

**Remarks on the Acceptance of the Leonardo da Vinci Award in Education**  
**Woodbridge, Vaughn**  
**November 2004**

When I was asked to be the Poet Laureate of Toronto, I thought immediately of furthering the world of poetry. I read the fine lines and saw the phrase "advocate of the arts". What do I know of the other arts? Not much, and perhaps more than I thought, for the principles of art are universal. I realized then that I was not much interested in promoting the world of "text". Poetry can always take care of itself. The divine spark of poetry is inextinguishable and will always fulminate somewhere in the darkness of indifference and ignorance or, as Auden said, "in places where executives would never want to tamper". Furthermore, I realized that the reason I became a priest after a lengthy career as a writer, was, in fact, to help people finish or begin the poem of their lives.

Leonardo da Vinci would have liked this. He was a true holist, and saw that the distinction between commerce and the arts, the world of action and contemplation, reality and imagination, etc., were foolish and damaging distinctions. He saw what we have only recently begun to appreciate in our modern world – the concept of connections – connections that weave together the fabric of a city and civilization in ways that are diametrically opposed to fragmentation, ghettoization, and globalization. He saw that the compartmentalizing of human endeavor and experience was limiting to the very grace that called us to live fully, in the spirit of which we were brought to life.

I'm not going to tell you that Leonardo would have been at home as a city planner, but I can tell you that his ideas are very much in fashion in the modern thinking regarding cultural policy for tomorrow's cities. People are beginning to understand that divisions in thinking between art and science, commerce and art, industry and culture make for neither good business nor good art.

What has this to do with a poet? And what has a poet to do with the city? Is it the business of writing inspiring poems, so that people can go on with their daily lives more cheerfully? I doubt it. What is the job of the artist? The job of the artist is to make the citizens of a city live their lives artistically, and it isn't until the citizens live their lives artistically that they can understand the place of the arts. And the place of the arts is not just in museums, art galleries, on stages or in books; it is in those places, and also in schools, in homes, business districts, in parks, in the streets. It is in those places where people use imagination and love and curiosity to reach the sublime in human interaction. It is in those places where people use their bodies with their minds and hearts in an integrated fashion to celebrate and extol their individuality and their communality. Does this sound anything like the principle expounded in the mission statement of the Leonardo da Vinci Academy? Somewhat.

Consider; “curiosity, demonstration, sensation, a willingness to embrace ambiguity, balance, corporeality, connection”. I've heard these same principles fostered at recent conferences where city theoreticians spoke to industry and art about how to make a city "creative". In fact, the global city seeks to be the creative city" with an understanding that a knowledge based economy (our sole competition against foreign economies) depends entirely on the notion of "creativity" entering the fabric of municipal life. Increasingly "creativity" is being recognized, as the central strategy to the economic and spiritual well being of citizens in a modern city; and cities that do not recognize this are doomed to languish in prosperity in any sense. This creativity must demonstrate itself in architecture, in building codes, in historical conservation, in industrial re-habilitation, in education and in multicultural policies.

The designers of such blueprints must think artistically; business men must think artistically, community leaders must think artistically, developers must think artistically; and the policy statements of the cities of the future must make it clear that the lack of the creative in municipal endeavors spells economic decline.

At this point, I run the risk of making too much of the role of the poet. Or perhaps society risks too much by not seeing its citizens as artists. However, the time may be right for a single poetic message, which Leonardo would have seen not just as poetry. And the message is this; the city is a poem, not a metaphor.

People have to write the poem of every day, its events, its transactions, its desires, its passions according to principles that are creative. Specifically, they have to re-integrate their faculties and gifts with whole-brain thinking and a cultivation of grace. The cultivation of grace is not just something to relegate (as we historically have done) to church and the arts. The cultivation of grace must be a strategy and foundation for a city's creative ethic.

In short, the very principles of Leonardo's thinking are becoming part and parcel of current trends in city development. The principles are not just sound thinking for our children; they are principles we have to reclaim as adults in the modern world, or be left behind in the quest for prosperity.

And so I am especially delighted in accepting this award. It is a reminder to me of the holistic impulse which drives and calls every poet. It is a reminder that every poet that assumes the principles of Leonardo's integrated thinking better understands citizenship, and it is a reminder that every citizen who shares in integrated thinking has a good start at becoming a poet.

I invite all of us to begin think of our city as a poem, and to remember that we are its authors, with every decision to be creative in our daily affairs.

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City of Toronto Poet Laureate