

SIGNS OF WATER: COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES ON WATER, RESPONSIBILITY, AND HOPE

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Instructions for Being Water: A Performance Score

JuPong Lin and Devora Neumark, in collaboration with Seitu Jones

Our world is in crisis; our collective home Mother Earth is at increasing risk of irrevocable change. We write as a team of artist-researchers, in synchrony with a team of climate scientists who have issued a warning that humanity has very little time to dramatically lower greenhouse emissions “or face the prospect of dangerous global warming.”¹ They have stated that “entire ecosystems” are already beginning to collapse, while “summer sea ice is disappearing in the Arctic and coral reefs are dying from heat stress.”² In our desire to contribute to a radical alternative to the widespread eclipse of the truth about interconnectivity, we — the Fierce Bellies collective — lean towards each other and again outward. We invite new kinships and invoke ways of living and being to counter the current patterns of destruction³ stemming from the colonialist dualistic thinking that creates a sense of separation and otherness.⁴

The Fierce Bellies collective locates the launch of this composition in Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh unceded and traditional First Nations territory, currently known as Vancouver, BC. We also acknowledge the Indigenous peoples of our current home places: Nonotuck and Nipmuc lands now called Massachusetts; Kanien’keha:ka — unceded Mohawk traditional territory — a place which has long served as a site

of meeting and exchange amongst nations; Iqaluit (Inuktitut for “place of many fish”) in the Inuit Nunangat; and the home of the Dakota, where the Twin Cities began at the confluence of two rivers, Ohewawahi or “a hill much visited.”

We propose instructions for *being water*, instructions rooted in holistic thinking and oneness, in alignment with Chinese and Taiwanese, Jewish Kabbalistic, African American, and Indigenous traditions and practices.

NOTE TO READER: This is a live art performance score.⁵ The authors invite you to adapt the instructions to suit your conditions. In this iteration of the score, we have incorporated excerpts from Lin’s poem, *1000 Gifts of Decolonial Love*, and Neumark’s collaborative epistolary projects, *Letters to the Water* and *Letters to the Ice*. We invite readers to replace these with their own community’s creative voices, if and as desired.

1. **Study** the entire script, including the endnotes, before enacting this performance
2. **Find** at least three other people with whom you are willing to make kinship
3. **Gather** materials (print score on waterproof cloth)
4. **Make your way** to the nearest ocean, at low tide
5. **Acknowledge** the Indigenous Peoples of the place you choose
6. **Give thanks** to your ancestors whose migrations (forced or otherwise) have brought you to this place
7. **Step** into the water and open your senses
8. **Notice** the temperature of the water, the smell of the air, the touch of your feet
9. **Listen** with your entire being
Voice #1: (sound of the water)
Voice #2: (sound of your breath and heartbeat)
Voice #3: (sound of winged, water-bound, and four-legged beings)

Voice #4: (sound of wind)

Voice #5: (all performers voice the question below)

Lín ê lâng án-tsuánn kiò hòi-iúnn? (Taiwanese Hokkien)

How do your people call the ocean? (Non-English languages welcome)

All voices: (a chorus of above voices)

10. While in the water, someone from the group **speak** the following letter out loud (see free translation in English in Appendix A):

Bonjour Devora,

Je t'écris depuis le Nord du 50^e parallèle.

Chaque jour, c'est l'eau du Golfe qui passe d'abord me saluer avant de te faire signe à toi qui samedi lira cette lettre, à 1 000 kilomètres du monde boréal dans lequel je vis depuis deux ans.

Samedi, comme promis, l'eau passera d'abord par ici.

Samedi, je mettrai ma ligne à pêche à l'eau, à l'embouchure de la Mishtashipu (prononcer : «michetachébo»), de la Grande (Mishta) Rivière (shipu), là où la rivière, la Moisie, se jette dans le Golfe du Saint-Laurent pour l'accompagner dans sa puissance.

Samedi, je me tiendrai à la pointe de ce territoire magnétique où se croisent les courants les plus contradictoires.

Les Innus sont les gardiens du Nitassinan (prononcer «nitassinanne»), de la Terre-Mère. Historiquement, la Moisie constituait le lieu de rassemblement des Innus, des derniers nomades qui venaient chaque été y camper pour pêcher et fumer le saumon, pour y récolter les petits fruits, en faire provision pour l'hiver.

Samedi, il y aura certainement sur la plage quelques familles de Uashat ou de Mani-utenam. Les Mamans s'assoieront sur

leur glacière Canadian Tire avec leur café de chez Tim Horton et riront de bon cœur en attendant le moment propice pour lever le grand filet à saumon tendu à 500 mètres de l'embouchure. Samedi, il y aura plein de petits enfants bronzés qui pousseront des cris de joie en se baignant tout nus dans la Mishtashipu.

Samedi, je lancerai ma ligne dans cette eau nomade qui à chaque marée ramène vers ses grèves des épaves boisées qui font signe du Nitassinan: là où les épinettes noires sont la dentelle de la Terre.

Samedi, je me nourrirai de ce temps-là que j'aurai enfin à moi, pour moi, en regardant flotter ces dentelles d'eau douce qui bientôt deviendront salées, océaniques.

Samedi, l'omble de fontaine ou encore l'anguille décideront peut-être de faire mon souper.

Samedi, sur le bord de la Moisie, je me poserai et me reposerais. L'eau passe d'abord par ici.

(Valérie Gill, *Letters to the Water*, August 2015)

11. **Watch** for the changing tide
12. **Smell** the salt in the air
13. **Wade** deeper into the water

I grew up fishing on weekends with my father and uncles in the Twin Cities lakes. I learned to appreciate the form, lines & functions of boats ... and studied wooden boat building with a focus on African watercraft.

(Seitu Jones, January 2017)

14. **Share** stories about your first experience in a boat
15. While in the water, someone else from the group **speak** the following poem out loud:

From across the ocean, and many miles of mountains

and valleys, I fold, unfold, refold, shrinking the divide
between
my home on Turtle Island and my birthplace —
Tâi-uân; between the Japanese empire and occupied Taiwan,
an island someone called “mudball in the sea”⁶
My mother called it a speck, a booger picked from the
nostril of China.

(JuPong Lin, *1000 Gifts of Decolonial Love*, April 2020)

16. **Immerse** yourself fully
17. **Taste** the salt on your lips
18. **Spot** for bald eagles and other birds of prey
19. **Pay homage** to the lives lost at sea
 - Voice #1: (bonded through the Middle Passage)
 - Voice #2: (while yearning for safe harbour)
 - Voice #3: (extinguished by swallowed plastic or covered in oil)
 - Voice #4: (displaced by the rising seas)
 - Voice #5: (choked off from water by imperial expansion)
 - All voices: (a chorus of above five voices)
20. Someone from the group **speak** the following letter out loud:

Dear Water: The Blackfoot word *Kiitohksin* means “that which sustains us.” Not just the things that sustain us but the relationships & everything intangible we rely on (& that rely on us). We haven’t lived up to this vision of the world; we have abused you & our relationship with you. But this is not an apology; it’s a promise. In this time of reconciliation, mending partnerships starts with you — that which sustains us & binds us & creates us.
We are water & we must heal ourselves.

(Liam Haggarty, *Letters to the Water*, October 2016)
21. **Retreat** back to shore

22. **Sit** facing the open sea, a foot from the water's edge
23. **Be present** to the changing tide
24. When the water washes over your knees, someone else from the group **speak** the following poem (or another one of the group's choosing) out loud:

Black-tipped, wide-spread wings,
 Spread wide as the wings of the lost Siberian crane
 that landed in the fields of farmer Huang Jheng-jun
 one lazy June day,⁷ first sighting ever
 in Taiwan. The farmer named his rice in honor
 of this snail-eating helper friend — “Jin Ho.”

Fold, unfold, refold a prayer for the
 Siberian crane, one of the most critically endangered
 of the 11 sister cranes, pushed closer to extinction
 every warming year,
 their marshy homes drained for farming,
 their existence made precarious by the rising heat
 of our extractive habits, by our insatiable pumps sucking
 black gold out of sacred soil
 and water — the bluest gold — from our earthly commons.
 (JuPong Lin, *1000 Gifts of Decolonial Love*, April 2020)

25. **Wade** along the water's edge
26. **Find** a place where the water licks your hips
27. With your mind, **draw up** qi⁸ from the water through your legs,
 lower *dantyan*, *mingmen*, upper *dantyan*, head, and into the sky
28. With your mind, **draw down** qi from the sky through your legs,
 lower *dantyan*, *mingmen*, upper *dantyan*, head, and into the
 water
29. **Dive** into deeper water, immersing your body fully, facing down
30. **Float** and **hold your breath** for as long as you can
31. When everyone has re-surfaced, **listen** to each other **breathe**

32. Below the surface, **form** a qi ball between your hands

As you would on a cold day to warm your hands, rub them together while resting your attention on the feeling of your qi or life force. Feel the energy in each of your hands and also the connection between them. This may be subtle at first so your awareness may need to be heightened. Once you feel that your hands are warm and you can sense the qi, slowly begin creating space between them, keeping your palms, fingers, and thumb parallel to each other in a relaxed gesture. Alternate bringing your hands closer and further apart in a slow and steady rhythm to further awaken your sensitivity to the qi (but don't let your hands touch when you bring them together). Notice if you feel heat or an energetic flux between your palms.

33. **Expand** the qi ball and send it across the water to find where it connects with the shore nearest your heartland

34. While in the water, someone from the group **speak** the following letter out loud:

35. Ice is--

For me ice is something good.

I will relate to one of our communities: we believe that God resided in the ice in one of our mountains -- in Mt. Kenya, where the ice was, where the first man and the first woman were created.

So, I feel like ice is a kind of a god, is kind of a nature. It controls the world -- like destiny. It's connected -- if you see the ice in the north pole, when it melts the sea rises. It controls everything. So, ice I feel like for me, it's God. It's water. It's life. It's healing. It quenches your thirst. It's something really, really, really powerful. And from here we relate with ice -- like up in the mountain -- the highest place ... and ice is situated in a place where we also try to relate in terms of problems. Like we say "You are as tall as the mountain you climb"; and you find ice is there. So, ice is ... it's life. Here we are excited about ice. I remember a few years ago it iced in one area of Nairobi -- in the out-

side of Nairobi: it's a spectacle that we are wowed with. It's something that we've never seen here, so we really treasure it. We treasure it. Even my first relationship with ice, I remember it was in Scandinavia. Ice was melting and I was out in the snow, in the ice, in the place of ice. And, also, sometimes it used to rain like hailstorms, whereby it was ice, and we were fascinated about it. But it no longer rains the hailstorms -- the ice pebbles. So, there is a danger within our climate, and we need to restore our world, and we need to restore our ice.

(John Titi Namai, *Letters to the Ice*, 2021)

36. When the water rises above your waist, someone else from the group **speak** the following poem out loud:

And we resist, we fold, we hold onto
ancestral memory, manual memory, muscle knowledge,
plant medicine, animal relations, interbeing, sun-moon,
yin yang⁹ cycles, always moving like salty waves, falling
rising, folding-unfolding into infinite timelessness.

Folding a beak is an act of resistance,
a reversal of space and time.

We can make flesh of cultural memory, and release
a revolutionary chorus of all beings.

...

I fold for Bikini Atoll forever scarred by US nuclear weapons
testing,

Pu'uloa, Oahu, renamed Pearl Harbor by U.S.
occupiers,

Turtle island where Indigenous resurgence sings of
decolonial love

...

I fold for our children, for water, for life

And call us to rise up, spread wings and fly

(JuPong Lin, *1000 Gifts of Decolonial Love*, April 2020)

37. **Immerse** yourself fully in the water a third time
38. **Follow** the tide to shore
39. **Consider** building a boat



FIGURE 11.1. Seitu Jones building the *Lutra* with Goddard College MFA in Interdisciplinary Art advisees at Fort Worden, WA, 2011. Photo by MFAIA at Goddard College.



FIGURE 11.2. *Lutra* ceremonial launch with Goddard College staff and students and first outing in Puget Sound, 2011. Photo by MFAIA at Goddard College.



FIGURE 11.3. *Lutra* ceremonial launch with Goddard College staff and students and first outing in Puget Sound, 2011. Photo by MFAIA at Goddard College.



FIGURE 11.4. *Lutra* ceremonial launch with Goddard College staff and students and first outing in Puget Sound, 2011. Photo by MFAIA at Goddard College.

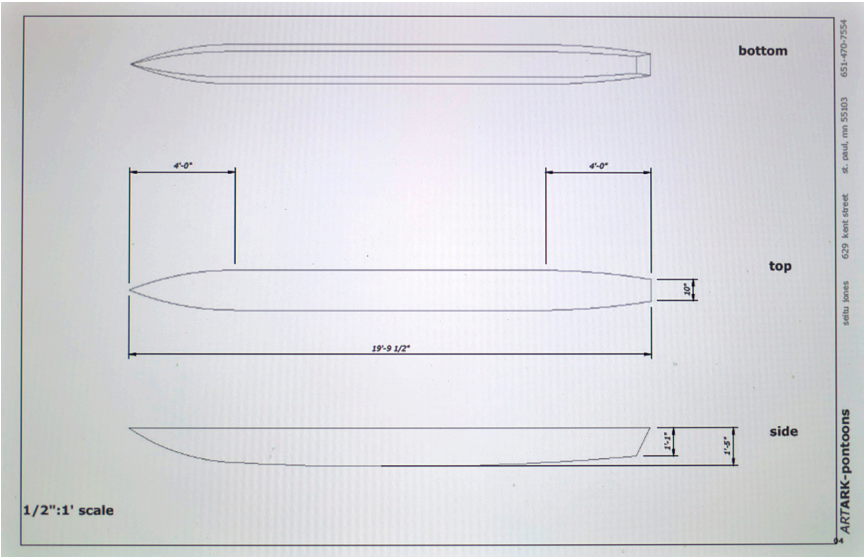


FIGURE 11.5. Seitu Jones, ArtArk design. Photo by Seitu Jones.

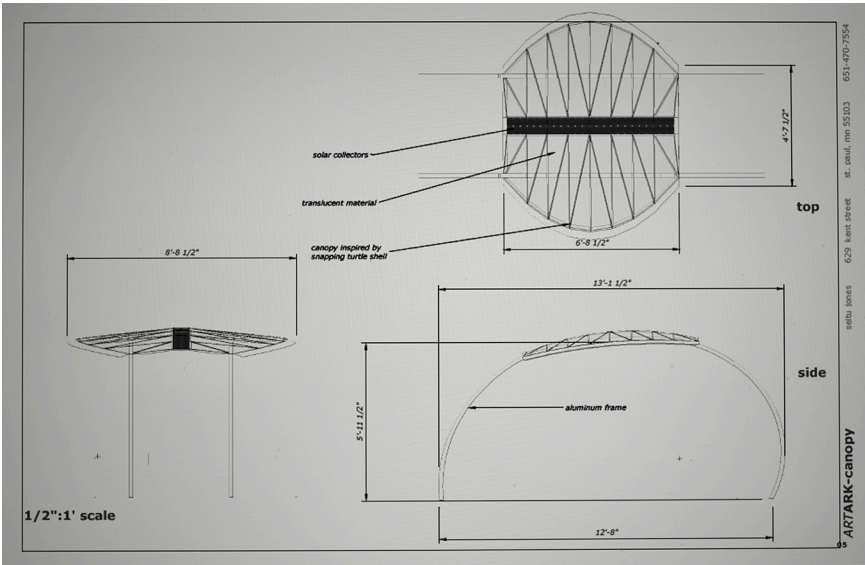


FIGURE 11.6. Seitu Jones, *ArtArk* design, canopy. Photo by Seitu Jones.



FIGURE 11.7.¹⁰ Test launch of the *ARTark* on Lake Phalen, St. Paul, built by Seitu Jones with boat apprentices from Urban Boatbuilders, May 31, 2017. Source: <http://urbanboatbuilders.org>.

40. **Link** arms and face the open shore
41. **Listen** to each other breathe
42. **Follow** the breath in and out of your body, breathing into each other's bodies
43. **Open** your pores
44. **Teach** one another how to save a life
45. **Retreat** to shore
46. **Sit** at water's edge
47. **Speak** the following letter out loud (see free English translation in Appendix B):

Chère eau,

Je t'aime. Je t'aime parce que tu es mon symbole de résistance. Tu t'infiltes, tu t'enrages, tu te calmes, tu résistes, tu aspirés, tu propulses, tu nourris, tu abreuves, tu nettoies, tu transportes, tu protèges, tu coules, tu tombes et tu t'élèves.

Tu es puissante et indomptable, je t'aime.

(M.-A. Poulin, *Letters to Water*, August 2015)

48. **Draft** a letter of gratitude to the water and **read** it out loud
49. **In repose, sense** your openings, your pores
50. When the skin on your neck feels dry, someone **speak** the following letter out loud:

Thanks to a gathering of molecules most extraordinary. A delicate balance of two tiny atoms dancing around a larger one. Millions of groupings moving and changing and holding together. An attraction that makes life possible. Thank you for your movement.

(Andrea Mackay, *Letters to the Water*, August 2015)

51. **Study** this image in Figure 11.8¹¹

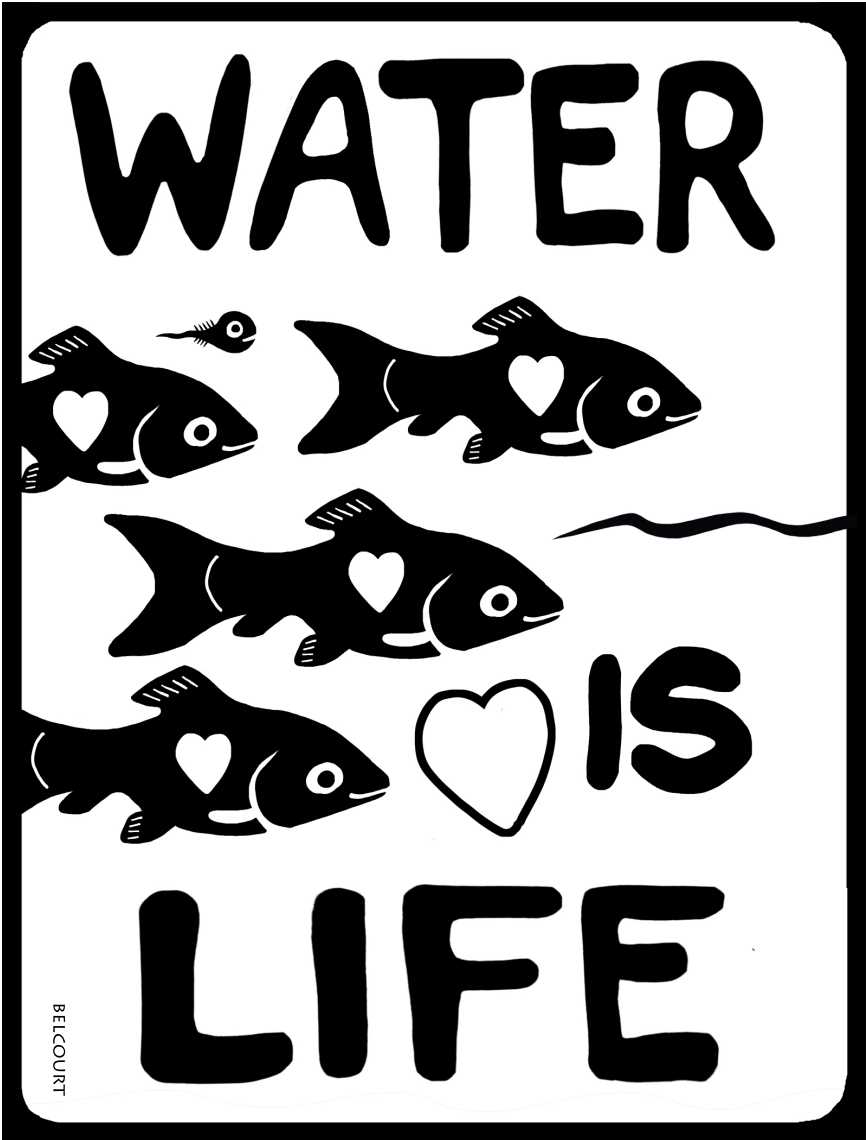


FIGURE 11.8. "Water is Life," by the Onaman Collective. Photo with permission.

52. **Consider** the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation’s fight against the Dakota Access Pipeline. Nick Estes wrote, in 2016, “Camp Oceti Sakowin, Red Warrior Camp, and Sacred Stone Camp, the various Native-led groups standing in unity against DAPL, have brought together the largest, mass-gathering of Natives and allies in more than a century, all on land and along a river the Army Corps of Engineers claims sole jurisdiction and authority over.”¹² As the fight against the pipeline continues to this day, an important lesson needs to be acknowledged that the pressure must be maintained across all sectors of society to protect water.
53. **Ask yourself:** What is your lifelong commitment to, “Water is Life”?¹³

Repeat as necessary.

NOTES

- 1 Ian Johnston, "World Has Three Years to Prevent Dangerous Climate Change, Warn Experts," *The Independent*, June 29, 2017. <http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/world-climate-change-save-humanity-experts-global-warming-rising-sea-levels-food-a7813251.html>.
- 2 Christiana Figueres, Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, Gail Whiteman, Johan Rockström, Anthony Hobley and Stefan Rahmstorf, "Three Years to Safeguard Our Climate," *Nature News*, 546 (June 29), 2017, <https://www.nature.com/articles/546593a>.
- 3 Colonizers accentuated divisions between privileged and non-privileged. "They created boundaries that divided colonized groups from one another and from their lands in ways that guaranteed a legacy of conflict and violence long after the colonial rulers departed," Val Plumwood, "Colonization, Eurocentrism and Anthropocentrism," in *Decolonizing Nature: Strategies for Conservation in a Post-Colonial Era*, ed. Martin Mulligan and W. M. Adam (London: Earthscan Publications, 2003), 51.
- 4 "The ideology of colonization, therefore, involves a form of anthropocentrism that underlies and justifies the colonization of non-human nature through the imposition of the colonizers' land forms and visions of ideal landscapes in just the same way that Eurocentrism underlies and justifies modern forms of European colonization, which see Indigenous cultures as 'primitive,' less rational and closer to children, animals and nature," Plumwood, "Colonization, Eurocentrism and Anthropocentrism," 53.
- 5 "I saw scores as a way of describing all such processes in all the arts, of making process visible and thereby designing with process through scores. I saw scores also as a way of communicating these processes over time and space to other people in other places at other moments and as a vehicle to allow many people to enter into the act of creation together, allowing for participation, feedback, and communications," Lawrence Halprin, *The RSVP Cycles: Creative Processes in the Human Environment* (New York: G. Braziller, 1969), p. 1.
- 6 This expression is from Keliher Macabe and Yonghe Yu, *Out of China or Yu Yonghe's Tale of Formosa: A History of Seventeenth-Century Taiwan* (Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc., 2004).
- 7 "Rare Crane a Boost to Taiwan's Troubled Wetlands," *Phys.org*, accessed August 28, 2016, <http://phys.org/news/2016-04-rare-crane-boost-taiwan-wetlands.html>.
- 8 "Qi is simultaneously what makes things happen in stuff and — depending on context — stuff that makes things happen or stuff in which things happen," Richard J. Smith, *The "I Ching": A Biography*. Lives of Great Religious Books (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 44.
- 9 "It is worth noting here that the moon also signifies water, the yin. Water bears life-giving power. Several myths describe women who become pregnant by touching water," Robin Wang, *Yinyang: The Way of Heaven and Earth in Chinese Thought and Culture*. New Approaches to Asian History 11 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 28.
- 10 <http://urbanboatbuilders.org>.

- 11 Christi Belcourt (Michif/Métis) and Isaac Murdoch (Ojibway), "Water is Life," Onaman Collective, 2016, <http://onamancollective.com/murdoch-belcourt-banner-downloads/>.
- 12 Nick Estes, "Fighting for Our Lives: #NoDAPL in Historical Context." *The Red Nation* (blog), September 18, 2016. <http://therednation.org/fighting-for-our-lives-nodapl-in-context/>.
- 13 The Hebrew phrase *mayim chayim*, or "living waters," means forever flowing water and represents energy, health, and fuel for the soul.

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Appendix A

Letters to the Water, August 2015, by Valérie Gill (free translation)

Hello Devora,

I am writing from north of the 50th parallel.

Saturday you will read this letter: every day it is the water of the Gulf, which first passes to greet me, that will come your way, 1,000 kilometers from the boreal world in which I've lived for the past two years. Saturday, as promised, the water will pass first through here.

Saturday, I will put my fishing line at the mouth of the Mishtashipu (pronounced "michetachébo"), from the Grande (Mishta) River (shipu), where the Moisie River flows into the Gulf of St. Lawrence to accompany its power.

Saturday, I will stand at the tip of this magnetic territory where the most contradictory currents cross.

The Innu are the guardians of Nitassinan (pronounced "nitas-sinanne"), of Mother Earth. Historically, the Moisie was the gathering place of the Innu, the last nomads who came here every summer to camp, to fish and smoke the salmon, to harvest the berries, to stock up for the winter.

Saturday, there will most certainly be some families from Uashat or Mani-utenam on the beach. The Moms will sit on their Canadian Tire coolers with their Tim Horton coffees and laugh heartily while waiting for the great salmon net stretched 500 meters from the mouth of the river. Saturday, there will be plenty of tanned little children who will shout for joy while bathing naked in the Mishtashipu.

Saturday, I will launch my line in this nomadic water, which at each tide brings back wooden wrecks, which signal Nitassinan: where the black spruce is the lace of the Earth.

Saturday, I will feed on that time that I will finally have to myself, and only for me, watching these bits of floating lace of fresh water that will soon become salty, oceanic.

Saturday, the brook trout or the eel may decide to make my supper.

Saturday, on the edge of the Moisie, I will self-reflect and rest. The water first passes through here.

Appendix B

Letters to Water, August 2015, by M.-A. Poulin (free translation)

Dear Water,

I love you. I love you because you are my symbol of resistance. You infiltrate, you enrage, you calm, you resist, you aspire, you propel, you nourish, you quench thirst, you clean, you transport, you protect, you flow, you fall, and you rise.

You are powerful and indomitable; I love you.

