

How has unnatural selection shaped neighbourhood evolution?

It is interesting to contemplate an entangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent on each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us.

– Charles Darwin, 1859

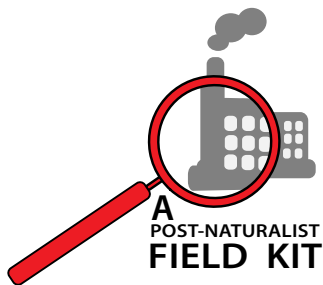


ACTIVITIES FOR QUESTION ONE

A. Walk in an industrial or business district and observe the names chiseled in older buildings. Are these 'fossil' names familiar or strange, and how do they compare to the names of the current occupants? Look for evidence of evolution in a building's design, such as bricked windows, loading docks moved or lowered, and sections added on or demolished. What might these patterns of naming and re-design reveal about the dominant forces in the neighborhood over time?

B. Contact a community organization. Ask for a tour of the neighborhood, focusing on the organization's history, mission, 'successful' and 'unsuccessful' campaigns, and current struggles.

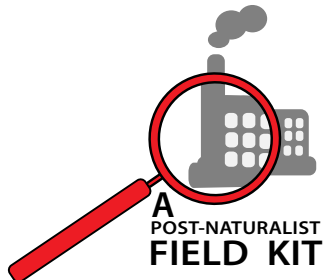
C. Find a local mega-project currently under consideration or in progress, as listed on the map. Walk the perimeter every three months for five years. Take samples and create documentation of the changes you observe over time.



What migratory pathways cross the neighbourhood?

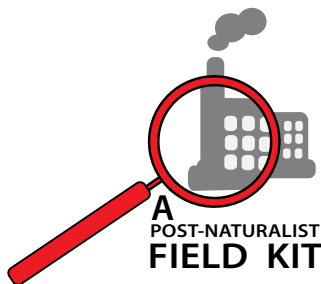
There is symbolic as well as actual beauty in the migration of birds. There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature—the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after the winter.

– Rachel Carson, 1964



ACTIVITIES FOR QUESTION TWO

- A.** Cross the tracks. How does the railroad right-of-way affect the surrounding habitat? Look for evidence of vibration and noise damage to buildings, impacts on residents' movement, and the ways that adjacent land is used. What is the relative value of people vs. freight in the 'right of way' zone?
- B.** Observe the entrance and exit ramps of major highways at several times of the day. How does highway affect the surrounding streets and blocks? How do the drivers react to you? Note what you smell, hear, and feel.
- C.** Walk the length of the neighbourhood on a street radiating outward from downtown. In addition to taking in the sights, tune in to your other senses. Listen for changes in music, language, and accent. Pay close attention to the smells outside restaurants. At regular intervals, ask a fellow pedestrian how they came to the neighbourhood, from where, and why.

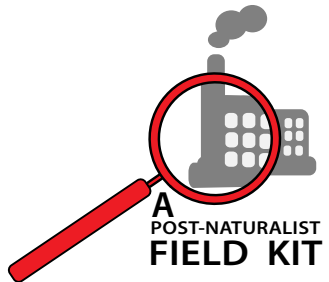


QUESTION THREE

How must the neighbourhood's future contend with its past?

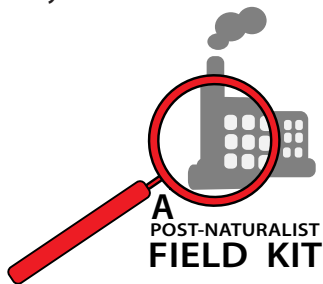
There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a weak Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim. That claim cannot be settled cheaply.

– Walter Benjamin, 1939



ACTIVITIES FOR QUESTION THREE

- A.** Visit one or more of the contaminated sites identified on the map. What do you see, hear, and smell there? Whom do you meet along the way? What sorts of development seem to be in store for the area? Note the types and conditions of plants, animals, and buildings near the site. Ask a fellow pedestrian what they know of contamination at the site.
- B.** Find signs of the re-use of former industrial facilities, including reclamation by plants and animals, adaptation to new industries, and the management of habitat for the affluent. Which pattern appears to be most common in different parts of the neighbourhood? Who seems to be driving the process?
- C.** Walk along and beneath the infrastructures of the 19th and 20th centuries—canals, railroads, and highways. What uses and users do you find there? Imagine the infrastructures of the future and how they will be used.

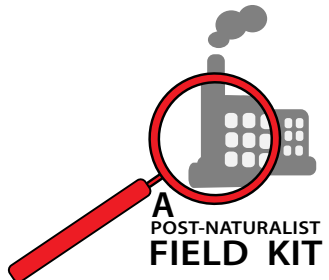


QUESTION FOUR

How is the neighbourhood's social ecology linked to other (eco)systems?

When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe.

– John Muir, 1911

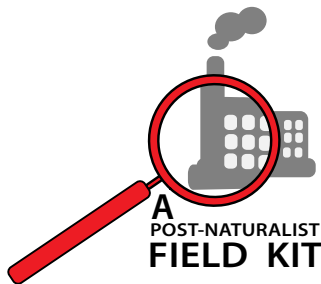


ACTIVITIES FOR QUESTION FOUR

A. Follow the overhead power lines back to the nearest substation. Note the characteristics of the streets that they pass over and the area around the substation. Check your compass for stray electric power—the more the needle jumps, the greater the electrical field. What does the substation sound like?

B. Observe the puddling of stormwater on a rainy day. Where does it tend to collect, and how quickly does it drain? How does it affect its surroundings as it pools, and what does it come in contact with when it touches the ground? Trace the route taken by this water from its beginning as rainfall and to its final destination, the sea.

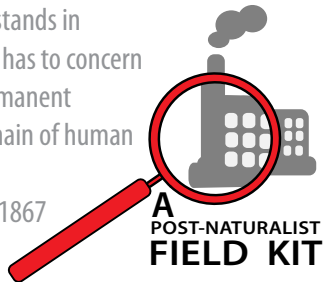
C. Follow a garbage truck on its rounds for the day and to the place it deposits what was collected. How far does the truck travel and through what areas? What is done with the garbage when it gets there? What is the garbage's ultimate fate, and how long will it take to reach it?



Where and how do different neighbourhood residents find, prepare, and consume their food?

The way that the cultivation of particular crops depends on fluctuations in market prices and the constant changes in cultivation with those prices fluctuating—the entire spirit of capitalist production, which is oriented to the most immediate of monetary profits—stands in contradiction to agriculture, which has to concern itself with the whole gamut of permanent conditions of life required by the chain of human generations.

— Karl Marx, 1867

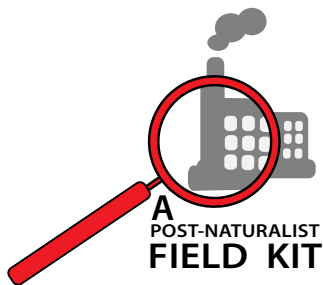


ACTIVITIES FOR QUESTION FIVE

- A.** Look up the major supermarkets in the neighbourhood. Travel to where they are not. What food sources do you find instead?

- B.** Walk the alleys and parking lots behind restaurants and supermarkets. What and whom do you meet there? How is excess food disposed of? Are the dumpsters locked or unlocked?

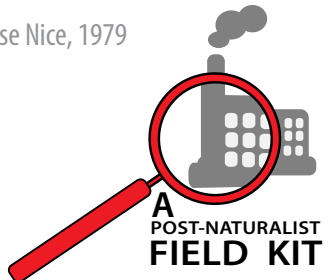
- C.** Visit a community garden on a summer evening. Ask someone you meet there for a tour and story of the garden.



To what degree does the neighbourhood's social ecology support different ways and forms of life?

I thought of my friends who never take walks... "for there was nothing to see." I was amazed and grieved at their blindness. I longed to open their eyes to the wonders around them...

– Margaret Morse Nice, 1979



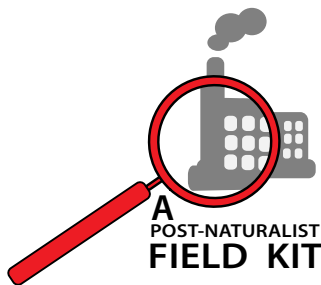
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ACTIVITIES FOR QUESTION SIX

A. Walk the train tracks looking for signs of non-railroad use. Tunnels in the brush may have been created by nesting raccoons, partying teenagers, or unhoused adults. What forms of life thrive in this habitat, and what are their (dis)connections with the rest of the neighbourhood?

B. Look for physical evidence of public over-investment in some neighbourhood niches and under-investment in others. What cultivars of dumpster or bus shelter and which species of street trees or ornamentals thrive in some microclimates but are not found in others?

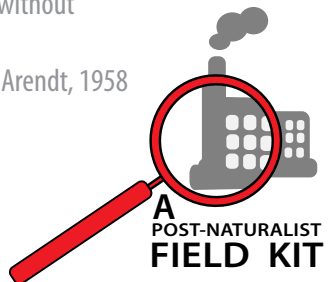
C. Look up the neighbourhood in a zoning map or the city's master plan. Compare what is planned for the future with what exists now. Visit the areas with the greatest planned change. How will the changes affect current inhabitants, and how do they feel about them?



How is the health of the neighbourhood linked to, or decoupled from, the health of the land?

The earth is the very quintessence of the human condition, and earthly nature, for all we know, may be unique in the universe in providing human beings with a habitat in which they can move and breathe without effort and without artifice.

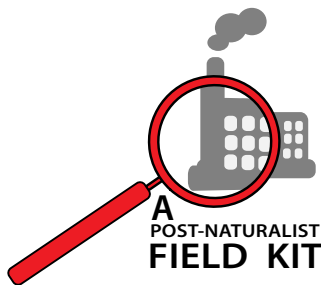
– Hannah Arendt, 1958



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ACTIVITIES FOR QUESTION SEVEN

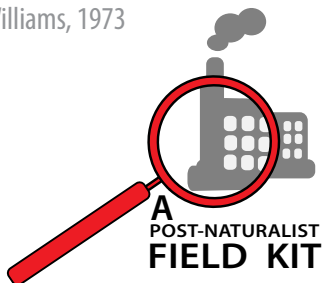
- A.** Visit a toxic site identified on the map. Inventory its social features. What kinds of social relations take place there? Between whom? To what degree do the uses of the site seem to recognize the contamination? To what degree does their behavior seem to address it?
- B.** Take a walk in the neighbourhood once a week for six months. Ask your fellow pedestrians how many people they know who have had cancer. Ask them if they think they know why.
- C.** Note the black dust that sometimes collects on windowsills and doorways. Note the nearest tree. Ask a pedestrian if they know anyone who has had cancer or a respiratory disease. Think about how air is made.



Where and in what ways does the environment become something to be purchased?

It was [a] kind of confidence, to make Nature move to an arranged design, that was the real invention of the landlords. And we cannot then separate their decorative from their productive arts; this new self-conscious observer was very specifically the self-conscious owner.

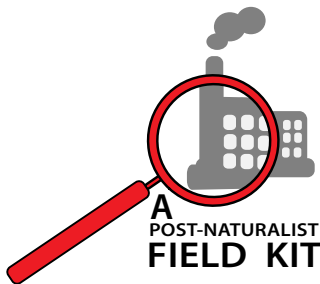
– Raymond Williams, 1973



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ACTIVITIES FOR QUESTION EIGHT

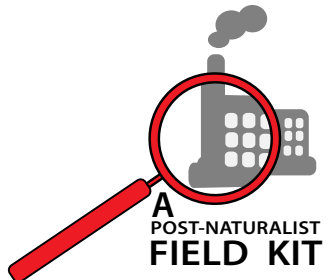
- A.** Survey the cost of a meal sold and consumed on the street and compare to the average cost of a meal sold and consumed in an indoor restaurant.
- B.** Stand by a highway entrance on a summer's day. Note the number and type of cars that pass in an hour and if their windows are rolled down or up. Express the average Blue Book value of cars with their windows rolled up as a multiple of the average Blue Book value of cars with their windows rolled down.
- C.** Visit a park or recreational area. Ask fellow visitors what it cost them—in labor time, fuel, equipment, and any fees—to be there. Ask them how long it will take for them to earn the cost back.



How are threats to neighbourhood integrity perceived and by whom?

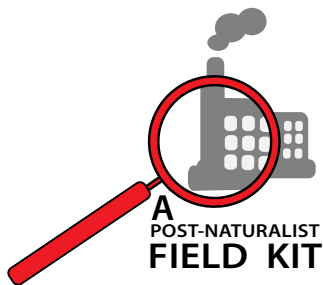
Man is everywhere a disturbing agent.
Wherever he plants his foot, the harmonies
of nature are turned to discords. . . [O]f all
organic beings, man alone is to be regarded as
essentially a destructive power..

– George Perkins Marsh, 1874



ACTIVITIES FOR QUESTION NINE

- A.** Walk the neighbourhood boundary. Note what and who is entering and exiting it. Note what and who remains on the edge.
- B.** Ask pedestrians at two different sites to list the top three threats to neighbourhood habitat. In what ways do the lists differ? In what ways are they the same?
- C.** Attend every neighbourhood or city council meeting for a year. Create a frequency graph of the topics of public comments and the individuals and groups making them. Note any time a group becomes the explicit or implicit topic of a comment.



What are some ways of increasing the diversity of forms of life and density of social relations in the neighbourhood?

When some remote ancestor invented the shovel, he became a giver: he could plant a tree. And when the axe was invented, he became a taker: he could chop it down. Whoever owns land has thus assumed, whether he know it or not, the divine functions of creating and destroying plants.

– Aldo Leopold, 1948



ACTIVITIES FOR QUESTION TEN

- A.** Create an informal public input process to elicit suggestions for neighbourhood improvement. Pair any suggestions that are mutually exclusive. Publish them all on a poster to distribute in the neighbourhood.

- B.** Spend an afternoon in a vacant lot in the neighbourhood. Note the activities that currently take place there. Ask those using or passing by the space what they would like to see in it. Imagine a use that would satisfy at least three different desires.

- C.** Organize incongruous uses of public space. Invite incongruous people to contribute to them.

