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Chapter Eight

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HOW TO MESS UP A TOWN

Saratoga Springs, in upstate New York, where I live, calls itself a city, officially, but possesses the qualities that most visitors would associate with the term *small town*. In many ways it is as near to being as classic an American small town as a town could be—given my predilections, that is why I chose to settle here twenty years ago. Its commercial life is concentrated on a typical main street, called Broadway here. There are many graceful, tree-lined streets of old houses, some of them quite grand. Until recently, the town had a palpable edge at which development ended and true open countryside began.

Saratoga is best known nowadays for its racetrack, but the town has been a resort for two centuries. The mineral springs first brought it renown as a watering hole after the American Revolution. It was especially popular with southern families seeking to escape the heat and summer plagues of their home country. Following the Civil War, it flowered as the East's preeminent high society playground, attracting the new class of northern industrial millionaires who built fantastic "cottages" (mansions), and spent the bright summer days tirelessly parading their wealth, and their marriageable daughters, about town. It boasted two of the largest hotels in the world of that time, the Grand Union and the United States, behemoths with hundreds of rooms and gargantuan porches. Gambling was centered in Richard Canfield's elegant Renaissance Revival casino.

During the 1920s, as a result of prohibition, gambling (and with it drinking) was dispersed to the woodsy hinterlands of town—a move

made possible by the rise of the automobile—where organized crime ran a string of posh private nightspots out of sight of the police, who were well-paid not to notice these operations. This wholesale perversion of the law led to the peculiar spectacle of society swells rubbing elbows with some of the nation's most notorious gangsters. Charles "Lucky" Luciano presided, making sure that mobs from the major cities each got a piece of the action.

After World War II, Saratoga had lost much of its luster as a resort. The racetrack remained, but casino gambling moved west to Las Vegas, a town created by gangsters for gangsters. The gigantic old hotels, built during an era when labor was cheap, became maintenance nightmares and were torn down. The railroads embarked on their forty-year decline and service was whittled down to one train a day. Many of the large Greek Revival and Victorian "cottages" went to rack and ruin. By the mid-1960s the whole town was full of decrepitating white elephants. Anything new built during this period—shopping centers, the first fast-food joints—tended to disrupt the existing town pattern. Combined with an aggressive, federally funded "urban renewal" program, the effects were very destructive.

When I arrived in the early 1970s, Saratoga was struggling to get back on its feet. Interstate 87, running between New York City and Montreal, had recently opened, and with it came the hope for redevelopment. But the Oil Embargo of 1973 made people think twice about commuting to the state capital, Albany, and the hoped-for boom was postponed. However, Saratoga was a good place to be a starving writer. Many of those grand decaying nineteenth-century houses contained magnificent apartments, surprisingly cheap to rent. As a result, the town acquired a lively hippie-bohemian community of young arty people who, like myself, preferred the scale and pattern of small-town living.

In the 1980s, practically every old house in town was renovated—including the one I now live in—and out went the magnificent, cheap apartments. Hippies became yuppies. The number of real estate firms in town quadrupled. The oil shortages of the previous decade were forgotten—in fact, the price of gas declined steadily—and commuters flocked in. A great deal of new stuff was built, almost all of it inimical to the town's essential character. Meanwhile, everything possible had been

done to accommodate automobiles at the expense of pedestrians, and of civic life in general. The edge of town, that transitional zone where real countryside begins, was erased in a frenzy of condo building. Saratoga is surely not a better place for all these things, though I remain because I have a life here now, and the same disease of townscape and landscape is prevalent everywhere else in the United States. The Saratoga I shall describe in this chapter is a fitting case study of this disease. The bad buildings and the bad relationships between things here are familiar symptoms everywhere.

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In the era before automobiles came on the scene, you took a train to Saratoga Springs. The train ran on tracks up a narrow right-of-way, through farms and forest, and stopped at the Saratoga depot, a block from Broadway. Goods shipped from elsewhere—everything from pine-apples to pianos—also arrived at the railroad depot, where they were either picked up by the local merchants, or forwarded by the local express agency.

Imagine what the town would have been like if railroad tracks ran down every single street carrying a constant stream of privately owned locomotives. Imagine further that the sides of every street were lined with idle engines, boxcars, pullmans, tankers, and cabooses, so that all of Saratoga was a gigantic railroad yard that only incidentally contained houses, shops, schools, churches, and businesses. This is roughly the situation today with the automobile. Saratoga, like virtually every other town in America, has become one big automobile storage depot that incidentally contains other things.

Today, you are apt to enter town on South Broadway. A zone of roadside commerce greets the visitor. There are, for instance, two car dealerships. By necessity the lots in front of the dealerships' buildings are filled with inventory. The buildings themselves hardly matter. One-story concrete-block affairs with flat roofs, they were not designed to be beautiful. They are just places where paperwork can be signed out of the weather.

This part of town is not friendly to pedestrians. Not that it's against the law to walk here, only that no one would have much reason to walk here unless his car broke down. It's not between any two places that

people would walk to and from on their lunch hour—e.g., homes and offices—or at any other time for that matter. There are no sidewalks out here on South Broadway, just strings of parking lots punctuated by curb cuts.

A little further up the street comes an inexpensive eating place called the Cobbler House (formerly a Lums franchise), and next to it, a Monroe Muller outlet. Both are plain industrial boxes designed with no other purpose than to expedite sales of the products sold within. Both are painted in garish colors to snag the attention of passing motorists. Both buildings are surrounded by parking lots that are nearly empty all of the time.

That the parking lots are so much bigger than they need to be is a result of several things. First, the zoning laws in this part of town ordain a minimum lot size. Your business has to occupy a lot of *at least* one quarter acre, whether it is a hot dog stand or a car dealership, which makes for a lot of dead space between business establishments. In effect, it mandates the same relationships between buildings as you would find in a suburban subdivision.

The zoning laws also require deep setbacks from the street, from the side property lines, and from the rear lot line, which encourages placing the building in the exact center of the lot with parking all around. The parking area, naturally, is paved with asphalt. Landscaping costs more to install and creates obstructions for motorists, not to mention maintenance headaches. So paving the whole lot is the easiest and least expensive solution, whether you need all the parking or not. Empty parking lots are the most common little dead noplaces of the postwar streetscape. Great big noplaces are made up of many little noplaces.

It's a bad practice done partly out of misguided good intentions. Businesses in this part of town are required by the codes to have a minimum number of parking spaces. There is no on-street parking here on South Broadway and the customers' cars have to go somewhere. So the business is expected to make provision. This is a good intention, though it results in a place that is unfriendly to pedestrians and oppressive to look at.

Building up to the sidewalk line is one of the crucial elements in creating places that are appealing to people on foot. The arrangement affords a feeling of enclosure and of visual interest, especially if the buildings

contain retail shops with merchandise in their windows. It might be preferable to build all these businesses out to a sidewalk line and stash the cars in the rear, but the setback law won't allow that. The law here on South Broadway assumes that it would be obnoxious for the building to begin right up at the sidewalk, because it would obstruct the motorists' view of other business establishments further up South Broadway—and, anyway, there aren't any sidewalks. The law has to assume that cars are more important than people.

On the other side of Monroe Muller, heading deeper into town on South Broadway, is a small realtor's office ensconced in what appears to be a miniature New England church, complete with steeple. The whole structure is about the size of a detached garage. It is a holdover from the period between the two World Wars when it was the fashion to put roadside businesses in cartoon-like buildings: gas stations that looked like mosques and log cabins, motels like windmills, lunchrooms shaped like hot dogs, hats, bulldogs, igloos.

The little white church functions as a sign as well as a miniature office building. In symbolic shorthand it says, "We sell traditional real estate here! We sell the coherence and stability, the enduring community, of traditional New England town life!" Saratoga is not a traditional New England town and never was. At the present time, Saratoga is the remnant of a Victorian gambling resort overlaid by an urban sprawl-scape, with all the disconnectedness and loss of traditional values that implies.

Why should this matter? Why not just accept the little fake church as a playful, harmless, adorable architectural oddity, as the lovers of kitsch do? Because it's a bad building, cheaply cute, out-of-scale, symbolically false, and stuck in the middle of a parking lot, a little noplace that contributes to the greater noplace. Because if the town had not been degraded by other bad buildings and bad design relationships, there would be no need for its mendacious symbolism, which cheapens the town just a little more.

Next is a Dairy Queen, housed in an industrial box with a gambrel roof so it resembles a barn. The barnyard is paved and is occupied by half dozen head of automobiles. In quick succession we pass a "convenience" store and a dry cleaner, both with plenty of parking. Across the street there is a diner that doubles as the local bus depot. (This is a

wonderful idea—to place the bus depot a good half mile from the center of town.) Then, a Chinese restaurant in another industrial box, a drive-in bank, a gas station, a minimall with a deli, video store, and laundromat, and a carwash.

Each business has its sign, of course, many of them plastic and internally lighted. In the 1970s, the town authorities put a limit on the size and height of commercial signs in this part of town, a political sop to those who objected to the stripification of South Broadway. Now instead of being gigantic, the signs are just very large.

In this instance the city fathers told the local property owners what they were not allowed to do. What the city fathers consistently fail to do—all over America—is come up with any coherent vision of what South Broadway ought to look like. This is due in part to a lack of good models. We have built so many terrible communities since 1945, and destroyed so much that was good, that there is very little to refer to. The design of almost anything is now reduced to a mere set of shopping choices for mass-produced components straight out of the builders' catalogs. At the official level, design is regarded as hopelessly effete, not something for real men sitting on zoning boards.

Town planners routinely pawn off design questions onto technical experts who, it turns out, often have selfish professional interests quite at odds with the public good—for instance, traffic engineers who are dedicated to building more and bigger highways, no matter how destructive these things prove to be for a town. Commonly, the experts do not live in the communities they are paid to advise, meaning that they don't have to live with the negative effects of their work.

The unwillingness to think about the public realm of the street in any other terms beside traffic, shows how little value Americans confer on the public realm in general. By any standard, South Broadway looks terrible. No thought has gone into the relationships between things—the buildings to each other, the buildings to the street, the pedestrian to the buildings. The detailing of the street is a mess. I have already mentioned the lack of sidewalks. The absence of trees planted along the sides of the street lends it a bleak, sun-blasted look, which the clutter of signs only aggravates. Even experienced from inside a car, the place is depressing. At the intersection of Lincoln Avenue, motels stand on two corners, both of early 1960s vintage. Each one presents a blank brick

wall to South Broadway, as though the street were too hideous to bear looking at. The fast-food strip follows, all the little cartoon eateries in a row: McDonald's, Dunkin' Donuts, Long John Silver, Pizza Hut, Kentucky Fried Chicken.

As a sort of crescendo to this long avenue of junk architecture, we arrive at the Holiday Inn. It is a three-story structure in what the construction industry calls "rainbow brick," designed to simulate the mold of antiquity. Here the effect is wasted. The building has all the formal charm of a junior high school. Parking is in front, of course, because cars are so decorative. A free-standing brown anodized aluminum plinth topped by the company's characteristic logo occupies an otherwise useless grassy median between the parking lot and the street—another little no-place. Presumably this is necessary because without the sign, visitors would not know whether the building was the county department of social services, a Jehovah's Witness Kingdom Hall, a minimum security prison, or a place of lodging.

There's a cute touch to the left of the grand entrance: a little fountain up against an enormous blank brick wall. It spurts water perhaps four feet up in the air, no higher, so that a man of average size, if sufficiently enthralled, could walk over from the parking lot and gaze down upon it in awe. It is about as tall as a foundation shrub, one of those clumpy junipers or yews beloved of suburban landscapers. Most sublimely, a blue floodlight plays through it, even at high noon, in case anyone fails to register that he is looking at real live water.

We are now entering the old city core of Saratoga Springs, where South Broadway becomes simply Broadway. On the left stands St. Peter's Catholic Church. The main front entrance was permanently sealed with concrete twenty years ago. This was the church's way of saying that the town's main thoroughfare had become too abominable to connect with. The same attitude is echoed across the street in the Congregation Sherei Tefila synagogue, which presents to the street a huge 30-foot-high and 50-foot-long red brick wall that is absolutely blank except for two dark recessed doorways. There is no ornament, nothing. You could play jai alai against it. The motif of utter blankness extends another amazing 100 feet with the facade of the Saratoga County YMCA, only here the color changes from brick red to cinder-block gray with a decorative horizontal stripe running the whole length.

Just past the YMCA lies what used to be the heart of town. On one side of Broadway is Congress Park, eight acres of pastorate designed by Frederick Law Olmsted. Across the street from the park, a gigantic parking lot occupies the former site of the Grand Union Hotel. When the hotel was razed in 1955, it was replaced by a Grand Union supermarket (no relation). The block-long, one-story flat-roofed plaza is now nearing the end of its "design life." At the time the plaza was built, it was against the zoning law to build apartments over new retail developments. This meant, in effect, that the historic pattern of Broadway could no longer be built, even on Broadway. This pattern was of buildings three to five stories tall, with retail on the first floor and offices, hotel rooms, or apartments above, with the buildings built out to the sidewalk—in short, a typical American small-town business district pattern. It made people feel good. They could mingle with neighbors on the sidewalk. They had something to look at in the shop windows. The multistory buildings with their decorated facades afforded the street a comforting sense of enclosure, as of a big room with pretty walls. The parking lot and plaza that replaced the Grand Union Hotel has none of that. Rather, it is a block-long hole in the pattern of downtown Saratoga, a big no-place. At night, under the pink-green glow of the halogen lamps, the parking lot is even more forbidding.

Why did the city fathers allow it to be built? Because the plaza complied with the building law. The law represented a number of attitudes in the collective mind of the community at that time—and was typical of the United States in general then. One was that an "old-fashioned" downtown had little value, especially compared to the value of easy parking. In the 1950s, when the plaza was built, most of the buildings on Broadway were at least a half-century old. They needed maintenance or rehabilitation. In America of the 1950s there was little interest in fixing up old things. America had just won a big war and its citizens felt entitled to new things.

Driving around for every necessity of life didn't seem like such a bad idea. Gas was cheap. Nobody gave a thought to the possibility that oil wells would run dry some day. That was sci-fi stuff. Driving to the supermarket was certainly easier than tramping downtown, visiting the grocer, the butcher, the baker, the five-and-ten, and then trudging home with twenty pounds of merchandise like a pack mule.

The historic pattern was also harmed by the postwar notion that people shouldn't live in the same place where business was. After World War II, it was deemed inhumane to let people live over a delicatessen, or an insurance agency, or a plant store—or conversely, to sell milk and newspapers in a residential neighborhood. The logical end of such a principle is suburbia. Superimposed over an older town pattern, like Saratoga Springs, the new pattern is a disaster. Dwellings above stores were the historical version of "affordable housing." The fact that we have not built apartments over stores for fifty years is largely responsible for the present crisis in affordable housing.

Along Broadway today there is still a good supply of old buildings, but over the years many others were lost through neglect, fire, or bad planning decisions, and without exception they have been replaced by worse things. A block up Broadway from the Grand Union once stood the United States Hotel, another colossus. (It served as the setting for Edna Ferber's novel *Saratoga Trunk*.) A Red Barn hamburger shop took its place—along with two acres of parking lot.

In terms of use, the United States Hotel was a building of huge complexity. It was, foremost, a public place, a social center as well as a place of lodging and dining. It contained shops and a parklike courtyard open to the public, an enormous piazza, all on one site. The Red Barn building has only one function: the sale of cheap food in volume. It has no lodgings, or ballrooms, or places of repose. Its plate glass windows contain nothing of interest to the pedestrian, and, anyway, they are set back from the sidewalk by a useless strip of grass. The building's only purpose is to maximize the profit of the Red Barn corporation. It was an insult to the community and, at the time it was built, it conformed to the codes.

After World War II, the Dutch Elm blight killed the towering American elm trees that lined Broadway. Their limbs had arched high over the street, and they combined with the large scale of the hotels (whose soaring facades acted as walls) to make a magnificent green-roofed arcade of Broadway in the summertime. After a while, the city undertook to replace the dead elms. But in doing so, they planted a hodgepodge of trees up and down the street—an oak here, a maple there, a red maple there, a columnar maple there. Perhaps they thought it would be boring to plant just one kind of tree. But they missed the point of how the elms

had functioned. The new mix of trees grew to different heights, had different shapes, crown spreads, and foliage color in the case of the red maples. The elms had provided dignified formality and a uniformity of structure. They had behaved architecturally, to form columns at uniform intervals along the sidewalks and a leafy roof above as their branches arched over the street. The new trees could never even approximate that effect.

The town installed benches along Broadway during the 1980s as part of an effort to compete with new shopping malls nearby. The cast-iron and wood benches are bolted in place at the outer edge of the sidewalk facing the street so that those who sit are rewarded first with a view of parked cars, and then, if they can see over the parked cars, a view of traffic on Broadway. It would seem obvious that people choose to sit along the sidewalk in order to watch other people, not traffic.

At the northern end of the business district stands the five-year-old Ramada Renaissance Hotel (to be renamed the Sheraton later this year). Back in the early 1970s, the site contained a row of Victorian mansions turned rooming houses, cheap hotels, and fraternal lodges. They were run down, but with their deep porches, turrets, and intricate detail, they related nicely to the street. Had they survived the comatose seventies, they likely would have been rehabilitated, as practically every other Victorian building in town has since been. But an urban renewal program was underway and the old mansions were razed, along with a lot of other older buildings that stood one block east or one block west of Broadway.

For over ten years, this particular parcel lay vacant. Then the Ramada Corporation came along. Their grim, four-story, red brick, flat-roofed building, with its monotonous industrial-looking windows, looks like it might be anything from a pharmaceutical testing lab to a vocational high school. As architecture it evinces nothing that honors the spirit of the town, echoes its history, or even celebrates the notion that people come here to have fun. Happily, it was, at least, built almost out to the sidewalk edge, with parking in the rear. Unhappily, the folks at Ramada decided that the side facing the parking lot would be the main entrance.

The side that faces Broadway, therefore, functions as the rear entrance. It pays tribute to the town's main street by offering four blank brown steel doors that are the fire exits of the hotel's conference rooms,

plus a series of delightful laundry ventilation grilles. Because of this, the sidewalk on the Broadway side of the hotel is absolutely absent of human activity morning, noon, and night. There is no reason for anyone to go there. It is a dead place.

Had retail space gone in at the first floor, with shop windows fronting the sidewalk, the building would have been a continuation of the existing downtown pattern, and pedestrians surely would have ventured up there. Ramada could have put rentable retail space where the conference rooms are—perhaps sacrificing a few guest suites or some precious parking slots, in order to relocate the conference rooms elsewhere. But whatever soulless little bottom-line god the Ramada executives pray to told them that Saratoga's main street was of no importance in the corporation's grand scheme to maximize their profits, so they offered four blank brown fire doors and those lovely ventilation grilles.

Meanwhile, the hotel's main entrance on the parking lot side of the building is connected to the life of the town only by cars. Facing this main entrance are blocks and blocks that were designated an urban renewal zone in the 1960s. Here stood little stores with dwellings upstairs (i.e., affordable housing), public amenities like saloons and lunchrooms, and even a sprinkling of small factories or workshops. Here lived the shop clerks, laborers, small artisans, and in some cases the owner of the business below.

All the urban renewal blocks on each side of Broadway were turned into parking lots. In twenty years, not a single new building has gone up on them. As a result the business district has been reduced pretty much to one street: Broadway. Whenever arson has eliminated a building on Broadway in the past fifteen years, the property has been turned into yet another parking lot, which is to say a little dead no-pace between the buildings. If just a few more buildings are lost and replaced with parking lots, Saratoga will have accomplished something rather remarkable: it will have transformed itself completely from a classic downtown business district into a commercial highway strip.

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A mile or so northeast of downtown Saratoga, at exit 15 of Interstate 87, lies the new wonderland of shopping malls. Technically, the malls stand in the adjoining town of Wilton, beyond the control of Saratoga

Springs. Two decades ago, Wilton was a township of farms. Since then, it has grown explosively, causing problems both for its older neighbor and its own future. The conflict between these two towns is a classic case of the costs incurred when officials promote growth at any cost.

Saratoga Mall, originally called Pyramid Mall, was built in the 1970s by the Pyramid Corporation of Syracuse, New York. Pyramid developed an interesting reputation for deceptiveness during the 1980s. In 1990, they were cited by The New York State Commission on Government Integrity for attempting to buy the city council election in Poughkeepsie, where their scheme to build a very large mall was not wholeheartedly embraced by local incumbents. Pyramid apparently escaped criminal prosecution because they had violated only the spirit of the law, not the letter, by pumping three quarters of a million dollars in campaign contributions to their favored candidates under the names of individual Pyramid employees—rather than under the company's name—and other stratagems to conceal its source.

Pyramid was welcomed with open arms in Wilton. Wilton had a big problem that was fairly typical of suburban sprawl places all over the country: taxes. In the parlance of planning officials, residential developments are "losers." The people who moved into the colonials and contemporaries all had goshdarn kids! And all the goshdarn kids were required to go to school! And all the suburban streets, like Carefree Lane and Ho Hum Drive (real names, by the way) had to be plowed in the winter and repaired in the summer. And the town of Wilton had to come up with the money to pay for all these services.

For the Mall to come along was a great stroke of fortune for Wilton. In terms of revenue, a shopping complex was considered a big "winner," among "the cream of the ratables" in the words of William H. Whyte, along with light industry and research labs—minimally obnoxious enterprises that produced a great deal of tax benefit. Commercial property carried high assessments so they paid a hefty property tax. But the real plus was that the town of Wilton would receive a cut of the sales tax collected by Saratoga County, too. So every smart, every Michael Jackson poster, every pair of Levi 501 jeans, every Monkey Ward dinner table that flowed out of Pyramid Mall helped to offset the drain of all those split-level losers out in the piney groves.

It worked so beautifully that by the 1980s Wilton was able to elim-

inate the residential property tax entirely. The town was in hog heaven. Local officials boasted loudly about it at election time. But what was magic for Wilton was a bitter pill for Saratoga Springs. The mall, predictably, almost ruined Saratoga's downtown business district. The town's movie theater closed. The single "department" store downtown became a steakhouse. The Newberry's five-and-dime became a punk-rock bar. The mall would have killed Broadway entirely had not Saratoga been a popular tourist town with a reliable stream of recreational shoppers. Eventually, though, a lot of the stores that had sold mundane necessities like furniture, auto parts, and brassieres were replaced by gift galleries, boutiques, and real estate agencies.

What goes around, comes around. In 1987, the Wilmore Corporation of Rochester, New York, announced plans to build a newer, bigger, and better mall in Wilton—on property literally adjoining the first mall. The new mall would be nearly a million square feet on 100 acres compared to less than a half million square feet on 40 acres for the old one. Officials of the town of Wilton were ecstatic. They were going to revenue nirvana.

There was no public opposition to the idea of the second mall, nor any discussion about whether it was necessary. The Pyramid company didn't squawk either. By then it had sold off its interest in the first mall to a consortium of investors. This was part of a clever new practice called "unbundling the rights of real estate." Here's how it worked:

The theory was that optimum profit from a given development could be achieved by deconstructing the ownership into "financial tear parts," the aggregate sale price of the "tear parts" exceeding what the mall would sell for as a whole unit, meaning extra gravy for Pyramid, the seller. So, one bunch of guys buys the land. Another bunch of guys buys the actual mall building and pays rent to the bunch who own the land. A third bunch of guys buys the management contract to make sure that the mall operates properly. Finally, the individual store owners lease their space from the second bunch of guys (who own the mall building) under the administrative supervision of the third bunch of guys (who manage the mall).

Meanwhile, the Pyramid Corporation takes its massive profit, puts together a new war machine, and moves onto the next venue—in this case Burlington, Vermont, a city that has been fighting Pyramid in the

courts for ten years to decline the honor of having a mall built on the edge of town.

Above and beyond this welter of real estate machinations, one thing was clear: there weren't enough shoppers in Saratoga Springs and its surrounding towns—Wilton included—to keep two malls in business. There was no question that Wilmorite went into this project knowing that in order to succeed they would have to poach customers from elsewhere. Like any business venture, it was a gamble. The rule of thumb in the mall-building game was that you had to look good on day one and make money for the next three years, then sell off the unbundled real estate rights, take your profit, and move on to the next project. If the economy chugged along and the price of gas remained stable so that people could drive any distance to buy a pair of Reeboks, the scheme had a good chance to succeed. The sheer novelty of a shiny new mall would probably suffice to bring those customers in for three years.

Except just as the new mall opened, a combination of forces was gathering to flush the U.S. economy down the toilet. As I write, the first mall is gradually being taken over by marginal enterprises selling joke T-shirts, Asian knickknacks, and the like. In its second year, the new mall is operating at 64 percent occupancy. Just after Christmas of 1992, one of its three anchor stores went bankrupt and closed.

MIT economist Lester Thurow summarized the eighties boom nicely: "We borrowed a trillion dollars from the Japanese and threw a party." Now you could add to that heap of debt the \$500 billion price tag on the Savings and Loan bailout, and throw in another trillion in yearly federal budget deficits accrued since Thurow made his remark—the Bush administration looked more and more like a case of fiscal delirium tremens. On top of this, you might also figure in the looming costs of global warming, and the long-term consequences it augured for the national lifestyle. And, of course, sooner or later the price of petroleum was apt to destabilize again. Hence, the overall prospect seemed dim that Americans might continue to afford an economy based on people endlessly driving around, buying smurfs and Michael Jackson posters.