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

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FEATURE

FLUVIAL NETWORKS OF CREATIVE RESISTANCE

By Joseph Underhill

The ship is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates.
—Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces"

This article explores the use of rivers as educational spaces within which to imagine and experiment with alternative ways of living. It draws primarily from the author's experience over the past twenty years of bringing students out onto the Mississippi River as part of a program that is now called the River Semester offered through Augsburg University's Center for Global Education and Experience. That program is one of a growing number of experimental outdoor and/or experiential education programs that form the basis of an emergent global network—one that I believe should be expanded and strengthened. In the face of multiple and overlapping planetary crises, rivers and watersheds

Buildings on the distant shore of the Mississippi River are barely visible behind the sailboat. Image courtesy of Thomas Turnbull.

around the world can provide productive alternatives to the range of current social injustices, environmental problems, political dysfunction, and social anomie. Through these alternatives, we can begin to build alternative social forms—what Foucault describes as "heterotopias"—that hold some promise for living well.

What does it mean to live "otherwise" at this moment in time (Haraway 2016; Muñoz 2009; Tsing 2017; Wölfle Hazard 2022)? What lifeways are suggested by a lengthy trip by canoe or sailboat down the Mississippi River? In some ways, one answer is a lived version of "going down to the river to pray." Akin to Michael Pollan's (2009) food rules—eat food, mostly plants, not too much—the rules we live by on these river trips amount to little more than consuming less, connecting with the world and with each other, and getting off our digital devices and screens. On these trips we spend almost all our time outside (with the attendant joys and discomforts), cook good food, sing and dance, make campfires virtually every night, swim in the river's muddy waters, learn about its pulse and flow, get plenty of physical exercise, and do what we can to work toward social and environmental justice. We attend to the mental and physical well-being of the group, using simple medicines, open communication, and honesty about who we are and what we need. These activities and ways of being are a source of joy in the Anthropocene, the contested term for a new geological era in which human activity has become the most significant force shaping the earth (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000). It is around a set of activities which decrease the amount of harm being done both to ourselves and to the environment that fluvial networks of creative resistance can and should be formed. This article gives examples of what these forms of living otherwise have been like for us on some of the trips we have taken down the river, and suggests that these activities form the basis, the methodology for building broader networks as part of the work we need to do to imagine a way home in the Anthropocene (Underhill 2020).

In the United States today, we face a range of fairly significant social, political, and environmental challenges. In many areas, such as child mortality, education levels, and average lifespan, we have seen substantial improvements over time, but in many areas of our lives there are troubling trends. Wildfires are springing up with increasing frequency and intensity; the political system is characterized by a high level of polarization and animosity, reflected in events such as the January 6, 2021, riots at the U.S. Capitol; the earth's temperature is steadily rising, with 2024 the warmest year in recorded history; the United States has the highest prison population rate in the world, with a disproportionately high number of those prisoners being people of color; there is a growing wealth gap, and rising rates of mental illness and deaths from drug overdose.[1]

Part of finding ways to thrive and live fully in the midst of these trends is to be true to who we are, to bring our whole selves into our work and to create spaces where our students can do that as well (hooks 1994; Lourde 1984; Palmer 2017). A pedagogy aspiring to authenticity requires that the programs we create reflect who we are as individuals. The practice of outdoor education, and the fairly radical departures from mainstream educational practices described here, are not for everyone. There will need to be all sorts of different ways to navigate our way through the climate crisis, the ongoing effects of racism and settler colonialism, the wars, the gun violence, the carceral state, the various forms of neo-authoritarianism popping up around the globe. The River Semester is itself a reflection of my own predilection for a particular response to the polycrises, which for me has involved exploration, wandering, swimming, sailing, and trying to live close to the land and connected to place. This is my own way of dealing with the various adverse trends listed above, one that amounts to both a diving in and an escape from many of the realities of the contemporary world.

As a teenager growing up in the shadow of Vietnam and in the thick of the nuclear arms race, I attended an outdoor survival school and volunteered on the Hudson River Sloop *Clearwater*. My first year in college, disenchanted with the scene on campus, I moved out of the dorm and slept in a tent in the pine barrens behind the campus. After a semester of courses taken on board a schooner sailing down the East Coast, I decided to switch schools and move to the West Coast. Rather than driving, a friend and I embarked on a four-month, 7,000-mile bike trip across the country. It was a pilgrimage in search of some alternatives to the polluted, violent, automobile-based, fossil-fueled system we found ourselves in.

Years later, when I began work at Augsburg University in Minneapolis, I began thinking about ways to get students down to the Mississippi, which flowed by just a few blocks from the campus. This exploration of rivers as spaces for educational experimentation began in 2001, with the creation of a course called Environmental and River Politics. The first trip on the river, from St. Cloud to Minneapolis, was part of an expedition organized by Dan McGuinness of the Audubon Society. For that five-day trip we used two wooden dories, or "pulling boats," with oars and sails built by Urban Boatbuilders. Subsequently I began working with the outfitter Wilderness Inquiry, taking progressively longer trips on the river. Other study away trips to New Zealand, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Tanzania, and Egypt provided additional experience and lessons on the educational value of studying *in situ*. By the time we had completed a 10-day river trip in August 2014, it seemed feasible to expand to a semester-long expedition, and in 2015 the River Semester program traveled the length of the Mississippi. This was repeated in 2018, and then again in 2019 as part of an international network of scholars, artists, and community practitioners organized by the Berlin-based *Haus der Kulturen der Welt* (HKW)and the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, under the title of Mississippi: An Anthropocene River. Based on that experience, the River Semester then designed and built two river catamarans—dubbed Water Striders—and took them on their maiden voyage during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2021. These new craft worked well and, with some modifications, were used again for the fifth river trip in 2023, as part of the Mississippi River Open School for Kinship and Social Exchange, funded by a grant from the Mellon Foundation. The next trip is planned for 2025, with the hope that this expedition can be a key element of a larger global network of alternative, outdoor educational programming.

This is not what university coursework has traditionally looked like. Higher education has evolved over the centuries, with shifting epistemological paradigms, the rise of new disciplines, adaptation of new technologies, and an increasingly diverse student body (Bastedo, Altbach, and Gumport 2016; Perkin 2007; Thelin 2019). But the basic pedagogical form has remained relatively constant. Students sit in classrooms taking notes, study for exams, and write papers. Today the academy must think through how to educate students to live in a world in which human activity has become the dominant force shaping the planet. This growing set of planetary responsibilities comes at a time of increasing strains in higher education and a widespread sense of embattlement and retrenchment on many college campuses. But even in the face of these political and economic challenges (and in part because of them), there is a need to help students imagine, and live out, alternatives to the contemporary social, economic, and political systems. We need our students to be able to imagine something beyond the current realities and, based on that vision, find ways to take meaningful and productive action. Although utopian imaginaries of authors such as Octavia Butler (2019) and Jose Estaban Muñoz (2009) play a role in suggesting alternatives to current realities, it is crucially important to create something here and now that reflects these values and visions (brown 2017).

We need programs that invite students, teachers, and community members in to the process of building alternatives and enacting new forms of living and education within the context of the problematic present. On our trips down the Mississippi, we have come to think of this as a form of pirate pedagogy.

See video: Jolly Roger on dredge spoil island.

On our trips traveling in small boats down the Mississippi, we developed the habit of flying the pirate's skull and crossbones flag, or Jolly Roger—a countercultural emblem that reflects aspects of the ethos of the program itself. Though we by no means embraced all aspects of what the flag symbolized, as a radical experiment in university curriculum, these trips do amount to something akin to piracy (Graeber 2023; Rediker 2015). Piracy sprung in part from the abuses of power on board sailing vessels in the seventeenth century and sought to redistribute wealth outside the bounds of the existing system of extractive capitalism and colonialism. We take some inspiration from the move toward setting up alternative ways of living, the joyous and mischievous rebelliousness embodied in the figure of the pirate, and the sense of expansive freedom referenced in Foucault's "other spaces." Although not quite the high seas, rivers, particularly ones as large as the Mississippi, provide fertile ground for this kind of educational experimentation *qua* mutiny.

Education on the Margins: Rivers as Creative and Liberating Spaces

The changes in the nature of our educational system called for by the current ecological crises encourage us to pay attention to the physical setting for that education. Despite laudable efforts at campus greening, college grounds, buildings, and classrooms still largely reflect the energy-intensive, high-tech, and car-centric culture of contemporary America. For instance, where I teach at Augsburg University, despite decades of working to reduce car commuting, the parking lots, which occupy a significant portion of campus, are overflowing. The newest building, although it achieved a high ranking with the U. S. Green Building Council, consumes more energy than any other building on campus. The life of the mind is premised on the ability to outsource almost all physical labor and avoid most discomfort or inconvenience (Illich [1974] 2009). The standards for college housing have risen to the point that many on-campus residences resemble luxury condos. These modern conveniences, amenities, and comforts attract students and can increase capacity in many ways, but they come at a cost and are part of the modern, consumerist, energy-intensive train on which we are riding. And all the energy consumption and resource extraction have an impact. College campuses are thoroughly enmeshed in these extractive practices, including their foundation as part of settler colonial and extractivist practices (paperson 2017). The cost of higher education is increasing much faster than inflation, while students are reporting higher and higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. Campuses are working on responding to this panoply of challenges by offering more mental health counseling, reducing their carbon footprint, and developing some new programs in response to the environmental and social justice challenges of the day. But progress is slow, and—despite serious campus greening efforts—even the switch from fossil fuels to solar energy and electric vehicles still requires a huge amount of mining and raw materials. Think, for example, of the rush to mine the copper, nickel, lithium, and rare earth metals needed to produce the batteries, solar cells, and electrical grid required in turn for the transition to an all-electric renewable energy economy. The extraction of

these minerals often comes at the expense of the marginalized communities living in the vicinity of those mining operations.

This is to say that the context and setting for teaching and learning matter. The mindset and physical surroundings—set and setting—are crucially important in the educational experience. Students are learning how to live their lives through the kinds of norms and structures they encounter as they leave home and begin their lives as semiautonomous adults. On campuses, they do so within standard climate-controlled, carpeted rooms, sitting in rows of seats, more often than not facing a screen while a professor gives a lecture with accompanying slide deck, largely isolated from the world around them. Faculty teach their particular specialized disciplines in which they have the required credentials, but the physical structures and daily routines of the college campus are, for the most part, taken for granted. This is not to say that we should stop teaching in classrooms. They are in many ways excellent places to learn. But I would argue that, even while teaching in those spaces, it is worth thinking about the ways in which these settings reinforce the idea that this is the way the world should be, even as, in the world outside, we are experiencing a dramatic increase in the rate of extinctions, and wildfires and violent storms are destroying landscapes and homes (Kolbert 2014, Wallace-Wells 2019).

If the system is so problematic, and existing campus practices are part of that system, it follows that there is great pedagogical benefit to being outside, questioning and critiquing the form and context of education in radical ways. Universities need students to know that there are other ways to live that offer healthier, more joyous, and less destructive ways of living (Gruenewald 2003; hooks 1994). This means trading the splendid isolation of the air-conditioned ivory tower for muddy, messy, beautifully anarchic spaces, where the pursuit of the liberal arts can be carried out in the thick of the Anthropocene. What are those spaces? There are already many ways in which education takes place off campus. There is a long (though often problematic) history of academic field research, from biological field study to archeological excavations and sociological community-engaged research. Study abroad has become increasingly common at both the undergraduate and graduate level. However, those programs typically use traditional pedagogies and research agendas, even if they take place off campus. Wilderness education, such as the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) and Outward Bound, and ocean-based programs like those run by the Sea Education Association (SEA) constitute alternatives to traditional curricula but have the drawback of being largely disconnected from "normal life" and human communities. They take place in remote wilderness or the open ocean, far from so many of the dynamics that are driving the Anthropocene. As we step outside the confines of modern cities and campuses with their glistening buildings, there is great educational value in what Donna Haraway (2016) refers to as "staying with the trouble" and resisting the urge to completely escape into the wild. The challenge remains of how we can live *in* the Anthropocene, not separate ourselves from it so thoroughly that we are just running away from the problem. There are many possibilities for how to live differently within the realities of contemporary society, but I think some of the most promising can be found where the normal rules don't necessarily apply—on the margins and in the liminal spaces. Akin to the fecund ecological spaces constituted by ecotones (regions of transition between ecological communities), it is in vacant lots or graffiti-covered abandoned buildings, on the fringes of urban areas, or on small farms where nature and culture become thoroughly intertwined that we find some of the most creative forms of social experimentation and alterity. We need to work with people and our plant and animal kin in spaces where experimentation is possible, in what are called edgelands, transition zones that are particularly rich sites for dreaming up new ways of living (Tsing 2017). If home and work are "first" and "second" spaces, and bars,

churches, and bowling alleys are "third spaces," these marginal and semianarchic riparian spaces constitute "fourth spaces" or what Evans and Boyte ([1986] 1997) describe as "free spaces" within which social experimentation is possible (Wölfle Hazard 2022).

I have come to see rivers and riparian spaces as spaces for alternative ways of learning for a number of reasons. Rivers, generally speaking, have been the sites of some of the most intensive and extensive human activities—the creation of most early civilizations, the building of tens of thousands of large dams, industry, waste disposal, and massive engineering and flood-control projects (Smith 2020). At the same time, these spaces are often muddy, overgrown, challenging to navigate, and difficult to access by automobile. On the lower Mississippi River (and other large rivers), the batture—the land between the river's edge and the levee—is especially wild, and long stretches of the lower Mississippi are referred to as "Wild Miles" due to the lack of development along the river. Since the battureland regularly floods, it is not amenable to human control. Overgrown urban riparian spaces, with abandoned postindustrial buildings, provide refuge from the oversight and norms of mainstream society. These are sites of various informal shelters, campfires, encampments for the unhoused, and guerilla art such as graffiti and primitive sculptures. Outside the gaze of the authorities and mainstream social norms, rebels and outcasts—those who take issue with mainstream culture—find space at the margins to live otherwise and resist the oppressive workings of the surveillance state (Scott 1998).

On our trips on the Mississippi, we found that river islands are particularly unregulated spaces. Islands (and, even more so, boats, which are in a sense moveable islands) often come to be places for alterity, outlawry, or experimentation (Foucault 1967). Though technically owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, channel islands on most of the Mississippi River are generally understood to be public domain within certain broad limits. People can spend some time on the islands, as long as no permanent structures are erected, and there is little to no official oversight on the river. The islands in the Upper Mississippi Fish and Wildlife Preserve have posted signs, but the regulations are almost comically permissive. For instance, they limit campers to no more than 14 days per month in any given spot, meaning that you could theoretically camp on islands indefinitely as long as you moved every two weeks. The U.S. Army Corps is focused almost exclusively on keeping the navigational channel open for the large barges, and they pay little attention to who has pitched tents on the islands as long as the tents do not interfere with their dredge operations. Some privately owned islands on the Lower River (mostly used for hunting) are monitored a bit more closely, mainly to make sure other hunters are not poaching game, but on the whole the river islands are relatively free of social controls. They have been used historically as bases for river pirates and wanderers of various sorts and remain spaces largely free from the norms of mainstream culture and economics (Sandlin 2011). For instance, in fall 2023 we camped on Stack Island (between Greenville and Vicksburg, Mississippi). The island itself is now privately owned, but due to the river's meandering course it has over the years been part of both Mississippi and Louisiana, and there has been a long-standing dispute over jurisdiction. It was virtually wiped out by the flooding that occurred in 1811 when a major earthquake, centered in New Madrid, Missouri, caused a kind of "river tsunami" (Freedman 2012). It was a base for river pirates in the eighteenth century, and as recently as the 1970s, it has been used as a hideaway for fugitive criminals. In this constantly shifting space, where legal jurisdiction is fuzzy at best, our group foraged for oyster mushrooms, discussed the war in Palestine, and held a ceremonial water blessing. The space fostered this kind of learning.

Rivers are productive spaces for education in the Anthropocene for a few other reasons. For one,

they are particularly well-suited for travel by boat, this being one of the main reasons human civilizations have developed on their banks in the first place. Beyond facilitating meeting people and seeing new places, this slow-paced and energy-efficient form of mobility can be seen as a response to the multifaceted planetary crises we face. As climate and ecosystems shift, coasts and riverbanks flood, and arid regions dry out, mobility is a form of resilience that allows us to respond to these changes, while at the same time requiring us to simplify, pare down, and travel light. Rivers are also emotionally and spiritually evocative spaces—sites of ritual, baptism, contemplation, sorrow, and loss. Over the course of our journeys down the river, the water blessing ceremony mentioned above became part of a weekly practice on the river's edge. The river was the site of frequent secular "baptisms" and ritual cleansings experienced when we swam or bathed in its waters.

We had many moments of experiencing community and alterity in these spaces. In what follows, I share a few of the experiences of freedom we had along the river. At their hearts, these experiences amount to a return to a simple, basic, communal form of living that is itself a fairly radical

The interior of Tom Holman's Bombfire Pizza during our visit there in October 2015. This place is a bacchanalia and fever dream in the only city located on an island in the Mississippi. Image courtesy of Joseph Underhill.

departure from what life is like when we are on campus. These long trips down the river are intense and physically demanding, entail various discomforts, and involve living in close quarters with a group for months on end, but there is nothing particularly profound or intellectually complicated about these experiences. Their core elements involve simply people getting together, usually outside or in some odd or unusual space, with food and drink, music and dance. They offer glimpses of or suggestions for how to keep forging ahead and building a healthy, joyous, resilient, and sustainable future.

The first example comes from eastern Iowa, a part of the country where I did not expect to find one of the wildest dining establishments I have ever visited. Bombfire Pizza, located in Sabula, Iowa, was the creation of Tom Holman, a retired military veteran and Dionysian muse for the pursuit of living otherwise, who had a habit of uttering a loud pirate's "Aarrggh!" whenever he entered the establishment. In October 2015, we visited the establishment, and our group of students and staff from Augsburg University and Augustana College joined local residents and an inebriated staff in an evening of joyous abandon. The space

Camped out under a picnic shelter during one of the many downpours experienced on the 2018 River Semester. Image courtesy of Joseph Underhill.

overflowed with the oddest assortment of found items (pictured above), musical instruments, and other flotsam and jetsam gathered from the river. A local musician (with more enthusiasm than talent) banged away at the piano, joined by some of the students. There was a palpable sense of revelry and a degree of abandon about the place that reflected something of the spirit of these liminal spaces along the river. Created by someone on the margins of society, this space was located on the edge of Iowa (in a city actually on the river), with the aim of building community, welcoming everybody, and celebrating life in the ruins of what had once been a thriving river city. That evening, the elements spontaneously came together for a thoroughly memorable experience, a time of feeling alive, and of asserting joy and humanity in the face of all the troubles and crises swirling around us.

Another example of the varied and idiosyncratic aspects of this way of learning occurred during the 2018 River Semester, in the midst of the wettest 12-month period in U.S. history. On the fifth day of the trip, high straight-line winds and the blaring of tornado sirens forced the group into a nearby storm shelter. Six of our eight tents, pitched in a field near some ancient burial mounds on Prairie Island Indian Community, were blown away. Two of the tents (with all their gear inside) ended up in the river. We spent that night in the dystopian environs of the local casino hotel, and the next day salvaged our gear, replaced the damaged tents, and continued downstream. Two weeks later the group was joined by a group of international scholars and environmental advocates for the paddle from Winona, Minnesota, down to La Crosse, Wisconsin. This stretch of river is in the beautiful Driftless (unglaciated) Region of the Upper Mississippi, marked by high bluffs and complex braided channels. Their first day on the river was hot and humid, and the group paddled along with the students broadcasting Bob Dylan's "The Times They are A-Changin'" for the amusement of our Norwegian visitors, who were keen to get an authentically American experience. As is typical of people who are new to the river, our guests had arrived with some apprehension about water quality in the Mississippi. Thanks to thousands of pollution control projects prompted by the Clean Water Act, though, the river in many places is now clean enough to swim in safely; during our lunch stop, it didn't take the sweaty group long to happily jump in and float along in the refreshingly cool water. That afternoon's paddle got the group as far as the village of Trempealeau, Wisconsin. When the weather radar showed the approach of yet another set of intense thunderstorms, the group was forced ashore and took shelter in the local "yacht club" (in this case a very modest boat house and restaurant). As the rain poured down outside, two of the Norwegian professors shared insights from their work related to the water culture and politics of the Nile and Ganges Rivers. With severe weather forecast for the next several days the group then had to seek some place to stay. We were directed to contact a local pastor and ended up being hosted by the Mount Calvary Lutheran Church. Over the course of three days, the church parishioners and good people of Trempealeau showed the group amazing hospitality, brought food, offered showers and rides, and invited the students to meet with the Bible study group. It so happened that we were also there for Yom Kippur, and there was a lay rabbi in the group, (along with Palestinian and Jordanian water rights advocates). The rabbi led us in an observance of the Day of Atonement in the sanctuary of the Lutheran church. In the quiet of the unlit space, seated in a circle on the floor in front of the altar, the group reflected on their regrets from the year before, on family, loss, missteps, and on hopes for the year to come. By the end of our time of sharing, many of the group were in tears. That evening the international group prepared a meal of Palestinian and Israeli dishes, along with some hotdish and other local fare, and shared the meal with our church hosts. Coming together across lines of difference (global, ideological, age, gender), we sat together as human beings in a town where Donald Trump

had received two-thirds of the vote in 2016. To say the least, these moments are hard to replicate within a standard classroom setting. They pointed, in multiple ways, toward strengthening community across lines of difference and recognizing the many forms of knowledge and ways of being found along the river, and around the world.

In March 2019, during a gathering organized as part of the Anthropocene River program, a group of academics, artists, and community members met at the Kanu Haus, a ramshackle abode located in a rough neighborhood in North St. Louis. The group was hosted by "Big Muddy" Mike Clark, a retired elementary school teacher, local river rat, and guide with deep connections to the Mississippi. Before dinner, the group wandered around Cementland, the abandoned ruins of what was to be a fantastical outdoor amusement park. The half-finished project, built in the wreck of an old cement plant, had the air of a postapocalyptic dreamscape, full of wild ambition, decay, and a resurgent urban ecosystem. Later, Mike cooked pork tenderloin over a fire as we discussed our surreal visit to Cementland, planned events for the coming fall, and shared ideas about education in the Anthropocene. There was joy, revelry, companionship, and a sense that other futures were

Discussion of the Anthropocene River at Kanu Haus after a walk around the ruins of Cementland in the Riverview neighborhood of St. Louis, Missouri. Image courtesy of Joseph Underhill.

Sorting and cleaning freshly harvested manoomin at a ricing camp in northern Minnesota with Betsy, an Ojibwe elder, and Giiwedin, an Ojibwe artist and social media influencer. Image courtesy of Noa Shapiro-Tamir.

possible. We experienced many such gatherings later that year as part of the 2019 River Semester and the "Mississippi. An Anthropocene River" project, a watershed moment in the creation of the fluvial networks imagined here.

The forms of alternative pedagogy proposed here, and reflected in the work of the Mississippi River Open School for Kinship and Social Exchange, manifested in powerful ways during our participation in a wild rice harvest at the Mississippi House (formerly known as the Welcome Water Protectors Center) in Palisade, Minnesota, in September 2023. The event grew out of a long-standing collaboration with front-line communities resisting the oil pipelines and new mining projects in northern Minnesota, and was organized by John Kim in partnership with Shanai Matteson, Ojibwe artist Rory Wakemup, Rory's aunt Betsy, and his brother Justin. Our group assisted in setting up the camp, which would be used to educate people about the importance of wild rice to the life and well-being of the Anishinaabeg. We made cedar knockers used to harvest the rice, scoped out ricing locations, and learned how to push canoes through the thick fields of emergent aquatic vegetation. Back at camp we helped with roasting, threshing, and winnowing the rice, and ended up with a full bag of finished rice for our efforts. Bushels of rice were harvested while we were there, and the ricing workshop, which took place the week after we left, was a success. It was a profoundly satisfying and authentically reciprocal experience, grounded in local knowledge and connecting to a vital form of praxis for the Anishinaabeg. Students left with a deep understanding of the importance of menoomin and the importance of preserving those ricing lakes. We carried the rice with us and made soup with it for several meals in the following month. We also made balls of rice seed and mud—dubbed "rice bombs"—which we later hurled into the river as we traveled south.

During our stay in New Orleans in November 2023, we had the good fortune of connecting with Ray "Moose" Jackson (2022), a local poet, artist, and educator. A fellow traveler in the creation of fluvial networks of creative resistance, he is launching a new boat-based coastal restoration enterprise on the Gulf Coast. As we departed New Orleans, the wind dictated that we head toward the Gulf of Mexico through Lake Pontchartrain, and we were looking for spots to camp. Moose suggested that we stop at Lincoln Beach in New Orleans East. Lincoln Beach was an African American space, an amusement park that saw its heyday in the 1940s and '50s. It was shut down after legal (if not de facto) desegregation in the 1960s but is now being revived and stewarded by a local coalition of advocates. Lincoln Beach is another thoroughly liminal space, located on the other side of the tracks and other side of the levee, where itinerants and local BIPOC community gather, celebrate, and relax (despite the occasional alligator sighting). Like many of the islands we stayed on, it is a space where local residents have been able to take some refuge, at least partially insulated from the ongoing racist dynamics in their community.

We arrived at the beach after dark, finding it strewn with evidence of active use by local residents. We did some cleanup, had the place to ourselves, and pitched our tents. Some of us slept on the beach, while others slept under a large concrete structure that had once been a music hall in the amusement park. The next day, one of the local caretakers, Sage Michael, came down to check on the new arrivals and gave his blessing to our temporary stay there. The following day, after yet another night of heavy thunderstorms and tornado warnings, Moose rejoined us with a gift of two bushel bags of oysters, which we proceeded to shuck, roast, and consume under the canopy of the abandoned amusement park structure. After our feast, Moose shared from his epic poem, *The Loup Garou* (2010) (the werewolf), before we crawled into our tents to sleep outside for the one hundredth night of our journey. On our departure the following day, Sage Michael came down to see us off, excited

Camped under the roof of one of the abandoned structures at Lincoln Beach. A site for musical performances in the 1950s and '60s, this was where we feasted on oysters brought to us by Moose Jackson. Image courtesy of Joseph Underhill.

about our adventure and talking about his plans for getting more boats for people to use down at the park.

These experiences, and others like them, provide some glimpses into what we might call simple acts of refusal, rebellion, celebration, rejuvenation, and empowerment. In these spaces, we turned away from the normal practices of the classroom to find different ways of learning and of living. From these experiences, students and fellow travelers gained an appreciation for slowing down. We found it a great relief to stop consuming, stop rushing around, stop staring at screens—and return to some of the basic elements of life in community on this planet. This does not require elaborate theorization, or expensive new gadgets, or much of anything beside the desire to do it and an openness to spending time outside under the wide expanse of the stars, in the company of people, using our bodies to move, cook, build, and dance. We need to build up a network of these kinds of programs, spaces, and experiences.

Building Fluvial Networks

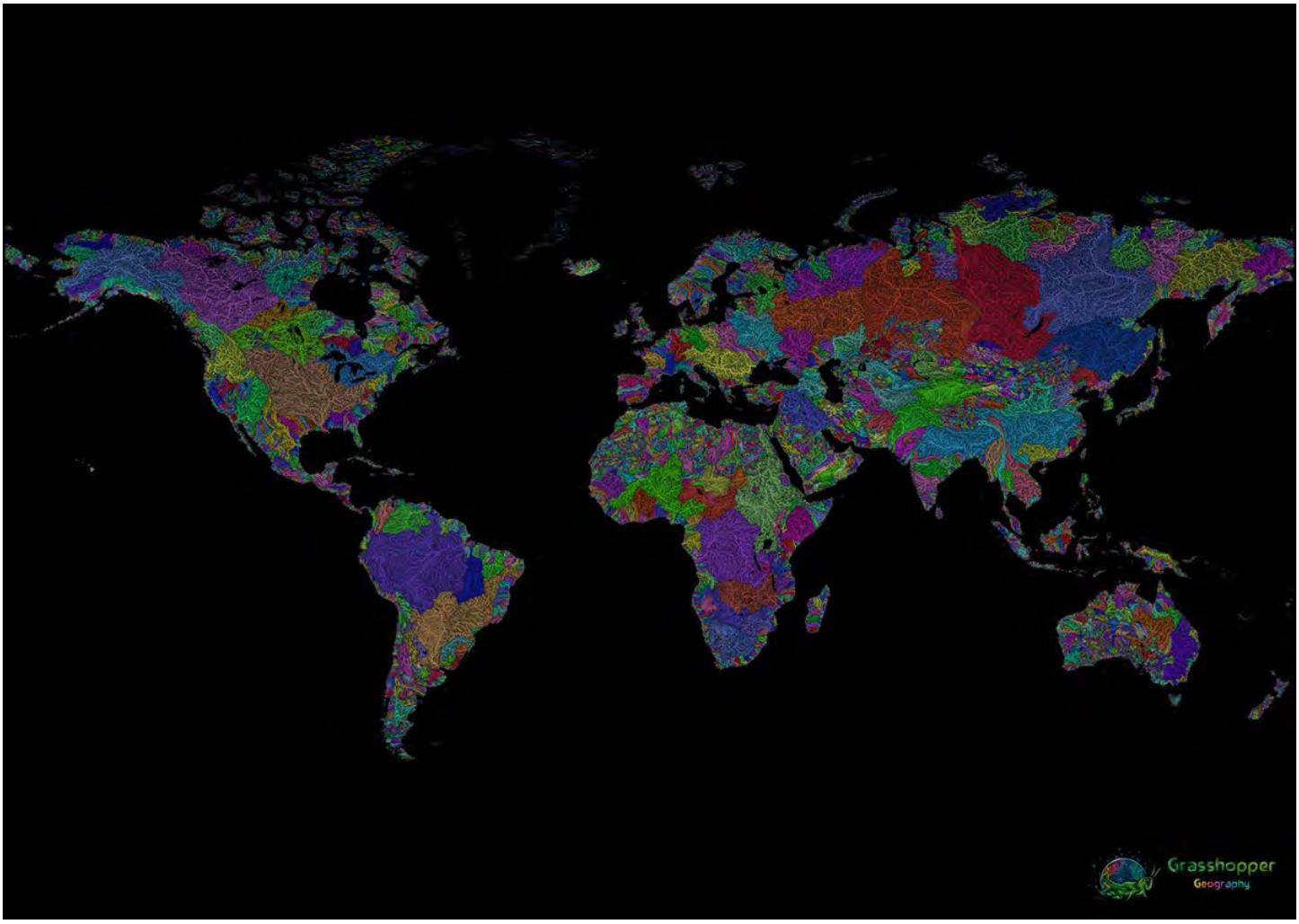
The experiences and networks described above are part of the process necessary for building and maintaining a movement for thriving in the Anthropocene. The emergent fluvial network imagined here draws on the work of a number of pioneering enterprises in higher education. These include programs like the Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs (HECUA), which used urban field-based research with a focus on economic and social justice and close partnership with local activists and artists. HECUA, which grew out of the unrest and civil rights movements of the late 1960s, offered numerous semester-long programs in Minnesota, Italy, Ecuador, Northern Ireland, and New Zealand, all with a focus on social justice. The organization ended in 2022, although efforts to revive portions of it continue. Similarly the network formed through Imagining America brings together academics, organizers, and artists for community-based, experiential education in the humanities. Its annual conferences offer opportunities for community engagement, often in marginal spaces, and provide inspiration for the kinds of networks imagined here. Other projects that inspire us include the Fourth Coast expedition down the Mississippi organized by Brown and Morrish (1990), Wes Modes' (2023) Shantyboat project and his Secret History of American River People, and Monique Verdin's many projects, including the Float Lab and Prairie des Femmes.

As mentioned earlier, the network imagined here grows directly out of the convenings organized by the Anthropocene project of HKW and the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in 2018–2022. That work now continues in the Anthropocene Commons, which organizes gatherings that take seriously the need to radically rethink pedagogies, curricula, and epistemologies, and that embody this joyful expression of alterity. The newly formed Max Planck Institute of Geoanthropology is further pushing the boundaries between the natural and social sciences, the humanities, and the arts as we live into the complex entanglements of the Anthropocene. The Floating ~~University~~ in Berlin provides another inspiring example of an experimental school, this one based at an old wastewater treatment plant site. As the name implies, it sees itself as not a university, but instead as a place for exploring radical alternatives to the status quo. Numerous artists and community activities and organizations are engaging these spaces in wonderfully creative and inspiring ways.

A range of kindred field-based programs constitute potential elements of this nascent community of river-based or alternative educational

programs. The Grand Canyon Semester, offered at times by Prescott College and Northern Arizona University, uses the Grand Canyon as the setting for a multidisciplinary exploration of environmental and social justice issues. Brevard College's Voice of the River, started in 1997, has organized a range of river trips around the U.S. and overseas; it currently takes students on a regional 18-day river trip. The Rio Tinto Field School was a weeklong field seminar in fall 2022 that hiked along Spain's Rio Tinto, one of the most heavily polluted watersheds in the world, birthplace of the Rio Tinto mining company, and site of Columbus' departure from Spain on his first voyage west. Semester in the West looks at environmental politics and climate change as students travel by bus around the western United States. The Adirondacks Semester is a nature-based program at Hamilton College, and Semester-A-Trail allows students to create their own curriculum while hiking the Appalachian Trail. The Oregon Extension, started in 1975, creates an intentional community in the Cascades. In various ways, each of these programs, offered in a range of marginal and riparian contexts, provides inspiration for new ways of learning and living in the twenty-first century. They can function as part of this emerging network of educational programs providing students with alternatives to simply being trained to be part of the modernist enterprise.

In addition, a number of academic institutes or networks focused on rivers constitute



A world of watersheds. Could these form the basis for a network of river-based educational programs? Artist/credit: Robert Szucs, source: www.grasshoppergeography.com.

contributing streams in this dendritic structure. These include the River Field Studies Network, an extensive and growing network of practitioners in river studies funded by the National Science Foundation and led by a team of stream ecologists and freshwater biologists. The National Great Rivers Research and Education Center (NGRREC) in Alton, Illinois, carries out a range of research, education, and outreach programs on the Middle Mississippi. Nongovernmental river-advocacy groups such as American Rivers, International Rivers, Riverkeepers, and Friends of the Mississippi River constitute another set of partners and collaborators in this work. There are likewise various river outfitters, such as Wilderness Inquiry in Minnesota; Quapaw Canoe Company in Clarksdale, Mississippi; Big Muddy Outfitters in St. Louis; and Urban Boatbuilders, which teaches boatbuilding and other woodworking skills to urban youth in the Twin Cities.

We can overlay this rich tapestry of organizations with a fluvial network of creative resistance. What might such a network look like? The global connections facilitated by the various forms of digital networks—email chains, shared Google docs, Discord servers, grant-funded meetings, and conferences—are all important in this work. In addition to these kinds of formal or digital networks, I would argue that what we need most are the kinds of river gatherings we have experienced in the course of our trips down the Mississippi. They will need to be multimodal, flexible, and reflective of whatever local realities, needs, and resources are available to make them happen. A pedagogy that responds to the Anthropocene has to sit with the tension between our inherent global interconnections and the need to stay grounded in the local. It must also be able to partake in the duality of groundedness and the virtual and disembodied interconnectedness of the internet. My particular work is on the Mississippi, and others are doing work on their own rivers.

Facilitating these changes on a larger scale will require connecting with kindred programs, and some of that work has already begun. What are the common elements or shared values? They consist of folks drawn together by the sense that things really need to change, by the pull of the rivers themselves, by the joys of community, food, and music, and by a passion for social justice. They are not wilderness retreats, taking place in distant or secluded locales, but they do draw on elements of those wilderness experiences. As in the stories of "pirate pedagogy" discussed above, this fluvial network needs to be based on meetings that are in person, involving a diverse set of participants: academic and nonacademic folks, artists, researchers, practitioners, activists, and nonhuman kin. This is the approach of the Mississippi River Open School for Kinship and Social Exchange, a wonderful regional example of the kind of network and activities proposed here. This network helps students become integrated into a larger community of river stewards, creators, and change agents that can support them and foster shared learning across watersheds. The gatherings work best when they can be outdoors and in marginal, liminal spaces (like Kanu Haus or Lincoln Beach). Other key ingredients for these gatherings include the primal elements of human communal activity: fire, music, dance, ceremony and ritual, and food and drink prepared and consumed together. To the extent that the world has become too complicated, these conditions call for simplifying, going back to our roots, and resisting the pull of modernity. For those so disposed, these practices constitute one important alternative to the curricular status quo. Already we have seen participants in these events and river trips going out into the world to organize, advocate, and create similar kinds of alternative curricula. Alumni are, among other things, advocating for women's rights and environmental protection in Columbia, leading outdoor education programs, participating in movements to protect Indigenous land, and working on organic farms. Through

these experiences we are learning how to live otherwise—in ways that reduce our environmental impact, improve our mental health, create strong communities, and connect us to the world. By increasing the interconnections between these efforts across watersheds, we can strengthen and facilitate efforts toward social change.

With a strengthened network of researchers, teachers, artists, and activists engaging in various forms of immersive and extended investigations on rivers such as the Nile, Amazon, Danube, Ganga, Mekong, and Yangtze, among others, what can we create in the riparian ruins and what signs of hope do we see in these muddied waters? Can we imagine fleets of river boats, vessels trading in alternative realities up and down the rivers of the world (Whyte 2019)? As with any countercultural practice, the alternative will not be an easy sell. It will require work, discomfort, and actively disentangling ourselves from the normal consumerist and extractivist ways of life that constitute much of the world of higher education. It does, however, come with the potential for the real joy that emerges from the full experience of the world, of good company, and of the satisfaction of going to bed at night exhausted, but knowing that there are indeed other possibilities besides those currently leading us toward an unnecessarily bleak future.

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Footnotes

[1] For data on these and a range of other current issues, see Our World in Data.

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