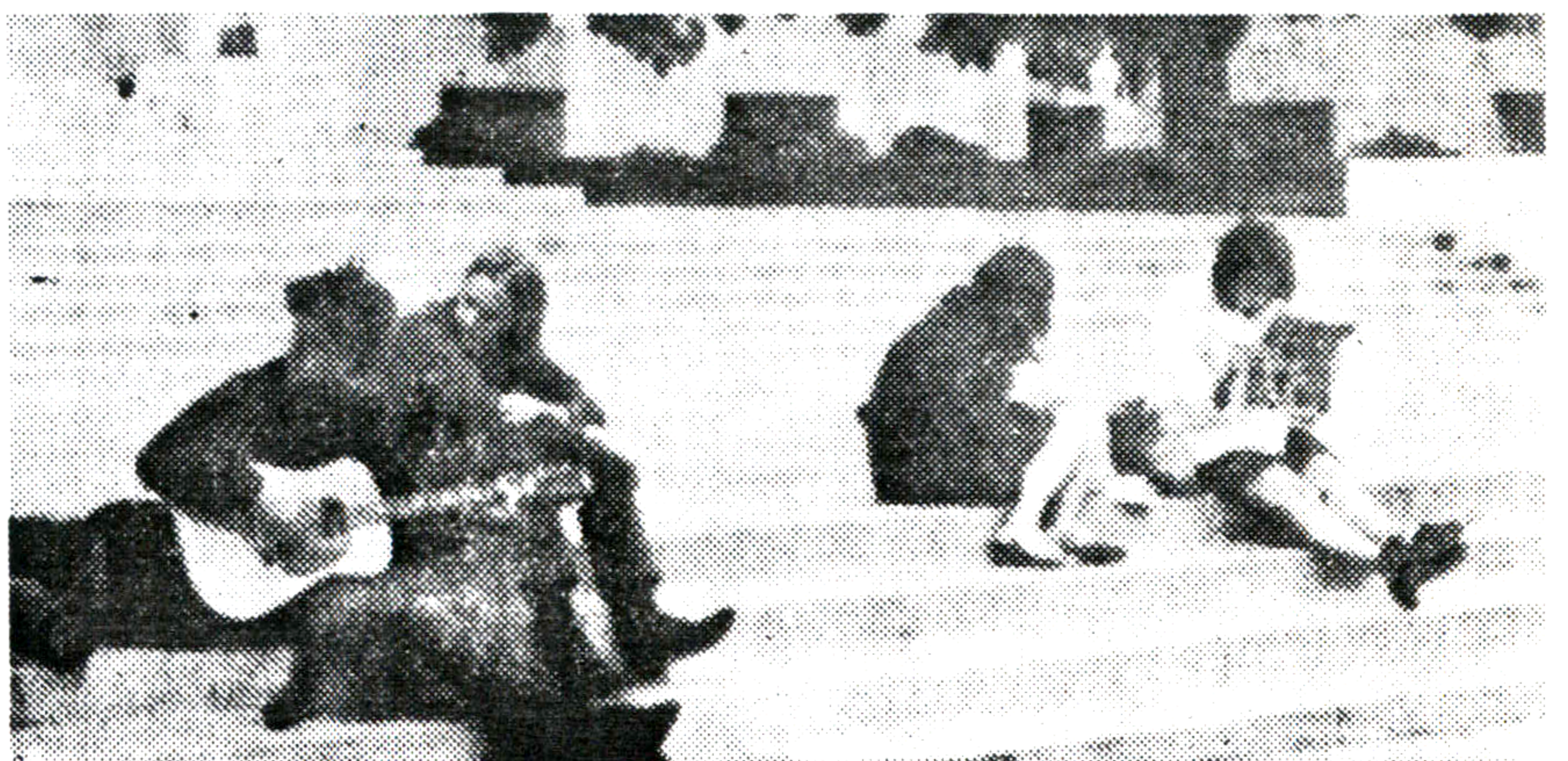
There is a simple kind of evidence, both for the reality of the tendencies, and for the value of the pattern. When there are areas in public places which are both slightly raised, and very accessible, people naturally gravitate toward them.

Cafe terraces, steps surrounding public plazas, stoops, porches, statues and seats and other perches, all give examples. The photographs show typical cases.



Public Place

*Therefore, in any public place, where people loiter:
Surround the place with raised areas which are immediately accessible from below (like stairs with seats, balustrades, a stepped terrace, or a stoop) - a railed balcony won't do.*



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This pattern is tentative. If you have any evidence to support or refute its current formulation, please send it to the Center for Environmental Structure, P.O. Box 5156, Berkeley, California 94705; we will add your comments to the next edition.