

CZERNIAK: And Syracuse University has a two-mile project.

SAUNDERS: I have a question about the default mode of mainstream urban design in this country in which there is a mom-and-apple-pie set of principles that, rightly, no one takes exception to, things like mixed uses, pedestrian scale, banishing automobiles as much as possible, good public transportation, retail open to streets, street trees, etc. We do want to spend our time on streets like this rather than on streets like those I saw thirty years ago in downtown Dayton, Ohio—empty parking lots, vast seas of concrete. We would rather be in Portland than that old Dayton. But Sorkin points out that all this offers a rather pathetic form of public life centered around comfortable hedonistic lifestyle mainly for shoppers enjoying their cappuccinos and their chance to buy Gap clothes, and if that's urbanism, we're screwed, because it doesn't have anything to do with political life or with social integration. It has to do with passive pleasures: the idea that sitting under a tree sipping cappuccino is *the* great city experience. Sorkin says that every damn city in America has these "lifestyle" streets, and they are deadly.

GOLDBERGER: This comes down to the question: Is the glass of urbanism half-empty or half-full? An urban impulse is alive that was not visible a generation ago. But it is expressing itself—and in this sense Sorkin is right—significantly through the consumer culture and aspirations for a comfortable middle-class existence. The things wrong with that model are easy to see—it's part of the increasing homogenization of culture. We may be rescued from the coldness and the banality of the cityscape you remember from Dayton, but at a price: public life and consumerism have become conflated.

Sorkin idealizes a certain prior public existence—I'm not sure there was ever a golden age of the public realm in this country. I doubt that public issues were ever debated in Union Square in New York or even Hyde Park in London. Decisions were made in a far less democratic way than they seem to be made today, and the public life we romanticize so much existed in large part because for most people the private realm was awful and made you want to get outside. This realm offered not a comfortable, ample residence with lots of bathrooms, heat, and air conditioning but a couple of mean cold rooms without a bathroom. Remember what city life was for most people in New York or Boston or Chicago in the late nineteenth century, the "golden age of the public realm." The private realm was crappy unless