



Notes:

# (Is)Land as Pedagogy



Little Island is a new public park, located in Hudson River Park, where all New Yorkers and visitors can experience nature and art in a unique urban oasis on the Hudson River.

# (Is) Land

## **Take a walk around the park. Observe and imagine, contextualize and scrutinize (~30 min)**

Use all of your senses to take in the experience: what do you see immediately in front of you, in the surrounding context, and off in the distance? What do you hear and smell and feel – through your fingertips, on your skin, under your feet? Can you taste the briny air?

Attune yourself to the Island's various landscaped "microclimates," sensory zones, topographies (e.g., elevations and depressions), material assemblages (e.g., concrete and steel, leaves and water, rust and dirt), and programmatic arrangements (i.e., spaces serving different functions and affording different forms of engagement). Imagine how we might design opportunities to learn with these variables. What can we learn up high or down low, on the Island's perimeter or at the center, buried amidst the concrete piles or shrouded in leaves, in the sun or shade, amidst quiet or clamor?

Expand your scope beyond the here and now; try to sense and imagine distantly. What might Little Island look, smell, and sound like at different times of day, or in different seasons? What don't you see from here? What aspects of the city are hidden from this location? (e.g., contrast the Hudson River's development with that of the East River). Where does Little Island fit within present, past, and future flows – of currents, capital, people, other species, logistical systems, and so forth?

What might this spot have looked, smelled, sounded, and felt like 50, 100, or 500 years ago? How does Little Island relate to this spot's geologic, environmental, indigenous, maritime, and meatpacking pasts; to the piers' queer histories; to Chelsea's commercial art scene; to the nearby "starchitecture" (including Barry Diller's own IAC building, designed by Frank Gehry), the High Line, the Whitney Museum, and Hudson Yards just 20 blocks north?

And what about 100 – or 500 – years in the future: what might it feel like to be on Little Island, if it exists, then? How might we design learning exercises to promote these broader spatial and temporal understandings?

Consider: who does this space welcome – or, as philosopher Louis Althusser encourages us to consider, who and how does this environment hail, or "interpellate," particular subjects? How might we design a pedagogical experience to make Little Island more welcoming and inclusive, to validate the experiences and knowledge that our students bring to this space?

**Now, imagine using Little Island as a pedagogical platform, a "school," that embraces Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's "land as pedagogy" ethos; Paulo Freire's advocacy for conscientization and "problem-posing" rather than "problem solving"; and bell hooks' advocacy for wonder, pleasure, and perhaps even, on occasion, productive discomfort and tension (~45 min)**

Consider: Who is your community?: pre-schoolers, college students, senior citizens, an intergenerational group of intentional learners?

How might you take advantage of this space's myriad material and experiential aspects to design lessons and experiences to allow your community of learners to learn about climate science, botany, structural engineering, real estate, (landscape) architecture, environmental psychology, queer / indigeneous / maritime / urban history, philanthropy, urban political economy, and a host of other entangled subjects?

How might you design – over the course of a single day-long workshop or a series of hour-long visits (consider, for example, your community's attention spans and the island's own temporalities!) – a curriculum that puts into practice many of the principles and strategies we discussed this semester. How might we promote engaged, multisensory, embodied, collaborative, interdisciplinary learning? You might recall that you, as a class, asked that we visit a "non-square" classroom: how can we take advantage of this classroom's morphologies and topologies, its lack of screens and white walls? How might we make its infrastructures – both physical and intellectual – transparent or experiential?

How might we acknowledge and exploit the island's multiplicity: as an engineered platform, as a settler colonizer of indigenous terrain, as a geological and oceanographic environment, as a product of urban development, as a node amidst an urban palimpsest (a layering of histories), as a point of confluence in multispecies ecologies?

How might we bring in collaborators, and recognize our classroom's embeddedness in its site and local community? Art lessons with the Whitney? Bread baking with Amy's in Chelsea Market?

Sketch out the longer arc of your curriculum, and try to flesh out at least three "lessons" or activities. Think back to our "lesson planning" exercise from April 5:

What are your learning goals? What skills and sensibilities do you hope your learners will develop?

Describe the activity and its modalities of engagement – e.g., a demonstration, a citizen science experiment, a sound-recording or role-playing exercise, etc.

Where will the lesson take place, and how will it engage with its particular site? Why does its situatedness matter?

What else matters?