

## Multiculturalism and the City

It is not the narrative of origin that the urban pilgrim wants. It is identity and to find it in others, by arriving at universals, and the Eros of universals. Cultures are the accidents of the universal. They are the styles of passion, mistaken for universals. That's why "smiles" are the common language between disparate cultures. The "ways" of smiling are incidental, the "codes" of charity are incidental, the "forms" of laughter are irrelevant. These are cultural. Smiles, charity and laughter are universals.

Toronto is discovering the language of universals, and is finding the cultural matter accidental, if exotic. If Toronto people "accept" each other, it is not because they have overcome their diversity; it is that they tacitly understand that the universals are the only means of ensuring the project of human companionship. Costumes, rituals and even ideological "parades" are not the heroic leaps over the bias of self and nationality. The wonder of Toronto is that the spirit over-rides the parochial and that which should rightly remain foreign; namely, the cultural. The exploration of "other" cultures is a curiosity and delight only because the universals are what people attend to in each other; i.e.; the need for play, the need for laughter, the need for sympathy, the need for the caress, gestural, beyond the codes of culture.

Anthropology has convinced us that we need to translate cultures before we can reach each other. This is the huge contemporary lie. Civic decency succeeds in spite of it. If the citizens of Toronto had needed to translate cultural codes before affirming their common humanity, they would have been at each other's throats a long time ago. Relative to other cities we are still a model of co-habitation and harmony. We need to arrive now at the level of rejoicing. In that rejoicing is the consummate trust to be a truly creative city. But let us be clear; the blueprint of our "getting along" has not been in our "multiculturalism". In the absence of a common language, we have bridged each other through fundamentals. It would appear that respect and civic decency are a literacy that didn't need programmes. A "literacy of grace" needs no doctrine, or doctrinaire men; municipally it merely requires a mentality that reflects the gifts we already have for each other. Public policy can guard and glamorize that literacy.

It cannot enforce it. When policy reflects the literacy of grace that Torontonians already show to each other, it will find itself to be a true engine of creativity.

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