

## The Notion of Welcome in Urban Design

Toronto is a hodge-podge of structures, typically in a post-modern idiom – many voices, hungering for attention, with variant statements of aesthetic. It articulates plurality, diversity, novelty, excited with designs evocative of prosperity. It can hardly be faulted for having an incoherent topography. The zeitgeist of progress and the vanity of individual statement conspire. Business forge their own self-advertisements, independent of street-level consensus. City governments can't bridle the appetites of finance; perhaps it's just as well; the private sector builds where city planning takes less initiative. In any event, cash flow is good for the city; but woe to the long term vision. Everywhere, cranes and bulldozers signal change and prosperity to tourists and investors. The rush to be a world class city leaves no visionary elbow-room. As a major financial centre, Toronto can't afford to lag behind as an image of a competing metropolis.

Sadly, bad architecture, once its up, is with us for a very long time. The citizen, confused by variant architectures, references himself secretly in neighborhood and local haunts; the citizen, after all, holds sacred those places that speak his humanity in a plain spoken way –the alleys, the orphaned spaces, the unpretentious shops, those byways that don't scream indifference, the buildings that say “remember the past as you invent the rest of your life”. Such places become the thoroughfares of affection, the citizen baulks at the pragmatic, or pretentious. Those parts of the city that have fallen between the cracks, that have escaped the imprint of gentrification, not yet in the hands of developers; that city draws loyalty from the young who wish to meditate on their city, not just offer it up as a garden of entertainment.

The point here is not that brand new aesthetic has no place. The point is that the citizen wants to adopt the modest city that asks something from him. The undeveloped city asks something of the citizen—the sympathy of habitat undressed of the pretentious and ambitious. Ambition is something the citizen has to deal with everyday; a plainspoken town tells the citizen he is accepted.

Acceptance is the theme the citizen wants to live with, and “welcome” is the theme that any new project of development has to live by.

The cardinal rule of the architectural, very likely of all the arts is the rule of "welcome" as strategy for canvas, page or street. The artist, the designer, the architect, must welcome the civic consciousness and be hospitable to the pilgrim of the urban. Hospitality and "graceful design" may be synonymous.

Hospitality says, "Welcome". It is the spirit of generosity that a reader, a spectator, or listener of the arts intuits in any work of art. It is the axiom of aesthetic. The civic instinct for "welcome" cannot be fooled by simulations of design spurred by greed, expedience and market cleverness. Sooner or later the civic appetite for the beautiful must show itself; and take the form of either frustration or delight.

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