

Cultural Daily

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SPACINGS....once upon a time, Architecture (3)

Maurice Amiel · Thursday, August 3rd, 2017

Once upon a time ... in the time of the lean-to and the grotto, humans experienced the basic built space related *duality of interior and exterior*.

Associating that duality with basic *relational opposites of security and insecurity, instrumental and esthetic experience, with social representation and cosmic symbolism, and with gender roles differentiation*, humans produced the embryo of formal Architecture!

These relational opposites still stand today in the architectural structuring of that duality, providing *a range of stimulating sensations, enriching perceptions and meaningful use-based experience*, subsumed in the notion of “Spacings”, and their architectural hierarchy: from **unitary built space** *such as temples, meeting spaces or utility buildings*; to **spatial sequence ensemble** *such as houses, compounds, museums and palaces*, and to **settlement ensembles** *such as the town, the village or the camp site*.

Pursuant to our last two articles, we shall discuss here the cases of two settlement ensembles (the first published in P. Jodidio's opus ARCHITECTURE NOW, and the second being a local example) in terms of the sensations, perceptions and use based experiences I could read, or project, into their spatial compositions i.e. spacings.

NOTE: at the scale implied by the notion of settlement, a settlement ensemble need not encompass the whole geographic settlement, but may be considered so any part of it that has settlement-wide popular appeal and social signification.

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The case of the Scottish Parliament: Edimburg, Scotland

EMBT Arch.

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Entry to the Scottish Parliament

At the end of the Royal Mile of Edinburgh the campus of the Scottish Parliament is sited to fit the typical massing of surrounding settlement, with one of its accesses, shown here from inside out,

picking up an institutional version of the picket fence and the scale of the surrounding circulation.

Surrounded by wide sidewalks, punctuated by a fenestration that warms up the concrete walls with wood slat screen details and raising its cantilevered volumes over a concrete base mass that echoes the windows curved screening, the parliament of a mountainous country seems to match its craggy landscape and tight urban and village structures in a symbolic gesture, perhaps, of its independent spirit.

It may not be an accident that the designers were a Catalan architect sympathetic to the cause of Scottish independence, and an Italian Venice trained architect, sensitive to the intricate relations of land and building of that city ... ***The Scottish Parliament campus is as much landscape architecture as it is building architecture.***

Speaking of urban landscape the nearest thing to a local civic and cultural campus is the recently completed complex of buildings and open spaces that is the new brand figure of Montreal.

The case of the “Quartier des spectacles”: Montreal, Quebec, Canada



Quartier des spectacles

Banking on the past success of a year long schedule of festivals in Montreal, all situated downtown in the streets around the Place des Arts (two theatres, two musical venues and one museum), the city has gone all out to transform the portion of a street that runs between a sloping embankment and the Museum of Contemporary Arts, into an outdoor festival plaza lit by four overhead and oversized light sources, and to build a new headquarters for the administrations of the year long schedule of festivals, one of them being shown in the feature image and reprised above.



While the heart of the district is mostly given to Winter carnival lit snow balls theme crowd oriented outdoor activities, the street turned plaza will also be used as venue for exhibition of ice sculptures, fountains and light shows, etc. depending on the season, as shown below.

Its most original “coup” is by far the row of two dozens adult swings, installed on a street dividing strip behind the Place des Arts theatre complex. This project, the winner of an urban design competition, unmistakably reflect the Quebecois francophone joie de vivre and its flourishing in the city of Montreal.



Les plaisirs de l’escarpolette reinterpreted

During festivals most street intersections in and around the district are lined with, if not downright occupied by, show stages and venues for consumption of food and drinks, giving Montreal the allure of a city “that does not sleep”.

Discussion

While a parliament is the locus of legislative power and political identity and a civic center is usually the locus for celebrating cultural identity, the symbolic value of both these “settlement ensembles” is of their design essence, and, *in both cases, it is the will of the people to use that space and be one with it, in a theatrical sense, that is behind their spacing experience and that establishes their symbolic significance.*

All photos credit Google Search under “Montreal quartier des spectacles”, and “Montreal Swing Project”.

Sketch from photograph credit Maurice Amiel

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