
Book Review

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The Civic City in a Nomadic World

by: Charles Landry

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In my recent book, *Terrorism, Tourism and the End of Hospitality in the West* I toyed with the idea that terrorism and the popular entertainment culture in the US is harming the classic conception of Western Hospitality – as it was imagined by ancient Greeks –. Needless to say, this represents a major problem for Occident since hospitality remains as its milestone. At a closer look, terrorism looks to discredit the loyalties of citizens to their governments creating an cultural implosion that sooner or later may affect the – already weakened – social ties (Korstanje, 2017). In the mid of this mayhem, Charles Landry not only proffers a caustic explanation of this much deeper issue but he gives an in-depth description that helps readers to understand the effects of mobilities in the modern (tourist) city.

In this reviewed book, the well-renowned cultural theorist, Charles Landry presents a more than interesting idea revolving around what he dubbed as ‘the nomadic World’. Combining suggesting photos and pictures with a polished prose that highlight the contradictions of Western civilization and postmodern life, Landry asserts that the concept of civic or ‘being civic’ should at the best discussed in view of a new more global world where not all have the same opportunities. Of course, as he puts it, “every person living in a city” (p.6) should share the chance of civic engagement. The book is organised in four section discussing different themes and points which ranges from old and new nomad lifestyles to the problems of migration and racism.

The first section, which names ‘the World in Motion’, ignites an hot debate on the challenges and problems of mobilities in a world where the ‘other’ is rarely welcomed. A new emerging culture of digitally-driven nomads are changing not only the ways production is conceived but also the borders between work and leisure. Though globalisation connects distant cities and cultures into the same platform, no less true is that thousands of expatriates often interrogate themselves on the anthropological definitions of attachment and place. To some extent, Landry adds, it is important not to lose the sight of retired Britons venture to live in the Southern Spain while they do not speak a word in Spanish and in a near future, they do not manifest any intention to do. As Landry observes, they are borrowing a landscape, implanting a new culture without any type of inconvenience with their visa. They receive hospitality while in their own homes

hospitality is neglected for others. This not only create a paradoxical situation but it begs a more than interesting dilemma respecting the inegalitarian conditions of exploitation which migrants go through in sharp contrast with the luxury world of tourists. Over the recent years, some voices have alerted on the inequalities and discrepancies around mobilities. Migration and tourism appear to be different sides of the same coin. One is reserved for richer citizens who are legally allowed to move freely through the globe whereas the other exhibits the close scrutiny of state in monitoring pour (undesired) migrants. The host-and-guest encounter not always is easy leading the notion citizenry into the critical limits. During long time, Anthropology debated on the meaning of identity as well as the notion of alterity and how, both may be changed according to politics. All these slippery matters are dully addressed in Landry's book. In the capitalist societies, natives are educated to feel foreign workers may place their situation in jeopardy or at the best their jobs at stake. Nevertheless, migration paves the ways for the rise of further understanding which not only contributes economically to the society but also breaks down the existent prejudices. In the mankind's history, migration and movement were not exemption but the rule. Our ancestors came from any other place likely forced to move in quest of better opportunities for their offspring. All we came from Africa and from that moment, the concept of purity was systemically constructed as a barrier to control the social discontent. In other cases, racism was historically rechannelled to serve as a scapegoat mechanism that blames others for the proper frustrations. Landry led to imagine the city, in the second part which names *The city in motion*. He explores the stories, expectances of city-dwellers -insiders and outsiders- who alternate different heritages and biographies. The simplistic thinking, far from emancipating the citizen, leads towards mistrust and fear. There is not only one city, but many cities where discussion and commitment make more equal. As he cites,

“There is an underclass and significant exclusions as in the bourgeois city. This city has largely broken the bonds of the feudal and begins to create forms of affiliation, fellowship and social life with coffee houses, clubs, salons or society circles. Within this historical process Gutenberg's printing press is as revolutionary as the internet was 30 years ago. Privilege knowledge escapes out of the monasteries. It is the speed and relative ease at which books can be produced that force-feeds exchange. It brings the known world to wider audiences and this taps their exploratory instincts.” (p.140)

Equally important, the image of the city poses serious challenges for anthropologists, ethnologists and fieldworkers (from others disciplines) to approach an accurate object of study as well as the understanding of their outcomes. The sense of individuality adjoined to relativism blurs the epistemological border of any discipline at the time, the understanding is on the wane in ever-changing world. This led Landry to question ‘the power of the concept’, which for this reviewer is one of the best sections of the book. We can grasp concepts, for example green, ecology, change or anything else, but to what extent we are able and convinced to promote a genuine change.

The microsociology of day-to-day interaction is discussed throughout the third section (zones of encounter), where the author dissects the nature and evolution of conflict as well the underlying tensions that characterise the zones of encounter. This sounds particularly illustrative in the case of terrorism that today not only is considered one of the major threats but also keeps the West on tenterhooks. Tourism plays a leading role commoditising the culture while at the same time it paves the ways for the rise of

resistance and other city. Empathy as well as the possibilities to situate in the place of the Other is of paramount importance to a new city.

In the last section, places of empathy, he brings reflection on the role of hospitality as the key factor of a new city-making process where aliens are respected. Based on a deeper secular humanism, our theorist calls the attention on the differences between xenopolis and cosmopolis. While the former signals to a city cohabited with foreigners, the latter refers to a humanist view of the city (a viewpoint began by Enlightenment) where different forms of living and feeling may be consolidated into the same culture. This does not mean the sense of cosmopolis neglects the conflict, but as Landry recognises,

“It seeks to consolidate different ways of living, recognizing arenas in which we must all live together and those where we can live apart. It generates structured opportunities to learn to know “the Other”, to explore and discover similarity and difference.” (p.265)

After further review, I must confess this book should be catalogued as a humanist attempt to integrate serious problems today the capitalism is far to resolve. No matter than the political affiliation, if you are liberal or Marxists, in this text which is captivated my attention, Landry sets forward a new understanding of the future city, a point which should be discussed in the years to come. From McLuhan’s texts, not only I have been enjoyed in reading a high-quality but not for this less critical piece like this before. Landry pivots in the articulation of a book of great erudition that is accompanied by a detailed analysis of reality.

References

Korstanje, M. (2017) *Terrorism, Tourism and the End of Hospitality in the West*, Springer Nature, New York.