

● SIDEWALKS ●

Benjamin Roth

The problem of public transportation is an ever-evolving beast. Cities are constantly adapting to changing technologies and the desires of their inhabitants. Some are privileged enough to have adopted timeless canals to traverse their mazes, while others employ cobblestone streets, trolley lines, or subway systems. These utilitarian inventions are quite contradictory, though, to their original purposes. Rather than inspiring connectedness, which they all seek to embody, these methods instead separate people from the mindfulness of their daily trek. Familiarity only exists at the start and end, possibly including some landmarks along the way. People are psychologically removed from the cities they inhabit when the focus becomes so utilitarian.

Sidewalks, on the other hand, embody the most human elements of a city. They connect while allowing for a more comprehensive connection between person and place to develop. Sidewalks are where your neighbor sells hotdogs to bankers and bums. They are where police officers chat with the deli owners who discount their sandwiches. There are joggers, dog walkers, briskly walking new mothers and their troupes, cigarette smokers taking their breaks, and old Polish women who seem to know every bit of valuable personal information about anybody to set foot on their street. They're also where the yells of a of a quickly crumbling marriage can be heard through open windows, where drugs are peddled by the opportunistic, and sirens are so ubiquitous that their infrequent absence provokes unease.

Effectually, sidewalks epitomize that which constitutes metropolitanism. They breed an understanding of space and community in an

unusually cold, hostile environment. They provide transportation, but one that doesn't seek to close off the outside world. The harmonious mixtures of fast and slow, crime and community, serenity and calamity, poverty and prosperity, design and decrepitude, and inclusion and hostility, in all of their urban integrity, are represented in the esplanade of the sidewalk. There is no other region in the city that is more representative of humanity's place amidst its achievements than the sidewalk. People of all creeds and conditions move through life together here, and the commonalities amongst them rise to the observable, appreciable surface.

As transportation becomes even more impersonal, the necessary functions of roadways change, and people move hastily away from direct sociality, sidewalks will become ever more important in their function to humanity. They will continue to be meeting places for diversity while offering the most unadulterated view of humanity available to the modern person. They will still function as mediums for commerce, community, knowledge, relation, and urban dynamism, regardless of the trajectory taken by other methods of transportation or socializing.

"Not TV or illegal drugs but the automobile has been the chief destroyer of American communities."

"Traffic congestion is caused by vehicles, not by people in themselves."

"A good city street neighborhood achieves a marvel of balance between its people's determination to have essential privacy and their simultaneous wishes for differing degrees of contact, enjoyment or help from the people around."

-Jane Jacobs