

out of the juxtaposition of different people and different cultures in close physical proximity. Traditional cities view engagement as a virtue. The new urban paradigm is the precise opposite; it sanctions disengagement, denying the premise of the traditional city even as it professes to celebrate the virtues of urbanity.

In its social attitude, the new urban paradigm is less truly urban than it is a kind of blurring of traditional differences between the city and suburb. This blurring exists all the more in what may be the purest examples of all of the new urban model, those clusters of shopping malls, hotels, and high-rise office buildings built on the outskirts of older cities, often at the intersection of major freeways. These so-called edge cities (an awkward term; I have always preferred the less high-sounding “out-town”) would seem to have every quality of cities except streets. Such places as City Post Oak in Houston, Tyson’s Corners outside Washington, Buckhead north of Atlanta, and Las Colinas outside Dallas are gleaming and relatively new, and represent an attempt to take on the more benign characteristics once associated with larger cities without acquiring any other qualities of urban downtowns. The message is obvious: urbanity is attractive, so long as it can be rendered friendly and harmless by excluding poverty and all that is associated with it—crime, drugs, and violence.

Paradoxically, what might be called suburban values have by now come to play a significant role in defining the urban experience. This is true not only in areas outside of cities, but in entire urban regions, often even including portions of older central cities themselves. By suburban values I mean much more than matters of geography, and much more than accommodation to the automobile, though this is surely a part of it: no longer need a suburbanite’s night at the symphony naturally be combined with a stroll on a city street or a visit to an urban cafe or restaurant. The orchestra hall in many places is just as likely to be driven to, and driven home from, as it is to be walked to along city streets.

Underlying this are two much more subtle, but ultimately far more profound, aspects of suburban values: the presumption of disengagement and, going hand-in-hand with this, an acceptance, even an elevation, of the notion of private space. Indeed, the truly defining characteristic of our time may be this privatization of the public realm, and it has come to affect our culture’s very notions of urbanism.

Suburbs have traditionally valued private space—the single-family, detached house, the yard, even the automobile itself—over public space, which they

have possessed in limited enough quantities under the best of circumstances. And most suburbs now have even less truly public space than they once did. Not only are malls taking the place of streets in the commercial life of many small towns, the privatization of the public realm has advanced even more dramatically with the huge increase in the number of gated, guarded suburban communities, places in which residential streets are now technically private places rather than public ones. In literally thousands of such communities, entire neighborhoods become, in effect, one vast piece of private property.

The rise of suburban values means much more than the growth of suburban sprawl, then. It has meant a change in the way public and private spaces work in both suburbs and cities. And it has meant that many cities, even ones that pride themselves on their energy, prosperity, and urbanity have come to take on certain characteristics once associated mainly with the suburbs. Now in both city and suburb, expressions of urbanity, which we might define as the making of public places where people can come together for both commercial and civic purposes, increasingly occur in private, enclosed places: shopping malls, both urban and suburban; “festival marketplaces” that seem to straddle the urban/suburban models; atrium hotel lobbies, which in some cities have become virtual town squares; lobbies of multiplex cinemas, which often contain a dozen or more theaters and thus exist at significant civic scale, and office building gallerias, arcades, and lobbies.

Private places all, yet they serve the function that was once reserved for public places such as the street, the town square, and the park. The magnificent and civilized balance Louis Kahn evoked in his musing on the street—a balance established over time, across the generations, not only between commercial and civic concerns but also between different architects who knew the street belonged to none of them individually but was in and of itself a part of the commonweal—is essentially a thing of the past. It is gone because it emerges from the implicit assumption that the street is a public place. The great streets of the great cities of the world are all arenas in which private enterprise has made what might almost be called a kind of sacrificial gesture, in which architects have worked together to create a sense of place that is larger and more consistent, not to mention considerably more complex, than anything any individual building can possibly attain.

This is not to say that such a balance between public and private concerns is not respected today. But it is rarely imitated. Indeed, genuine street life exists