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UNDERPLANET

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Introduction: UNDERPLANET

"And God and everything
On your telephone"
– Born Slippy (*Underworld*, 1996).

This manuscript began under the title *SEEN/Tunnels* and later became *Glass, Metal and Worms.* A month before submitting the final draft, I decided to call it *Underplanet.* The title emerged from the sense that the sonic practices discussed here exceed the aural field of contemporary art and music, moving instead through a subterranean register characterized by buried histories, material residues, and persistent forms of life below the surface of representation, undermining its authority. The underworld

carries a cultural designation as a site of sleep, dreams, fantasy, and speculation. In many contexts it is associated with the finality of death. But lately it seems that the narrative that used to inform the world, and by extension the underworld, has been suspended. In recent decades, the virtuality imagined at the beginning of Web 2.0 has all but absorbed and reorganized human culture, so much so that even recent works in art, sound, and music quickly become estranged from their original contexts. And while their forms may remain largely unchanged, the frameworks through which they are interpreted alter with the pace of political and technological life. This book takes advantage of this moment of suspended belief. Lingering between the real and the speculative, it asks whether sonic narratives embedded in material might still be drawn out and used to find new and convivial forms of relation.

My framing of the terms world, planet, and underworld/underplanet is heavily informed by relatively recent decolonial writing on art and music: Édouard Glissant conceptualized the world (*Tout-Monde*) as a dynamic, borderless network of relations rather than a fixed, unified totality.[1] Sylvia Wynter argues that every historical society organizes its "world" through a founding metanarrative or cosmogony—a story that dictates

who counts as fully human and who is cast as "other" to sustain the social order.[2] Denise Ferreira da Silva further critiques the modern idea of the world as a colonial and racial construct producing continuous racial difference to justify violence, extraction, and the subjugation of the racialized "Other."[3] Yet, the ecological discourse that claims modernity tends to exclude colonized spaces, even though they are instrumentalized in the development of modern Earth sciences. In his 2022 book, *Decolonial Ecology: Thinking from the Caribbean World*, Malcom Ferdinand describes modernity as structured by a "double fracture": an environmental fracture produced by technocratic capitalism and a colonial fracture produced through slavery, colonization, racial domination, and the subjugation of Indigenous peoples and women.[4] He elucidates that while the colonial and the environmental fractures are co-produced within the same modern order, we must resist the empirical tendency to fold colonized and Indigenous peoples into a generalized category of "nature." Consequently, I conceive of the planet not as a romantic exterior to politics, nor a metaphor for racialized life, but a material and social environment that exceeds the logistical arrangements of the world and yet thrives.

"The earth moves against the world,"[5] write Fred Moten and Stefano Harney in their influential essay "Base Faith" on the web platform *e-flux*. "The world answers in fire and flood. The more the earth churns the more vicious the world's response. But the earth still moves." They continue: "The world's only argument against the earth is logistical. It must be done. The earth's movement must be stopped, or contained, or weakened, or accessed." *The undercommons*, a space that Harney and Moten refer to in 2013, is where such movement takes place, where its inevitable inertia gathers: a complex reality the world is eager to suppress, deny, and exile. Paradoxically, while the Earth simply must keep moving for the World to exist at all, world-making and world-building is reserved for "the fortunate isles,"[6] and the psyches of the privileged who live there, earth-making and earth-building is done by worms, the ghosts, the bots, the Frankensteinian spectres of the collective body,[7] intertwined with the root rot below, verging upon the surface.

In the *Underplanet,* there is no sun.[8] When light is scarce and vision limited, other senses become primary: touch, smell, taste, and especially hearing, whose reach carries rhythm, acoustics, time, and space. Is there a way in which sound *materializes* in the physical world? In *The Memory of the World* (2024) environmental philosopher

Ted Toadvine suggests that an early split between continental and anglophone existential philosophy concerns the presence of the sun in the absence of an observer. In the European tradition,

> the sun exists only within a world, and a world emerges only at the confluence of a perceiver and the perceived. But does this not deny the insistence of a time before the world, a primordial prehistory that haunts the world from within?[9]

In the absence of the sun's guiding light, can certain sonic practices point towards real shared conditions of being? And if so, what evidence do resonant materials yield, and how might that evidence cross the subaltern boundaries that keep life contained in the clutches of capitalism? I approach this subject through three prismatic musical thresholds—glass, metal, and worms—tracing how each figure carries both a literal acoustics and a metaphor that organizes collective life.

This book seeks to push real matter out of the undercurrents of philosophical territory as collective forms articulated by scores, sounds, and actions make claims

[…]

Glass World

Annea Lockwood's *A Thousand Year Dreaming*[32] (1990) opens with the call of a conch shell. A second shell sounds soon after. Other sounds then appear at the margins, including oboes, didgeridoos, horns, stones, and other sound-making things. As the work develops, it mediates a shared acoustic situation: people activating objects in the same space, their bodies producing and receiving sound, waves meeting and altering one another. The recording suggests a space shaped by bodies, objects, proximity, and resonance. Once this space is established, fragments of the environment enter the listening field and fall into the musical register that is

being co-created. It recalls other shared sonic territories: sounds from adjacent rooms or nearby apartments, carried voices, or domestic activity passing through walls.[33] Unseen, these sounds are reorganized by memory and association.

When Lockwood first spoke to me about her work in January 2026, she said: "My pieces tend to be generated by something concrete, a concrete sound that I'm fascinated with; There is nothing that's not music, in a way."[34] There is a recurring conviction to her work: that certain sounds reverberate across organisms, suggesting forms of contact that precede or exceed social meaning. This idea holds the key to understanding her recordings of glass and rivers as forms of co-creation,[35] both intellectual and divine. In this chapter, I will be focusing primarily on Lockwood's work through the lens of the threshold between life and death, which I believe she explores through her use of materials. Drawing from other scholars and artists' work, I speculate on the social and gendered ramifications of the relationship between water and glass. Finally, I connect these experiences with vessels, containers and caves, the construction of identity through dreams and sound's role in it.

A Thousand Year Dreaming is a 45-minute ensemble work first commissioned by Essential Music and