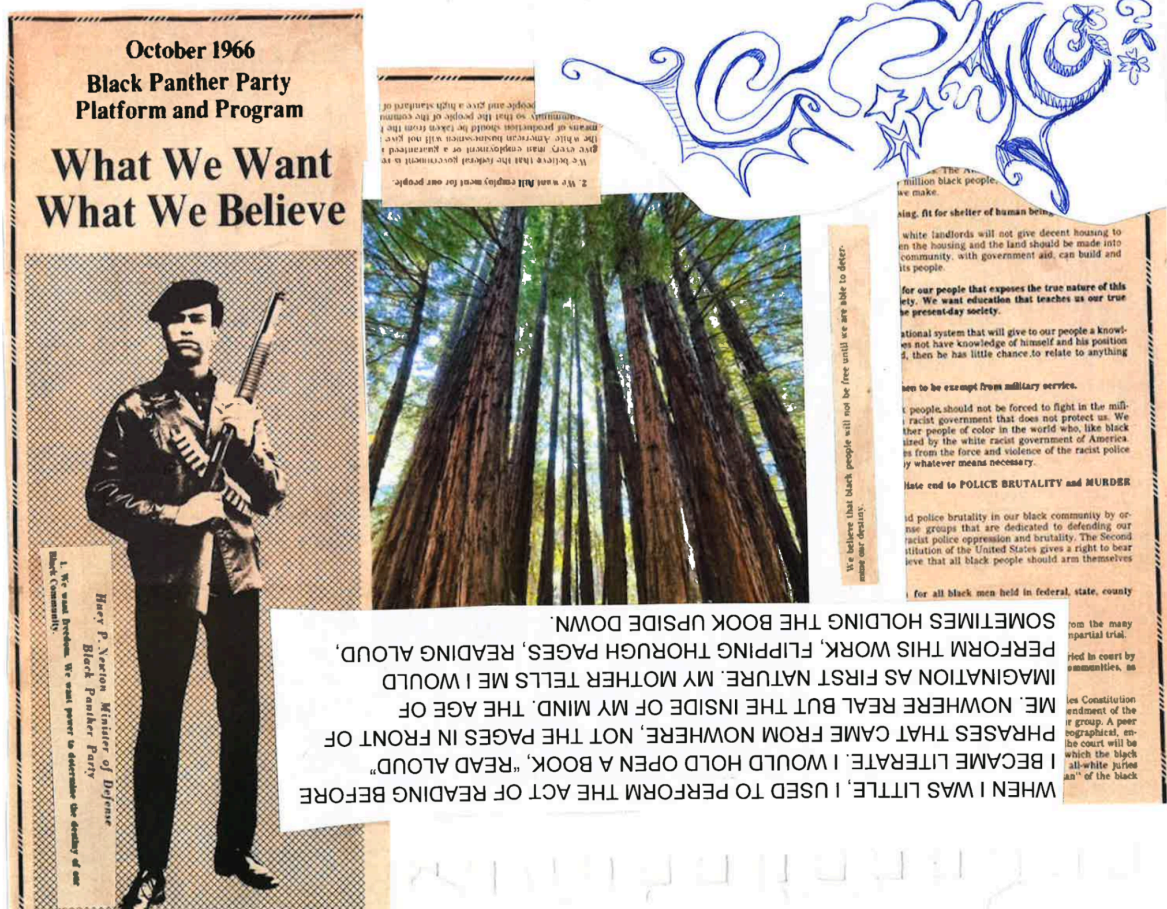


# The Under-Earth Glossary



## Nia Bethel-Brescia

April 30, 2025

American Studies 302: Senior Project  
Advisor: Molly McGlennen, PhD.

### **Abstract:**

Under-earth exists to be a teaching resource, to feed the revolutionary, radical, more-than-political consciousness. Concerned with the inner life of the word and the possibilities it can offer us, the under-earth glossary uses language as material to establish fertile ground for the abolitionist and decolonial world-building project. Rejecting the notion that the individual should be the decisive voice of academic inquiry, in favor of the multi-vocal chorus, under-earth is disperse and decentered, constituted by a web-like network of knowing. In favor of the non-sense, the piece-meal, and the ghost-song, under-earth falls apart to come together anew. You are invited to enter this theoretical imaginary space through an aesthetic and epistemological practice of decomposition. Above all, the under-earth glossary is seeking an actionable definition of freedom: freedom transformed into practices, movements, tangible ways to be in the world. To articulate this definition, the glossary weaves together numerous threads borrowed from the living network that is the revolutionary archive.

## THE SAME BEGINNING OF SOMETHING NEW

Embodied knowledge doesn't live on the page, but words do their best to capture and record what we know- in the name of preservation, with the aim or goal to teach. The proposition of the under-earth glossary is that a palm-sized book of collaged pages fashioned from scraps of root system and revolutionary text can perform this pedagogical work better than a traditional academic essay. The underground history I have spent the past 5 years listening for to uncover and recover into song demanded a different form. So I grapple with the glossary.

The under-earth glossary exists in part to be a teaching resource. Compiling fragments of a subaltern history, weaving archival-ancestral lessons into present-day actions joined by the central threads of abolitionist, decolonial, and ecologically focused values. This collection of aims may sound too all-expansive and too far-reaching to some. Yet to those of us who are listening to the song of the earth, we recognize that these "categorically distinct" resistance movements are tending to the same catastrophic trajectory and observed reality of destruction.<sup>1</sup>

We hear the mournful earth-song of the crackling forest fire ablaze. We hear the house-shattering wave carried in by the hurricane. The abolitionist, decolonial, ecologically-focused song sings in counterpoint to this earth-sorrow rumbling beneath everything.

## WHO SINGS UNDER-EARTH?

In the history of humanity, the author is a recent invention—  
Usurpation of community by private ownership.

It is the [chorus] that [sings] in assembly. ‘  
speech speaks

(Bannerjee and Woulter, 2022, 1)

I alter Bannerjee and Woulter's original phrasing to introduce poetics and to foreground their importance to this project. Song stands in for speech, and each glossary entry is

---

<sup>1</sup>In *The Undercommons*, Moten and Harney disrupt the concept of knowable categories: "Public administration holds to the idea both in the lecture hall and the professional journal that its categories are knowable... To question them thus becomes not only incompetent and un-ethical but the enactment of a security breach" (Moten and Harney, 2013, 35). Questioning and refusing categorial distinctions is part of the political work that under-earth aims to do.

strategically suffused with poetics. Poetry relates to memory differently than traditional academic speech, can lodge in-under the din of everyday thoughts with rhythm, rhyme, and beauty. Under-earth identifies power and ideological value in language that sticks. Language that stays with you, or pulls you in, or makes you think twice. Language that you trip on, language that mirrors, flips, and rhymes. Under-earth embraces the intra-ruption and the shapeshifting definition.

Inter-

*between two distinct subject-objects*

Intra-

*between two subject-objects that are categorically indistinct from one another*

-rupture

*to break, breach, or disturb*

We see ourselves less as author-owners of words

And more as bards singing about a war.

Our words are common—

Battlefield din.

(Bannerjee and Woulter, 2022, 3)

In *Keywords for African American Studies*, Meta DuEwa Jones describes poetics to include “poetry, oratory, elocution, art, narrative, music, and performative visual and verbal power” (2018). DuEwa further describes poetics as a process of subversive coding, a necessary practice of obstruction which protects those involved in the organization of revolt and rebellion. The under-earth chorus is bolstered by poetics from Black Panther Party members, Indigenous political thinkers, and Black feminist futurist writers.

We, the chorus, read the ground for guidance and find our foundational metaphor in the mycorrhiza. We become aware of the metaphor itself as a method for making networks. Metaphor which works to close the distance between two disparate subject-objects while simultaneously showing the gaps between them.<sup>2</sup> Inside the gap, the ghost song, the movement-impulse, the revolutionary urge you must make real.

---

<sup>2</sup> This concept of metaphor as method for making networks comes from my friend Ethan Luk. Ethan and I are both in the 2024-25 cohort of Dia Art Foundation’s *Pedagogies of Site* Fellowship. I am so grateful to this learning community for the knowledge and creativity that they have shared with me over the past year.

## MULTIVOCAL KNOWLEDGE SHARING

“Why have we kept our own names? Out of habit, purely out of habit. To make ourselves unrecognizable in turn. To render imperceptible, not ourselves, but what makes us act, feel, and think. Also because it's nice to talk like everybody else, to say the sun rises, when everybody knows it's only a manner of speaking. To reach, not the point where one no longer says I, but the point where it is no longer of any importance whether one says I. We are no longer ourselves. Each will know his own. We have been aided, inspired, multiplied.” (Deleuze and Guatarri, 1980, 3)

Inside this small book, you will hear many voices- voices wrapped around themselves like petals sheathed around the seed. We carry the same beginning of something new. Rather than making an exceptional individual addition to the ivory tower archive, the work of under-earth is to privilege the multiplicity of the chorus. The chorus which sings:

“We’re already here, moving. We’ve been around. We’re more than politics, more than settled, more than democratic. We surround democracy’s false image in order to unsettle it. Every time it tries to enclose us in a decision, we’re undecided. Every time it tries to represent our will, we’re unwilling. Every time it tries to take root, we’re gone (because we’re already here, moving). We ask and we tell and we cast the spell that we are under, which tells us what to do and how we shall be moved, here, where we dance the war of apposition.” (Moten and Harney, 2013, 19)

The knowledge that we share is a networked knowledge, not generated in isolation but contingent upon the voices of the others and explicit about the multitude of this knowing. We unearth knowledge to overlap and interpose alongside the ecological model of the mycorrhizal network underground.<sup>3</sup>

## GIFT ECONOMICS

As the gatherer and assembler of these words, I am driven by a politics of distribution and dissemination. My work here is to multiply the words that wish-work to educate, following the logics of “gift economics” as laid out by the Potawatomi botanist and

---

<sup>3</sup> Mycorrhiza describes a mutualistic relationship between fungi and plant roots. Fungi send water and nutrients from the soil into tree roots, and in return, the tree sends carbohydrates to the fungi. This can be a life-or-death partnership- without the mycorrhiza, either species may struggle to survive. The mycorrhizal network not only accounts for this health sustaining connection between fungi and tree, but it also connects the tree roots to each other. Through this network, trees can send information and warnings to each other in the form of chemical compounds. Thus, one function of the mycorrhizal network is interdependence through reciprocal nourishment and underground knowledge-sharing.

author Robin Wall Kimmerer (2024). According to Kimmerer, the currencies of the gift economy, namely, gratitude and reciprocity, multiply with every exchange. She teaches the lesson of reciprocity as a relationship, a way to keep the gift in motion.

Under neoliberal capitalist economics, reciprocity, exchange, and motion are stalled in order for wealth to accumulate and concentrate in the hands of the powerful few. The powerful few who have no intention to support new life beyond the narrow borders of bloodline and name. Engaging with under-earth gift economics means channeling wealth and abundance into a circulatory system that moves through a cyclical trajectory: from birth to death to birth. Conversely, under neoliberal capitalist economic systems, wealth is directed at maintaining white-supremacist settler colonial hierarchies, reinforcing a destructive vision of immortality and perpetual ownership.

In gardening, turning the soil, also known as tilling or ploughing, involves inverting the soil to prepare it for planting. Under-earth time is set in motion by tilling, turning upside down, and establishing a fertile ground. With poetry and fractured images, we plant the seeds or plot the blueprint for the imagining of an elsewhere place, and we practice a different way of relating to each other— sharing that begins with language.

“One has to recognize that language is more than just a group of words and more than just the technical relationship between sounds and words. Language is more than just a functional mechanism. It is a spiritual energy that is available to all. It includes all of us and is not exclusively in the power of human beings – we are part of that power as human beings.” (Ortiz, 1977, 6)

In this way, illuminated by the author and poet Simon J. Ortiz (Pueblo of Acoma), the gift of language eschews ownership. Inside of under-earth, we negate the gesture of the claim to ownership by embodying the gesture of the gift.

## **ESCHEW OWNERSHIP**

The impetus of under-earth is not knowledge-*production*. I make a distinction here between *production*, which implies an object-product that can be bought and sold on a market, and *generation*, which feels more apt to describe the forever ongoing processes of earth-nature keeping itself alive. The trajectory of an object produced by capitalist logics inevitably bends toward the status of property- immobile, immortal, and without agency. The purpose and endpoint of an object-product is to be owned. I am never not imagining a future with more freedom, which is analogous to looking for a way out of the status of being owned, which is work I pick up from my ancestors.

I do not wish to make an academic object that I can claim individual ownership of. Rather, I enter under-earth to gather knowledge and to give it away. New knowledge is generated through the collaging of many voices together. In practice and content, under-earth is centered around knowledge-*sharing*. I share the words of the people I have learned from. I do not stand alone on the page. I practice Moten and Harney's directive– to dance the war of apposition.



/,apə'ziSH(ə)n/

noun

1. **TECHNICAL**

the positioning of things or the condition of being side by side or close together.

Side by side and close together, I dance within a resistance movement that could also be called a revolution. The war over naming the problem is important to be aware of at the start of any text, especially one whose primary concern is the word.<sup>4</sup>

## LISTENING FOR THE SONG OF THE GHOST

There is a theory of historiography (the study of the telling of history) called constructivism, which believes that all history is *fiction*. If not fiction- story for story's sake- constructivism believes all history is *interpretation*. This view of history submits to the perpetual instability of the past. Contingency haunting the archive, a haunting that reverberates through time to sing to you now through these pages, and my incomplete singular voice. If all history is fiction, then we must contend with the power that we give to the authors of history, the gatekeepers of the archives, the decision-makers of institutional memory. I have struggled against these gates. I have grasped at gaps in history only to hear handfuls of ghost song, missing the sound of my ancestors' names. Alongside the chorus, I practice the care-work of recovering the smudged out story, seeing beyond the facades of historical silence,<sup>5</sup> listening for the song of the ghost.

---

<sup>4</sup> In Dr. China Sajadian's Anthropology seminar "Revolutionary Subjects and Political Futures," taught for the first time this spring at Vassar, part of the groundwork we lay at the beginning of class was an awareness of the prolific arguments in fields like History and Political Science over whether a moment of political mobilization should be called a revolution, an insurrection, an uprising, a coup, etc. Sometimes our knowledge-sharing work can unfold more freely if we set aside the definitional argument and focus instead on something like subjectivity, or relation. Not all of time can be constrained to a name.

<sup>5</sup> Trouillot, *The Power in the Story, Silencing the Past*. 1995.

## BLACK LIFE– THE REASON I AM ALIVE

Elizabeth Alexander says that the phrase “Black Lives Matter” feels both ancient and prophetic at the same time– that there will “never be a moment where we do not need to say it” (2022).<sup>6</sup> How long have we handled these loaded words? Black Lives Matter as an ethos was not born in 2020, when Minneapolis P.D. member Derek Chauvin caused George Floyd’s premature death. Nor did it appear out of thin air in 2013, when Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometti started a political-movement-building project under the name #BlackLivesMatter. Garza, Cullors, and Tometti mobilized in response to a political moment when the state resolutely denied the mattering of Black life with the acquittal of Trayvon Martin’s murderer, George Zimmerman.<sup>7</sup> The revolutionary spirit that lives inside the term, “Black Lives Matter,” has lived much longer than these moments, than you or me or any one human life. In the brief scale of my own human life, I am stuck on Alexander’s poetic offering:

There will never be a moment where we do not need to say it.

It feels true as a cycle of breath. It also feels pregnant with grief. Does she mean that the mattering of Black life will always be in question? Growing up Black and mixed race in a queer family, raised by two mothers, and, until Vassar, always attending schools that had majority POC populations, I have carried the undeniable mattering of Black Life with me, as fact, since birth.

Speech arouses beings

Leads them in chorus.

Being sings of Being

Truth roars.

(Bannejee and Woulter, 2022, 3)

In 2020, at 17 years old, deep in the COVID-19 lockdown era, my knowledge was transformed by the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter Movement– a disruption in the collective remembering of racism in america. I wanted to activate my knowledge in order to tear this disruption into something wider *Inside the gap, the ghost-song* I felt a responsibility to amplify the disturbance, to sing loudly our grief *the movement-impulse* to hear the full force of our history *the revolutionary urge we must make real* our true Black life mattering and the resonant sound of the all-of-us acknowledgment of this truth.

---

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Alexander. *The Trayvon Generation*, 2022. 80.

<sup>7</sup> <https://blacklivesmatter.com/our-history/>

In 2020 I was radicalized, re-made. I was lost in a mournful disillusionment. The shadow of constructivism dawned on me, and I could no longer trust whatever had been named objective. I was confronted with the pale failures of my high school education. U.S. history whitewashed and sanitized in a rage-inducing way. Black life depicted as a side note, reshaped and reduced by white settler authority. The gatekeepers of the archives insisted *and continue to insist* on minimizing the fundamental role of Black life, exploited Black labor and premature Black death in the continuation of the U.S. nation-building project.

Five years later *the rage, the rage, the rage* and several months into the second tr\*mp presidential term, the executive branch of the U.S. government attempts to “restore truth and sanity to american history.” This looks like dismantling the Department of Education.<sup>8</sup> This looks like the explicit targeting and elimination of Educational programs that privilege marginalized perspectives. This sounds like:

tr\*mp administration Exec. Order “Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History” 2025.

“Over the past decade, Americans have witnessed a concerted and widespread effort to rewrite our Nation’s history, replacing objective facts with a distorted narrative driven by ideology rather than truth”

For the colonized subject, objectivity is always against him. (Fanon, 1961, 37)

“This revisionist movement seeks to undermine the remarkable achievements of the United States by casting its founding principles and historical milestones in a negative light. Under this historical revision, our Nation’s unparalleled legacy of advancing liberty, individual rights, and human happiness is reconstructed as inherently racist, sexist, oppressive, or otherwise irredeemably flawed”

“the rage, the rage, the rage, and the recognition of the many, infinite, others, raging, and alone, and able to feed, to eat, to live, to love, to fight, and to kill the evil, sick, crippling, rulers of our universal, me and not-me misery” (Jordan, 1971, 6).<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Mimbela, Ricardo and Deirdre Schifeling. “Trump’s Attack on the Department of Education, Explained” *ACLU*. March 14, 2025.

<sup>9</sup> This quote comes from an unpublished outline of June Jordan’s second novel project, variously titled “Okay now” or “On Time.” The novel was never realized, but Jordan’s intentions for the work survive in a document titled “Book Proposal,” held in the June Jordan collection in the Schlesinger Library at Harvard’s Radcliffe Institute. Tobias Huttner provides a rich analysis of this section of Jordan’s archive in his journal article “The Love Elegy and the Land Question: On June Jordan’s Radical Occasions” (2024), which is where I accessed this quote.

“Rather than fostering unity and a deeper understanding of our shared past, the widespread effort to rewrite history deepens societal divides and fosters a sense of national shame, disregarding the progress America has made and the ideals that continue to inspire millions around the globe”

Truth is unforgetting, reversing the great oblivion that has made us forget what our ancestors knew— that humans and other-than-humans together inhabit Being, and can be separated only at the cost of perdition. (Bannerjee and Woulter, 2022, 5).

The erasures that U.S. history rests upon become pronounced, prolonged. All the news lands like a bleach burn, all the color in our past and present stands at risk. But beyond, outside, and underneath the state’s attempt silence us, the song of the ghost rings loud.

Poetry will have never been obscene having been a haven. Holding fast is not the opposite of running away, is not in between. The dismal swamp is a jam, an open waterway. Why seek out the state? Comfort under the state’s protection, which is a kind of brutality. We appeal to the future we imagine. We imagine what we are. Blackness as appeal, as escape. We are always also walking in another world. (Moten, 2007, 6).

Entering under-earth means returning to places we’ve already been before, as self, as beginning of self in ancestor, as the continuation of self in future-ghost.<sup>10</sup> I return to this fragment of my educational history (which finds echoes and resonances in the memories of so many of my peers) to illustrate the stakes of underground knowledge-sharing, to give language to the histories that have haunted me throughout my time as an American Studies scholar.

## DECOMPOSITION

We think of English as a very definitive language, useful in defining things— which means setting limits. But that’s not supposed to be what language is. Language is not definition; language is all-expansive. We, thinking ourselves capable of the task, assign rules and roles to language unnecessarily. Therefore we limit our words, our language, and we limit our perception, our understanding, our knowledge” (Ortiz, 1977, 8).

The under-earth glossary challenges this limiting function of definition. The glossary does not define, but decomposes. Against the prescribed rules and expectations of the glossary as the locus for fixed definition and authoritative voice, the under-earth glossary surrenders to constant change. It is shapeshifting as we speak.

---

<sup>10</sup> The term future-ghsot comes from “A Glossary of Haunting” written by Eve Tuck and C.Ree, introduced to me by my friend and fellow AMST scholar Jillian Lin. I am grateful to this essay for the useful language, and for the inspiration to engage with the form of the glossary.

Decomposition encompasses not just change but transformational change. Before we can adopt any academic refashioning of the term “decomposition” into something like a methodology, a framework, or a creative research practice, we must acknowledge that the very first practitioner of decomposition is the earth itself. Cells breaking down, fungi and bacteria coming in to push material from one point in the life-cycle to the next. Nature models this cyclical process of regeneration with ease. Being nature ourselves, I believe this is an ease we have access to. I invite you into under-earth to practice decomposition with me. In my efforts to visually create the theoretical imaginary space of under-earth, I practice decomposition through collage. Visual materials are broken down into composite parts, distinct yet connected, sharing the same ground. This is a way to aesthetically acknowledge the many-partedness of knowledge, the multivocal nature of the history I want to amplify. This is a way to create new life-worlds on the page out of what already exists.

Through this gathering and assembling process, I enact another lesson from Kimmerer’s teachings of gift economics: “There is no such thing as waste, only starting material” (2024, 17). My starting material— images and stories scraped from archives, slotted into place with fragments of root system, forest network, farm land, free breakfast. Spliced apart by scissors, puzzled into place by intuitive hands— the under-earth glossary is a visual merging of the ecological + socio-political practices of interdependence in pursuit of realizing freedom.

The dreams of the colonial subject are muscular dreams, dreams of action, dreams of aggressive vitality. I dream I am jumping, swimming, running and climbing. I dream I burst out laughing, I am leaping across a river and chased by a pack of cars that never catches up with me. (Fanon, 1961, 15)

A decompositional method of history-telling requires privileging the voice of the spectral and the prophetic, the haunting and the haunted. My ancestors, my past-self, my future-ghost. We asked to learn the revolutionary song and were denied the chance to hear the chorus of Black life in community. Under-earth is permission in time and space to listen to the poetic account of our survival. An account that is muscled as giant tree roots snaking down into geologic past, transparent as glass and sharing space on the page with the opacity of the present movement: haptic, concrete, and alive inside of us.

## POETIC TOTALITY

“Technically, language can be disassembled according to linguistic function... You can derive– subsequently define– how a language is formed, how, and for what purpose it is used, and its development in a context. But when the totality is considered, language as experience and expression, it doesn’t break down so easily and conveniently. And there is no need to break it down and define its parts” (Ortiz, 1977, 3).

Ortiz describes the decompositional urge–the tendency to break down– as a linguistic function of English, specifically in contrast to the Acoma language, in which “a word does not break down into separate elements. A word is complete” (1977, 3). Because my thinking is influenced by Indigenous authors like Ortiz and also by Caribbean philosophers like Édouard Glissant, who writes about *la totalité-monde*, or the all-world, the everyone-and-everything connected as one subject-object– under-earth is reaching for a kind of Totality.<sup>11</sup> This is what poetry does: reach for totality. As a genre, poetry’s simultaneous inclusion and rejection of rules makes it all-encompassing, or all-expansive, to use Ortiz’s turn of phrase.

In apposition with Ortiz and Glissant, my educational history and thought patterns have also been influenced by dominant cultural categories of U.S. hegemony: settler colonialism, anti-Black racial capitalism, and the imperial dominance of the English language. I recognize that my desires to work compositionally stem in part from this place– the limited definitive mode of the English language. Moreover, my thinking and educational history are also undeniably shaped by Black feminist political thought. I study Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower*, whose protagonist faces catastrophe with stunning reserve and practicality. I stay enchanted by June Jordan’s words, whose poetic practice could never be separated from politics. I thank Tina Campt for her formulation of the Grammar of Black Feminist Futurity, words I have underlined and copied down and repeated in my head over many months, words that make the rush of time feel less like the onslaught of the heavy unknown and more like water over river rocks, a perpetual current pushing towards what is alive. Listen quietly to this poetic offering:

To me it is crucial to think about futurity through a notion of “tense.” What is the “tense” of a black feminist future? It is a tense of anteriority, a tense relationship to an idea of possibility that is neither innocent nor naïve. Nor is it necessarily heroic or intentional. It

---

<sup>11</sup> “Glossary: Tout-Monde.” Édouard Glissant. <http://www.edouardglissant.fr/toutmonde.html>

is often humble and strategic; subtle and discriminating. It is devious and exacting. It's not always loud and demanding. It is frequently quiet and opportunistic, dogged and disruptive.

The grammar of black feminist futurity is a performance of a future that hasn't yet happened but must. It is an attachment to a belief in what should be true, which impels us to realize that aspiration. It is the power to imagine beyond current fact and to envision that which is not but must be. It's a politics of pre-figuration that involves living the future now – as imperative rather than subjunctive – as a striving for the future you want to see, right now, in the present. (Campt, 2017, 34-5)

This framework brings the future beyond the realm of the imagined into the real here and now. Inside under-earth, threading these voices together- Campt, Glissant, Ortiz, Octavia and June, my self, my lineage of ghosts, I ask: Can I reclaim a decompositional method from a Queer Black Feminist Futurist perspective? Ortiz sees the completeness of Acoma language in contrast to the decompositional linguistic function of english, but under-earth wonders if there is a way to embrace the breaking down, the falling apart, the revelation of the many-partedness of a word, a sentence, a story, a knowledge system, in the same breath as the attempt to illustrate a poetic totality.

"I think the function of poetry throughout the millennia has been to show us that language is a living force. How is it a living force? Because if we just think of the notion that it is a shaped breath that creates it, think of that shaped breath– is that material? Is air material? Is breath material? You see, the definitions that we live by are so inadequate. Since I was a little girl, my mother could say, "But my darling, you don't speak like a regular person. You have words in your mouth as if they were fruits."

...Did you know that for example, the way honey is created, I chew it and I pass it on to you. You are another bee. You chew it too and after we have all chewed it, it becomes honey. I think of language more in those terms. Language is something that we chew, that we feel. It certainly has agency. Language has agency as I perceive it the same way flowers have agency. The agency may be just to persist, just to go on, just to find other speakers, just to find other echoes, other sounds, other music, other vibration." (Cecilia Vicuña, interviewed by David Naimon, 2024)

Why does under-earth call upon poetic totality? What is useful to us inside the concept of everything? From everything, we gather the tools to shape the future beyond current fact. From everything, we make freedom real.

## WHAT IS REAL? WHAT HAS SUBSTANCE? THE IDEALIST/MATERIALIST DILEMMA

There is also something in a song that is actually substantial... when you realize the significance of what something means to you, then [words] are very tangible. You value the meaning of the song for it's motion in the dance and the expression and perception it allows you... You not only feel it –you know. The substance is emotional, but beyond that, spiritual, and it's real and you are present in and part of it." (Ortiz, 1977, 5-6.)



WHEN I WAS LITTLE, I USED TO PERFORM THE ACT OF READING BEFORE I BECAME LITERATE. I WOULD HOLD OPEN A BOOK, “READ ALOUD” PHRASES THAT CAME FROM NOWHERE, NOT THE PAGES IN FRONT OF ME. NOWHERE REAL BUT THE INSIDE OF MY MIND. THE AGE OF IMAGINATION AS FIRST NATURE. MY MOTHER TELLS ME I WOULD PERFORM THIS WORK, FLIPPING THROUGH PAGES, READING ALOUD, SOMETIMES HOLDING THE BOOK UPSIDE DOWN.

I surface this image of little me with the upside-down book because I think this imaginative practice that I use to take up is evidence of the early impulse to world-build. Now, a senior in college, creating this culminating project, I am world-building (still, again, anew) through my reading of a fragmented archive as interconnected. I display the materials as a rhizome, the fungal threads that act as my foundational metaphor. I gather the chorus to sing under-earth, and we hold our sheet music upside down.

## HOW IS UNDER-EARTH CREATED AND MUTUALLY-CONTINUALLY GENERATED?

“As we can see, something changed. Crucially, instead of imagining the persistent reiteration of static relations, it might be more powerful to analyze relationship dynamics that extend beyond obvious conceptual or spatial boundaries and then decide what a particular form, old or new, is made of, by trying to make it into something else.

This—making something into something else—is what negation is. To do so is to wonder about a form's present, future-shaping design— something we can discern from the evidence of its constitutive patterns, without being beguiled or distracted by social ancestors we perceive, reasonably or emotionally, in the form's features” (Gilmore, 2022, 447).

- Practice decomposition: make something into something else, break apart to put back together again
- Embrace negation and constant change.
- Share knowledge freely
- Speak from the under-side, rather than the center
- Dance the war of apposition, always your voice alongside the others'
- Practice gift economics: a politics of distribution characterized by generosity and a conscious awareness of our shared desire to stay alive

All under-earth decisions are made from the basis of the inescapable condition of existence that we share, the fact that we live on land. Under-earth inhabitants consciously take up the task of living on and with the land, recognizing nature as community, and recognizing the distinction between nature and human as a Euro-western colonial invention. Under-earth draws from Black and Indigenous re-/imaginings of land, untangling the legal weight and history of property as applied to enslaved Black people. Some of these land-earth-experiments take place on the page, from the fierce literary minds of Black Feminist world-builders June Jordan and Octavia Butler. Some of these experiences take place on the ground, in the soil, in the farmlands of North Carolina, in the green corners of urban Boston.<sup>1213</sup> All of these land-earth-experiments require a cooperative effort to realize and maintain. In under-earth, these experiments take place underneath, outside of, apart from the power of the state. Power is drawn from elsewhere— below, where the tree sucks up water from the root.

---

<sup>12</sup> Earthseed Land Cooperative. <https://earthseedlandcoop.org/>

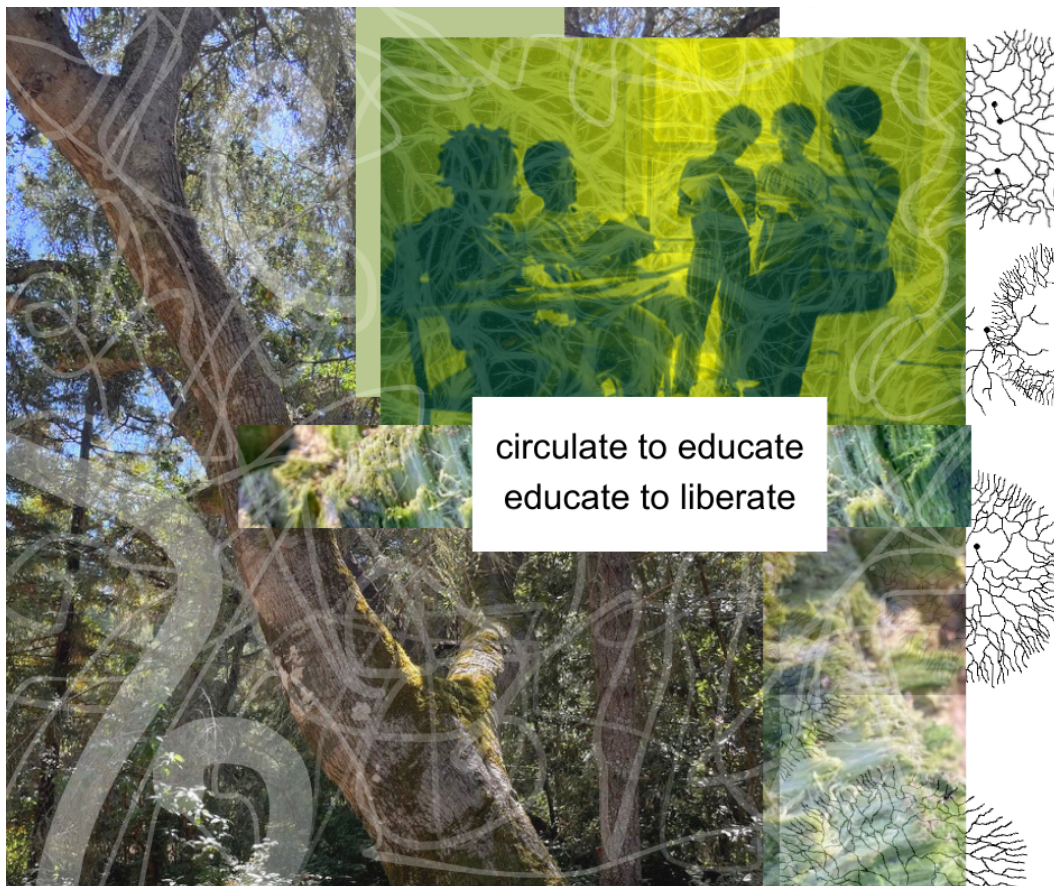
<sup>13</sup> Boston Food Forest Coalition. <https://www.bostonfoodforest.org/>.

*Sub*, meaning “under” -*Altern*, meaning “other”

under-other-earth sings:

“Against the rootlessness of capital, [Subaltern Studies] posits a vision of rooted interdependence.” (Bannerjee and Woulter, 2022, 6)

## UNDER-EARTH: A THEORETICAL IMAGINARY SPACE



The point is relation: between these moments in space-time, between the images, drawings, notes, and historical documents that make up the collages, between your fingertips and the page. It is a physical thing, this practice of learning. I wish for you to hold the history in your hands.

### Works Cited

Alexander, Elizabeth. *The Trayvon Generation*. First edition. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2022.

Banerjee, Milinda, Jelle J. P. Wouters, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Marisol de la Cadena, Thom Van Dooren, and Suraj Yengde. *Subaltern Studies 2.0 : Being against the Capitalocene / Milinda Banerjee, Jelle J.P. Wouters with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Marisol De La Cadena, Thom Van Dooren, Suraj Yengde*. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2022.

Black Panther Party Ten-Point Platform and Program pamphlet. October 1966.

Boston Food Forest Coalition. <https://www.bostonfoodforest.org/>.

Butler, Octavia E. *Parable of the Sower*. London: Headline, 2019.

Campt, Tina M. "QUIET SOUNDINGS: The Grammar of Black Futurity." In *Listening to Images*, 13–46. Duke University Press, 2017.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1134dm3.5>.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus : Capitalism and Schizophrenia / Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari ; Translation and Foreword by Brian Massumi*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

Earthseed Land Cooperative. <https://earthseedlandcoop.org/>

Exec. Order "Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History" (2025).  
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/03/restoring-truth-and-sanity-to-american-history/>

Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth / Frantz Fanon ; Translated from the French by Richard Philcox ; with Commentary by Jean-Paul Sartre, Homi K. Bhabha, and Cornel West*. Translated by Richard Philcox. Revised sixtieth anniversary edition. New York, NY: Grove Press, 2021.

Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. *Abolition Geography : Essays towards Liberation*. "Abolition Geography and the Problem of Innocence". Edited by Brenna Bhandar and Alberto Toscano. London ; Verso, 2022.

Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. *Golden Gulag : Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*. 1st ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007. doi:10.1525/9780520938038.

"Glossary: Tout-Monde." Édouard Glissant.  
<http://www.edouardglissant.fr/toutmonde.html>

Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten. *The Undercommons : Fugitive Planning & Black Study / Stefano Harney & Fred Moten*. Wivenhoe ; Minor Compositions, 2013.

Huttner, Tobias. "The Love Elegy and the Land Question: On June Jordan's Radical Occasions" *Contemporary Literature*, December 2023, 63 (3) 309-340

Jones, Meta, DuEwa. "Poetics" In *Keywords for African American Studies*, by Erica R. Edwards, Roderick A. Ferguson, and Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, 1st ed. New York University Press. 2018.  
<https://search.credoreference.com/articles/Qm9va0FydGljbGU6NDc2OTM0Mw==?aid=275948>.

Kimmerer, Robin Wall. *The Serviceberry : Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World / Robin Wall Kimmerer ; with Illustrations by John Burgoyne*. First Scribner hardcover edition. New York: Scribner, 2024.

Mimbela, Ricardo and Deirdre Schifeling. "Trump's Attack on the Department of Education, Explained" *ACLU*. March 14, 2025.

Moten, Fred. "BLACK OPTIMISM/BLACK OPERATION." Double Operative Chicago. 2007. [https://doubleoperative.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/moten-black-optimism\\_black-operation.pdf](https://doubleoperative.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/moten-black-optimism_black-operation.pdf)

Ortiz, Simon J. *Song, Poetry and Language : Expression and Perception*. First edition. Tsale, Ariz: Navajo Community College Press, 1977.

Tuck, Eve and C.Ree, "A Glossary of Haunting," Handbook of Autoethnography Edited by Stacey Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams, and Carolyn Ellis, 639–658. Left Coast Press, Inc. 2013.

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. "The Power in the Story." In *Silencing the Past*. United States: Beacon Press, 2015.

Vicuña, Cecilia. Interview by David Naimon, "Ceclia Vicuña: Deer Book" *Between the Covers Podcast*, July 2024.  
<https://tinhouse.com/transcript/between-the-covers-cecilia-vicuna-interview/>

"#Black Lives Matter- Our History" <https://blacklivesmatter.com/our-history/>

### Works Consulted

Bispo, Nêgo. "The beginning, the middle, and the beginning" Interview by Márcio Cruz. *Where the Leaves Fall*, Issue 16. March 2024.

Césaire, Aimé. "Poetry and Knowledge." *Sulfur* no. 5 (1982): 17-32,  
<http://libproxy.vassar.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/poetry-knowledge/docview/866208306/se-2>

Film Group Collection. *The Murder of Fred Hampton*. Film, 1 hour 29 minutes and 26 seconds. (1971) Photochemically preserved in 2017 by the UCLA Film and Television Archive, accessed through Chicago Film Archives.  
<https://www.chicagofilmarchives.org/preservation/view/the-murder-of-fred-hampton-1971/>

Glissant, Édouard, and Betsy Wing. *Poetics of Relation / Édouard Glissant ; Translated by Betsy Wing*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997.

Jordan, June. *Civil Wars*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1981.

Kimmerer, Robin Wall. *Braiding Sweetgrass / Robin Wall Kimmerer*. First paperback edition. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Milkweed Editions, 2013.

Lorde, Audre. "Poetry is not a Luxury." *Chrysalis: A Magazine of Female Culture*, no. 3, 1977. <https://doi.org/10.3368/cl.63.3.309>

Reed, Adolph. "Marx, Race, and Neoliberalism." *New Labor Forum* 22, no. 1 (2013): 49–57. doi:10.1177/1095796012471637.

Simard, Suzanne. *Finding the Mother Tree : Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest / Suzanne Simard*. First edition. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2021.

Smith, Paul Chaat, and Robert Allen Warrior. *Like a Hurricane : The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee / Paul Chaat Smith & Robert Allen Warrior*. New York: New Press, 1997.

Song, Yuan Yuan et al. "Defoliation of interior Douglas-fir elicits carbon transfer and stress signalling to ponderosa pine neighbors through ectomycorrhizal networks." *Scientific reports* vol. 5 8495. 16 Feb. 2015, doi:10.1038/srep08495