

THE FUTURE OF URBANITY IN THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

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Urbanity can be understood as frequent meetings with strangers and unique human works (Henri Lefebvre). Urbanity is about difference. Industrial Society has not been very interested in urbanity, and mainly worked against it (through standardization, zoning, automobilism, etc). Now, information society changes the agenda. Urban space in "real" reality (meetspace/streetspace) now competes with the "virtual" reality of Cyberspace or the Internet. Here, you have frequent meetings with strangers and unique human works too. The urbanity of the Internet develops several times faster than meetspace/streetspace urbanity. Besides being new and partly different, it, to some extent, demands less investment economically and politically. To many people, it is also more accessible and comfortable. As the information society to a large extent is about difference instead of similarities, complexity instead of simple order, networks instead of hierarchies, the question of urbanity takes on a new

importance. Aesthetical, ethical and moral questions arise, to which meetspace/streetspace urbanity has a lot to offer as a complement and alternative to either cyberspace urbanity, or personal inwardness and isolation (Richard Sennet). Today, there are new threats to meetspace/streetspace urbanity related to dislocations in "real" space, growing crime and mental disorders, anti-urban ideas about "urban ecology," and the dullness of most "real" urban spaces compared to electronic media. Architects now have to choose if they want to strengthen meetspace/streetspace urbanity. In any case, a better understanding of urbanity is needed, as there are a lot of misconceptions about it among architects. This paper will try to develop these statements and ask further critical questions about them, as well as comment on some recent works by others on the subject.

Editor's note: The full text of this paper was not available at the time of publication.