
Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Notes on Some Territorial Curiosities

Maurice Amiel · Sunday, September 25th, 2022

Basic definition and observations

I call **territorial curiosities** those physical and social characteristics of places at variance with those we expect to find in order to help us **read the relative specificity and exclusivity of access and use** of urban places.

My intuition at this time is that these curiosities **introduce a certain spice to urban life as well as being indicators of ongoing changes to the territorial dynamic of the city.**

The two cases presented below are taken from the **pedestrian public realm**, both are entryways: one to a corner convenience store, and the one to a women's hostelry

In what follows I will try to present the physical particularities and observed behaviours that produce these curiosities.

The case of the entry to the “corner convenience store”



Commercial informality

If it were not for the sign way up above the tent portico with its transparent areas allowing to see the piles of empty boxes and a bit of the store area, the signs taped to the tent and the folding panel advertising ice cream half way to the tent would have already allowed us to read an **informal neighbourhood commercial territory**.

And so it is, meaning people come in and out at all times of day and evening in informal attire indicating they are living next door and are just buying what they had forgotten to get at a regular chain store: coffee, beer, bread, canned food, and home maintenance liquids and powders, and ice cream, etc.

Yet, I invite the reader to look at the front and side views of this situation and notice what looks like rows of milk carton plastic containers piled at the tent corner, some on the asphalt entryway and some partly on the edge of the building side-yard, as shown below.



informal socializing seats

These are in fact left over boxes used by the delivery truck drivers to sit on on their breaks creating an **overlaid user population**, quite different from the fast in-and-out neighbouring ones in terms of the curious use of these boxes and their groupings near and about the entry way.

I have yet to see the neighbours take a seat on these boxes and lick an ice cream or sip a coffee; territorially we have **one place and two use patterns of the entry way, one for utilitarian access and exit, the other for rest and refuelling!**

Over time these two use patterns seem to have adjusted to each other and to coexist ... territorially speaking.

The case of the entry to the women's hostelry

This is again a case to two separate uses requiring a fencing of sort between a vegetable garden, where a grassy front yard had existed, and the entry itself with its own spatial structure of steps, benches for waiting, bicycle rack, etc. as shown below.



fences make good neighbours

While the activity of entering and exiting is rather constant across seasons, the activity of planting and harvesting is structured across the seasons by a staff of maintenance staff turned gardeners.

Well-separated in space from the entry proper, it is the vegetable garden that attracts the population walking along the sidewalk, that will slow down to watch the growth of plants while kept from entering by thick planting.

While the paved entry way is manifestly used mainly by people living in the hostelry, not only busily entering or exiting but also patiently waiting on a bench for someone to arrive in order to leave, or enter together.



formal entrance

The only cross-territory use pattern, as shown below, is established by a row of slabs cutting across a corner yard used by passers-by, as well as by residents, as a short-cut to the entrance or to the street.



crossing the formal territory

End words

I wish to end this post with a work in progress being the enlargement of sidewalks at intersections of my street with the main one, as shown below.



planting, cars and people

What this apparent curiosity augurs is a slowing down of traffic and a reduction of parked car near the intersection for safety reasons, but also the eventual addition of low decorative planting at the sidewalk bulge for the pleasure of the pedestrians.

This case of territorial overlay between vehicular and pedestrian domains, is also a case of complementariness between the two, a promising development of urban life.

Credit all photographs to the author.

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