

# 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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