

Topics

Spring Rites and Revolutionary Wrongs

Window Dressing

With spring, the Avenue of the Americas comes to life; those wind-swept winter plazas turn into tree-lined promenades. This year, the windows are blooming, too, with displays of books, records, clothes and other consumer goods, providing relief from the avenue's standard ground-floor fare of bank and corporate showrooms. While not exactly a landslide, this trend to retail uses is a happy change from the endless blocks of blank, 'institutional' facades that seem to vie for the dulllest draperies and the biggest signs announcing the latest credit terms.

Things are looking up for window shopping on Third Avenue and along the newer parts of Fifth and Madison, as well, where the block-size new office buildings seem to have been constructed with those banks, brokerage firms, ticket offices and business showrooms automatically built in. Large-scale commercial construction has consistently swept out the healthy variety of small shops that make neighborhoods real places.

The city's planners have tried to relieve the problem of spreading sterility with special zoning, but the changes are coming about, naturally and ironically, through the rental market. With a slow economy, banks are retrenching and corporations are moving their expensive showrooms upstairs, where rents are lower. The people who work in the large new office buildings and who are inclined to be more interested in T-shirt chic than comptometers, contribute a natural market for consumer goods.

But joy at the changes should not be unconfined. Most of the new shops are chain stores, offering standardized products and displays of mass merchandising. Although the chains are better than the banks, they are not as good as the small, specialized personal shops and services that give a cosmopolitan city its rich options of style and choice. Variety is not disorder, as planners once believed; it is a vital urban asset. Still, everything is relative in street life. A walk along the funereal Third Avenue block between 55th and 56th Streets, where a suavely forbidding, black-windowed

bank fronts on unrelieved concrete, can make Lamston's look like Tivoli.

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Beggars on Horseback

The reports of what the North Vietnamese are doing to the South Vietnamese, the Cambodian Communists to other Cambodians, and the new Ethiopian rulers to Ethiopian students follow in a long line of afflictions that newly ensconced revolutionary regimes have imposed on their peoples. The atrocities committed in the name of some high cause or ideology are so common as to defy fresh comment, yet how can they be ignored? So we retreat again to Yeats, who said it all in "The Great Day":

*Hurrah for revolution and more
cannon-shot!*

*A beggar upon horseback lashes
a beggar on foot!*

*Hurrah for revolution and can-
non come again!*

*The beggars have changed
places, but the lash goes on.*

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