

Voyage de papier

Photo-souvenir
Photo-contact
Mémoire négative
Une goutte d'acide entre les mains.

Tranches de poussières

Impossible de trouver ce que je ne cherche pas
Le mur de traits s'énonce à l'infini sans que le code ne se déchiffre
La mosaïque de poussières littéraires se détache mais se soude à nouveau
Les vivants se touchent sans le vouloir
Encore
La rue a fracturé la coquille
Les murs d'absence sont de papier
Poudre de sable et livres anciens
Les racines courent sur le sol
à la recherche d'une eau qui n'existe plus.



Marée montante

Ressac de fin de journée
Entre les récifs d'immeubles les bancs costumés se rassemblent
menacés par des méduses de glace bavant des larmes de printemps

Courant chaud

Le vent balait le flanc des masses
Les caniveaux sont parcourus par le sable de l'hiver passé
qui roule et roule sans être remarqué
La lumière passe au-dessus des têtes comme un rêve menaçant
Les hommes marchent sur un lit d'alluvions industriels
Des lames de métal hurlant viennent se briser sur les sourds

Mer sans plantes

plages bétonnées

oiseaux rendus bâtards par le fer

La métaphore se dissout devant l'évidence

Ici regne le bruit

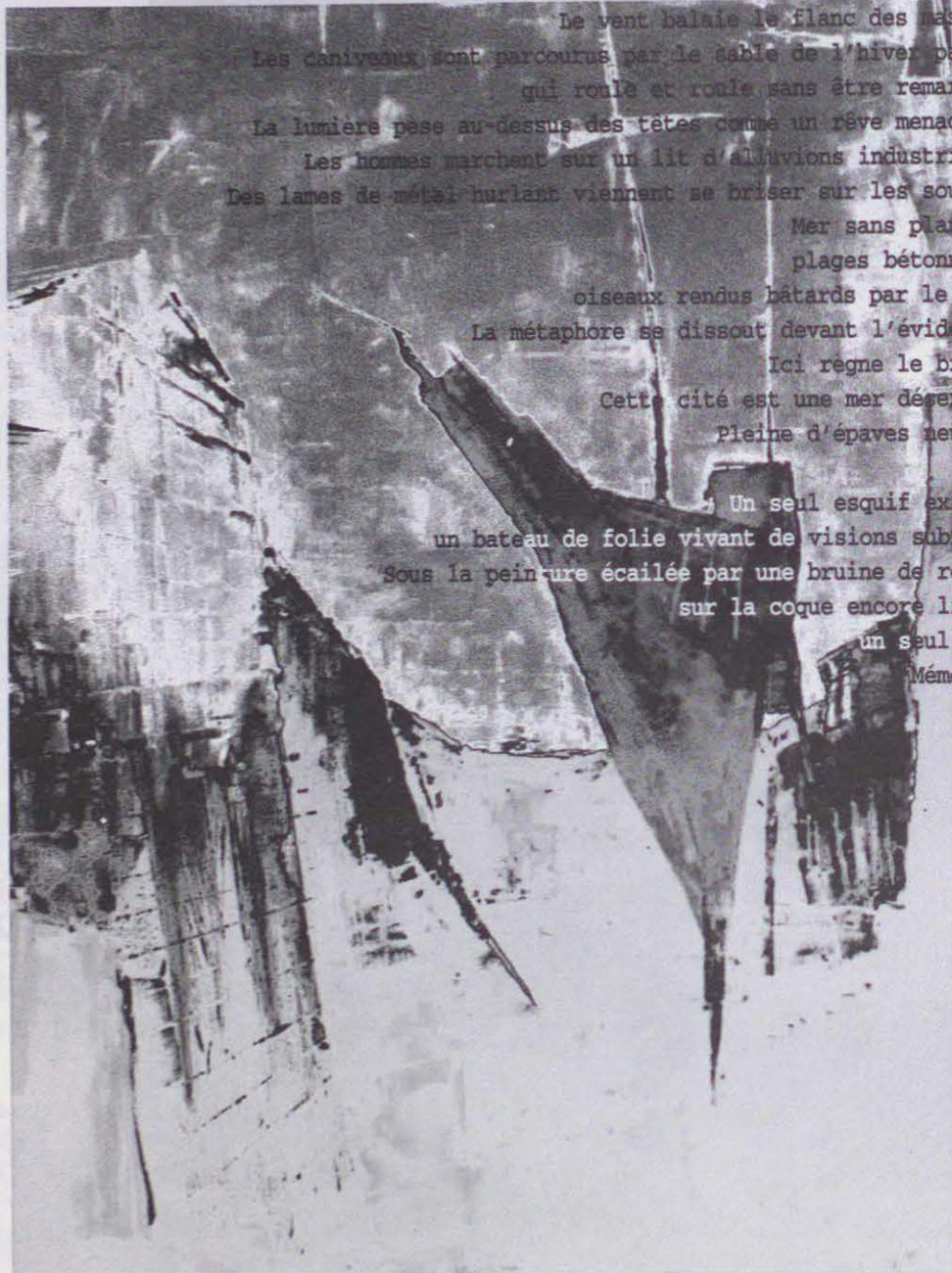
Cette cité est une mer désertée

Pleine d'épaves neuves

Un seul esquif existe
un bateau de folie vivant de visions subites
Sous la peinture écaillée par une bruine de rêves
sur la coque encore lisse
un seul mot

Mémoria

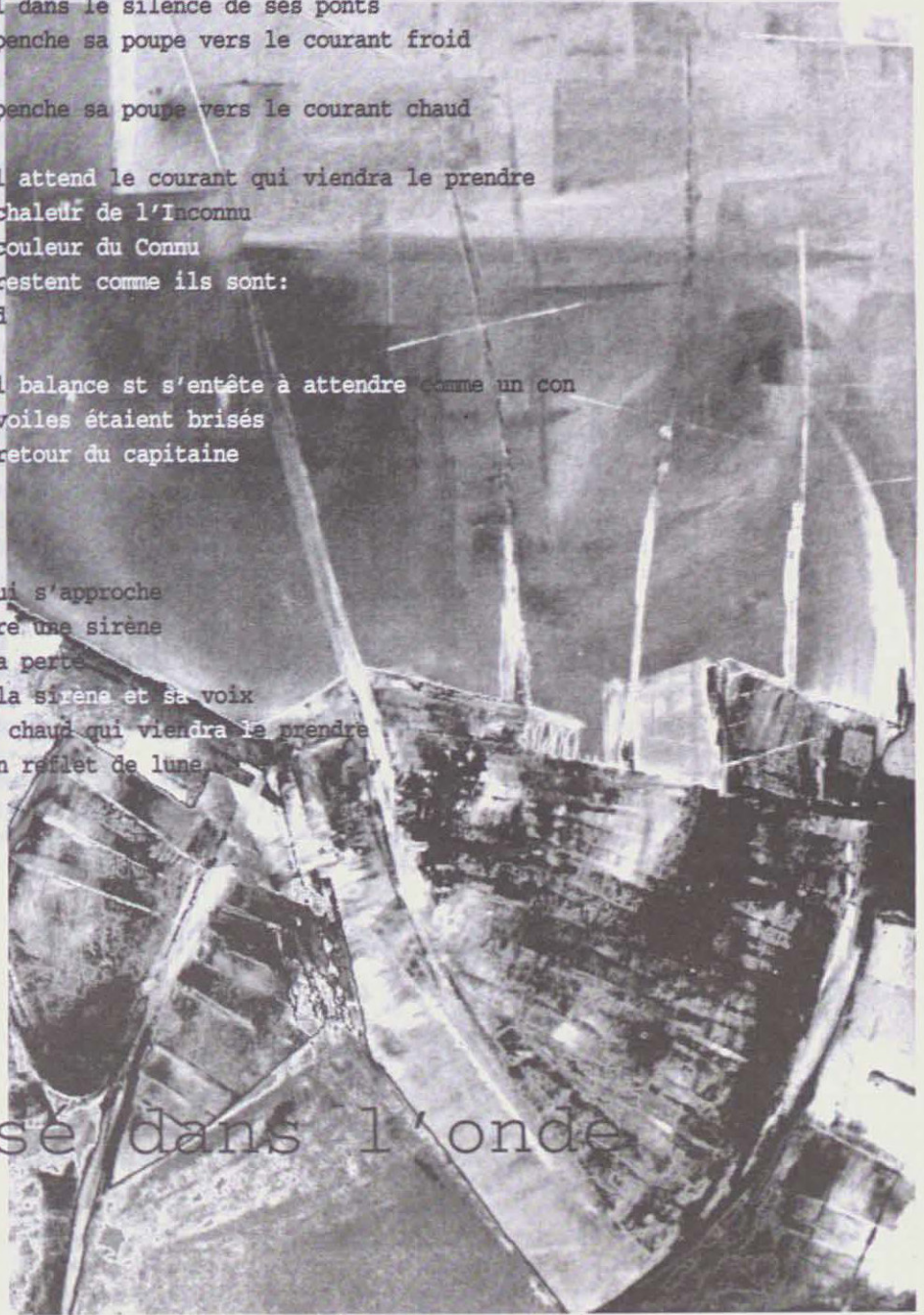
Olivier Ménard a complété son baccalauréat en architecture à l'Université McGill l'an dernier, et il est présentement à la recherche d'une maison d'édition qui acceptera de publier son recueil de poèmes.



by short soft boards, is a heavy black cast iron grate. The grate guards a deep void within the house, comforting ghosts and the darkness of the depths of the ancient soil. A hollow fear exudes from the mystery of this path through the walls.

Sur une mer pas si lointaine
s'est pris un navire frêle
au coeur d'un bain de sable et d'algues
Entre deux courants il s'agite
il penche et craque et subit les affres des vents
Il pleure la rouille de ses clous
se décompose dans le sel de ses larmes
assiste à sa mort lente
Son capitaine l'a quitté depuis maintes marées déjà
et il est seul dans le silence de ses ponts
et tantôt il penche sa poupe vers le courant froid
le Connu
Et tantôt il penche sa poupe vers le courant chaud
l'Inconnu
Et toujours il attend le courant qui viendra le prendre
Il espère la chaleur de l'Inconnu
Il espère la couleur du Connu
Mais ceux-ci restent comme ils sont:
chaud et froid
impalpables
Et toujours il balance et s'entête à attendre comme un con
comme si ses voiles étaient brisés
Il attend le retour du capitaine
en exil
Et parfois
le soir
il l'entend qui s'approche
C'est peut-être une sirène
Le signe de sa perte
Et il désire la sirène et sa voix
et le courant chaud qui viendra le prendre
au hasard d'un reflet de lune

L'enlise dans l'onde



En Macédoine, un fermier fait rouler un gâteau sur le flanc d'une colline - si le gâteau tombe du côté droit, le fermier bâtira sa ferme à cet emplacement. Dans le cas contraire, il cherchera un autre site. Dans le désert du Kenya, la nouvelle mariée enjambe un bol de lait de chèvre placé sur le seuil de sa nouvelle maison. Dans les sociétés indigènes, de tels rituels sont intrinsèques au processus de construction au même titre que la pose des pierres ou l'érection des poutres. Quelle était la signification de ces rituels, et en quoi consiste leur importance pour la pratique architecturale actuelle?

Through a wide double door, an overstuffed living room heavy with dark night conversations contrasts the unburdened room of green; the walls here a sky-blue. To the right stands a light pine cabinet spilling out with slippery yellow slabs of "National Geographic," images of life and adventure an eon and a million miles from the history played out in a quiet New England house. Atop this cabinet rests an old brass lamp, blue-shaded with a paper and string-fringed shade, festive against the heavy material of the room. A large window looks out into the same gray light that illuminates the air of the entire house. An old black and white television, its own cacophony of conversation, blares from another corner alongside the richly worn

BUILDING CEREMONIES IN INDIGENOUS ARCHITECTURE

A farmer in Macedonia rolls a cake down a hillside - if it lands face up, he will build his farmhouse there, face down and he will move on to another site. In the deserts of northern Kenya, a bride steps over a bowl of goat's milk on the threshold of her new home. These and many other rituals have long been incorporated into the construction process by men and women in indigenous societies, who felt them to be as real and necessary as the laying of stones and raising of timbers. Why were they so important, and what significance do they have for contemporary architectural practice?

RITUAL AND ORDER

It is through ritual that we weave our everyday activities into the fabric of the cosmos. In ritual, we reconstruct our cosmology and reaffirm our place in the universe. Like mythology, ritual serves as a reminder of cosmological order brought to life in the everyday activities of the people who share it. The language of ritual, however, is spoken through action, through the body. Ritual is symbolic action - that is, the actions of a person engaged in a ritual have meaning beyond "themselves." The fire in the new house, for example, is not lit with the embers from the hearth of the old house simply to keep the new house warm, but to establish continuity between the old dwelling and the new. Ritual can play many roles in society, defining and maintaining social structure not the least among them. However, we will be examining that aspect of ritual which represents organized and repeated activity with symbolic reference to the spiritual.

Ritual is the experience and expression of order - the order of things brought to life in the actions of our own bodies, brought to the life of the community in the sharing of a common action in a common space. Judith MacDougall's 1980 film, *The House Opening*, depicts just such a communal expression. After the death of an Aborigine man, his family vacates his house for one year while his spirit moves about the house restlessly, preparing for its journey to the next world. At the end of that year, his family gathers for a week-long ceremony that includes dances, feasts and songs. The culmination of this week is the house-opening ceremony. The man's wife enters the house, which has remained unoccupied since her husband's death, and goes from room to room carrying a bundle of burning eucalyptus branches. The spirit, fleeing the smoke, leaves the house and the family is able to return without fear of disturbing, or being disturbed by, the restless spirit.

The wife says of the house-opening ceremony, "I feel it's time the children knew where they were. If we lose this, there's no hope."¹ In this comment lies the deep connection between ritual and order: without ritual, we cannot know "where we are" in life, and without this knowledge we are lost. Why do we need these ceremonies to tell us where we are? How does our participation in ritual create such a profound order in our lives?

Our need for ritual is deeply rooted in our need for order. Ritual provides us with a kind of time and space in which we can, individually and collectively, focus



A Batammaliba earth-priest folds the ritual bundle, the *tatati*, into the building's foundation. Both the intangible symbolic action of the ritual and the tangible symbolic object, the *tatati*, will remain a part of the completed building. (Blier, 25.)



A house for the dead. A miniature version of the home is placed over the bones of the deceased by the Lao Song Dam of Thailand. Symbolic actions and symbolic objects mark passages in life, building, and the cosmos. (Izickowitz, *The Influence of the Spirit World on the Habitation of the Lao Song Dam, Thailand*, 117.)

¹ Judith MacDougall, director. Film: *The House Opening*, Australian Institute for Aboriginal Studies, 1980.

our attention on the underlying order that pervades the day-to-day. The experience of ritual tells us where we are – in time, in space, in life, and in the cosmos – both as individuals and as a community, sharing in the attended moment, in the attended place. The order ritual expresses is a cosmological order, not necessarily a social or geometric one. The Latin root, *ōrdō*, refers to a row of threads in a loom, and it is possible that the order of the universe is reflected in the fact that every point within the whole of the cloth is interconnected with every other.

There are two reasons why we need order – one cosmological and the other psychological. The cosmological argument is that order is *the* fundamental quality binding the stuff of the universe together. Rudolf Arnheim suggests a deep bond between mind and nature in his observation that, “Man’s striving for order, of which art is but one manifestation, derives from a similar universal tendency throughout the organic world.”² It is therefore necessary to grasp the order present in the world around us if we are to understand the world, perhaps even to function in it. This leads to the second argument in the case for order, one grounded in our own psychological makeup. “Modern psychology,” writes Rudolf Wittkower, “supports the contention that the quest for a basic order and harmony lies deep in human nature.”³ But how do we know where we are, or where we are headed, as we pass from one stage of life to another? In birth, coming-of-age, getting married, even in dying, we are crossing a threshold into a new world. A ritual is an act of passage; it is a life transition given form.

² Rudolf Arnheim, *Entropy and Art: An Essay on Order and Disorder*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971) 48.

³ Rudolf Wittkower, “Systems of Proportion,” in *Architect’s Yearbook*, (1953) 9.

rhythms of life This striving for order is present in all things, and its presence is manifested in common patterns of birth, growth, and death. We see the pattern of our own life cycle reflected in the change of seasons. Important thresholds within these cycles are often marked by ceremonies. Similar celebrations for the birth of a child, breaking ground for a new house, and the coming of spring, show how these common thresholds are marked by similar rites. In this vein, A.K. Ramanujan writes how in certain parts of India, “The ritual for building a temple begins with digging in the earth and planting a pot of seed. The temple is said to rise from the implanted seed, like a human.”⁴ When I was born, my parents planted a maple tree in the front yard. By the time I was twenty, that tree was forty feet tall, and the connection between my own growth and the growth of nature was made clear to me every time I looked out the window.

⁴ A.K. Ramanujan, “Structure and Anti-Structure: the Virasaiva Example” in *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, Victor Turner, ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974) 281.

deceiving the gods Looking across cultures, we can see many connections between rituals in the birth of a child and the birth of a house. At one time in China, for example, a father would hang a pair of his trousers over the headboard of his newborn baby’s crib in the hope that evil spirits would be drawn to the pants rather than to the baby.⁵ In Tibetan settlements in Ladakh, carpenters hang a large red wooden mock-up of a penis from the cornice of a newly completed house; the neighbours then praise the phallus instead of the house. The jealous gods, who might be angered by the vanity of human achievement if the house itself were praised, vent their wrath on the statue instead of on the new house.⁶

⁵ Doolittle, “Social Life of the Chinese” in Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 56.

⁶ Robert Powell, “Tibetan Houses in Ladakh” in *Art and Archaeology Research Papers*, no. 12 (Dec. 1977) 61.

In Kyirong, Nepal, Tibetan refugees sculpt small figurines, called *torma*, and charge them with evil influence, then destroy them. They perform this ceremony, not only at the inauguration of a building, but also at the birth of a family member.⁷ In each of these rites, an expendable ceremonial object is used as the target of evil influence that would otherwise be directed at the more precious entity – the child or house. In the eyes of many indigenous people, ground-breaking and house-building are seen as disruptions to the state of order that exists on the unspoiled site. Ritual is one means of alleviating this disruption and avoiding the vengeance of angry spirits.

⁷ Claes Corlin, “The Organization of Space in a Tibetan Refugee Settlement” in K.G. Izikowitz, *The House in East and Southeast Asia: Anthropological and Architectural Aspects* (London: Curzon Press, Ltd., 1982) 178.

carrying fire Important life changes, whether in the life of a person, a house or the cosmos, are often marked by ritual in indigenous cultures. The ritual experience creates a bridge from old to new. In coming-of-age ceremonies, young women and men leave childhood behind and enter the uncharted territory of adulthood.