Landscape Architecture as Liberatory Praxis

Ground

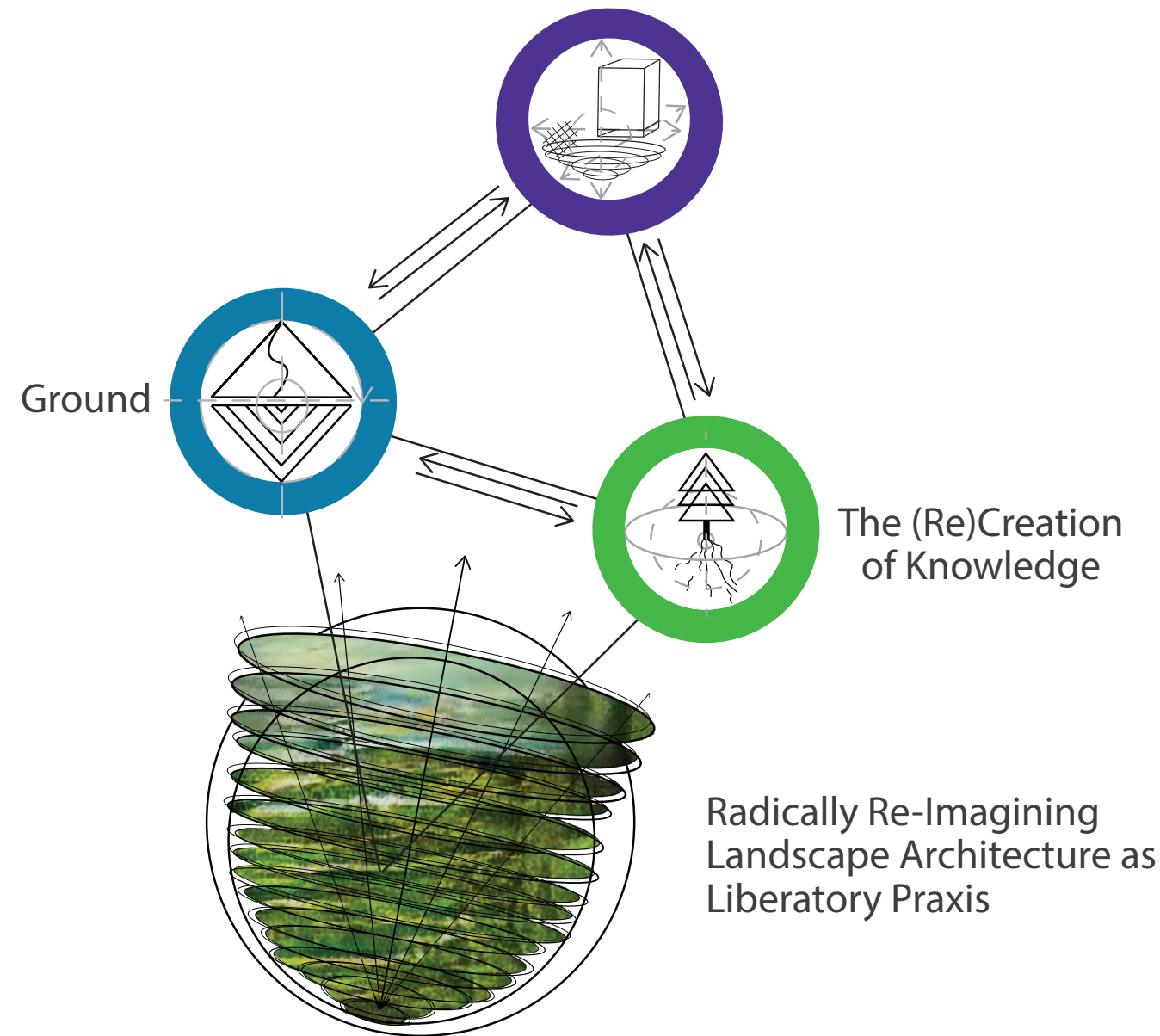The (Re)Creation of Knowledge

Radically Re-Imagining Landscape Architecture as Liberatory Praxis

**Further Resources**

**Texts**
- The Aesthetics of Equity by Craig Wilkins
- Defining Landscape Democracy: A Path to Spatial Justice by Egoz, S., Jørgensen, K., & Ruggeri, D.
- Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love, and Liberation by Syedullah, J., Owens, L. R., & Williams, A. K.
- Seeking Spatial Justice by Edward Soja

**Tools**
- Liberatory Design Cards By Anaissie, T., Cary, V., Clifford, D., Malarkey, T., & Wise, S. (Stanford d.school + The National Equity Project)
- Liberatory Urbanism: Approaches to a Practice
      https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4IdS1I0GTWY (alternately available in podcast form)

Created through a partnership between University of Washington College of Built Environment's Applied Research Consortium and Gustafson, Guthrie, Nichol (GGN). For further information, go to ???

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# Introducing Landscape Architecture as Liberatory Praxis

Conflicts in the built environment often seem to emerge from the ether with volatility levels nearing a flashpoint. Waves similarly appear to emerge just before they break. Waves, of water and conflict alike, are not a sudden manifestation. Their origination and progression is called a fetch and the length a fetch travels determines the strength of the wave. Designers are facing conflicts today that result from the "long fetch" of history. **This resource proposes a conceptual and procedural set of "tools for seeing the invisible," or tracking the fetch of central areas of conflict within community design projects, and tools for reconstructing landscape architectural practice towards liberatory praxis.** Landscape architecture defines the spatial orientation and energetic resonance of public community areas in the built environment. In the U.S., design disciplines are a product of the fetch of history and have inherited many of the lingering biases, structures, and frames of thought from that fetch. The fetch of U.S. history originated in genocide and moved through all other forms of subjugation to reach current day. Landscape architecture requires a **radical re-imagining** to divest from the negative components of design practice it inherited and realign toward liberatory praxis. **Liberatory praxis is a practice that seeks freedom from the continuing systemic oppression present in the United States.** It moves toward internal, external, and communal freedom from the "depths of suffering," or working to untangle subjugations and begin healing. If this is not intentionally prioritized, design practice risks a continuation of social harms. Landscape architecture functions as liberatory praxis by uncovering erased histories and amplifying marginalized stories, voices, experiences, and landmarks within a community and democratically leverages that information to advance spatial justice.

**This resource makes landscape architecture as liberatory praxis accessible to anyone with an interest in the built environment and re-orients landscape professionals toward liberation. The core concepts of landscape as liberatory praxis are broken down here for further exploration.**

Those include:

## Radically Re-Imagining
Radically re-imagining landscape architecture serves as a conceptual and methodological foundation for the rest of this resource. Here, radical, from the word radix meaning "root," facilitates an analysis of the past to uncover the root of landscape architecture while re-imagination takes the information gleaned and builds toward a reconfiguration for the future to better align its practices with its goals. This re-imagining requires embracing the political dimensions of design and the tradition of oral storytelling in the margin in order to utilize design as an active tool for the facilitation of spatial justice.

## Ground
In this framework, ground considers not only the physicality of landscape projects, but also the reciprocal ecologies between people in the margin and the margin itself and different ways of understanding the interplay between layered and interconnected elements of the community. Ground serves as an archival construction for understanding the symbolic, political, social, cultural, and communal realities of the past and possibilities of the future. It aims to recognize and acknowledge the uneven landscapes of power responsible for creating marginality in landscapes and ways to responsibly navigate within that marginality moving forward.

## The (Re)Creation of Knowledge
The (re)creation of knowledge unpacks the way that we learn about, research, and collaboratively reflect on narrative threads of community. The process acknowledges the biases present in prevalent information about communities in the margin and the process of gathering that information, communicates with communities to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their multi-storied reality, and aims to guide the design process based upon this new reciprocal relationship.

## Landscape Architecture as Liberatory Praxis
Landscape architecture's intersectional nature positions the field ideally to act as a catalyst for liberatory changes that advance spatial justice. Landscape architecture as liberatory praxis applies the re-imagined framework outlined in this resource holistically and explores liberation through landscape.

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# Application

Traditional Approach          Liberatory Approach



How are you bringing the voices of different project stakeholders together?

How do you respond to feedback? Can plans change?

Are you building reciprocal relationships? How are perspectives from different political positions incorporated into the design process? What drives the project?

Does your work build off of any previous efforts? Are you making this project easy to build off of in the future?

A radical re-imagining needs to refashion the variety of ways in which design fields traditionally center the positionality of municipalities and community support agencies over that of the community. Community engagement, as defined within this work, is intended to be a democratic process; if work is fully mapped out and underway without first understanding the community's stance, it is very difficult to have liberatory outcomes if those assumptions on stance prove to be untrue. It is vital to attend to the diverse modes of being and knowing in the margin in order to create a foundation of democratic community engagement. Cultivating a landscape practice that doubles as a liberatory praxis means making the community the heart of the project and centering intentional and active listening processes to develop the true scope, goals, and deliverables for a project. People need to be intentionally brought together to navigate ways in which community goals, values, histories, and place meanings overlap or break off from each other and how those views may deviate from what municipalities or community agencies were expecting. It is vital to build a strong foundation within the process or reciprocal relationships will not be able to develop. Move forward in projects with intention, taking time to reconsider standard operating procedures along the way. Be thoughtful around decision making. Take time to consider your own political orientation and be transparent in discussing that orientation with the community. Work to define how a specific project can have impacts that extend outside of the site to advance spatial justice.

## The Foundation of Democratic Community Engagement



Grounding the development of reciprocal relationships in the shoal.

## Further Resources

**Texts**
Slavery is a Metaphor: A Critical Commentary on Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor." by Garba, T., & Sorentino, S.-M.
The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies by King, T. L.
The Successive Nature of City Parks: Making and Remaking Unequal Access Over Time by Elliott, J. R., Korver-Glenn, E., & Bolger, D.
Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human by Weheliye, A. G.
The Life of Imagination: Revealing and Making the World by Gosetti-Ferencei, J. A.
**Tools**
Alexander G. Weheliye: Black Life. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X0I6xGqMHns

# Radical Re-Imagining

Radically re-imagining landscape architecture requires identifying the negative manifestations in practice, tracking their fetch, and working to create new ways to utilize the field as a liberatory praxis. The friction between the intention and practice of landscape architecture connects back to the origin of the practice. Design in the United States originated as a "technology of settler-colonialism," or a system that is structured to further the goals of settler-colonialism automatically unless someone steps in to disrupt business as usual. Settler-colonial technologies gone unchallenged result in subjugation. Understanding the structure, role, and impact of subjugation in the United States facilitates a vigilance against perpetuating subjugation through design. The shoaling process takes insights from the fetch of history; slows them down; and analyzes them in conjunction to the knowledge, perspective, values, and place meanings held by communities in the margin to facilitate the radical re-imagining process.

## Settler-Colonialism

Radically re-imagining landscape architecture requires unpacking its roots in settler-colonialism. Settler-colonialism occurs when colonizers settle into the place they are violently controlling, rather than ruling from afar, and as a facet of that settlement use violent subjugation to create a new society and culture at the expense of the existing one. Settler-colonial power structures are centered around the native-slave-settler triad. The triad is the foundation of white supremacy, which was created to define a cohesive shared identity and culture for the settler, and serves as a primer for understanding the relational dynamics within the United States as multifaceted paradigms, rather than traditional binaries. It defines the "ideal" positionalities for people within the triad -- the settler generates wealth, property, and rights; the Indigenous population disappears; and Black people remain fungible and landless.

Decolonization is a proposed remedy to settler-colonialism in the United States. In Tuck and Yang's seminal work, *Decolonization is not a Metaphor*, they argue that decolonization "requires the abolition of land as property and upholds the sovereignty of Native land and people" and is not a metaphorical conceptualization to be used to unpack settler-colonialism. Decolonization is often utilized in the United States to mean "postcolonial thought" without the prerequisite decolonization taking place. Tuck and Yang's view of decolonization replicates settler-colonialism by shifting power within the triad from settler to native and requiring descendants of enslaved Africans and settlers alike to disappear. Abolition, to be expanded upon later in the text, allows the space for the complicated, nuanced, and interconnected reality of life in the United States that is absent in the discourse around literal decolonization.

## Subjugation

Subjugation of difference and rampant anti-Blackness were necessary precursors to the success of settler-colonialism in the U.S.; creating a frame to truly dismantle technologies of settler-colonialism has to allow space for the difference and be devoid of anti-Blackness. Navigating liberatory thought in a country that has not been decolonized requires reflexivity around the subjugation of difference through genocide, enslavement, and violence in the past and through technologies of settler-colonialism that are displacing difference currently. Design practice ties directly into the long fetch of settler-colonialism and reflexivity is necessary to navigate its wake.

For a more liberatory praxis to be achieved, landscape architecture must acknowledge the reality of subjugation in the United States. Contemporary practices and policies must work to reshape themselves from a technology of settler-colonialism to one of liberatory praxis. Projects need to acknowledge any role their land has played in that subjugation and the role of subjugation in the geographic formations around the official site from the conception of development. In that vein, while race is one factor that helps us to understand how the subjugations of difference have played out through time, race was created to advance settler-colonialism and, as such, is also a technology of settler-colonialism. Analyzing and serving communities in the margin through a solely racial lens oversimplifies the complex spatial and social subjugations that interface to create that place of marginality. The axes of subjugation map out justifications used to displace difference. Subjugation is justified around both the larger societal categories of race, class, gender, religion, sexuality, ethnicity, culture, ability, access, immigration status, language, and age and because of basic misunderstandings, bias, and differences of opinion. These justifications for subjugation have to be critically interpreted as an intersectional whole in order to avoid shallow, non-sequitous conclusions and advance landscape architecture as liberatory praxis.

# Application
## Shoaling

Shoaling is the methodology used to navigate settler-colonialism; subjugation; situated knowledge; and the cultural, geographical, and interrelational reciprocal ecologies of belonging as a means of radically re-imagining landscape architecture as liberatory praxis. The concept of Shoaling is drawn from the book The Black Shoals by Tiffany Lethabo King. A shoal is a geologic formation - e.g. sandbars & rock outcroppings - that force one to pause before proceeding. Shoaling is used metaphorically to slow design practice and give occasion for designers to pause and consider their position, values, and process. This enables a deepening awareness of different modes of thinking, being, understanding, and relating to the land and community places. As neither land nor water, its contradictory nature serves as a "disruptive mechanism that interrupts and slows normative thought and violent knowledge production". The intention behind shoaling is to see how these complex ideas interact with each other through a lens directly critiquing the inherent, perpetual, and continual violence of colonization that manifests in contemporary practice.

Shoaling uses multi-storied histories, relationships, ecologies, and intentionality to slow down the design process and give designers a more comprehensive understanding of how to support the community in their quest for spatial justice. Shoaling creates the strategies used to navigate the relationships, ecologies, and subjugations of a community. The process increases designer awareness and reflexivity, identifies barriers and subjugations facing the community, and begins looking at ways to abolish those barriers, rather than working within their confines. Abolition is a Black political answer to decolonization that allows space for metaphor and nuance. As such, abolition can take place through the removal of settler-colonial technologies or through their structural re-imagining. While the initial colonization, re-settlement, and structuring of subjugation in the United States have already presumably been abolished, what we are dealing with now is the lasting impacts of the technologies they created. Abolishing the lasting cultural impacts of those technologies, healing from those impacts, and radically re-imagining how people should be served by those technologies leads to communal liberation. Here, liberation consists of diving into the complexities of subjugation and working to untangle nuances through relationship building. That process is guided by a community's understanding of their own ecology. Liberatory landscape architecture is a collaborative and reciprocal relationship building process. The process works within community to identify their key values and use those values to create a "liberatory compass" that guides them through the radical re-imagination process.

## Navigating Radical Re-Imagining

Radical re-imagining requires tracking the fetch of history to analyze its impacts on the present and potential impacts moving forward. The fetch of history begins with an innocuous initiating event and continues to push forward until attracting notice, most often at a point of conflict. Re-imagining landscape architecture as liberatory praxis takes place in the shoal. The shoal is situated in the present to draw from history, ground, community knowledge, and manifestations for the future. Development puts increasing pressure on community; by creating the space to shoal, that increase in pressure is de-escalated enough to become a productive tidal zone on the edge of conflict. The tools developed in this reciprocal relationship-building process act as a liberatory compass that guides the rest of the radical re-imagination process. A wave break is the point where conflict comes to the surface in traditional landscape architecture practice. The wave break is considered the surfacing and origin of conflict in traditional models. Here, the wave break after the shoal denotes the abolition and restructuring of oppressive technologies of settler-colonialism.
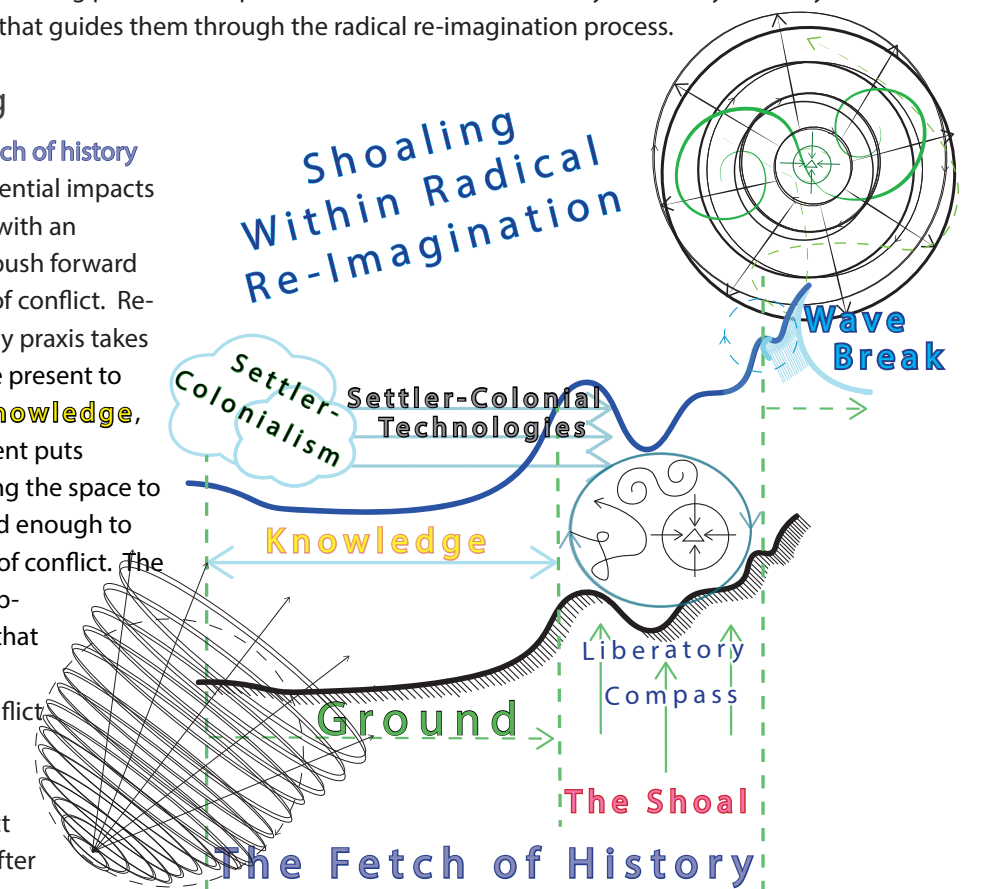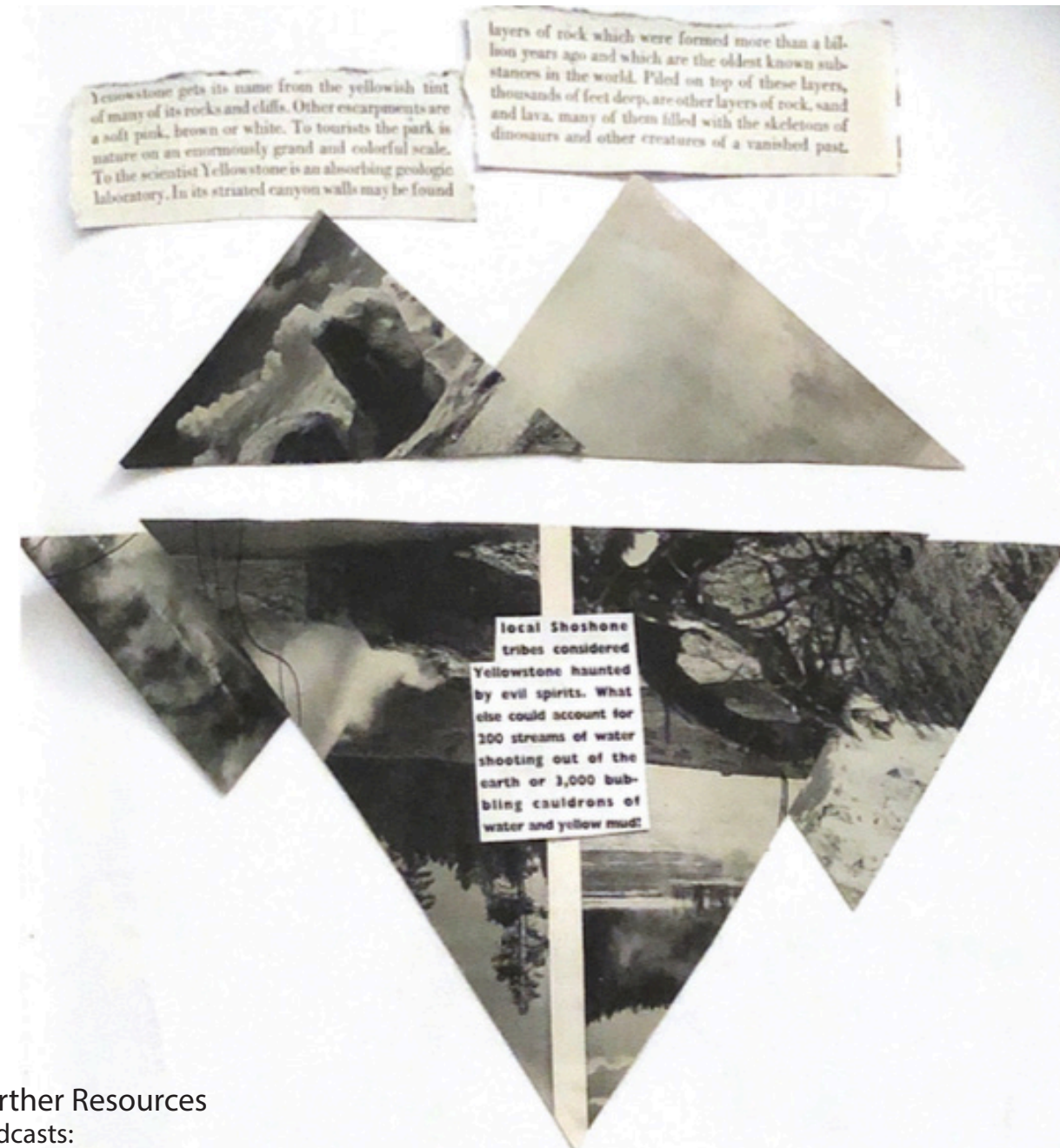


Shoaling Within Radical Re-Imagination

Further Resources
Podcasts:
**Growing Old: Tales from an Urban Canopy** at t.ly/n4yN
Boone, K on the **Landscape Architecture Podcast at t.ly/RkJR**
Video:
**The Relational Ecology of Belonging Over Time in Seahurst Park** at https://vimeo.com/471785521
Texts:
**Demonic Grounds: Black Women And the Cartographies of Struggle** by McKittrick, K.
**Groundwork** in Site Matters (pp. 89–118) by Dripps, R
**Urban foraging and the relational ecologies of belonging** by Poe, M. R., LeCompte, J., McLain, R., & Hurley, P.
**How to Kill a City** by Moskowitz, P.
**The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America by Rothstein, R.**

# Ground

"Ground" conceptually deserves deeper consideration in both literal and symbolic ways as a tool for liberatory praxis. It is expansive, encompassing, and varied in both its application and definition and works to document the fetch of site through history and the temporal dimensions of place. Ground explores the dynamics of site, the way that people anchor in place, and the overall archival and intersectional nature of the multi-storied history of a place. Landscape architecture builds key project knowledge from site analysis. Grounding offers a more inclusive approach to site analysis and can help many of the problems that manifest further along in the landscape architecture process. The fetch of site has to be consistently re-analyzed for suppressed narratives that more equitably represent place meaning and reciprocal ecologies of place.

## Site vs. Ground

A site is the section of earth where a design project is slated to take place. Its interactions with the greater community can be limited through ownership and thoroughly defined boundaries. Sites function within a landscape of meaning for community and can be imbued with meaning of its own. A site can go so far as to develop its own relationship with a community based on its history in relationship to the broader community history. Traditional interpretations of site work to conceptualize the scale of a project and define the boundaries for the scope of work. Ground can mean a purpose or reason; the physical earth and your connection to it; the pursuit of something, i.e. running it to ground; or a ground rule. The multiplicity of positions present within the word ground allow for it to represent a world of possibility. Ground serves as a connection between land and its often conflicting and complicated histories.

## Embracing History

Developed, designed, and formally recognized geographies in the U.S. were all re-imagined through settler-colonialism to displace, reorder, and subjugate difference; the multidimensional and multi-historied concept of ground allows for the complex, often opposing narratives of that history to be more thoroughly explored. Ground strives for a complete picture of the spatiality of subjugation and geographic identity. The opposing narratives throughout U.S. history cannot be adequately explored independent of each other. The experience of the black diasporas in the US in particular is one of actively seeking to re-ground and become rooted. The "sites of subjugation and loss, dispossession, and violence" that are "implicit, rather than marginal, to sociospatial order" "require black displacement, black placelessness, black labor, and a black population that submissively stays 'in place.'" This overlaps greatly with Indigenous struggles with land, loss, and forced migration, oftentimes intertwining or functioning in a direct relationship. Inversely, European immigrants from working class, non-Protestant, countries considered culturally "inferior" were initially considered to be an inferior sub-race within the white race before eventually succumbing entirely to the settler-colonial technology of racialization. These people and their descendants actively made choices to assimilate, often for fear of what they would lose if they did not. These trajectories through the liminality of racialization happened in tandem, often with groups being pitted against each other in the hopes of eschewing their own stigmatization or subjugation. The intersection of Indigenous politics with anti-Blackness is hard to understand without first being able to analyze the displacing impact of agricultural efforts by enslaved Africans and anti-Indigenous war efforts by enlisted Black people as bi-directional technologies of settler-colonialism. Similarly, tracing the fetch of land-related subjugation allows for us to see the way fear, greed, and implicit or explicit bias were utilized in parallel to pit people against each other. Grounding ourselves in the fetch of history allows a more comprehensive tracking of the ripples left behind in its wake.

## Ground as Time Travel

Conceptually, ground represents the complex liminality of place over time. Both the framing and etymology of ground add to its power to invoke multi-storied place histories. It allows the multiplicity of what is, what has been, and what could be to exist in the broader contextual underlayment; ground contains infinite possibilities and tracks changes as they come. Ground represents a "folding of time" that transcends linear understandings of time, allowing the patient observer glimpses of the past and future. Ground for these marginalized communities is often an ecotonal space with complex overlapping and interrelated histories; it is only through the grounded navigation of those histories that liberation can be negotiated. The energy that is pushed into place creates the past, present, and future "material physicality of the diaspora." In a sense, the decades-long project of investment and divergence in the margin since World War II has left a tangible mark geographically; that mark allows those grounded in the margin to step away from the ordinary constraints of time and gain a more comprehensive understanding of history. The material physicalities of history are comprehensively mapped through ground.

# Process

Landscape architecture takes place in the ecotone between the malleability of ground and the settler-colonial technologies creating the built environment; the discipline lends itself to working toward spatial justice goals in a way that fields with firmer boundary constraints cannot. Using ground to advance landscape architecture as liberatory praxis allows for a richer understanding of what has come before, what could come again, and encourages the community rooted to that ground to envision radical re-imagining. Ground serves as a foundational piece of the radical re-imagining process that overlaps and intersects with shoaling, knowledge re-creation, and landscape architecture as liberatory praxis. In application, the grounding process is about expanding narrow conceptions of what a project is capable of and understanding the history and technologies that it is up against.

Ethnoecology and landscape literacy are particularly useful lenses for the analysis of ground. Ethnoecology centers the reciprocal ecologies of place. Reciprocal ecologies of place describes the relationships between people, animals, other organisms and things, and the ground they inhabit. These relational entanglements, both political and otherwise; obligations to each other; and resource management methods create the "region of care" that define lived experiences in geography. In particular, ethnoecology's theoretical framing of time-scales is a direct analysis of many of the components of ground. Those time-scales, geologic time; plant, animal, and soil time; Indigenous Peoples' time; nation-state time; global time; and living ethical responsibilities and possibilities time, provide an excellent beginning to the expanded conception and understanding of site (Anna, 2020). Ethnoecology welcomes radical imagination in conjunction with the community but lacks the frame necessary to analyze designed environments for enjoyment, outside of foraging and gardening purposes. Landscape literacy partners the community's dialectic understanding of the ground they live upon with the power of landscape architecture to transform that ground to better meet their needs. Landscape literacy connects the broader understanding of site provided by time-scales to the existing populations, creating a complete conceptualization of ground. Outlining the considerations necessary for the comprehension of ground elevates ground from a vague conceptualization to a process.

**Grounding gives us the space to create the foundation of democratic community engagement and further bolsters the reciprocal relationship-building process as things progress.** The foundation of democratic community engagement fosters the reciprocal relationship-building process. As the co-mingling knowledge of democratic community engagement is shoaled, it uncovers multi-storied community goals, values, histories, and place meanings and utilizes the coalescence of that knowledge to develop a liberatory compass. The liberatory compass pushes forward and navigates within the radical re-imagination of landscape architecture as liberatory praxis with particular focus around navigating ground and reconstructing knowledge.



The Foundation of Democratic Community Engagement → The Liberatory Compass → Grounding Radical Re-Imagination
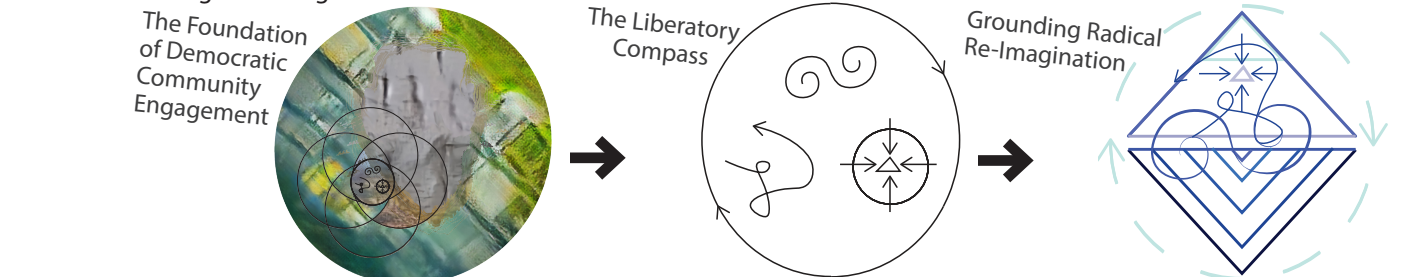
| Considerations for the foundation of Radical Re-imagining: | To Begin the Relationship Building Process, Consider: | Examples of resources: |
|---|---|---|
| • Political ecologies of place | • What underutilized, inaccessible, or derelict resources are present in this community? What is the history of those resources? What barriers are there around those resources? | Public amenities |
| • Questioning Technologies of Settler-Colonialism | | Affordable/Attainable Housing |
| • Reflexivity | | Grocery Stores/Healthy food |
| • Transparency | | Transportation |
| • Healing | • What resources does the community want? Have they had those resources in the past? If so, why were they lost? | Health care |
| • Inclusivity | | Employment |
| • Spatial Justice | | Technology |
| | • What resources are present in other communities that this one does not have? Why? | Libraries/Quality Education |
| | | Sanitation |

Allow the community to expound upon their reciprocal relationships with place.

Tools
Imagining Justice through Oral History - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MbKnhurPegc
Brown, L. A., & Strega, S. (2005). Research as Resistance: Critical, Indigenous and Anti-oppressive Approaches. Canadian Scholars' Press.
Denzin, N. K., & Salvo, J. (2020). New Directions in Theorizing Qualitative Research: Theory as Resistance. Myers Education Press.
Hawthorne, C. (2019). Black matters are spatial matters: Black geographies for the twenty-first century. Geography Compass, 13(11), 1.
Simpson, M., & Bagelman, J. (2018). Decolonizing Urban Political Ecologies: The Production of Nature in Settler Colonial Cities. Annals of the Association of American Geographers. 108(2), 558–568.
Flower, L. (2003). Talking across Difference: Intercultural Rhetoric and the Search for Situated Knowledge. College Composition and Communication, 55(1), 38–68.
Jourian, T. J., & Nicolazzo, Z. (2017). Bringing our communities to the research table: the liberatory potential of collaborative methodological practices alongside LGBTQ participants. Educational Action Research, 25(4), 594–609.
McHugh, N. A. (2015). The Limits of Knowledge: Generating Pragmatist Feminist Cases for Situated Knowing. SUNY Press.
Foucault, M. (1980). Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977. Pantheon Books.
Gwaltney, J. L. (1980).
'Drylongso: A self-portrait of Black America. Random House New York

# The (Re)Construction of Knowledge

Tracking the fetch of knowledge construction facilitates a more thorough understanding of the ways that knowledge represented as ultimate truth fails to acknowledge the partiality and goals of its creator.  Recognizing the subjectivity of knowledge and knowledge creation is vital to spatial justice research and practice.   Understanding the context of prevalent narratives and the sources from which they were constructed is crucial to understanding the subjective, experiential, and anecdotal realities of communities in the margin that often do not have the access necessary to define their own narrative.  The process of re-constructing knowledge centers around active listening, acceptance, and reciprocal relationship building.  Utilizing storytelling to facilitate the re-construction of knowledge grounds radical re-imagination in the experiential knowledge of the community.  Oral traditions have a long, parallel fetch to that of formalized knowledge creation.  Hearing and accepting stories shared by the community facilitates healing; allows for formal recognition of the community's years of subjugation; and jump-starts the process of distilling community values, goals, and barriers.

## The Fetch of Formalized Knowledge Creation

The formalization of knowledge, as it stands now, is a technology of settler-colonialism used to justify current forms of subjugation and exploitation.  The rules around what is and is not considered formal knowledge were constructed over the long fetch of history through the interplay between power and subjectivity.  Formalized knowledge, archives, and all of the places organized around finding information in the United States were constructed around documenting the process of settler-colonialism; they prioritize dominant settler perspectives and the written word and work to downplay atrocities in history.  The fetch of knowledge creation developed widespread bias in dominant narratives and the information most easily accessible. Current and dominant forms of knowledge production continue to ignore subjectivity in service of maintaining representations of truth that paint the U.S. in the best light.

Within the fetch of formalized knowledge creation, communities in the margin are featured as either a problem or research subjects.  These communities are represented as one-dimensional, exoticized, mysterious, unintelligent, unskilled, violent, uncivilized, sub-humans that are incapable of solving their own problems.  The organization of Indigenous knowledge intereprets time differently, absent of the difference between past, current, and future events and knowledge.  Throughout that fetch, the tradition of extractive information gathering has been utilized to justify subjugation and problematize communities for their subjugation.  This history has created a healthy distrust of research and researchers alike.
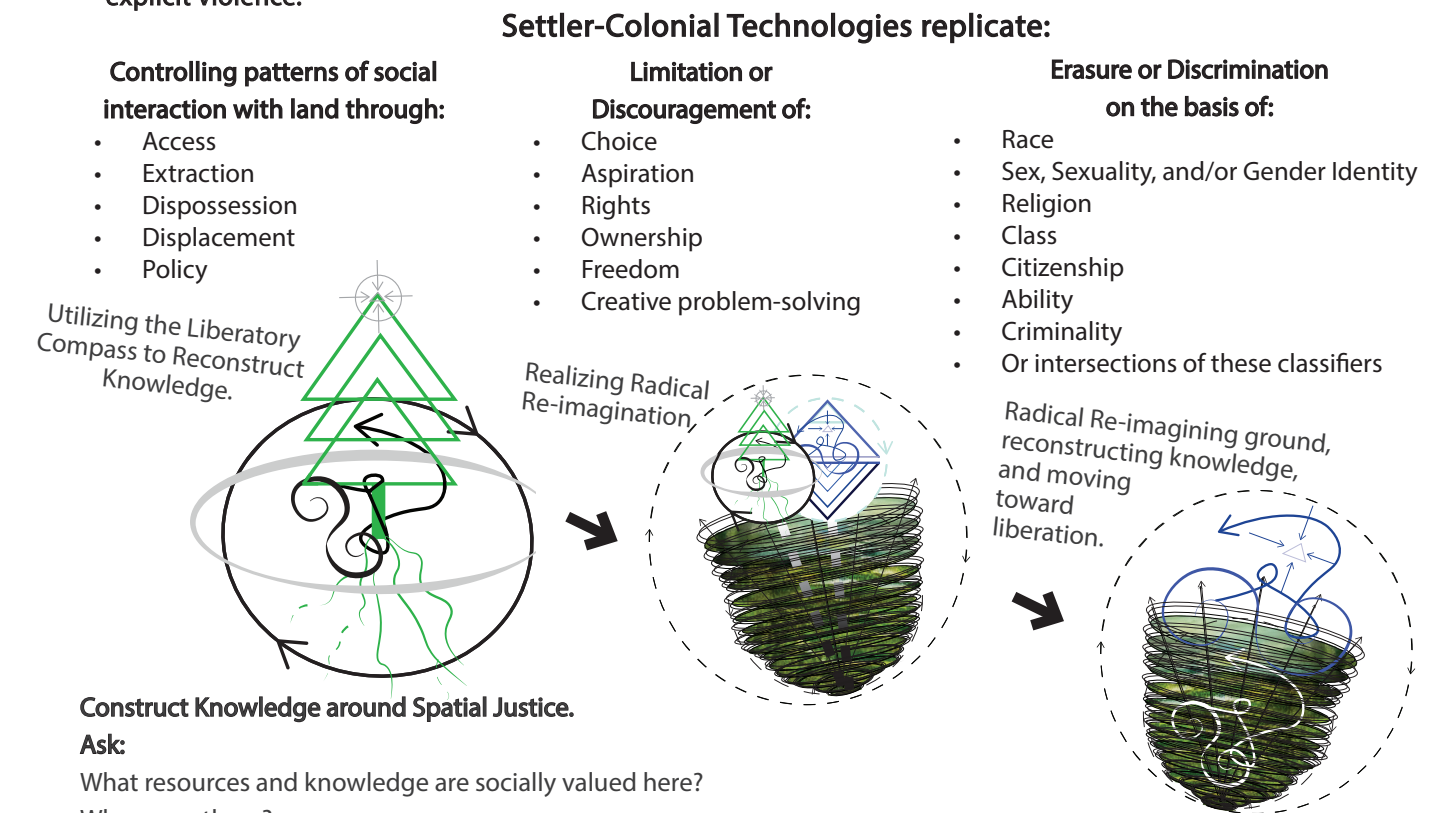
Subjective theories formalized as objective scientific research were initially used to create the racial categories that then justified the subjugation of anyone that was not white and the settler-colonial efforts to create a communal identity around whiteness in the Americas.  Medical research, in particular, was created through experimentation on Black bodies.  False portrayals of cultural identity are intertwined with the fetch of formalized knowledge creation as a whole, souring the scientific establishment and formalized knowledge for communities that either do not see themselves represented or see themselves represented inaccurately.  As such, designers who go into the engagement process hoping to create reciprocal relationships are running headlong into layers of subjugation and are often interpreted by the community as another extractive process that may or may not even come to fruition.

## Knowledge  Reconstruction Through Storytelling

The fetch of formal knowledge construction is long, but storytelling's fetch far exceeds it.  Communities in the margin have long oral traditions.  Stories told around a campfire; songs used in ritual, performance, celebration, and to speed up the work day; origin stories; and stories around relational ecologies began before written history and has continued into modern day.  Storytelling serves as an alternative, often more accurate, history of a place and that better addresses the complexities of day to day life.  If the community engagement process created space for  storytelling to facilitate the re-creation of knowledge and healing.  The unearthing of historical ways of knowing within a community moves forward a comprehensive and reciprocal narrative of the community.  This narrative exploration process allows for dialogue around community values, goals, and barriers that form the foundation for the knowledge re-creation process.  Storytelling holds the power to humanize difference and mobilize values.  This allows designers to learn in conversation with the community, reflect back what they have learned, and ideate around those stories in community.

# Navigating and Facilitating Knowledge Reconstruction

Knowledge reconstruction is the first tangible step toward liberation through liberatory praxis after the contemplative and reciprocal process of realizing radical re-imagination.  It builds on the foundation of grounding to re-imagine the desired outcomes of the community engagement.  Liberation requires addressing previous strife and working toward healing.  Making space for storytelling in order to cultivate reciprocal relationships and form a holistic, inclusive, and comprehensive understanding of the multi-storied past of the community and what they  desire for their future.  Telling stories is a means of navigating the waters of subjugation with the hopes of reaching the other side.  Taking these stories and using them as a liberatory compass to navigate through the healing process allows for the landscape architecture process to systematically dismantle geographic, political, and procedural subjugation toward liberatory outcomes.
**Reconstructing knowledge through democratic community engagement requires identifying and examining the technologies of Settler-Colonialism.  These technologies are meant to subjugate and control through implicit or explicit violence.**

## Settler-Colonial Technologies replicate:

| Controlling patterns of social interaction with land through: | Limitation or Discouragement of: | Erasure or Discrimination on the basis of: |
|---|---|---|
| • Access<br>• Extraction<br>• Dispossession<br>• Displacement<br>• Policy | • Choice<br>• Aspiration<br>• Rights<br>• Ownership<br>• Freedom<br>• Creative problem-solving | • Race<br>• Sex, Sexuality, and/or Gender Identity<br>• Religion<br>• Class<br>• Citizenship<br>• Ability<br>• Criminality<br>• Or intersections of these classifiers |

Utilizing the Liberatory Compass to Reconstruct Knowledge.

Realizing Radical Re-imagination.

Radical Re-imagining ground, reconstructing knowledge, and moving toward liberation.

**Construct Knowledge around Spatial Justice.**
**Ask:**
What resources and knowledge are socially valued here?
Who owns them?
What resources or knowledge has been lost?
What resources or knowledge do other communities have that this one does not?
What is hindering access?
What would increase access?
What resources feel socially exclusionary and why?
What resources are easily accessible?
What forms of knowledge are being expressed here and how?
Reflect on the process of grounding and incorporate that knowledge.
As all of the components of ground and knowledge come together, they re-imagine and give form to the complexities of radical re-imagining, leading to developing a landscape architecture practice that advances spatial justice.  In order to move towards liberation, landscape architecture has to address a few very specific points.  The radical re-imagining process creates the liberatory compass for design projects from democratic community engagement and starts tracking the fetch of spatial injustice in ground and social injustice in knowledge (re)creation.  This experience provides the opportunity for the community to review reciprocal political ecologies in a place where their voices hold equal weight to those that would normally hold more power.  This disrupts the traditional roles within the relational ecologies of place and allows for healing.  This healing takes place as a bi-product of the radical re-imagination process.  The democratic community engagement process facilitates healing by dismantling traditional relational ecologies of place and working to identify community values
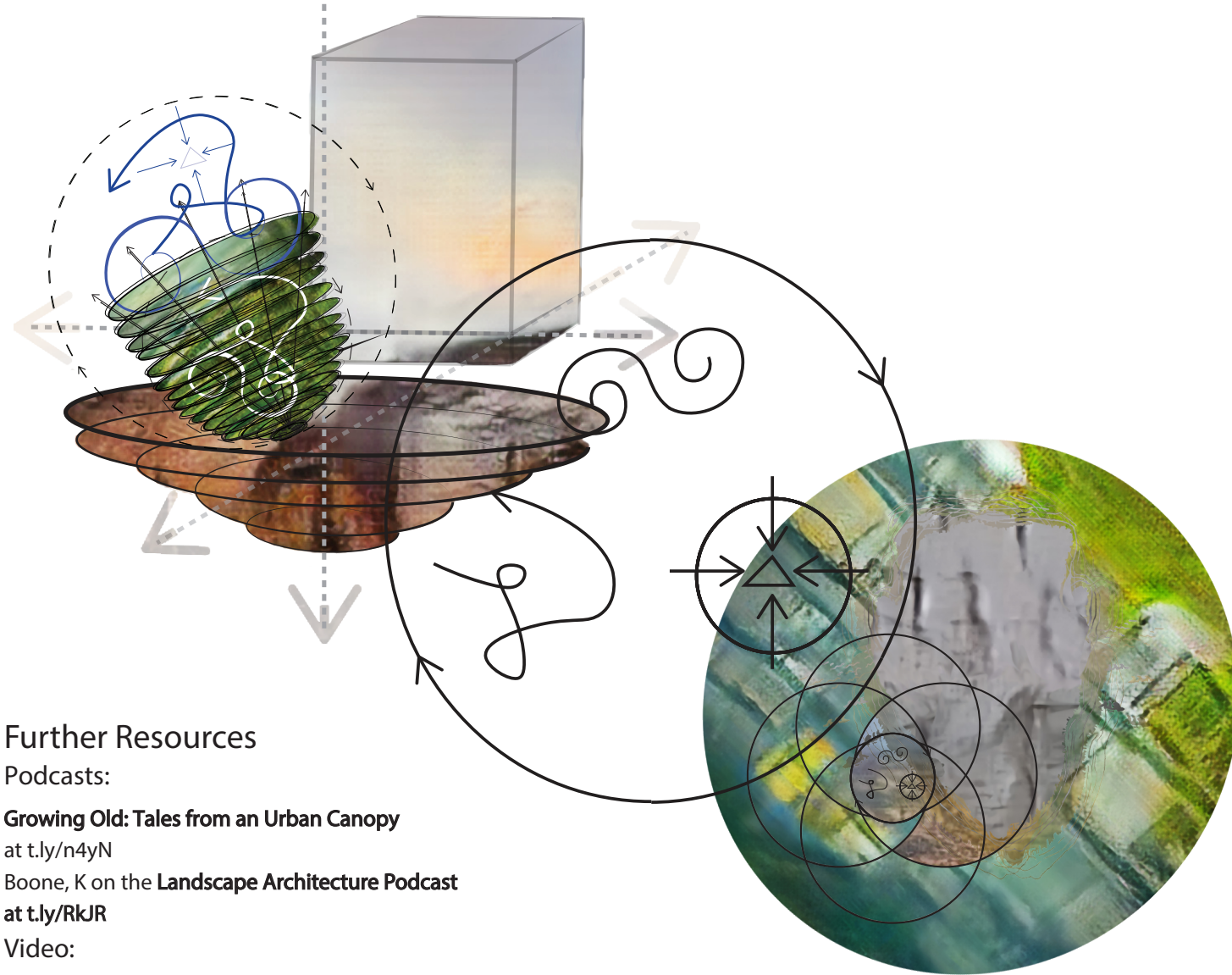
## Further Resources

Podcasts:

**Growing Old: Tales from an Urban Canopy**
at t.ly/n4yN
Boone, K on the **Landscape Architecture Podcast**
at t.ly/RkJR

Video:

**The Relational Ecology of Belonging
Over Time in Seahurst Park**

at https://vimeo.com/471785521

Texts:

**The Aesthetics of Equity**
by Craig Wilkins

**Demonic Grounds: Black Women And the Cartographies of Struggle**
by McKittrick, K.

**Groundwork** in Site Matters (pp. 89–118)
by Dripps, R

**How to Kill a City**
by Moskowitz, P.

**Urban foraging and the relational ecologies of belonging**
by Poe, M. R., LeCompte, J., McLain, R., & Hurley, P.

# Landscape Architecture as Liberatory Praxis

## Liberatory Praxis

Radically re-imagining landscape architecture as liberatory praxis comes in waves.
Up to this point, those waves consisted of:

**Radical Re-Imagining**
• Democratic foundation of community engagement
• Reciprocal relationship-building
• Use Shoaling + Liberatory Compass within reciprocal relationship-building to guide the re-imagining process
• Weave throughout and around liberatory praxis

**Ground**
• Expand the kinds of information relevant to project design + engagement
• Ground the process in relevant geographies and themes
• Provide a map of the past and the future

**Reconstructing Knowledge**
• Look to the past to create a more representative future
• Uplift the multi-storied histories of place
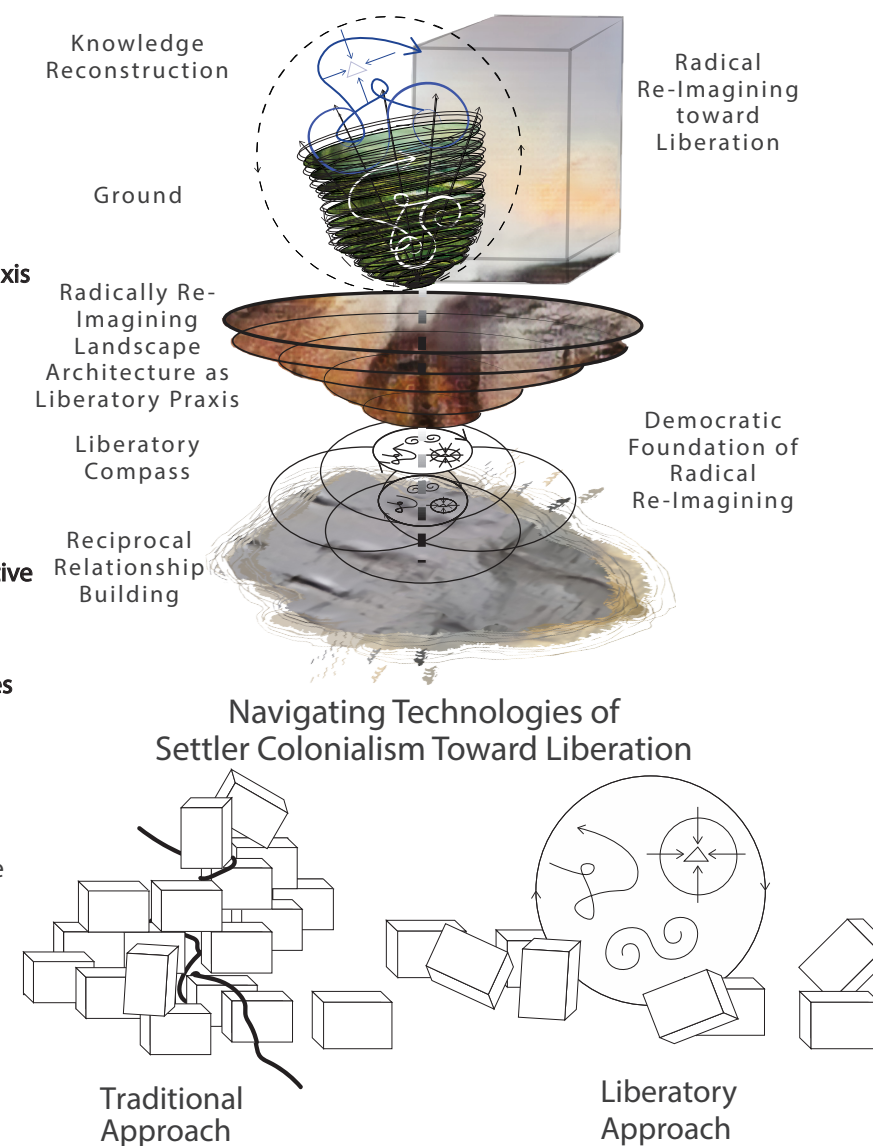• Respect and advance the community's desires

Our reconstruction of landscape architecture as liberatory praxis maintains an overlapping, obligatory, and reciprocal entanglement with the previous waves of re-imagination, building to erode the shores of settler-colonialism. Landscape architecture functions here as a vehicle furthering spatial justice expansion goals outlined through the re-imagining process. Landscape's liminality defines the structure of landscape architecture as liberatory praxis, but other applications could create a very different coalescence. Referring back to the foundational considerations of radical re-imagining listed earlier, practitioners pushing forward the community engagement process have several very specific responsibilities.
They must:
• Practice reflexivity
• Critically interrogate the reciprocal political ecologies of place
• Question technologies of settler-colonialism

Reflexivity requires understanding the way that our own knowledge is situated and figuring out how to utilize our own positionality. Reflexivity helps the practitioner to hold the space necessary for the abolishment of the communal baggage that remains after continual subjugation, creating the space for transformative outcomes.

**Knowledge Reconstruction**

**Ground**

**Radically Re-Imagining Landscape Architecture as Liberatory Praxis**

**Liberatory Compass**

**Reciprocal Relationship Building**

**Radical Re-Imagining toward Liberation**

**Democratic Foundation of Radical Re-Imagining**

### Navigating Technologies of Settler Colonialism Toward Liberation

Traditional Approach

Liberatory Approach

**Some specific ways to practice reflexivity in landscape architecture include:**
1. Sharing more authentically about yourself and your journey to this work
2. Incorporating more people into the decision-making process, even if a decision feels insignificant
3. Documenting why specific decisions were made and the way that your reflexivity factored into the process, whether in a personal reflexivity journal or in a more formalized manner
4. Explaining the beliefs and perspectives of the people involved before sharing their conclusions

# Application

Reciprocal political ecologies are of particular importance when advancing spatial justice through landscape architecture. Political ecologies are an overlapping and complex web made up of the social inclusion, exclusion, and cohesion enacted by organizations and people who embrace dominant culture in the United States; the work done by actors who likely mean well, but work in fields that are technologies of settler-colonialism; and the lack of resources, access, or participation of those in the margin as a result of that systemic subjugation. Landscape architects are typically outside the communities in which they practice both geographically and socially. They are often hired by people with power who have harmed the very community for which they are presumably designing. Taking the time to analyze these political ecologies is a large part of practicing reflexivity; continually gauging your complicity with what the funding organization wants versus strictly aligning with community interests is vital to sustaining democratic engagement. This could be an informal process centered around the relationship between the client and landscape practitioners, a process driven by the creation of equitable contracts, a more structured process where the political impacts of a specific project are assessed to steer the best course of action, or any number of other configurations that reflect the methods being utilized in a specific project. Subjugation is both a reason to further practice reflexivity and a source of conflict within engagement. Liberation requires that painful memories come to light in order to free the community from their lasting burden. Landscape architecture as liberatory praxis is about forming reciprocal relationships in order to understand the reciprocal ecologies of place and work to enhance, strengthen, nurture, and support those relationships; Understanding the political ecologies of place are vital to forming an understanding of how to best support the community. Consider the political ecologies of place and allow for the democratic community engagement process to cut across those traditional ecologies and foster the bridging and restructuring of those ecologies.

Questioning the technologies of settler-colonialism requires an abolishment of subjugation in existing technologies. It is possible to take back settler-colonial technologies for democracy instead of doing away with them entirely. Talking about individuality by honoring differences and celebrating identity, rather than practicing erasure of those in the margins is a big first step towards taking technologies back. Another method is increasing access for communities in the margin. Increasing physical access, pathways to ownership, virtual access, and the reciprocal messaging of environments so that marginalized communities feel welcome and encouraged to utilize community resources takes a technology of settler-colonial subjugation and makes it one of liberatory inclusion. Designs should recognize the multi-storied histories brought forth during the relationship-building process to make the site feel welcoming. Additionally, in the democratic community engagement process, all aspects of the process and the goals has to be restorative rather than extractive. Extra effort should be put forth to design around the community's environmental management techniques and their literacy of their home should be centered. Projects have to invest in the broader community. Consider how the project can expand the values identified through the reciprocal relationship-building process to advance spatial justice in the broader community. Identify any broader policy changes that would help to further dismantle barriers around land, access, and liberatory outcomes. What can be done to decriminalize existing in the margins? What is the current process for allowing municipal code exceptions? How can policy be altered to uplift the most marginalized? Always make space for people with criminal convictions, the poor, the unhoused, youth, the elderly, and/or racially diverse or disabled populations existing in the community to feel heard, respected, and supported in their diverse identities and needs. Structure the workflow of the project around the values identified by the community.

**Re-imagined Deliverables:**
• A Liberatory Compass built on the foundation of democratic community engagement that guides the projects forward momentum based upon the values, goals, knowledge, and grounding uncovered in the reciprocal relationship building process.
• A process of reevaluating and revising project goals with community
• Design concepts created in community.
• Revised drawings based around community input
• Systemic Abolition
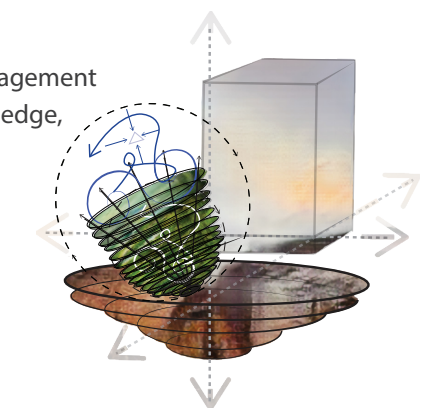• Reflecting on the process and searching for more ways to expand the impacts of the liberatory compass.