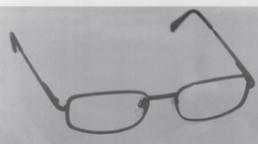


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Individuality is overrated



GRAHAM
LETTNER

"How about this common exercise in doublethink: wanting Edmonton to improve the public transit system and simultaneously skipping out on the meager \$2.25 LRT-fare. Of course, homelessness is an absolute scourge, but must-see-TV doesn't leave much time to take to pitch in at a downtown soup kitchen."

It just doesn't work. Being an individual that is. In this wide, wonderful, wholly interconnected, interdependent, intergalactic world, the individual has become obsolete. It's so '90s. It's about time we accepted this fact and got on with the business of making our society much, much better.

Think of all the ways a person is utterly dependant on society. Who grows all the food that we eat each day? Individuals don't hunt and gather water, power and cable TV all by themselves. It's rare indeed to find someone who can write, produce and play all their own original music—the rest of us mere mortals rely on iTunes.

The police, the fire department, the courts and every other municipal service are daily instances of societal dependence by the individual. So are international trade agreements, security alliances, borders, coast guards and over-eager airport security staff.

Walk down the publicly paved and funded road, leaf through the black and white daily put together by the associated press late last night, see a doctor to get that rash looked at, watch a movie, quote another off-colour *Family Guy* line: every daily event declares undeniably the supremacy of society over individual insignificance.

Dig a bit deeper and you'll get philosophers like Ludwig Wittgenstein saying that even an individual's language only acquires meaning through public usage. Fancy that: without societal conventions the individual can't even express himself.

Yet it's overly tempting to want to have our proverbial cake and eat it too. It would be great if our ever-bewildered provincial government could govern Alberta out of the mess of an overheated economy, but forget about lending any credence the current leadership race. As for the environment, props go to green energy, carbon taxes and Al Gore—just don't let the proposed new wind farm go ahead and ruin Pincher Creek's Rocky Mountain view.

How about this common exercise in doublethink: wanting Edmonton to improve the public transit system and simultaneously skipping out on the meager \$2.25 LRT-fare. Of course, homelessness is an absolute scourge, but must-see-TV doesn't leave much time to take to pitch in at a downtown soup kitchen.

We as individuals are flawed because we're each a one-way street. We're great at taking from society, but not so conscious about putting back, adding to or growing society

in return. We're fundamentally maladaptive as we narrow our focus to ourselves dismembered from society, a state that is as fundamentally untrue as it is dangerous.

The world has changed and become hyper-complex and hyper-connected, impossible to discern from a single point of view. The world is unintelligible to the individual because the individual no longer fits into the world.

The problems we see as a society require enlightened self-interest, wisdom that crosses borders and perspectives, and understanding that comes with shedding the petty label of individuality. In short, the individual is unsustainability personified.

Albert Einstein said he reminded himself daily that his life depends on the work and effort of so many others both living and dead, and that he felt compelled to give in the same order that he had received and continued to receive.

I think his sentiment is captured like this: the individual is obsolete. Think about it, mull it over, then accept it and get to work. Tomorrow's society will hinge on how many of us can drop the outdated moniker of individual and get on with making the world a better place.

Third Way needed for washrooms

The times they are a-changin'—and gender expectations along with them



ELIZABETH
MCMILLAN

Anyone who has ever wandered into the wrong public washroom has known the wrath of angry occupants appalled that you would dare intrude into "their" space. But imagine if this happened to you everyday.

Distinguishing the person-in-a-dress from a person-in-pants on washroom doors is not the answer. Because seriously, it's often hard to tell the difference to begin with. And moreover, very few women using women's washrooms are ever wearing giant crinolines. It's not the 19th century anymore.

If you were on campus last week you may have noticed signs asking "infinite genders ... two washrooms?" That's because a group of concerned members of the campus community has started a publicity campaign advocating single stall, gender neutral bathrooms on campus.

Before you get your gender-specific underwear in a knot and start referencing *Ally MacBeal* reruns, this isn't to suggest that the current bathroom facilities should be demolished in favour of a no-holds-barred environment. What it does propose is integrating the possibility of a transgender-friendly space, an alternative to the two-choice format that currently exists—much like a unisex

wheelchair-accessible bathroom.

Think of it as a people's washroom. Parents could feel comfortable taking their children there; people with mobility issues could manoeuvre more easily, and it would provide a refuge for people who just don't enjoy using public washrooms. Others would probably enjoy the option of a lock that actually works and a barrier between them and the rest of campus. The practicality is undeniable, as anyone who's ever had an unexpected case of nausea away from home can attest.

**Public washrooms are
neither safe nor private.
They are a public area
removed from the
public eye.**

Other universities such as McGill have made this commonplace. And since the U of A is all about getting up to par with McGill, this is something we should consider.

Public washrooms are neither safe nor private. They are a public area removed from the public eye. Assaults committed against both men and women have been known to happen there for precisely this reason. Transgendered people are more at risk because they threaten the masculine or feminine space so designated by the sign on the door.

On a daily basis people are harassed by intentional and unintentional opposition to their ambiguous

appearances, which confuse traditional conceptualizations of masculinity and femininity. Challenging the structural gender binary is a step in the right direction towards acknowledging that not everyone can—or wants to be—categorized in such binary terms.

As it stands now, there are unused single-stall bathrooms in the Tory Building and the Humanities Centre. In other buildings, there are many floors with more than one men's and women's washroom. Converting one of these three rooms into a gender-neutral space would not rob either sex of their exclusive space and would create an inviting alternative open to everyone.

Does this proposed change create a sexualized environment? Hardly, unless you're an antsy first-year couple looking for some quality time away from your residence roommate. Instead, this removes the focus on gender roles and creates a secure space.

Gender-neutral bathrooms are an easy way to rethink ideas surrounding sex, gender and identity politics. By forcing people quite literally to choose one door or another, society tries to overlook and dismiss anyone who does not fit the norm.

So think about the possibilities of infinite genders and infinite options—though you probably won't get to see the posted signs anymore. A concerned citizen apparently took them down, no doubt worried that the world would stop if they considered an option beyond the ones nailed securely to the door—or maybe they just thought it was still the '50s.