Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

ECHOES OF THE CITY: The People

Maurice Amiel · Wednesday, November 5th, 2014

Introduction

I hope you will agree when I state that without its people, a city is nothing but a ghost town, an archaeological remain.

You and I, with the "things" around us, by our sheer *co-presence*, as in the featured image above, and *by moving and gathering* in the city, are the ultimate measuring rods of a city's *meaning and of its scale.*

As such the people are the **Echoes of the City,** the living proof of its inhabitation.

Welcome to this new series in which I intend to illustrate and comment on these aspects of urban life.

Co-presence

Since way before selfies, the basic and traditional subject of photography has been our co-presence in time and space: people, significant people usually, together in a particular place and on a particular occasion, marking a moment in History or in their personal one, the record of which is usually kept in a family album.

Today's recording of the "other" and of our co-presence in public space, besides the selfie, is subsumed in what we call street photography. Not an easy thing, requiring a certain savvy if not a surreptitious approach, with happy results at times such as this lovely example of social curiosity free of the usual scruples, so characteristic of youth.

Gathering

Much of life in the city expresses itself as occasions for gathering, from encounters to meetings, inside and outside of buildings, and between them.

A church parvis has no meaning, and/or reason for being, without the usual gatherings in it marking significant moments of our life and of the city's, as shown in this post-wedding social moment in a Montreal suburb.

Note how the motor bike riders have stopped in a mixed attitude of respect and curiosity.

Moving

When you and I move in the city, we provide, in all modesty, some of the most interesting elements of life in it … of course a bit of dramatic sunlight helps!

The person shown below carrying coffee to her office mates is certainly appropriately shod for walking the cobblestone paved street of Old Montreal … in a way she is perhaps, in her mind, already where she is moving to.

Of course moving implies wilful displacement toward a destination, providing a sense of energy to the streets and sidewalks of the city.

Meaning and Scale

When in doubt about what a place is, its size and nature, looking at people's actions and placements will usually provide the necessary clues as to what is happening and how: the gist of meaning and scale.

Yes, public gardens are part and parcel of a city and of urban life … you may pick up below on the fine mingling of nature and culture, with a touching hint of the universal accessibility of Montreal's Botanical Garden and its social inclusivity … yes, I mean the motorized wheelchairs and baby carriage!

Discussion

A most common positive comment on my past series dealing with URBAN SOCIABILITY, CITY STILLS and URBAN FIELD NOTES, has been the fact that they helped you see "things" you previously had paid no attention to.

Now it's time to pay attention, together, to "people in the city" … to the ECHOES OF THE CITY without necessarily, as shown in the photos, making abstraction of the settings where people move, aggregate and interact in meaningful ways.

Photo credit Maurice Amiel

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