

HOSPITALITY

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2014

For several months now, AHANS has been engaged in an on-going discussion about disparities - everything from STIRs to Piketty's studies of capital concentration in the 21st century. We know that disparities have proportional impacts. Where there's little left to lose, any loss has a crushing impact. Whereas at the other end of the scale, even significant losses make only a ripple (Too big to fail.).

Architect and educator Aldo van Eyck proposed that "place" is humanized space and "occasion" is humanized time. This very neat proposition unites two phenomena in a single trope. Just as "place" distinguishes a particular instance in the endless flow of space, so too does "occasion" mark a special moment within the otherwise seamless flow of time.

When we appropriate space and time we do so to make them our own.

What's more, in exercising our claim to a particular place or a specific time, we are also affirming our physical presence as a complete person, as a whole 'self' with mass, dimension and character. In this sense the appropriation of space and time are fundamental to the exercise of our humanity. Alternatively, exile, incarceration and institutionalization by which others seek to limit our freedom of movement in space and time, are inherently repressive and dehumanizing.

So what would it mean to one's sense of self to be made placeless and thereby rendered powerless in unending space, unable to make one's mark and stand on it? Clearly, not to be acknowledged for one's self would be disconcerting. But what if the very space itself was so impervious in its continuity that it offered not the slightest hint of where to make a mark or 'pause it'? In fact, every day would be an endless round of passing encounters with authority or well-meaning charity. In fact, this is how some people describe prison routines and others recall a mind-numbing (drug induced?) stay in one of our long-term care facilities.

Every day, outsiders to soul-destroying experiences such as these are free (privileged?) to differentiate specific moments in space and time and celebrate them as 'special'. Whether trivial or not is not the point. The expression of one's humanity is the point. Now again by contrast imagine what it would be like to always be on the move, never be able to catch 'a quiet moment' in which to think, reflect or dream? Never mind the horrid symbolism of the anti-loitering spikes in Montreal or here for that matter.

What would it mean to your humanity to be constantly 'moved-along', roused about from here to there but not there? What would it mean to you never to be at rest, at peace, to never have a moment to yourself? To feel 'at home' in a place? What does that mean? What's the sensation? Where does it come from? Is it the same sensation as 'being at home'? Are these feelings I have or are they projected to me by the place itself? Or by its residents? Or are these qualities of place which it extends first to its residents and which by virtue of their generosity are also available to strangers? Such qualities are not just there to seduce the tourists. They ring with authenticity. They are who we are and what we mean to one another. When we are by nature 'hospitable', enjoyment, pleasure, personal fulfillment and well-being belong by right to all of us and not just the privileged few.