

## The City and Diversity

We should be wary of advertising diversity as “a strength” until we find means of articulating commonality among citizens. Differences are not glamorous in the absence of a civic identity. And less glamorous with the disappearance of cultural self-referentiality within the “urban”. Most “new Canadians” do not live in ghettos of cultural origin and less so in the landscape of the urban sprawl where disparate nationalities are perplexed in the lack of common language and confused by a media culture that speaks the global and not the local. In the absence of community, disorientation is what comes of diversity.

Urban density compels people to mutual exploration. But in the hinterland of urban sprawl the lack of cultural "meeting ground" allows no dialogue of differences. Identity, after all, does not start with "other"; it starts with the confidence of meeting another, having departed from a base of cultural self-referentiality. The urban pilgrim is not a free-floating consciousness, content and hybrid in whatever demographic adventure it finds itself in. The migrant departs from a cultural "orientation" and from that confidence explores the unfamiliar. The unfamiliar becomes familiar when cultural origin has been reminded of itself. Without this cultural self-referentiality, multiculturalism can seem a threat, and inhibit curiosity about diversity.

A rallying cry to make the most of heterogeneity does not fool the citizen into pretending there is unity in an eclectic demography.

What is required is a civic ideology that is attractive and compelling as commonality, to weave the strands of the cultural fabric into identity. Prescripts of tolerance, diversity and inclusivity are fair currency in the forum of policy discussion, but they remain cold abstractions to a citizenry hungry for the eros of mutuality.

The ground of mutuality may be levered with densification, hubs of cultural interaction, and urban design and strategy that incites and excites encounter and involvement.

But the eros of this mutuality cannot be strategized. It can only be inspired. And words are everything in that inspiration.

**Involvement, Not Interaction.**

The urban challenge does not require "interaction" of citizens with citizens. It requires their "involvement" with each other. Involvement is empathic in aspect, an immersion into the psycho-dynamics of "other". Interaction is just "action" by moving 'through' the situation of others. We have here more than a semantic difference. Words either dimensionalize or flatten the subject of discussion. When that subject is the citizen we must demand of language a dimensionality.

It will not do to speak of people as “resources” or “social capital”. Language that flattens the subject robs the subject of integrity.

When people are “involved” with each other, they come away with something of each other; when they "interact" they come away with little more than was invested.

The ethic of civil behaviouralism requires an “involvement” of citizens with each other, of a kind that hones the skills of care and concern, and initiates the art of the civic. For it is from compassion, not civic duty, that a city learns to fall in love with itself.

In the secular arena it can never be a duty to care compassionately for neighbor and stranger. Yet is only from involvement and compassion, that the mechanism of passion structures itself. A city that would be passionate must know compassion by involvement, and involvement means breaking out of the procedures that negotiate the private self.

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