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URBAN FIELD NOTES: Two Querencias

Maurice Amiel · Wednesday, September 24th, 2014

Event and place centered querencias

It occurred to me, while rethinking the notion of querencia, that preceding a bullfight, the arena would give little cue as to where the bull will make its most aggressive stand if provoked, i.e. where its querencia would be may be the direction of the sun.

Faced with danger, a herd of horned animals in the wild will most likely use the compact grouping mode of resistance in an open plain situation, facing outward with head lowered and horns well in sight…the basic model American westward moving pioneers used in the wagon train tight circle, from the inside of which they would fight off attacks.

It also occurred to me that socialized humans have developed all sorts of conventions about places of permissible aggressive resistance to provocation such as the sacred precinct of the home (remember *Straw Dogs*?), fitting them with symbols to forewarn of such resistance: fences, mean dog signs, etc., but also with more civil means such as audio communication at locked doors.

The two querencias I present here are interesting variations of the above examples, interesting for their quite public presence and for their quite different territorial expression: one being event centered with conventional ephemeral props, the other being place centered with more permanent layers of soft to hard limit markers.

Collective, event centered querencia

No buffalos here, just the membership of a Housing Cooperative celebrating an anniversary of their coop foundation. (See top image below).

The ribbons over a spike topped fence and the birthday balloon convention signal a festive non problematic grouping, while the group's backs to the street clearly signal a more private ongoing event: methinks listening to a speech while eating a piece of the birthday cake…something that cannot really be shared with the public.

An ephemeral querencia will dissolve when the event ends, the front yard returning to its normal state: a completely fenced in, spare, stern, formal precinct. (See bottom image below).

Individual, place centered querencia

One will see, occasionally, a semi-basement unit sprout a patio, often surrounded with cedar or juniper shrub.

From that kernel, this tenant has gone all out: roofing the patio, lighting it, adding a low wood screen, AND an outer territorial limit by stringing more shrubs and a corral portal like structure to nail down the PRIVATE AREA message, if it ever needed it.

Yet, take a second look at the left side of the entire set up and consider the lone metal post, remaining for what was once a Frost fence running from one building to the other.

A most crude territorial marker compared to the softer actual landscape treatment.

Yet, again, consider this: the possibility, just the possibility, that the tenant has a shotgun in a glass case inside the unit, and next to the sliding doors to the unit.

The sacred precinct of home as the original querencia, maybe? The cultural material that makes *Straw Dogs*, and the above mentioned possibility, ring true!

All photo credit Maurice Amiel

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