

Cultural Daily

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URBAN FIELD NOTES: Pathways, Querencias and Sweet Spots

Maurice Amiel · Tuesday, September 2nd, 2014

What is it about ... the feature image that is!

Much of what we experience of the physical city, in continuous and auto referential fashion, is given while walking and being aware of our surroundings ... *however encumbered the sidewalks may be at times!*

Please consider how our near total sensorial, perceptive and interactive apparatus is solicited in situations and settings we walk to, into and through...*such as unloading time at Tim Horton's, next to a 24/7 convenience store, next to a subway entrance being renovated!*

We usually respond to these situations with an appropriate action, or choice of such if choice is given; we will sometimes respond reflexively by adjusting our mental image of a particular area of the city that may have changed; we may occasionally hunker down and proceed on automatic pilot, proof of it is how we are surprised by the fact we have arrived at a given point, almost entirely out of awareness...*no chance of that happening here with snow drifts splitting the large sidewalk into one section for through walking and another for local access!*

Please consider this as an invitation to exercise your awareness of the various situations you find yourself in and of the ways you may experience the city.

Take the Path; the most beautiful metaphor *for life as lived time*, one we enter not quite knowing what to expect along the way, but with a reasonable certitude that we have what it takes to meet it ... *as long as we keep moving.*

Consider for a second how distressed one may become for not finding the number of the avenue and the one of its cross street to locate oneself in the gridiron street pattern of most cities.



Consider, with a bit more introspection, how circumspect we may feel when we do not find all the coded items that tell us we are in a public domain and not trespassing, but for the civility of light poles and fire hydrant and the resulting intuition that the path leads to a street.

Take the Querencia—that place we always return to in order to feel authentic and empowered.

To quote the Spanish poet J. C. Arevalo: “*The Querencia is that place in the bullfighting arena where the bull becomes brave while on the defensive ... to attempt to dare a bull in that situation may be beautiful but is certainly dangerous*”

(My translation from a French version of the original text)

Out of the bullfight context, where the concept originated, a querencia may be a nurse’s station, a favorite carrel in a library or table in a restaurant, your front porch, or the proverbial wall you may feel backed against in any situation.

This phenomenon is certainly relative to one’s own personal resources and the circumstances of the situation one is in.



*Not easy to find and illustrate, but, by and by, we shall try to find enough examples of it ... just think what it would take to try, as a stranger, to enter that picnic shelter set up in this housing Coop side yard ... it feels simply so authentically part and parcel of the people in it as to radiate a territorial imperative that must be respected. **Consider the corollary proposition of how empowered the occupants may feel toward the stranger.***

Take the Sweet Spot—that place so unexpectedly pleasant and touching in a very special social and/or esthetic way.

It may be caused by the unexpectedness of it in terms of the care someone has given to a particular place such as a genial modification to an ordinary house, or something you have been toying with and find it realized in the flesh, etc.

Experiencing a sweet spot in the city brightens one’s general disposition, it make us radiate with almost physical well being, and I would venture to say, with an environmental intelligence nurtured by the physical city.



*Not to underestimate the gamut of sensory input that a given place can play on one’s perceptual apparatus: the souvenirs that the smell of cedar tree will bring out of the depth of emotional memory, the colors that seduce, the textures we can almost touch with our eyes, the shape of a door opening, of cascading terraces, of a folded umbrella and the placement of a potted cedar standing in front of a garage door, **like a finger placed on one’s mouth to signify “quiet please”.***

All photo credit, Maurice Amiel

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