

**Address to the Creative Cities Network Conference
Co-presentation with Rita Davies, Toronto Culture
Toronto, October 2006**

I am delighted to have this opportunity to speak to you today about the theoretical framework of Toronto creative strategy. The work of the Creative Cities network has been seminal for communications, solidarity and initiative on the creative cities front. The first disseminations of my urban philosophy were embraced by the network and I am grateful for that support

My work has not been typical to the task of a Poet Laureate, but useful to the creative cities agenda. When I came on board as Laureate I was expected to be advocate of the arts. But it was clear to me from the start that the arts would be forever handicapped until they were companioned by the notion of "civic aesthetic". i.e.; until the citizen saw himself/herself as author of the city---the arts were doomed to remain a destination point and not a way of life. Indeed, this is the vision of creative cities—to generate an ethic of creativity that permeates business, recreation, politics, citizenship. All sectors must be creative, and all citizens aware of their imaginative capacity. Governance must know that creativity opens the door to civic trust, and that civic trust is the foundation of good city building. Trust enables co-habitation, racial concord, mercantile prosperity, safer streets, exciting boulevards and, ultimately, sustainability.

I was fortunate to come on board after Rita Davies had laid the strategic groundwork for a Creative Toronto. She initiated and championed the notion, mapped out in Toronto's Creative City Plan--a blueprint for fostering the arts in the global climate. This wasn't an easy task—Toronto had a history of business earnest that relegated culture to the world of the re-creative. It segregated commerce and the arts. To a large extent this is a global tendency, one that is being painstakingly remedied by the creative cities agenda. And Toronto strategies for the bridging of commerce and culture are dedicated.

Live With Culture, Toronto's brand for the creative ethic, is meant to bring citizens to self-awareness. Behind it is a simple notion. i.e. what citizens *do* is already creative; the strategy is to have them realize it. This is crucial. Art and culture are as elemental to family building, community building and city building as the air we breath and the water we drink. Culture is not extraneous, and it is not a sector. It is a resource embedded in every civic act, waiting to be liberated. Creativity is our only inexhaustible resource. True city builders know this.

The challenge is clear. If we are to come together as different peoples in a migratory age, we must have a common ethic -- and it cannot be religious, political, socio-cultural or ideological. Ideas do not rally; political platforms do not rally; indices and policy will not rally unless people recognize in each other a code of commonality. In today's diversity, such commonality can only be found in creativity, common delight and shared wonder. Wonder deconstructs the stereotypes, cultural differences and tensions. We cannot hope to find a common theme by anthropological, sociological and multi-cultural methods.

There isn't enough time. The science of stitching cultures together complicates itself with every new initiative. Time is running out. Unless our cities cohere quickly with an inspired citizenry, variant agendas and special interests will make a legacy of what Jane Jacobs called "the plain sullenness on people's faces". What bonds people to civic coherence is the common delight that creativity brings. And by creativity I don't mean just the arts. I mean a way of thinking, being, interacting, trusting by which the citizen sees daily enterprise in a context of adventure, allowance, mutuality, and beauty.

The theme of this conference is diversity and creativity. Let me be clear. Diversity management is not just about inclusiveness. We will never include people unless they are inspired by a common motif. This isn't done by appeasing local and tribal concerns of heritage and lifestyle. People must emerge from heritage and life styles into a common forum, where their uniqueness is a *given*, but more importantly, where their universality is defined.

That's why creativity works. It's a universal. It develops civic allegiance. It generates mutual trust. But this mutual trust is not to be had unless a first city establishes a climate of allowance and not protocol. Municipal style must redress the damage done by the weather of surveillance, global insecurity, paranoia, and market fear. The damage is evident by plain observation. Human nature has been revised. It now seeks to withdraw, in response to the factioning ideologies, discredited institutions--the lack of recognition between civic narratives---the loss of common spiritual codes. These and many factors have conspired to turn the civic psychology into an entity that means to look out for itself. It wants to garrison family and personal interest behind gated community, in negotiated encounter, safeguarded by the mechanisms of the procedural.

Technology, the virtual, and an aggressive market have engineered a civic nature that will not easily encounter-- that seeks to eliminate risk and outlaw the random. This alone will deprive a city of its birthright as a place of unexpected intimacies. When intimacy is suspect, a city cannot risk. A city that wishes to compete globally must popularize again the art of engaging the random. It must learn to risk.

Toronto is a blueprint for the challenges of the global city. Its diversity, its growth, even its amorphous self-image are challenges that every city will meet. Globalization will demand that every city be clear about what its *soul* is. Globalization threatens to eradicate the legacy and self – referentiality of cities, leaving their history and legacy as mere archives. In the future, cities will be differentiated only by the nature of their enthusiasm-- the style in which their citizens work, play, sacrifice and venture together. This is the only economic drawing card there is. Cities will not have the edge because of better amenities, showplaces, towers or gimmicks. They will move ahead because the world will come to them to see how city soul is done; to eavesdrop on a kind of spirit peculiar to that city. Creativity is everything in that manufacture.

The capital projects and schemes of the Toronto Culture Division are accomplishments. Capital projects and venues are a mirror by which a city is stirred to self-confidence. This confidence, however, is nothing without a habitat of creativity.

For the true creative city is a perpetual motion machine. It regenerates itself in unexpected ways, while the job of strategy is to release imagination

One of our keenest projects in Toronto is a project called “Humanitas”, conceived by Rita Davies, Karen Black, David Crombie and other city thinkers. Humanitas is a cultural clearing house that is both museum and export of Toronto love. A true civic museum is an archive of what a city loves and has loved. The municipal task is to awaken citizens to similar things to love, not similar things to agree on.

Such propositions, I believe, are the underpinning to creativity and civic survival.

Finally, let me suggest the relationship between sustainable cities and creativity. Cities will not survive without civic care. Creativity inspires civic care and instructs through empathy and delight. It is the only lever we have for civic cohesion. Let me stress again that the urban experiment is not about checking in your cultural baggage at every way station of civic life. It's about finding in someone else a home for universal enthusiasms. It's about finding in another citizen, not what you are inter-dependent about, but what you can't live without.

And what you can't live without is shared imagination. The job of creative strategy is to release imagination. You don't do that do that by empowering or including. You do it by convening universal hopes. It is a project of inspiration and not negotiation. An inspired city has no time for negotiating self- love. It's simply in the business of love, and the strategies for city building become second nature when that is understood.

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