

# Nature

The Louisiana delta is now often referred to by hydrologists as a “coupled human and natural system,” or, for short, a CHANS.

It's an ugly term  
— another nomenclatural hairball —  
but there's no simple way to talk  
about the tangle we've created.  
A Mississippi that's been harnessed,  
straightened, regularized, and shackled  
can still exert a godlike force;  
it's no longer exactly a river, though.  
It's hard to say who occupies  
Mount Olympus these days, if anyone.

**Elizabeth Kolbert,**  
***Under a White Sky***