Akikpautik (or Chaudière Falls) in the Kitchissippi River, in Canada’s National Capital Region, has long been considered a sacred place for gathering and worship by Algonquin peoples. Since 1908, it has been dammed, first harnessed for private industrial use and later for public hydroelectric generation. In this state, the Falls have remained inaccessible to the indigenous communities for which it is sacred, as well to the general public.

Over the course of the past decade, local and federal layers of government supported core plans for the architectural and landscape redevelopment of the Falls and its surrounding islands according to Algonquin Elder William Commanda’s Circle of All Nations vision. Undamming the Falls is a key part of this vision — an act that would be of restorative significance to the culture and ecology of the Ottawa / Gatineau region, and one that could be seen as a step toward remediation with the area’s indigenous peoples.

An energy subsidiary of the City of Ottawa now owns most of the dam, and is currently expanding its hydroelectric capacity, including proposals that increase a limited “access” to what — while entirely dammed — is still referred to as the “Falls”. Calls for the Falls to be freed, and for the full implementation of the Commanda plan, have been ignored, with the surrounding islands recently rezoned from parkland to allow for the construction of Zibi, a commercial condominium development.

“The Falls from Here” consists of a map of the region, hypertext and field recordings of the Falls from points of inaccessibility.

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Akikpautik ("Pipe Bowl Falls"), also known as the Chaudière Falls, (dammed), recorded July 27/August 6 2015, on the unceded, unsurrendered Algonquin territory of Ottawa/Gatineau, Canada.

dammed, nineteen-oh-nine,
to half-mute (or less)
voice hoarsened and
rough with log

the hush of time has
not dampened yr murmur

nor have words been beaten
from you.

still,
a long way from "cathedrals", this:
the grind and clank and spit
of dull function

stirs the cauldron, now
(some offering)
& jack-hammer religion
checks yr grammar w/ the rod.

can i hear you? mist.
the turbines hum.

"go, atheist," wrote Lett,
to what brink? the closest

as close as one can ring
a sacred hiss
thru noisebramble of

the indifferent hour, rushing
over the bridge

and the evertour de bikepath.

the birds know. and the gulls fly
warily

over yr body
where settlers fight
for the scraps of a deed
or a history;

waving it proud, as if indemnity
for what is

whilst the rest of us glow in our hovels

at night w/ contentment
& eco justifies all.

but in the scent of tobacco
in the dream of a fish you

plummet toward yr rightful place
throat open, full,
cascading;
the roar of eel on yr lips

(beyond e.b. eddy & domtar scrip)
to a time of deep knowing.

now, perhaps

i hear yr whisper,
his sing w/ judgement.

soon, i read, they will let us
move closer than ever before
onto promontories of thin
history, safe

places; perspectives
from which

to nod our heads, look out for a moment,
and turn away.