

Neighborhoods

New York is a city of neighborhoods, each one singularly insular and intensely aware of its own destiny. Change brings localized trauma. When a neighborhood is blitzed with big new apartment houses, for example, it is the local residents who find themselves bereft of the essential services that were accommodated modestly in the bulldozed old buildings. Even new residents take notice when it almost becomes necessary to make an appointment to get into the supermarket.

That overcrowded supermarket replaces a variety of shops and specialties. The butcher, the baker and the greengrocer are a quaint, vanishing breed, treasured fiercely by those still lucky enough to have them. The new residential neighborhood is a study in environmental poverty. Brick slabs house the food chain, a bank and a dry cleaner. It is a street scene of redundant and surpassing sterility.

The development process is unalleviated by any concern with the human condition. The costs of today's financing and construction are so high that only high-rent space is available. These economics, however, have nothing to do with real life, or real needs. The only thing real about it is the investor's profit and the neighborhood's loss. The bank is handy for the builder, and everyone else gets taken to the cleaner.