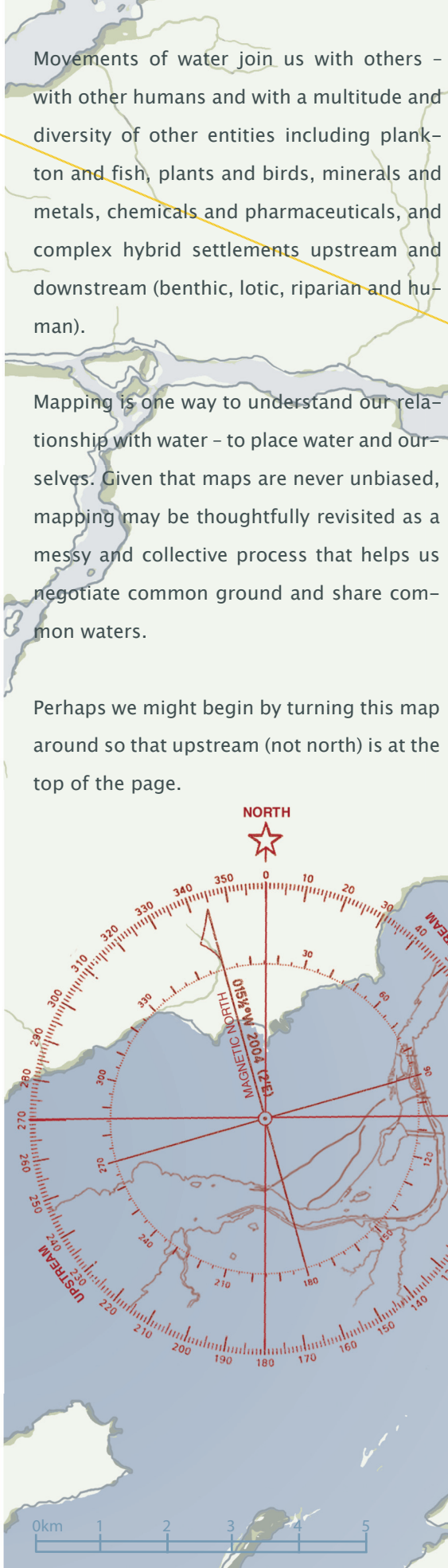


# MAPPING WATERY RELATIONS AT THE LACHINE RAPIDS

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The archipelago was not always drawn the same way. Mapping is a way of perceiving, understanding and defining places. A descriptive mapping in 1612 becomes the topographic conventions of 1945.



Movements of water join us with others – with other humans and with a multitude and diversity of other entities including plankton and fish, plants and birds, minerals and metals, chemicals and pharmaceuticals, and complex hybrid settlements upstream and downstream (benthic, lotic, riparian and human).

Mapping is one way to understand our relationship with water – to place water and ourselves. Given that maps are never unbiased, mapping may be thoughtfully revisited as a messy and collective process that helps us negotiate common ground and share common waters.

Perhaps we might begin by turning this map around so that upstream (not north) is at the top of the page.

## TOPONYMY

In naming a place, we establish a relationship with it by speaking, remembering and reiterating its configurations and meanings. Implicitly, the language of naming claims or acknowledges place for the native speakers of that language. Through maps, we mark lands and waters with culturally and linguistically specific toponyms. The French named their settlements for religion (Ville-Marie) and royalty (Montreal), whereas Kahnawá:ke is named for its watery location.

## KAHNAWÁ:KE

means “by,” “at” or “on the rapids” – identifying this proud community with river waters and Iohná:wate (the Lachine Rapids). The history of Kahnawá:ke is entangled with the changes that have been carried by swift river waters to its shores: struggles to occupy strategic portages and territories among various First Nations; the arrival of European missionaries, traders and colonizers; the subsequent emergence of two Canadas; and attempted assimilation of Indigenous Peoples, lands and waters. Kahnawá:ke is part of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy that challenges the Canada-US border.

## SEAWAY

The international St. Lawrence Seaway, negotiated by Canada and the US in the 1950s, facilitated the movement of commercial shipping between the Atlantic Ocean and the Great Lakes. Moháwk scholar Stephanie Phillips described the traumatic impact on the lands appropriated to construct the seaway and, particularly, the way it severed Kahnawá:ke from a once-direct and intimate relationship with the river. To different extents, the communities of Sainte-Catherine, Candiac, La Prairie, Brossard, Saint-Lambert and Longueuil also suffered radical changes in their relationships to the river. In July 2010, roughly 180 tonnes of bunker fuel leaked into the seaway near Sainte-Catherine. Though contained in a few days (and small in relation to the tragic BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico), this accident highlights how our daily use of waterways are risky. Thus, Bruce Power’s proposal to ship defunct radioactive steam generators for recycling in Sweden via the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway has raised the passionate protest of many seaway communities. Perhaps relations to waters are not entirely broken.

## TIOHTIÁ:KE

(or the Montreal archipelago) means “where the people divide” in Kanien’kéha (Mohawk). Like all living beings, people follow and move with waters. Tiohtia:ke is where the Ottawa and St. Lawrence rivers meet and divide again in a complex dance of islands and lakes just east of the Beauharnois Axis. The St. Lawrence flows between the rocky Precambrian Shield to the north and the Appalachian Plateau to the south, in a fertile valley that holds an intense diversity of life. Water carries life, death and radical change. Water has brought different peoples to this archipelago. The many encounters of the Huron-Wendat, Algonquin and Iroquois Nations took place in, on and near these river waters. Europeans also arrived this way, bringing strange cultures of language, technology and bacteria.

## FISH WATER KIN

In 2010, Henry Lickers from Ahkwasáhsne proposed that we understand the Oka (Kanehsatá:ke) Crisis as a consequence of changes in the river. As river waters became polluted with the effluents of so-called industrial progress, the lives of those most intimately connected to the river were the most affected. Fish, and people who ate fish daily, were displaced as the land and waters radically changed – environmentally, nutritionally and therefore culturally. This material displacement is not separable from political and legal mechanisms used to appropriate lands and waters. As relations to waters became toxic, so the kinship between fish and humans was poisoned. Given the entangled flows of shared waters, all inhabitants of the archipelago drink from this same river.

## RAPIDS, NOT CHINA

The watery relations of the rapids are many. This ongoing event of fast turbulent flows is also an important knot in the river. Control of the portages around the rapids were strategic to the relations between the Iroquois, Wendat and Algonquin. These rushing tangled currents were not navigable by heavy European vessels, which catalyzed the founding of Ville-Marie and then Montreal. Its noisy, powerful persistence provoked construction of canals and seaway, bridges and dams. The rapids and its shores are a unique biodiverse refuge for plants, birds, fish and humans. These rapids have been called Iohná:wate, Grand Sault, Grand Sault Saint-Louys, Saut Saint-Louis, Rapide de St. Louis and Rapides de Lachine. The current name is a compression of “La Chine,” a reference to René-Robert Cavalier, Sieur de La Salle, who once lived beside the Lachine Rapids and who explored many places but never found a hoped-for passage to China.

## WATER POWER PARK

Built in the 1890s, the Lachine Rapids Powerhouse extended its engineered arms into the current until it was decommissioned in the 1930s. River currents responded to this structure with eddies and sedimentation at its downstream end. The resulting wetlands have become the post-industrial Parc des Rapides (part of the National Migratory Bird Sanctuary of the Ile aux Hérons). This protected eddy co-exists with dense urbanization in LaSalle and suggests that there is hope for some form of viable, biodiverse and hybrid urbanity. This rich shoreline park is neither purely natural nor cultured, and has been enthusiastically adopted by birds and birders, plankton, fish and fisherfolk, strollers, whitewater kayakers and many other forms of lotic life.

## THIRST, SEWAGE, SWIMMING

It is from the mouth of the Aqueduct Canal (just above the visible rapids), that Montreal extracts the majority of its drinking water. The filtration and pumping stations along this canal move the water to various reservoirs on the slopes of Mount Royal. This urbanized island is like a creature swimming with its head in the current: it drinks water upstream while wastewaters leave the island at the furthest point downstream. The wastewater treatment plant only began full operations in 1995. Where there were once many beaches along the river, a link between beaches, untreated sewage and water-borne illness led to a distrust of the river. People stopped swimming in the river. Now, people are returning to the water – especially for whitewater sports like kayaking and surfing in the standing waves of the rapids and in front of Habitat 67. In geological time, the St. Lawrence River is young (about 6000 years old). The shores of the Montreal Archipelago have endured an intense history of anthropogenic alterations including: the early absorption of Normandin Islet into a pier in the Port of Montreal; the engineered waters of the Lachine and Aqueduct Canals; the construction of the bridges that suture Montreal Island to the South Shore; the reshaping of existing islands and lands to make the Seaway; and the making of new shores for Expo ’67. Ile des Soeurs and Verdun, using earth excavated from Montreal’s Metro system and elsewhere.

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