

Cultural Daily

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CITY STILL: A Civic Minded Occupation

Maurice Amiel · Wednesday, April 16th, 2014

Leave The Car At Home Day

On Leave The Car At Home Day, the city forgoes the returns on a few paying parking spots to the benefit of pertinent projects for their occupation.

On that occasion a group of students from the nearby Université de Montréal have set up a public “street level balcony” of sorts, fronting neighbouring coffee houses and beer and pizza joints.



To do so they have chosen the head of a parking file so as not to be squeezed between two cars and have exploited to the maximum on-site elements not usually available to commercial outdoor spaces, such as the asphalt pavement, the street trees and planting strip and the sidewalk curb used for seating in the sun ... noting the orientation to the car traffic of the participants.

Besides these, the students have brought the essential ingredients of balcony setting: a protective floor mat, drinks, sun shading beach umbrella, seats and boom box...and of course their bikes (Note the graphic symbol of the bike lane, incidentally located right in front of the group of occupiers).

Drivers-by could not miss the group action nor its message.

Together, on-site elements and those brought to the site, may be considered as so many environmental resources in the elaboration of an ephemeral event-setting squeezed between street and sidewalk, **the symbolic power of which being drawn mainly from the breached limit of the curb.**

You may note, behind the suspended flags line, a rather forlorn out of place bystander: the parking meter, somewhat lost between the sidewalk folding menu boards of the neighbouring eateries!

Well defined socially, spatially and temporally, this occupation did not develop any “frayed edges”, social or spatial: no vandalism and no abusive noises besides the well intentioned boom box, civic minded with a clean-up up at the end of the day.

It was all done in good neighbourly spirit involving a subtle mix of territorial signs. On the one hand the city occupying dimension with the breaching of the curb and the breaching of air space (the boom box as PA system) and, on the other, the more festive and benign indicators of beach

umbrella and flag line.

Photo and collage credit Maurice Amiel

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