

## Toronto's Love Affair With Creativity

Toronto is having a love affair with creativity. Last year it went public with the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Canadian Opera Company, National Ballet School, Royal Ontario Museums – engines of cultural glamour boasting debut and renaissance. This was coincident with the fortunate appearance of a mayor whose charm was made to order for a cultural awakening. The Culture Division "Year of Creativity", province and municipality let loose the talent scouts to hunt for Toronto's creative "hubs"; the new City of Toronto Act gave us notions of what Toronto might be if left to her ingenuities; the Waterfront Revitalization Corporation promised a waterfront to dazzle; Tourism Toronto lamely jumped in with "Toronto Unlimited" (to the outrage of citizens who thought more of Toronto than they realized).

This year the love affair is brazen; the Humanitas Festival augurs an ambitious 10-year project that flaunts Toronto's talents to a global audience; the MaRS Project weaves technology and ingenuity to lever creative economies; the Creative Cities Project has unpackaged its recommendations for innovation as an urban ethic. Waterfront designs have wowed the city into re-visioning its urban pleasures. Does all this "buzz" have a beginning? Does it have an end?

Hopefully not. *Creativity*—the big password for industry and city revitalization. Maybe it's a big synonym for gentrification; you might call it the making of a world-class city; or you might call it slick testaments to personal energisms –projects that threaten to turn the city into a theme park of cultural events and tourist traps. Let's give it the benefit of the doubt. The creative spark is in Toronto. Our wares, cultures and inventions are on parade. This leaves one problem at the end of the yellow brick road—a big problem (one that is tugging at the stitches in the form of ethnic distrust). Cohesion. What is the means and ethic by which Toronto can claim allegiance to itself? What's Toronto's identity? And let's not cloak the issue with claims of "diversity being our strength" –all those happy invocations of a tolerance may have more to do with luck, so far, unless we strategize something less abstract and tired than "tolerance". Creativity might be the glue that keeps us together. For in creativity is the delight that distracts ideology from self-seriousness.

But let's reflect. Creativity isn't just a way of generating dollars, tourists and condos. Creativity has to become a way of life that informs the day to day life of all citizens beyond the haven of the buzz-city south of Eglinton. Beyond the metropolitan rush of creativity, there is the greater part of the population that sees culture as project and creativity as a luxury of the few. Most of the GTA sees the making of money as an endeavor distinct from the making of culture; and we can't go on relying on groups of brilliant initiative-takers to go on carrying the gospel of creativity forward without the collective will of the GTA.

What good does it do to do to build cultural temples if the pilgrims have shuttle back home to edge cities, intent on what they think the real business of life is--to make money, to stay afloat, to get quickly onto the lucky side of the gulf between the rich and the poor.

The obvious mustn't escape us. If Toronto wants to cohere it has to go all the way with what the creative craze suggests. Commerce and culture must be seen as one. Perhaps we should advertise publicly, again and again, with funded dollars, that "Creativity Means Business"; we must hear that again and again until we live by it. Otherwise we will retain our silos and happy ghettos of diversity with their local nationalisms, with no common zeitgeist. The city, both in the metropolis and the "sprawl" must share one ethic of creativity. You can't funnel people to a downtown of cultural respite and expect that they will have a collective will called Toronto. City-building and creativity must be seen as family building, community building and the building of ideals. So far creativity in Toronto means a project for those who can afford it, informed by the energy of bohemians who give the designers something to market. Edge cities, satellite cities, bedroom communities must become bedfellows in this love affair. And the valentines have to start coming from the realtors and developers north of Bloor Street. The message is seductively simple. If we want an attractive city, a livable city, we have to know that creativity brings civic delight; and we have to nurture this delight as a civic strategy.

But Toronto deserves more than a civic strategy. Mayor Daley of Chicago came to Toronto last year and talked to our luminaries about what he thought made Chicago great. He spoke of all the special interest groups yielding their agendas for the sake of a love for the town. He spoke of religious groups, social service groups, politicians, coalitions all "joining" in the construction for the "good", in loyalty to the city. The word "joining" came up again and again.

We have a talent for alliances in Toronto, and an aversion to "joining" together. Alliances is what Toronto has always done best. Alliances are safe; they are a transactional model. They won't do for the project of sewing our civic fabric together.

Alliances are negotiated. Being in love with a town means that you don't have time to negotiate. When you are in love, you don't negotiate; you don't put up buildings that don't speak to other buildings; you don't break the town up into communities each with its own loyalties. We have to come together, with a common ideal and a common enthusiasm. Creativity is the language of ideals and enthusiasm.

Finally, if this love affair with creativity is going to continue we have to know Toronto as a place, not of opportunisms, but of opportunities guided by a gratitude for what history we've spent here. There are all kinds of initiatives and urban gurus around town. Everyone feels privileged with an inspired vision. The city cries out for one vision, and only one—to be made in the image of those who love it. Unless our enthusiasms carry this understanding, creativity is going to remain a buzzword and the notion of Toronto as model for global cities will come to an end.

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