



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

Edited by Robert Boschman & Sonya L. Jakubec

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The background of the book cover is a photograph. On the left, there are two large, blue, corrugated pipes. The pipe in the foreground is partially covered by dense green ivy. The background of the image is a body of water reflecting a cloudy sky and some trees.

*Edited by*

ROBERT BOSCHMAN  
& SONYA L. JAKUBEC

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*Community Perspectives on  
Water, Responsibility, and Hope*

## SIGNS OF WATER

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*This book is dedicated  
to the memory  
of  
Milton Born with a Tooth  
(1958–2019)*





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# Foreword

*Robert William Sandford*

Global Water Futures Chair, Water & Climate Security  
Institute for Water, Environment and Health  
United Nations University

The world is waking up to the fact that there has never been a time in history when it was more important, wherever you live, to know where the water you drink comes from; how much of it is used and for what purposes; and the condition in which it is returned to the river for downstream use of others. We are also waking up to the fact that water will be more ecologically precious than we can even begin to imagine in the future and that we must, for the sake of the future, value it as we never have before.

To that end, this is a book that actually fulfills the promise of embracing the widest range of awareness of water and culture not just regionally and nationally, but globally. It is truly multi- and transdisciplinary in perspective. The book demonstrates just how many ways a thoughtful observer can immerse themselves in water. In this book, water is viewed as a form of liquid modernity. The reader is invited to ponder the notion of the aquagenesis of human life while, at the same time, react to confront the challenges of the digital revolution, neoliberalism, and all of the anthropogenic hazards of this problematic century head on and to do so with self-deprecating wit, equanimity, and optimism.

If you savour posthuman political theory, there is a chapter in which you can lose yourself in metaphorical vampire contemplation of Detroit's neoliberal racialized liquidity. If music videos are your *métier*, there is a deep critique of the water scenes in Beyoncé's *Lemonade* album. In other chapters, less metaphorical and far blunter realities relate to access to clean water surface from cultural settings as widely diverse and geographically different as Northern Canada, the American west, the Amazon, Sub-Saharan Africa, and India. In one chapter you accompany the author on a walk through a graveyard in a remote Alberta First Nation. Many of those buried there died prematurely—a testament to the deteriorating health of local residents linked directly to alarming industrial impacts on the condition of their water supply. In Arizona, the reader is invited to bear witness to the consequences of irremediable damage to aquifers due to the breakdown of long-term intergenerational standards of care. In Brazil, we confront the gap between promise and practice with respect to the rights of Indigenous peoples. In Northwest Cameroon we confront the global issue of soil depletion and we are introduced to all the usual suspects that threaten the future in the absence of good governance. In another chapter we are uplifted by the enormous power of stories and story-telling to remind us of what we know from the past and how we must act if we are to have hope for the future.

While each of the chapters offers its own insights, the value of the book also resides in the comparative example offered through the rich, elaborate weaving of stories and the broad range of shared experiences related to how water informs our way of life. Pull on any thread in the fluid fabric that holds this book together and you will see that thread connected somehow to every other and all connect in some way to the link between water and culture. If you care about reliable drinking water supply, sustainable water management, hydro-ecological stability, the human right to water, Indigenous water issues, water and community, or how water is linked to climate change, this book cannot but bring you to the threshold of both optimism and outrage.

Ultimately, however, this is a book about hope. We now know what Indigenous peoples have known for thousands of years. We can reduce and moderate the threat of disruptive global change by protecting, restoring, and constantly rehabilitating natural system function. From this we

see that this is not the end of the world. It is just the beginning of another. There is great power in realizing this, for it is at the local level—where we live—that we have the most power to bring about change and to act most effectively in service of where and how we live and who we love, now and in the future.

In sum, this book makes it clear that if we are to have any hope of addressing the threat of climate disruption in time, we need reconciliation—meaningful reconciliation—first with one another, and at the same time with the Earth. Such reconciliation would demand that we first restore local identity and humanity’s sense of place and connection; that we restore truth; restore responsibility to human dignity, economic morality, and equality, and in so doing restore common purpose and a vision for the future of humanity and the planet. Of that message, I am sure that Milton Born with a Tooth, to whom this book is dedicated, would greatly approve.





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