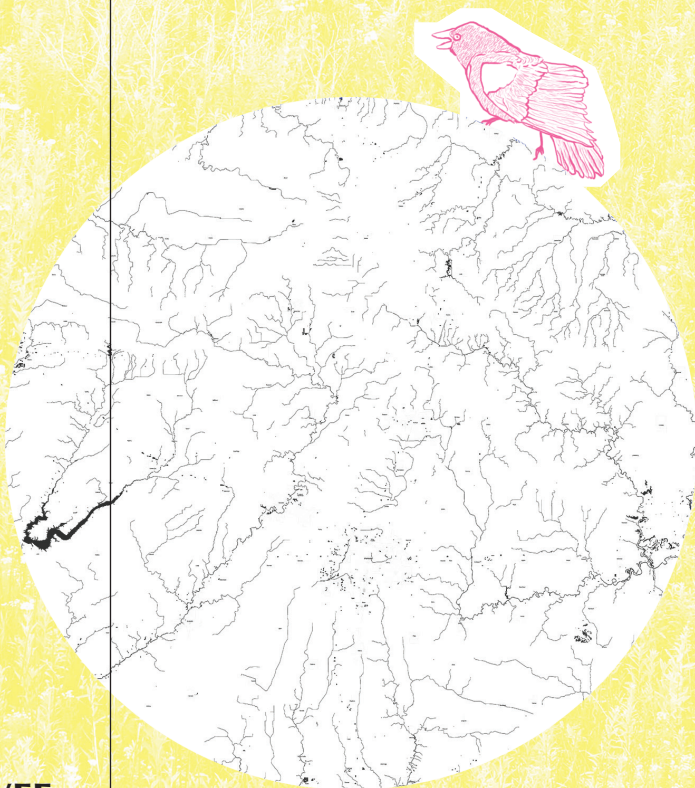


AFTER EXTRACTION

EXERCISES FOR POLITICAL ECOLOGY IMAGINARIES



**OVER
THE LEVEE**

**UNDER
THE PLOW**

AN EXPERIENTIAL CURRICULUM

These ten cards accompany the booklet, *Field Guide 05: After Extraction: A Partial Political Ecology of Central Illinois*, one in a series of **Field Guides to the Anthropocene Drift**. That booklet is a narrative guide to lands known as Central Illinois—specifically a region that some call the “Illinois Headwaters.” It is a combination of historical and contemporary observations of geological, social, and political forces that have shaped those lands and the lives that exist upon them. It attempts to be a creative application of political ecology, a field of study that views environmental and ecological concerns as always subject to political, social, and economic forces. Political ecology challenges the perception of landscapes as discrete and “natural.” As geographer Don Mitchell has said, “Landscape is important because it really is everything we see when we go outside. But it is also everything we do not see. ...it is only by examining the landscape in its material form... and only by analyzing the social relations that go into its making, that we can begin to really learn (and learn from) what we are looking at.” *

The booklet’s narratives are drawn from my experiences in specific places and my attempt to make sense of those experiences through research, reading, having conversations with others, and imagining other ways of relating to those places. These cards are designed to facilitate similar experiences in other places, other landscapes. How might our ability or inability to perceive such relationships across landscapes lead to different relations with them?

Ryan Griffis

* “New Axioms for Reading the Landscape: Paying Attention to Political Economy and Social Justice,” Don Mitchell. (2008)

1

A collage of images. At the top, a bulldozer is shown in a halftone pattern. Below it, a bulldozer is pushing a large pile of dirt. The background features a river flowing through a landscape. At the bottom, a city grid is visible, partially obscured by a dark, irregular shape.

HEADWATERS ARE A MYTH

SAYING HELLO

AFTER EXTRACTION

Try to answer as many of these as you can. It's not important that you already have complete answers, you can discuss the questions with others and consult any sources of information as you like. Write answers on this card, or somewhere else if you like.

Locate the nearest flowing body of water. This could be a river, a slough, a stream, a brook, a creek, a drainage ditch, an underground storm sewer.

What is its name (if it has one)? Where did this name come from? Does it have other names?

Can you locate where it begins? If so, what is there?

Where does it end?

Is there water present here now? Is there usually water here?

If you can touch the water (and it is safe to do so), what is the temperature?

If you can take a sample, using a clear cup or jar, how would you describe the water's color and clarity?

What languages are currently spoken along this body of water? What other languages are/have been used here?



2

**HOW TO DRAW LINES ON THE
GROUND IN A FLOODPLAIN, AND
WATCH THEM BE WASHED AWAY**

AFTER EXTRACTION

This exercise can be completed at the same site as the previous exercise, or at any accessible location, whether or not there is a body of water. The following three cards contain simple diagrams labeled *PRESENT*, *PAST*, & *FUTURE*. Respond to the following questions by writing and/or drawing on each diagram.

PRESENT

What is your relationship to this place? What histories and events connect you to it? Where do you locate yourself relative to the social and environmental forces that have shaped this place?

What do you know about the atmosphere above you, right now? Can you describe what it is composed of? What lives there? How far up does your knowledge reach?

What do you know about the earth and/or water beneath you, right now? Can you describe what it is composed of? What lives there? How deep does your knowledge reach?

PAST

Imagine this same atmosphere/earth/water as far back in time as you can, aiming for as close as you can get to 500 years ago. How far back does your connection to this place go? What precedes your connection? What do you see, hear, smell, feel? What is different?

FUTURE

Imagine this same atmosphere/earth/water as far into the future as you can, aiming for as close as you can get to 500 years from now. What is here now, and what is similar and different? How have you helped shape this place?

PRESENT

2.1

19,975 m — 65,536 ft

5 m — 16 ft

0.5 m — 2 ft



0.3 m — 1 ft

1.25 m — 4 ft

78 m — 256 ft

AFTER EXTRACTION

PAST

2.2

19,975 m — 65,536 ft

5 m — 16 ft

0.5 m — 2 ft



0.3 m — 1 ft

1.25 m — 4 ft

78 m — 256 ft

AFTER EXTRACTION

FUTURE

2.3

19,975 m — 65,536 ft

—

5 m — 16 ft

—

0.5 m — 2 ft

—



0.3 m — 1 ft

—

1.25 m — 4 ft

—

78 m — 256 ft

—

AFTER EXTRACTION



3

SCALES OF KNOWING

AN EXERCISE IN QUADRAT & TRANSECT METHODS

AFTER EXTRACTION

This exercise should be completed at a location with flowing water and can be the same site used in the first exercise. Here, we will use a “viewfinder” to limit the scale of the territory perceived and provide directional “lines of sight” to consider. Use the space around the viewfinder to write responses as desired.

Find the nearest body of flowing water, and use the viewfinder card to respond to the following questions:

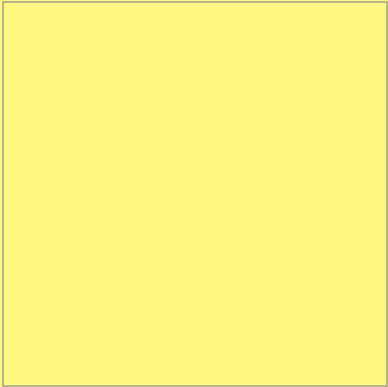
1. Aim the viewfinder at the ground

What do you see/hear/smell/feel there? How many different things do you see? How did these things get there? Do you believe that this small segment of ground is representative of the larger area?

2. Aim the viewfinder at the horizon, looking upstream

What can you see/hear/smell/feel at the furthest point on the horizon? How many things can you perceive? What changes occur between here and there (for example, in communities, elevation, land use, cultural activity, biodiversity, jurisdictions)? What things might enter the water as it flows between there and here?

3. Now, aim the viewfinder at the horizon, looking downstream, and answer the same questions



AFTER EXTRACTION

4



AFTER EXTRACTION

HOW TO KNOW IF YOU'RE STANDING ON A WETLAND

At any of the locations used in the previous exercises:

Is the ground you are standing on permeable or paved? Can you perceive any water? Is the water standing (a pond or lake)? Flowing (a river or creek)? Exposed, or contained (sewers or plumbing)? How is it accessible or utilized by humans and non-humans? Are there "wet" and "dry" periods here? How is water governed here (laws, governing bodies, corporate ownership, conservation efforts)?

Now, look at the map on the front of this card, and mark your approximate location (if in the Continental US). If your mark is visible, you are on indigenous land. If your mark is on a white area, you are most likely standing on land that was some form of wetland.

There are various types of wetlands, but a basic characteristic is that they are covered by water for significant periods of time throughout the year. The US EPA explains their importance:

Long regarded as wastelands, wetlands are now recognized as important features in the landscape [for] protecting and improving water quality, providing fish and wildlife habitats, storing floodwaters, and maintaining surface water flow during dry periods. ... they are some of the most biologically productive natural ecosystems in the world, comparable to tropical rain forests and coral reefs in their productivity and the diversity of species they support.

More than 220 million acres of wetlands are thought to have existed in the lower 48 states in the 1600s. Since then, wetland loss has been dramatic, with twenty-two states having lost more than 50 percent of their original wetlands.

For more information on these policies and current conservation efforts, see "Drain" (page 9) in *After Extraction*.

AFTER EXTRACTION

AS BELOW, SO ABOVE

This exercise can be done indoors or outdoors anywhere in the US.

First, get a glass of drinking water from the tap, if possible and safe. Next, visit the "How's My Waterway?" website run by the US EPA: mywaterway.epa.gov

Once on the website, enter your address or zip code in the search field, and click "Go." You will be taken to a map that reveals the outline of your local watershed and area water bodies. Clicking on any of these waterbodies will reveal more information, including recorded impairments and pollutants and the state of aquatic life. Select a waterbody that is close to you, or one that you have a special affinity for, and view the available information. Draw your watershed and waterbody on the front of this card.

Drink your glass of water and imagine that your body *is* the watershed. Imagine that the glass is the initial source of water in the area—rainfall, a spring, an open hydrant. As the water passes through your mouth and throat, it encounters plants and animals, and collects materials from the surface of the land (sediment, agricultural chemicals and waste, industrial effluent, debris). Some of these contribute more materials to the water, and some of them filter the water. As the water passes further into your body, it continues the water cycle journey, joining groundwater, aquifers, oceans, lakes, and weather systems. Eventually, it may again become the water you, or someone else, drinks.

Go back to your drawing and make notes of the things that the water encounters through the cycle you just imagined.