The Penn Program in Environmental Humanities Presents

ECOTOPIAN TOOLKIT

2018 PROJECTS





Penn Program in Environmental Humanities



TOOL-MAKING has long been regarded as a signature trait of the human species. Increasingly, this ability has been documented in non-humans and more-than-humans too. What tools might we make together in this supposed age of the human, the Anthropocene? What tools are we most urgently in need of in this geological epoch when humans are forcefully shaping and re-shaping earth's systems?

Global warming and other anthropocene challenges, including the ongoing mass extinction event, often lead to apocalyptic visions, despair, or apathy. We may be roughly eighty, two hundred, five hundred years—or far longer—into the profound planetary transformations named by the Anthropocene. The origins of the age of the human are disputed, but Toolmakers' primary concern is not to date its onset. Instead, it is our shared conviction that considering a longer history of the now can help us better to represent and so to respond to our troubled and toxic contemporary moment.

Amidst our sense of dystopian urgency, Ecotopian Toolmakers aim to recall the role of utopian narratives in the environmental imaginary, including the environmental sciences. Looking toward the future, we ask how utopian thought might prompt the kinds of integrated and participatory production of knowledge that Anthropocene entanglements require. We want to shed light on the pasts and futures of utopian thought not as an escape from the urgency and violence of the Anthropocene, but as a productive response. If utopian desires lie behind environmental actions, including the production of knowledge, they are rarely constructed consciously and creatively. Might a utopian turn help us navigate warmer, rising waters? Can it help build refuge?

Makers and users of Ecotopian Tools explore how the utopian imaginary can help make worlds simultaneously less carbon-intensive, more equitable, more mutually entangled, and openly available for visions of other possible futures. Together, we are asking: Can the utopian imaginary help to conceptualize environmental problems so that their solutions are participatory? Democratic? Collaborative? Multi-lingual? Open-ended? Attuned to environmental injustice, slow violence and toxic legacies? Hopeful?

With project grants to Toolmakers from the Penn Program in Environmental Humanities, we have been exploring these questions while making, and using, Ecotopian Tools since 2017. We are pleased to present this little book awash with big ideas and the Ecotopian Tools of our 2018 Toolmakers. We hope you will use them well—and stay tuned for our 2019 Ecotopian Toolmakers programs.



Deirdre Murphy
Mapping Movements: The Invisible Highways of Urban Birds at the Water's Edge

Mapping Movements, The Invisible Highways of Urban Birds at the Water's Edge is a large-scale Intaglio print that illuminates the abundance of avian life along the banks of the Schuylkill River. Using traditional bird banding data techniques and innovative Motus geo-tracking technology, Murphy reflects on past and current understanding of urban bird migration in the anthropocene age along with the effects of climate change on their migratory patterns. Data visualization was in collaboration with John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge, The University of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania Audubon and Drexel University's Academy of Natural Science. Intaglio print was produced by C.R. Ettinger Print Studio in Philadelphia. www.deirdremurphyart.com

Murphy earned her MFA from the University of Pennsylvania and BFA from the Kansas City Art Institute. Murphy is represented by the Gross McCleaf Gallery, Boxheart Gallery and Zinc Contemporary Gallery. Exhibitions include: Independence Seaport Museum, Philadelphia International Airport, Palm Springs Museum of Art, Biggs Museum of American Art, New Bedford Art Museum, Tacoma Art Museum.



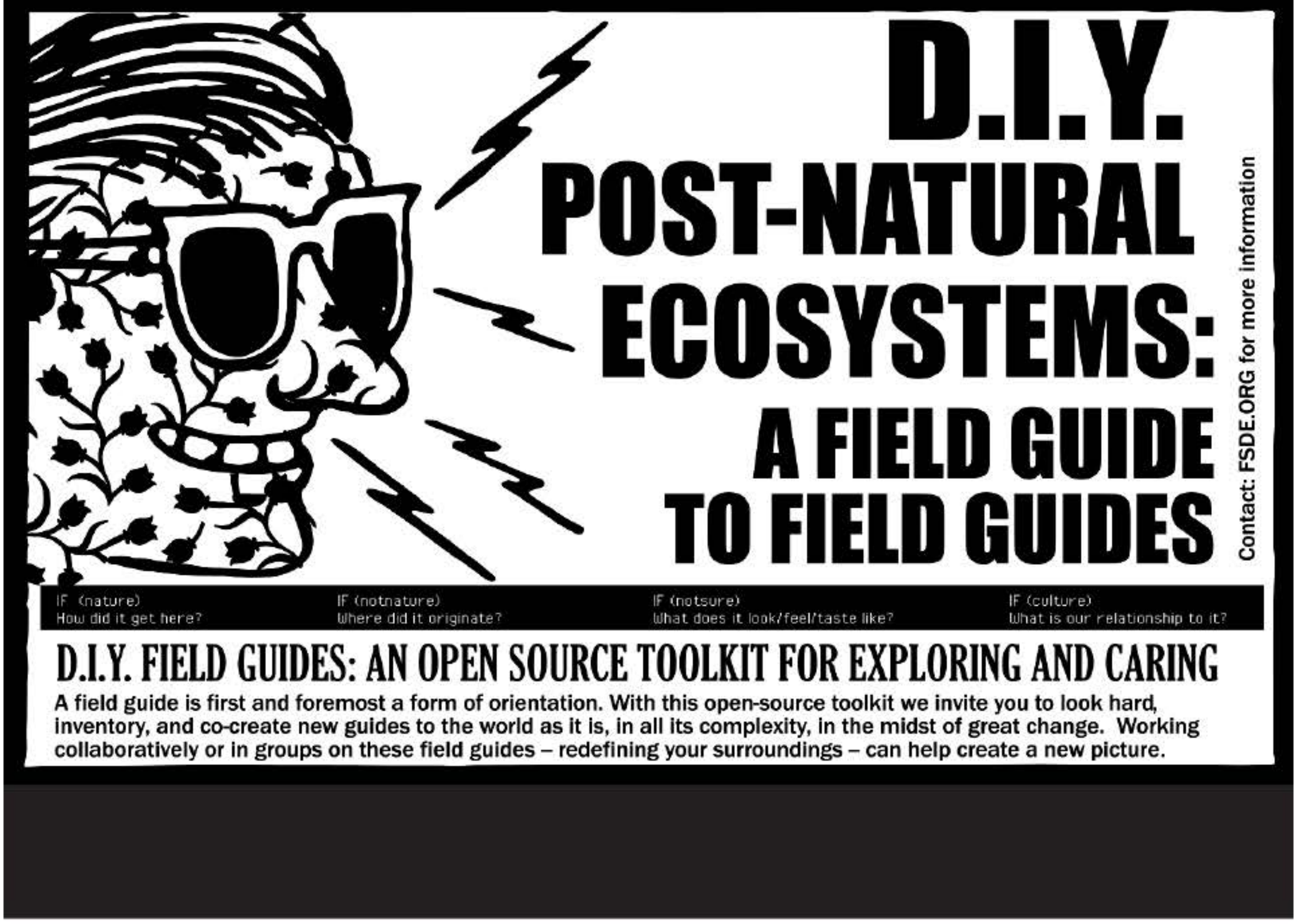


Environmental Performance Agency (EPA)
Embodied Scientist Parkour

Embodied Scientist Parkour is a training for interspecies communication and deepened relationships with the in-between landscapes of the Schuylkill River. Reimagining a conventional fitness course, the project invites participants to engage in a series of site-specific movement scores situated along the Grays Ferry Crescent Trail to expand the possibility of how we collect and co-generate embodied scientific data. Find a partner to train with — entangle your bodies with wild urban plants, vibrate with the multispecies highway, and develop new forms of intimacy with the river's edge. **#embodiedscientist**

Environmental Performance Agency is an artist collective using social and embodied practices to advocate for the agency of all living performers co-creating our environment, specifically through the lens of spontaneous urban plants, native or migrant. EPA agents include andrea haenggi, Christopher Kennedy, Ellie Irons, Catherine Grau.





Floating Studio for Dark Ecologies
D.I.Y Post-Natural Ecosystems: A Field Guide to Field Guides

D.I.Y. Post-Natural Ecosystems – a working method for creating field guides to "Dark Ecologies" – is an open source tool intended to generate a library of field guides to novel ecosystems and under-recognized infrastructures. It provides instructions, models, and methods of documenting and archiving hyperobjects and interrelationships across geologic time and planetary scales. Included is a plan for a flat bottomed punt (designed with the collective Mare Liberum) which can be constructed from found materials, and a workshop outline. The FSDE Field Guides project offers the opportunity to invest in a new mindset: creative imagination as emergency preparedness.

Under the collective name Floating Studio for Dark Ecologies, Dylan Gauthier, Kendra Sullivan, and Marina Zurkow have come together to catalyze connections between artists, activists, and citizen scientists working and living amidst accelerated changes, globalization and deep uncertainty. "Dark ecology" (Timothy Morton) challenges Romantic views of nature as separate from human action and invites us to "make visible what is hiding underneath."



Photo: Austin Bream



FICTILIS
Wastewater Walk

Wastewater Walk is a series of performative walks leading participants along the paths traveled by human waste through mostly invisible infrastructure to treatment facilities, which embody a complex confluence of social-environmental issues around sustainability, resilience, equity, accessibility, and the psychological ramifications of urban sanitation systems. FICTILIS's 2018 Philadelphia walk explored the built and unbuilt environment around a small section of the Schuylkill River, framing floatable plastic and foam waste as artifacts of global commodities markets, followed by a tour of the Southeast Water Pollution Control (wastewater treatment) plant, where similar deposits of petroleum-based debris were observed.

FICTILIS is the collaborative practice of multimedia artists and curators Andrea Steves and Timothy Furstnau. They work on a project basis, across many types of media and disciplines, with ongoing interests in language and taxonomy, materialisms and waste flows, monuments and public memory, and political ecology.



river beasts & besties

exploring our fears of the deep

Ethnologica

River Beasts and Besties: Exploring our Fears of the Deep

Philadelphia families created the art in this book during a collaborative visual storytelling and myth-making workshop called “River Beasts and Besties.” During the workshop, we celebrated cultural beliefs about rivers from around the world and explored the mystery of what lives—or doesn’t—beneath the water’s surface. We created fantastical beasts to explore dystopian imaginings of urban waterways and fears about the future health of our watershed. We also conjured besties, our mythical creatures to protect our rivers from ecological destruction. We hope this book will help readers to do the same.

Beth Uzwiak is an artist, anthropologist and cultural activist with a deep commitment to community engagement. She has exhibited art in numerous places including Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pyramid Atlantic Art Center and Woman Made Gallery. Anastasia Hudgins is a sociocultural anthropologist with broad experience in qualitative research. Much of her work revolves around the relationships between health, human rights and social policy. Together, they founded Ethnologica, a research consultancy firm with a focus on community-based ethnography.