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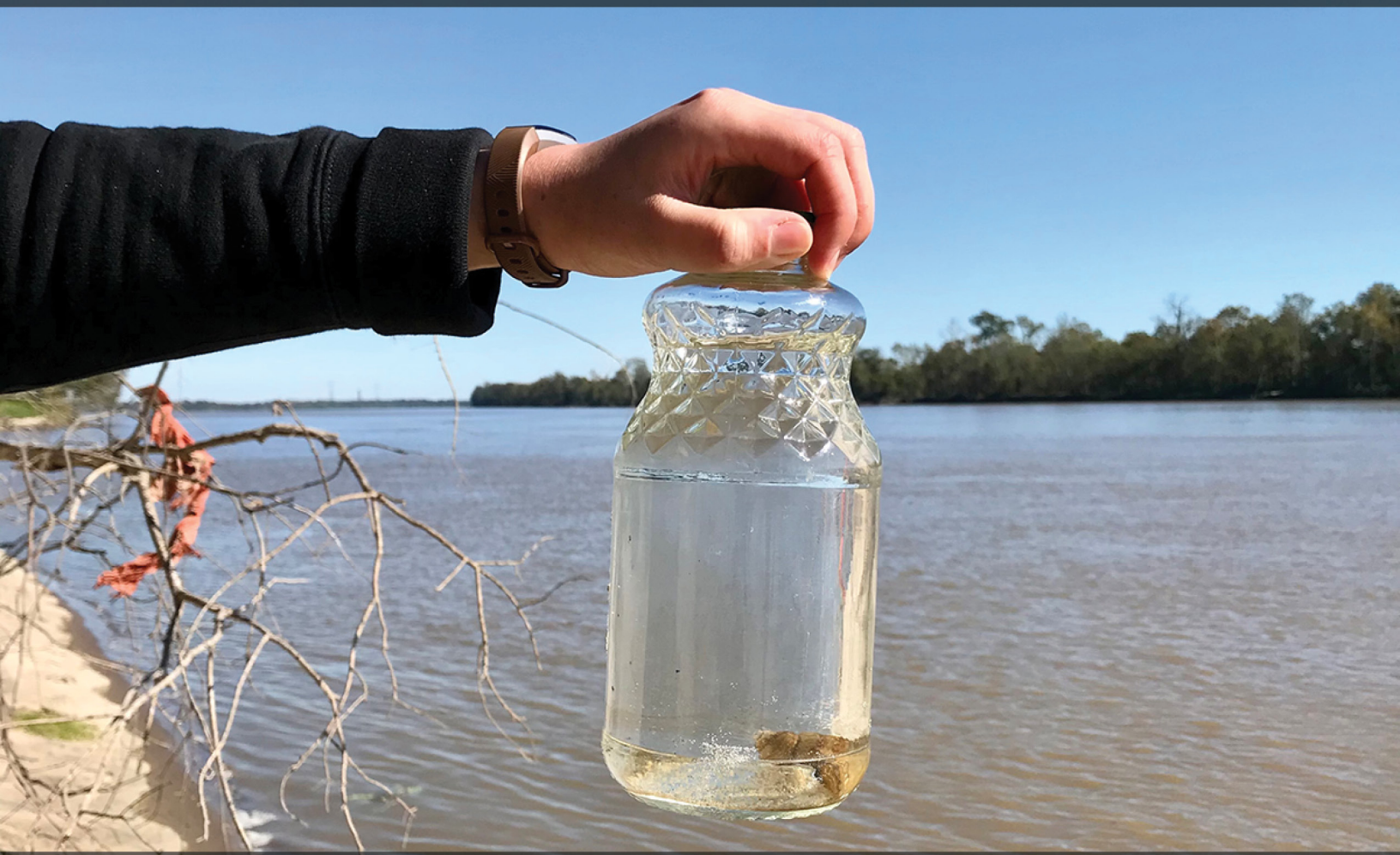
OPEN RIVERS : RETHINKING WATER, PLACE & COMMUNITY



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The cover image is courtesy of Michelle Garvey from her article in this issue.

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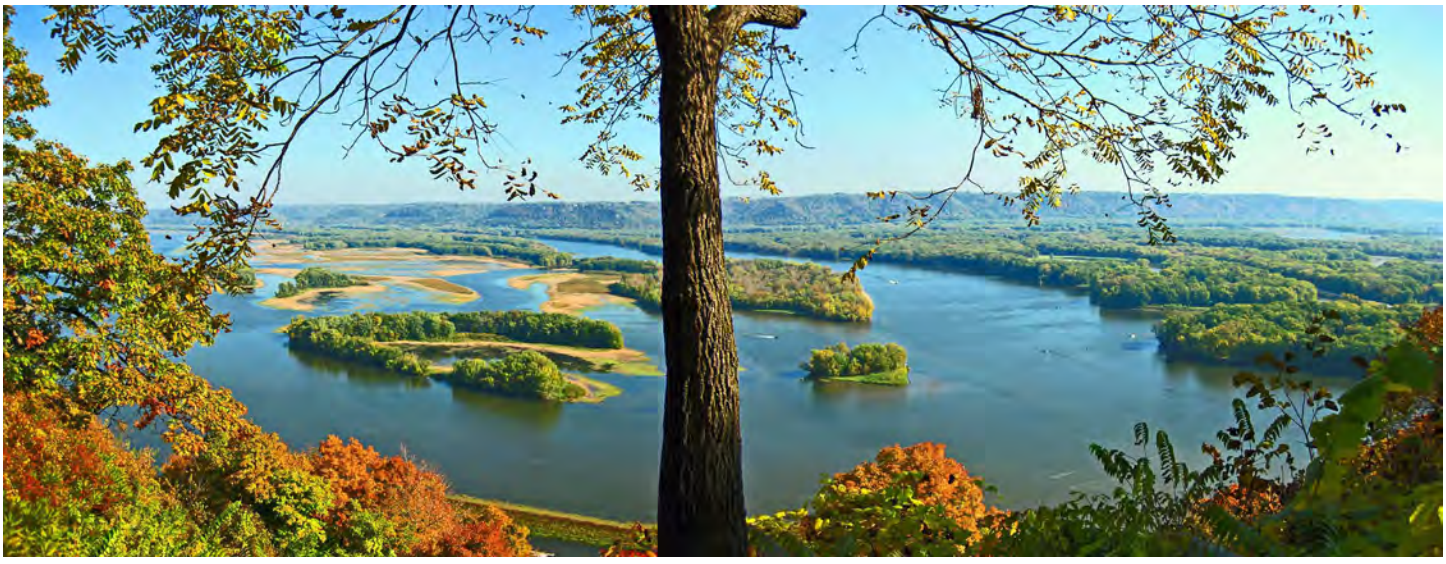
By John Kim

Introduction to the Mississippi River Open School

The *Mississippi River Open School for Kinship and Social Exchange* (*Open School*) (2022–2025) has engaged pressing issues at the intersections of race, environment, and extraction through education, cultural exchange, and action. A core aspect of this work has been partnerships with communities, many on the front line of struggles against resource extraction and climate-change-related natural disasters. A concept that has situated much of our work has been the Anthropocene, the proposal that human activities have caused widespread changes to Earth systems to such an extent that we have entered a new geological epoch. As articles in this collection suggest, the Anthropocene allows us to connect disparate polycrises experienced along the Mississippi River, including biodiversity loss, racial health disparities, destruction of wetland habitats, and flooding, as part of these interrelated global changes to Earth systems.

Mississippi River Open School
for Kinship and Social Exchange



Mississippi River in autumn. Image by Christopher Osten, via Unsplash.

The *Open School* consists of six regional locations, which we refer to as river hubs, spanning the entirety of the Mississippi from its headwaters to the Gulf of Mexico. The northernmost river hub is coordinated by water protectors, land stewards, and artist-activists as a space for land-based education and action against impending threats to the environment. The Upper Mississippi hub foregrounds Indigenous and Black perspectives and histories around southeast Minnesota and southwest Wisconsin. Along the vast midsection of the Mississippi's meander, a constellation of people are working on issues of race, ecology, and place at three additional hubs, located in St. Louis, Missouri, southern Illinois, and Memphis, Tennessee. The southernmost river hub is in and around New Orleans, Louisiana and comprises a group of cultural organizers, activists, and educators.

This edition of *Open Rivers* consists of feature articles and columns we refer to as toolkits that illustrate our work on the project. As organizers and activists, we seek to engage various publics in order to make meaningful interventions into the problems facing the Mississippi watershed and share our activities widely both inside and outside educational institutions.[1] To this end, we have employed creative practices designed to respond to these issues. These toolkit columns are a sampling of them. With contributions from diverse partners up and down the river, the types of columns are wide-ranging; they include drawing exercises, recipes, emergency communication devices, best practices for showing up, and more.

The essays found in this collection, by contrast, are longer form research articles either about the *Open School* or directly inspired by it. The topic of flooding appears in a number of the articles as both a sign of the current climate chaos and a reminder of nature's unmanageability. This is appropriate for a collection about the Mississippi, which has been prone to deadly flooding along its entire span, from its headwaters region to the gulf. Quoting lyrics by India.

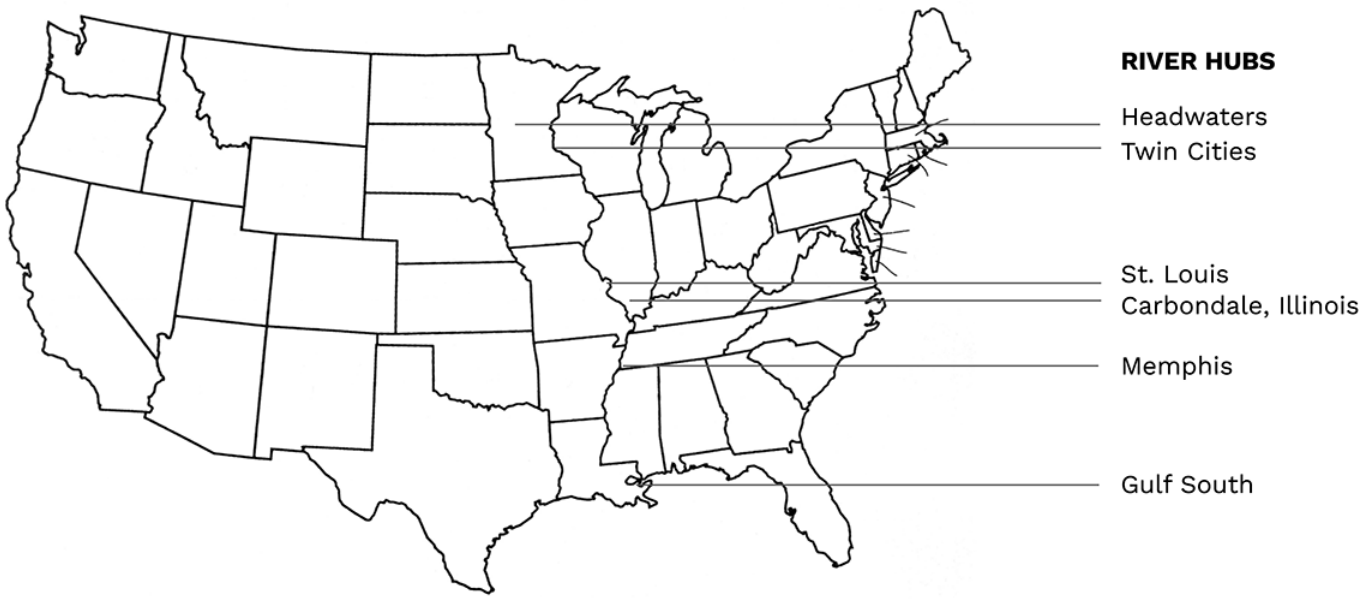


Figure 1. Map of Open School river hubs along the Mississippi River. Image courtesy of John Kim.

Arie, Ebony Aya references flooding in her essay, "Spirituality and Ecology: (Re)Membering Black Women's Legacies":

> River rise, carry me back home.
> I cannot (re)member the way
> River rise, carry me back home
> I surrender today.

I puzzled over these lines, for they speak to finding solace in death caused by flooding. The lines reflect Aya's ambivalent relationship with nature, which she traces to the generational trauma of slavery: "we as Black people have been forced to produce from it (slavery, sharecropping) and have subsequently been punished by it in ways that it did not seem other communities were (Hurricane Katrina and the earthquake in Haiti in 2009 to name just a few examples)." She calls for a reclamation of Black ecological consciousness as a way to repair this historical trauma.

With the rising frequency and severity of floods, how might we read India.Arie's lines in light of the concept of the Anthropocene? Does it speak to an acceptance of the Anthropocene as a radical form of ecological understanding? A way to respond to these questions comes out in pairing Ebony Aya's essay with oft-quoted lines by Toni Morrison:

> You know, they straightened out the Mississippi River in places, to make room for houses and livable acreage. Occasionally the river floods these places. "Floods" is the word they use, but in fact it is not flooding; it is remembering. Remembering where it used to be. All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was. Writers are like that: remembering where we were, what valley we ran through, what the banks were like, the light that was there and the route back to our original place. It is emotional memory—what the nerves and the skin remember as well as how it appeared. And a rush of imagination is our "flooding." (Morrison 2008, 77)

The Mississippi River is heavily engineered with dams and levees that discipline its length in order to make the river pliant to the movement of capital. When the river floods, it overtops these human-made structures and "remembers" its unbounded course. Flooding is a reminder of nature's indifference to human ambition and an affront to our need for control.

Though often a disaster for the human inhabitants who strive to make a living along the Mississippi's dried-out banks, flooding is a deferred miracle for the exuberant other-than-human life that needs this water to thrive. In her essay, "Imagining Life-as-Place: Harm Reduction for the Soft Anthropocene," Sarah Lewison diagnoses the need to exercise control and mastery over other-than-human worlds as a historic trauma in our relationship with nature. Lewison defends the concept of the "bioregional" as key to unlocking a therapeutic process of healing this social and ecological disconnection through the application of creativity, compassion, and direct action.

Groups that resist the damming of a river offer inspiration for coinhabiting the world with the other-than-human in ways that reduce harm. Brian Holmes's essay about the Paraguay-Paraná River, a system that spans the south-central part of South America, celebrates the efforts of the Casa Río eco/art group which has successfully resisted efforts to control the river and its seasonal flooding. To live with floods suggests a modality of life in which we do not subject nature to human domination, instead practicing what Holmes calls a "biocultural" relation with the river. In his essay "Fluvial Networks of Creative Resistance," Joseph Underhill argues that the River Semester experiential education program also prefigures such a life for students who live and learn while immersed in the Mississippi River's arterial braids and flows for over one hundred days.

For Toni Morrison, a flood is also a metaphor for a remembering of the repressed, the time before the traumatic rupture in our relation with the

other-than-human. We must overcome the deeply inscribed need for control over nature in order to release the possibility of reciprocal pleasures with it. In "Moving through Water Together," Stephanie Lindquist describes alternative artistic and cultural practices, including hosting group saunas and sweating, that release pleasures in our relations with and experience of water. Ecological practices that promote kinship and delight are also explored in Lynn Peemoeller's essay "Pokelore: How a Common Weed Leads Us to Kinship with Our Mid-River Landscape" accompanied by Jennifer Colten's photographs. In looking at the history of pokeweed recipes, we see how cuisine and food cultures respond to anthropogenic changes in the regional composition of our other-than-human kin.

As floods rise around us, we are swept headlong into an unsettled future. In alignment with India. Arie's lyrics, these essays advise us to "surrender" to the waters in at least two reparative senses: they call for a transformation of modes of knowledge production that have led us deep into the Anthropocene, and they also prescribe ways of living in good relation with the other-than-human that prepare us together for what lies in wait downriver.

Finally, not all the toolkit contributions and essays made it into this issue of *Open Rivers*. You can visit our website to read more about the Mississippi River Open School for Kinship and Social Exchange.

Action Camps Everywhere

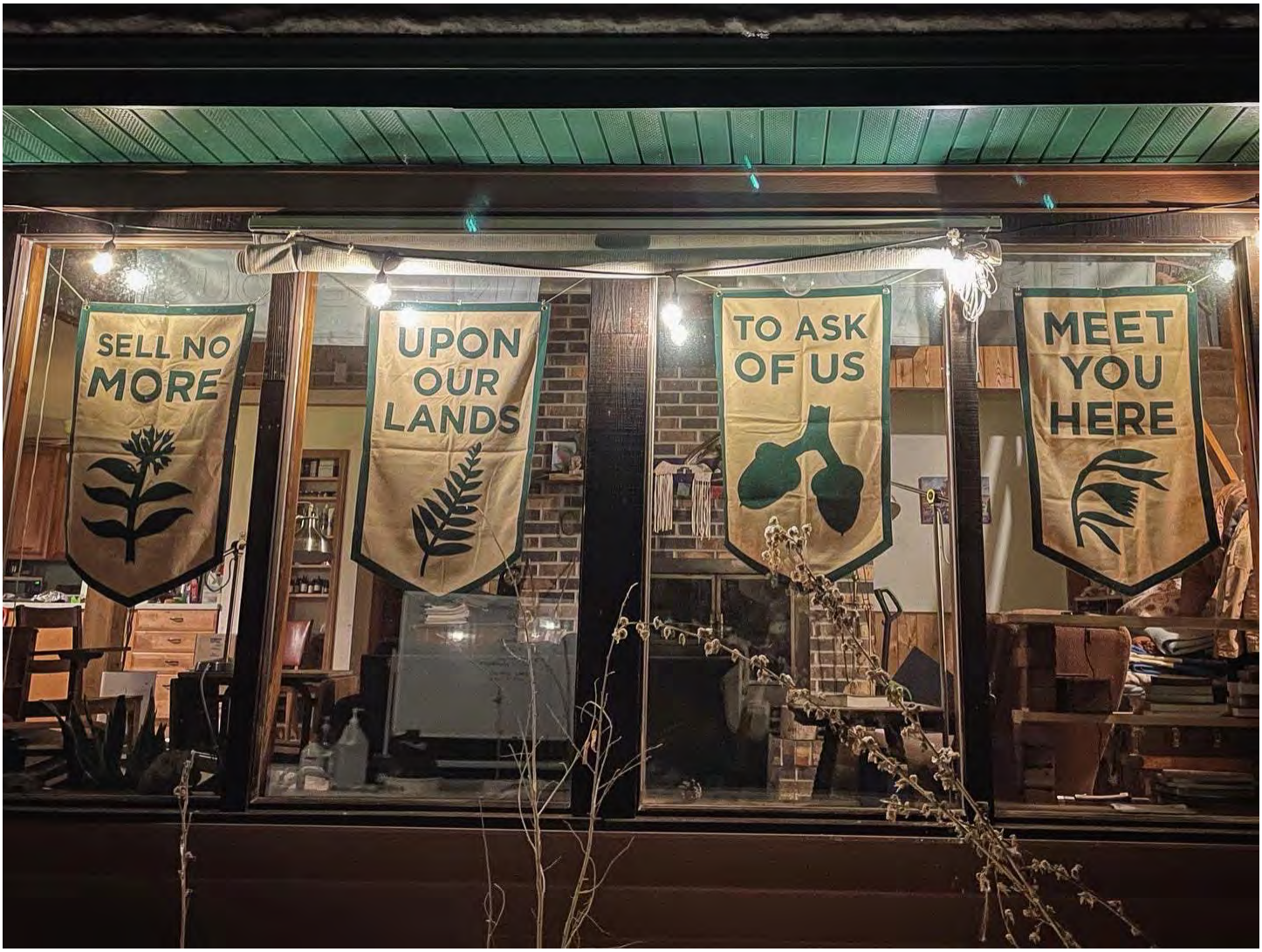
The remainder of this article is adapted from a talk for the 2024 International Roundtable at Macalester College. The theme of the year's roundtable was *"Slowing Down, Seeking Roots, Making Sanctuary": Belonging Beyond the Anthropocene*. I was invited to give a keynote address that reflected on the *Open School* because it resonated with the roundtable's theme in a number of ways that I discuss below. Given the context, this essay is not intended as a post-project reflection on the *Open School* in its entirety, though it offers a few summative ideas that I discovered through my participation in the project. The *Open School* has been collaborative from its inception, involving dozens of collaborators along the length of the river, and this is reflected in the diversity of articles that appear in this edition of *Open* Rivers.[2] These remarks, however, were written by me and reflect my partial perspective on these activities, as is evidenced in the fact that I draw primarily on examples from the region I call home, the Upper Midwest.

Since its inception in 2022, the *Open School* has explored diverse activities and approaches. The ones I selectively focus on in this introduction I characterize as solidarity programs in the Anthropocene: programs that resist conditions that contribute to the Anthropocene and can prefigure life after it. I describe how these programs are variously educational, community-centered, research-based, activist, or some combination of these. An emphasis on solidarity suggests that such programs flourish with the formation of extraordinary communities that model collective action by drawing direct learning or inspiration from alternative educational practices, such as forest schools, Indigenous and traditional forms of ecological knowledge, cultural organizing, and diverse histories of mutual aid. The first part of this article reviews examples of this work; the second section steps back to discuss conceptual themes and frameworks that eddy around and through these activities. Together, these sections generate specific recommendations for educational reforms that are responsive to looming social and environmental crises associated with the Anthropocene.

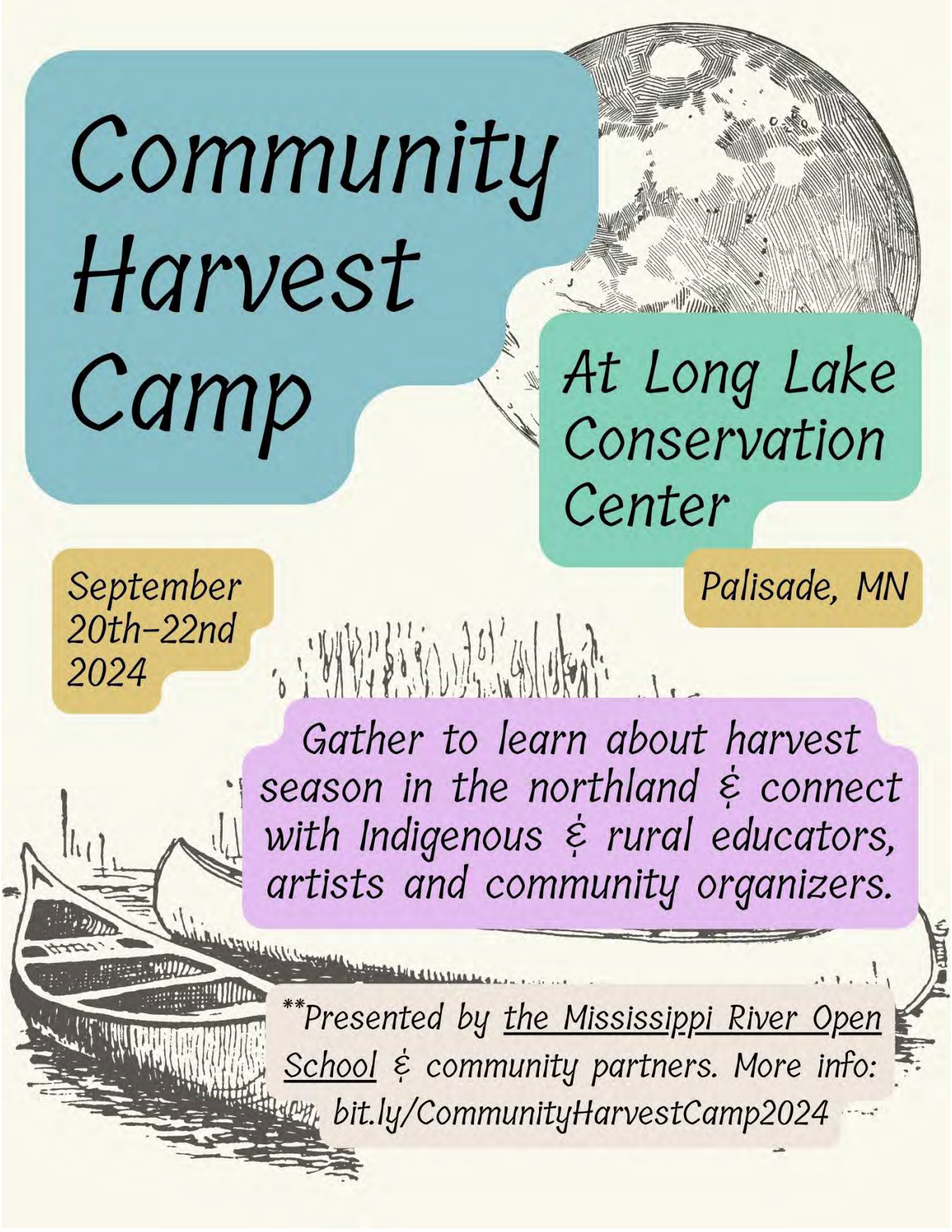
The example I would like to discuss first is the *Open School's* work with the Welcome Water Protector Center located on the Great River Road

in Palisade, Minnesota, a rural location about two and a half hours north of the Twin Cities. The space stopped officially being called the Welcome Center in about 2022, but the name persists in certain circles because of strong associations with the place and its history. For the sake of clarity, I will continue to refer to this space as the Welcome Center, but the efforts and relationships are more dynamic than that. A diverse group of people were involved in organizing the space, and in order to protect their privacy, I do not name them here, but I also spent a significant amount of time there contributing to activities, so it is close to my interests and makes it easier for me to speak in an informed manner. The Welcome Center's physical space on the Great River Road closed in early 2024, but activities continue at alternate locations throughout the region.

From 2022–2024 the *Open School* worked with the Welcome Center to co-create cultural and educational programming in collaboration with Native and non-native elders, artists, organizers, activists, and educators who moved through the space. Because it was a bustling nexus for frontline community organizing, the activities



Photograph of the front of the main house at the Welcome Water Protector Center. The banners were lent to the Stop Line 3 movement by Dylan Miner (Métis Nation of Ontario). Image courtesy of John Kim.

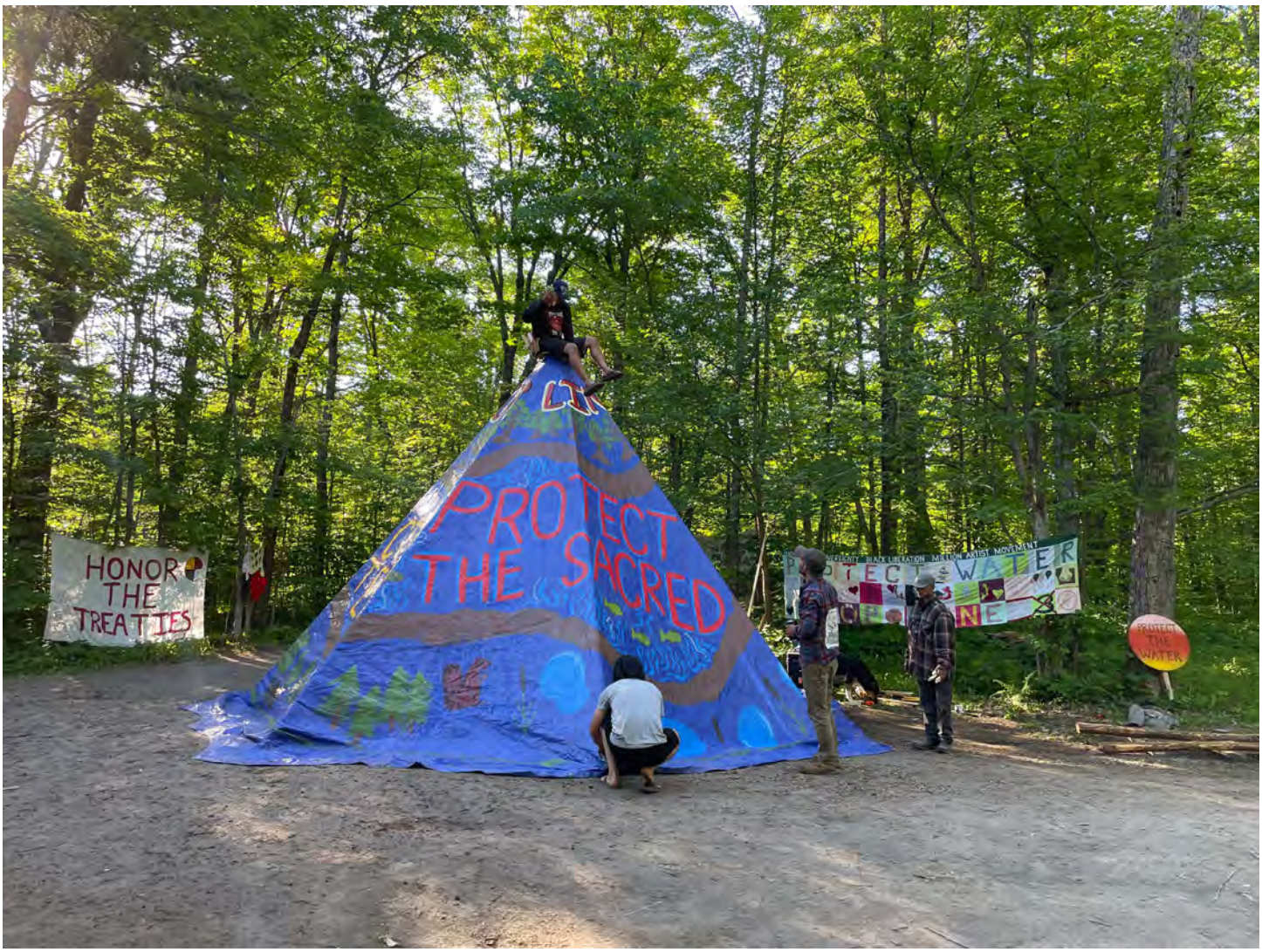


Invitation to the fall 2024 Community Harvest Camp. Poster by Shanai Matteson.

that were convened there were often open to the public and not exclusively for college and university students, but students' needs were considered throughout. We learned about diverse traditional, Native, and non-native cultural and ecological approaches to the teaching of practices of care and living.

As an example, teachers led seasonal camps for visitors to celebrate and learn about nature's seasonal gifts. This involved experiential learning activities about spring sugar bushing, summer foraging, fall harvesting, winter storytelling and art sharing, among others. For those of us who were not raised with these traditions, we were incredibly fortunate to learn from teachers who shared with us elements of this knowledge in ways that were appropriate for their communities.

The Welcome Center's recent history provides backstory for the generosity many showed for that space. The Center was located on the banks of the Mississippi River where the Enbridge Line 3 oil pipeline crosses its span. Because of this location, the forest around the Welcome Center itself became an action camp for the Stop Line 3 movement (2020–2021).[3] Given the



Paul Chiyokten Wagner (Wsaanich / Saanich) teaches people at the Welcome Water Protector Center how to build tarpees, an emergency shelter that Paul developed. Image courtesy of John Kim.

significance of the Mississippi River for the region and the entire country, this pipeline crossing was the site of some of the nation's fiercest resistance to pipeline construction.

After the completion of the pipeline, another environmental threat loomed on the horizon: Tamarack Mine, a proposed copper and nickel sulfide mine just 30 minutes from the Enbridge oil pipeline crossing in Palisade (Mogul 2025). Northern Minnesota's economic history has been tied to resource extraction for centuries, and the proposed mine is representative of an explosive growth in mining activity around the world in the global hunt for minerals to power the green energy gold rush (Mogul 2025). The Welcome Center shifted to raising awareness of the threats the mine posed to the region's wetland ecosystems and co-creating learning activities about it, focusing on the differential impacts of so-called "green mining" on rural and Native communities on the mine's front line.

This article focuses on a particular aspect of these learning activities: namely, the *form* of the camp at the Welcome Center. By form, I refer to the camp's social organization and its daily routines, which are powerfully emergent educational experiences. The layered social richness and camaraderie of living and learning as part of this community is difficult to convey, but it gets to the heart of what I want to communicate here.

The Anthropocene is a Geosocial Disaster

I compare action camps to what Rebecca Solnit (2010) has called extraordinary communities—the self-organized groups that can form in the aftermath of natural disasters. In the days and weeks following a disaster, and in the wreckage left in its wake, it is possible to witness the formation of communities of care that provide essential services to support life, including food, shelter, healthcare, community, and security. Dormant forms of sociality and solidarity emerge as widespread volunteerism and mutual aid. This has been powerfully observed in the aftermath of many disasters, including Hurricane Katrina, the 1985 Mexico City earthquake, and the COVID-19 pandemic (Solnit 2010; Spade 2020).

Kathleen Tierney (2014) argues that all disasters are social in origin. Obviously, one cannot stop a hurricane or a massive flood, so what Tierny means is that a disaster's human toll is a consequence of the social infrastructure in affected communities. Communities on the frontline of disasters may not have access to sufficient material and financial resources, the expertise, or preparedness to mount an effective emergency response. The ongoing neoliberal rollback of social services, including the underfunding of federal emergency response programs, has direct consequences for the survivability of crises.

Another way in which the survivability of disasters can be understood as social in origin is through a recognition of ongoing social engineering that has been leading to growing isolation, separation, and disconnection from others which can constrain a community's emergency response. Inspired by this work with the *Open School*, in Spring 2024 I taught a class entitled, "Alone Together: The Contradictions of Social Media." The class's premise was that, notwithstanding the "social" in social media, the media's historical role has often been the distinct opposite. With the endless expansion of commodification into everyday social relations, the media has led to a separation of people into individualized consumers. (We considered the widespread introduction of television into living rooms as an illustration of the media as a technology of mass social isolation.) This digital isolation and separation have had the effect of

fomenting perceived political helplessness and real political powerlessness. As Dean Spade (2020, 13) argues, "Today, many of us live in the most atomized societies in human history, which makes our lives less secure and undermines our ability to organize together to change unjust conditions on a large scale." It is important to add that this atomization is not only produced by the media but enforced by corporate and capital interests in the form of state-sanctioned police and military violence, governmental neglect, and white supremacy.

The Anthropocene is a geosocial disaster. It is a crisis on a geologic scale, and there's fundamentally this social one as well.

As many critical commentators noted during the COVID-19 pandemic, crises are a portal through which it is possible to discover cracks in the edifice of the neoliberal state (Roy 2020). The extraordinary communities that form in action camps are a portal for the reconstruction of sociality as a necessary alternative to atomization. Extraordinary communities exhibit what Victor Turner (1969) termed *communitas*, the social connectedness that binds people in solidarity during particular times of cultural change or transition. Within the field of anthropology, *communitas* has been applied to the study of rituals, specifically the powerful collective feeling and utopian desires that emerge among participants. Rituals loosen the prevailing norms that govern inflexible social hierarchies, allowing people to connect across lines of difference. *Communitas* can be dangerous for a society that is invested in the rigid maintenance of the status quo, as *communitas* can disrupt, invert, or otherwise upset dominant hierarchies and formations of power.

Communitas can also exist in the liminal time around a disaster, as is evidenced in the extraordinary communities that come together in the wake of catastrophes (Matthewman and Uekusa 2021). When faced with the consequences of our social separation and atomization, the forces that govern and regulate everyday behaviors, out of necessity, fall away. We require moments of effervescent *communitas* to disrupt unequal social structures (Badiou and Elliot 2012).

Action Camps as Extraordinary Learning Communities

We live in a time of action camps as extraordinary communities that challenge the unfolding geosocial disaster. In camps, we relearn forms of collective action and solidarity that have nurtured human togetherness for millennia prior to the isolation and separation that characterize our current moment. Action camps are a portal to an emergent space for the repair of damaged sociality. We might know little about how to collectively prepare, cook, and distribute meals for a group of one hundred, but we will quickly learn on the job. A design for an emergency winter shelter might not exist, but with others we will brainstorm, design, and build it.

In "falling together" (Solnit 2010) to create social systems to provide basic services, experiential teaching and learning happens. A decolonized education exists in the creation of learning spaces in which people come to recognize the knowledge and skills they already possess and are moved to share with others. This is how the emergent educational space of action camps differs from traditional schooling. While traditional schools can reinforce obedience from an early age through subjection into hierarchical roles, in camps, everyone has skills and knowledge to contribute and, as such, everyone can teach and learn from each other.

As spaces of learning, action camps did not arise spontaneously but draw from multiple traditions. I want to acknowledge a few sources of influence.

Indigenous-Led Resistance Movements

Isabel Huot-Link (2023) shares how her understanding of decolonization and social justice were shaped through a relational education at Line 3 pipeline resistance camps: "Residents built relationships with and around particular places through art-making, cultivating gardens, skill-sharing, sharing stories, educating youth, and organizing resistance strategy in response to the geographies of treaty territories, reservations, and pipeline corridors." A long history of Indigenous-led resistance movements has shaped the social organization of action camps. Writing about the Oceti Sakowin camp during protests against the Dakota Access pipeline (DAPL) at Standing Rock, Nick Estes (2019) connects the DAPL protests to a history of struggles against settler colonization and the environmental consequences of its logic of extraction. He characterizes the social organization of the Standing Rock camps as an "abolition geography." Put in terms we have been considering in this article, his description of abolition geography resonates with our framework for an extraordinary community where economic equity and social equality can be realized:

> Free food, free education, free health care, free legal aid, a strong sense of community, safety, and security were guaranteed to all. . . . In the absence of empire, people came together to help each other, to care for one another. The #NoDAPL camps were designed according to need, not profit. (There were no prisons or armed bodies of the state.) That's what separated them from the world of cops, settlers, and oil companies that surrounded them. Capitalism is not merely an economic system, but also a social system. And it was here abundantly evident that Indigenous social systems offered a radically different way of relating to other people and the world. (Estes 2019, 252)

Community Survival Programs

Estes's vision of camps as "a radically different way of relating to other people and the world" is inspired by Black-led abolitionist movements and mutual aid societies. In referring to action camps as solidarity programs I am connecting with analyses of the Black Panthers and their community survival programs in particular. As described by David Hilliard: "We call the program a 'survival' program—survival pending revolution—not something to replace the revolution . . . but an activity that strengthens us for the coming fight, a lifeboat or raft leading us safely to shore" (Hilliard and Cole 1993, 211–12).

The name—solidarity programs—is intended as an acknowledgement of the significant differences between Panther community survival programs and what I am referring to as solidarity programs. The Panthers' efforts were rooted in a long tradition of Black mutual aid that organized the social services needed to support the basic conditions for life (Gordon Nembhard 2014). Because of the legacies of slavery and white supremacy, Black communities in the U.S. have often been unable to access equitable social services. Out of necessity, the Panthers created autonomous social systems for security, health care, food distribution, and education. Many of these systems were subject to repression that was notoriously violent, but remarkably, some of them were adopted by the federal government, such as a free lunch program in schools (Heynen 2009).

Multiple throughlines connect survival programs and contemporary efforts to cultivate extraordinary communities. One of our project partners along the Gulf South, Monique Verdin (Houma Nation), for example, references this history in her project, "Marooned: Between Water and Land" (2024). Having lived through multiple flooding events and facing conditions that grow more precarious with climate change, Monique and her collaborators are developing a camp to "support the co-creation and stewardship of safe refuge for people, plants and other living beings to foster biodiversity, food, medicine, and a sense of autonomy" (Verdin 2024).

Earth Schools

I have referred to camps in various ways so far, including action, resistance, and seasonal camps. As I have highlighted throughout this article, they provide an educational setting in which learning is experiential and based in nature. An apt comparison here is the Forest School, an educational setting in which outdoor spaces become the classroom for experiential learning. Recent trends in Forest Schools have moved away from a romantic celebration of nature and toward the design of land-based education in the Anthropocene (Mycock 2019). In living and learning on an extensively controlled and engineered river like the Mississippi for one hundred days, the River Semester is a model for this type of education.

In order to distinguish these types of programs from Forest Schools, I prefer to refer to them as Earth Schools, programs which prioritize a reckoning with the challenges of the Anthropocene. Earth Schools ask: how do we live and learn experientially in disturbed Anthropocenic landscapes? They go beyond instruction about ecological relations between humans, plants, and animals, and extend learning to coinhabitation with other-than-human worlds (Haraway 2016). Earth Schools incubate forms of action for the care of the planet and its inhabitants against further despoiling by capitalist extraction. Earth Schools are settings in which to repair and relearn social capacities that have been degraded, by design, by pervasive digital isolation and alienation.

Action Camps Everywhere

Indigenous-led resistance movements, community survival programs, and Earth Schools all contribute knowledge and practical wisdom that inspire the organization of action camps as I've experienced them. The phrase "Action camps everywhere" is a recognition of the opportunities for education modeled on the unique experiential settings found in camps. "Action camps everywhere" opens this education to students, activists, scientists, artists, the public––anyone who needs this knowledge to be prepared for, and even thrive, in the midst of the crises that surround us. "Action camps everywhere" is a call to establish action camps in forests, on riverbanks, in deserts, on college campuses, on oceans, everywhere, because the front line *is* everywhere. We need action camps everywhere as they are emergent spaces for the solidarity programs sharing the knowledge and practices that can get us out of the Anthropocene.

Solidarity Programs in the Anthropocene

"Action camps everywhere" may be a provocative slogan, but how might we apply it to reimagining education, namely college and university education in the Anthropocene? Can we draw inspiration from action camps as extraordinary communities in this reimagining? What should higher education look like if it were mobilized to get us out of the Anthropocene? In contrast to the previous section of this article, the content below is more theoretical. I reflect on themes in the programmatic approaches that we have tried to implement in our work with the *Open School*. I also frame this discussion through reflection on the Anthropocene, which puts these ideas into conversation with others who have advocated for educational changes to better respond to contemporary urgencies.

Transformation of Modes of Knowledge Production

Paul Crutzen, a climatologist who has advocated for the adoption of a new geological epoch characterized by widespread human transformations of Earth systems, said, "What I hope is that the term 'Anthropocene' will be a warning to the world" (quoted in Kolbert 2024). Crutzen's proposal is motivated by a sense of extreme urgency for research and education to attend to the world's thorny problems. The popularization of the concept of the Anthropocene speaks to how academic research can be made more accessible and productive for debates inside and outside the academy.

Our current planetary emergency and the threats of the inhabitability of the Earth for all living species speak to the stakes of transforming knowledge. The forms of knowledge production that have led us to the Anthropocene are ill-equipped to lead us out of it (Stengers 2018). Higher education in particular has had a central role in reproducing dominant knowledge practices that contribute to the Anthropocene (Liboiron 2021). A changing planet requires a transformation in the knowledge practices that characterize, understand, mitigate, and educate about these changes (Latour 2018; Krenak 2023).

Problem-Focused Research and Teaching

With the intensity and frequency of polycrises that surround us, communities on the front line of these struggles have responded with reparative, creative, visionary, and emergent strategies. (One tactic has been the formation of extraordinary communities discussed earlier in this article.) Frontline communities have developed sophisticated analyses of their condition and imagined wide-ranging responses. As crises continue to spread to communities and places unaccustomed to them, frontline communities have much knowledge to impart.

Colleges and universities can do more to work in solidarity with frontline communities. Community engagement centers are invaluable for mediating these relationships because of ethical concerns in partnering with groups that may have experienced generations of extractive social relations. Different ways to structure these relationships can be defined depending on needs; a frontline community can provide guidance on the identification of problems, with faculty and students developing projects in consultation with that community. More transformatively, we can also imagine more reciprocal, bidirectional

relationships, where students learn directly from frontline communities that are in a better position to understand many of the problems society faces.

We sought to build a reciprocal relationship in our work with the Welcome Water Protector Center. This has taken multiple forms, including supporting the Center's efforts to offer cultural programming and public education about environmental threats facing the region. This relationship, in turn, enabled the Welcome Center to provide additional opportunities for public learning. For campus constituencies, this partnership has opened up possible pathways for research and teaching across divisions and departments, including Environmental Studies (alternatives to extraction through mineral recycling), International Studies (critical digital infrastructure), geography (remote sensing and GIS study of new mines), physics (the electrochemistry of batteries), geology (the geology of fracking and its threats to water aquifers), among others.

The reciprocal relationship between the Welcome Center and college and university faculty highlights how a problem-focused curriculum can reorient teaching and research priorities on campuses. In consultation with frontline communities, faculty can identify problems that contribute to defining campus research and educational initiatives and committing resources to promote collaborative work. This should be done in a reciprocal way in which colleges and universities support communities' needs.

Transdisciplinarity as "Metadisciplinary Spaces of Teaching and Dialogue"

The title of this section is a mouthful, but it means that when dealing with an urgent issue, you make use of all the tools you have at your disposal. I understand interdisciplinarity as a transfer of methods and approaches from one discipline to another. In this sense interdisciplinarity can preserve existing frameworks of disciplinary research and constrain the capacity for interdisciplines to develop distinctive, innovative, or novel methods and approaches to the study of problems. When considering the Anthropocene and its intertwined polycrises that cut across classical divisions of knowledge, a reproduction of disciplinarity can be a hindrance to a critical engagement with problem-focused research and teaching goals.

Transdisciplinarity recognizes methods and approaches that go beyond interdisciplinarity. In accepting the inaugural Professorship of Earth Politics at the University of Cape Town, Professor Lesley Green (2023) argued that "transdisciplinarity needs to graduate to a metadisciplinary framework." This is to say that metadisciplinarity unlocks common approaches and processes to mobilize new modes of research, teaching, and action. One way to understand the debate surrounding the definition of the Anthropocene is as a site of tension concerning its status as a metadisciplinary concept. On the one hand, the International Union of Geological Sciences' evaluation of the evidentiary basis for the periodization has sought to apply a disciplinary framework (geology) to the Anthropocene. As a counter-formulation to a narrowly defined geological conceptualization of the Anthropocene, the "colonial Anthropocene" has drawn on ideas of coloniality and resource extraction from humanistic and social scientific fields in examining forces that have contributed to the Anthropocene (Brown and Kanouse 2021). As an example of how a metadisciplinary concept can inspire new modes of knowledge production at the intersection of transdisciplinary collaboration, the colonial Anthropocene has been incredibly productive for opening up varying ways to understand Earth systems changes as part of human history.

Conclusion

The second part of this article applied the idea of solidarity programs to the reimagining of educational practices that respond to crises in the Anthropocene. Some deconstructive critics would argue that this does not go far enough, and they would call for an abolition of the university in its current form by inverting it so as to offer educational resources to the many on its outside that are excluded from its benefits.[5] Though I am sympathetic to the critique, this sees the problem in only two dimensions: inside or outside, refuge or frontline, public or private, professional or unprofessional, university or what Stefano Harney and Fred Moten (2013) call undercommons.

Short of abolition, can we think of ways to transform the university into a pedagogical environment that is open to the camps and communities from which it is imperative to learn? How can universities support communities so they can continue their necessary work? How might we create opportunities for students to responsibly learn from and with communities without overburdening them?

Our use of the term "open" in the *Open School* offers an alternative spatial model for reorienting the way in which we think about the relationship between universities and communities.[6] If we *evert* the university, that is, turn it inside out, it can become a home for public pedagogy. What was exclusive to the inside can be offered to the outside. Resources that are accessible to students on campuses (including funding, meeting spaces, expertise, training, libraries, etc.) can be made available to communities as well. This suggests novel ways to respond with varied strategies for engagement.

The university can become a welcoming center for social, material, and intellectual reciprocity and exchange. This learning can happen on university campuses, the front porches of communities, and around a campfire. This is one way in which we mean "open" here: an *Open School* is a reimagining of the location of education. Rather than cloistered in closed universities, an *Open School* consists of globally distributed hubs as sites of eversion and experimentation for crossing the formal organization of the university (Kim 2021). With kinship and social reciprocity, an *Open School* is an extraordinary community for collective learning and action that resists the geosocial disaster that unfolds around us.

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Footnotes

[1] This is a theme I take up at length later in this essay.

[2] I wish to extend a heartfelt thanks to the many, many people who have contributed to the activities and the ideas discussed in this essay. In the interest of protecting people's privacy, I try to avoid naming specific people throughout this essay. Instead, I will acknowledge the partnering and collaborating institutions, organizations, and programs here. (However, I recognize that unaffiliated individuals are left off this list.) These include my Spring 2024 Media and Cultural Studies class "Alone Together: The Contradictions of Social Media,"A Studio in the Woods; André Cailloux Center for Performing Arts and Cultural Justice; Antenna; Anthropocene Curriculum; Anthropocene Commons; Antioch University Graduate School of Leadership and Change; Art of the Rural; Black Voters Matter; Bvlbancha Liberation Radio; Center for the Gulf South at Tulane University; Civic Studio, Water Leaders Institute; Community Members for Environmental Justice; Contemporary Arts Center; Dillard University Minority Health & Health Equity Research Center; EASEL; Fire in the Village; FKA Welcome Water Protector Center; Grand Marais at Frank Holten State Park; Guns Down in Orange Mound; Historical Society of Brooklyn, Illinois; Honor the Earth; House of World Cultures; Hyde Park Matters; Juice Orange Mound; Land Memory Bank & Seed Exchange; Landmark Farmer's Market; LEEP, LLC; Macalester College; Max Planck Institute for the History of Science; Max Planck Institute of Geoanthropology; Nanih Bvlbancha; Native Women's Care Circle; Neighborhood Story Project, New Orleans Mosquito, Rodent & Termite Control Board; Orange Mound Arts Council; Paper Machine; PUNCTUATE; Rebecca Snedeker; Rhodes College; Rise & Repair; River Semester; Seeing Black; Sewerage & Water Board of New Orleans; Southern Illinois University Carbondale; Spillway; Stand for Children TN; Teaching Social Action Institute; The Water Collaborative; Thompson's Event Center; Wakemup Productions; Washington University; Whole Child Strategies; and others. This project evolved from earlier collaborations that were supported by the House of World Cultures (Berlin) and the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science. The current iteration is funded by a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Humanities for All Times initiative.

[3] Thank you to Dr. Malte Vogl for suggesting the term "action" as a broader way to refer to camps.

[4] The governing body's rejection of the epoch in March 2024 (Barknosky and Hannibal 2024) is an indication of the limits of disciplinarity in providing intellectual tools needed to address today's problems.

[5] See Eli Meyerhoff's (2019) study of alternative education movements and their critiques of mainstream education in the U.S., which include calls for the abolition of its current form.

[6] See our website (www.mississippiriver.school) for more information on the *Open School* as method in addition to examples of this work.

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