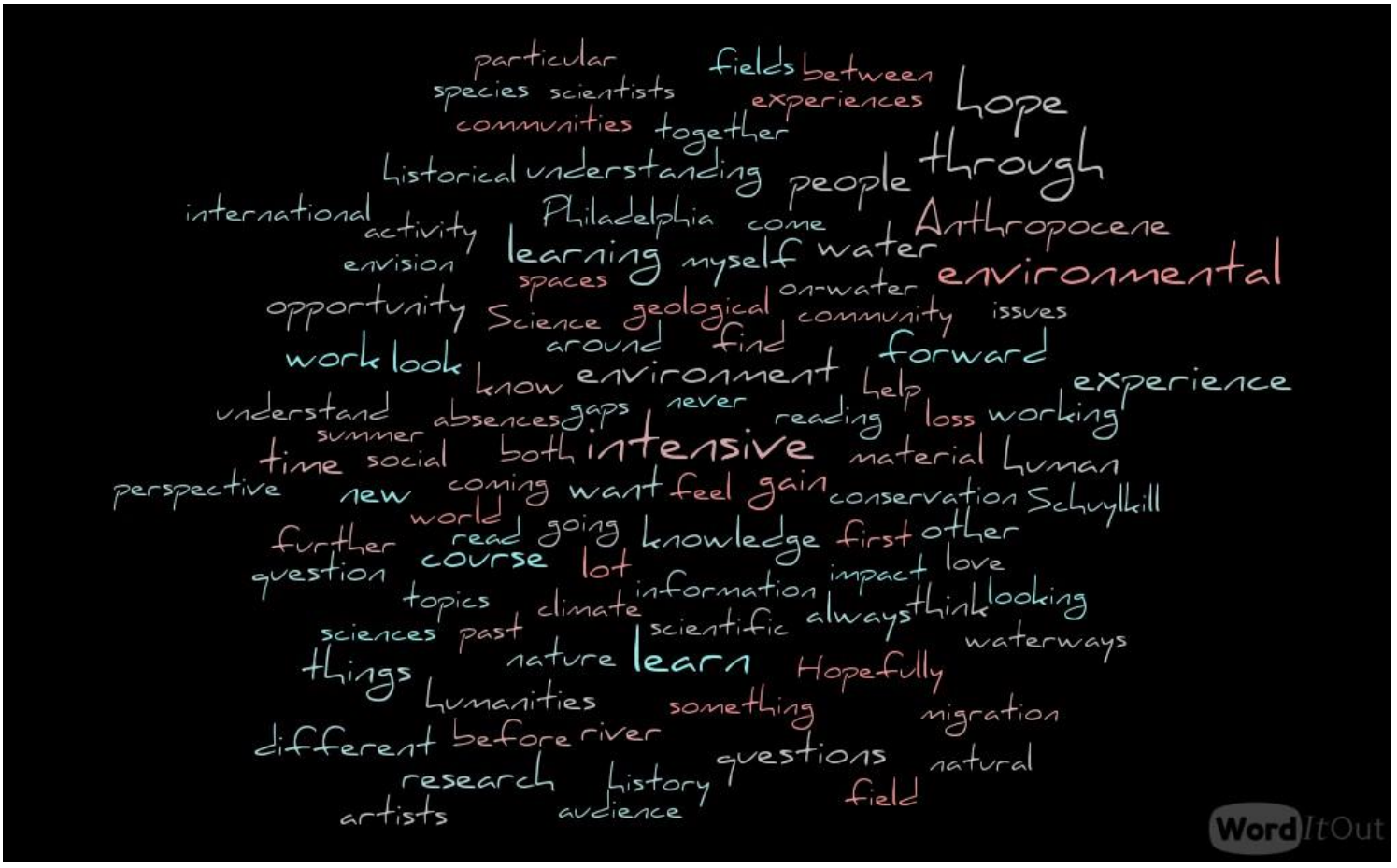
On-Water Intensive
Why we are intensively on the water

Posted by BWIGGIN *on* JUNE 22, 2018JUNE 22, 2018



In this essay, participants in this ongoing experimental, interdisciplinary, and trans-institutional research seminar share why they wanted to spend ten days together on Philadelphia's waterways. These are days mostly *on water*, on the waters of the Delaware watershed, with a special focus on its major tributary, the Schuylkill River. They are exhilarating and exhausting.

At the close of day four (of ten), we share here a few reasons we wanted to create and develop this learning community. Our voices in this essay are purposefully sampled and mixed. (Elsewhere on this site, we provide individual bios and pics.)

Our shared reasons flow nonetheless from our situated experiences, including our particular biographical, disciplinary, and institutionals locations. From our various

vantage points, we sink, flow, spill, and float on Philadelphia's urban waterways in ways whose sums are more than our parts.

The following essay was wri en by the participants in the On Water Intensive; individual contributions were assembled here by facilitators Peter DeCarlo and Bethany Wiggin.

> *I've been spending a lot of time lately thinking about the situatedness of the self in the environment: how we both shape and are shaped by the places we live.*

[But h]ow do we study that which is absent? Absence comes about any number of ways—from being destroyed, hidden, forgo en. For historians, understanding the past is almost by definition studying that which is no longer there. Only a fraction of the past is recorded, and only some of the records persist through time. How do historians fill these gaps? Science purports to understand how things work, but systematic absences of evidence abound. Soft-bodied organisms are excluded from the fossil record, for example, and the reactions at the heart of stars do not occur on earth.

I am an amateur paleontologist. I'm not sure if there's any purpose behind my fossil hunting besides the excuse it gives me to walk up a creek and pick up rocks.

In order to learn as much as possible in the next two weeks, I'm going to try to challenge myself to speak up. This is no solo creek walk.

[What is the] specific evidence of the Anthropocene? [W]here [does it] accumulate … in the rock, ice, etc.? Geographically which global regions show the influence of human activity most profoundly?

Every discipline has its absences. To some degree, they all have methods of working around them.

Towards whom is this archive catered? Whose history is documented here?

I find the difficulty in defining the Anthropocene extremely interesting. On one hand, the requirement of global-scale changes being recorded in geological stratigraphic material to define a geological unit of time, while surely difficult and complex, seems as if it could be relatively straightforward from a scientific point of view. However, it seems as though there is an extra level of complication added to the definition of a geological unit of time defined by *human activity* because of social and political views combined with the question of when our impact on the world around us actually became significant.

Perhaps one of the most exciting possibilities, however, of the environmental humanities, is that in forming connections between disciplines, the paper figures we place in these gaps may amalgamate into something more three dimensional.

While I am aware of myself as an active participant in my/the e/Environment, I'd never thought of myself as situated in (or as a participant in-?) geologic time… which is odd, because of course I am.

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My hope for this intensive is to experience [how this] liminal and migratory space– how this body of water connects to many different and spread out localities.

I want to experience the fullness that the Schuylkill has to offer.

I [want to] gain a be er understanding of how different disciplines intersect and how they can work together,

Personally, my initial goal is to go into each day open-minded to the possibility of new ideas, theories, and data, always assuming that the person I am talking to knows something that I don't. I also hope to meet lots of new and interesting people from many diverse backgrounds and I hope to obtain new and different perspectives of environmental topics, issues, and even policies by talking and working with them throughout this course.

Since the first time I've heard about the On Water Intensive, it just felt right. Artists, historians and scientists convening together to develop tools for assessing, interpreting and narrating the water that we live by and on and with-–can a student wish for more? Maybe you can wish for more—but your instructors are pre y pleased 🙂