

Creativity versus Invention and Innovation
Address to the Creative Places and Spaces/Risk Revolution Conference
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I am delighted to be before so many dedicated to creativity, city building and humane civic life. There are thinkers and inspirations from all over the world, and a gathering like this bodes well for a way of life that must take over from our steam-engine worldviews-worldviews that have that have decimated urban landscapes and dispirited the global pilgrim.

Every person is creative; the only strategy is to have them recognize it. The suppression of that creativity translates into anger, violence, mental unhealth and crime. Global strategy may or may not be aware of this. The obvious answer to globalized diversity appears to be more and more policing, regulation, and security measures. It is conferences like this that offer the only human alternative; the release of creativity in the human experience. Only this will bring us back to the delight, the joy and the fulfillment that predicates a sane urban future.

Having said as much, let me add some caveats as a poet.

There's an aspect of creativity that should scare off those eager to "use" it (though it will never scare off those willing to "serve" it). It's the element of risk; radical risk, and not calculated risk.

The artist knows you don't come up with the masterpiece on demand. The artist knows that failure is the rubric of success, and that there is no waste in the economy of creation. Anything not used, has its place, where you least expected it.

More importantly, the artist knows that, in creating; to quote the poet, Yeats, "one is wrestling with a god". This is the arena of creating. One is not wrestling with one's abilities, ambitions or limitations. Those are things to transcend, if one has the grace to engage with the unknown.

In the business of creativity, it is the vision that has you on the leash, not vice versa. The vision won't behave, on request, like numbers on a ledger. And application is no guarantee in the alchemy of creation. Application is just an entry fee that vision requires, along with the courage to "surrender" to insight. There is the faith of knowing that what was not revealed today may turn up as a revelation tomorrow; but the artist knows that to court either the muse or the mother of invention is to learn humility and patience.

It is this ability to not jump the gun, to not force the hand of illumination, that distinguishes the visionary from the professional, the hack from the inspired writer, the greedy developer from a great planner, a leader from a politician. It is what distinguishes a "vibrant" city from a merely "developed" one; for a city that has taken time to dress itself well is aware of itself as a work of art, and is beautiful to its citizens.

Creative economies seek invention and innovation. These require mere imagination. We can put them under the banner of creativity, but we'll be short changing ourselves and our potential as city-builders. Creativity is a way of life. Invention, innovation are the quick harvest; they call for cleverness and some application to negotiate new- level growth. Invention and innovation are what progress is made of; they are not the life-blood of what impels creation. "Progress" stumbles on ideals; creativity hunts a vision. "Progress" is pedantic. Creativity, on the other hand, *owns* imagination. It commands the allegiance and love of the creative person as a way of being, living, thinking. The imagination that comes of that allegiance is powerful, self-renewing, and tireless in delight. It permeates all aspects of civic life. It is the only limitless resource.

To know this is to release an industry that is in perpetual motion. Allegiance to true creativity defines imagination against the myopia of fast progress. For the ethos of creativity left unchecked, by its natural genius, instructs all witnesses to the shared project of wonder. This is what makes a city great, a society great and, yes, even productive.

For those who think the world's resources are infinite, the short-term gain is perfect. Progress persuades investors that buildings are going up, stockholder reports are looking good, and the market is hungry. And we can defer, as we always have, the question of infrastructures, smog and the sullen faces of citizens enslaved to the building of quick urban pyramids---we can address these things later. But the "later" has arrived.

Creativity must become a way of life; it is not a question of "sustainability" but of survival, and the beauty that inspires it. And the kinds of risks that true creativity demands are crucial to that end.

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