

# Sustainability Sunday Fact Sheet

## #6: Critical Viewing – James Howard Kunstler: The Tragedy of Suburbia

This Sunday I'd like to continue on the road we've been paving over the last few weeks with this lecture. This is an important body of concerns and information for multiple reasons, so let's take a look at some of the key points and then move into some things we can do with the knowledge with which we're presented. One of the first points Kunstler brings up is how we define ourselves with space, IE moving in and out of space helps us interpret who we are as individuals and communities. Let's take a look at what it means to be confronted by places we don't care about, the average person who is assimilated into suburbia is usually going to be working in the city, coming home and heading to the specific shopping center designed for that specific suburb which will usually contain a Wall Mart, a Star Bucks, a Mc Donald's, a Target, a Home Depot, a best buy and a grocery store- these are your staples, the rest of these shops and restaurants are kind of interchange. This is what you see- day in and day out this system that has little to no variation selling products that you really don't need, then going home to watch television while eating a non nutritious dinner and finally going to bed to do it all over again. I agree that if you are engulfed in places you don't care about, we will eventually become a nation not worth fighting for. A public space should function to do just what Kunstler says: tell us about who we are as a culture and give us a glimpse as to where we're going so what does it say when more and more of our space is built to consume in places that may have customer service but no humanity?

We take for granted that these buildings especially the ones that are designated as our town centers carry weight and speak languages. We are susceptible to this dialogue and without even being aware of it carry the subconscious effects into our daily routines and lives. We see more and more this idea of a hyper-reality, he mentions remedying mutilated urbanism with "nature" but I want to bring up other examples- like Disney Land. What does it mean to us as a culture when instead of going to South America we visit "Brazil Town" in a place like Las Vegas? Because it's safer or more economical, what happens when instead of interacting with the world or nature we just keep creating the illusion of it? We then return to our "homes" to hide away from all the cruelty and senselessness of the world. And what are those homes, what do they say about us to ourselves and others? I agree with him when he says they broadcast a message that just repeats over and over: "We're Normal!"

But what is normal, who the hell do you know that's normal and why are we so insistent on being that way- We live in compartments; everything separated from everything else like food on a plate that can't touch each other. Yet the more things change the more good is coming out. With more and more people realizing that the way we have been living doesn't work anymore the more you see change back into what Kunstler describes as a place that functions like a living organism, that has all

the necessary organs to maintain healthy systemic communities. This is what we must get back to, and just like a man after my own heart he brings up the most important point of them all- WE MUST STOP THINKING OF OURSELVES AS CONSUMERS!! We are human beings, we are meant to interact and commune, not to just wake up and consume until it's time to back to sleep and repeat ad infinitum. There is no easy solution; there is no quick fix, so this week here a few things you can do to be more aware in your own community.

1. Take a mental inventory of the space you're in, from your bedroom to your neighborhood, to the places in which you do commerce and the places you go to for R & R. Step back from these spaces and ask yourself what language does the space you are in say to you, about you, and about you as a part of a larger community- and finally where does a sense of joy and engagement fit in it?
2. After you have taken this assessment of the space you frequent let's take it a step further. We often settle into the routines we make and begin to know a "set" number of people from a "set" number of places. Find 1 or 2 places that carry both a communal and positive language and see what type of people you might meet in these spaces. Try to visit them on a semi-regular basis.
3. As stated earlier you should be a human before you are a consumer I cannot say this enough- however you as the "aware" and "engaged" consumer hold a power. Thus take a look at the places no one cares about, and realize that if these places don't do business they won't survive. Think of 1 place that you go to consume a product\products that are only wants. Cut this out and replace it with a vendor that either offers sustainable products or a space that has absolutely nothing to do with commerce like nature etc.
4. Think about the things you do by yourself, granted time alone is needed but what about the things that make more sense communally. IE eating a meal together, or running mutual errands, etc. It is these little things that build relationships and strengthen community awareness and understanding that will help us be ready to transition into healthy modes of living.
5. LIVE LOCALLY, SUSTAINABLY, AND CONSCIOUSLY!

Thanks for comin out, Dane.