

The Diaspora of Guinness (Prologue)



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Prologue

A very popular error: Having the courage of one's own conviction; rather, it is a matter of having the courage for an 'attack' on one's own convictions.
Friedrich Nietzsche/Notebooks



When Jean Francois Lyotard spoke of the end of the *grand narrative* he may not have anticipated all the minor narratives that would cluster around and eventually be put in place of this urge to assert new meaning when none existed, or the passion to reverse older illusions of control and devastating geography. Are we to fall for the slick pairings that offer such delight, the regional/the global, the personal/the social, the world/the local? Is this indeed such a delight that it offers us merits for a new course or one that invites others to catch up to our thinking as it changes and takes in the 'craic'?

It is of course still a challenge for many of us, frequent travelling scholars and errant poets, to take the global from the local, to squeeze the regional from the pips not the core of the apple, and to drink the golden nectar not the Guinness. Yet this is our charge: to gather in combat, contest, debate and grumble. What then is the *craic* of our task, and how have we become translators of irretrievable (urban?) language to students who lose the light in between the ‘crack’? What is this new poetry-for-old if not the invention of the new geographers and translators of the relational?

To write like this – an apologia of the apologia - invites a temptation to all translators to speak plainly, jump the hoops of critical fire and redefine yet another minor about to be major narrative – *Regional Urbanism*. Is this the new ‘craic’ through which the light gets in? *The Poetics of Critical Regional Urbanism*? No, our contribution cannot be titled that.

In 1996, as a different person admittedly, I delivered the Preston Thomas Memorial Lecture at Cornell in the form of four evenings of poetry. For such an open conference I proposed a series of urban poems, perhaps also an epistolary fragment to Mister F, or possibly an anecdote from the Old Vaults in the town of Denbigh, North Wales; something, anything, more or less about the ‘relational’ city oscillating between the regional and global, and the type of issues that academic proceedings might let fall through that other ‘craic’.

What is this apologia? Cities are good for us? Who knows, who says? What is the Craic? Leonard Cohen has a song which goes: *There is a crack, a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in.* Any talk about alternatives to existing patterns or responses to global/regional/local/world/market urbanism first and foremost must be a *craic*. It is where the light gets in, where the fun gets through, where the Irish *craic* takes place. It is the moment however when all our critical and scholarly fidgeting becomes institutionalized or 'commoditized'; known as the *Diaspora of Guinness* - we are killing the *craic*.

Whilst working on this volume and thinking of this ever-present apologia for fraudulence, my retired academic friends, hearing the state of the academy and all sorts of character assassination and vilification in this Potemkin Village said: "sometimes it is time to close an institution and start again." This has been on my mind and for some years now and I am now considering what it means to write ugly. It's a new phrase we know. I now have two horns and an eagle's mask; ever more medusa-headed than ever. All of us - urbanists, reprehensible raconteurs, regional globalists, street poets and masked troubadours; forget convictions and perfect offerings, go for whichever crack lets us through.

Dr James Horace Vertigo

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