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Stitching as Knowing: Mapping Nebraska with Textiles and Thread

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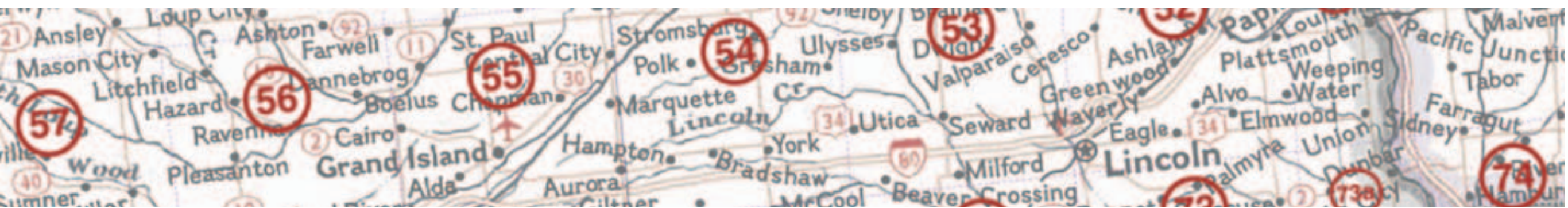
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Stitching as Knowing

Mapping Nebraska with Textiles and Thread

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Wauneta
Section 65

I'm mapping Nebraska . . .



Box Butte
Section 015

. . . making a stitched and digitally imaged cartography of the state—physical, social, cultural, psychological—where I live





Topo map tracings



Terrain Squares and Locator Map

I stitch, embroider, trace, stencil, screen, transfer, button, bind and connect. I piece and layer and quilt . . .



“Already been
here and gone.
Just the tops of
the grass
bending.”

—Michael Hannon

Fort Niobrara
Section 006

what I see, what I sense and what I remember



Locator Map, Section 42A
in progress



TOPO by National Geographic

working with images and data, using both the digital (pixels and code) . . .



Cloth and paper laminations
with digital imagery

as well as the “digital” — the work of the hand



Merritt Reservoir
Section 018

archiving what is visible and what is hidden



Mapping Nebraska: Locator Map and Terrain Squares
Haydon Art Center

Making a fabric . . . Nebraska

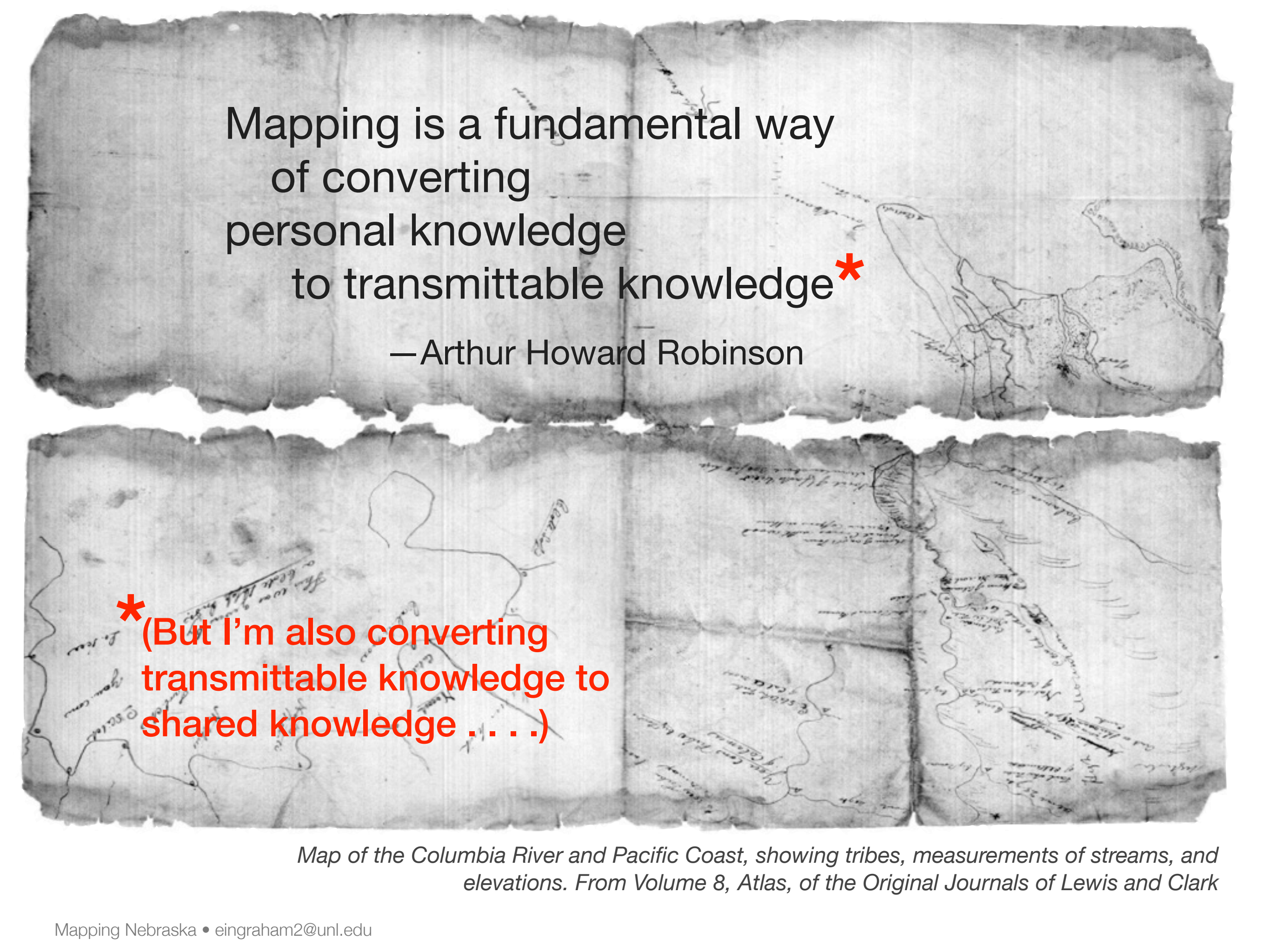


You're on earth.
There's no cure for
that.

—Samuel Beckett

Hampton
Section 055

. . . locating myself, and the viewer
grounding myself, and the viewer

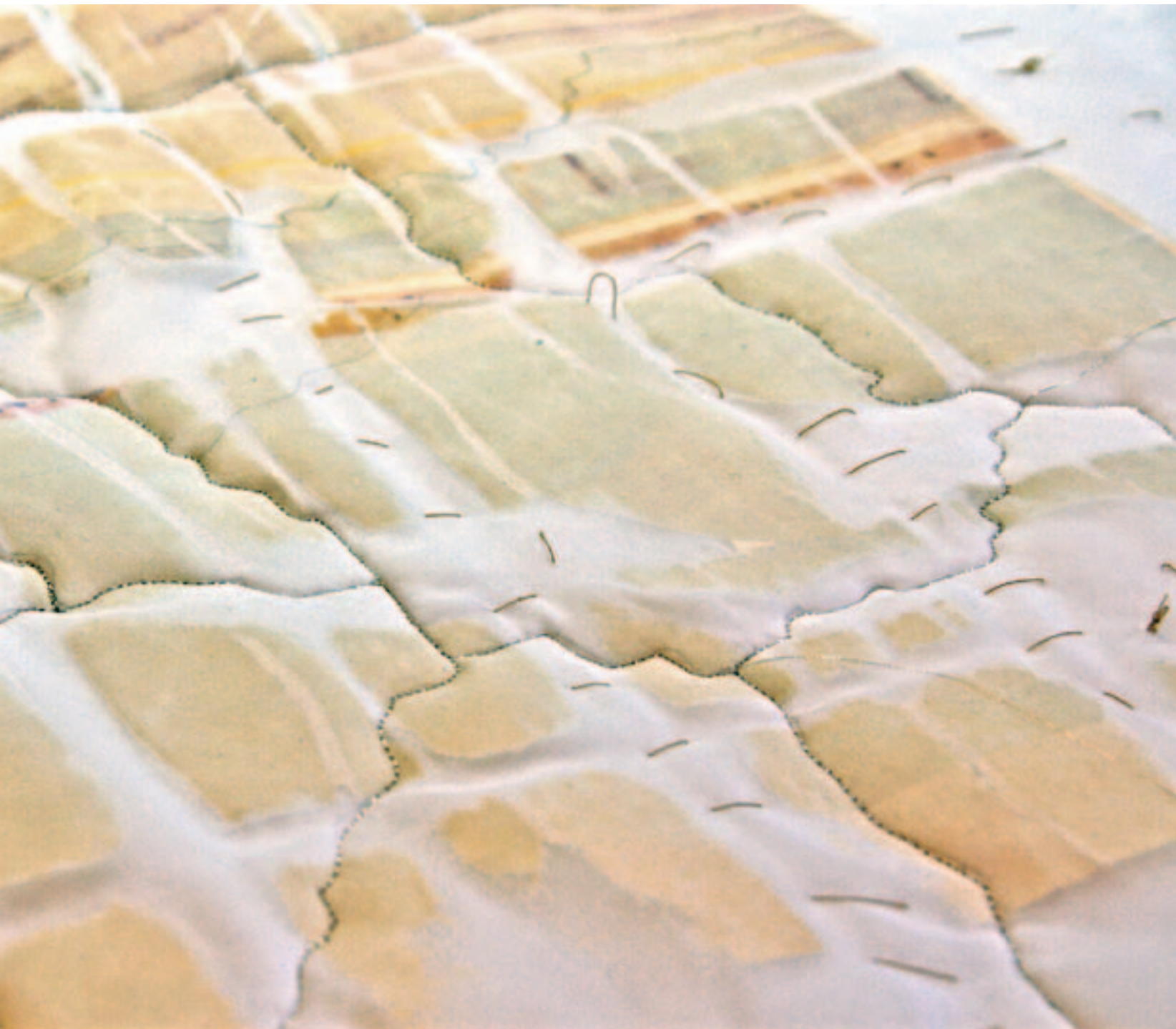


Mapping is a fundamental way
of converting
personal knowledge
to transmittable knowledge*

—Arthur Howard Robinson

*(But I'm also converting
transmittable knowledge to
shared knowledge)

Map of the Columbia River and Pacific Coast, showing tribes, measurements of streams, and elevations. From Volume 8, Atlas, of the Original Journals of Lewis and Clark



cloth pliable, woven, felted fabric
for covering, concealing, decorating,
protecting

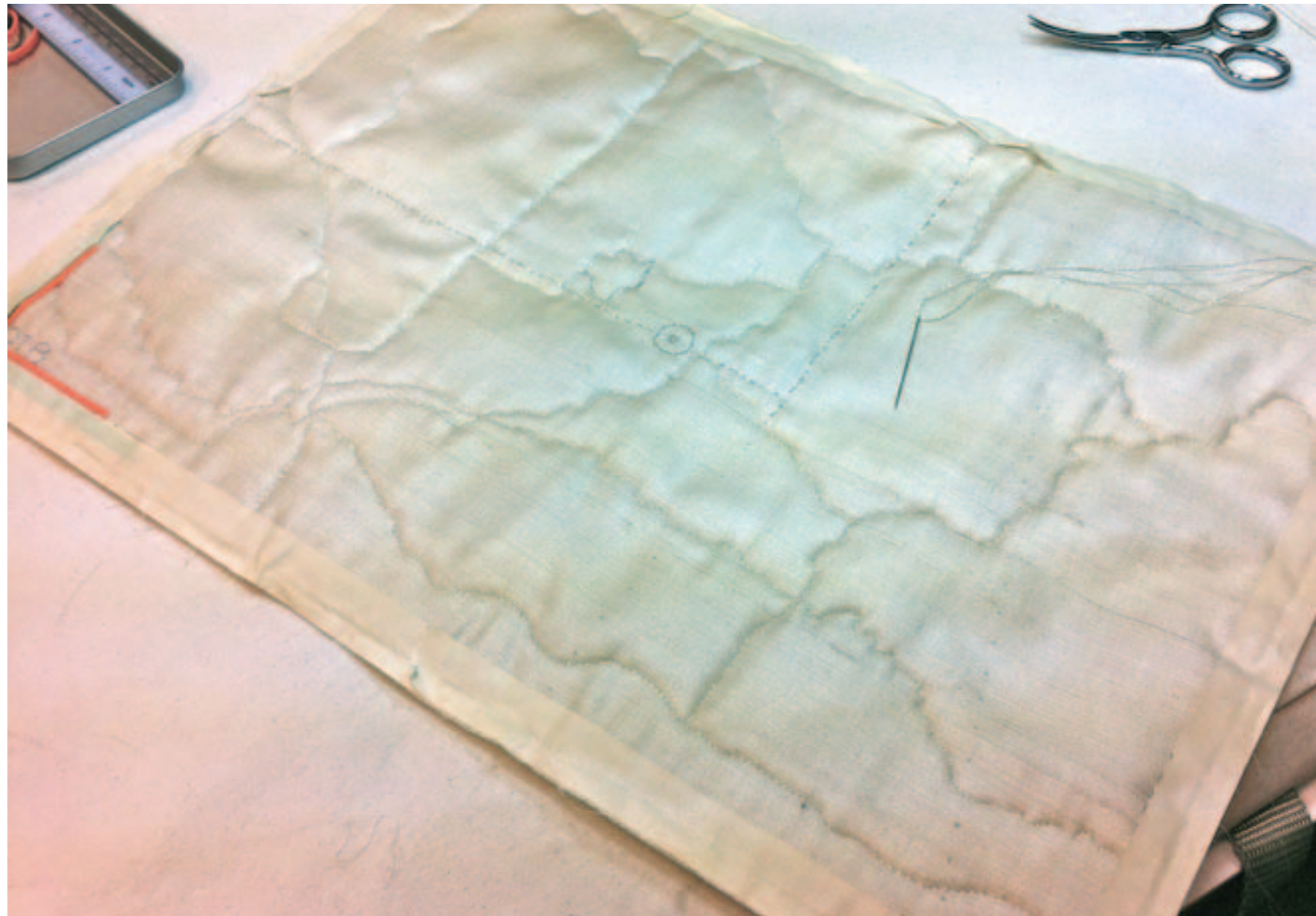
stitch a loop of thread
from a single pass of the needle
for making, mending,
joining, securing

embroider decorate with pattern
or design
add invented details

Stitching, like mapping, is also a fundamental way of knowing
but one which is situated internally, with reference to the body . . .



Ground Cloth
Louisville, Section 052 (detail)



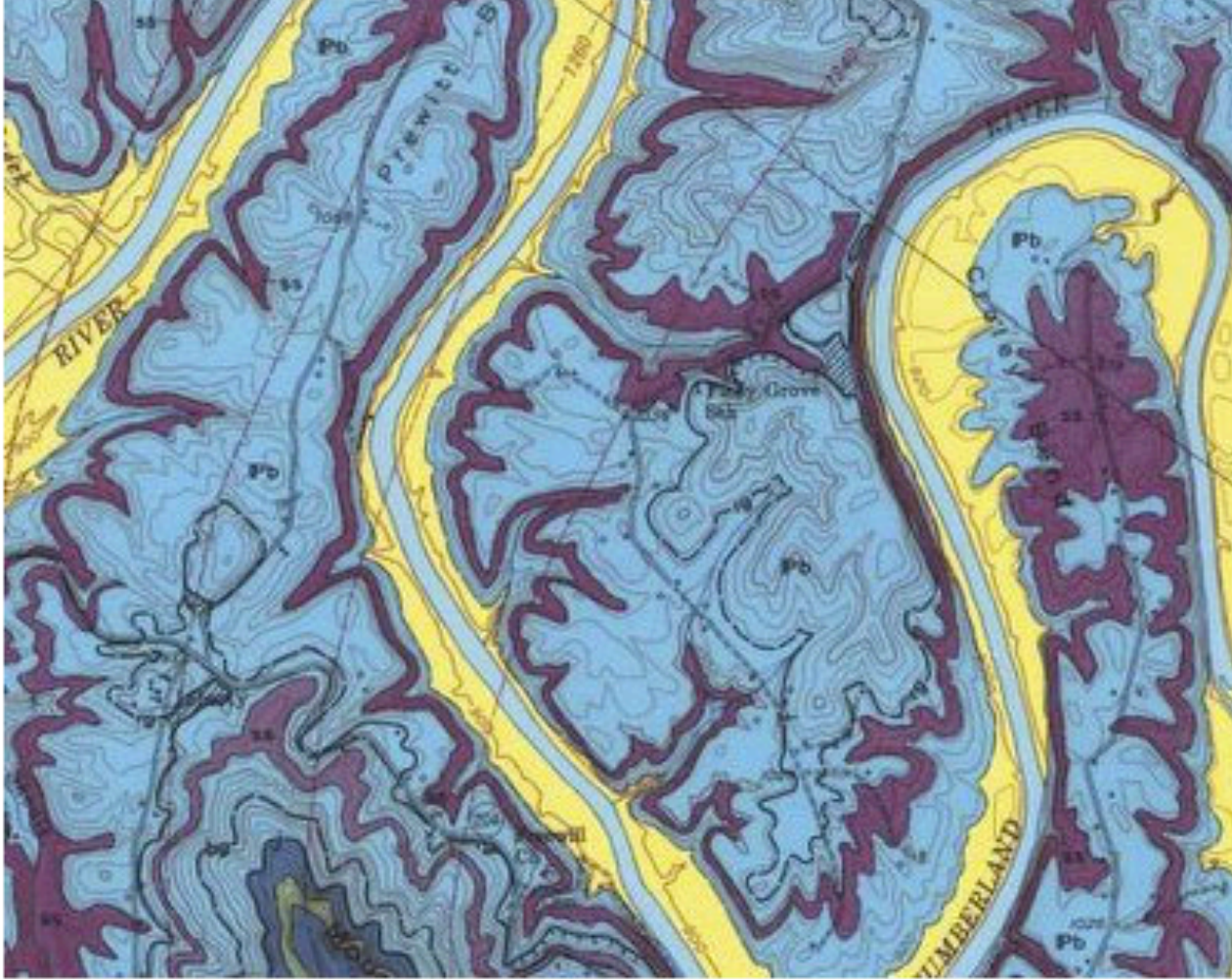
Ground Cloth
Merritt Dam, Section 018 (back)

Drawing is a patient search (Le Corbusier)
Stitching is a tactile exploration (Elizabeth Ingraham)



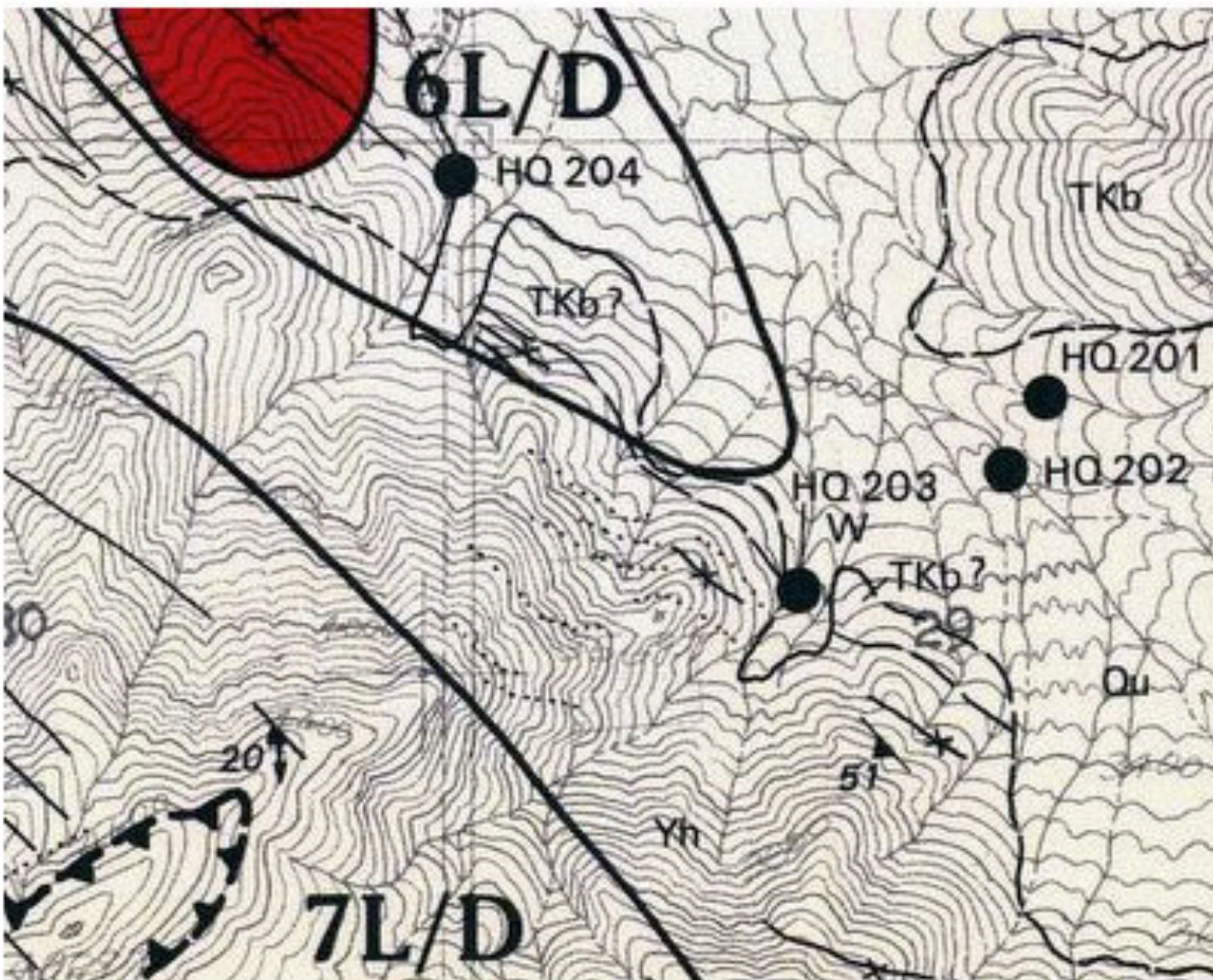
Terrain Square, Section 084
First level of stitching

. . . there is a ritual to repetition, which provides an antidote to isolation and despair,
which gives scope to fantasy and frees the mind (Lucy Lippard)



My project began in naiveté and innocence.

I was enthralled with “the extraordinary beauty of abstract terrestrial science . . .”



<http://bldgblog.blogspot.com/2005/12/bldgblogs-topographic-map-circus.html>

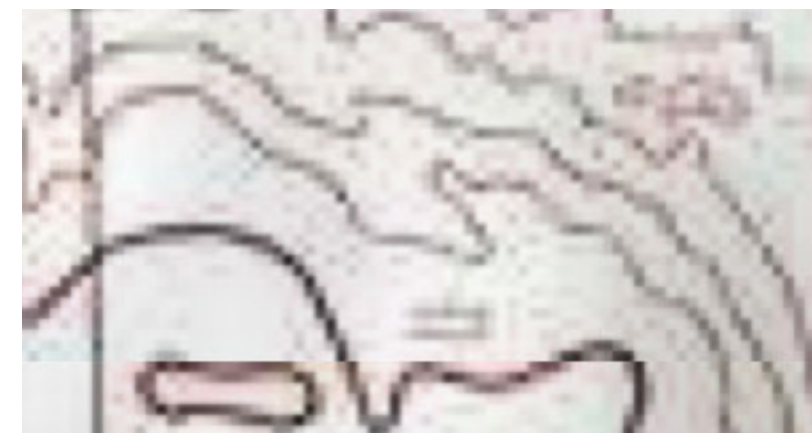
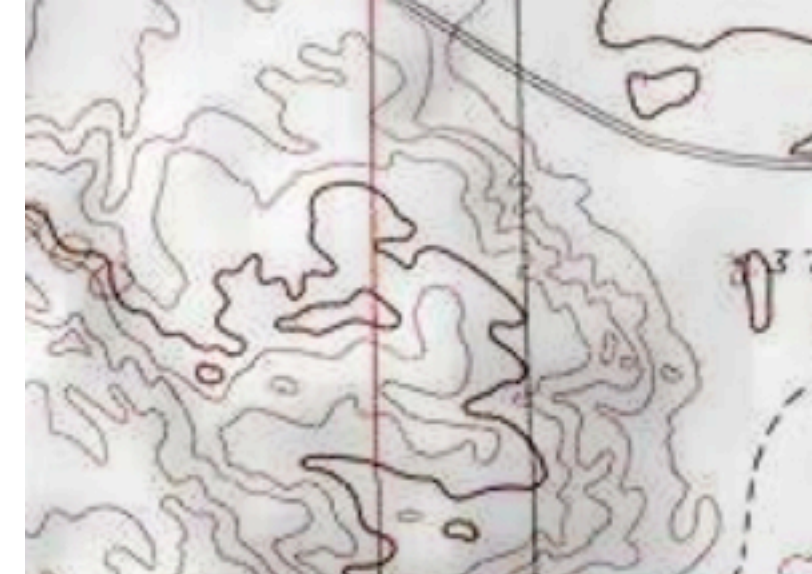
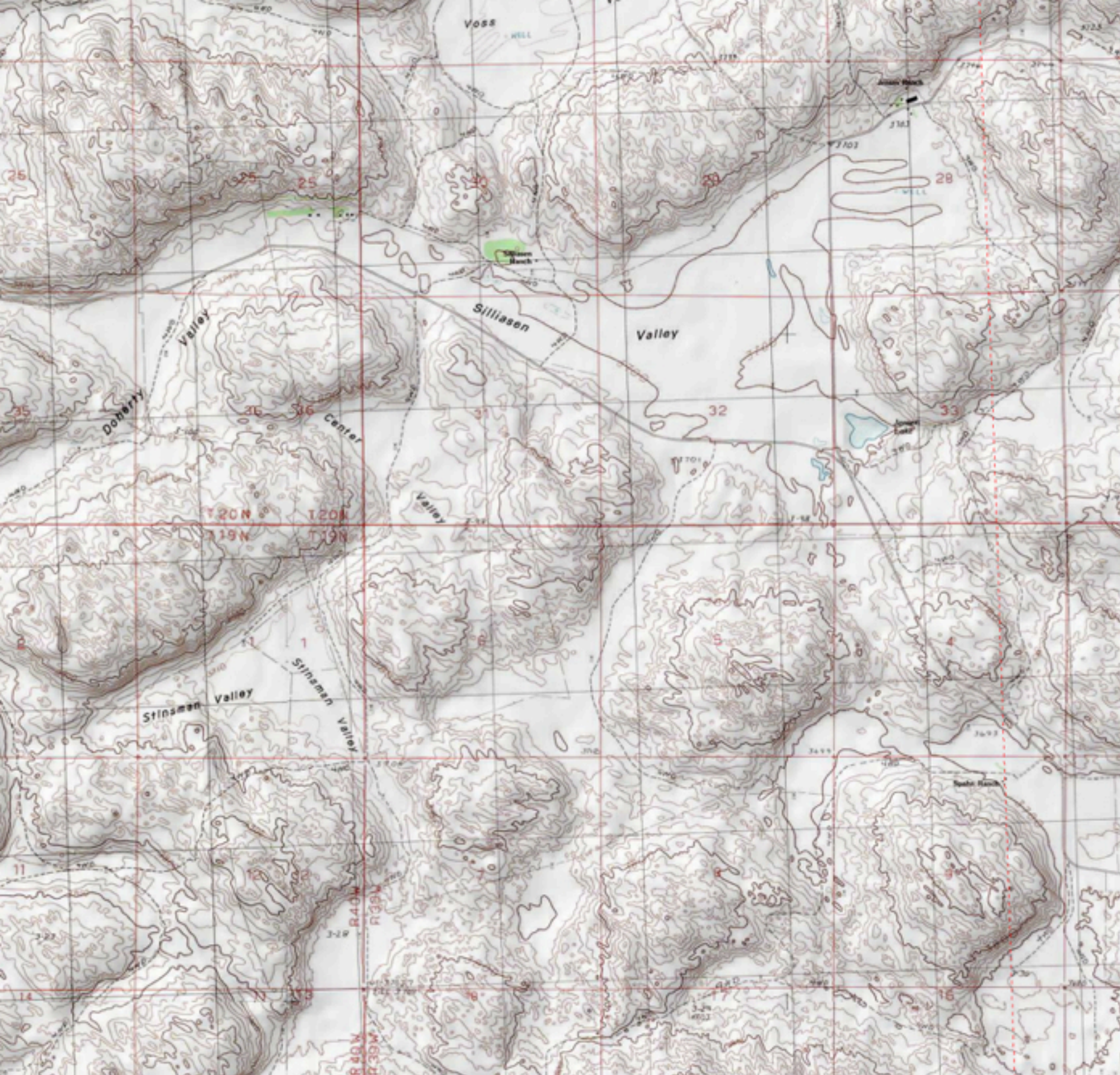


I reasoned that I were going to look at topographic maps, why not look at Nebraska?

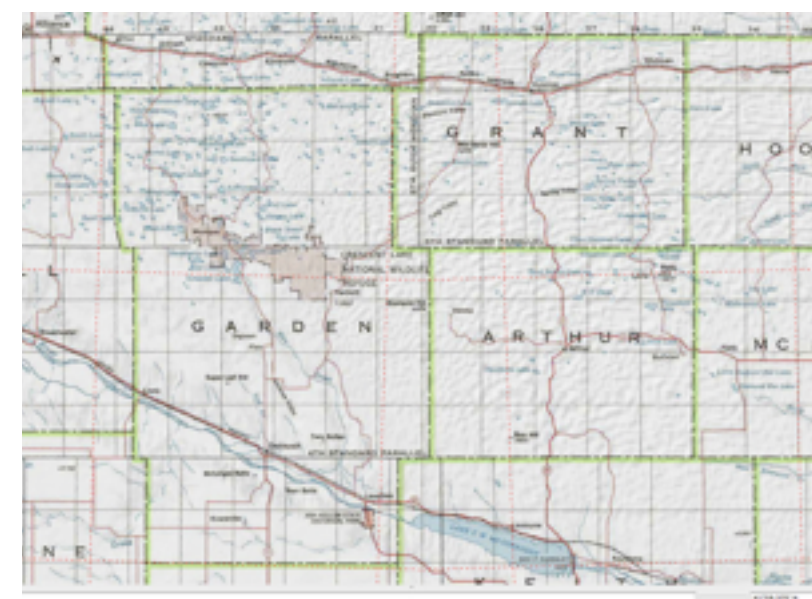
Imagine my surprise when I discovered you get Kansas for free

Five levels of map detail—from two National Geographic Atlas maps to a USGS 1:24,000 scale (7.5') seamless topographic map—the most detailed outdoor recreation maps available!

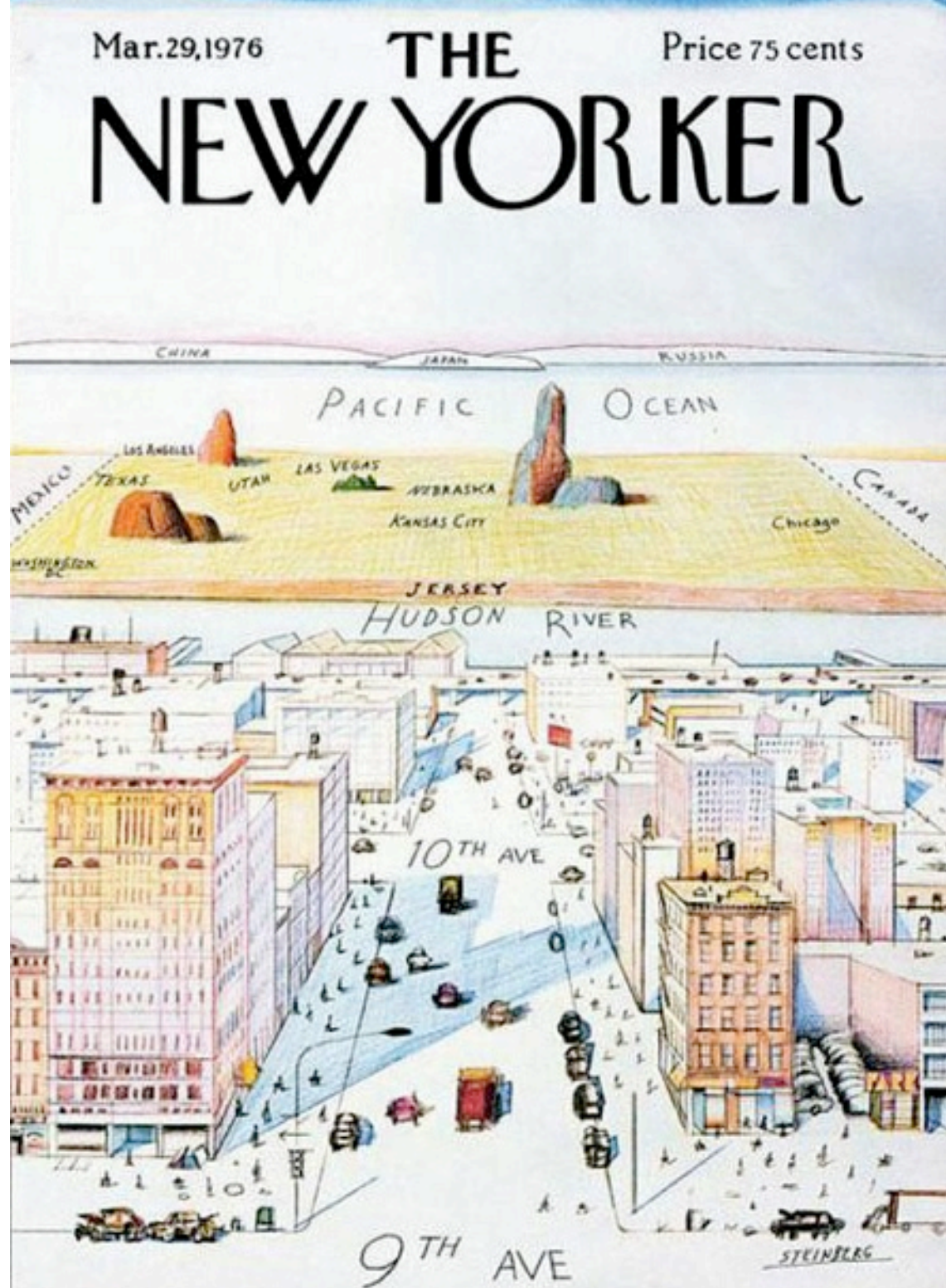
Order now!



41°39.023' N	101°51.603' W	3785 ft.
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Looking at these topo maps, I quickly became frustrated. I didn't know where I was . . .



Nebraska from NYC - Saul Steinberg



My understanding of Nebraska when I began this project

My understanding of Nebraska was as uninformed and incomplete as that of someone living in Manhattan. Maybe more so

Being dissatisfied* is a great start,
because by being dissatisfied you can
elbow your way into a space where
everything can come from an original
place right from the start.

—Chris Wink, Blue Man Group

**and ashamed of my ignorance and
saddened by my lack of connection to the
state where I live . . .*

I needed to see ALL of the towns in Nebraska

I needed a map larger than any I could buy

I decided to draw my own

The Liz Grid



I divided Nebraska into an eccentric grid of 95 sections, 33 miles square, numbered right to left, then left to right (“boustrophedon” or “as the oxen ploughs”)—a system also used by the US Survey.



Locator Map Section 42A in progress

For more than two years, I drew Nebraska. I drew **every** city, every town, every railroad, every river, every lake and every creek, to scale (1" = 2.75 mi) on 12" squares of Tyvek. (Trapezoidal sections reflect the curvature of the earth)



Locator Map in progress
Linsey Graef, UCARE student



Locator Map
7' (h) x 15' (w)
graphite on Tyvek

How I started and how I finished.



Locator Map
detail, sections 10 and 11



Locator Map
graphite on Tyvek

Tyvek is a non woven fabric and graphite has the same Greek root—*graphein* or “to write”—as the word “cartography”



o (detail) Sec.s 73A-74; 75A-75;
ng marks Nebraska border



Locator Map, detail Sec.s 12-*A; 13-16A
graphic shows location of Terrain Square

Details of the Locator Map with the Tyvek squares stitched together and then topstitched. Section numbers are blind stamped and embroidered in Braille and a stamped graphic marks the location of the quilted relief squares.



Section 35, detail



Section 35, contours for stitching

Finally I am ready to stitch



Terrain Square, Section 084

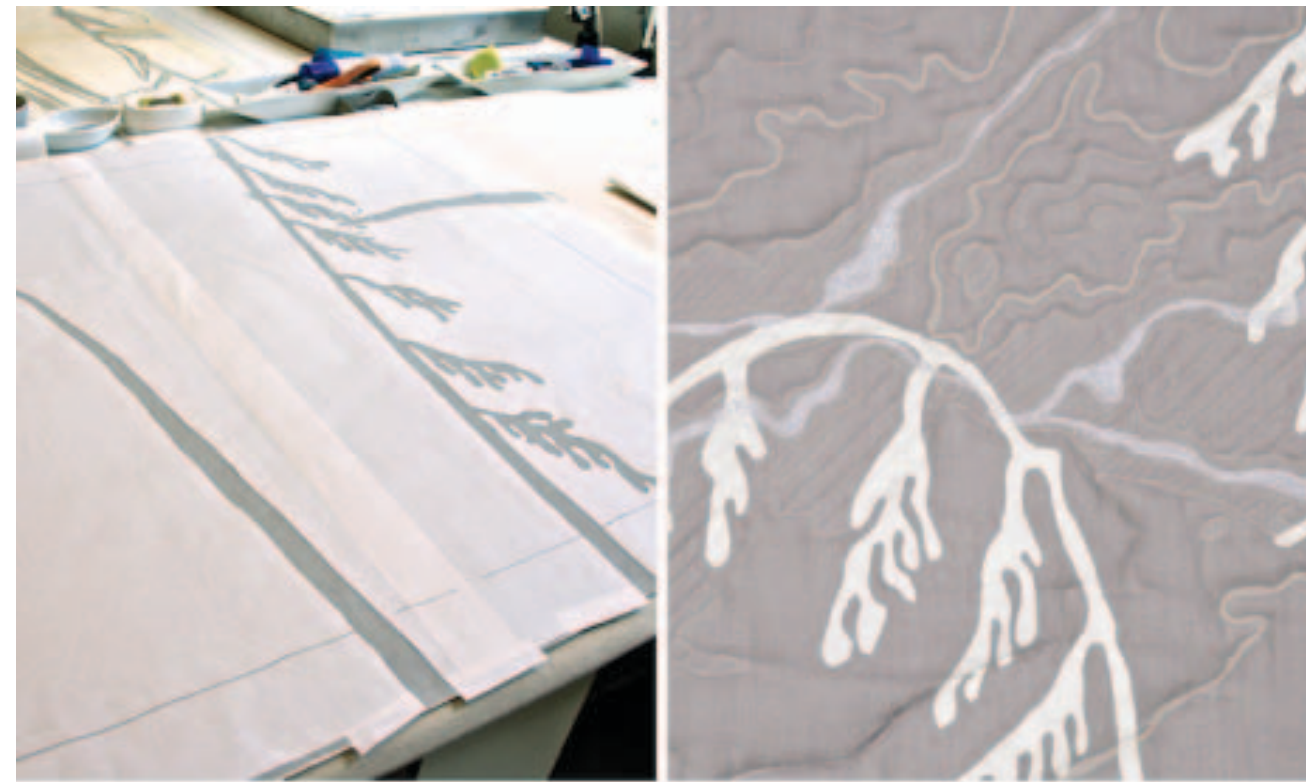


Terrain Squares in progress

From topo software to printed map to traced contours to stitched square . . .



8' x 8' graphic of Nebraska grasses



Hand stenciling the backs
Sylvia Cox, UCARE student

Since I wanted the viewer to see the back . . . I made the back different
with stenciled fragments of a graphic of my memory of Nebraska grasses



Terrain Squares
detail of buttons and tabs



Terrain Squares
detail of joined squares

. . . combining masculine systems of mapping with feminine systems of stitching



Stitching tests

A life I didn't
choose chose me.
Even my tools are
the wrong ones for
what I have to do.

—Adrienne Rich

We must use what
we have to invent
what we desire.

—Adrienne Rich

. . . . breaking all the rules . . .



Terrain Square Section 011 (front)



Terrain Square Section 011 (back)

The blue lakes and rivers become white on the reverse, forming ghost lakes and ghost rivers, which combine with the stenciled “ghost grasses” in unpredictable ways.



Seven Terrain Squares with the Locator Map

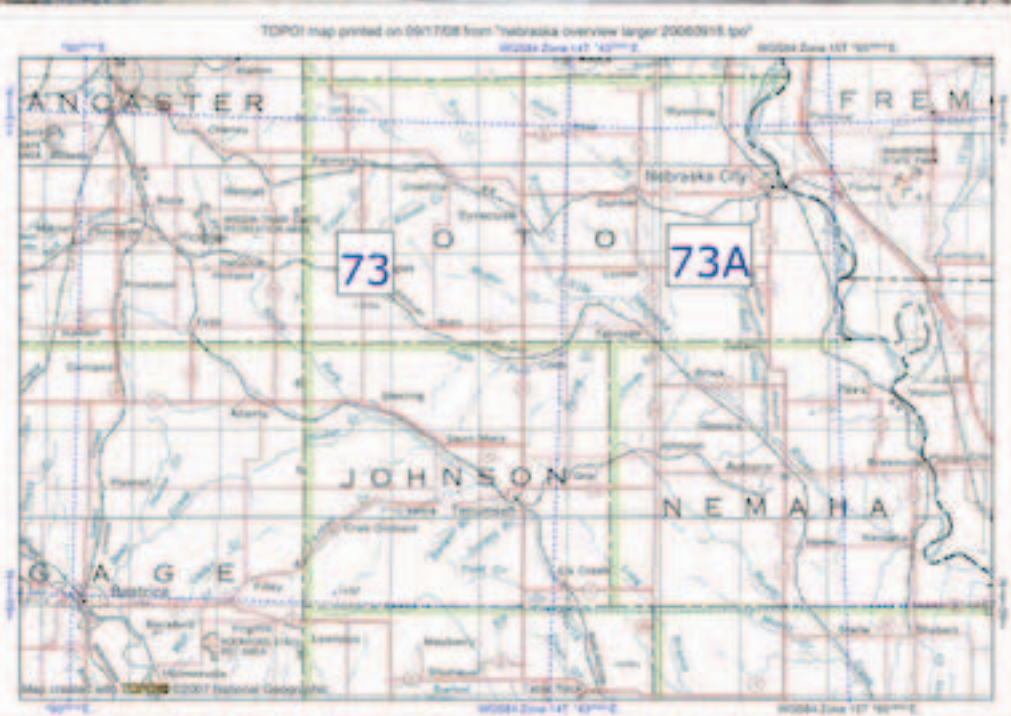


Locator Map
Sec.s 1-2; 23-25

I wanted to contrast the abstract knowledge I was getting from drawing the map with the experience of being on the ground, in that landscape

I began my “Surveys” or on-the-ground documentation.

What would I see, feel, hear? What would I understand that I couldn't know from the map?

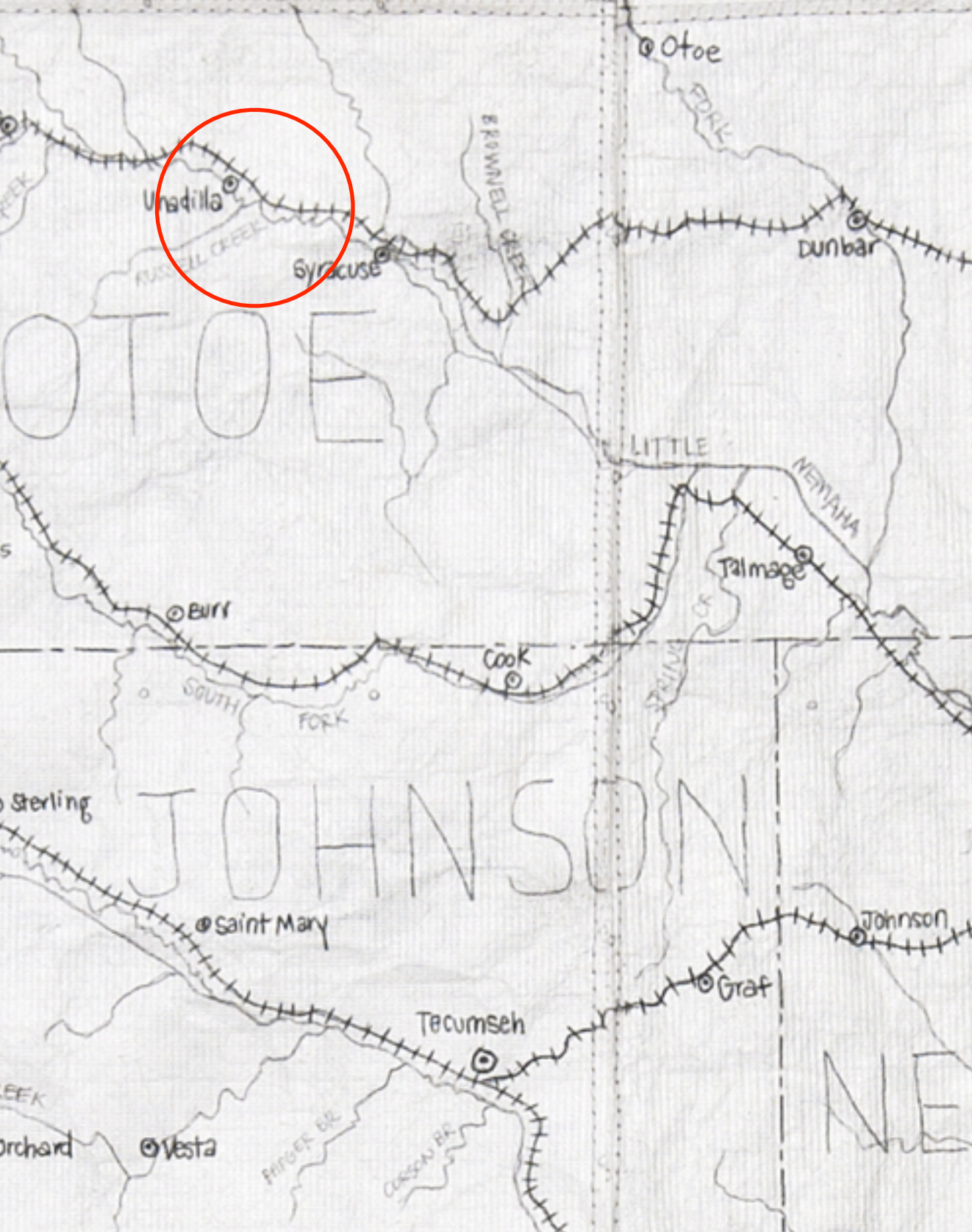


I use a dashboard-mounted Flip video camera to film the roads as I drive. While left running, it filmed me as I stopped to photograph the Little Nemaha River south of Unadilla on Country Road 20



Surveys

Little Nemaha River
Section 073



Locator Map, Section 073



Little Nemaha River, Section 073

I discovered the experience is very different on the ground. Although these contours seem familiar . . .



West of Verdel, Section 003

I discovered there's always another road



Toadstool Road S to Hwy 71 S



Steamboat Trace Trail S of Brownville



Hwy 20 W of Gordon



Nebraska National Forest
Section 032

Even when the road begins to disappear
I discovered that I couldn't stitch these contours before I had traveled over them



Niobrara Reflection 1 / Who will tell the river its path is incorrect?



Niobrara Reflection 1, detail, back

These travels in turn inform the fourth component of my project, mixed media “Ground Cloths”



Niobrara State Park, Section 003

responding to a specific location, in this case, the confluence of the Missouri and Niobrara Rivers



Niobrara Reflection in progress; hand-written text on rice paper

... of territory by
... there's no cure for that
... wrestles with all I know
... what we desire, charting
... is incorrect, claiming
... perhaps my heart is moved
... from what we do not know
... I have landed in flight
... the task is to imagine the real
... century as if, by a sword
... excavating cellularly like a word
... when you describe the town
... can't be illuminated, could
... think reverent and distilled
... reclaiming preserving lines or
... mapping you don't see what
... ing you do do is, stay loose
... of landscape, documenting
... a record of my intention,
... ordinary the primacy of beauty
... of persistence the vigor
... of much or presence I
... etching a record of loss and
... of the grass bending my not
... of interest is more important
... report the facts I need to
... my comprehension, bordering
... are made negotiating between
... flowing traversing rambling
... surveying marking measuring
... the sense of place to know knowledge
... articulations and connections
... consequence the disregarded
... of the landscape grounded
... and immediate we don't solve
... without distractions and disguises and protection
... a prime meridian overlays and leg
... validating unknowing reveries
... that surround us not an empiricist so encumbrance

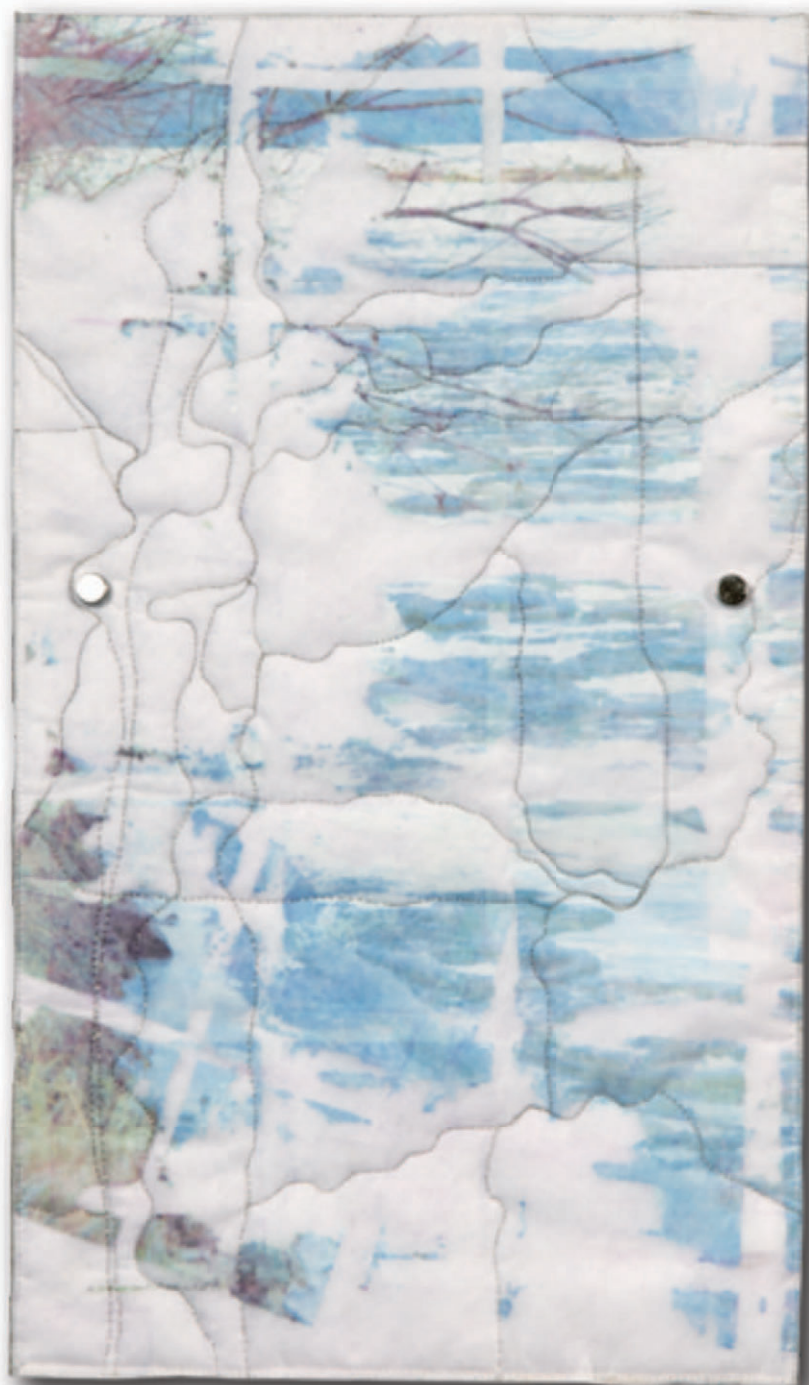


Niobrara Reflection 2 / The solace
of the contour line



Niobrara Reflection 2, detail, back

and my memory of the moonlight on the water . . .



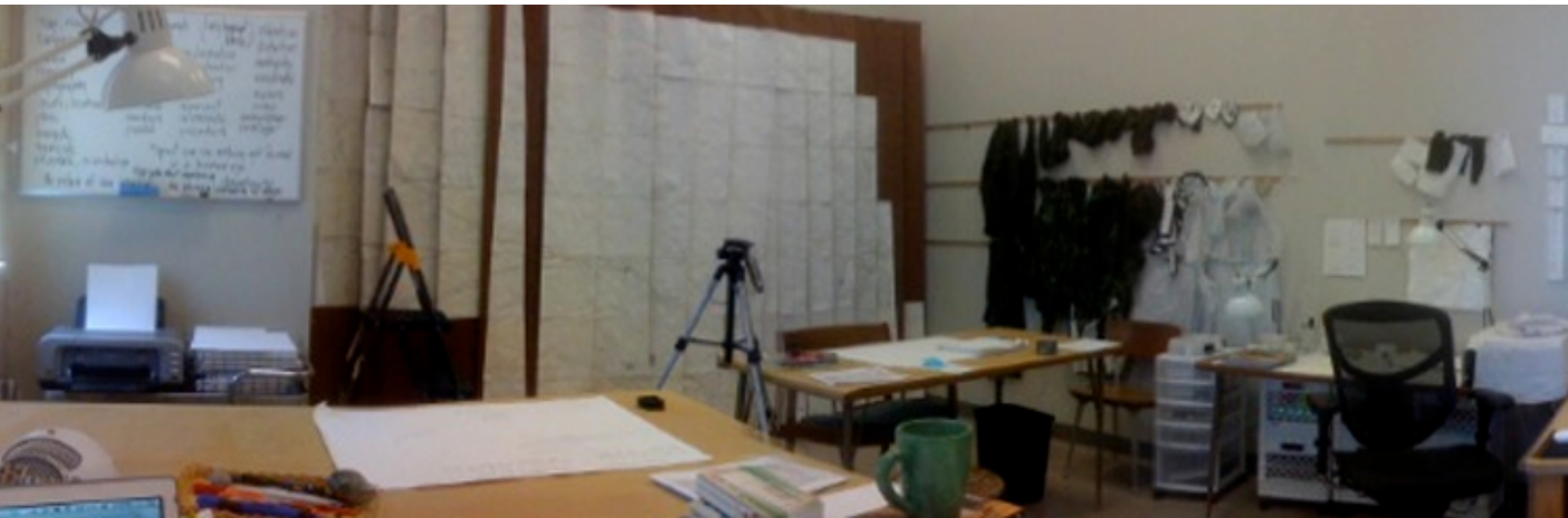
Laminated paper on voile



Louisville
Section 052

or the sound of melting ice flows on the Platte

If stitching is knowing, what have I learned,
mapping Nebraska?



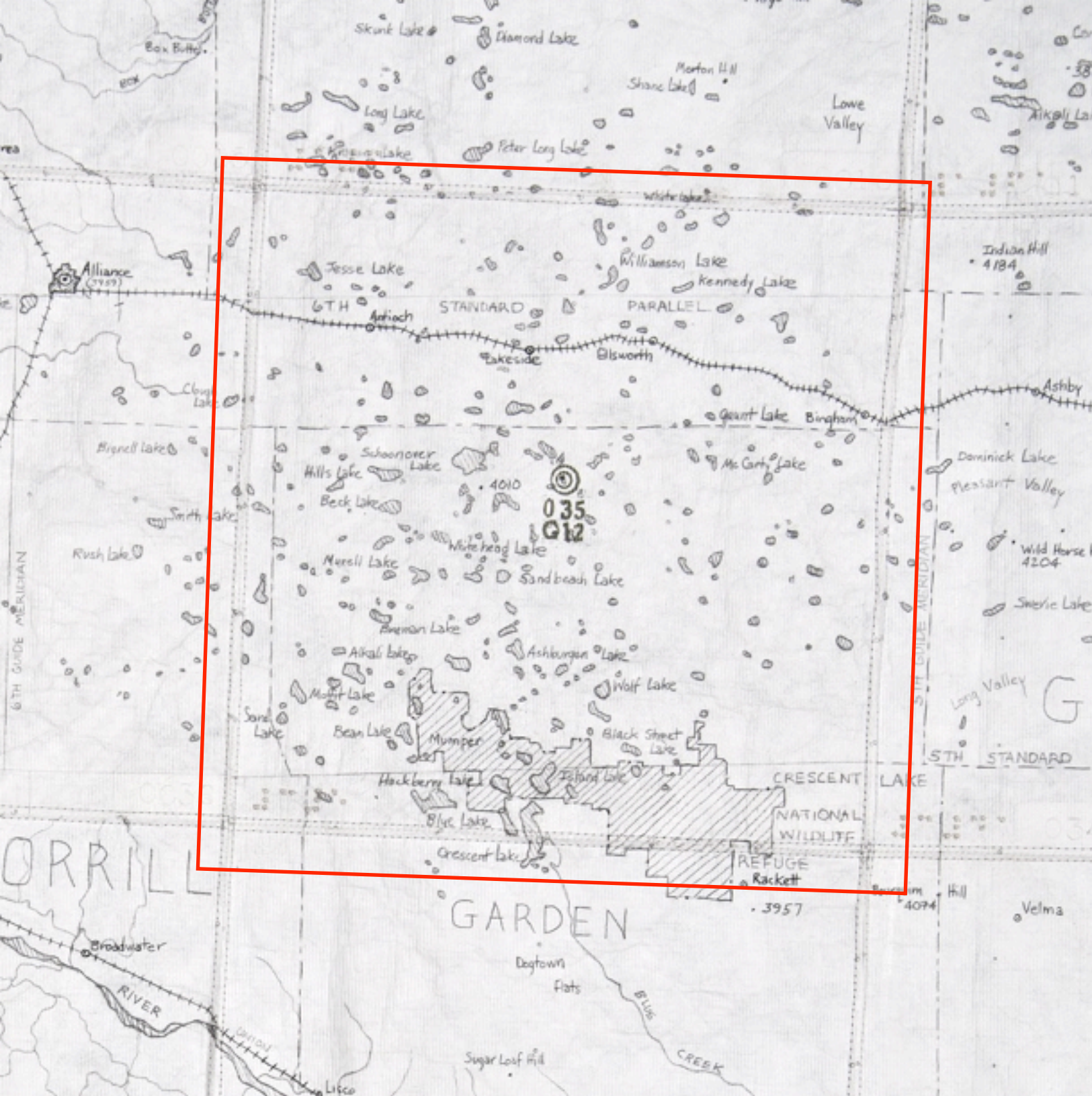


Section 035
Topo map



Section 035
back of Terrain Square

I've learned that we could look at the the topo map for Section 35
and the back of the embroidered square from section 35 . . .



And we could look at the drawing of Section 35 and I can remember my confusion, wondering how there could be so many lakes? What does this look like on the ground?

Section 035
Locator Map detail
Terrain Square detail

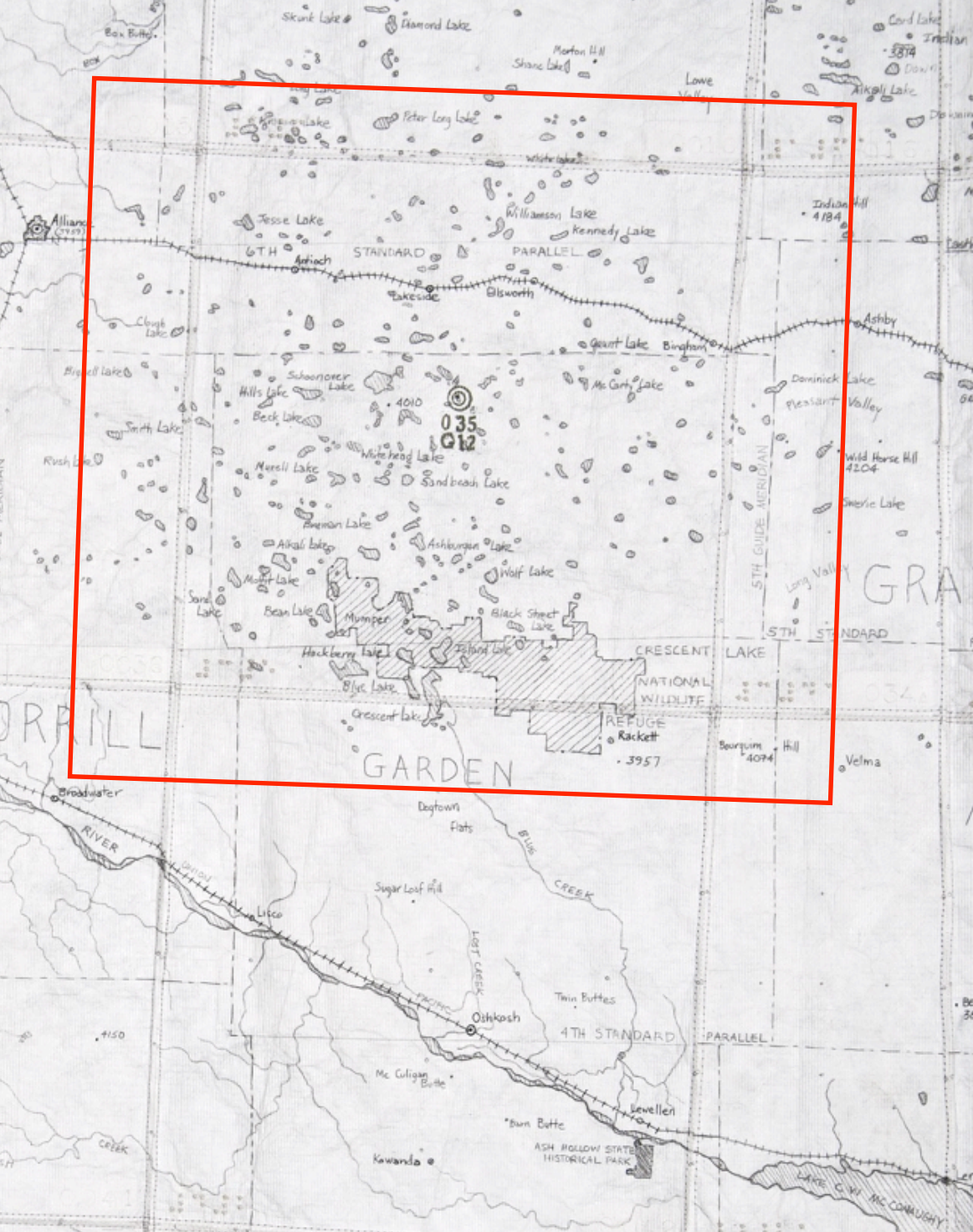


Island Lake
Section 035

But my mapping, my stitching, my drawing record just a fraction of my
experience on the ground, in that landscape

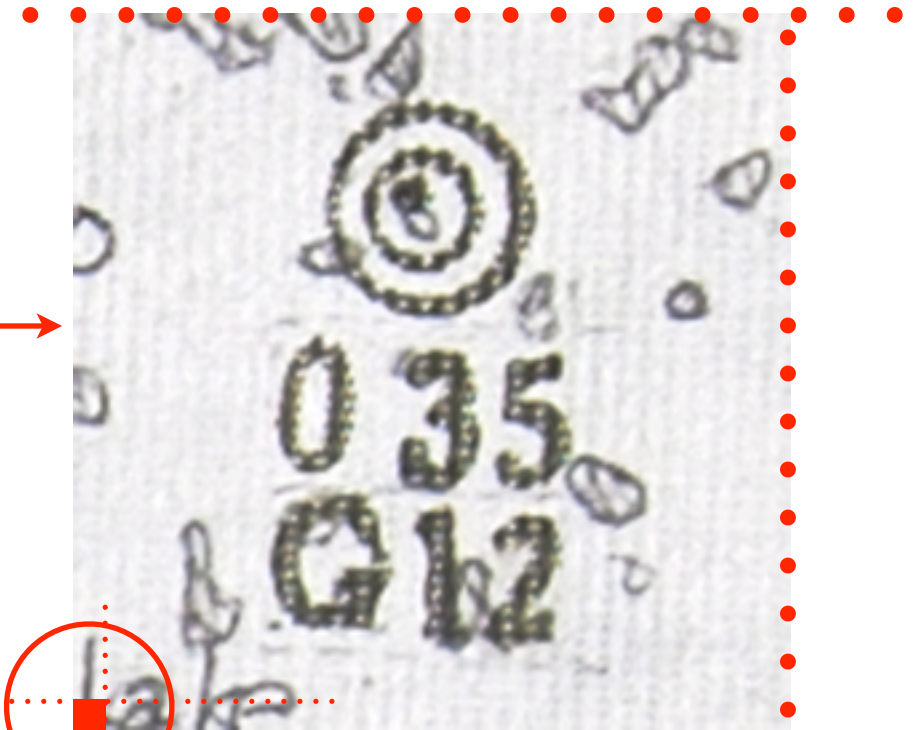
I've learned it's hard to come to terms with the scale of maps

(When the scale is small, you can see a big area and you can orient yourself but can't see the details. When the scale is large you can see the details but you don't know where you are because you can't see the context)

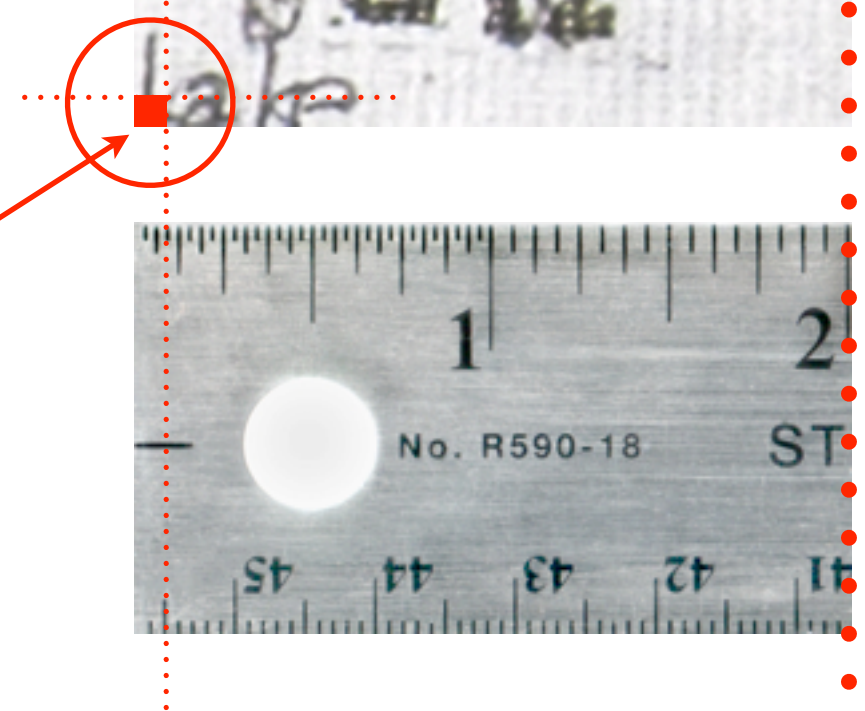


Section 35

2 inches
of the
drawn
Locator
Map



2 inches
of the
quilted
Terrain
Square



2 inches of Section 35 on the Locator Map
compared to 2 inches on the quilted Terrain Square

2 inches on the Locator Map is 5.5 *miles*

2 inches on the quilted Terrain Square is 1192 *feet*
or about 3/32 of an inch on the drawn Locator Map



Section 035

I learned that driving through Section 35 is like driving through an ocean of grass . . .

I realized that my maps are translations

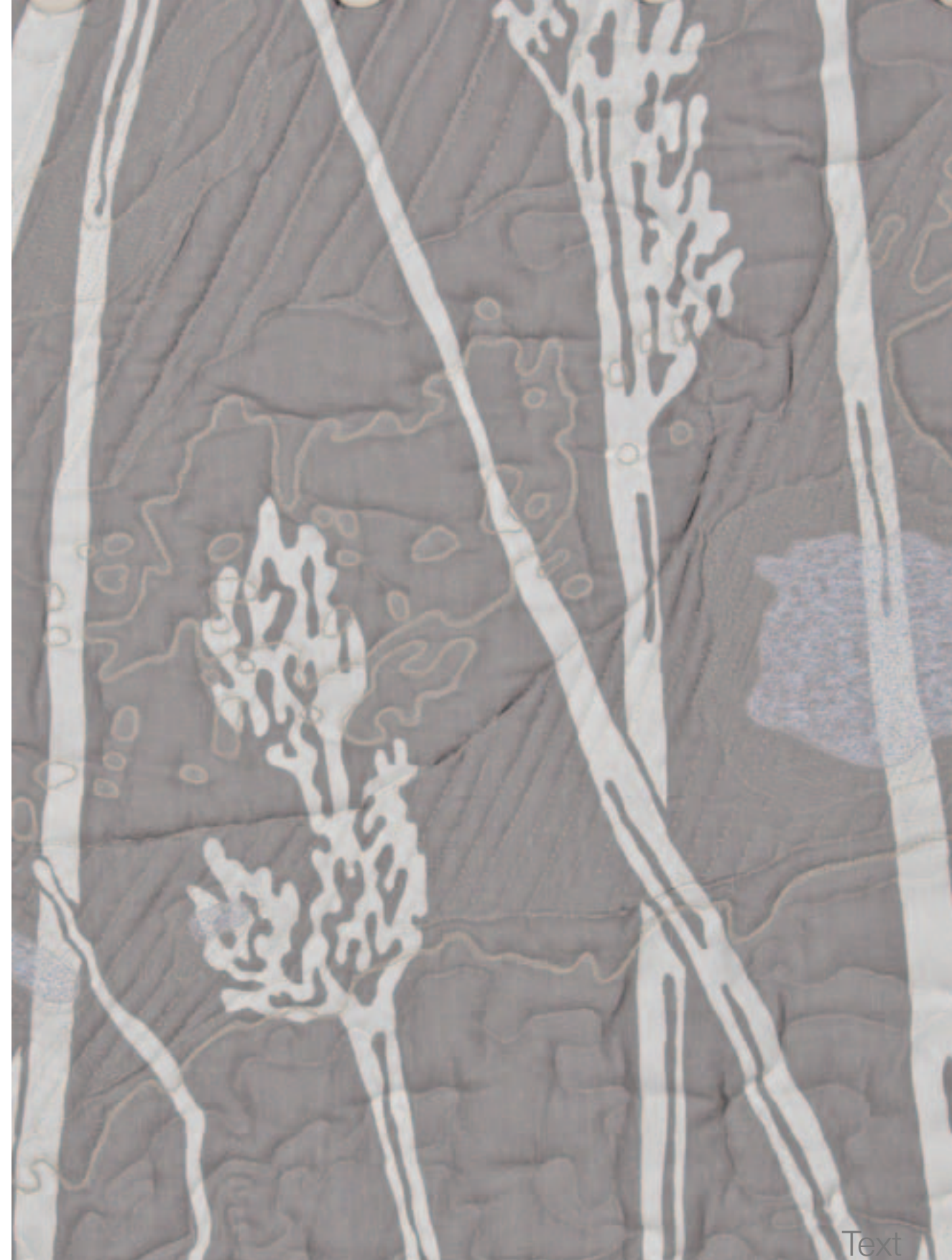
(I can't have absolute accuracy or completeness)

but I can aim for fidelity, for truthfulness



Island Lake
Section 035

. . .to convey something of how it feels to journey over and through rolling hills and waving grasses.



Terrain Square, Section 019, front and back (detail)



Toadstool Section 011



Gavins Point Section 002

I have drawn and stitched and driven across Nebraska, from Toadstool to Gavins Point



Pelican Point Section 026

From Pelican Point to Hay Springs



Hay Spring 009



Cortland
Section 073

I've learned that the corn is never far away



Arcadia
Section 47

. . . even in Arcadia, which has its own sorrows



Cather Prairie
Section 80

I've learned that attention is a scarce resource



Terrain Square materials tests

I've learned that technology is not just computers.
Technology (téchnē + logía) is also art, craft, skill and study.



We are losing out ability to imagine and that is the quickest way to lose sight of the truth. (Paul Bowles)

Ground Cloth: Dunning-Toadstool
Sections 032-011

I've learned that that imagination is also a technology . . .



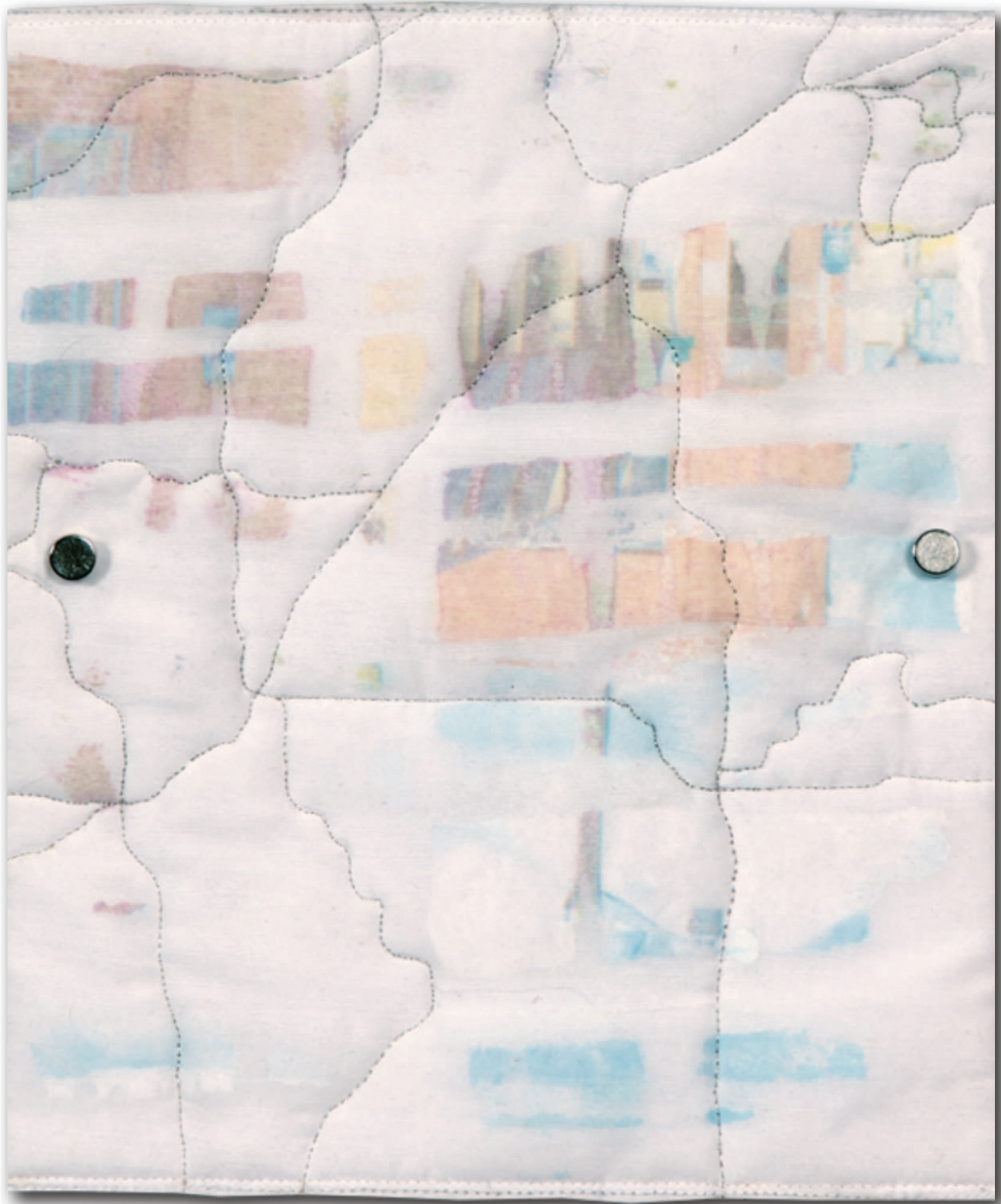
Scottsbluff
Section 037

. . . that lines on a map can't describe—or contain—the beauty of the landscape



Valentine
Section 006

which is often subtle, and revealed over a long time and across great distances



Much the way a line
of stitching travels
across cloth and
gradually
accumulates . . .

I learned I don't want to just make objects.

(I want to make understanding.)



Vision begins to happen
in such a life
as if a woman quietly walked
away
from the argument and jargon
in a room

and sitting down in the kitchen,
began turning in her lap
bits of yarn, calico and velvet
scraps

—Adrienne Rich, “Transcendental
Etude”

*There are very few human beings
who receive the truth
complete and staggering,
by instant illumination.*

*Most of us acquire it
fragment by fragment,
on a small scale, by successive developments,
cellularly, like a mosaic.*

—Anaïs Nin

(layer by layer, seam by seam
button by button, stitch by stitch)

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