

Cultural Daily

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PLACE MAKING: On the poetics of the proximate environment – poetic figures of a loop walk

Maurice Amiel · Wednesday, May 18th, 2016

In the spirit of “a walk around the block”

The spirit of “a walk around the block” is a bit like noting remarkable verses in a poem, i.e. what is as pleasant to the ear as meaningful to the mind.

I would like to continue this exploration of the proximate environment with a few notable poetic figures involving the ground and the place-and-visual-sequence-defining built items along a loop walk.

First to be noted is the return of the color green, however tentatively this mid spring, and the return of the pleasure of walking on dry ground with all its paved variations. (See feature image)

What is not to be missed along the loop walk ...

... the experience of being *squeezed between public and private traffic patterns* ...



... passing by the “*hidden but not secret garden*” ...



... being tempted to *jay walk between two paved walkways located on either side of a busy two way street* ...



... walking the limit between *two historic urban platting at right angle to each other*: the long side of the bloc to the right, and the narrow sides of the perpendicular blocs to the left ...



... encountering about half way up the long side bloc *a residential group, that is as much urban design as architecture, and that opens a view unto the next street where a mid bloc alley should have been!* Are we in Montreal or in early 20th century Vienna? Are we invited to use the pathway to cross the bloc? More on that later as we borrow that next street on the way back ...



... nearing the *shady “head” of the loop walk*, squeezed between two office buildings framing the junction of the street I am on to the main inter-neighborhoods thoroughfare with its subway and bus lines junction station and commercial strip, ahead and to the left ...



... turning right we encounter another *urban design feature, aimed at creating a buffer between the building and the heavy traffic*, that is a mini plaza with benches and trees and a mail box to accommodate the crowd entering and leaving the building, as well as the crowd getting on or off the subway and buses and zooming for the mac food venue ...



... reaching the end of the mini plaza I realize how elevated it is, vis-a-vis the street I am coming to, and *how segregated my position is vis a vis the walkers and the traffic. It is at this strategic*

point that the local beggars choose to ply their trade rather wisely at they catch the people coming out of the bank, at a point where they must slow down to use the stairs.



Crossing the street in order to remain in the shade, I look to my right to realize that these façades are indeed the rear of the buildings facing the street I just came out of. These are a series of loose exercises in rear entry and balcony privacy keeping, or rear yard basketball, gardening, etc. ...



... and of course the treatment of the entrance to that earlier mentioned cross bloc circulation pathway...*very private naturally, as the gate and the sign make it quite obvious* ...



... what about the side of the street I am walking on? Well ... *the usual lined up façades with the occasional miniature landscaping on the miniature front yard. We are at the eastern limit of one of the oldest platting development of the city* ...



... comparing this to the other side make obvious the *dimensional contrast between older and newer developments. Note the picnic table placed under a shady vine orchard ... eventually* ...



... turning at the next intersection to leave the loop and get back to the stem street I started to walk on, I encounter the *symmetrical landscape paving short cut* ... symmetrical to the one shown on the feature image.



... encountering, then, *the weird directing of traffic flow at a T intersection* between the street I am walking along, the one way street facing it and the two way traffic it must merge in ... falsely indicated as one way by the white arrow!



A bloc away from my starting point I encounter the *landmark wrought iron gazebo* peeking over the lush hedge surrounding the earlier mentioned “hidden garden”.



Discussion

What has taken me twice twenty minutes to walk and photograph this familiar loop, should have taken you a bit less to read and ponder the images ... *hopefully getting a sense of this sliver of proximate environment and all that it contains of traces of human occupancy, historical city platting development, and architectural building types adaptation and originality.*

What about place making in our intended genius loci and spatial poetics perspective?

I don't think it lies in any intellectual analysis, **rather it is of the order of the emotional response to rime in literary poetics**, to the special pleasure of discovering its pattern (s) tying stanzas together and turning the poem into an adventure in reading and being.

*I found equivalent spatial poetic figures in the various **modulations of street to sidewalk to building façades relation** (read rime patterns), in the **bloc orientation changes** (read stanza patterning) and in one the many **crazy T intersections** in the city (read over-signifying verse), all within **fifteen or twenty minutes walk to the bank and back.***

*All this makes me smile interiorly, specially as the mid spring late afternoon sunshine makes it all rime somehow, in the sense of **qualifying a mental image of the loop walk as source of poetic figures, if not of the perceptual profile of a singular place.***

Credit all photos Maurice Amiel

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