

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## PLACE MAKING: on the poetics of the water's edge.

Maurice Amiel · Wednesday, September 14th, 2016

### Preliminary

The water's edge is not your usual place ... for one thing there are so many types of water bodies that have so many types of edges!

*At the water's edge* for instance is a wonderful book of photographs by J. Mayerowitz ... a book that can easily be taken for a National Geographic publication about Cape Cod, were it not so universal in its scope of situations that touch us deep inside.

As a matter of fact the book, which has been edited in various formats and at various prices to be affordable, has a poetic introduction by writer and editor Maggie Barrett that captures some of that universal call of the water's edge.

She writes: “ *For those of us born to the sea or lucky enough to spend our lives by it, we covet the seasons when we are left alone with it.* ”

As one born to sand and sea and who has always lived in cities near water bodies or traversed by rivers, I have approached this post in a most personal manner. Selecting extracts from a suite of poems composed near my turning seventy that answered the need to find patterns of continuities and ruptures in my migrant life, one of these continuities being the nearness to water and its edges, came naturally.

Association with images taken at water's edges around Montreal, an island in the St Lawrence River, came also naturally ... enjoy!

### At the water's edge ... No footprint is possible



walking the water's edge

No foot print is possible in the sea,  
and that is what makes the water's edge  
so attractive.

The foot shaped sand pocket  
gathers the water  
which softens its edges,  
which ghosts its image,

which sucks the pocket  
down,  
until next foot  
comes  
down on the sand ...  
but never in the sea,  
which invites, rather, “eureka!” type  
experiences.

**At the water’s edge ... the horizon was one**



the horizon is one

The horizon was one  
and its distances many,  
that carried envy,  
fear,  
And eventually hope.

(...)

Swimming to the depth-indicating  
buoy,  
or to the offshore rock,  
gave us a measure  
of our endurance.

(...)

The changing colors  
from here to there  
told us of relative  
calm,  
or announced the prospect  
of storm

**At the water’s edge ... the water’s edge was one**



the beaches are many

The water’s edge was one  
and the beaches many,  
but not as many were  
to be its shores  
from which there was  
to be no return.  
You brought home  
sand in your sandals,

and salt in your  
 hair and on your skin,  
 and the sights of urchins,  
 and the feel of algae  
 under your feet.  
 Of such things was made the  
 desire for the water's edge,  
 which became transmuted into  
 piers and weirs and  
 walks and benches and  
 the shady places  
 of new shores,  
 issued from design imagination.

### **At the water's edge ... The air in the sea**



the air in the sea

The air in the sea  
 reaches deep under,  
 to be breathed by fish  
 gills.

The air on the sea  
 running amok is  
 captured in bubbles made of  
 thin liquid film  
 which turns them into foam;  
 When these burst,  
 the air from the sea  
 reaches our  
 nose and lungs  
 with that iodine  
 smell,  
 breathed  
 into our  
 memory gills.

The air and the sea  
 are made one  
 by life  
 and by  
 memory,  
 having first issued  
 the former,  
 and then seduced  
 the latter.

### **At the water's edge ... Barnacles, algae and sea urchins**



barnacles, algae and sea urchins

Barnacles, algae and sea urchins  
 don't inhabit the sea  
 as much as they do  
 the rocks  
 in the sea;  
 at least that is where one  
 finds them,  
 and their welcoming  
 scratches  
 slime  
 and  
 pricks.  
 Take them out  
 of the sea  
 and they dry out,  
 and brittle away  
 and mix  
 with the sand.  
 Until then  
 swim around,  
 don't walk  
 on them rocks  
 in the sea,  
 where barnacles,  
 algae and sea urchins  
 peacefully  
 people  
 the  
 rock.

### **At the water's edge ... at the continents mapped shoreline ...**



the mapped shoreline

At the continents' mapped shoreline  
 the blue  
 parallel lines representing the  
 oceans and seas  
 stopped,  
 ever so carefully so as not to  
 smear the shoreline.  
 Ever so carefully,

(...)

you must fill in the edges first

and then fill up the rest  
 of the ocean's map.  
 Ever so carefully we dug holes  
 and canals in the sand,  
 and then,  
 as if inaugurating  
 them  
 we allowed the waters  
 to rise.  
 No speeches and no champagne  
 bottle breaking ...  
 just the thrill of having the sandy  
 edges remain firm;  
 just the pleasure of  
 seeing my map  
 look like the perfect ones  
 in the history books.

### Transition

This post is the last of my long series of contributions to Cultural Weekly on the general topic of urban sociability: *place making, city stills, live places, explorations in urban sociability, cityscape and landscape, echoes of the city, cityscape and time, and urban field notes*.

The text of this post is taken from the poetic suite, **“SOUNDINGS: on the continuities and ruptures of the migrant life,”** which I composed between 2008 and 2010.

The images were taken in the sweet light of late summer in the general areas of Hudson, Quebec and Cap Saint Jacques on the island of Montreal,

Both text and images are herewith submitted for the enjoyment of the reader, as a “thank you” for your assiduity, and as an invitation to visit the nearest water body and to ponder your “place” at the water’s edge. As for me, it is a transition to whatever inspiration and inclination may allow ... at seventy six!

*All images credit Maurice Amiel*

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