

Topics

Under the Rainbow

Roofscapes

This is a time for rooftops. They are the traditional summer landscape of the city. Or they were before air conditioning, when roofs and stoops were the only places where the breezes stirred. At night people slept on roofs, or went dancing on roofs with painted skies and roll-back ceilings. During the day they sunbathed on "tar beach." This landscape of pebbles and sticky asphalt, with outcroppings of chimneys, parapets and stairs, was captured superbly in the photographs of André Kertész, the casual architecture and pigeons and flowerpots fixed forever in a shaft of summer sun.

But today, city roofs are different places. They provide space for cooling machinery, or urban gardeners who raise monumentally expensive tomatoes, or condominium swimming pools. We thought of all this recently because of a friend's report that on a rooftop below her apartment a young

man has taken to sleeping on hot July nights. He has furnished a corner with a mat and pillows; he retires early and rises late. But he is not looking at the moon. The blue flicker of a television set brings the scene right up to date.

Voyage to Nowhere

"Step right up for the Nothing Tour," says the man in the white cap. He waves you onto the bus, one of those new Grummans that has been out of service since spring.

"Our first stop," he says proudly at 99th Street and Second Avenue, "is the world-famous \$2.25 billion Second Avenue subway, intended to take people from lower Manhattan all the way to Co-op City. Those gratings cover the excavations. But that's all there is, holes in the ground."

The bus moves down Lexington Avenue. "Here," the guide announces, "is the 63d Street tunnel." There are

cranes and metal plates in the street. "It was supposed to allow the subway to go under the East River and extend to farthest Queens. But now only part will be finished, at a cost of \$590 million, and it will only take people to nearest Queens."

On into Brooklyn, to the Williamsburg section, until glass and steel towers loom ahead. "Here's a hum-dinger! It's Woodhull, the 'dream' hospital, finished three years ago and cost \$200 million. Still empty."

Now, he says, for the newest feature of the tour. In Wantagh, on Long Island, the bus passes a brand-new sewage treatment plant. "It's costing \$14.5 million," the guide says, "but it will probably never open. It was for treating sludge, but now they're dumping sludge offshore again."

He moves briskly down the aisle to collect the tour fare. "Exact change only," he says, by which he means a Susan B. Anthony dollar. The bus speeds on, toward Yankee Stadium.