

**Address to the Champions of the EPCOR Centre for the Performing Arts
Calgary, Alberta
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When I became Toronto's second Poet Laureate, I was expected to simply promote the arts and cook up schemes for selling poetry. I thought about it and realized artists had never been lazy in promoting the arts. Short of flying airplanes trailing banners saying "buy poetry", they had done and are doing everything to reconcile commerce and the arts. So I put forward the notion that the arts would always be fluff and destination point until the citizen saw the city as a canvas or a poem authored with the same principles of creativity with which we build cities, families, communities.

This led me to a trajectory of provincial and municipal committees, advertising the notion of creative cities, championing what I call *civic aesthetic*- i.e. the idea that architecting the space between people is preface and purpose of creative city building. The influence of Richard Florida has been rampant in this agenda--his idea that diversity and bohemian index and creative class are crucial to competing cities. Joel Kotkin from L.A. proclaims the resurrection of urban sprawl areas (judicious, since the real problem of the urban is not in the metropolises). Charles Landry in England mentors cities with a gospel of innovation and imagination remedial to global sameness. Every city in North America seems to have levered the cultural concern into the question of sustainability, livability and wealth generation, to position themselves as "knowledge economies" Well and good.

There is an added perk to the creative agenda. It persuades people that the quality of life predicates prosperity. (Furthermore, creativity is glamorous and resonates with the contemporary fad of wellness). But the real hope of the creative agenda is that we may once again produce citizens, and not just consumers. And that is my own interest; an area I might generally call "global aesthetic".

I worry, however, that the contemporary discussion interprets creativity to mean design and innovation. Sadly, these are the plums and not the feast of creativity. They are the quick harvest. Real creativity means radical risk, and creativity begins, not in the innovation centers, but in the risk taken by social capital. That is: until we manage civic trust, we will not risk our ideas and insights. The creative city is first a city of trust.

Trust enables city spirit, and spirit is not a "manufactured" thing. It is released. That is the job of governance. To release it, with the understanding that city spirit is the engine to city building. Physical construction may give the illusion of a dynamic city, an illusion that may stimulate citizens and make for temporary "buzz". But the *soul of citizenship* is what makes a city stand head and shoulders above others,

I have traveled to various cities with leadership teams taking notes on best practices, creative hubs, capital funding and private sector initiatives, etc. In Toronto, we've just completed a Creative Cities Strategies Report for Ontario. Together with colleagues in Creative London and New York we have come up with recommendations for fostering

creative economies. These strategies are typical, inventive and holistic. But more importantly, they grasp a central philosophical notion. i.e. citizens are already creative-- the strategy is to help them realize it.

Toronto has a rich cultural landscape. It has capital projects--opera houses, art galleries, waterfront revitalization and design review panels, heritage, festivals, Nuit Blanche; the list is impressive. It has a wealth of new Canadians and, like Calgary, and an inestimable treasure of young people who take naturally to thinking "outside the box". Toronto lacks for Calgary's maverick natural beauty, so our challenge is rather more metaphysical. All cities are capitalizing on the natural brand of their setting. Those less blessed must find out (as must all cities) that the architecture of civic spirit is the key to investment and civic health. Capital projects and economic booms cannot substitute for the real reason people come to a city. People come, not because the city has better amenities (in the canon of which all cities can provide them), but because there is an electricity in the air, a joy of cohabitation and exuberance that perpetuates itself.

Which brings me to the question of city soul. It was taken for granted once. Each town had personality, a sense of itself. We had clear ideological allegiance, religious, ethnic or institutional (and the cities were smaller). It was easier to identify yourself as a city, as a community, as an individual. There was cohesion and less experimentation. And now we have great experimentation and less cohesion. Commonality is the urgent agenda of the global city. The mantra of diversity simply postpones the project of commonality. Cities must find, beyond the vocabularies of diversity, that which the citizen sees as universal. We have no time for studying each other as cultural items. The project of articulating city soul is paramount.

City soul is the felt aggregate of the desires and noble enthusiasms of a city. It is necessary because mutual recognition is the natural ambience of human beings. Without mutuality we are barely functional. To recognize each other as companions in vision is to avoid loneliness, fear, paranoia and the expensive holocaust of urban depression. City soul is not just the business of private citizens. It is up to governance to understand the deep psychology of the civic --to understand the civic desire as something more than an inventory of consumer wants and entitlements. City soul is makes for an extraordinarily economy, when people are enlivened to perfect the delights and altruisms of shared identity. City soul can be seen as the nature of a city's enthusiasm-- a style of enthusiasm orchestrated by mutuality and allowance. Mutuality and allowance are the first casualties of global harvesting. Mutuality and allowance are countermanded by surveillance, suspicion, distrust, privacy laws, protocol, and excessive proceduralism. When this happens, we have a sanitized city, not a creative city. Peppering a city with an event landscape of art does is not a solution. Without city spirit, a city becomes a cultural theme park, and not a seamless experience of intimacy and civic delight.

Economy and enthusiasm are related. The city of the future will attract and retain creative talent and innovative business because of the nature of its enthusiasm. All cities will offer similar things. Investment, media and tourism will come for a style of enthusiasm that sets that city apart from others.

Not enthusiasm for individual projects, but enthusiasm for the city as a whole—an enthusiasm generated by shared loyalty and civic delight. What emerges is civic allegiance as a guiding principle.

This requires that both business and the arts do more than collaborate. As I noted in my preface to *The Creative Cities Strategies Report*, the transactional model of alliances and merging interests must give way to a new model – one shaped by *a communion of purpose*. Toronto, like many cities, has many gurus, urban institutes, agencies, think tanks and smart initiatives that translate into a happening town. Perhaps the same could be said of Atlanta, Calgary Houston, etc. The question is this: is a “happening” town enough, in the long run, to persuade the citizens that prosperity and civic happiness have met? Is a city a place only of entertainment, fiscal stability and convenience? Do we require a civic joy and romance? Do we require a city soul? If we do, it won't be enough to be inventive. We will have to pay attention to the primal requests of the citizen.

What are the primal requests? (1) to recognize another citizen as a resource of sacrifice (2) to participate in a shared forum of wonder (3) to be recognized as an integrity free of the trivializations of market trends (4) to see the city as a home identified by common delights and aspirations.

Calgary is awake to these requests. The success of the Brilliant City Project conceived by *Epcor* testifies to the responsiveness of Calgary citizens to the geography of civic desire. Toronto just joined Paris, Brussels and other cities celebrating *Nuit Blanche*, an all night event in which a city becomes forum of its creativity. These kinds of events advertise commonality and break down the silos of commerce and culture. Simply, creativity must be seen as a way of life, and the wonder and excitement of it stylize a city into a habitable and attractive place.

The most exciting thing about *Brilliant City* and *Nuit Blanche* is that they restore the cities to themselves. The citizen goes public as a creative person. Diverse enterprises are seen as creative. The citizens witness their civic contributions. They recognize each other as co-creators fascinated by imagination. This bonds them and creates a communal zeitgeist.

There is another important element in the alchemy of successful, creative cities, and it is what I call *empathic citizenship*. Strategies must be geared to the awakening of civic empathy. To lever the recognition of mutual loves and aspirations. In the language of social capital, we call this “bonding”. But we are better off calling it “empathy”. Empathy is the lodestone of civic care. And civic care is how a city builds well.

Finally, let me share with you a growing anxiety I have about city-building. It is a trend known as “gentrification”. It can be identified as wealth generation by design affiliations and a lifestyle negotiated by market image and negotiated space. In a recent visit to Baltimore, I saw formerly derelict neighborhoods that had gone the way of sandblasting, surveillance and new urbanism.

They had become free of crime, poverty and the fracas of the unemployed. They were now safe, picturesque and adorned with mixed-use development. The homes were well kept, tidy and nicely landscaped. And there was no one on the streets. If there was any advent of city soul it was imperceptible. There may have been some nightlife or vitality in the metropolitan core where the bars, bistros and Starbucks were situated. But any outward sign of city spirit evaporated as one moved away from the city centre.

The scene repeats itself in the greater urban area of many cities. It is in the edge cities and in the suburban archipelagos that the creative agenda is desperately needed. The city is much more than its metropolis. The downtown cores will inevitably be “revitalized”. The bulk of the population is in new development, in the affluent, unengaged communities, withered by the weather of political correctness, where there are no strategies for inviting the civic consciousness to encounter.

There is an ethic of disengagement vying with a need for civic encounter. And it is not addressed in the urban discussion. The need to negotiate space is in direct opposition to the idea of a city as a place of unexpected intimacies. It is the contradiction of our times. Until it is resolved, the question of city soul and livability cannot move ahead. Security and civic adventure cannot strike a balance if social engineering has revised human nature to be suspicious of civic nature. It is a dilemma I offer for your consideration as city thinkers and city philosophers and leaders dedicated to the championing of a love for Calgary.

I wish us all Godspeed in fostering the urban romance.

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