Performing Sonic Archives: Listening to Berea, Sun Ra, and the Little Cities of Black Diamonds

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This dissertation titled
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ABSTRACT

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Performing Sonic Archives: Listening to Berea, Sun Ra, and the Little Cities of Black Diamonds

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This is a project of performing three sonic archives: the Berea College Appalachian Sound Archives in Kentucky, the Sun Ra/El Saturn Collection of the Creative Audio Archives in Chicago, and the Little Cities Archive in southeastern Ohio. Here, I define “performing the archive” (Calzadilla and Marcus 2006; Osthoff 2009; RC Smith 2003) as any interpretive act related to the archive, including (but not limited to) listening, musical and visual appropriation, historiography, and ethnographic fieldwork and analysis. I offer “sonic archives” as a distinct genre that requires new archival approaches—rooted in listening and sound—that do not exclude traditional archives but add to and complement them. As such, listening is my primary method used throughout the dissertation. It is both performative and dialogical, and a direct way to sonically engage with people, place, and archival materials. My interest lies in listening to the archive’s sonic components “across the grain” (Zeitlyn 2012; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991), grounding them in senses of place, and hearing the diversity of the voices they contain. I focus on the smaller stories—flawed, open-ended, fragmented, interstitial—that coalesce to form the body of an archive listened to and performed “from below” (Sekula 1986). Listening is employed in two different methodological contexts, “sonic ethnography” and “archival performance.” Sonic ethnography involves a deep
engagement with both the archival materials and the people and places they are connected to. Archival performance allows for an embodied re-imagining and re-contextualization of the archive. Together, these methodologies form the basis of this dissertation’s assertion to not only listen to archives “from below” but also to allow the interpretive act of remixing to be informed by this perspective. Thus, “performing the sonic archive” brings together the analytical and creative work of scholars and artists—including myself—that seek to use, reinterpret, and re-contextualize the archive sonically, thereby highlighting an embodied agency of the archive’s materials through their interaction.
For Jennifer and Henry Harnetty
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INTRODUCTION: A “GEOGRAPHY OF SCARS”
AND AN ARCHIVE “FROM BELOW”

“The trouble was a familiar one: too much power, too little knowledge.” Wendell Berry

This is a project of performing three sonic archives. “The archive” has been described as a meta-narrative, a conceptual or philosophical problem, or as a bureaucratic mechanism (Ernst 2012; Merewether 2006; Spieker 2008). These traditional text- and document-based understandings of the archive often obscure listening and sound in favor of looking and reading. I offer “sonic archives” as a distinct genre that requires different approaches—rooted in listening and sound—that do not exclude traditional archives but add to and complement them. These approaches are not bound to either an ocular or aural centrism (Erlmann 2004), and instead challenge and open our perception of histories and presence. As such, sonic archives are comprised of historic sound recordings; they may also include text, musical notation, and images; and are even further extended to encompass places and larger regions. I define “performing the archive” (Calzadilla and Marcus 2006; Osthoff 2009; RC Smith 2003) as any interpretive act related to the archive, including (but not limited to) listening, musical and visual appropriation, historiography, and ethnographic fieldwork and analysis. My subjective, embodied intervention as a researcher and composer contributes to an expanded notion of the archive. This includes listening to archives “from below” as well as developing contextual sonic senses of region and place. Thus, “performing the sonic archive” brings
together the analytical and creative work of scholars and artists—including myself—that seek to use, reinterpret, and re-contextualize the archive sonically.

This dissertation considers the sonic archive as a space in which performance, place, knowledge, and power coalesce. My interest lies in expanding an understanding of the archive by listening to its sonic components “across the grain” (Zeitlyn 2012; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991), grounding it in senses of place, and hearing the diversity of the voices it contains. I focus on the smaller stories—flawed, open-ended, fragmented, interstitial—that coalesce to form the body of an archive listened to and performed “from below” (Sekula 1986). The result is a topography of necessarily imperfect and unfinished accounts (Spieker 2008; Stewart 1996). These accounts are replete with the mistakes, errors, and triumphs of both past and present; the process of listening to them offers a means of acknowledgment and becomes an integral part of a larger archival stewardship.

My primary work with sound is through listening. I listen to the sound objects of the archive literally and metaphorically; I also listen to contemporary, emergent sounds outside the archive. I position my work in relation to the field of sound studies, with an emphasis on historical soundscapes and aural history in connection with the archive (Courbin 1998; Bruce R. Smith 1999; Mark M. Smith 2004; Sterne 2003; Thompson 2002). As suggested by work on “listening awry” (Drobnick 2004), “mislistening” (Carter 2004), and “mishearing” (Labelle 2010), the physical nature of sound and listening affords an exploration of multiple connections between people and place that are present around the sounds, spiraling out from them, moving wave-like and projecting through communities. Thus, the act of listening is an act of acknowledgement. Listening
opens a new space of engagement with the archive by allowing multiple narratives and voices to be heard.

Three sonic archives are the objects of study: the Berea College Appalachian Sound Archives in Kentucky, the Sun Ra/El Saturn Collection of the Creative Audio Archives in Chicago, and the Little Cities Archive in southeastern Ohio. Using sound as a primary source of knowledge, I critically explore these archives’ embeddedness in place and to the many voices within them. Each archive serves as a starting point, a sonic network that allows a critical analysis of social, historical, cultural, and material contexts. The use of these three archives also expands and complicates the relationship between sound, performance, and archives. Importantly, the archive as a repository of objects—documents, text, recordings—is merely a beginning, and, as these cases evince, an incomplete account of the archive (Burton 2006; RC Smith 2003; Foucault 1972). The interrelated network of historical and contemporary contexts and human relationships bring such an integral force to bear onto the archive that it becomes impossible to separate the object from the interactions that occur in relation to it. They inform one another, and perpetuate one another. In this way, sound—as a primary focus—becomes not only the material examined, but also allows a move away from understanding sound archives as objects alone to incorporate forces, processes, and becomings (Cox 2011; Deleuze and Guattari 1987).

Each archive merits a different approach to its interpretation and performance. These approaches are continually more expansive, moving from inside to outside the archive, from my own interpretation to that of others, from documents and recordings to
encompassing an entire region. As such, the three archives differ in content, location, how they were formed, and how they are maintained. The Berea College Appalachian Sound Archives consist of over 80 years of non-commercial recordings from across the Appalachian region. Organized into nearly thirty collections, the Berea Archives contain sounds of hundreds of different musicians, singers, and storytellers. With so many distinct contributors, the recordings create an archive assembled from below. My work with the Berea Archives includes listening in solidarity with these voices, and paying attention to social and historical contexts revealed through the recordings. Conversely, the Sun Ra/El Saturn Collection is centered on a single figure, Sun Ra (born Herman Poole Blount, 1914-93), an experimental jazz composer and bandleader. It is comprised of over 600 recordings collected over 30 years of Sun Ra’s career. Here, I focus on contemporary artists and musicians, including myself, who have listened to and re-contextualized the Sun Ra Collection as performances. Finally, I use the Little Cities Archive as a central place of engagement with the region in which it is located, and expand the notion of “the archive” to include the entire region it serves. In this way, the documents and recordings located there form the basis of a larger regional sonic ethnography of the past and present of energy, labor, disaster, protest, and recovery. The Little Cities Archive draws from several dozen small coal-mining towns primarily active in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is much smaller in scale than the other two archives, and its sound recordings are limited to a box of cassette tapes consisting mostly of oral histories and interviews.
I explore the sounds of each archive in order to understand the contexts in which they were made. These sounds are not limited to music, and include interactions that otherwise would be removed from commercial recordings. In my analysis of these sounds I draw from fields influenced by a recent sonic turn, including sound studies, performance studies, anthropology, geography, phonography, as well as music composition. From the Berea Archives, I listen to the interstitial sounds of conversation, doors slamming, and laughter that occur while a family in Kentucky sings a hymn tune together; the vitality of a banjo player despite the loss of technique; and hearing a fiddle player suddenly remembering the lyrics to an old tune that had been forgotten. The Sun Ra/El Saturn Collection includes the sounds of rehearsal tapes filled with incomplete takes and in-between banter; Sun Ra reading poems mediated through the telephone; home recordings of conversation and television programs; and lectures in which Ra uses homophones and word play. I also focus on artists and musicians critically performing the Sun Ra archive: a painter listens to the recordings and creates indirectly influenced collages, allowing the archive to seep into the present moment; and a musician creates an entire work out of unfinished fragments from a single tape. The Little Cities Archive contains interviews, homemade recordings, and roundtable discussions that add to other historical documents it contains. Recordings include the intimate sounds of a woman eating dinner with her grandparents; social sounds of communities coming together to discuss their childhoods and working in the mines; and a decades-old interview with a mine inspector from the region. To these, I have added my own field recordings and interviews related to energy production, including a local operator’s oil drilling rig in
operation; and the clanking noises along Monday Creek of “dosers,” which are sounding
the process of neutralizing acid mine drainage caused over a century ago.

This dissertation critically performs these three sonic archives as a means of
embodying the materials they contain. Performing the archive highlights an agency of the
archive by activating its materials through human interaction. In particular, these
performances are part of a process of listening to and interpreting the archive from below,
rather than a single top-down interpretation. Examples include a filmmaker remaking Sun
Ra tunes into marching band flashmobs that celebrate Ra’s legacy and protest against
class oppression and racism; artists creating field recordings that are then listened to and
performed in situ; and my own re-contextualized performances of all three of these
archives into sound collages.

The work of Wendell Berry and Allan Sekula highlight a dilemma associated with
performing the archive: any act of access and interpretation carries with it the potential
for an imbalance of power, and the destruction that invariably results from an exploitation
of that power. I bring Berry’s notion of land use and interpretation to bear on sonic
archives, as well as Sekula’s call to read the archive from below. In a brief 1975 essay
entitled “Damage,” Berry speaks of the land he farms and is caretaker to in Kentucky, of
his efforts to improve the land, and of the harm that occurred as a result of his well-
meaning but uninformed decisions. Despite his best intentions and efforts, Berry’s
actions were beyond the scope and scale of his knowledge, resulting in a scarring of the
landscape. His failure points to both his limitations as a farmer and to the seed of
potential learning that arises as a result of mistakes. Berry’s comments initially concern
land use, but he then expands the discussion to compare this experience with his perception of the arts, and brings the two together. Berry states,

> It used to be that I could think of art as a refuge from such troubles. ...Art was what was truly permanent, therefore what truly mattered. ...I am no longer able to think that way. That is because I now live in my subject. My subject is my place in the world, and I live in my place. (Berry 1990, 6)

Berry comes to know that what he originally thought of as the separate entities of place and culture are in fact deeply entwined. His home, the land beneath his feet, and a sense of localness are not things merely addressed in his art, they are his art. Likewise, his essays, poetry, and his understanding of culture become intimately connected to place. He is keenly aware of the power he wields on the land, and how it changes the land over time. He is also aware of his own limitations, the teleology of his capacity to influence the land and by association his art. This knowledge, one that arrives as a result of the unintended consequences of injury to his subject—a sense of place—leads Berry to action, to attempt an embodied stewardship of both land and culture. Seeking to balance power with knowledge, even this stewardship is nevertheless human and flawed, and can never fully erase its own history of marks on the landscape. Berry concludes, stating, “an art that heals and protects its subjects is a geography of scars” (7). Berry acknowledges the complex relationship between place, culture, and power. It is a relationship that requires an embodied engagement, however flawed, and is necessarily disfigured as a result.
If Berry’s experience suggests a movement toward a greater sense of cultural connection to place—a vantage point that is local, attached, and from the ground up—then Sekula advocates a similar perspective applied to the interpretation of an archive. Sekula refers to the acts of interpreting and appropriating the archive as both a “liberation” and a “loss” (1983, 194): unintended damage and even structural violence temper any sense of discovery and excitement from the archive’s creation and use. In his essay “Photography Between Labour and Capital” (which is included in a book of commercial mining photographs), Sekula acknowledges the “power relationships” deeply ingrained in the archive and its use as property, stating that neither the contents, nor the forms, nor the many receptions and interpretations of the archive of human achievement can be assumed to be innocent. And further, even the concept of “human achievements” has to be used with critical emphasis in an age of automation. The archive has to be read from below, from a position of solidarity with those displaced, deformed, silenced, or made invisible by the machineries of profit and progress. (Sekula 1983, 202)

Though referring to the process of reading and creating photographic archives, Sekula’s statement is equally applicable to the sonic. Sound archives, especially as they are newly digitized, are easily reproduced and appropriated, and are thus susceptible to the automation, profit, and progress Sekula refers to. In essence, no interaction with the archive’s creation or interpretation is fully objective or beyond reproach. Critically acknowledging this fact along with reading the archive from below upends the archive’s power structure. Resulting archival interpretations allow those to speak who would
otherwise not be heard. Sekula encourages the archival interpreter (or reader) to “listen to, and act in solidarity with, the polyphonic testimony of the oppressed and exploited” (1986, 64). By recognizing archival power relationships and attempting to invert them through the act of listening, Sekula points to a way of navigating the polysemic nature of archival materials and their ability to be detached from earlier contexts and meanings. This process acknowledges and contributes to stratified archival histories and meanings, rather than take away from them in an attempt to claim ownership. Berry’s embodied stewardship and Sekula’s call to read archives “from below” frame the central questions and problems in this dissertation; they also point to respectfully accessing and interpreting the past via archives, to participate locally in the present, and forge new relationships with those affected by this material into the future.

I offer the interpretive act of “performing the sonic archive” to address the issues raised by Berry and Sekula, and as a means to further mitigate and disseminate the power structures bound within archives. In this way, the archive is not only listened to from below, but is remixed from the same perspective. Performance offers an embodied means of considering issues of property, authorship, and origin. In order to do so, it is apparent that archival performances must be rooted in acknowledgement and accountability, and informed by senses of place and contextual research. Thus, the project and scope of this dissertation is to move through sonic archives, appropriating them, and re-contextualizing them to navigate ethical concerns that are tied to them.
Theorizing the Archive

The archive has long been a subject of examination in cultural and critical studies, and scholars have shown a growing interest over the last century in particular. Figures such as Sigmund Freud (1925), Michel Foucault (1970), and Jacques Derrida (1995), have discussed the archive at length, each weighing in on different aspects of its functions, power, and significance. Spieker (2008) discusses ways in which the archive has been used as material for artists and artistic movements, such as Marcel Duchamp, Andy Warhol, early surrealism, Russian futurists, mid-century photographers, and postmodern artists “at play” in the archive. After many decades of critical analysis and artistic use, the archive may seem to be a well-worn topic, and one wonders what can be added to the larger conversation. The use of sounds and sound recordings in archives, however, has not been scrutinized as fully as that of textual and visual elements. Notions of applying key elements of performance to the archive have also emerged in recent decades, and remain richly open to investigation (Jackson 2000; Schneider 2001; Taylor 2003; Osthoff 2009). Reinterpretation and re-contextualization of sound archives as an artistic and scholarly process further expand these elements.

Although there are numerous definitions of the word “archive,” the term’s origins and traditional meanings are associated with the controlling and bureaucratic power of the state. Ernst (2012) creates a strong distinction between an archive and a collection, with the former focusing on legal documents and government administration, and the latter associated more with museums and libraries. Ernst cites power and control as being the central difference between the two, arguing that over the last century this distinction
has become increasingly blurred. Ernst critically notes that artists have taken on more and more cultural aspects of memory, and have incorrectly identified their work as archival. Merewether (2006) also makes a distinction between archives and what he calls “non-archival collections,” emphasizing the historiographic function of the archive. He states that the archive “constitutes a repository or ordered system of documents and records, both verbal and visual, that is the foundation from which history is written” (Merewether 2006, 10). Investigating the archive in relationship to modernism and the arts, Spieker focuses on its bureaucratic aspects and how this helped to form an “irrational underside of modernism’s archival connection” which in turn allowed artists to subvert and react against archives (2008, 3). In contrast, Foucault offers an encompassing definition of the archive, one that is concerned not so much with the objects collected as with an ever-unfolding *a priori* system that defines and shapes how and what is collected and stored, and the ways in which we relate to them (1970, 130).

With so many understandings of the term “archive,” I choose to draw from the above perspectives, yet tailor my use of “archive” to sound and my objects of study. Ernst’s division between archive and collection is helpful, yet I have found that power and control remain as important to collections as they are to archives, thus mitigating a central component of his distinction. On one hand, history, memory, social and everyday life, environment, and politics inform my understanding of the “archive” more broadly and the sound archive in particular. On the other hand, it is impossible to ignore the institutional power present in the collecting, storage, protection, and dissemination of archival recordings and materials, including the three sound archives that I have chosen
to study. The fact that all three sound archives largely fall under Ernst’s definition of “collection”—yet are self-identified as “archives”—only adds to this blurred overlap between terminologies. Therefore, my use of “archive” retains and expands key elements of both archives and collections as described above. Both cultural contexts and institutional power are linked together in these sound archives and influence one another.

Recorded sound archives in particular have the ability to add to the more traditional connection between text and document. The ambiguity of the meanings of sound, as well as the medium of sound recording and its time-based nature are more aligned with photography and film, rather than text and narrative. Ernst notes that recorded sound produces a “noisy memory,” and encompasses and registers “the whole range of acoustic events” (2012, 173–4). This is in contrast to music notation whose “alphabetic symbolism” is akin to traditional archival texts and documents. Sound also allows for the ability to hear several distinct layers at once, a simultaneity that lends to a multi-voiced stratification that is both materially in the present and is layered upon past histories.

*Listening as a Primary Method*

Echoing the directive “What did you hear?” of the sound art collective Ultra Red (2013), the primary method used in this dissertation is listening. Susan Smith’s (2000) call to investigate the “possibility of learning through listening” is followed here, and the act of listening—to people, places, recordings, and through documents—becomes broader than the physical act of hearing alone to encompass a spectrum of listening
practices, from intimate conversations to soundscapes\(^1\) of a given place, to listening to sounds that jump from one sensory perception to another (as embedded in the visual information of a photograph, for example). Throughout the dissertation, I listen through images, text, and archival and field recordings. I also listen to live and living contexts, to others in conversation, as well as the environments I am in: the places and soundscapes of which I am a part.

Listening is a process that reveals the unfolding nature of place and relationships between people, how they are created, and how they transform and disappear through time. Susan Smith states that in “the making—the performance—of a soundspace there is a world of politics, economics, emotion, and embodiment that may offer a rather different way of knowing than those we currently rely on” (2000, 635). For Ultra Red, listening allows for a movement, “from reflection to critical analysis...[to] the production of cultural objects,” which ultimately leads to a complex mix of “not only consensus but also dissonance; the multivalence of subjectivities,” what they refer to as “listening in tension” (2013, 1-3). Furthermore, Ultra Red critiques 20th century avant-garde composers’ inability to become socially engaged, stating that they “stopped short of taking action to transform the world one perceives” (2013, 1). I follow this directive to become more socially involved through listening, and I am able to listen contrapuntally across time, different media, and disciplines as an active and embodied engagement with sound.

\(^1\) “Soundscape” (Schafer 1994) refers to the environmental and human sounds of a given place or immersive environment – in short, the “sonic environment.”
I employ “contrapuntal listening” to incorporate meaning beyond a purely musical use of the term. Counterpoint, located within the aesthetics of Western classical music, is traditionally defined as “the ability, unique to music, to say two things at once comprehensibly.”² As such, the musical act of listening contrapuntally allows for the simultaneity of sounds from non-musical contexts, including historical, societal, political, and material, to be brought into play or even conflict with one another. Said (1993) applies the term counterpoint to the act of reading literature as a means of illuminating an exchange between writer, subject, power, and history. Said states,

As we look back at the cultural archive, we begin to reread it not univocally but *contrapuntally*, with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts. (Said 1993, 51)

Said’s “contrapuntal” reading allows for stratified histories to move and interact both independently and interdependently with each other, and extends the term away from music to describe the process of reading and interpreting text. Most importantly, Said disrupts and reexamines “counterpoint” as a Western musical term to highlight how it can be altered to understand the flow, exchange, and clash between colonizer and colonized, oppressors and oppressed, powerful and marginalized. Said’s “counterpoint” points to a

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² An extended definition of counterpoint in Western classical music is, “The ability, unique to music, to say two things at once comprehensibly. The term derives from the expression *punctus contra punctum*, i.e. ‘point against point’ or ‘note against note’. A single ‘part’ or ‘voice’ added to another is called ‘a counterpoint’ to that other, but the more common use of the word is that of the combination of simultaneous parts or voices, each of significance in itself and the whole resulting in a coherent texture. In this sense Counterpoint is the same as ‘polyphony’.” Oxford Dictionary of Music, accessed Jun 10, 2014, [www.oxfordmusiconline.com](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com).
sense of movement, simultaneity, and the continual unfolding of historical, political, and social exchanges through time.

I draw from Said’s historic and multi-disciplinary approach to “counterpoint” and reapply it to the sonic act of listening. In this way, listening is a process that can be musical but is not necessarily so, and can take place across methodologies and disciplines. This process not only deepens the contexts of sounds heard but also allows what Samuels et al. (2010, 335) refer to as multiple subject “positionalities of listeners,” ensuring that they are listened to from many perspectives. My own archival-listening project follows Said’s call to reread history contrapuntally, and takes into account Ultra Red’s critique of 20th century avant-garde composers. I make use of my training as a musician to inform an expanded notion of the sonic that can reach out to and take an active role in places and communities of people.

Within the wider context of sound studies, modes of critical listening—what Sterne refers to as “typologies of listening”—provide the basis for my intervention in the field. These include historical and archival listening, as well as listening from the perspective of a musician and artist, akin to Oliveros’ (2005) “deep listening” and Lucier’s (1995) “virtuosic listening.” These types of listening are applied to the richly contextual sonic aspects of ethnographic fieldwork, what Erlmann (2004) refers to as an “ethnographic ear.” Combined, they allow for a number of voices and subject positions to be heard. All of the approaches that I draw on stem from a desire to combine the present-moment auditory process of polyphonic listening to a given soundscape with a critical, historical listening that expands the listening process to include cultural, political, and
temporal elements. As such, the combination of past and present emphasizes simultaneous sounds, and does so across time and space.

Listening can be a way of aurally understanding the past. Because sound is transitory and fleeting, historical listening involves an imaginative approach to sounding the past, especially when applied to historical moments before the advent of recorded sound. As discussed above, a gap exists between past and present, necessarily involving an aural straining across space and time. The use of both sound and textual archives help to cross this divide. The archive has been used in cultural and historical fields as a means of imagining and interpreting sounds of the past, essentially creating a historical soundscape that is no longer present. This technique refers not only to sound recordings but textual and visual references to sound.

Key examples of what Mark M. Smith (2004) refers to as “aural history” include Alain Courbin’s (1998) study of the uses of French village bells, highlighting how sound can define both social and physical space; Bruce R. Smith’s (1999) use of historical documents that mention sound to construct a historic soundscape of London in 1600; Emily Thompson’s (2002, 124) study of modernity in the early twentieth century, and her use of “soundscape” to “inform a more general understanding of the society and culture that produced it”; and Sterne’s (2003) history of the origins and manifestations of sound reproduction in the nineteenth century. This historical listening to sounds already dissipated can also be understood as a form of peripheral listening. Drobnick (via Zizek) refers to this as “listening awry,” wherein the process of listening—rather than being straightforward—is instead “from an angle, from an ‘interested’ rather than objective
perspective” (2004, 11). Ihde (1976) suggests a phenomenological “auditory imagination,” where perception and imagination function as two, co-present modalities of experience, and the listener can move between them.

Listening as a primary method is a direct way to engage with people and place. Listening contrapuntally allows not only the interplay of sounds but also extends beyond to encompass the acts of paying close attention to environment and engaging with people. As such, listening is at once a performative gesture and dialogical: to listen is to actively participate in conversation with sound’s physical and imagined presence, as well as the nexus of relationships that stem from the sonic experience. Proceeding from Said’s use of the term and combined with aurality, contrapuntal listening is a particular form of critical awareness where stratified layers of time and space come together, and we, as listeners, can choose to isolate, combine, or take them in as a whole.

Methodologies: Archival Performance

My primary method of listening is employed in two different methodological contexts, “archival performance” and “sonic ethnography.” These methodologies used together orient the framework of this dissertation toward connecting sound archives, performance, and place. They provide strategies for a practice-based research with the ability to listen to the archive through performance and ethnography, a way of listening contrapuntally that brings together cultural, historical, societal, and political contexts present in and around sound.
Archival performance (Cook and Schwartz 2002, Jackson 2000) considers how archives are activated through their creation, use, interpretation, and re-contextualization. It sees these interventions as active and creatively integral to the archival process. The term is used here to bring together fields of archival studies, performance studies, and music composition, the last of which entails both sonic performance and sampling practice. Archival performance is a practice-based form of research that is an embodied engagement with sound that attempts to connect with past and present through the archive. It encompasses Taylor’s reference to performance as a way of knowing that “enables scholars to analyze events as performance” (2003, 3), as well as an acknowledgement of power structures, and an open engagement with the sound archive related to recent postmodern analysis of the archive in archival studies. Finally, sound archives are used as material to be interpreted, analyzed, and re-contextualized from, among other positions, a musical-compositional perspective.

I draw on the work of archivists to provide a theoretical background for archival performance, and apply it to those actively reinterpreting the archive and using it as material. Over the past several decades, the field of archival studies has slowly evolved from a traditional positivist approach in favor of postmodern analysis of the archive (Kaplan 2002). It has turned away from a long history of “archival isolation” in favor of a greater involvement in a “societal-based approach” that is both subjective and questioning (Kaplan 2002, 215-16). In accord with this turn, Cook and Schwartz’s (2002) two-part article, entitled “Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory” and “From (Postmodern) Theory to (Archival) Performance,” acknowledges
the power structures in archives, and demands an awareness and accountability. Rather than understanding archival studies as a static and passive endeavor, Cook and Schwartz see their role as archivists as dynamic and participatory, stating that

archivists continually reshape, reinterpret, and reinvent the archive. Such archival performances represent power over memory and identity, over the fundamental ways in which society seeks documentary clues about where it has come from, and where it may be going. The performances of archivists, the power of the archive, should no longer remain naturalized, interiorized, “obvious,” or denied, but opened up to vital debate and transparent accountability. ...When power is denied, overlooked, or unchallenged, it is misleading at best and dangerous at worst. Power recognized becomes power that can be questions, made accountable, and opened to transparent dialogue and enriched understanding. (181)

Cook and Schwartz incorporate elements of postmodern theory and performance, thereby allowing for a wide range of challenges to current archival practice, as well as suggestions for further change and scholarship. This process allows others, including scholars, artists, and musicians, to both participate in archival performance and to be held accountable for their own interactions with and contributions to the archive. When power connected to the archive is acknowledged, many people diffuse and share it, rather than a select few (185).

Through the lens of performance studies, Jackson’s use of “archival performances” (2000, 35) describes her combination of historiography, ethnography, and performance related to place through the archive. She sees her ethnographic research at
the Hull-House in Chicago as both “uncanny” and “unsettling,” a disruptive movement through the archive that points to both the past and present (32-3). For Jackson, this leads to a historical and temporal compression, where the past—literally, fragmentarily, dialectically—seeps and floods into the present. Taylor (2003) also identifies and addresses this gap between past and present, along with that between the archival document and lived experience. In asking how “expressive behavior (performance)” can “transmit cultural memory and identity” (xvi), Taylor describes the gap as being between the “archive” and the “repertoire,” with the latter referring specifically to an embodied knowledge and memory (19). For Taylor, the archive and the repertoire do not meet, and the archive can never capture the repertoire. However, if Taylor is primarily concerned with the movement from the repertoire and to the archive, where embodied actions are incompletely documented and stored (23), my own intervention is centered in the opposite movement, or rather an additional movement, with the materials moving back out of the archive and into a performance repertoire. The archival materials carry with them a potential to be reused as performances (Geiger et al. 2010; Zeitlyn 2012). The embodied knowledge that is lost is not so much returned but acts as a trace and a model for a newly re-contextualized experiential process.

Berry and Sekula’s work reverberates in my mind as I think about the history of sound recording and appropriation. Making use of existing recordings through the process of sampling can be understood as a direct engagement with sound archives, yet this practice echoes Berry’s well-meaning scarring of the land, followed by critical questioning with no clear answers. The notion of an unequivocal right to sample becomes
problematic; the practice of re-contextualization potentially affects or even harms the traditions the samples belong to. In fact, the practice of sampling appears to be repeating the same patterns of other forms of appropriation, tantamount to cultural imperialism: the initial elation and detached freedom of sampling—with very little regard or understanding for the contexts connected to the samples used—shifts to an increasingly skeptical concern that slowly betrays an ignorance and position of privilege. Therefore, an effort to resolve these concerns is at the heart of this dissertation. I seek to expand an open, connected engagement with the sonic archive and sampling practice, and to move away from a detached perspective.

Applied to sound reproduction, musical borrowing, and digital sampling of sonic archives in particular, archival performance moves beyond a solely utopian/dystopian paradigm and toward a model that allows for a complex mix of cultural contexts and processes. My use of archival performance in this dissertation necessarily includes the fields of music composition and sound art, with a particular emphasis on sonic performance and sampling practice as a means of analyzing archives. Western classical traditions of musical borrowing and appropriation—as practiced by such composers as Charles Ives, Steve Reich, and Michael Finnissy— influenced my early training as a composer; I now employ aspects of their work combined with the above critically informed awareness as I listen to and perform sonic archives. DJs in popular culture such as J Dilla, as well as visual artists who make use of recorded sound such as Christian Marclay and Steve Roden, have also influenced this approach.
Musical borrowing and appropriation have a long and complex history. Burkholder (2013) notes that in the western classical tradition, using older music to create new works is a process that is “pervasive in all periods and traditions,” and dates back at least to medieval monophony. Within such a ubiquitous practice, there are both positive and negative aspects. The potential lack of regard or understanding for the contexts connected to the samples used tempers the detached freedom and ease of appropriation from styles, periods, and places around the world. Clearly this raises questions regarding ethical use of appropriation, and this practice could, at worst, fall into the larger problems of exploitation and even cultural imperialism. Depending on what is sampled and by whom, the approach could be an exciting and inspiring elision or hybrid, or could lack depth and accountability, betraying an unawareness of privilege or an abuse of that position. Berry’s phrase echoes the dilemma: too much power, too little knowledge. This leads to concerns about what rights one has to use these samples, and what unforeseen consequences are acted upon the traditions they belong to by re-contextualizing them.

Musical borrowing—from its earliest origins to digital sampling—is a key component of Western musical history. The issues related to musical appropriation in sampling (what Chris Cutler (2005), in discussing the works of John Oswald, provocatively refers to as “plunderphonics”) have been in debate for several decades and are connected to ownership, copyright laws, and intellectual property. One alternative to this seemingly endless debate is to move away from understanding these recordings as property (intellectual or otherwise), and instead as an entire set of relationships with the recording as a central point of their interactions. As such, the recordings are not merely
things in which meaning resides in their monetary value. Rather, meaning resides in the connections and human interactions they evoke and provoke.

Benjamin (1968) famously connects mass reproducibility with the loss of an “aura,” or initial meaning or value of a work of art. As Berger explains, a forced “mystification” replaces this loss of aura, a value based solely on a market or monetary value of the original work (2008, 21). Benjamin was speaking of film and photography in particular, and Berger painting; sound recordings, however, both share and refute these qualities. Unlike painting, the nature of sound is not necessarily rooted in an object. Sound can instead allow for what Christoph Cox calls a “becoming” and constant “flux” that are part of its makeup, stating that they function “not as static objects but as temporal events” (2011, 156). On the other hand, the advent of sound recording simultaneously provided an object that is connected to the sound as a storage device, as well as a means of its mass reproduction (Cutler 2005, 138).

The sound recording, then, serves as an object-marker, caught between the sounds made and the relationships the sounds point back to, and out to. With the use of sampling practices, the technical tools used to diffuse and transfer the aura of a given sound recording now allow it to be turned back on itself. Sampling opens a space for additional voices in the mix, with each adding layers of meaning and history to past and present. The resulting works contain the possibility of both capturing traces and adding additional layers of interaction. By conceiving of these sounds not as property but as a constellation of relationships, debates over ownership and authorship are critically revealed. At the same time, these relationships point to the connections that anchor the sounds to human
interactions. Meaning that has been previously detached is allowed to reenter the conversation. Finally, as part of an alternative to detachment, this process recognizes the possibility of connecting the recordings to the contexts stemming from them. The recordings are both coupled with the past and disrupted by time.

Chang (2009) refutes traditional scholarship on sampling practice (as it applies to hip-hop in particular) that revolves around “authenticity, ownership, and originality.” She instead argues that “play and rupture” are the defining elements, thus accounting for sampling’s historical and temporal dimensions without reverting to issues of origin and authorship. Applied to sonic archives and their performance, it is possible to make use of the technological tools of sampling practice to highlight this play and rupture, while simultaneously acknowledging previous layers of history. Chang states,

The most idealistic accounts of sampling envision the practice as cultural metaphor, musical space doubling as social space. If this is true, then the producer spins a tale of the patchwork self, for whom technology no longer produces fracture and schizophrenia, but a uniquely fluid integrity. At the same time, this utopian impulse must be tempered by cultural and social practices if sampling is to serve as anything more than metaphor. (Chang 2009, 157)

By creating a space for grounding and emplacing the sample—and by extension the archive—archival performance offers a critical lens to understand interactions and relationships that are present both inside and outside of the archive, as well as in the past and the present. The process of combining contemporary sampling practice with archival studies and ethnography both deepens and further complicates the historical ties, traces,
“ruptures,” and “play” that are already simultaneously present. Rather than being utopic, the process is instead searching and ambiguous, and invites a tenuous, dialogic, and even fragile practice between archival materials and their re-contextualization.

**Methodologies: Sonic Ethnography**

I offer “sonic ethnography” as a methodology that uses sound as a primary lens to analyze and understand place. Following Shipley and Peterson (2012, 404), I listen to sounds ethnographically as a way to consider the social practices tied to them and that help to give them meaning. If archival performance allows for an embodied re-imagining and re-contextualization of the archive, then sonic ethnography provides direct and personal contact with living people, places, and objects of today, and the sounds that are made by them. This in turn strengthens and creates new ties and exchanges between present and past. The methodology of sonic ethnography incorporates ethnographic methods, including fieldwork, oral interviews, observation, and participation, with a special emphasis on sound (Gershon 2012). These methods can themselves be understood as performances (Taylor 2003; Zeitlyn 2012). Zeitlyn suggests that the resulting materials produced become archival “surrogates of the events that created them,” an “archives of the performance of research” (2012, 469). Wergen and Holt (2008) use the related term “sounding ethnography” both to study the sonic in culture and to apply the sonic to an ethnographic practice. Threaded through these methods my training as a musician, combined with additional modes of listening, informs a process of critical listening. Critical listening simultaneously pays attention to past and present, and is archival,
historical, and musical. In this dissertation, these techniques are applied in the field and in the archive.

Phonography, which refers to the practice and theory of field recording, is used here as a sonic method to understand place, bringing together ethnographic fieldwork with artistic practice. Phonography, emerging with the advent of recorded sound, has been connected to ethnography and fieldwork since the beginning of the twentieth century, and experimental composers later expanded it as a musical practice (Lane and Carlyle 2013, 9). More recently, anthropologists, geographers, artists, and musicians, among others, have taken up phonography along with other ethnographically oriented practices such as soundwalks and sound maps. They are following the larger sonic turn away from representation and text and toward performance (Thrift 2008; Duffy and Waitt 2011).

The practice of phonography encourages the disciplinary lines between the above fields to often overlap. More broadly, the connections between art and anthropology have resulted in hybrid creative practices (Schneider and Wright 2006; 2010; 2013). As such, artists, in collaboration with anthropologists, can contribute to ethnography as performance, and by extension, anthropology as performance (Calzadilla and Marcus 2006). Applied to sound, Samuels et al. (2010) call for a “sounded anthropology,” in which sound and soundscapes are recognized as valuable contributions to ethnographic fieldwork. This is exemplified through Feld’s (1990) field recordings of the Bosavi of Papua New Guinea, which developed an innovative sonic and poetic approach to ethnography. Likewise, “sonic geography” is used here to bring together listening and
place. It considers the relationships between sound and people through phonographic methods that provide empirical data for analysis (Gallagher and Prior 2013). This use of the soundscape by geographers allows for what Atkinson (2007) calls a “sonic ecology,” where space and place are mapped sonically.

Twentieth-century avant-garde composers such as Pierre Schaeffer, John Cage, Steve Reich, and Luc Ferrari incorporated field recordings into their tape and electronic compositions. The resulting pieces brought together experimental musical techniques and everyday sounds. My project in turn applies these techniques to the realm of sonic ethnography by engaging with and incorporating additional social contexts associated with those sounds. Likewise, sound artists such as Peter Cusack, Christina Kubisch, Annea Lockwood, and Francisco Lopez have used field recordings as raw material to craft compositions, sound pieces, essays, and installations (Lane and Carlyle 2013). Composers such as Hildegard Westerkamp (1974; 2007) and Pauline Oliveros (2005) have incorporated practices such as “soundwalks” into their work, broadly defined as, “any excursion whose main purpose is listening to the environment” (Westerkamp 2001). These practices encourage listening that considers music, noise, silence, and social and cultural contexts equally. In thinking of these different fields and their relationship to sound, it is important to note that what sonic ethnography has to offer is complementary to more traditional forms of ethnography, and does not replace it. Sound is used as a reference point while still taking into account other sensory perceptions (Feld 1996).

An extension of sonic ethnography, Feld’s (1996) concept of “acoustemology” is defined as “sound as a modality of knowing and being in the world.” Feld initially
developed an “ethnography of sound” that later evolved into acoustemology, which combines the terms acoustics and epistemology. By bringing sound into the fold of multi-sensory anthropology, Feld’s acoustemology offers important insight into understanding the contexts that are embodied ethnographic work in places and regions. Noting the importance of place in applying acoustemology, Feld states that

acoustemology means an exploration of sonic sensibilities, specifically of ways in which sound is central to making sense, to knowing, to experiential truth. This seems particularly relevant to understanding the interplay of sound and felt balance in the sense and sensuality of emplacement, of making place. For places are as potentially reverberant as they are reflective, and one’s embodied experiences and memories of them may draw significantly on the interplay of that resoundingness and reflectiveness. (Feld and Basso 1996, 97)

By linking place to the sonic, we position our senses to become aware of what is already present but often not heard. A dynamic relationship of “embodied experiences” is created between the ethnographer, the ethnographic subjects and their stories, the soundscapes of place, and the archival recordings that connect the present of a place with the past. It is this connection through both archival and field recordings, as well as ethnographic interactions with those living in a given place, that can create a network of contexts and relationships to be considered. Hence, we hear a sense of place being sounded through a field recording of an Ohio independent operator’s 50-year-old oil drilling rig in operation and interviewing him (see Chapter 2), as he shares his struggles to survive in an environment where big business and economic uncertainty increasingly dominate. The
sounds of the machinery the operator uses, the grain of the his voice, and the soundscape captured on the recording all point to connections and relationships that extend well beyond the sonic, and into social, political, and historic dynamics shaping the region.

In order for ethnography to move from sounds heard to an analysis of broader cultural contexts, I offer sonic ethnography as a means to connect the sonic past and present through the experience of embodied observation and participation, what Toop (2010) refers to as the “mediumship of the listener.” Lefebvre sees these experiences as rhythmic, and bodies, places, and objects as “bundles of rhythms” (2004, 80). These rhythms are not limited to the sonic, and encompass biological, social, cultural, and political patterns. They encourage a close listening to the world around us, and in doing so we observe rhythms continually in the process of unfolding and becoming. Lefebvre’s use of the musical term “polyrhythm” implies extending it to include non-musical and even extra-sonic meanings. Lefebvre states,

Go deeper, dig beneath the surface, listen attentively instead of simply looking, of reflecting the effects of a mirror. You thus perceive that each plant, each tree, has its rhythm, made up of several: the trees, the flowers, the seeds and fruits, each have their time... Continue and you will see this garden and the objects (which are in no way things) polyrhythmically, or if you prefer symphonically. In place of a collection of fixed things, you will follow each being, each body, as having its own time above the whole. Each one therefore having its place, its rhythm, with its recent past, a foreseeable and a distant future. (Lefebvre 2004, 31)
Polyrhythm’s traditional musical definition of two or more simultaneous, independent rhythms is reshaped and expanded to describe not only the immediate moment of the environment around us, but also each individual life-cycle, history, and trajectory. Of particular interest to this dissertation is the ability to trace these rhythms individually while simultaneously bringing each into play with the others, thus evoking a musical epistemology of the contexts of a place. As such, this is a way—through a process of memory and paying close attention to what surrounds us in the present moment—to listen to the polyrhythms and meanings of time, of past and future, and hear these rhythms simultaneously independently and interdependently. It is this musical way of knowing that contributes to and expands Lefebvre’s concept of the social production of space. Rhythmanalysis reinforces Sekula’s call to read the archive from below. As Lefebvre writes, “social spaces interpenetrate one another and/or superimpose themselves upon one another” along “networks and pathways which facilitate the exchange of material things and information” (1991, 77-86); this co-presence or simultaneity creates an important dynamic of many voices and positions being heard at once. It allows these voices, from both “center and periphery,” to be heard together and apart, ruptured and continuous, pulling in and out of time (2004, ix, 36-7).

Equally applicable to both archival recordings as well as fieldwork, sonic ethnography opens a space for both an analysis of the sounds heard and objects studied. It allows for a focused attention that carefully takes into account overlooked and in-between sounds that often go unnoticed, and the media that carry the sounds. Wolfgang Ernst’s “media archaeology” stresses a detailed analysis of sound that is not limited to cultural
contexts but also includes the media used, where “the materiality of the recording medium itself becomes poetical” (2012, 183). Phonographs, cassette tapes, musical instruments, as well as objects that sound provide a material body of sonic information, lending an object-based insight that deepens our understanding into place and history. The noise of recordings and the media on which they are played provide a direct connection to the past, what Ernst refers to as a “media-archaeological short circuit between otherwise historically clearly separate times” (2012, 57). It also provides a “short-circuit” of the gap between past and present by playing and listening to historical objects such as musical instruments that continue to sound in the same way as in the past.

Ernst’s call to focus primarily on the materiality of media and the archive echoes Walter Benjamin’s historical materialism. Benjamin’s connection with the past via material objects (such as books), as well as his notion of the “dialectical image” in such writings as his essay “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” elucidate something of the sonic. Jackson describes the archival implications of Benjamin’s dialectical image, where past and present occur fleetingly, but also explosively as a “flash” or montage (Benjamin 1968, 255; Jackson 2000, 33). Benjamin’s Arcades Project can be thought of as a series of textual montages that bring past and present together via the historiographic archive. Importantly, sound and sound recordings as a medium are well suited to this approach. The ability to bring past and present together, simultaneously and stratified, are present in soundscapes and recordings, and can be heard literally in the form of sound montage, or what are often referred to as “mash-ups” or sound collage. In this way, recollections of a past mining disaster can clash with the sounds of hydraulic fracturing protest today. They
can be heard together, simultaneously, in what Benjamin sees not as a representation of the past as “the way it really was” but as a “memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger” (1968, 255). Thus, the material objects in the three archives discussed here are brought together with ethnographic methods and phonography; together, they are used to critically perform these sound archives.

Chapter Outline

Part one, entitled “Listening to Berea and Sun Ra,” begins the discussion of archival performance by focusing on the Berea College Appalachian Sound Archives in Kentucky, and the Sun Ra/El Saturn Collection in the Creative Audio Archives of Experimental Sound Studio, Chicago, two archives that employ “from below” perspectives in their creation and interpretation. The Berea Archives have been assembled from below, and as such are not focused on one author or collector. Conversely, my exploration of the Sun Ra/El Saturn Collection is centered on a group of artist-interpreters listening to and remixing the archive from below, acting in solidarity with Sun Ra and his legacy.

Chapter one, “Archival Ethnography and the Berea Appalachian Sound Archives,” explores and critically performs the Berea Sound Archives. Developed over the past eight years, my relationship with the archive and its archivists and historians has informed a process of listening to the archive that is both compositional and ethnographic. Through careful, close listening, past and present are brought together. Often removed from commercial releases but remaining in archival recordings, in-
between sonic moments become material to be analyzed or creatively interpreted by musicians and scholars. Here, in-betweenness becomes both material and method, and points to ethnographic observations and the particular “grain” of the places and people recorded. Engagement inside and outside the sound archive includes developing close relationships with those connected to the archival material, including archivists, historians, collectors, those recorded, and their relatives. This also includes working with different communities that are connected to the recordings, where re-contextualized field recordings are brought back to their original recorded location to be shared and discussed.

Chapter two, entitled “Multi-Voiced Archival Performance and the Sun Ra/El Saturn Collection,” continues the examination of archival performance across styles and disciplines to focus on artists interpreting the Sun Ra/El Saturn Collection. A “from below” approach to listening and re-creation is taken to question and challenge traditional notions of archival power, fostering a multi-voiced, multi-disciplinary interpretation of an archive built around a singular figure. The chapter follows the premise that creating many new works from a sonic archive not only refutes notions of control and authoritative authorship, but also opens a new space of sonic engagement that is not limited to music alone. Key concepts include the distinction between liveness and deadness, authorship, creators and remixers, peripheral listening, the an-archive, and speculation. It is based on interviews with commissioned musicians, visual artists, writers, and film makers, all directly or indirectly drawing from (yet rooted in) the Sun Ra archive in the present, each with their own voice contributing to and augmenting its meanings of both past and future.
Part two, entitled “Listening to the Little Cities of Black Diamonds,” builds upon the previous chapters and expands the notion of archival performance through an in-depth sonic and ethnographic analysis of the Little Cities of Black Diamonds in southeastern Ohio. With the Little Cities Archive as a place of convergence, I develop concepts related to region, place, ecology, and listening. These chapters work with the archive as material, applying the above methodologies to the larger region the archive serves. The result is a way of understanding through sound and listening (Feld 1996; Smith 2000). The region is critically explored both inside and outside the archive, and each chapter pays attention to the sounds generated there, with an emphasis on those related to energy extraction and production, or, energy soundscapes. Within this context, I use the archive as a means of connecting with people of the region, focusing on how energy extraction and production—the dominant economic and environmental impact on the region over the past two centuries—affects them. Tensions and connections between the past and present are considered through a careful listening to each by means of an aural history of the region, as well as contemporary phonographic and ethnographic participation and observation. The past and present of the region are simultaneously investigated through sonic means and methodologies, rather than arranged chronologically. In this way, the sonic offers a stratified, listening-based alternative to complement more traditional historical narratives.

Chapter three, “Prologue to ‘Listening to the Little Cities’,” orients the reader within the sonic and cultural contexts of the “Little Cities” region. I begin by tracing my own family’s history in the town of Shawnee, Ohio. Shawnee also serves as a central point of the region. The Little Cities Archive is also introduced and described, and I take
a sound walk in the streets of Shawnee to connect the archive with its geographical setting, listening to the sounds that help to define the region.

Chapter four, “The Sounds of Labor and Disaster: Booms and Busts,” listens to the cyclical patterns of boom and bust in the region as a means for understanding how labor related to energy has historically affected and continues to affect people of the region today. This includes field recordings and analysis of the energy soundscapes of labor, both historical and contemporary. They include small-scale independent gas and oil drilling and extraction, as well as the sounds of large-scale hydraulic fracturing (or, “fracking”) that are moving into the region. Artists are also at work in the region in relation to energy extraction, and I investigate their critical and aesthetic contributions as part of the larger field of labor in the “Little Cities.” This chapter also traces the energy soundscapes of disaster, where explosions, fires, earthquakes, and frack-waste spills all form a dynamic yet destructive index of sounds. Examples include the Millfield Mine explosion, where sound functioned as a warning of danger; the New Straitsville mine fire that was begun deliberately in the midst of a labor dispute in the nineteenth century and is still burning today; and more recent events such as a fracking-related earthquakes, leaks, and gas line explosions.

Chapter five, “The Sounds of Recovery and Protest: Emergence and Disappearance,” returns to southeastern Ohio in order to focus on the recurring rhythms of environmental reclamation and conflict, considering how both mirror economic patterns of disappearance and emergence. In this chapter, I am anchored to yet continue to move in radiating circles out from the Little Cities Archive: I listen to current and
archival examples of the soundscapes of protest in the “Little Cities,” including protest songs performed in the forest, as well as following a “direct action” group as they prepare to chain themselves to fracking waste-well sites; I draw on field recordings of the region, such as recordings of local environmental restoration groups to hear the sounds of recovery, including “dosers” in the waterways; I examine the biological rhythms of growth in the Wayne National Forest along with how its soundscape has changed over the last century; finally, I follow the rhythms of an incomplete cultural revival as recovery efforts clash against economic hardship and renewed interest in extraction, including examples creating community gardens, and closing down of important social institutions such as local libraries and post offices.
PART 1: LISTENING FROM BELOW: BEREA AND SUN RA ARCHIVES

In content and style, the differences between the Berea Appalachian Sound Archives and the Sun Ra/El Saturn Collection could not be more apparent. Berea’s focus on traditional Appalachian music, and the experimental and iconoclastic space-inspired sounds of Sun Ra clearly represent divergent traditions and contextual backgrounds. Nevertheless, they represent two sides of the same archival issue: how sonic archives might be assembled, listened to, and re-contextualized “from below,” rather than from a singular, authoritative perspective. In this way, the Berea Archives show how recordings from many voices across a large region can come together; and the Sun Ra/El Saturn Collection exemplifies how the marginalized work of Sun Ra can be remixed by many different artists. Finally, it is my own agency as a researcher and composer—one among many others—that threads through these archives. I listen in solidarity with those who made the recordings, and my interpretive acts are also acts of archival stewardship.
Chapter 1: Archival Ethnography and the Berea Appalachian Sound Archives

Barbara Kunkle’s 1973 field recordings of Lexie Baker, J.P. Fraley, and others begin not with a tune but instead invite the listener in with conversation and laughter. Just as the tape starts and Fraley says, mid-sentence, “…bring some more chairs in here,” a coo-coo clock strikes eight times and laughter erupts. Kunkle declares, “That’s going to be the best beginning of a tape I’ve ever had!” Later, amid lively banter, Fraley repeats the phrase, “I can’t…I just…I just can’t…” as if he is unaware of the tape recorder and is searching to remember one of the many tunes in his mind. Soon, however, he begins to tune up his violin, a melody emerges, and a guitar joins in. After they finish playing, the process starts again with the conversation picking up right where it left off and Fraley already beginning to sound out the notes to another tune. In these recordings, songs come and go amongst a host of other sounds and events. There are no exact beginnings or endings to either the fiddle tunes or the environment in which they are played: they are blurred together. The conversation becomes musical, and the music conversational.

Barbara Kunkle captured the above field recordings in Wise County, Virginia, and they represent a fraction of the vast collections housed in the Berea College Appalachian Sound Archives in Kentucky. This chapter considers archival interpretation and offers close and careful listening of archival recordings as a primary method to engage with it. My object of study is the Berea Sound Archives, and I focus on detailed descriptions and analysis of a selection of recordings from them, including the Kunkle recordings above. The recordings discussed are a reflection of my own listening process.
since my first visit to Berea over eight years ago, and reveal the relationships I have developed over that time with archivists, sound preservationists, musicians, and historians. I also examine newly composed sound works that I have made from sampling Berea’s archival recordings. The archival recordings and the resulting compositions are considered to be performances of the archive. My close examination of the recordings and compositions are the basis for building a critical understanding of the Berea Archives, as well as offering them as examples of both curatorial and creative interpretation.

One of the strengths of the Berea Archives is the variety of its collections and styles of music, which span over eighty years. Several of the nearly thirty collections refer back to the person who sought out and recorded musicians across Appalachia, such as John Harrod, Leonard Roberts, Bruce Greene, and Kunkle. Other collections focus on self-made recordings and documentation of professional or amateur musicians, such as Nora Carpenter or Asa Martin. Still others focus on radio, public events, or festivals like the Celebration of Traditional Music that takes place every year in Berea. Within these collections, different genres are represented: ballads and banjo music, fiddle tunes and folk tales, radio gospel programs and lined-out hymns.

Most importantly, what is contained at Berea is the documentation of distinct and personal narratives that create an archive assembled from below. The result is an intricate collection of individual voices, each with a story to tell. These stories begin with the performers yet are ever expanding to include collectors, archivists, historians, as well as listeners hearing these accounts for the first time.
The variety and depth of the Berea Archives present a challenge to those who wish to access it: listening to and interpreting to the archive becomes overwhelming, and it becomes increasingly difficult to navigate its contents with acknowledgment and respect for the historical contexts it contains. While there are common musical characteristics and thematic threads present throughout the Berea Archives, my objective is to use the act of close and repeated listening as my primary guide in my understanding and interpretation of them. As each recording unfolds, I listen carefully and in solidarity with the voices of those recorded, in keeping with the larger theme of this dissertation of listening “from below.” I also listen with a composer’s ear, reflective of my own background and training. Finally, I listen with Erlmann’s (2004) “ethnographic ear.” Applied to a sound archive, listening ethnographically seeks out the social and historical contexts, as well as sonic information and noise of the recording medium itself. These contexts are revealed through the sounds taking place before, during, and after the tunes, sounds that otherwise would be cut out in a commercial recording.

Together, listening with a composer’s ear and an ethnographic ear allows for a form of archival ethnography. This includes both an analysis of the archival materials, as well as my personal experiences of accessing them. While archival research can be an important part of an ethnographic study, it is often used in a supportive, secondary role to complement field work. Here, I reverse the process: beginning with and rooting my research inside the sound archive, I allow it to provide suggestions and connections that lead out well beyond the confinement of its walls. The physical environments of the archive, the experiences of moving outside the archive, as well as the circumstances
related to my personal involvement at Berea, all expand and elaborate on the contexts present in the archival recordings. As such, these contexts—both inside and outside the archive—become conflated, and bleed through into one another. As with the other chapters, my focus is on drawing from different perspectives that help to create an archive, and then continuing this process to inform the archive’s interpretation and performance.

*The Past is Present*

In the spring of 2006, I was among the initial recipients of the Berea College Appalachian Sound Archives Fellowship. The program invites scholars and musicians to spend time in the archives and develop research projects based on them. My research was focused on creating a newly composed musical project that, under the auspices of the Berea Archives, made use of samples to form a re-contextualized sound collage. As such, it coincided with and reflected the benefits and challenges of the changing nature of sound archives as they were transformed from analog to digital. The program’s administrators clearly took a risk in sponsoring a project that had the latent potential to undermine or considerably alter how the archive’s materials are heard and disseminated. This project highlighted an awareness of the magnitude of connections stemming from the archival recordings, as well as the stewardship that is an integral part of their access. It was during this time that I first encountered archivists, sound preservationists, historians, folklorists, and musicians all under one roof, brought together through a

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3 See David Grubbs’ *Records Ruin the Landscape* for a relevant discussion on the transformation of archives from analog to digital, specifically chapter 5, “Remove the Records from Texas: Online Resources and Impermanent Archives.”
shared interest in the archival recordings. This experience fostered a critical engagement with sound archives, and led to my learning and identifying ways of listening to and interpreting them.

My initial working experience upon arrival at Berea was one of being overwhelmed. Each day I would descend into the basement of Hutchins Library and set up a small recording station at a desk. An often-solitary experience, I worked regular hours in the archives, listening for eight or more hours a day. After several weeks, fatigue would routinely settle in, and my concentration suffered. Often, I became uncertain if the sounds I heard were coming through my headphones, were occurring in the room, or were auditory hallucinations. Sleeping at night was no different; it felt like another shift at the library, and in my dreams I continued to fall asleep at my listening desk only to wake up sweating, lost. I continued to listen and gather material, but often I was hearing without fully listening. As a result the listening process felt akin to groping in the dark, and initial research plans quickly became improbable and obsolete. The number of archival materials engulfed my initial enthusiasm. Any attempt at a systematic exploration of them was met with the realization that the process was beyond the scope of my project.

Shannon Jackson saw her research in the Hull-House Settlement archives of Chicago as an overwhelming, uneasy, and disruptive process, often with the feeling of being in two times and places at once. She states that, “enmeshment in the archive’s network of deferred memories...[became] an uncanniness to be explored... Even as its juxtapositions fettered my image of a pure historical past, they also unsettled my stable
notions of the contemporary” (2000, 32-3). Jackson realized the difficulties of a researcher attempting to understand and interpret the past via the archive. She could only turn inward, and to the awareness of an ever-present space between her and her task. Inquiring about what she as a historian of “social space” could discern from the archive, Jackson states,

Locked in a world of microfiche and dusty files, assailed by the smell of ink toxin and number 2 pencils, sensitivity to spatial and bodily experience certainly reminds her of her own corporeality—her endurance capacity, her steadily blurring eyesight—and its location within a larger institutional space—its fluorescent lights, its time schedule, its policy against removing important historical objects. But of the spatial and bodily performance of dead individuals, she can only hope to sense the shadow of that pale shadow. Her location as researcher is, it would seem, thrice removed. (Jackson 2000, 21)

Thus, the archival experience is divided into two forms: the immediacy of the working environment with its impact on the body and mind of the researcher, and the ever-present distance between the researcher and her subjects. The temporal and physical space between Jackson and her archival materials are paradoxically fused and always out of grasp. Nevertheless, Jackson suggests bridging the multifaceted gap between present and history by moving away from the deconstructionist and poststructuralist limitations of the “linguistic turn” (21). Written documents are no longer necessarily of primary importance as other realms of inquiry join them. Jackson proposes an “investigation into how the discursive operates in non-written cultural forms,” adding that “copresence, simultaneity,
and affective embodiment are, to the performance theorist, fundamental points of entry into the mediation of reality, albeit a mediation that does not always occur in written exchange” (22). These characteristics also fall under the auspices of the sonic, joining it to scholarly attempts to avoid the linguistic turn of poststructuralism (Samuels et al. 2010). It is here that a space of sonic engagement with archival materials allows for the above qualities, while simultaneously helping to mitigate the primacy of the written document.

At the heart of all archival research is the fact that it is not possible to possess the historiographic material. Jackson notes that she obviously was not present, in a physical sense, during the creation of the archival documents. Nevertheless, she cannot take for granted that the past remains in the past. Instead, past and present are conflated, with a non-linear conveyance occurring between the two. Jackson states that this integration becomes another kind of historiographical moment, one telling me that the past is not lost but actually quite resiliently and unanticipatedly present. The character of such an overpresent moment or “now-time” is not exactly akin to remembering or longing since that would imply my once knowing or once having. Instead I find myself caught red-handed in a dialectical history whose presence I never imagined, stunned to find myself holding onto a body without ever having reached for it. (Jackson 2000, 35)

For Jackson, an experience of the past via the archive is suddenly embodied. During my day-to-day listening, this new form of historiography became more and more dominant,
as the past, via sound, seeped into the living contexts of the present. It was not nostalgic or sentimental, and I did not desire to be in the past or relive it. Instead, I heard my own voice and those of the people around me to be in a contrapuntal, simultaneous conversation with the archival recordings. A radio program listened to in the basement of the archive leapt to my car radio as I drove away from the library. A conversation overheard in a cafe while I was having breakfast was echoed and confused with a field recording listened to later in the archive. This mediation between past and present took place not through the “written exchange” of archival documents but rather through sound as a new access point. The gap between inaccessible past and the present momentarily disappeared, and was suddenly immediate.

This immediacy could be felt as I listened to a 1958 WBVL Radio broadcast out of Barbourville, Kentucky. The archival sound recording acted as a mediator between past and present and the voices heard were directly and instantly involved in the present-moment of my listening. The recording begins with a young girl rattling off a long list of names, presumably of listeners to the program. She states as fast as she can, “We’d like to sing our next number for Mr. and Mrs. Kedger Warfield and family in Rockhold, Rt. 2, Mr. and Mrs. Ed Powers and family in Corbin, Mr. and Mrs. John R. Parton and granddaughter Gina Mackiabend...” She continues, reading quickly, and I imagine each family has called in to make a request to be heard, to sit at home and listen to their own names sent back to them through the radio. As the young girl continues to read, the piano warms up, playing an arpeggiated chord. It is out of tune. A telephone rings in the background. The Prichard Quartet begins a gospel hymn entitled “He is Knocking.”
Individual voices can be discerned within the group, and the singing is informal, imperfect, amateur—in the sense that it is done out of a love for the act of singing, and not necessarily for professional or monetary ends—and earnest.

This radio program, among others in the archives, acts as a bridge between the radio station and the listeners. It was used as a religious and community connector. It also became a public space designated for the local, the regional, and the amateur alongside national and professional broadcasts. Through this public space, several senses of “local” assert themselves through their difference and individuality. Finally, as an unforeseen consequence (since the intention of the broadcast was only to be heard once, in 1958, by the group of listeners tuning in), the program acts as a bridge between the time of the recording and the process of my listening to it a half-century later. The past is present, and embodied.

*Learning to Listen to the Archives: “A Tangle of Potential Connections”*

As I continued to listen to the Berea Archives, I developed strategies for accessing its materials. Themes and word associations—such as “winter,” “night,” “cowboy,” or “traveling,” and aural gestures such as tuning, coughing, and chiming—yielded a series of encounters with recordings that were frequently connected by means other than harmonic, rhythmic, or melodic content. Often, I would enter the stacks of recordings and make choices based on visual cues, allowing these associations to provide connections between recordings. This process reminded me of how, decades earlier, I would check out books, scores, and music from libraries that had not been so for long periods of time,
in an effort to keep them moving, in circulation. The above strategies would often yield dead ends, yet proved to be a valuable exercise in remaining open to more indeterminate connections. They also served as a means of becoming familiar with the less well-known recordings of the archives, as part of a larger process of becoming familiar with a holistic conception of them.

Most importantly, I came to appreciate the recommendations and clues obtained from those most familiar with the collections: the archivists, librarians, scholars, and sound preservationists working in the archives. Coffee breaks became forums for gleaning hints and traces as stories and opinions were exchanged. As I came to know several people associated with the archives, they would offer suggestions of recordings to listen to. Frequently, stacks of recordings would be waiting for me when I arrived in the mornings. Daily, someone would walk up to me, excitedly offering a recording they had just listened to and wanting to share it. The curiosity and exchange that took place within these interactions became central to my understanding of the Berea Archives. In short, listening selections were borne primarily out of conversation.

I developed strategies for listening to the recordings as I gradually became aware of their ethnographic potential. I focused my aural attention away from melodic and rhythmic material alone, and the additional contextual information present on the recording leaped to the foreground of the listing experience. Listening with a composer’s ear, these moments merged with the tunes being performed, and music appeared where it is often not accounted for. These performative aspects of everyday sounds and moments become an inseparable part of the listening experience.
When the Helton Family finishes singing the hymn tune “I Know it Was the Blood,” the music doesn’t completely stop. Instead, the song immediately transforms into several events at once: a man clears his throat, and begins a conversation heard in the background; a young girl continues to sing her part of the hymn’s melody; Mr. Helton describes the song and recites the words, stating,

Now that’s a popular old… I know it was the blood, that’s an old one! I know it was the blood, I know it was the blood for me, I know it was the blood. One day when I was lost, he died upon the cross. I know it was the blood for me.

The fiddle picks up again, enthusiastically switching to a new tune. Recordist Bruce Greene asks, “Is that in the...do they have that in a hymn book somewhere?” Helton answers, and then comments on the new tune already underway, “I don’t know...It’s over the hills! Now there’s a good-un! I bet you can play that one...” Conversations, stories, and voices come together in counterpoint that is heard as a new piece of music, and it is all captured spontaneously on a single recorded tape.

Listening contrapuntally and closely is a sonic parallel to Kathleen Stewart’s (2007) suggestion to pay attention to what she refers to as “ordinary affects.” She defines ordinary affects as moments of everyday observation “composed out of heterogeneous and non-coherent singularities” (4). Stewart sees her poetic, analytic writing on the everyday as “an assemblage of disparate scenes…a tangle of trajectories, connections, and disjunctures,” and that she writes “not as a trusted guide carefully laying out the links between theoretical categories and the real world, but as a point of impact, curiosity, and encounter” (5). Stewart uses these ordinary affects as epistemological tools, rather than
linguistic or textual symbols. She states that they are “an animate circuit that conducts force,” and a “tangle of potential connections” (4). This approach provides a way to engage with both Stewart’s material and subjects that is not detached and finalized but immersive, questioning, and unfinished. It points to the “ordinary” emotions and experiences of everyday life, where in-between moments such as boredom, play, and humor are seen as a means to understanding larger social and historical issues. They are simply, as Stewart states, “things that happen... [that] circuits and flows the forms of life” (2).

The in-between banter and “ordinary affects” of everyday life described above are a defining element in the recordings of Addie Graham, where her character is revealed in part through the dialogue that took place before, during, and after the songs she sang. At the time Barbara Kunkle made the recordings in the 1970s (along with Graham’s daughter), Graham was in her 90s, and still full of much humor and the ability to recall several dozen songs. Most of her repertoire was comprised of ballads, folk songs, and religious music that she learned prior to 1920, and held onto in her memory for the next fifty years (Kunkle and Kirby 2008, 11).

As I began to listen to Kunkle’s recordings, I first noticed that Graham is aware of and unsure of the microphone. Kunkle asks her questions and reassures her, and Graham responds, “Oh, I was afraid to talk...” Later, Graham reveals both her sense of humor and self-awareness of being recorded, saying,

I’m going to get my voice cleared by goin’ to Florida. I have to get right here, now. Do I have to get right in front of these things [microphones]? Well, I can’t
look at nobody and sing. Now, let’s see... I look so bad. Let’s see now. I tie that up to bronchitis hurting my neck. I hope I haven’t forgotten it [the song].

During the tapes, Graham recites poems, tells of her family history, and remembers local and regional events. She often coughs, and clears her throat. She quips, “I’ve got bronchitis, ain’t worth a dern.” Throughout, Graham shares her spry humor, and the banter and room noises of the field recordings lend insight not only into their historical moment in time, but also to rhythms of age and health, conversation and social interaction, laughter, and memory. Often Graham delivers quick-witted banter, stating, “Barbara, let’s me and you go into business on some of my songs.” At other times, Graham searches through her mind, fumbling to remember: “My goodness, since I’ve been sick I haven’t got my memory.” At one point, she must take a break from recording, saying, “I’ve... I’ve lost track of some of ‘em... See if I can remember... I can’t help it, can you turn it off?” The recording stops, and the listener is left with the sudden “silent” hiss of the archival cassette tape as it continues to turn.

At the beginnings of songs, Graham’s voice moves up and down, searching for the correct pitch that will set her off singing. At still other points in the recordings, Graham appears lost in thought. After finishing “Drunkard’s Dream,” she wistfully states, “That’s Drunkard’s Dream, nearly everybody knows it... Uh... That’s about... I always liked it right well... Drunkard’s Dream... [hums three notes]... yeah.” Here, Graham’s voice slows down, becoming quiet and contemplative. During these small, seemingly inconsequential moments, elements of Graham’s personality are revealed. Over the length of the tapes, I hear her shift from unsure to comfortable in front of the microphone. I hear moments of
recollection and reflection, as the physical act of singing triggers Graham to become lost in thought. I hear the frustration that comes from not fully remembering, or from not getting a song just right.

As I listened, I began to feel as if I were in the room with Graham, her daughter Opsa Guthrie, and Kunkle. Stewart, too, inserts herself as an anonymous character in her ethnographic writings, to “mark the difference between this writerly identity and the kind of subject that arises as a daydream of a simple presence” (2007, 5). Her protagonist becomes a “point of contact,” one who “gazes, imagines, senses, takes on, performs, and asserts not a flat and finished truth but some possibilities (and threats) that have come into view in the effort to become attuned to what a particular scene might have to offer” (5). Drawing from this performance that blurs the distinction between scholarship and creative interaction and interpretation, I place myself into these archival recordings, actively participating through engaged listening. I am aware of my own presence as a listener, a presence that enters a space that also includes those recorded, those recording, and others that have and will listen in. I hear subtle changes in voices, observe the ebb and flow of conversation, and am receptive to the fleeting emotions and subtle inflections that are transcribed onto the magnetic tape.

Before singing a ballad entitled “Young People Who Delight in Sin,” Graham speaks of the fear she had upon first hearing the song as a young girl. She states, “Now let me see if I can remember it, it’s coming to my mind, one that I heard sung when I was a baby and I never liked myself since. ...And I never did get over it. Scared me to death.” A sample of the lyrics reveals a particularly gruesome story: “Oh, mother fair you well, /
your only daughter screams in hell. / ...Am I to burn forever more? / Till thousand, thousand years are o’er.” Immediately upon finishing the song, and without waiting for it to settle in the room, Graham states, “Now would you want to hear a thing like that?” Graham’s daughter Opsa comments on the song, saying “it did something to you.” Graham agrees, stating, “That did something to me, it did so. Never would sing it. It scared me till I never got over it in my life. ... I guess I was just 3 or 4 years old, I was right little. ...I’ll tell you that scared me till I’d like to have died.” Opsa, astonished, states that she has never heard Graham ever sing the song before: Graham has waited until her 90s to sing a song that she learned as a young child, without forgetting the words or melody. Graham continues, chiding the man that taught it to her: “And I remember that...and of course you know I have a memory. I suffered and I suffered and I couldn’t get to sleep at night. It scared me to death. And did you know that old turd-hole had his ass kicked for singing that [to me]?” Peals of laughter erupt in the room, acting as a collective sigh of relief after the song’s tension and its harrowing lyrics spellbound the listeners. Kunkle, laughing, asks, “May I quote you on that?”

After the laughter dies down, Graham again makes known her dislike of the song and how it affected her entire life. “That stayed with me...but I tell you right now I don’t like those songs, I don’t like that one.” For Graham, the act of singing the song triggered both reminiscence and a visceral reaction. Augoyard and Torgue (2005) understand this sonic effect as “anamnesis,” where a sound or song can bring back the past in the listener; in this case, the past travels the entire span of Graham’s lifetime.
The above recordings reveal that the archive requires a living context in order to be activated. Consequently, the archive reflects the contexts of those listening to it as it simultaneously discloses the past. It is a present moment that is not fixed, even after it has been recorded. I hear Graham leaping 90 years back into her own past through the mediumship of one particular song. She remembers the moment as a three-year-old child where the power of a ballad transfixed and terrified her. The recording, then, is a temporal marker, connecting her childhood to her then-present moment in the 1970s, at the time of the recording. Yet the recording also moves in more than one temporal direction, connecting as many “presents” as there are listeners: it connects the moment of recording in the 1970s to my present moment as I listen in. Thus, these recordings illustrate that there are many “presents,” just as there are many different forms of “local” or “here and there.” Stacked up in an ever-increasing pile, they do not unfold linearly. I listen back to be in the room with Graham, and she moves forward to greet me.

Conflating “Inside” and “Outside”

There is a divide between inside and outside the archive. The divide occurs both in the physical space of the archive, and with its materials and documents and their interpretation. In Archive Fever, Derrida (1995) offers a term to define one such space outside the archive: exergue. He states that, “an exergue serves to stock in anticipation and to prearchive a lexicon which, from there on, ought to lay down the law and give the order, even if this means contenting itself with naming the problem, that is, the subject” (7). An exergue, by this definition, is in a position always before the archive. It is an
active process that “prearchives” the language: it is the archive becoming. An exergue
lies outside of the work to give order to it. This is incorporated into the structure of
Archive Fever, where the main “Theses” of the text comprise only a few pages near the
end, and the bulk of the body consists of an “Exergue,” “Preamble,” “Forward,” and a
“Postscript,” all outside the supposedly central text. Derrida states that all archives are “at
once institutive and conservative. Revolutionary and traditional,” and with this comes an
“archival violence” (7). The propulsion for this violence, Derrida reads from Freud, is an
“anarchivic...death drive,” one which carries with it “loss,” and “works to destroy the
archive” (9-10). Derrida is describing a process of the archive that is paradoxical, trying
to destroy itself and yet needing an outside space to redefine it. Derrida continues,
stating, “There is no archive without a place of consignation, without a technique of
repetition, and without a certain exteriority. No archive without outside” (11).

I draw from Derrida’s “exergue” to articulate an “outside” that that does not
necessarily function out of nostalgia or a drive to destroy. This outside lies in the tension
between Derrida’s “revolutionary and traditional,” Sekula’s (1983) “liberation” and
“loss,” and Bloom’s (1973) “contraction” and “expansion.” It is constituted out of human
interaction as a means to add to the archive, disrupt it, and keep it in circulation. Such
encounters and human relationships offer the one thing that an archive does not: living
contexts that continually add to and change the archival materials. The archival
performances that occur as a result offer a critical engagement with “archive fever.” Just
as there must be an outside, the archive cannot remain a closed system to those who
access it. The process of listening to and working within the archive must be opened
outward and set in motion through some form of human interaction. Paradoxically, the archival process eventually swallows this up, too, and its cyclical rhythm starts over, continuing to unfold into the future.

One such experience of moving from inside to outside the archive occurred shortly after my residency at Berea began. Only days after first encountering the above recordings of Addie Graham, I traveled to Whitesburg, Kentucky to Appalshop, a non-profit arts center focused on Appalachian communities and culture. While there, I enthusiastically described to a group of people the recordings of Graham that I had just listened to. A woman that I had been talking with smiled, and then stated that Graham was her great-grandmother. Humbled and taken aback, it was at this moment that I realized my interest in the sound archive could not be in the materials alone. Each document and recording is neither static nor consigned to a singular entity. Rather, it is immersed in a network of people, alive and dead, that stretch back well before the recording’s creation and extending out to the present moment and beyond. What began for me as the solitary act of listening to a recording on headphones, in ignorance, was merely a single juncture in a complex of family, relationships, traditions, culture, and time.

Another “outside” experience occurred at the end of my fellowship at Berea. I had the opportunity to present my initial research in a public forum, and descendants of those in the archival recordings were in attendance. After playing excerpts of pieces in which I brought together several samples from the archives in a sound collage, one woman remarked to me, “It was like hearing the ghosts of my relatives.” Inter-generational
connections outside of the archive link back to the archival materials, with the newly re-contextualized sound piece acting as a link between the two. In some cases the pieces serve to rekindle connections between archival materials and those they affect, and in other cases they create an entirely new connection.

The resulting work from these initial archival experiences is a full-length album entitled *American Winter (2007)*. It is a sound collage comprised of samples from the Berea Archives and combined with related yet newly composed music. Integrated into the combination of recordings is an attention to the rhythms of place, community, and everyday life associated with the archives. These rhythms became the primary means for choosing in-between moments as material. Much like Stewart, I focused my attention on the “heterogeneous and non-coherent” elements both of the sound archives in general and at the local level of each field recording. I moved through the materials not as a “trusted guide” but rather in a state of searching, listening carefully, seeking to let the disconnected nature of the recordings come together. Similarly, like Jackson, my “now-time” interaction with the archival materials led to a historical and temporal compression, where the past—literally, fragmentarily, dialectically—seeped and flooded into the present.

The movement between inside and outside the archive is not necessarily linear, and as such includes forms of circular movement, repetition, and returning. In the spring and summer of 2008, I came back with fellow artists to both Berea and to Whitesburg, Kentucky, to participate in two residencies funded by the National Performance Network. The residencies included installations, performances, talks, and workshops. During this
time, I realized that my initial experience in 2006 was not a self-contained event but rather a beginning of a longer research-based archival performance. At Cumberland Community College, my colleagues and I worked with students to produce audio interviews of war veterans and coal miners, members of two of the most prominent and dangerous forms of work still available in the region. At Appalshop and at Berea College, we performed a video and sound collage made from the above archival sources. And, at the Berea College Appalachian Center Gallery, I presented *The Subtle Land (2008)*, a sound installation based entirely on archival recordings from the college. The piece serves as a showcase of the diversity of the recordings located in the Berea Archives, as well as a sonic reflection of the agricultural landscape of Kentucky (where many of the recordings were made and located) and Ohio (where I live). *The Subtle Land* borrows from integrated farming systems as a structural model, and applies agrarian principles of adaptability, variety, respect, and local economy to sound.

At Appalshop, the circular movement of return once again focused on Addie Graham, and took place in a public workshop entitled “Ballads, Biscuits, and Gravy.” While eating breakfast together, I spoke with traditional musicians and performed as part of a conversation on the intersection between technology and tradition. Among the musicians was Rich Kirby, grandson to Addie Graham and well known as a musician in his own right. During the workshop I played excerpts from *American Winter* that featured samples of Graham. Kirby, already familiar with his grandmother’s singing, had been instrumental in releasing an album of Graham singing on June Appal records in the
1970s. Kirby commented on my reworking of the samples, as well as the broader experience of hearing his grandmother three times removed, stating,

When I heard that you were using recordings of Addie [Graham], I thought for sure that I wouldn't like it at all. But now I am just mystified. I can now see that you are try to do something different, taking a more global approach to show how all of these stories are connected. I don't know exactly what she would have thought of your music, but I think she would approve. (Kirby, pers. comm.)

These interactions removed the layers of detachment that can all to easily occur when working with samples. Still, the experience for me was a very nervous one. Aside from seeking legal permission to make use of the samples, I was also intensely interested in the reactions of people close to the recordings because of their relationship to those recorded. I came to realize that their presence and commentary affected my use and interpretation of archival materials. The samples became less fragmented, and less altered. I worked to create a music that co-existed alongside the samples. This method allowed the samples and my own contribution to remain independent yet connected, rather than trying to fit them into a prescribed metric or harmonic scheme.

A practice of sampling that draws from both inside and outside the archive creates the possibility of becoming an act of stewardship. If sampling allows for the copying and reworking of archival materials and thus the detachment from original contexts, then the process of returning the newly interpreted samples back to their place of origin opens a new space of engagement, one that does not necessarily exclude those already connected
to the materials. Kirby situated the recordings of Graham in their familial, physical, and historical contexts, directly influencing my consideration of them. The act of returning to Kentucky and the interaction that occurred as a result encouraged Kirby and others to contribute to the new pieces. Their presence not only provided a physical link between past and present, but also intimately allowed the embodied archival rhythms latent within the recordings to circulate, and remain in motion.

“Close-Ups” and Up-Close Listening

Careful, up-close listening to recordings from the Berea Archives reveals additional insights into the personal accounts of those recorded, and into the larger scope of the archives as a whole. These insights are not all apparent at first, and they emerge
through multiple concentrated hearings. The ability to listen closely through repetition is tied to the medium of sound recording, which is suited to allowing chance occurrences and everyday sounds to come to the fore. In “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Benjamin (1968) filters film’s unique abilities as a medium through a Freudian analysis of the everyday. In speaking about Freud’s Psychopathology of Everyday Life, Benjamin comments, “This book isolated and made analyzable things which had heretofore floated along unnoticed in the broad stream of perception. For the entire spectrum of optical, and now also acoustical, perception the film has brought about a similar deepening of apperception” (235). Benjamin draws a direct parallel between this Freudian attention to the particularities of the everyday and vision and sound in film. Benjamin focuses on the cinematic technique of the “close-up,” stating,

> By close-ups of the things around us, by focusing on hidden details of familiar objects, by exploring commonplace milieus under the ingenious guidance of the camera, the film, on the one hand, extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule out lives; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action. …With the close-up, space expands [and] it reveals entirely new structural formations of the subject. (Benjamin 1968, 236)

In sound recording, placing a microphone close to the subject—or, in the listening process, simply turning up the volume—can achieve a similar “close-up” effect. More broadly, focused and careful repeated listening across the topography of the recording can also create a similar result that is particularly well suited to field recordings. This process is not focused solely on narrative and semantic meanings. Listeners can shift their
attention to one of several simultaneous aspects of a recording, such as a conversation buried in a room full of people. This is a process similar to focusing on an inner melodic line, or a harmonic change in a piece of music. Through repeated listening, this process can expand to explore several elements on a given recording at once. The listener hears the recording and its subjects in greater detail, subject to the unintentional consequences spontaneous field recordings determine.

The captured spontaneity of the recording has the potential to be altered and transformed into a fixed composition by the listener, simply through repetition. In turn, this process alters the original intention of the recording, thus opening up possible constructive or problematic interpretations. Grubbs suggests that, “repeated listens...can make manifest otherwise impossible-to-perceive details” and “each listen increasingly resolves into something closer to a musical composition” (2014, 140). Our ears recognize patterns, and transform them into musical motifs, melodies, or rhythms. As I listen again and again to the Berea recordings, I bear this in mind as I transcribe what I hear into musical notation and words. I also continually listen with an ear to the stewardship of the recording and its original intention. Although always incomplete, these transcriptions nevertheless allow me to grasp at the simultaneities present on the recordings: the small but significant insight into the tension between power, property, and coal mining; the collision of music and memory in a fiddle tune; the emotion contained within a lost brother’s ballad.

4 Returning to film, Walter Burch refers to the characteristics of non-linearity and de-emphasis on narrative in early cinema as the “autarky and unicity of each frame,” and refers to a “non-centered quality of the image,” “exteriority,” and “nonclosure” (Burch 198, 486-8). Importantly, the “autarky” of each tableau of much early cinema lends itself to a kind of “topographical reading,” where every part of the frame is filled with information, and there are often many events occurring simultaneously (Burch 1990, 152).
In a recorded interview at Maggard Mines in Kentucky, a manager speaks of illegal coal mining that takes place throughout the region. He begins, stating, “Coal is supposed to be marked on a map. Cause, you see, the people that own the coal get a royalty payment from the coal. They don’t mine it themselves but they lease it out to Maggard.” As he speaks, the machinery of coal mining can be heard in the background: metal clanking, trucks driving, the low drone of motors, whirring belts, and men shouting. The manager continues, stating,

But many, many times in the past there have been coal operations that have gone in and they paid no attention to the boundary lines, they just take coal. And somebody else leases that boundary of coal and wants to operate it and they go in and it’s already worked out, see.

Here, the man takes a pause, lasting seconds as the machines continue to spin. Then, he dryly quips, “It’s called ‘theft’ in unglamorous terms.” The interviewer laughs, and the recording ends.

This recording begins with a man offering an informational explanation of the coal operations at Maggard Mines. It also shows his ability to articulate his story, and his sense of timing. He allows the narrative to develop and build, even adding a pregnant pause at the end to strengthen his story. Repeated, “close-up” listening renders conversation and industrial noise into musical gestures: foreground and background in counterpoint with one another. The archival recording subtly reveals patterns and rhythms of class, industry, and culture, as well as the tensions present between them. As I listen repeatedly, I am allowing ideas and perceptions to flourish in my understanding of
the archival material. This brief story, humorous at first listen, later begins to point to the inner workings of capitalism as it pertains to the coal mining industry. There is confusion between ownership and stewardship, and I am left considering what “theft” is. I am increasingly unclear in knowing who exactly is stealing in a culture of extraction: those that do not obey the laws, or those receiving royalties because of their ownership of the mines.

Memory can unfold and be revealed during the course of a field recording. In Walter McNew’s performance of “Girl I Left Behind Me,” the recording begins with a solo violin. The tempo is languid and slow. A banjo begins to play along, picking up occasional notes from the fiddle as if its performer is learning the tune while listening. The melody is mournful, and McNew’s playing is nuanced and includes strong phrasing, bended notes, and harmonics (that bring a welcome variation to the melody, but may or may not have been intentional). Upon finishing, the sound recordist Bruce Greene states, “It’s beautiful,” and another man agrees, saying, “It’s lonesome.” “Yeah,” says McNew, “That’s an old... Ah, let’s see, I knew some of the words on it...” McNew sings through a verse of the song: “I quit my work one evening, walked in to the public square. / The mail was just arriving; I met the driver there. / He handed me a letter, that I might understand. / That the girl I left behind me, had gone with another man.” He ends his singing, immediately breaking into laughter, and the two other men laugh along, saying “Whoo!” However, McNew is not finished. Despite saying, “That’s all I know of that...” he suddenly begins to sing again, in fits and starts: “For I have money a plenty, to serve both you and I...” He stops again, saying, “And right there, see, is where I can’t remember to
save my life what them words are. But anyway...” only to begin once again. McNew sings, “and we’ll ramble around from town to town, with the girl I left behind.” Everyone breaks into laughter once more, and the recording moves on.

Figure 2. Walter McNew performing. Berea College Appalachian Sound Archives.

In this recording, I listen to and witness memory and music colliding. McNew struggles to remember the lyrics (no easy feat in front of a rolling tape recorder), and then as he relaxes they surprisingly spill out. Or, perhaps it is McNew’s modesty revealing itself on the recording, a characteristic I have noticed again and again across the Berea Archives. Perhaps McNew does not want to seem boastful of his knowledge, as if he is showing off, and instead he allows the lyrics to come out slowly, organically, within the context of an artfully performed conversation.
Both “Message” and “Noise”

Just as my perception changes during an extended listening process, the recordings change, too. Digital transfers and new formats, fragmentation, editing, and age all add their mark. Expanding Benjamin’s notion of the close-up as a “deepening of apperception,” Ernst’s “media archaeology” listens to the noises on recordings in addition to the signals (2012, 69). As such, the scratches, crackles, tape warbles, and digital noise all contribute to the information contained on the recordings. Ernst simply does not filter them out. On early phonographic recordings, Ernst states,

What we hear is both the message…and the noise (the scratch of the recording medium). The record stores the noise of the wax cylinder itself as well—which is not discursive but media-archaeological information (about the physically real event). Let us listen to this carefully and not exclude it hermeneutically as in the proverbial cocktail-party effect of auditory communication between humans.

(Ernst 2012, 182-3)

Ernst is more interested in “past technical knowledge” of the media than historical and semantic meanings of sound recordings (181). However, I allow for both the message and the noise to co-exist, each with its own layers of information and significance, and each “unfrozen” through the recording being played along with concentrated listening.

In June of 1968, sound recordist William Tallmadge traveled to Decoy, in Knott County, Kentucky. There, Tallmadge recorded and interviewed Frankie and Lionel Duff. Frankie sang hymns and ballads in a clear and unwavering voice. The recording begins with feet shuffling, and something sounding like a coin is placed on the table. The room
reverberates slightly, betraying its small size and the lack of absorbent materials such as carpet; perhaps it is the kitchen. The tape occasionally is recorded at too high of a level, and it distorts. The hiss of the tape acts as a perpetual accompaniment, different from the digital silence of today (that has its own distinct sound). Frankie sings a fragment of a song learned from her deceased brother and unknown to Tallmadge. As ice cubes are dropped into glasses, she states,

And then I had an older brother, [he] got killed when I was about eight years old.

I remember how...I can remember how he used to sit on the front porch and sing. I remember two verses of the song that he sang. But I can’t find anybody who knows the song.

Tallmadge responds and then trails off, saying, “Sing it! A song that nobody knows is a pretty great...” After Frankie finishes the fragment, she admits that she cannot remember any more verses, but instead recollects the situation in which she first heard the song. She states,

I remember sitting on the front porch one evening, after dark, and he’s sitting there in a chair singing this song. Playing the banjo. And I was just sitting on the floor and I thought it was the most beautiful sound I ever heard. I thought the tunes they played on the banjo...there’ll never be anything as pretty in all the world.

The song, “Down by the Riverside,” tells of unrequited love and is haunting, perhaps because it is unfinished. However, in the context of the recording, it is the fragments of a personal story— along with the accompanying noises that unfold before and after the
song—that become entwined and inseparable from the music. Frankie has held on to this song in her memory as a connection to her lost brother. The song and recording each act as time machines, transporting Frankie back to her childhood, to her front porch at night, listening to her brother. Frankie, the music, the story, and the media signature of the recording all come together through the agency of the archive as it collects and then disseminates these elements to the listener, only to continue moving outward once more.

_Heterophonic Archives_

To “tarry” is to remain in a place longer than intended. I linger with these recordings, and the recordings linger, too. Through repeated listening, I am able to perceive greater and greater detail in the recordings, and insignificant moments become compositional. In addition, field recordings often continue to record longer than planned, accidentally and silently capturing moments where there is no intention to perform, no self-conscious dialogue. In Tallmadge’s field recording of “Tarry With Me O My Savoir,” this lingering occurs both in the hymn and in the room, opening a space of vulnerability and expression that is held for an extended period of time.

Howard Chalmer leads a group of men and women in “lining out” the old hymn. A lined out hymn is often sung during a religious service, most notably in small, rural, “Old Regular Baptist” churches. A lead singer guides the hymn. The singer begins an initial melody for each line, and the group follows with a melodic variation. As the tape begins, there is a discussion among the group as to what Tallmadge is interested in recording. “Why don’t you take turns,” a woman states, “both of you do some lining. He
wants to see...” Before beginning to sing, Chalmer is aware of the recording device, and an awkward exchange takes place. Chalmer states, “You can, uh, I mean, uh, leave your recorder off, now. I’ll start one line, see if I got the right key, and then I can drop back and you can turn your recorder on and I’ll tell you when we’re ready to start.” However, much like the recordings above, just as Tallmadge acquiesces and begins to say, “All right. This is not a, uh, this is just to see how it really works,” Chalmer has already started, not waiting for the recorder to be turned off or the others to finish speaking. He decides to begin despite the tape recorder’s presence. The first sung words are inaudible, but his voice dovetails and emerges from the conversation and rises above it in volume, becoming stronger and clear as he becomes more comfortable.

As the group comes together, I listen to their voices moving heterophonically along a single melodic line. Each voice is distinctly heard, and each makes subtle changes, turns, and inflections that serve not only as embellishments but also as marks of individuality. Lyrics are also altered, often with two or more of the singers simultaneously using different words, thereby multiplying the already polysemic meanings of the text. At one point, some sing “are” while other sing “were.” At another point Chalmer clearly sings “night,” but in the recording I later hear “knife.” There are other sounds, too, that become part of the musical fabric of the recording. Children are playing in the background, and perhaps this indicates that it is midday. A bell rings, and later a distant train whistle blows, both coinciding in pitch with the singing. The tape warbles, indicating its age and how it has changed while sitting on a shelf waiting to be listened to. All of these sounds come together to offer a glimmer of the time and place in
which the recording was made, as well as the subsequent changes that have occurred to it during its lifetime. As the group completes “lining out” the hymn, they finish a full half note higher in pitch than when they started. Their singing, without accompaniment, is unmoored, and as a result the intensity pushes everyone up in pitch, yet all remain together. After a few moments, a member of the group says, “Well, I’d say brother Chalmer has done about as good a-lining as you could find.”

It is this aural image of several individuals and everyday sounds coming together to sing in unison—but also with variation—that can be transferred to a larger understanding of the Berea Archives. These archives are broadly held together through their connection to the larger Appalachian region and its cultures, but they also allow for hundreds and thousands of distinct voices to exist alongside each other with no single dominating style, performer, or collector. They remain independent and interdependent, singular and connected, and powerfully express the history of the region as it continues to unfold in the present.

**Conclusion**

The practice of archival ethnography fosters an ability to hear some of the narratives present in the Berea Archives, but also to add additional narratives into the mix. In *Old Time Kentucky Fiddle Tunes*, Titon states that, “fiddlers do not quite possess the tunes but, rather, use and care for them as a good steward tends a fertile field” (2001, 1). This applies not only to fiddlers but also to all who come in contact with archival artifacts. The movement and exchange of the recordings do not end with the listener or
the collector. Rather, the recordings pass through, with the listener caring for them and adding yet another layer as they continue on, ever changing and expanding.

My experience in the Berea Archives taught me that these recordings are anything but static, removed, and disengaged. I have found the opposite: sound archives are a nexus of temporal, media, historical, and social interactions. Listening to them allows for further discursive interaction, and a means of understanding them in a new light. Both inside and outside the archive, an embodied space is continuing to unfold, one in which each member of the community related to it—listener, writer, composer, artist, performer, archivist—can polyphonically and heterophonically contribute to this process of setting it in motion, thus keeping it circulating and alive.
Chapter 2: Multi-Voiced Archival Performance and the Sun Ra/El Saturn Collection

A recording begins. A half-dozen screeching cellos glissando and pizzicato down in pitch into a pattern that is both polyrhythmic and sporadic; they expand and contract slightly in and out of metric time. Celesta, bass clarinet, vibraphone, and electric piano soon join the cellos. As the instruments begin to settle into discernible rhythmic patterns, another recording interrupts them, related in musical content yet different in timbre and grain: it is a rehearsal tape, and its hiss and room sound betray that it is taking place at a different place and earlier time. The tape reveals a second band of instruments—flute, drums, bassoon, and keyboard—that dovetail and take over from those at the beginning. A voice breaks in, stating, “That ain’t the sound. Let me hear your rim shot... It ain’t powerful enough... Now, one, one, one, two... Marshall: one, two, three, four!” The two ensembles join together, old and new, their sounds merging and departing in turn, and all performers are listening to and following the leader’s instructions.

The recording, entitled “Marshall,” is a sound collage I composed consisting of archival samples of Sun Ra rehearsing his band, the Arkestra. It is remixed with additional, new performances by musicians Fred Lonberg-Holm, Jeff Kimmel, Jeremy Woodruff, Aaron Michael Butler, and myself. “Marshall” makes use of interstitial moments of Sun Ra counting, teaching, talking with musicians, and making musical adjustments as the piece unfolds. My intervention takes advantage of these moments and brings them to the fore: what was initially a documentation of a working process becomes primary musical material, and the backbone of a new sonic work.
“Marshall” highlights the agency of an archive. The archival recordings offer what Jane Bennett (2010) understands as a “vitality” or “vibrant materiality.” This chapter begins by considering the Sun Ra/El Saturn Collection, and follows this vitality of the archive as it bleeds through to the present to be interpreted by artists, writers, filmmakers, and musicians. The archive transforms and is transformed by new voices that move across its living contexts, across disciplines, and across time and space. The newly created works based on the Sun Ra recordings also call attention to an imbalance of power between original creators, institutions that hold and disseminate the recordings, and remixers of the archival material. They are each operating as participants along a spectrum of the archive’s use and interpretation.

The Sun Ra/El Saturn Collection is a catalogue of approximately 600 audio tapes that span over thirty years of the experimental jazz composer and bandleader Sun Ra’s (1914-1993; born Herman Poole Blount) career, from the 1950s to 1993. It is housed in the Creative Audio Archive at the non-profit Experimental Sound Studio (ESS) in Chicago, which is also home to a recording studio, performance space, and gallery dedicated to sound art. John Corbett and Terri Kapsalis acquired and stored the collection in 2000 after the death of Alton Abraham, who originally owned the recordings. The collection was donated to ESS in 2007, and its digitization was completed in 2010. The recordings are remarkably varied—including rehearsal tapes, live concerts, phone

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5 Bennett’s (2010, viii) definition of “vitality” is as follows: “the capacity of things...not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forced with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own,” and “A vibrant materiality that runs alongside and inside humans.”

messages, recordings from television, lectures, and poetry—and are held together tangentially through their connection with Sun Ra. The collection furthers historical and cultural elements related to Ra’s music and art, as well as American history, mythology, Afroturism, memory, race, civil rights, and everyday life. ESS received funding to preserve the collection and to develop ways of interpreting it. ⁷ They commissioned a number of musicians, writers, and visual artists to create new works based on the collection. The artists were asked to celebrate, contemplate, and begin a dialogue with the newly digitized collection in order to draw attention to it and hear the recordings in new ways. The artists involved with interpreting the collection—including writer and musician Terri Kapsalis, visual artist and musician Damon Locks, filmmakers Cauleen Smith and Rob Shaw, and musicians Todd Carter, Mike Reed, and myself—work in different disciplines and media. The resulting pieces are kaleidoscopic in nature and scope, with the same collection seen and heard from multiple subject positions. ⁸

My own work with the collection as a composer and sound artist deepened an interest in the music of Sun Ra, as well as the larger issue of working with sound archives as source material and how it is translated across disciplines. I became curious about the other commissioned artists, and how they created a rich and complex series of reflections on Sun Ra that are varied, layered, and simultaneously listen back to the past and toward the future. As a result, the same spirit of a multi-voiced approach to the collection is shared here. My interviews with the artists are incorporated throughout, revealing

⁷ ESS received a three-year grant from the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation to “preserve and interpret this important and unique collection.”
⁸ My commissioned work resulted in a six-channel sound installation and a full-length album titled The Star-Faced One, released on Atavistic Records, 2013.
individual observations and pointing to larger collective insights into processes of
creatively reinterpreting the archives. At the same time, it is clear that my personal
experiences with the collection as one of the commissioned artists have deeply informed
my scholarly research on the subject. This can be understood as a form of the emergent
field of “practice-based research” in the arts (Barton et al. 2010; Allegue et al. 2009;
Riley and Hunter 2009).

Stemming from these artists’ wide-ranging experiences, a central premise of this
chapter is that by simultaneously creating many works from an archive, a new space of
sonic engagement is opened that is not limited to music alone. Multiple voices move
across the archive as active, embodied performances, or “performances of history”
(Jackson 2000). The methodological approaches the artists applied to this process are
identified and explored, such as archival homophones, peripheral listening, and
speculation. Special attention is focused on overlooked or discarded moments in the Sun
Ra recordings. In addition, this chapter focuses on the difficult relationship formed
between the creators of the archival material and those remixing it. A sonic
historiography emerges from this relationship that potentially opens new ways of
exchange, dialogue, respect, conflict, and multiple meanings. The focus on a singular
archive provides a means for addressing some of the many ethical concerns with
appropriation; it allows for both a strong juxtaposition of material and a larger cohesion
holding the new works together. In this way, performing the Sun Ra/El Saturn Collection
enables an expressive mix rooted in its already stratified histories, while simultaneously
revealing new futures.
Senses of place also inform the Sun Ra/El Saturn Collection and its living contexts. Sun Ra lived in Chicago for fifteen years (1946-1961). The collection is housed in Chicago, and many of the recordings were made there. Chicago is thus a geographical place that grounds the historical recordings of Sun Ra as well as their contemporary contexts. In addition, space and space travel have been widely discussed in relationship to Sun Ra—often metaphorically—as an unorthodox but necessary sense of place (Eshun 1998; Kreiss 2012; Lock 1999; Sites 2012; Szwed 1998). Beginning during his time Chicago and lasting throughout the rest of his career, Sun Ra increasingly incorporated outer space as a mythological place, one traveled to and expressed through his music. This process can in part be understood as a means of confronting and rejecting the racism and marginalization from society that he faced. The collection’s sense of place is expanded to include the commissioned artists, who work within an inter-dependent network of each other. In addition to the collection itself, the artists are brought together through Chicago and through Ra’s metaphorical outer-space-as-place. Their resulting works point to a nexus of places in which the works are inspired by, created, and presented in, while simultaneously referring back to Sun Ra. Interestingly, the commissioned artists further expand this network through the shared, collaborative nature of their projects, bringing a steadily increasing group of voices into the fold of archival performance.

In thinking about the complexities of creatively using the Sun Ra/El Saturn Collection, I began by asking the artists how they saw their potentially affirming or even problematic relationship with the collection’s material, and more broadly with authorship. How did they understand these different forms of what Stanyek and Piekut (2010) refer to as “posthumous duets” and “intermundane collaborations,” unknowingly and perhaps unwillingly from beyond the grave with Sun Ra? Each of the relationships in this case presumes an imbalance of power between the deceased Sun Ra and the living artists using his work as material. However, Stanyek and Piekut point out that this dominance of the living over the dead is not necessarily a given, and they seek to show that both the dead and the living are still acting together. “Posthumous duets” blur the line between liveness and deadness, and instead emphasize a dialogic “leakiness”; their use of “intermundane” emphasizes an “interpenetration” between the two (20, 14). This leads Stanyek and Piekut to ask, “Where does one body—one sound—begin and the other end, and in what ways do sounds gather up the world, absorb and form the bodies they meet?” (31).

What became clear to me as I pursued this line of questioning is that the use of a singular archive—in this case the Sun Ra/El Saturn Collection—by many different artists plays a significant part in identifying roles between posthumous creators, contemporary archivists, and collaborative artists. Stanyek and Piekut’s focus remains primarily with commercial recordings and their connection to late capitalism, yet these observations also show the blurred distinctions that permeate the sound archive. Rather than being stable it
is in constant flux, with change occurring along all points of the spectrum of liveness and deadness. These changes in the archive are not necessarily bound by time, and instead emphasize their relational and overlapping qualities. Within a single archive there is a more clear delineation between each of these roles, and the effect is a strong juxtaposition between them that allows the original material to remain intact and present, while simultaneously allowing new voices to exist alongside it. Hence, the relationships that take place between them contain the potential, if not a guarantee, of “solidarity,” a way of engaging the material in a non-exploitive manner. Rather than being “anarchival,” where there is an attempt to subvert or erase the power structures present (Ernst 2012; Lessard 2009), here the artists each seem to be approaching the collection from the perspectives of acknowledgement of and multiple subject positions on Sun Ra and his work. This allows for a reading and interpretation of the archive not dominated by the detachment, distance, and irony often associated with postmodern “pastiche” and “bricolage” (Weheliye 2005; Eshun 1998). It is instead deliberately anchored to the original works. This rootedness, in part, lends strength to the subsequent works that are made from the archive as source material. It in turn affects the artists and how they use the material: they move toward and away from the collection without forgetting its presence, allowing them to know the recordings and their contexts intimately.

It must be stressed that this ideal of a connected, multi-voiced exchange does not by any means guarantee a respectful dialogue with the Sun Ra recordings, rather than a power-based rewriting of them. It merely contains the potential to keep that power imbalance in check. A multi-voiced exchange allows only the possibility to add to and
also acknowledge multiple voices and layers of history and meaning rather than take away from them in an attempt to claim ownership or authorship. The polysemic nature of archival materials, regardless of medium, have the ability to be easily detached from earlier contexts and meanings despite the intentions of interpreters. This allows the possibility of solidarity and exploitation, conflict and consideration, and is even further complicated as the archival material is changed over time. Still, just as the effects of a monoculture are diminished through the diversity of a poly- or permaculture, a multi-voiced approach to the interpretation of an archive offers the possibility of an outcome of what Elisabeth Kaplan refers to as “many paths to partial truths” (2002, 220). As such, it does not automatically and fully mitigate the power imbalances of archives, but does act as a catalyst toward awareness and acknowledgement that is always present, regardless of intention. This reiterates Sekula’s (1983) reference to the “liberation” and “loss” present in the creation, stewardship, and use of archival materials.

The notions of “in the mix” and “remixing” are also an integral aspect of locating the practice of a multi-voiced interpretation of the Sun Ra/El Saturn Collection. Remixing offers historical and contemporary ways of navigating contexts that spring from the archive. I draw from Weheliye’s *Phonographies* (2005), in which he explores the prose, poetry, and musical excerpts of Du Bois’ *The Souls of Black Folk* as a form of “performative” remixing, likening it to contemporary DJing. As with Stanyek and Piekut, the past and the passage of time are in direct relationship with the present, and Weheliye views this combination as a “sonic-textual temporality” (99). Weheliye states that “history ceases to operate as an axiomatic category brimming with found objects in the
inevitable flow of time; instead it functions as a series of vexed knots that require that active intervention of the critic or the DJ” in order to deal with the “discontinuities of the temporal” (74). Weheliye brings together Du Bois, along with Ralph Ellison, through the lens of Walter Benjamin’s form of historical materialism. Together, their work provides “the tools for conjecturing non-historicist compilations of the temporal, especially apropos the tradition of the oppressed and the sonic” (Weheliye 104). In the context of archival performance, Weheliye’s use of “remixing” illustrates that sound is history, and reiterates the fact that history is clearly not linear. Because of the relationship between power and the oppressed, history is constantly being written and rewritten: the dead and living are becoming more or less alive. As such, oppressed voices such as Du Bois and Ellison are, in Ellison’s own words, outside “the grooves of history” (75).

To be outside the grooves of history is to not be allowed in, an act of exclusion based in large part on race that Sun Ra in particular was well aware of. Weheliye’s understanding of “remixing” permeates the Sun Ra/El Saturn Collection, and encompasses not only the sonic but also visual and textual aspects of it. The act of many contemporary artists remixing an archive of a marginalized figure becomes part of the process of rewriting or inverting history in solidarity with those excluded. Each new utterance added to Sun Ra’s own emphasizes alternative grooves of history, ones in which Sun Ra and archival material connected to him move to the center and act as an anchored link to an expanding ensemble of new voices.
Several of the commissioned artists see their relationship to Sun Ra as one of teacher and student rather than as equal collaborators, thereby flipping the archival power imbalance. Cauleen Smith states,

I cast myself in the role of an apprentice to Sun Ra, and made my work inhabiting this space... [My work] is a direct response to the lessons offered in the archives from Sun Ra via his voice, his conversations, the things he recorded on the radio and TV, [and] his lectures to the Arkestra in particular.¹⁰

Damon Locks too sees himself as student, and “not as someone that was trying to put myself in [Ra’s] place and act as him.”¹¹ Locks looked for points of intersection, what he refers to as “crossovers,” between his own interests and his perception of Sun Ra’s interests. For Todd Carter this interaction was akin to “a dialogue or an instructive monologue” with Sun Ra, rather than being in conflict with his memory or the archive. Carter points out the instructional role of Sun Ra, stating, “As Sun Ra says to Alton Abraham while trying to set up a new tape recorder, ‘You already know how to do it.’”¹²

Smith, Locks, and Carter, as well as the other commissioned artists are performing the archive by both following and moving along side perceived directives from Ra via his music. The result of artists working within a particular archive is a complication of the already complex, stratified histories associated with Sun Ra. This sense of many voices rooted in a single source highlights a kind of historical stratification and counterpoint. Layers of sonic interpretations are continually unfolding, and the

¹⁰ Smith, discussion.
¹¹ Locks, discussion.
¹² Todd Carter, interview with the author, March 7, 2013.
remixers of the archive are not only in dialogue with the collection, but with its collectors and archivists, and each another.

In my own re-contextualization of Sun Ra’s work in an installation and album entitled *The Star Faced One: from the Sun Ra/El Saturn Archives* (2013), the original “authorship” and presence of Sun Ra never fully disappears, and must necessarily be a part of my own interpretive contribution. Akin to Barthes’ (1978) “myth of filiation” of the author, Sun Ra occupies an unstable space, one that is in a constant process of questioning, flux, and becoming. Long after Sun Ra’s death, he is both present and absent, and remains a “character” in his own work. My intervention is necessarily an act of inclusion and exclusion of Sun Ra’s presence, flowing between forgetting and remembering, between authors and remixers.

The process of composing *The Star Faced One* was to create several coexisting, stratified musics. I initially collaged recordings from the archive into a sample-based click track. This was given to several musicians along with composed melodic fragments, which they in turn used as a reference point to improvise with. Finally, I took both the new and archival recordings and combined them, creating a discursive interaction where Sun Ra, the additional musicians, and myself as mixer all came together as characters in the piece. The process allowed me to understand the archive as a network of sounds joined together in ways both disparate and intimate. My contribution became an active part of the larger collection.

As listener, performer, and participant, I hear the layers of historical and contemporary recordings simultaneously, and the process of rewriting the archive
highlights the many layers of personal and historical counterpoint involved. It is not only the original author who becomes a character: each person who interacts with the archive become entangled and involved. My own memories, emotions, concerns, and histories are present alongside many others, creating something additional to what was originally intended. Thus, *The Star Faced One* celebrates and shares the work of Sun Ra, and adds the voices of contemporary musicians whose contributions now reside alongside the historical recordings. New listeners, in turn, become yet another part of this performative, circular motion between the archive and its continually unfolding human interaction.

*The Solar Flare Arkestral Marching Band Performs “Space is the Place”*

Filmmaker Cauleen Smith’s “The Solar Flare Arkestral Marching Band” directly addresses archival performances rooted in celebration, disruption, and protest. Over several years, Smith has worked with a number of Sun Ra-related collections in Chicago that include artworks, broadsheets, and writings, in addition to music. As a result, Smith did not limit herself to filmmaking alone in her interpretations. This exploration led to several interrelated projects including visual works, vinyl recordings, flashmobs, a reading library, and an open recording studio. These projects were all part of her artist residency at Threewalls Gallery in Chicago. For the Solar Flare Arkestral Marching Band, Smith commissioned five Chicago composers to make arrangements of Sun Ra pieces that were then performed as flashmobs in various parts of Chicago, and beyond.

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13 In addition to the archive at ESS, Smith conducted research in collections related to Sun Ra at the University of Chicago and the Center for Race and Culture.

Smith states that the group functions as a “rogue insurgent marching band,” in order to “celebrate this model of self-invention and to protest the lingering and ever oppressive constraints which beleaguer working class people in America.”\textsuperscript{15} For Smith, the band is a present-day “homage to Sun Ra,” and converges “from many points (like stars) into a designated site to incite the abandonment of the status quo, interrupt corporate routine, and celebrate the ways that individuals agree to exist within communities.”\textsuperscript{16} This sentiment closely reiterates the broader multi-voiced approach to the archive described above that is simultaneously anchored to Sun Ra and opening out into new futures.

\textbf{Figure 3}. Solar Flare Arkestra Marching Band flashmob performance.

\textsuperscript{15} ibid.  
\textsuperscript{16} ibid.
In a video documentation of a flashmob, Smith organized the Rich South High School marching band to perform Sun Ra’s “Space is the Place” in Chinatown Square, Chicago. As the video unfolds, the square is relatively quiet, and it is raining. Drums are heard from afar as the marching band parades into the square, followed by curious onlookers. The familiar Sun Ra refrain of “Space is the Place” is first heard in the bass instruments, and is soon joined by musicians singing the words. A crowd gathers. The musicians are standing exposed in the middle of the square as rain pours down, splashing off of the instruments. An enthusiastic synchronized dance accompanies their performance. As they finish, the marching band exits from the square in the same organized manner as it came to it. Now empty, Chinatown Square returns to its earlier state, and the musicians peel off one by one, giggling and laughing, proud of the event they just participated in.

This performance of “Space is the Place” illustrates how Smith’s investigation into the Sun Ra archives directly links to her research into the South Side of Chicago of today. It also reflects Sun Ra’s own history of living there during a transformative period of his career (Kreiss 2012; Lewis 2008; Szwed 1998). Lewis (2008) links the “hypersegregated, overcrowded, cheek-by-jowl black environment of Chicago’s South Side” with Sun Ra’s “claim of extraterrestriality,” and sees the South Side as a place where ideas like this could flourish, in part because of the migratory movement from the South to Chicago. Lewis states,

That such all-black, largely working-class environments could become the staging ground for eclectic fusion and postmodernities need not surprise us—that is, if we
recognize that it was not hybridity but mobility, the master trope of the Great Migration, that fueled the aspirations of black people in a complexly articulated but socially black milieu like the South Side. (Lewis 2008, 149-50)

Likewise, Sites (2012a) identifies a “musical shift from urban space to outer space” in Sun Ra’s music of that period, and directly relates it in part to Ra’s experiences in Chicago. Sites states that Sun Ra’s creative output during this period furnishes an array of musical compositions in which the city—as an empirical object of representation, a pathway to other worlds, and a local community of listeners and participants who might journey with him—plays a central but quite varied role. ...Sun Ra’s music of the Chicago period...traces a shifting relationship between the city, space, and utopian realms. ...Outer space...turns out to be not so much a separate realm endowed with particular attributes as it does an exploratory process, a set of pathways that are routinely traveled—in a strange yet everyday mode of utopian exploration—by the musician-workers who have created them. (Sites 2012a, 578, 583-4)

For Cauleen Smith, the act of emplacing the music and the marching band in Chicago’s Chinatown Square points back to this historical context, but also allows her to not be limited by the archival material alone. Instead, it is expanded to involve a number of contemporary and social contexts, and the resulting new work is as much a reflection of the present as it is of the past. Smith states of the performance, “In that moment, Chinatown Square was The Place and The Space to inhabit.”17 This sense of the fusion of present and past is also reflected in related performances, where the Solar Flare Arkestral

Marching band held flashmobs “at the corner of N. Peoria and Randolph” in Chicago, as well as the Raymond Hilliard Homes public housing project. The geographical sites, music, people that are present, as well as the objects located there (such as architecture), all simultaneously carry markers of many stories and reflections of both the history of those places and of the present moment. Smith’s work helps to expose a new generation to Sun Ra’s music and message. It brings together liminal and marginalized communities in Chicago to both affirm their existence and draw attention to the many continually overlooked and unresolved race and poverty issues in a city that Sun Ra himself lived in.

The Solar Flare Arkestral Marching Band embodies the Sun Ra archives. The sonic material is brought out of the confines of the archive and, quite literally, into the streets of the city. Smith actively involves many participants, including the youth who are performing the music. Following in Ra’s own footsteps, the music is used as a tool to draw from local resources and bring together different communities. Smith chooses sites related to Sun Ra throughout Chicago that also have relationships to contemporary social issues, with the public housing projects at the forefront. She states that, “inquires into social justice are embedded in to almost everything Sun Ra created, so it felt to me like an organic location for the work.” The marching band interrupts everyday life, causing a momentary disruption of the status quo and an invitation to reflect on it and reject it. The archival sounds, embodied by the band, become a form of contemporary celebration and of protest, simultaneously bringing people together through Sun Ra and highlighting inequalities that still exist today.

19 Cauleen Smith, in discussion with the author, 2013.
Smith’s acts of archival emplacement and embodiment highlight a movement between geographical place and non-linear time. They reflect back to Sun Ra’s own movement between geographical and mythological place, with his music acting as a conduit between the two. The connection between Sun Ra, music, and place on one hand, and mythical, metaphorical, utopic, or imagined space on the other can be expanded to include the many networks and contexts of the living artists reinterpreting the collection. Smith continues the tradition of bringing this mythical place to a geographical location, with the music used as a connector or pathway between them.

“Sow So Soul”: Archival Homophones

Shortly before his death in 2014, Amiri Baraka spoke of Sun Ra’s ability to bridge text and sound. Together, they hold a homophonic power. Baraka states, “Ra taught that a word is not only an idea, but a sound. It has force and power, and the way it sounded makes it open in the world of what it sounds like, and its many meanings manifest at once...” Sun Ra delighted in this polysemic and philosophical wordplay brought together with sound, which often manifested itself in lectures and writings closely aligned with the practice of “street-corner preaching” (Corbett 2006). Many of the recordings from the Sun Ra/El Saturn Collection are steeped in this homophonic adaptation of words. In the archival transcription below, Ra is lecturing to a class during

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his residency at the University of California at Berkeley in 1971.21 Amid the sounds of chalk quickly etching on a chalkboard, Ra concludes a portion of a lecture, stating,

Watch what you’re saying, because you’re going to have to give an account for it. In other words, you’re going to reap what you sow. Now, that “reap what you sow” is another thing that is dangerous. You’re gonna “reap what you sow,” that’s what you think it means, but there’s also the phonetic: you’re gonna “reap what you so.” Now, what is that? “So” means something. You say, “it is so,” it means something you make true, it’s over there with this truth thing. Whatever you call the truth, you see, you’re gonna get that back. Now, you’re gonna “reap what you so.” Now what’s “so?” It’s represented by a plus, like you say... So, that’s so, that’s positive, [a] plus sign. As I said, when people die they give them a certificate: something certified means something that is positified, something that is true, something that is so. It moves over into this, too: people get mad, and they say they “so.” You see over there? And then, you’ve got this “soul” when people are ailing and they delve into their soul. Now, I’m gonna show you one more word on this thing, and then I’m gonna play you some music.

Sun Ra is using homophonic wordplay as a technique that develops a personal, methodical, and argumentative logic. It is subjective and often idiosyncratic, yet also points to deep cultural, historical, and political insights, with Ra as the singular connecting voice. With this in mind, I would like to suggest that Ra’s love for wordplay and homophones offers an appropriate extended metaphor for the process of artists

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21 This recording, “SR149 Reel 179,” is undated but does indicate being made at the University of California, Berkeley, and corresponds with Sun Ra’s lectures that took place there in 1971.
creatively approaching the archive as material to be performed. When trying to grasp the extremely heterogeneous nature of the recordings in the collection, it is important to remember that it is Sun Ra alone that holds it together. He becomes the link, no matter how tangential, between each recording regardless of his presence on it.

Hence, archival recordings such as Sun Ra sitting in his apartment taping a television show on acupuncture, a studio session for a Busch beer commercial, and a Pentecostal preacher’s sermon are *archival homophones* connected only by Sun Ra. Terri Kapsalis (2012) considers the archive to be an “active laboratory, a place of fantasy, not a mausoleum,” and points to “word play and permutations” as a way of moving through the collection. She draws a self-created line of connections—a “fictitious etymology”—between the roots of words such as “ark” and “archive,” and then uses this as a means for understanding the larger project of reinterpreting the collection. This use of homophones in particular—such as Sun Ra seamlessly joining the words “Sow,” “So,” and “Soul” together—turns the archive into a space of social, musical, tangential, and ambiguous connections between Sun Ra and its remixers as the archive continues to unfold into the future. The Sun Ra/El Saturn Collection acts as a starting point, a sonic network that allows a critical analysis of social, historical, cultural, and material contexts. The presence of many artists following their own paths along these archival homophones allows for several perspectives on and approaches to the recordings, thereby expanding and complicating the notion of archives and their performance. The process of exploring these recordings, no matter how loosely connected to Sun Ra, allow a move away from
understanding sounds and sound archives as objects alone, and instead focuses on the relationships and living contexts that extend from the materials within.

**In-between Sounds, Mislistening, and Peripheral Listening**

In corresponding with the artists involved with the Sun Ra/El Saturn Collection, it became clear that a number of other methodological strategies relating to archival performance could be gleaned from their experiences. In addition to archival homophones, the use of in-between and interstitial moments of the collection often provided primary material for new works. Forms of both intense and peripheral listening featured prominently in the artists’ creative processes, as well as speculation of both the past and the future as related to the collection. Using these methods, each artist developed their own approach to the collection, and the resulting works are as reflective of their own backgrounds, interests, and experiences as they are of Sun Ra’s.

Removed from commercial recordings, the artists use in-between and interstitial sounds within the collection as re-contextualized primary material. “In-betweenness” here broadly refers to sounds that are often removed from commercial recordings, yet are retained in the archive. In-betweenness in the Sun Ra/El Saturn Collection includes recorded ephemera such as banter and laughter, rehearsals, and phone messages. In-between sound also includes the audible material aspects of the media used, such as tape hiss and deterioration. The use of in-between sounds of the archive is not as much a diffusion of the authorship of the original creators as it is the unearthing of additional layers of sonic information, allowing a greater depth of insight and dialogue between
creators and remixers. It also points to the listeners’ perceptual shift. Individual apprehensions of the recordings change over time; today’s listeners hear them in a different manner from their counterparts in the past, adding their own subjectivities and aesthetic tastes. Paying attention to these sounds and incorporating them into new sonic and visual works functions as a device to shift the point of focus from a singular, canonic interpretation to allow many viewpoints on the collection at once. They allow a deeper understanding of the past, and a stratified and contrapuntal historiography in which remixers move in different patterns within the collection.

Todd Carter, a Transfer Engineer at ESS, helped to digitize the collection in addition to being one of the commissioned artists. This dual role gave Carter an immersive vantage point, allowing for both preservation and expansion of what he refers to as “the living archive.” Carter states, “As I digitized the tapes and read through the extensive notes I began to develop my own symbology for marking sounds that I would later incorporate into a live surround-sound mix.” In the resulting piece, 2010: Digital Black or Sun Ra pt. II, the live mix becomes a place where in-between moments of the collection come together with longer excerpts. In the recorded version, a combination of several different Ra lectures, heavily distorted percussion, radio signals, electronic synthesized sounds, and singing from the Arkestra, can be heard. Of these sounds, in-between moments are incorporated, which include the sounds of the materials of the archive, and their deterioration over time. Carter states that “there were many varied examples of tape print-through, electromagnetic deterioration, tape stop/start sound, [and] demagnetizing artifacts,” all of which became material to be improvised with for the new

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22 Carter, discussion.
piece. These sounds placed in a live context allow for a literal form of archival performance. Carter adds, “I laid out an 8-track multitrack framework which I mixed and improvised additional sounds with a computer. All of the sounds were mixed using individual faders with discrete surround control from the auxiliary sends.” As such, *Digital Black* becomes a way of bringing the in-between and media content of the recordings out of the confines of the archive and into a dynamic, uncertain present-moment, with Carter’s compositional voice directly curating and interacting with the material.

In sharp contrast, Mike Reed’s *Living by Lanterns* is a live performance and full-length album that focuses on material from a *single* rehearsal tape, entitled “NY 1961,” rather than drawing from a wide range of material. From this one recording, Reed and collaborator Jason Adasiewicz carefully identified melodic and harmonic fragments that otherwise had been rejected or left undeveloped from Ra’s music, and recomposed them into new pieces. In the initial compositional and conceptual process, Reed deliberately avoided sampling the collection, and instead favored transcribing these in-between moments. According to Reed, this allowed him to maintain some distance from the original material. As a result, the new pieces contain kernels of Sun Ra’s material that are buried under layers of newly composed melodic, rhythmic, and timbral components. Reed states that

> the first step in the process was to completely dismiss the idea of commenting [on] or honoring Sun Ra. ...In my mind it doesn’t matter who’s tapes these are, it’s just source material, in this case it happens to be Sun Ra. …The more
interesting idea was of creating new music using someone’s un-finished, un-wanted and abandoned material. (Reed 2011)

Kapsalis, in a written commentary on *Living by Lanterns*, refers to this process of beginning with “unused historical material” as the transformation of the archive, becoming “a vehicle for creating new myths” (2012). Paul Carter (2004) suggests that the process of paying attention to gaps in the material is a form of “mislistening,” which also functions as a means of combating a purely nostalgic or sentimental approach to the historic collection.

The method of “mislistening,”—similarly referred to as “listening awry” (Drobnick 2004) and “mishearing” (Labelle 2010)—is employed by the artists as they listen across the collection subjectively according to their medium, experiences, and interests. Further afield, mislistening is related to Bloom’s (1973) premise in *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, where “strong misreadings” of previous authors form a central tenet of creating new works (Bloom 1973; Straus 1991). Addressing this in poetry, Bloom states,

> Every poem is a misinterpretation of a parent poem. A poem is not an overcoming of anxiety, but is that anxiety... There are no interpretations but only misinterpretations... Poetry is the anxiety of influence, is misprision, is a disciplined perverseness. Poetry is misunderstanding, misinterpretation, misalliance... Poetry is both contraction and expansion; for all the ratios of revision are contracting movements, yet making is an expansive one. Good poetry
is a dialectic of revisionary movement (contraction) and freshening outward-going-ness. (Bloom 1973, 94-5)

Bloom acknowledges past generations and their influence on the present, rather than focusing on the search for originality and novelty. To struggle with the anxiety that is produced as a result becomes the very means by which poets both extend the life of older works and dialogically add their own to the mix. “Misreading,” then, is the moment in which a new voice, filled with its own concerns, beliefs, and misunderstandings, can enter into a direct conversation with another poet across time and space. Applied to the Sun Ra/El Saturn commissioning project, each of the artists are directly and concretely engaged in this very process of “contraction” and “expansion.” Interestingly, this resonates with Sekula’s (1983) reference to interpreting archives as both a “liberation” and a “loss.” The project of reinterpreting the archive, then, including sampling, recomposing, translating to other disciplines and media, and more diffuse interactions can be productively considered as a candid engagement with mishearing.

With this in mind, mishearing can be extended to include modalities of listening, including close, focused listening to archival excerpts, and listening that is peripheral in nature. The musician and visual artist Damon Locks’ creative interpretation of the collection includes both a series of digital prints and a collaborative work with Terri Kapsalis of sound, text, and video, entitled *Noon Moons.* For the digital prints, Locks began his work with the archival material by listening to many recordings in his studio

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24 They were joined by musician Wayne Montana, and Rob Shaw, who added animation to their sound.
while he created visual images. He then continued his work without the music. Locks’ intent was to have the archive indirectly influence him as he translated its material and meanings into different media, and then to allow the collection to recede as his own voice emerged. The prints reflect this process, where references to the collection are layered, nuanced, and often oblique. The prints are collage-like and employ techniques of photography and drawing. Throughout the series, scenes of everyday life are combined with references to Sun Ra’s opus of space, music, and Egyptian and afro-futurist imagery.

In digital prints such as “Street Scene: A New Dimension” (2010), the image is densely complex, with several layers of information and visual noise present together. Color is saturated, and the bright figures of young girls jumping rope on a city street are contrasted with textures of cracked paint and drawn, fluid lines. Acknowledging this complexity, Locks states, “I enjoy a distressed, weather worn, aged look. I layer and combine images to develop a composition using drawings and my photographs. I then push the collage into time and space with visual noise and texture.” Throughout, several moons and suns are present in contrasting colors, and are seen in the back-, middle-, and foregrounds.

Other works by Locks such as “Noon Moon” (2012) remain strikingly black and white, where the contrasts between photography, distress, and space imagery are even stronger and at times reminiscent of graphic novels. This combination of the everyday and space-based imagery brings together present day social situations and issues with

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27 ibid.
mythology and metaphor. It lends a haunting, “looming” quality, where elements of science fiction are tied to and based in reality. In this way, Locks’ work subtly yet directly reflects Sun Ra’s own ability to employ myth and space as a means of addressing social, political, and racial issues.

Figure 4. “Street Scene: A New Dimension” (2010), Damon Locks.

Kapsalis echoes the above sentiments in her commissioned work. Her listening process as a musician and writer is inquisitive, without a preconceived notion of what to listen for. Her long-term relationship with the archive has affected her approach to its
materials. Both she and John Corbett listened to, organized, and took notes on the recordings for a decade before donating them to ESS. On *Noon Moons*, her collaborative piece with Locks, she states, “We both just listened and listened and took notes and were listening for things that caught our ears. It was a very intuitive and organic process. I did not have a guiding idea from the outset. I was listening both for ideas and for sections we might sample.” Creative research, for Kapsalis, involves the process of “letting the mind wander” in order to hear the many connections, links, and offshoots present within the archive. Sounds might leap out of the background, or her work may take on and draw from elements from the sounds heard more directly. For Kapsalis, as well as the other artists, there is a gradual focusing of the material, often with accompanying detailed notes.

Reminiscent of Locks and Kapsalis, Cauleen Smith’s own working process began with an intense period of listening. Smith states,

I listened to [the Sun Ra/El Saturn Collection] about ten hours a day every day for about six weeks. ...His ideas, sounds, procedures, and even sense of humor crept into every part of my life and even at times, my dreams. But for a long time, I had no idea how to tie together the disparate things that I found interesting.

Smith is searching in an open-ended way. She allows the material to seep into her present world, sometimes even unconsciously. This is reminiscent of both Shannon Jackson’s temporal compression in the archive, and Jane Bennett’s “vibrant matter.” The artist/remixer engages with the archive through listening, and the archive in turn actively

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28 Kapsalis, discussion.
29 Kapsalis, discussion.
30 Smith, discussion.
transforms the listener and her work. All of these experiences, then, can be thought of as a mixture of mishearing, close listening, and peripheral listening, where the Sun Ra recordings over time affect the listeners in both direct and indirect ways.

“Calcified Speculations” and Space as a Mythical Performative Place

The process of listening and becoming close to the archival material closely parallels conjectures of the artists’ relationships with Sun Ra, what Smith calls “calcified speculations” that bridge the temporal and performative gap between Ra and the artists.\textsuperscript{31} This may be thought of as each individual artist’s understanding of Sun Ra and his musical and philosophical outlook, as well as part of a more generalized creative archival process. Smith’s cogent remark harkens back to both Jackson and Weheliye: despite the seeming temporal fixity of the recordings, their listeners are nevertheless transforming them. Sun Ra’s own speculative fascination with the future and outer space links with his creation of a mythological place, and, among other things, offered him a process with which to reject or circumvent the racism he experienced during his lifetime. This speculative place looks both forward in time to outer space, and back in time to a mythological understanding of Africa, specifically Egypt. As such, these conjectures represent an inner logic, a response to the obliteration, through centuries of slavery, of Sun Ra’s ancestry and heritage. Recovering these past histories, Hall (1997) points out, becomes a necessary part of a “from below” representation of those on the margins of culture and power. Hall states,

\textsuperscript{31} ibid.
You could not discover, or try to discuss, the Black movements, civil rights movements, the movements of Black cultural politics in the modern world, without the notion of the rediscovery of where people came from, the return to some kind of roots, the speaking of a past which previously had no language.

(Hall 1997, 35)

This process for Sun Ra is one of survival, both as an individual and as part of a larger imaginary of blackness confronting an institutionalized racism. Where history has been eradicated, Ra feels comfortable generating his own histories—often deliberately fantastical and contradictory—that simultaneously reach back, sampling the past, and projecting into the future.

With this in mind, it becomes clear that speculation acts as a creative tool for an acknowledgement of Ra’s experiences by working with archival material that brings together past, present, and future through him. Speculation plays an important part in Afrofuturism as it relates to fiction and science fiction in particular (Yaszek 2006; Eshun 2003). Eshun links speculation directly to alienation and what he calls the “extraterrestrial turn,” in Afrofuturism, stating that,

Extraterrestriality thereby becomes a point of transvaluation through which this variation over time, understood as forcible mutation, can become a resource for speculation. It should be understood not so much as escapism, but rather as an identification with the potentiality of space and distance within the high-pressure zone of perpetual racial hostility. (Eshun 2003, 299)
For the commissioned artists, each is careful to allow an ambiguous space within these speculations to remain as the recordings are heard anew. In Smith’s case, she speculated about the many meanings within the recordings and why they were made, but decided in the end that she “did not feel there was any room or need...for an intervention or comment” from her.\(^{32}\) As much as possible, she retained a space for Sun Ra to speak for himself through the archival material, even through her own ideas and acts are simultaneously present.

Calcified speculations return the focus of the Sun Ra/El Saturn Collection to the movement and mobility between geographical and mythical place in both Sun Ra’s work and the commissioned artists’ reflections on it. That myth is a primary concern of Sun Ra is reinforced with his own words. In his 1974 film *Space is the Place*, black teenagers at a youth center ask Sun Ra, “Are you real?” Sun Ra responds by saying

> How do you know I’m real? I’m *not* real, I’m just like you. You don’t exist in this society. If you did, your people wouldn’t be seeking equal rights. You’re not real. If you were, you’d have some status among the nations of the world. So we’re both *myths*. I do not come to you as a reality, I come to you as the myth, because that’s what black people are, *myths*. I came from a dream that the black man dreamed long ago. I’m actually a present sent to you by your ancestors.\(^{33}\)

Later in the film, Ra continues this sentiment, stating, “Farewell, earthlings. You just want to speak of realities, not myths. Well, I am the myth talking to you, so it’s

\(^{32}\) ibid.

\(^{33}\) *Space is the Place*, [videorecording].
farewell."^34 By focusing on the metaphors of outer space and of his own mythology, Sun Ra draws attention to and seizes control of—among other issues—his alien-like status in the United States. John Szwed sees this for Sun Ra as being a way of “claiming the ‘outside’ as one’s own” (1998, 137). Szwed continues, stating that, “Space was also a metaphor which transvalues the dominant terms so that they become aberrant, a minority position, while the terms of the outside, the beyond, the margins, become the standard” (140). Sun Ra’s use of “myth” here points to two distinct meanings of the word. Ra is describing himself as a myth as a form of acknowledgement of the segregation that he grew up with during the Jim Crow era, as well as the racism and marginalization of black peoples around the world that still persists. In the United States, Ra simply didn’t exist because of his place in society, and therefore his detachment from it via his own myth brings this overlooked injustice to the fore. Ra also uses “myth” as a belief system, harkening back to his street-corner preaching, one in which his proclamations of being from outer space occupy an ambiguous place between truth and fiction, imagination and reality.

Flowing between these two places—the reality of the United States and mythological outer space—is the music. Music acts as both the carrier to the place and the place itself. Ra saw people as instruments, and their music—their vibrations—are what make up the entire cosmos. Ra states, “Yes, you’re music too. You’re all instruments. Everyone is supposed to be playing their part, in this vast arkestry of the cosmos.”^35 As such, Sun Ra used his music as the means of transportation for both

^34 Ibid.
^35 Ibid.
himself and his listeners to this mythological place, a place where time has stopped. Travelers to this place can define a new space to move freely in and, as Sun Ra states, “to live again as ourselves.” This performative mythological place reflects a complex set of social and historical contexts in which it is situated, including aspects of Du Bois’ “double consciousness,” Afrocentrism, Egyptology, and Afrofuturism (Eshun 2003; Lock 1999; Nelson 2002; Szwed 1998; Weheliye 2005). Between Earth and Saturn, race and society, reality and myth, untruth and truth, there is a gap, a space that Ra and his music reside in. This is arrived at and dwelled in through the performative act of experiencing the music, and can extend to the immersion of live artists performing the dead archive. This third space that bridges between worlds harkens back to Taylor’s gap between the archive and the repertoire, and cogently highlights what Stanyek and Piekut refer to as the “unhelpful and undervalued schism between presence and absence” (2010, 20). As destabilized as it may be, this gap also points to Ra’s ability to move in an unpredictable manner, to resist classification or be identified with a particular movement, and to not shy away from appropriating into his own language whatever best suited its contrary nature. Eshun sees this as a form of detachment—where Ra “listens to Earth from offworld,” and “gains the satellite’s perspective”—and as an opening up of a “space of the head” (1998, 159). Sun Ra transforms a sense of place from the Earth to outer space to the mind, and creates a movement away from the world while simultaneously disrupting and undermining any sense of the status quo or societal norms.

Several Sun Ra scholars (Eshun 1998; Kreiss 2012; Lock 1999; Sites 2012; Szwed 1998) have discussed space as a mythical place at length. Nevertheless, space as

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36 Ibid., 140.
place also provides an important opening for the ESS-commissioned artists to engage with the collection. Rather than a form of mimicry, the artists join in the same spirit of contradiction and exploration through their speculations on Sun Ra, and confront the above binaries, including between the archive and its living contexts.

In the collaborative work *Noon Moons*, Terri Kapsalis’s own “calcified speculations” involve her imagining what Sun Ra might be concerned with if alive today. This not only guides her methods of using the sonic material, but her ideas as well, including an interest in children, wordplay, and the 2008 global economic recession that was still new as the piece was being made. Kapsalis states that

> children were a big theme in [Sun Ra’s] work and it made sense to collaborate with children so Damon [Locks] and I pursued that. I started thinking about texting and what Ra might have thought about that and that led to the piece I wrote and read on texting. I thought about the economic downturn and what Ra might have thought about it, so I was focused on word play and permutations. The archive then became a cache of clues and suggestions and so on.

Visually, the eighteen-minute video unfolds with a brightly animated object that appears to be both moon and sun (or, perhaps an eclipsed sun) that is present throughout. During the length of the film it travels through Chicago city landscapes, into the sky and over mountains, and into outer space. The moon/sun journeys from local to global to mythical, paralleling Sun Ra’s own use of space as a mythological place. As it travels through outer space to other planets, it moves further and further away from the earth. Eventually, the moon/sun arrives at a planet—perhaps new, or perhaps the earth again—and descends
into grass, to the dirt beneath, and finally to a darkness further below, again reminiscent of outer space. It stays still in this place, in silence, as the film comes to an end.

Sonically, sampled excerpts join live instruments in *Noon Moons*, and the archive is brought to life. A male narrator begins the work with descriptions of the moon at the beginning and the sun at the end. Between passages sampled from Sun Ra’s lectures, children are heard spelling out words, such as “earth,” “freedom,” and “east.” Children also repeat a phrase from Sun Ra, chanting, “They say that history repeats itself.” Among these sounds, a female voice (Kapsalis’ own) states, “Auto correct has something to tell you,” and describes the process by which smart phones change words as they are entered into their keypads. In this way, entering the word “monopoly” into the phone yields the pattern “o, on, non, noon, moons,” as it is spelled out. The voice repeats this phrase several times, and it then becomes the basis for a melodic bass line, followed again by samples from the archive. The auto correct performs a mechanized, glitchy, and additive anagram-like processing of words. This process is translated into rhythmic and melodic patterns that in part sonically structure the larger work. In addition, permutations of acronyms from specific words are worked through. The letters “F-A” of the word “far,” become a fast-paced recitation of as many acronyms as possible, such as “field artillery” and “fallen angel.” These additive and acronym processes show that the recordings, ideas, and themes that Kapsalis chose function in several closely related ways. First, they point to the past and connect with speculations on Sun Ra. Second, they address present-day social issues such as race, poverty, politics, and economy, and allow for new recordings of contemporary musicians and children to co-exist with the archival
materials. And finally, the improvisatory nature of the word permutations allows for a playful generation of “clues and suggestions” of imagined new futures.

Figure 5. “Noon Moons” (2010).

*Noon Moons* exemplifies the archival connections between past and present, between Sun Ra and the artists adding their own voices. In this work as well as the other works presented here, the artists adopt both literal and figurative gestures, sounds, text, and visual imagery of Sun Ra that is present within the archive. They extend this language, making it their own, while simultaneously traveling along similar “grooves of
history.” The sound and imagery present in *Noon Moons* echoes in some ways the alien planet that Sun Ra inhabits in his film *Space is the Place*. However, several new voices also adapted and changed them by adding their own visions to the larger themes and ideas. Sun Ra states in *Space is the Place* that,

The music is different here; the vibrations are different. Not like planet earth. Planet earth sounds of guns, anger, frustration. There was no one to talk to on planet earth that would understand. We set up a colony of black people here. See what they could do on a planet all their own, without any white people there. They could drink in the beauty of this planet. It would affect their vibrations; for the better, of course. Another place in the universe, up under different starts. That would be where the Alter-destiny would come in. Equation-wise, the first thing to do is: consider time as officially ended. We work on the other side of time. We’ll bring them here either through isotope teleportation, transmolecularization, or better still: transport the whole planet here through music.37

There is a corresponding reverberation or archival trace of these ideas heard and seen in *Noon Moons*. The new work based on the archive both reminds us of Sun Ra’s legacy and yet also takes use to a new place, another planet in a connected solar system of references and ideas. Kapsalis and Locks are treading the same ground, the same grooves, but from a different time and with their own experiences, personalities, and voices speaking dialectically with the archive. This new planet, similar to the planet in *Space is the Place*, is a representation of a performative mythological space. It is the place where time has stopped, a place of freedom and song, of music and new vibration. Sun Ra

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37 *Space is the Place*, [videorecording].
himself says this again and again, suggesting to move at first black peoples of the Earth, and then the entire planet to this new world of “different vibrations” through music.

Conclusion

This chapter identifies the many ways in which a diverse group of artists use, reinterpret, and re-contextualize the Sun Ra/El Saturn Collection. They also contribute to the larger concern of focusing on many voices from below as opposed to a singular authoritative voice from above. Again, it must be emphasized that there is no one way to carry on or interpret the archival recordings. Instead, many voices act simultaneously, many small stories independently creating a nexus of living contexts and relationships that point back to the material.

Because all of the commissioned pieces (including my own) are also collaborative in nature, there is a general feeling as if each artist felt compelled to share this work with others in a communal spirit. Each commission, then, expands outward into larger and larger networks of voices adding to the ever-evolving interpretation of—or listening to—the archive. Further expanding this process is the artists’ playful and speculative engagement with the archive. Word play, homophones, and mislistening all play a part in the different routes each artist took in their engagement with the historical recordings, transforming them into embodied and emplaced performances and works. The result is many new voices, all moving along interrelated trajectories, and teeming with celebration, mistakes, anomalies, and contradictions. Finally, these voices act as many
forms of acknowledgement from below, of both Sun Ra and the many issues that his body of work represents.
Sound does not stay put, and the past does not, either. Instead, sound leaks and flows, it emerges and dissipates; it bounces, returns, and echoes fleetingly. What we are left with, if lucky, are the objects that sound fills, resonates in, and then departs from. As a result, sounds from the past are long gone and yet we strain our ears to hear, hoping to catch a moment of them, often to no avail. But there are clues. In February of 2014, I stand in the middle of a partially restored theater in Shawnee, Ohio, at one time called the “Indian,” then the “New Linda,” and now finally the “Tecumseh.”

The walls are stripped down to their latticework. The old, faded, and moth-eaten tapestry over the stage is still hanging, and the hall is mostly empty save a few seats and artifacts: old records, glass bottles, film fragments, a beat-up piano, a light box that says, “To-night/Basket-Ball/Dancing.”

As I listen, the theater is noticeably quiet. There is wind outside, an occasional car passes by, and creaking sounds descend from the third floor above me. In this place, I also strain to listen to the sounds that occurred here almost exactly eighty-nine years before, on February 28, 1925. The event, titled the “Preliminary Triangular Music Contest,” was essentially a battle-of-the-bands between two high school orchestras from Perry County: Junction City versus Shawnee (Dishon and Winnenberg 1998). I imagine the two orchestras sitting across from one another and beginning to tune their

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instruments. A jumble of violins, saxophones, piano, coronets, trombones, and drums clash in an Ivesian cacophony. The sounds move down the stairs and out into the cold, as the doors are opened and the audience files into the theater. I listen for laughter, gossiping, feet shuffling, polite clapping. According to the written program, there are violin, vocal, and piano solos, as well as numbers with the entire orchestras. After each school plays through eight selections, judges tally scores, and cheers and stomping are heard from the balcony as Shawnee wins, 5-3.

My grandfather, Mordecai Derwood Williams (1907-67), sits in the Shawnee orchestra, next to his brother Bill. They are both playing saxophone. 1925 is Mordecai’s senior year in high school, and performing in the orchestra is just one of many activities he is part of in Shawnee. In the same room as the music contest, perhaps even the night before, Mordecai leads the Shawnee basketball team as captain. The 1925 high school yearbook comments, “Mort is a popular Captt. and his team have had confidence in his headwork in the critical places. We are sorry to lose him this year.”39 Chairs moved aside and hoops installed, the Tecumseh Theater transforms to adapt to the event, and so does Mordecai. I imagine the scene to be raucous, the muffled sounds of feet running and squeaking along with the ball bouncing and crowd cheering, audible from the floors above and below the theater.

Research in the Little Cities Archive in Shawnee reveals more of Mordecai’s early history, largely unknown by my family today. In addition to being in the orchestra and captain of the basketball team, he was the vice president of both the Junior-Senior Literary Organization and the Junior-Senior Society, ran track, participated in the senior

39 Little Cities Archive, Shawnee, Ohio.
play, and was even the “Joke Editor” of the school’s “Blue and Gray” newsletter. Perhaps most importantly, these archival documents display Mordecai’s conspicuous talent as a visual artist. Throughout, his fellow students often praise and remark on his drawing ability. Mordecai designed the 1925 yearbook, and his hand-drawn text and elegant ink drawings are placed throughout. In this yearbook and one from the year before, I find several photographs of Mordecai, and all suggest that he is poised, serious, and full of ability and a desire to apply these skills he so clearly displays.

At the end of April of the same year and again in the Tecumseh Theater, Mordecai graduates in a class of 27. The graduation, more formal than the previous two events, has music that includes performances of sentimental and light-orchestral songs,
including Fritz Kreisler’s “Fair Rosmarin,” and Percy Granger’s “Country Gardens.” I do not know if Mordecai played with the orchestra or sat with his fellow graduates, although it seems reasonable to imagine that he may have enjoyed performing both roles at once. A program of the event shows music is woven between and through an “Invocation,” a “Salutatory,” an “Oration,” a “Class History,” a “Valedictory,” an “Address,” a “Presentation,” and a “Benediction.” In Dishon and Winnenberg’s book *Shawnee: Reflections Upon the First 125 Years*, this event in particular is mentioned, where the “new graduates went forth to make their mark on the world” (1998, 34). This sense of excitement was also applicable to the town of Shawnee at that time. Dishon and Winnenberg comment, “In 1925 the time was ripe for ‘something’ to happen... The town [Shawnee] seemed ready to burst onto the scene once again and become a ‘boom town.’ There was a certain energy about it, a low pot on the stove about to boil” (42).

These three events—musical contest, basketball game, and graduation—bring together a person and a place over a concentrated period of time. They are accessed through an archive, and their distinct sonic aspects are brought to the fore. As such, the narrative of my grandfather acts as an initial framework of the conceptual parameters used in the following two chapters focused on the “Little Cities of Black Diamonds” region. Senses of place are developed through archival research and ethnographic observation, and I situate myself in a physical space to listen to the past as it simultaneously reverberates in the present.

I continue to trace the Williams family back to their arrival in Shawnee on August 4, 1872, some 50 years earlier than Mordecai’s graduation. Mordecai’s grandparents,
John E. Williams and Jane Howell were immigrants from Wales, and they were part of a large migration of Welsh mining families to the region. John worked in the mines during the height of a coal boom in the 1870s (Tribe 1988; Lewis 2008, 65). At the time of their arrival the town of Shawnee was newly founded and dramatically expanding in population, seemingly overnight. As a result the town was even referred to as “The Magic City” (Dishon and Winnenberg 1998, 6).

Shawnee, located in rural southeastern Appalachian Ohio, is part of a network of coal mining towns now referred to as the “Little Cities of Black Diamonds.” The larger region is brought together with a common heritage of mining and mineral extraction (including timber, coal, oil, clay, and natural gas), energy production, cycles of environmental destruction and recovery, and the formation of early labor unions. Historian Ivan Tribe first coined the name “Little Cities of Black Diamonds” in his dissertation and subsequent 1988 book *Little Cities of Black Diamonds: Urban Development in the Hocking Coal Region*, with “black diamonds” referring to coal in particular. Today, the population of each of the “Little Cities” has declined, the historical architecture of their main streets is in various stages of disrepair and reclamation, and the remaining small businesses struggle to maintain economic viability. Shawnee’s cultural identity—as part of a larger Appalachian region—is “intensely localized” (Stewart 1996) even as globalization and transnationalism affect it. Shawnee and the “Little Cities” are steeped in a re-articulation of the “hidden histories” of their past while working to survive in the present (Hall 1997). The history of the region shows an unfolding story of booms and busts related to energy production from the mid-nineteenth century to the present.
In addition to the personal significance to my family, the experiences of my grandfather at the Tecumseh Theater are a small part of the much larger cluster of historical events of the region. They offer a singular insight into an awareness of the local of Shawnee, and in turn deepen the senses of place that I experience in the theater and in the town. Combined with additional narratives and experiences, this approach opens the local sounds of Shawnee and the “Little Cities” to become a network of both present interactions and traces of the past.

It is important to note that these experiences and interactions are understood subjectively, and as such are not fixed or stable. They are instead necessarily in flux. Bruno Latour argues that the “social” is not a “stabilized state of affairs” or a “type of thing either visible or to be postulated,” and is instead “a trail of associations between heterogeneous elements” (2005, 2-8). Furthermore, Kathleen Stewart states that the local of Appalachia in particular is “...a place that is at once diffused and intensely localized, incorporated into a national imaginary and left out, intensely tactile and ephemeral as the ghostly traces of forgotten things” (1996, 4). Pursuing these lines of thought, it is clear that to follow these traces without assuming a neatly defined set of objects is key. Rather, I pursue a jumble of connections and associations, primarily through listening. I observe senses of place, allowing the local to be always in a state of movement and transformation, akin to the physical nature of sound. A sonic understanding of Shawnee and beyond thus focuses on the sounds of the community that remains, and the sonic remnants of the community that once was there.
My goal in each of these chapters on the “Little Cities” is to listen intently and deeply. In doing so I use sound as a connecting force to highlight the agency of the archive with emplaced listening, critically exploring connections between people, place, work, and environment as they are revealed in archival documents, material objects, and through people living today. In linking senses of place with the sonic, I follow Feld, who asks, “What of place as heard and felt? Place as sounding or resounding?” (1996, 94). In response to these questions, my standing in the Tecumseh Theater of today and straining my ears to listen back through sound to my grandfather offers a larger historical insight and a way to connect personally with the issues that affect the region. I trace my grandfather as just one part of a constellation of histories, interactions, and sounds gleaned from a number of sources, from archival documents to conversations to my own physical presence in the theater.

The Little Cities Archive

Located within the Wayne National Forest, the “Little Cities of Black Diamonds” is comprised of over thirty-five towns. Along with its close neighbor New Straitsville, the town of Shawnee acts as a central point of the “Little Cities” for several reasons, including its architectural and historical significance as well as the organizations housed there. In addition to the Tecumseh Theater, Shawnee has a second opera house, and the buildings that line Main Street are of a distinct architectural style that includes second story balconies. Shawnee is home to the Sunday Creek Associates, a community organization that is also responsible for the reclamation of several buildings, most
notably the Tecumseh Theater. The Buckeye Trail Association is also headquartered in Shawnee, and the trail appropriately runs up to the association’s back door.

Shawnee is home to the Little Cities Archive, and it is there that I accidentally discovered my own family history in detail. The archive is located on West Main Street and serves as “the repository for all forms of information about the history of the Little Cities of Black Diamonds area which includes southern Perry, northern Athens, and eastern Hocking Counties of Ohio.” The archive is housed in a very small, two room building (you have to cross the street if you wish to go to the bathroom) with a painted orange exterior. It is informally organized and maintained through a string of small grants and much volunteer work. Nevertheless, it is inviting, and acts as a local place where townspeople and visitors from out of town alike meet. Nearly every day that I visit the archive, someone stops in to say hello. The walls have posters and artifacts hanging next to weathered photographs and paintings by local artists; there are old musical instruments placed alongside a mining breathing apparatus in the main room.

My experience with the Little Cities Archive began as a student in a graduate seminar on sound at Ohio University in 2010. Over the past four years, there have been many community projects and events that I have witnessed or been a part of. In 2011, a series of podcasts were created and shared with the public that acted as historical and architectural audio tours of Shawnee and the larger region. I helped to edit and record the initial podcasts, and this experience provided an immersive introduction to the region. Robert Sember from the sound art collective Ultra Red led a listening session in the

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Tecumseh Theater, in which participants contributed recordings of the region and offered descriptions of what they heard (see Chapter 4). There have been festivals, parades, celebrations, and volunteer days. On one volunteer day in particular, I joined several people who helped clean the interior of the Tecumseh Theater as well as put up shelves in the archive. These activities bring an awareness of the “Little Cities” to those outside of the immediate region. This influx of people offers a boost to the local economy, but may also carry the unintended consequence of making the local people feel as if they are on display, as part of an experiment or exhibit.

While working in the archive, I asked a local historian and member of the Sunday Creek Associates if there were any sound recordings located there. Rummaging through a back closet in his office, he produced a box of over forty cassette tapes, mostly recorded by him, that were made in the 1980s and 1990s. They were used to record oral histories and group sessions with local residents of the “Little Cities” in order to preserve generations of stories before they were lost. Over several months, I listened to and digitized all of the recordings, many of which had already begun to decay. Among their warble and hiss, the aging tapes provide a valuable sonic contribution to this dissertation. They also reveal much insight into the lives and narratives of those that have lived in these towns, heard in their own voices, and from their perspectives. During their recording, the local historian would bring together a group of people every few weeks to discuss their childhoods, work, and lives in the “Little Cities” over coffee. After the sessions, he would play the cassettes many times over as he drove in his car, and the repetition allowed the stories and people to permeate his knowledge of the region. Over
many years the history groups met to speak and listen with one another. This process, according to the historian, led to a greater understanding and perspective on the participant’s lives and on the region. Akin to the sound art collective Ultra Red’s protocols for listening, it also led to social change: listening to one another, and repeatedly returning to their collective stories altered them and ultimately changed their place. In discussing their pasts, they forged new ways to reinterpret it, actively reshaping their present and future in the “Little Cities.” The recordings, then, are not passive archival documents, but active tools of engagement with the region.

In conjunction with a number of contexts, it is clear that the sound recordings of the Little Cities Archive show that the archive itself can act as a catalyst for critical engagement, action, intervention, and change. As such, throughout each of the chapters in this dissertation, I use the archive as a starting point, a central node in a large network of places, people, ideas, and materials. Furthermore, the Little Cities Archive itself, as a space of engagement, becomes more than the documents contained within. For the community it acts as a focal point, a meeting place, an office, and somewhere to ask for directions or advice. It helps to form an identity of the “Little Cities,” one that is public and open to both residents and visitors. Because of its location on the historic main street of Shawnee, it is situated in the present time yet contains elements of the past in both its documents and its architecture.
A Brief Soundwalk in Shawnee

As part of the project of listening to the “Little Cities,” I complement archival research in Shawnee by moving outside the archive and exploring a host of local sounds that resonate throughout the town. I begin this process literally by exiting the Little Cities Archive, in order to take a brief soundwalk.41 I walk along the streets of Shawnee in order to gather a sense of the sounds and rhythms that come together to form a sonic impression of the town. Shawnee is unusually quiet, even in the middle of the day. Only a few cars periodically break this quiet as they drive past. A man sits in a window sill, having his lunch. Several buildings are uninhabited, and some are in disrepair or falling down. There is a restaurant, a bar, a community gift shop, and a furniture store that has operated continuously for several generations. The Wayne National Forest surrounds the town, giving the impression of a muffled isolation, even comfort.

I pass an antique shop, with artifacts from the region on display. Inside, I pick up an old photo album, and other than a few photos in the front, the album has no pictures. “They took the photos out,” says the shop owner. “But it’s a nice album, very rare.” The old photo corners are still in place, and the paper is discolored where the photos used to be. Next to or under each blank space, the captions remain: “Ron. Note his broken arm,” is neatly written under one such empty space. “Rex, the best dog,” is under another. In this photo album, there is a gap—or silence—between the written text and the missing images, and a further silence between past and present. A carefully created book of local

41 According to Hildegard Westerkamp (2007), a soundwalk is, “any excursion whose main purpose is listening to the environment.”
memories has been split apart, and in doing so any future contextual understanding of the images has been altered, severed into multiple narratives.

I return to the street, and a tornado siren unexpectedly blasts even though it is a sunny day. When I ask a local resident about it, he laughs and says that the siren communicates different things to the all-volunteer services of the village, including medical help, transportation for the elderly, police, and weather. The siren signals messages for the residents known only to them. My own bewilderment at the sound of the siren betrays that I (as a visitor) am not a local. The siren, acting like a secular version of a church bell, helps to sonically define and articulate Shawnee as a place. Its harsh, permeating sound both repels and attracts, and this push and pull also reflects the transitory space that the sound defines. Alain Courbin (1998) notes that bells not only define a space, but promote a sense of being closely tied to the local, and ultimately time and again “recharge” that space. The siren works in a similar manner: it moves out, disrupting the quiet town with a sound most often associated with warning and danger, yet it also draws people in to serve and ultimately strengthen the community.

As I return to the Little Cities Archive, I am reminded of other sounds that take place on Main Street in Shawnee. Several annual festivals take place throughout the year, marking the cyclical patterns of celebration and tradition. A gazebo in the center of town has hosted bands for decades, as well as offering a place for children and teenagers to meet, play, and even get into trouble. A regular series of music concerts are now held in the Tecumseh, refilling it with sounds it has not experienced in years. These sounds
and rhythms combine to build an aural portrayal of Shawnee, one that is filled with repetition, change, stasis, and movement through time.

**Family and Listening to Place**

Similar to sounds, people do not stay put either, and their interactions are neither fixed nor stable over time. Throughout the twentieth century and to today, Shawnee and the other “Little Cities” have experienced a lasting economic downturn. The immediate years after 1925 were a dramatic turning point, an antecedent of the Great Depression to come only a few years later (Tribe 1988; Dishon and Winnenberg 1998). As the boom of mining turned to bust, mining companies reduced pay, union disputes followed, mines closed, unemployment soared, and the coal industry moved out of the region for fields in Kentucky, Illinois, and West Virginia (Dishon and Winnenberg 44). As a result, after 1925 the Williams family—among others from Shawnee, and part of a larger trend in Appalachia—migrated north to a larger city. Moving to Columbus, Ohio, the Williams family weathered the economic depression as well as they could. Mordecai took on a number of jobs: factory work, desk jobs, and even moonlighting as a clothing designer. Strangely, as he raised his own family, Mordecai actively discouraged his children’s own artistic abilities, and those proud moments of achievement in high school were perhaps seen by him as folly, child’s play. The regional mining bust of the “Little Cities” followed by the Great Depression had a profound impact on my grandfather; one that, despite his talents, he could not have been fully prepared for.
The point in offering the above scenes is not a nostalgic or sentimental rendering of my family’s past. Rather, these small stories and the sounds associated with them join with others to offer a soundscape of the region, as heard from below. In her book *Belonging: A Culture of Place*, bell hooks warns against a purely nostalgic reading of family and place, yet is still compelled to “return again and again” to her childhood home of rural Kentucky. hooks states,

> Writing about the past often places one at risk for evoking a nostalgia that simply looks back with longing and idealizes. Locating a space of genuineness, of integrity as I recall the past and endeavor to connect it to the ideas and yearnings of the present has been crucial to my process. Using the past as raw material compelling me to think critically about my native place, about ecology and issues of sustainability, I return again and again to memories of family. (hooks 2008, 4-5)

This sense of wariness contributes to a critical revealing of place yet acknowledges our own subjectivity and helps to navigate between uncritical nostalgia and impersonal stereotype. As I move on to listen to other stories of labor, disaster, recovery, and protest in the “Little Cities,” these personal fragments are carried alongside, and together they begin to form a collage of sound, text, image, and living interaction, an archive of ideas and contexts that do no stay put, but are continually changing, emerging, and dispersing.

It was only after my first visit to Shawnee in 2010 that I began to piece together the links between the region and my family. All of my childhood trips to visit family were to Junction City in northern Perry County (the same town defeated in the musical
competition described above), which is the birthplace of my father and home to his side of the family. Despite both my mother and father having roots in the region, I was not fully aware of Shawnee’s history and how it intersected with my ancestors. Over the past four years, the archival and ethnographic research that I have pursued has not only critically deepened my understanding of the region but has acted as a catalyst of rediscovering the “hidden histories” present within my family. As I continued to meet and talk with people from the “Little Cities,” these connections slowly began to reveal themselves in small ways. After mentioning my name to a man walking by on Main Street in Shawnee, he said, “Oh, I knew your uncle Charlie. He got a lot of people jobs around here when there were none to be had.” Chance interactions like this one are a small but intense spark, a localized insight that points to larger associations that define both familial and broader connections to the region. Listened to and returned to “again and again,” these interactions form the basis for a critical articulation of the “Little Cities,” one understood as an assemblage of places, desires, opinions, and expressions.
Chapter 4: The Sounds of Labor and Disaster: Booms and Busts

As I arrive in the New Straitsville, Ohio parking lot, there are two large, hand-painted signs—"Robinson" and "CAVE"—at either side of stairs that curve and disappear into the forest. I begin to make a sound recording. Walking over a small bridge to reach the stairs, I see a marker designating the area as an official, state-recognized historical place. When I reach the top of the stairs a field opens up, and a wide but shallowly recessed cave sits at the back along the hillside. I walk over and stand at the mouth of Robinson’s Cave, which is at once absorbing and reflecting its surrounding environment. It is late winter, and the area is overwhelmed with the sounds of melting ice, dripping water, and crunching snow underfoot. The wind stirs fallen leaves and moves the canopy of trees overhead. In the distance and down below in the town, an old school bell is quietly heard, and cars drive through the briny slush and snow. The soundings of Robinson’s Cave are a reflection of its immediate and contemporary soundscape, but the past echoes here as well. Drawing from aural historians (Bruce R. Smith 1999; Mark Smith 2004; Thompson 2002), and invoking Ihde’s (1976) “auditory imagination,” my ears are straining to listen simultaneously to the contemporary soundscape and to additional historical layers of the sonic past, sounds that dissipated beyond audible range long ago. I am aurally, contrapuntally imagining the past while standing in the present, trying to cross the space and time that separate the two. This negative aural space refers more broadly to the Japanese term “ma,” which is used in
philosophy and the arts as an understanding of the in-between gaps or spaces in a work that are not formal, but imaginative (Pilgrim 1986, 225).

In this chapter, I explore the sounds of labor and of disaster in the “Little Cities.” Labor and disaster are so entwined as to be key definers of the region for the past two centuries. Again and again, bust follows boom, often as a direct result of negligence or danger in relationship to a human-made disaster. Both labor and disaster are tied together in this region through various forms of energy extraction from the land. The resulting soundscapes act as aural focal points, allowing several narratives and ideas to co-exist, often antagonistically. Inquiring into the sounds of labor, I focus on a range of modalities of those working in the region, including historical labor as heard from the archive, independent petroleum workers, the larger industrial complex of today, and the work of artists as they critically engage with the region. Likewise, listening to the sounds of disaster in the “Little Cities” yields a rich yet disturbing soundscape of historical explosions and fires in Millfield, New Straitsville, and beyond, as well as environmental destruction throughout the region that brings us back to the present moment.

Standing in Robinson’s Cave, I continue to listen to the past while remaining in the present, listening for sounds that can only be imagined through aural speculation. Before European settlement, this region had a diverse Native American history. The Adena and Hopewell peoples and the Shawnee, Moxahala, Wyandot, and Delaware tribes, among others, occupied and hunted in the hills and forest lands here for many centuries, including those in the immediate vicinity of the cave (Bashaw et al. 2007, 10-12). After European settlement and the many forms of mineral extraction that came and
grew with it over the nineteenth century, Robinson’s Cave became a location where coal miners meet secretly to unionize. Local historians speak of the miners walking quietly up to the cave at night, leaving their mining lamps on to see in the dark, and assembling in the grassy field just in front of the cave. On the marker outside the entrance, historian Mary Ann Reeves states that the cave, “offered a secluded location with great acoustics where large groups of Hocking Valley coal miners could meet in secret.” Because of the shape of the cave, meetings could take place there quietly yet clearly, out of sight and without fear of being overheard. Whispers reverberated in the cave, and remained there. These meetings between different factions and groups must have been impassioned, yet

they ultimately played a key part in forming the United Mine Workers of America in 1890.

Robinson’s Cave served as a more contentious and problematic site, too. In 1884, the cave was again a secret meeting place. However, this time a group of people met conspiring to set nearby mines on fire “in a desperate attempt to end the Hocking Valley Strike.” The underground fire that resulted remains active to this day, over 125 years later. These historical events, combined with the fact that the cave was used explicitly for its acoustic characteristics, lend a particular aural insight into the cultural identity of the larger “Little Cities” region. Sound, place, and traces of history are bound together as people, environment, and economy all continue to change and unfold.

I understand the above description of this particular place as an energy soundscape, where sounds heard today meet the historical and social fields of the region (Thompson 2002). In this case, they are grounded in energy extraction and production. Along with the Tecumseh Theater and the Little Cities Archive in Shawnee, it is clear that Robinson’s Cave illustrates an “intensely localized” place where the central themes of my study of the region—labor, disaster, recovery, and protest—are all present. Throughout this dissertation, I continue to return to Robinson’s Cave along with other particular sites in the “Little Cities” many times, observing subtle transformations in its sonic environment. I also apply the evolving changes in my own knowledge to this listening process as my understanding of the region deepens.

Ways of listening that do not directly involve sound—that is, listening to sounds that cannot be heard—is a key component of chapters two and three. Lefebvre’s

43 ibid.
“rhythmanalysis” provides an especially apt tool for discerning unheard sounds in the form of rhythms. Lefebvre states, “Everywhere there is interaction between a place, a time, and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm” (2004, 15). This “rhythm” is a key way of accessing a deepening understanding of the interaction with the past, fused with the “simultaneity of the present” (15). The “expenditure of energy” of the “Little Cities” region is not only tied with mineral extraction, but resides in historical and biological life-cycles, photographs, social upheaval, conversations and oral histories, as well as in the archive and day-to-day interactions with local communities. I continue to listen and seek out rhythms in these objects and processes that are unfolding, even if they do not necessarily have an overtly sonic component. I understand this methodology as a way to critically expand sound and its relationship to place beyond a descriptive taxonomy of sounds alone.

**Energy Soundscapes of Labor**

The sounds on the mines around Mayengema are scratchy, percussive sounds. Sounds of scraping, shaking, and digging. These are sounds of destruction. Over them float the voices of miners and bosses. Male voices, sometimes singing, but more often bantering, arguing, or cursing. The diamonds they search for make no sounds that distinguish them from the gravel, mud, and water of the mine.

(Hoffman 2012)

Thus begins Daniel Hoffman’s (2012) “Corpus: Mining the Border,” a photographic essay that ethnographically explores diamond mining near the border between Sierra
Leone and Liberia. The fact that Hoffman chose an aural description to evoke mining points to the overwhelming sensory experience of sound in the labor of mining. The contrast between the harshness of voices of authority and the silence of the minerals that are sought for frame an aural space of conflict and exhaustion in which the miners exist. These sounds may take place across the world and at a different time and context from early coal mining in the “Little Cities,” but they vividly convey the dangerous and dehumanizing effects that are often associated with mining more broadly. As such, the aural image above resonates with the harsh working conditions miners faced in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Yet the historic soundscapes of the “Little Cities” region also include sounds above ground that are reverberations stemming directly from the economic and social forces of mining below.

*Historic Soundscapes of the “Little Cities”*

There are numerous sonic instances in the “Little Cities” that are either directly referenced or can be inferred pertaining to the early history of extraction labor. These can be gleaned from written and pictorial accounts that complement the scarcity of available audio recordings. As a result, historical labor soundscapes are listened to through text, images, and recordings of the region as the mining towns came into existence, and the materials are often drawn from the Little Cities Archives.
The sounds of explosions are an early “soundmark” (Schafer 1994) in the region related to coal mining.44 An 1836 account of coal mining in Pomeroy, Meigs County, states that,

In mining the coal, gunpowder is extensively used; a small charge, throwing out large masses of the coal, which are readily broken into portable fragments, and taken to the mouth of the mine in a hand cart, where a railroad conveys a loaded car to the river, dragging up an empty one at the same time. Large boats, lying at the shore, receive the coal from the cars, and convey it to the markets below.

(Eavenson 1942, 268)

The explosives are used as a tool for procuring coal in the region, but in doing so they also indicate an arrival of a culture of extraction by means of destruction, as well as a shift in scale. They sound the expanded industrialization of coal, and the increased development to come throughout the nineteenth century. Also inferred from this account are several means of transportation—including cart, canal, railroad, and boats—each with its own distinct sonic signature. The different forms of transportation indicate a region in flux and with increased activity; it is quickly changing and adopting new forms of movement and growth.

Ivan Tribe’s detailed narrative of the origins of labor in the region indicates a direct relationship between the development of railroads and the development of towns in the “Little Cities” (Tribe 1988, 35; Eavenson 1942, 273). The sounds of a train finally reaching its newly finished terminus in New Straitsville signaled the beginnings of a new

44 R. Murray Schafer’s (1994, 274) definition of “soundmark” is as follows: “The term is derived from landmark to refer to a community sound which is unique or possesses qualities which make it specially regarded or noticed by the people in that community.”
city there. It also signaled a regional shift away from presumably quieter, slower canal traffic, thus solidifying a sharp rise in decibels alongside greater production in an extraction-based economy. Early accounts saw this change as a positive component of the larger benefits of industrialization. Tribe states,

> Although in the years to come, the Hocking Valley would see the unpleasant side of the coal industry as well as the brighter, the editor of the *Hocking County Sentinel* best stated the optimistic tone of 1870 when he said, “our valley smiles as it never did before, and laughs all over, when the cars come murmuring through cut and curve with their long line of heavy loads of black diamonds. Give us the Hocking Valley yet.” (Tribe 1988, 26)

This overtly cheerful early description of train cars “murmuring” through the “laughing” Hocking Valley foreshadows equally descriptive but perhaps inaccurate accounts of today’s energy industry through promotional videos. Similarly, this optimism can be heard in the many fervent speeches given throughout the region in the nineteenth century to promote mineral extraction. These speeches provided an often enthusiastic but flawed representation of the potential of the region, in order to attract and secure investors to develop and build its industrial infrastructure (Tribe 1988, 71). They also provide a sharp contrast to later testimonies of miners. When speaking about the mines in the town of San Toy in the twentieth century, miner Johnny Gaitten remarks that they were “as close as you could get to hell on earth.”

> Voices of cheery promotion are held and heard together with testimonies of harsh working conditions, and a complex soundscape begins to emerge.

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As the towns continued to mature in the “Little Cities,” a sonic imprint arose and changed accordingly. The activity of New Straitsville as a boom town can be heard in a letter from an inhabitant referred to as, “J.A.W.” stating,

The buzz of the saw, the noise of the hammer, and the shrill whistle of the locomotive still prevail. Several houses are going up rapidly in both the old and new town. Taking both towns into consideration we have about five hundred inhabitants and [are] rapidly increasing. (Tribe 1988, 36)

The quick succession in which many of the towns were built created an equally dynamic set of rhythms that contrasted those of the rural environment in which they were situated. Through the attraction of money and coal, these rhythms build in volume and frequency. At this time, other biological, environmental, and social rhythms were unfolding, too. The forest disappears, and oil derricks rise up to take the place of trees. More and more people arrive, and social and labor spaces are created and expanded to incorporate them.

The sounds of social conflict complement the sounds of a rapidly swelling town, including that of violence and fights stemming from the workforce. Tribe states,

Acts of violence characterized the early social life of New Straitsville. ...By April 1871, the New Straitsville correspondent announced that with so many fights occurring daily, he would mention only the principle ones. Such included the outstanding violent episode of the preceding week at Mrs. Stapleton’s saloon where two men named Allwine and Sherrard started a row which culminated in the beating of Mrs. Stapleton and breaking of glasses and bottles. (Tribe 1988, 36-7)
Yet another example involves an account of the violence that occurred over a rent dispute:

When Hess returned, he got drunk in a neighboring saloon and seeking revenge, “made an assault on the building,” breaking in the door with a keg of beer. He then took a chair and broke all the glass, did as much damage as possible and left town. (Tribe 1988, 39)

Fist fights, glass shattering, and guns firing go along with the chaotic and violent sounds associated with the stereotypical mining activities of “drinking, cock-fighting, dog-fighting, and poker playing” (58). These patterns are echoed today, especially in the hydraulic fracturing industry more broadly, including a rapid increase in such forms of violence as domestic violence, assault, and sexual violence against women. Thus, during the course of the “Little Cities”’ history a larger social rhythm emerges in relationship to labor: development, rapid expansion, then violence, and followed by an influx of churches and temperance movements (37). However, each of these rhythms is not only performed linearly, but also concurrently, over time. There is a salesmanship concerning the “tranquility” of the towns, but this exists alongside the fighting and violence that were commonplace. The result is a disparity between a projected image of the towns and what actually happened, along with its accompanying soundscapes.

Photographs and audio recordings related to labor from the Little Cities Archive also offer sonic inferences. Photos speak aurally, and one can hear through these

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“auditory artifacts” (Toop 2010) the sounds of industry, machinery, trains, and horses; the intense heat of brick kilns; cattle wandering through the town streets; and, of course, mining. An early photograph simply called “Miner” shows a man guiding a horse-drawn cart out of the mines, and highlights the use of animals and the sounds associated with them. The miner has muddy feet and clothes, pointing to the dampened acoustic space of the mine and the difficulty of moving through it. A photo entitled “Women Miners” poses a crew of men and women together, a rare sight in a field in which men were dominant. Faces sooty and carrying lunch pails, the women’s expressions appear to be proud, stern, smiling, and determined. A later photo, “Miners at Meigs,” depicts a group of men—perhaps from the 1960s—crouched below the heavily scraped roof of the mine, providing an aural scar of the mining machinery used to cut a path through the ground. Likewise, photos of the “Congo Mine Belt” show large chunks of coal crashing down from a conveyor belt and into the back of a rail car. Running continuously, the large, industrial, and noisy machinery was used to move and sort the coal, and its sounds became a permanent fixture in the mines.

Photos from the early oil and gas industry also reveal a distinct soundscape, one above ground as opposed to the underworld of coal. “In the Hills of S[hawnee]” shows a single oil well nestled in a valley, with a tipple in the distance. Surrounded by trees and nothing else, this well in operation would provide an aural rupture to a soundscape that otherwise would be lacking in human-made sounds. The image of oil spurting forth from an early well offers a similar puncture into the rural sonic environment. The early twentieth century photo “Oil Well Supply” shows a group of men standing in front of a

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47 The following images are all located in the Little Cities Archive, Shawnee, Ohio.
supply store, some in suits and others in coveralls, with a desk clerk seen working inside the building. The storefront, located on the main street of a “Little City,” becomes a place of class tension, where commerce, management, and mining labor converge. Miners must come here to interact, and to purchase explosives and other equipment. Perhaps the most striking image from the archives related to oil can be found in both black and white and in a tinted postcard form, and depicts a landscape of the New Straitsville oil fields from a hilly vantage point. Conspicuously absent are trees, which had already been removed over the course of the nineteenth century. Dozens of derricks can been seen fading into the background. Here, the aural essence of the photo is one of machines and engines echoing through the valley without any forest to absorb their sound. Notably, the fact that this image is also a postcard indicates a novelty and pride in this particular landscape, one of progress, domination over nature, and wealth.

Sound recordings from the Little Cities Archive, although few in number, expand a sonic understanding of the region. Oral histories and recorded interviews not only provide depictions of the experiences of those that lived there, but additional information is revealed such as vocal inflection and social interaction. In an interview with Jack Summers, he describes the childhood experience of watching miners coming home from work, stating, “Lights bobbin’, going down the road where the mine was. Lights on their hats. And then in the evening, of course, you could see ‘em coming.”

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48 The following sound recordings are all located in the Little Cities Archive, Shawnee, Ohio.
Listening to the recording of Summers, I imagine the miners traveling together, their feet polyrhythmically shuffling across dirt, gravel, and brick, with conversation and banter punctuating the rhythms. Another recording of a woman named Lucy, a local musician and teacher, shows how music and labor often came together. She recalls, “When the mines were working down at Millfield, they had safety meetings and everything. I know at different times they had a movie house down there, and we had big shows at the movie house.” Lucy provided musical entertainment during safety meetings, presumably used to offer an incentive for the miners to attend.

“Could I tell you a little story about that?” asks Joshua “Judd” Matheney on one of the sound recordings in the Little Cities Archive. The recording was made in 1988, and
on it Matheney spoke of his family and childhood, and of becoming a state mine inspector. The sound and grain of his voice reveals his age and regional accent as he recounts his life. Matheney describes working in the mines, and a typical day of loading coal in the first half of the twentieth century. The sounds of controlled explosions, what he refers to as “shooting down a hole,” were frequently heard. Matheney also spoke of his experiences as an inspector, and of getting along with men and women working in small family mining operations; mines often located on their own private property. “I didn’t crowd the law on them too bad,” states Matheney. When asked what he looked out for during an inspection, he responds, “unsafe conditions...ventilation... clearance along the hallways...unguarded machinery... anything that a man could get parts of his body into.” Of particular interest, Matheney refers to a process of sounding the roof of a mine with a pick to check for safety. He states,

I went in a little mine up Pittsburgh Holler one day, couple of men working by themselves. And, I looked up at the roof and there was just like a circle around it. And I said, “Fellas, what do you got up there?” And they said, “Ohhh, they call ‘em ‘pots,’ but it’s alright.” And I said, “Let me have your pick a moment.” And, uh, I sounded it with a pick, a customary way of checking the roof. And it sounded a little drummy, and I said, “Fellas I believe that’s dangerous.” “Ahh, no, don’t think so.” “Let me have your bar for a moment.” One of ‘em handed me a pinch bar, and I pinched a little bit, and finally got a pretty solid hole. I chipped in, gave a good pry on it, and there was big circle of slate, at least six foot across, and there was this cone shape... It would’ve mashed those two men easily, if
they’d... Of course all men didn’t escape them kind of conditions, many men got tangled up with them and lost their lives.

The “drummy” quality of the roof indicated—to Matheney’s trained ear—an unsafe mine. Schwartz (2010) refers to this process of “sounding” the roof of mines by tapping it as “jowling,” a term used in the UK and dating back to early coal mining there.

Matheney’s ability to listen to the mines as well as listening to those operating them served as a means of not only maintaining mine safety, but also building a rapport with miners in the region over his lifetime.

Contrasts Between Small- and Large-Scale Energy Labor

As I continue to listen to both archival materials and people working in the energy industry today in the “Little Cities,” one of the key themes that has emerged is a growing transformation and disparity between small, independently operated companies in the extraction industry and large-scale multinational entities. Small, single-family operations in gas, oil, and coal in particular offer a stark contrast to the large corporations that are buying up what land and mineral rights that remain today.\(^49\) This is largely a matter of scale: “mom and pop” businesses are often limited to a small number of wells, and because they live on and are invested in the land on which they work, they are bound to place in a very different way from their corporate counterparts. With gas and oil wells in particular, it is not possible for these small outfits to pursue today’s version of hydraulic

\(^49\) Chesapeake Energy Corp., for example, “has spent about $2 billion to lease the mineral rights to more than a million acres—about 5% of Ohio’s land mass—in a bet that Ohio’s Utica Shale fields will become a major oil producer.” See “Chesapeake Irks Landowners as it Renegotiates Leases,” (The Wall Street Journal, July 15, 2012).
fracturing, or “fracking,” as the large political, economic, industrial, and mechanical apparatus that is required is far beyond their means. As a result, smaller operations face both technological and monetary obsolescence, and disappear in a similar manner as small-scale agriculture.  

Clearly the operations of independent workers are not without drawbacks, such as avoidance of regulation and oversight, and corruption. A woman from Shawnee tells me about the majority of workers in the area being “honest” and following regulations, but that there were always those that couldn’t afford (“or, more likely, are too cheap”) to pay to have the waste water properly disposed of. She talked of drillers who stuffed trees down old wells in order to plug them, rather than using the more expensive regulated materials. She also acknowledged that fracking was not a “mom and pop” business, stating, “It is too expensive and the equipment is cost-prohibitive for small gas companies to get into it.” For her, these advantages and disadvantages were more of a practical matter rather than an ideological one; it was simply an acknowledgement of a changing industry landscape. A similar vein runs through an earlier generation: Judd Matheney’s oral history states that during his tenure as a mine inspector it wasn’t compulsory to seal off abandoned mine shafts. Consequently, he recalls that one Caananville mine was stuffed with objects such as electric lamps and batteries. The following two examples, then, offer a few select voices related to small-scale petroleum production, and I listen to quieter sides of the industry through a “from below” perspective. The accounts are

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50 According to the U.S. Farm Census, “the U.S. lost nearly 100,000 farms in the past five years as smaller farms were developed or added to larger farms,” accessed June 16, 2014. http://growingohio.com/features/2014/02/farm-census-shows-fewer-farms-higher-revenue/.
detailed but finite aural snapshots, and threaded throughout are both sonic references as well as the conversations that arise from sonic inquiry.

“Reading the Dirt”: Drilling an Independent Oil Well

On a cold December day, I join an independent driller along with two young men as they drill a gas and oil well. I first arrive at the driller’s house in the morning. As I am welcomed in, the house feels nearly as cold inside as it is outside. The house is heated with two wood burning stoves, and they are cool this early in the morning. Later, I am told that electrical appliances in the house for things such as cooking are used only every other day, to keep bills low. Despite it being cold, the house is lively, with family and friends coming and going. There is a steady stream of people stopping by to say hello before heading off to work. Breakfast is being made, and several pots of coffee are consumed while there.

By 11:30, we are on the road to the site, and I begin to make a field recording. Just south of Crooksville, the well is on private property and the driller quickly and effortlessly navigates the extremely muddy roads, roads that I would have been stuck in immediately. After we get out of the truck, I notice there are thousands of fragments of green ware ceramics all over the ground. He informs me that they come from Roseville, known for its pottery, and that the unwanted scraps are used to help provide traction for the vehicles. Discarded remnants of clay extraction now find their way back into the ground, serving a second purpose before disappearing back into the mud.
The drilling site is in a small clearing in the woods, and the drilling rig sits in the middle: a 1956 model that is attached to a beat-up truck from the same year. The truck’s windows are broken out, and it has been vandalized. The entire rig, truck and all, is moved from site to site with a bulldozer. The rig’s appearance looks as if it couldn’t possibly work. There is a small shanty built to one side, complete with an old leather couch and a natural gas-powered barrel with a fire in it. The driller tells me that natural gas powers the rig, taken from gas stored in a close by field. This gas was siphoned off during the initial drilling process and now it is powering the deeper drilling “for free.”

Preparations take about an hour. The driller has been working in this particular site since the summer. Because he doesn’t get paid until the well is complete, he has been working for months without pay. It has been an especially frustrating well, I am told, because they have continued to hit rough rocks and deposits, slowing down the entire process. Still optimistic, he says they will soon be drilling more productively. On a good day, they will get thirty to forty feet, but only ten today, if they are lucky.

The two young men that are with us help prepare the well. It is uncertain if and how they will be paid, but it is clear they are willing to work to help support the older driller. They noisily chain and ratchet up the drill bit so that he can weld (“Jerry-rig,” says one of the men, laughing) pieces of metal onto it to make it the correct circumference. The hissing sound of the welding cuts across the woods. It is done quickly and efficiently, and no one seems to mind the muddy ground. With a long hiss, the air is let out of the line and the motor to the rig starts. The rig is big, noisy, and fascinating. Gears, wheels, squeaks, and cables all conspire to create lurching rhythmic patterns,
reminiscent of industrial music. It deceptively doesn’t look or sound like it should work, but it is not very long before it is running and ready to go.

“You want to get a badass sound, man? Check this out,” says one of the men.

Two buckets are filled with limestone, and are slowly thrown down into the well. When I ask what this does, the driller tells me that it “fills the hole back up, about six feet. Helps the drill go straighter.” As the rocks descend hundreds of feet, they bounce off the walls of the well and we hear them hit the bottom. “Sounds like a gun ricochet,” says one of the young men. “Yeah, it does. Or it’s like water,” says the other. To me, they sound like fireworks, and the sound measures the distance traveled into the earth, sending sound waves and echoes down and back up to the surface in a matter of seconds.

The drilling begins. The driller tells me that if something goes wrong that I should run away from the side of the rig, in case the tower falls or there is an explosion. Behind the instruments, he looks like a conductor of a musical ensemble: his movements are in rhythm with the motor and his many years of experience make his adjustments to the archaic machinery graceful. The drill bit does not rotate; instead, it pounds. The pounding is both heard and felt, and from this point on, shouting to one another is our only form of communication. The driller pulls the drill up and down, helping the engine do its work. There are several levers that he is simultaneously operating, allowing him to add an inch of cable at a time to its length, thereby increasing the depth of the drill. In this dangerous and unstable environment, I am reminded that he is working by feel and by sound. The rhythmic regularity of the pounding sonically connotes his years of experience, and his control over the machinery. The intense pounding tells him what kind of rock he is
drilling through and at what speed. After some time, the drilling stops, chains continuously rattle as they are drawn up, and a sample of the pounded material is inspected: the driller is “reading the dirt.” Each sample is laid out on long board that ends up looking like a painter’s palette, and he is able to differentiate between them according to their colors and textures. As soon as it was put on the board, he ran his fingers through the dirt and knew right away what he was dealing with, a hard rock tough to pound through. “You can hear that rig running, can’t ya?” he yells to me as the drill again settles in to a steady rhythm. “You get what you thought you’d get?” Later that day, I leave the drilling site as the men continue their work. I walk back through the mud to my car, and the intense and overwhelming sounds of the drilling fade into the distance, yet are still pounding in my ears and stomach.

Listening to this energy soundscape allows an insight to the process of extraction, and the ability to listen to the driller, his co-workers, and his family. It is a form of both direct and peripheral listening, where the sounds made and heard point to the process of drilling as well as the human interactions that occur around that experience. The focused sounds of drilling, in conjunction with straining to listen to interactions around it, act in counterpoint with one another. During the process of listening to the rig and to the driller, I begin to have a sense of a few of the many voices in the region. I listen to their particularities, their skills, and how they view others. He is quiet, and offers very few words. It is only through watching and listening to him in his home and work environment that a larger picture is revealed. He wants to work but his age and health limit him physically, having recently had a stroke. He is also limited financially, and his
resourcefulness and reuse of older materials can not compete with the much larger corporations moving into the region to dig deeper hydraulic fracturing wells. Still, he is focused on what he can do within limited means, and his goal is to keep working, to make enough money for Christmas, for bills, and for heating the house. He is well aware of his own mortality, and his diminishing role in the extraction of energy from the earth. His only income is directly tied to a form of oil and gas production disappearing from the industry. But the immediate concern for him is to complete the well. If the well flows, then he and his family will have money. Six months later, when I check in again with him, he tells me that in the end he was never able to complete the well, forced to give up and leave the property.

_Harnetty Oil and Gas_

Contrasting with the previous example—but still part of independent energy labor in the region—is a visit my father and I make to my 86-year old uncle John, the sole employee of the “Harnetty Oil and Gas Company,” located in Junction City, Ohio. Like many other towns in the region, Junction City is home to several industries related to extraction, including clay, oil, and gas. It is located in the central region of Perry County, between the more agricultural northern and the coal-rich but agriculturally poor southern parts. As we drive south through the county, this divide is apparent in the terrain. The northern part of the county has rolling hills with many neatly maintained mid-sized farms. Further south, the topography becomes increasingly hilly, the farms disappear, and the Wayne National Forest becomes more prominent.
We meet John at the Top Hat, the local restaurant where John eats every day of the year (except for Christmas). Amid the din of lunchtime conversations, I ask John when he got started with drilling and maintaining wells. “We really didn’t get on our own until about 1970,” he replies. His first well was in the side yard, by the house. Gradually, John (along with another brother, now deceased) continued to invest in wells throughout the county. Their involvement in oil and gas was relatively small and limited, yet lucrative over time. At the most, the two brothers had an interest in eleven wells simultaneously, but now John is down to three. Daily, he still drives to each well to maintain them and make sure they are running properly. Last winter, he injured himself falling off of a gas storage tank while clearing off snow from on top. Asked where the gas goes after extraction, John states that there are three different pipelines located close to the wells. “There’s a 12-inch line, goes between Zanesville, Lancaster, down [to] Sugar Grove [for] storage. [There, they] pump it back down in the ground.” Eventually they are trucked, moved on trains, or end up at the Ohio River to be shipped elsewhere. The pipelines are part of a hidden infrastructure, moving the petroleum products efficiently but also subject to leaks and spills.51

As we are speaking, a group of men from another welling family come into the restaurant for lunch, and John politely says hello to them. Then he quietly says to us, “Well, we can talk about something else,” indicating that we need to stop talking about the business. We return to John’s house after lunch. The home is orderly and well maintained both outside and in, and to my memory, has looked just about the same for

many decades. There are religious books, magazines, and a T.V. Guide lying about. We continue our discussion, which digresses from sand, to glass, fracking, coal, and clay. These seemingly unrelated resources are brought together through their association with the region. They all connected through extraction industries, and patterns can be discerned between them as they affect one another. We talk of the connection between clay and coal, and John explains that a lot of clay was found during the process of mining coal out. However, the clay industry (that many members of my family took part in) disappeared over the course of the twentieth century, due to the rise of plastics and globalization. John also shows us some “sand,” which to me appears to be more like large, tough, rocks. This sand is an underground layer that is tough to drill through. “Harder than hell,” says John. “Fracking broke it up. That’s what they frack.” In order to bust through this sand, the drillers must use a different type of sand, related to silica sand used for glass production. “They run out of the good stuff for glass at Anchor Hocking [a local glass manufacturing plant located in nearby Lancaster]. Now they ship it in from somewhere,” says John. “It’s like everything else. After so long they generally run out of it.” Materials are taken from the ground until either they disappear or the industry crashes. The rhythms and exchanges in resources and industries are continually pushed around with winners and losers, and begin to feel like a game of “rock, paper, scissors”: Coal mining uncovers clay, plastics replace clay tiles and put their plants out of business, and the fracking boom depletes the same materials that are used for glass.

I turn to fracking, asking John what his thoughts are on it and if he is currently involved with it. “We just drill straight down and that’s it,” John responds. In the past,
they used older, cruder forms of fracturing the sand and shale, but without moving horizontally. John states, “When they first started to frack they used everything. They used walnut shells. Then they got to using the frack sands.” John continues:

Used to be they used nitroglycerin. They put a charge off and drop it. Supposed to go off at the bottom or before; they had a timer on it. But they didn’t always get it right. And, lot a times the guy driving the truck, he might have been drunk, cause that was a little bit of a dangerous job.

When I ask John if he owns a part of a frack-waste injection well located just outside of town, he tells me, “I don’t want anything to do with that well. They should know that whatever they put down there is going to come back up.”

As we talk about John’s relatively small operations, I am again reminded about scale and its effect on the local circulation of resources, money, and even stewardship and friendship. When I ask, “Do you draw your own gas from one of your wells to heat your house?” John responds, “Well, yeah. We got our own gas. The one [well] down near the building, there’s about seven or eight places use gas off of it. That’s on us, on my place.”

In essence, John makes sure that a significant number of his neighbors are supplied with gas free of charge; they are brought together, as an indication of friendship, through energy extraction. Without a day-to-day interaction with members of a small rural community, this is a gesture that a large gas company does not even need to entertain.

On the wells, the meter that continually counts the cubic feet of gas or oil being extracted can itself become a sonic indicator of its success or failure. John tells of going through three meters in quick succession on one particular well. He proudly states, “That
first one didn’t last a year. Wore it out. Didn’t get a big enough meter.” As he would approach the well site, the meter’s sound was the first indicator as to its production. John comments, “It made seven revolutions...and you could hear it spinning before you got to it, about 500 feet away. It was making over a million cubic foot at that time.” The flow and circulation of gas moves quickly enough to be heard and even break meters. This pressure in the ground that pushes the gas and oil out is made audible, and those working on the well listen to it. It also reveals the mass of energy and even money stored within an otherwise silent gas.

John also tells us of hired geologists creating seismographs to survey the rock formations underground, albeit on a much smaller scale from larger fracking operations. He describes their process, stating, “They put charges on the ground. Only goes down about two foot. All they’re doing is recording the vibrations they’re getting back, but they’re putting in dynamite.” The geologist measures seismic waves as they travel underground and bounce back to the surface, much in the same way as the ear hears acoustic waves.⁵² John takes out a seismic chart of a well and shows it to us. It consists of a series of horizontal waves going down several hundred feet. It looks something akin to an electronic music score or recording software. “That gives you a different picture, doesn’t it?” says John. “You wouldn’t know what you [were] looking at.” Pointing to a highlighted set of seismic waves on the chart, John says, “Now here’s the spot. But the funny part is, we hit gas, must have been up here. 150-some foot from here, we got a

[gas] well before we got to the oil. Now this has got 240-50 some pounds on it, and we’re getting the oil on it, too.”

I ask about honesty and corruption in the petroleum industry. “Well I’ll tell ya, we’re probably the only honest ones in the oil business,” responds John. “Oil people, you got to know how to read ‘em. And they are full of crooks. Big ones, little ones.” Because there are often several investors on a single well, a tenuous relationship is formed between the different parties. Landowners, lease holders, the gas company, and other investors all get involved in the process, especially if it is a successful well. Often, investors are suspicious of one another as they jostle for percentages of returns. The oil and gas can even be poached from underground by drilling a separate well on another property at an angle. Other factors, including reuse of older and damaged materials and equipment, are practices that can go unnoticed and cut costs at expense of safety.

With this visit, I am again reminded of the connections between family, place, and community. Through the wells, John is bound to the land in a different manner than his large-scale counterparts in the extraction industry. His concerns are with a small group of people that are all living and working close to the well sites, and for various reasons it is in his best interest to extract in such a way that aids not only himself but also those around him. However, these connections are by no means utopic, and are tempered by the fact that the resources he draws from are finite, polluting, and non-renewable. John’s story—along with the driller above—points to the complexities and contradictions present in the region’s extraction industry and culture. Taking advantage of the resources available, struggling to hold on to disappearing practices, and caught between an
encroaching industrial apparatus and the knowledge of environmental degradation, these
two examples indicate that there is no simple or single way to move forward in an
extraction-based industry.

*The Encroaching Sounds of Fracking*

Because large-scale hydraulic fracturing ("fracking") has not yet arrived in the
immediate “Little Cities” vicinity but is imminent, there is much speculation about its
impact on the region. A perhaps more immediate concern for many is waste-injection
wells, since Ohio already imports a large amount of waste from neighboring states. For
the present moment, however, I listen to the sounds of large-scale fracking industry off in
the distance, as it continues to grow throughout the eastern part of Ohio. In particular, I
pay attention to its connections with job growth, seismic testing, and noise pollution.

The jobs being created due to the recent fracking boom in eastern Ohio have
affected the region’s economic, environmental, and social climate, but also have altered
its soundscape. Organizations such as “ShaleNet” have been created within the past few
years, offering job opportunities and training for those seeking to enter the gas and oil
workforce, sharply contrasting the smaller outfits that have been in the area. Once again,
the scale has been dramatically increased. ShaleNet’s main headline reads, “Linking
talent to opportunity,” and their mission is, “to help individuals build lasting careers in
the oil and natural gas industry.”53 Bringing together the gas industry, public workforce,
and colleges, ShaleNet has received nearly $20 million from the U.S. Department of

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Labor. It offers one- and two-year training in jobs from “Pipeline Technician” to “Petroleum Technologist.” Informational videos offer an optimistic introduction—with an equally cheerful soundtrack—to the gas and oil boom, and the promise of advancement. They tout the benefits of the industry, including jobs, payment for land and mineral rights, transportation, and a clean source of energy. The videos also sound keywords and phrases that evoke a strategically placed nationalism, such as “freedom,” and “Right here, in the American soil.” As such, a strong parallel is suggested between these videos and the overly and falsely optimistic speeches made during the very first coal booms in the nineteenth century described above. They intentionally make a persuasive argument for the benefits of the industry in order to build its infrastructure and workforce.

Seismic testing plays an increasingly important sonic role in the gas and oil industry, and, following western Pennsylvania, testing has grown both in number and in scale in eastern Ohio. Acting much like controlled earthquakes (and thus linking to fracking-induced earthquakes described later in this chapter), seismic testing is along the spectrum of seismic activity. It is a process by which geologists listen to acoustic phenomena in order to determine probable locations of oil and gas deposits underground. Akin to echolocation and ultrasound, seismic vibrations bounce and return, sonically and temporally marking geological layers beneath the surface. Sensitive microphones are used to record the vibrations the trucks created, called “geophones,” and, as the name

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54 Ibid.
suggests, are the land-equivalent to “hydrophones” used in large bodies of water for similar purposes.

Increasingly, older testing done with a single truck and charges placed at regular intervals (like the kind described above), is now replaced with large industrial equipment—called “vibroseis trucks” or “thumper trucks”—that are both more accurate and much more expensive. (Interestingly, an Australian version of the vibroseis truck that is described as being environmentally friendly was given the aptly descriptive name “EnviroVibes.”)\(^{56}\) Throughout eastern Ohio, parades of vibroseis trucks travel through back roads mapping the rock formations underneath the ground. Three or four trucks travel together, often with police escort and to the bewilderment of local residents. They are heavy, oversized, and noisy as they stop to take seismic measurements. Each truck lowers large plates down onto the ground. These plates send vibrations through the ground that bounce below and return to be heard with geophones placed at a separate location. Among the din of engine noises, there are occasional whirring sounds, buzzing upward in pitch as a glissando, sending seismic vibrations downward into the ground.

Felt in the nearby vicinity, the tests are disruptive enough that farmers are cautioned to be “highly proactive and communicate with the company and seismic crews performing the test in order to ensure minimal impact on agricultural operations” (Landefeld and Hogan 2012, 1). This process is repeated several times; then, the plates are lifted and the trucks move in formation down the road to the next location.

Seismic testing is trans-property; its waves move across properties and boundary lines, both above and below the ground. As a result of seismic testing’s increasing

\(^{56}\) Ibid.
accuracy, it has also become a valuable commodity. Costing “thousands of dollars per acre” to create, the resulting data are “licensed, bought, and sold by seismic survey companies, brokers, and exploration companies.” Whereas sonic forms in the cultural realm such as digitized music continually move toward open source exchange and little to no commodity value, when tied to petroleum reservoirs the sonic is fast becoming a multi-million dollar industry.

Further afield, this increased commodity value has attracted the involvement of large corporations based on military-created sonic technology. Stemming from a tool used on spy submarines, a “Halliburton Fracking Microphone” has recently been developed to listen to the entire fracking process, where “a gossamer-thin glass line threaded two miles underground is allowing oilfield engineers to listen to a new kind of music: the sounds of fracking.” With this microphone, Halliburton is creating a “catalog of sounds” that “signal the perfect frack: an explosion, cracking rock, and eventually the gurgle of hydrocarbons seeping into the well bore... The longer and more numerous the cracks, the more oil and gas will flow.” The process is extremely expensive, thereby further favoring large companies that can afford to pay to have a technological advantage. A Halliburton representative states that, “Our whole goal is to make the perfect frack every time. ...Our whole goal is to make the earth transparent.” As such, Halliburton is actively engaged in a process of listening to the underground soundscape, creating a taxonomy of sounds, and analyzing them. This is similar to my own engagement with the

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57 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
sounds of fracking, except in this case the end goal is to commodify the entire process. Halliburton aspires to “make the earth transparent” in order to generate sonic property, to assert ownership over both the sounds of fracking and the equipment used to procure them.

With the expansion and increased industrialization of the energy industry in the region, the side effect of noise pollution will invariably follow. The sounds of fracking are related to both the drilling and extraction processes. At a typical drilling platform, the drilling machinery creates a soundscape of long, deeply pitched drones combined with the hissing sounds of water and steam, and the occasional eerie industrial moan of the drilling equipment. Once the fracking process begins, it must run continually, thus its corresponding soundscape persists day and night. A parade of trucks carrying water to the drilling site also adds to the sounds heard. According to the University of Pennsylvania, a typical well requires anywhere from “320 to 1,365 truckloads of equipment to bring a well into production.” These trucks rumble through cities and towns, and along rural roads. Once in production, the “flaring” of gas wells (in which excess waste gas is burned off into the atmosphere) can be exceptionally loud, and is often compared to the sound of jet engines. Together, these sounds form a soundscape that traverses the spectrum of our listening capability. Deep seismic waves resonate underground, and streams of burning gas hiss above; drones, rumbling, gurgling, and rushing water are all present in-between.

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60 For an example at the Hollenbeck Gas Site located in western Pennsylvania, see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zPE2RU5099U&feature=youtu.be
However distinct and captivating the overall soundscape of fracking is, its recent proliferation has produced a homogeneity that masks the senses of place that may be unique to a given region. The sound recordist Peter Cusack has made numerous phonographic recordings of the energy industry across the globe. After recording several different nuclear energy sites in different countries, he came to the conclusion that “they all sound the same” (2012, 75). Noting the significance of these unvaried sounds, Cusack continues,

If one is looking for a sound that represents the underlying power behind today’s global financial, industrial, and military elites, then this is it. It is not necessarily loud, but constantly present—unchanging, fearless, soulless, utterly authoritarian and rarely touched by the small sounds of life. (Cusack 2012, 75)

This description aptly fits the sounds of the fracking industry that are present in Ohio, and quickly encroaching on the “Little Cities.” Large-scale drilling, in the end, does not produce a unique “soundmark” that is particular to a given place. Rather, it is indistinguishable from place to place, and that uniformity signals a larger infrastructure of transnational money and power. It has increasingly covered and obscured an underlying soundscape grown up from the land, and drowned out the sounds of people inhabiting different forms of “local.”

*Artists at Work: “Critical Regionalism” and “What did you hear?”*

Shifting the focus to include another form of labor in the region, I turn to two artists who developed projects directly related to the extraction industry in the “Little
Cities.” Both Matthew Friday and Robert Sember evoke senses of place related to the region’s history in their work. Combined, their projects address two major issues related to this dissertation, a direct and critical engagement with the local of the “Little Cities,” as well as employing the method of listening as a primary way of understanding place.

Along with Yates McKee, Matthew Friday was instrumental in forming the “Critical Regionalism Initiative” (CRI) at the Ohio University School of Art in 2009. The term “critical regionalism” was borrowed from architectural theory, which is a response to modernism that also incorporates local contexts. In the original use of the term, Frampton warns against a literal or nostalgic vernacular revival and instead advocates incorporating “elements derived indirectly from the peculiarities of a particular place” and with a “high level of critical self-consciousness” (1983, 21). Friday and McKee draw from this approach to place and the local, and apply it to southeastern Ohio through the lens of visual art. The resulting work was part of a group exhibit called “...In a Most Dangerous Manner,” at the Spaces gallery in Cleveland. 62 In the exhibition catalog, McKee states that their collaborative project, Research Sites, aims to explore the status of regionalism as a conceptual horizon for practices involved with the emergent “geographical impulse” in contemporary art. Rather than claim to present a definitive portrait of Appalachian Ohio from which an essential “regional aesthetic” might then be distilled, Research Sites is an avowedly provisional, incomplete, and at times contradictory series of site-specific inquiries whose combined effect is to put into question the boundaries

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62 This event took place from January 29 to March 26, 2009.
and identity of the very region from which they take their inspiration. (McKee 2009)

As part of the piece, Friday worked with both local groups and an environmental engineer to develop a paint derived from acid mine drainage (McKee 2009). The paint, a muted red-brown, covers the walls of the gallery, and an array of photos, map-like drawings of the region, and even a large pile of coal are placed in relationship to it. The result is a work in which the viewer is left to contemplate the materials from the area as they are transformed, without being subjected to a search for a culture of the region deemed to be authentic.

A week-long 2013 residency by Robert Sember at Ohio University complements the above collaborative work of Friday and his colleagues. Sember is a member of the activist art collective “Ultra-Red.” During this time, Sember led a number of workshops geared at creating a local listening project focused on the sounds of the region. The practice of listening deeply over a long amount of time was developed by Ultra-Red as a form of “militant sound investigation,” a process of exploring themes, questions, and contradictions of a place through sound. According to Sember, the process is a continual response to a question; over time this process builds knowledge, and allows a group of people to hear not only the “sound objects,” but also themselves listening individually and together. During the residency, there was a systematic movement from abstract to concrete, from question to response. “This is art with an expiration date,” states Sember. “It is not precious. It does its work, and when it’s done, it’s done.” The key to this

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63 The School of Interdisciplinary Arts at Ohio University invited Sember to the residency in March of 2013.
64 From a lecture and workshop Sember gave as part of his 2013 residency at Ohio University.
listening process, according to Sember, is to allow the sound object to foster the “desire for listening.” The “organizing” work of listening, in turn, includes not only a series of concrete responses to the sound objects, but also leads to political organization.

The residency culminated in a group listening session at the Tecumseh Theater in Shawnee. A long table was placed in the middle of the room. Chairs sat around the table at a distance, and the table was covered with butcher paper. A group of students, faculty, and local residents gathered together in order to listen. A number of sound recordings were played, and with strict regularity a moderator (in this case, I performed this part) marks the time of day and dispassionately asks, “What did you hear?” The participants had gathered recordings over several days, including sounds of a child singing, field recordings full of animal life, kids skateboarding, feet crunching in gravel, conversations about family and courtship, and gas pumps and gurgling oil wells. These sounds come together to answer the questions, “What are the sounds of Athens?” and “What are the sounds of southeastern Ohio?” The group fell into a rhythm of sitting and listening, absorbing the sound recordings, and then getting up, in silence, to walk to the table and write down what they heard. Akin to performing a text-based score in a formalized post-Cagian tradition, this process continued in a rigorous manner until all of the recordings had been listened to. Afterwards, participants spent time discussing what they heard and their reactions to it. As the discussions unfolded, our perception of the sounds deepened and even changed. What sounded like an erratic drummer to one person turned out to be a century-old steam pump; what seemed like a purring cat was in fact a sleeping child. Thus, the discussions that took place after listening were crucial to the overall
understanding of the sounds, and ultimately the region. Through even more listening, repetition, and further discussions that could potentially take place over weeks, months, and beyond, sound and listening play a fundamental roll in a transformative critical engagement with a place.

The collaborative project “Knights of Labor” situates the sentiment of the above works in a localized space—Robinson’s Cave—in May of 2009. Combining both Friday’s and Sember’s classes from Ohio University, the group focused on the cave as a site of labor, community, and respect. Among other activities at the cave, such as reading “radical texts” related to the labor struggles in the region, Friday states that, “Participants joined in singing several historical coal mining and labor union songs as quilts that mapped the geological, historical and utopian temporality were unfolded and discussed.” In this performance, site and sound are brought together in an effort to bridge an emplaced past and present and the events that unfolded there. The project also looked forward, drawing from the “radical pronouncements of community and solidarity” of the Knights of Labor as a prototype and inspiration to create new forms of cooperation. Robinson’s Cave, which has been assigned so much significance because of its history, seclusion, and acoustic properties, here defines a sonic space of a singing and speaking, and resonates with both the past and hope for the future.

Energy Soundscapes of Disaster

“In the mines, do you know how many people died?” asks a young boy who is recording an interview with his grandmother for a school assignment. “Do you know
anybody? Can you tell me three people? Can you name ‘em?’” The grandmother is quiet, perhaps impatient, and only answers reluctantly with “yes” and “no” and an occasional name. Somehow, the recording has survived, and ended up in the Little Cities Archive. As I listen in, I hear the boy dutifully completing his class assignment. His grandmother’s reticence forces him to continue to search for questions; he fumbles and says, “uh, umm,” but this nevertheless opens a conversational space between them about a past he has not experienced firsthand. By the time the tape was made in the 1980s, the mining in the “Little Cities” had already experienced many decades of decline. The disasters and deaths that took place within them were mostly in the past, transformed into memory and stories. The tape ends with the boy sending a message for his teacher, saying, “Well, I hope you give me an ‘A’."

Just as economic busts invariably follow booms, so too are the soundscapes of disaster bound with labor. In the “Little Cities,” the economic booms literally become sonic booms and explosions, both below and above the ground. In this section, I explore the sonic components of disaster, and again draw from archival materials as well as listening to contemporary recordings. The historic disasters that have taken place in the “Little Cities” have included fires and explosions, train wrecks and mine cave-ins. But there are also sounds of disasters taking place more currently, including earthquakes, chemical spills, and more explosions.

In some cases, there is a disparity between what is heard and the danger that it signals. In Cusack’s (2012) *Sounds From Dangerous Places*, field recordings are made of locations across the world that are environmentally or politically dangerous such as
Chernobyl, the infamous site of a 1986 nuclear disaster. Cusack’s intent is to make field recordings as a form of “sonic journalism,” yet he realizes that it is not always possible to aurally hear the danger. He notes that Chernobyl does not have a particularly “eerie” quality; instead, the resulting recordings made sound like pleasant nature soundscapes.

Cusack states,

Dangerous places can be both sonically and visually compelling, even beautiful and atmospheric. There is, often, an extreme dichotomy between an aesthetic response and knowledge of the “danger,” whether it is pollution, social injustice, military, or geopolitical. ...What can we learn by listening to the sounds of dangerous places? (Cusack 2012, vii)

The divide between the conceptual idea of the project and its end result can be significant, and this also applies to the soundscapes of the “Little Cities.” However, it can also be complemented with the process of listening to historical and contemporary contexts, as well as incorporating other sensual information. The act of making and listening to recordings, fleshed out with additional ways of knowing, offers a sonic entry point to these issues and a means to directly engage with a place and the people who live there.

Explosions: “A pressure came on our ears”

On November 5, 1930 an explosion at the Millfield Mine No. 6 killed 82 miners and became the worst mining disaster in Ohio. Accounts of the explosion from the Little Cities Archive readily indicate the Millfield disaster as not only a scene of death and
destruction, but also an intensely sonic event. They depict a vivid yet troubling soundscape ranging from mayhem to stunned silence.

The sonic qualities of pressure, force, and airflow have a strong presence throughout archival accounts of the explosion and its aftermath. The official Millfield report made by inspectors in the weeks after the explosion indicates that not only (presumably methane) gas exploded, but also coal dust (Forbes et al. 1930). As with the New Straitsville mine fire described below, the very sources of energy being extracted also acted as a fuel for disaster. This report recorded testimonies of eyewitnesses to the explosion, most notably that of B.H. Pettit, a local farmer who was “returning from work, in a field, toward the new air shaft, and saw Ed. Dempsey—a mechanic who was working on top of the shaft—blown from the top of the shaft and land 15 feet from the shaft” (Forbes et al. 1930, 30). Douglas L. Crowell echoes this description of the powerful force of the explosion in a United States Mine Rescue Operation report, stating,

A group of 79 miners working about 4,700 feet from the main shaft heard a “terrific slam and a whistling noise” of a powerful gale approaching them from the northern portion of the mine. Instinctively, some miners dropped to the floor of the mine, while others were knocked down as a great gust of wind passed over them. This gust of wind was followed shortly afterward by a second rush of air passing in the opposite direction. ...The force of the explosion was so great that near the point of the explosion (10,200 feet from the main shaft) electric shuttle
engines and mine cars were knocked off their tracks, steel I beams were twisted and blown about like sticks, and wooden timbers were smashed into kindling.\textsuperscript{65} Slams, whistling, and powerful gales of wind push and pull against the miners underground, with an explosive force strong enough to destroy anything in its path. For survivors, these sonic waves are deeply memorable, engrained components to their harrowing experiences in the mines.

In the days following the explosion, newspaper headlines and photographs reverberated throughout the country, and depicted it repeatedly in sonic terms. “We had just started to work when there was a terrific noise and a wall of flame,” reported Walter Porter, a miner in the explosion. Another paper offers several testimonies that depict the pressure of the explosion followed by yelling and commotion. It states, “Rasp said he was blown almost 100 feet from the place where he had been standing by the force of the explosion. He heard a roaring noise and then the shouts of his fellow underground prisoners.” One photograph in particular from the Archives powerfully portrays the reaction to the event. The photo, entitled “People at Millfield Mine Disaster” shows a loud, chaotic scene: hundreds of people are crowded around a building, jostling to see if their family members are alive, anxiously awaiting any news. Others are standing about, perhaps journalists, and are in discussion with one another. Yet another article, entitled “Telephone Brings Aid to Miners,” focuses on the novelty of telephone transmission used to relay information about the disaster. “Tragedy stalks in isolated places, but always there is a telephone somewhere within reach that will carry the call for aid to the proper agencies. ...At 1:30 p.m. one Wednesday, it carried a message of horrible significance to

galvanize the sleepy little mining town and send its residents pouring out over the road to the mine.”

Figure 9. “People at Millfield Mine Disaster.” Little Cities Archive.

The initial chaos of the explosion at Millfield was followed later by silence, and then grief. *The Dayton Daily News* reported, “A silent crowd of women and children whose husbands and fathers met death stood throughout the night, hoping against hope that their loved ones had escaped the choking gas, but broke into tears when body after body was brought to the surface in a cage that dropped down into the depths of the mine.”

Another survivor of the explosion, Tom Russell, noted that a neighbor, upon

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hearing about the explosion, “started screaming and pulling her hair and yelled at my mother and said, ‘What are you doing? Our men are in there dying like rats.’”

Listened to together, these reports of confusion, screaming, crying, and grief depict a series of sonic shock waves spreading out across the region in the explosion’s immediate aftermath. As such, the sonic boom of the explosion did not end when its sound waves exited the mine. Rather, the boom continued on in a series of sounds and testimonies that were all in direct relationship to the explosion. These sonic shock waves dissipated far beyond the initial explosion. They can be heard in the absence of the lives of those that died, of new friendships formed out of grief, or in the memories handed down to subsequent generations. The explosion sonically altered the soundscape and continues to resonate today.

Sigmund Kozma, who died in 2009 at the age of 97, was the last living survivor of the disaster. During an interview for the film “Meeting Again” by Justin Zimmerman (2008), Kozma recalls being in the mine at the time of the explosion. Kozma states that we went down inside the mine... So we heard through there. The way we noticed it is a, a pressure came on our ears. I said, “Dad, what was that?” He said, “That was an explosion.” ... Immediately after the explosion, it was chaos. (Zimmerman 2008)

In a related article from the Athens News (December 4, 1995), Kozma further expands on the physical experience of the explosion as a wave. He states,

We were loading a coal car and we felt the pressure (much like diving) and then it was released. All you could hear was the force of air (in your ears). There was no
sound of an explosion... The force of the explosion hit them and rolled them. ...As long as we had good air we would have lived. We followed where the (good) air was (leading us).  

Kozma’s two descriptions impart the physical impact that the explosion had. Despite not hearing the explosion, he nevertheless sensed it in the form of pressure. Acoustically, sound is defined in terms of waves of pressure and vibration as they push through the air (or water, or other material) and disturb the atmospheric pressure that is already a constant (Taylor and Campbell 2014). Thus, the seemingly contradictory testimony of Kozma hearing “pressure” but “no sound” points to a sonic and seismic event that is not audible but felt, akin to touch.

Kozma’s father knew from experience that this felt pressure indicated an explosion, and acted accordingly. Another survivor of the Millfield explosion, Johnny Gaitten, similarly describes the dangers of the mines, and how listening plays a part in survival. He states,

The day before the explosion at the Millfield mine, I knowed there was gas around there. ...Now I’m going to tell you one law that goes with coal mining. When you walk in the mine, you’re on your own. If you don’t know enough to take care of yourself, stay the hell out of there. You got to know what things sound like. You got to know why.  

Gaitten’s description shows that miners have a repository of sounds that act as indicators of good or dangerous situations, and they are key to survival. This knowledge, coming

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from experience in the mines, is similar to Matheney’s “jowling” technique described above: it is a sonic tool achieved through listening to an industrial work environment to discern danger.\textsuperscript{69}

Pressure and the related flow of air in the mines not only are key indicators of the explosion at Millfield, but also are more broadly central to miners being able to work in the mines at all. In the Little Cities Archive, I came across a large envelope with Kozma’s name written on it. Inside were hand-drawn maps of the mine that Kozma created, with the title, “A SCETCH [sic] OF NO. VI mine for purpose of assisting one in a better understanding of the general layout of the mine & The Air Flow.” The drawings show a general layout of the mines, including the “Main Shaft,” “New Air Shaft,” and “Return Air.” There is an image of a fan, and an indication of the direction of fresh air as it is drawn into the mine. An elaborate system of the air flowing through the different chambers is drawn, and the map also indicates which chambers had been “worked out,” meaning that the coal had been taken from these rooms. The maps rightly depict a preoccupation with how fresh air is pumped into the mines and gasses out; the air is a lifeline that the miners depend on. When disrupted or stopped, the miners cannot survive. In their carefully drawn detail, the maps also indicate how the Millfield disaster and coal mining permeated Kozma’s memory and imagination for a lifetime.

Although safety has undoubtedly increased in the intervening years since the Millfield disaster, explosions can still be heard in the region as part of its energy soundscape. A recent example occurred in 2011, near the town of Glouster, Ohio, where

\textsuperscript{69} For a related discussion, see Karin Bijsterveld’s (2012) “Listening to Machines: Industrial Noise, Hearing Loss and the Cultural Meaning of Sound.”
an explosion from the Tennessee Gas Pipeline sent flames 100 feet into the air. A local news report states that calls were received “from up to twelve miles away from people who felt the explosion and heard the rumble from the fire.”\textsuperscript{70} Another example occurred in May of 2014, when a driller “heard a loud noise” on a new fracking well site in Morgan County, Ohio, possibly from a “mechanical failure” (Arenschild 2014).\textsuperscript{71} Overpressurized after “unexpectedly” hitting gas at over 7,000 feet below the surface, the well blew out, leaking thousands of gallons of oil and mud into a nearby stream (Narciso 2014).\textsuperscript{72} Local residents were evacuated, for fear of a gas explosion. Eight weeks later, according to \textit{The Columbus Dispatch}, “tanker trucks and vacuums are still whirring...trying to clean up thousands of gallons of oil and chemicals” (Arenschild 2014). And, as I write this, efforts are already being made to drill two wells on the same well pad, despite these previous problems. In the present moment, it is easy to understand each of these events as being anomalies. When viewed and heard as part of a centuries-long extraction process, however, the sample set becomes larger and they become part of a chain of disasters, spills, and explosions, occurring with regularity. They become a rhythmic pattern that carries with it an increasing significance over time.

The “Miner’s Registry” in the Little Cities Archives is a compendium of many of the miners that worked in the region. Here, as with archival photographs, one has the opportunity to develop a contextual practice of listening for the sounds not heard, but

\textsuperscript{70} http://www.10tv.com/content/stories/2011/11/16/athens-county-explosion.html
instead inferred in the written information. Beside the names of many of the miners, the registry notes provide a brief insight into their lives, heroism, injury, and deaths. These notes become unintentional short stories, mysterious in their brevity. Again and again, miners are met with dangerous experiences, ranging from comical to gruesome.

In the registry, injuries and death from collisions are common, as well as entanglement with machinery: “Left foot mashed, caught by mine machine, age 34”; “Crushed by fall of coal night shift loader, killed.” Other entries indicate falling debris or falling miners. In 1912, Lewis Blackford “was shooting a rock hole to make mule height. The deceased and partner sounded roof and thought it safe but a piece fell, striking his skull.” In 1876, Albert Biggory made a wrong move and “Fell off chutes outside, Killed.” At other times, a simple note shows heroics, and even humor: “[A] cave-in buried two bros. Sam dug them out. One brother was believed to be dead until Sam threw dirt. He said, ‘Sammy don’t be throwing dirt on me that way.’” Or, more suspiciously, one note simply states, “Died on his way home from the mines.”

Sometimes, the sonic references are notable, even if they indicate silence: “Floyd Collins was declared dead after an accident in the mines although the men never located his body. Mrs. Sinift’s mother sang a song about his him but her daughter can’t remember how it went”; or, “He lived just for a few minutes and never spoke.” Finally, it is noteworthy to mention that the registry is not purely a document of the past, as it continues to record the names and lives of those who mine today. In 2012, several miners were injured when cars collided into one another. The account states, “A mistake in communication led to work cars colliding in a

73 Little Cities of Black Diamonds Miner’s Registry, Shawnee, Ohio.
dip under ground in the mine. [John] Reich was placed on Med-flight to Columbus as a precaution.”

Repetition and frequency of the registry’s reports creates a rhythm of injury spanning over the lifetime of the mines. Daily, miners descended beneath the earth well aware of this rhythm, and were unwilling or unable to choose a different form of work. So many miners were caught, crushed, squeezed, or mashed—by cars, or by trains—that the injuries and deaths took on an air of normalcy. Pillars and roofs and coal fell on them, and many died from falling slate, coal, sulfur, clay, and shale. Limbs were broken, fingers severed, and legs amputated. Together, these individual injuries and deaths form a larger pattern, scarring both the land and those who worked in the mines.

The New Straitsville Mine Fires: “With a Faint Hiss”

The accidental disaster at Millfield has an intentional counterpart in the New Straitsville Mine Fires. The fires have been continuously burning since 1884, for 130 years. In inquiring about the sounds of the fires burning, it is hard to determine their current sonic signature; they are elusive, and most of the time appear today as subtle melted patches of wintry snow in the hillsides surrounding New Straitsville. It is easier to observe and hear the fire’s economic and cultural ramifications as it has affected those who have lived in the area since the fires began. Mine fires are not unique, however, and those in places like Centralia, Pennsylvania continue to aggressively burn today. There, rain pings and sizzles as it falls on coal-heated rocks, and hissing steam is pushed through cracks in the ground.
Conlogue (2011, 2013) describes mine fires in western Pennsylvania, similar to those in southeastern Ohio. Focusing on the writing and poetry of W.S. Merwin, Conlogue discovers a sense of place through “literary fieldwork,” where “poem, place, and history” come together to give “back to us our lived experience” (Conlogue 2011, 599). In the poem “Burning Mountain,” Merwin describes a mine fire in detail, which parallels the experience of the New Straitsville fires:

No blacker than others in winter, but / The hushed snow never arrives on that slope. / An emanation of steam on damp days, / With a faint hiss, if you listen some places, / Yes, and if you pause to notice an odor, / Even so near the chimneyed city, these / Betray what the mountain has at heart.

The poem evokes the elusiveness of the fires as they burn below the surface of the ground. They come and go, and require careful attention in order to fully notice them. Yet the fire’s presence reaches the surface to destabilize the communities that live among its difficult-to-find flames. In New Straitsville, this presence caused a road to cave-in, 74 years after the fire had been started. A local paper commented, “The ‘notoriety’ [of the mine fire] gave the impression that New Straitsville itself was ready to cave-in and that it would not be a safe place to live.”74 The landscape above ground is thus deceptive: the hard-to-find fire eats away below the surface, causing unease and unrest above.

New Straitsville was not only a scene of rebellion and environmental disaster related to the mine fires, but also became a site of “notoriety” and even novelty. On February 1, 1938 a radio edition of “Ripley’s Believe it or Not” was broadcast from New Straitsville. Although the radio broadcast did not survive, newspaper announcements of it

74 Unknown newspaper from the Little Cities Archives.
hint at its sonic components. The Evening Leader in Corning, New York, advertised the program in a section called “Between the Wavelengths,” stating,

   For the second time there’s to be a broadcast from a coal mine fire that has been burning since 1884—53 years. ... Tom Manning, NBC announcer...will handle the broadcast, which, according to the plans, will come from the mine as close to the fire as the men can get. The description will be included in Bob Ripley’s program... So will crackling of the flames.

Likewise, the Evening News from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania described the broadcast as including the “crackling and hissing sounds of New Straitsville, Ohio’s, ‘perpetual fire.’” These descriptions leave me with the mental image of radio reporters standing in the mouth of a mine entrance, dangling a microphone over and into the smoking fire. The radio broadcasts also show that the novelty of the mine fire was compellingly sonic if it was interesting enough to record it. In this way, they became early phonographic field recordings of disaster soundmarks in New Straitsville. Their “crackling” radiated out along wavelengths and across the country.

   Once again, photographs from the Little Cities Archive lend contextual depth into the mine fire, and sonic insights are inferred through them. In “Mine Fire Plummer Hill” (do-ph-596), the blurry photo depicts a mysterious black hole in the bottom center, with steam and smoke seeping out. There is no animal or plant life around it, thus limiting its immediate soundscape to the related sounds of the fire below the ground. Another image (lc-ph-287) shows the gimmick of local residents frying eggs in a crack in the ground,
where the fire is breaking through the surface. In my mind I hear the sizzle of the eggs tempered by the strong odor of sulfur, making for an unpleasant meal.

One of the more iconic archival images of the mine fire involves a scene of two men erecting signs that say, “The World’s Greatest Mine Fire,” “Plummer Hill,” and “Scene of ‘Bob’ Ripley’s Broadcast.” They are advertising the mine fire not only as a tourist site of curiosity, but also a place significant enough to be given the appearance of legitimacy by the Ripley broadcast. Cars are parked in the background, and what appears to be a lemonade stand or ticket booth has customers standing in line. Adding to the unusual quality of the photo is the intimidating figure of a large man in a pork pie hat standing to the right of the signs and posing while holding a shotgun. He is looking directly at the camera, and his eyes are squinting and uninviting. Those in the scene are attempting to attract novelty seekers, yet at the same appear to be discouraging them from visiting.

In the end, it is the mining and its corresponding infrastructure that became novelties, and the mine fire remains the permanent fixture. The fire reveals the instability of an economy and community built solely on extraction. The mining and the larger extraction economy are novelties with their own arc and rhythm of a strong attack followed by an abrupt decline, and finally with a long decay, leaving destruction in their wake. The photograph strikes at the heart of the strange situation New Straitsville found itself in, not only after the fire began, but from its very origins. Built on the optimism of a coal boom, the town attracted laborers while ingenuity and creativity fueled development.

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75 Entitled “Mine Fire Plummer Hill Sign New Straitsville.”
But from perspective “from below”—that of the miners—the mining industry would never provide either environmental, health, or economic sustainability; it was designed from the beginning to be untenable, for most. The mine fires may have created an environmental and economic disaster, but disaster was already inevitable due to the nature of mineral extraction. The fires merely hastened the rhythms of destruction already in motion.
Earthquakes and Frack-Waste

The environmental disasters that still affect the region today simultaneously move in two different temporal directions at once. They are both reverberations of the past, and rumbles of what is yet to come. The sound of acid mine drainage (AMD) flowing out of the side of a mined-out hill near Shawnee is at first indistinguishable from an otherwise environmentally healthy flowing stream. Yet images reveal something quite different. As I recorded and photographed the stream, the rocks gleamed in the sunlight, silver and white. Metals such as aluminum leaching into the water cause this metallic brightness, and over time they coat the rocks. Likewise, swirling clouds of a deep reddish brown color indicate high levels of iron. Reading the stream in this manner allows me to see the destruction in process, yet the soundscape remains pleasantly, unknowingly unchanged. Or does it? The more that I listen and learn about the region, I begin to notice the absence of sounds that had been present before the metals began to percolate out of the hills. The acidic water disrupts an entire food chain related to the streams, eliminating aquatic life. This in turn creates silences in the area. Birdcalls disappear, beaver dams are not built, and we are left with the singular sound of the stream on its own.

The AMD stream is one example of the region’s soundscape moving in a direction from complexity and variety to uniformity and absence. In a parallel movement, new sounds are added and occupy the sonic space of the “Little Cities,” such as the seismic rumbles of earthquakes related to frack-waste injection wells, signaling destruction from below the earth’s surface. Kahn (2013) describes these seismic sounds as pointing to a process in which “the ground itself became acoustic.” Kahn states, “Even when they are
inaudible, earthquakes and other seismic events are acoustical. What cannot be heard can be felt, as acoustical waves move through the earth and move the ground, and subaudible sounds travel unheard from one end of the earth through to another” (137). In this way, earthquakes become a twin to the seismic testing described above. In fact, one could see them as being on opposite ends of the same human-produced process across the region: seismic testing determines sites for drilling to take place; wells are dug and fracked for extraction; these wells are in turn filled with frack-waste; and finally, earthquakes resound the same spaces, echoing, returning acoustical waves back to the surface.

These seismic waves were literally felt in the “Little Cities” in November of 2013, when a small, 3.5 magnitude earthquake took place just outside of Nelsonville.76 Earlier, in northeastern Ohio, residents heard “strange sounds” that turn out to be a series of earthquakes (Fischetti 2012; Smyth 2012; Tong 2012). The earthquakes in northeastern Ohio, according to Scientific American, have been linked closely to fracking wells (Fischetti 2012). These quakes mark a sharp rise in the seismic activity of Ohio, at a rate in the past four years that is greater than the past century.77 According to Ellsworth (2013), these “human-induced earthquakes” are related to fracking. He states, “Injection-induced earthquakes, such as those that struck in 2011, clearly contribute to the seismic hazard” (Ellsworth 2013). These findings indicate that there is a clear connection between waste-wells and earthquakes, although the majority of the quakes are “microearthquakes” and, at under magnitude 2.0, generally do not present any serious risk. However, Ellsworth advises that caution should be taken especially with large wells.

that are drilling deeply along faults. While the connections seem to be strong yet the risks uncertain between fracking and earthquakes, it is apparent that they are both seismic activities, and therefore acoustical. In tandem with seismic testing, fracking and earthquakes have transformed the soundscape of the entirety of eastern Ohio.

**Conclusion**

Through listening we learn how energy, labor, and disaster are inexorably linked in the “Little Cities” region. Their sounds are dovetailed, and the arc of their timelines of coming and going overlap. It is also clear that this continual change has once again grown in scale, becoming louder and louder as the region experiences the upswing of yet another boom and bust energy extraction cycle. Seismic activity, the hissing of underground fires, and the felt pressure of explosions all signal historic and contemporary disasters in the “Little Cities.” Artists draw from the material landscape, and listen as part of their work in the region. Labor stemming from fracking, oil, gas, and coal generates a complex array of sounds to be added to the soundscape, yet it also obscures and even eliminates others. These sounds travel back into the past, too, and have their origins in the historic soundscapes of nineteenth century industrial expansion, which also changed and eliminated even earlier soundscapes.

Each sound in the “Little Cities” contains within it a movement and an expenditure of energy. Together with the many senses of place that can be discerned in the region, as well as their presence over long stretches of time, these sounds join together to create a chorus of rhythms. Overlapping, noisy, and even silent, these rhythms in turn form a
network of *energy soundscapes*. As I listen to the “Little Cities,” assessing and analyzing these energy soundscapes, I am uncertain of how they will continue to develop and dissipate. However, it does appear that they—as part of a larger rhythmic pattern now occurring for over two centuries—will continue to move along the lines of expansion and contraction, of extraction and disaster, of booms and busts.
Chapter 5: The Sounds of Recovery and Protest: Emergence and Disappearance

This chapter critically listens to the sounds and rhythms of recovery and of protest in the “Little Cities.” In addressing the related and often contentious issue of sustainability, Jeff Todd Titon (2011) cites “co-presence” as a sonic trait that allows one to sense “the presence of something greater than oneself through sound.” Likewise, the sonic method of listening offers a way of holding the diverse and often conflicting realities of recovery and protest together for critical analysis, and to realize senses of place through a connection to its sounds and music. Often, the rhythms and sounds listened to are silent, or more broadly metaphorical. Repeating at different rates and durations, they are a fusion of both cyclical and linear time, rhythms of “becoming,” or of clock-time, “returning” rhythms, or metronomic rhythms (Lefebvre 2004, 90). In this chapter I continue to address recovery and protest through the temporalities of rhythms not necessarily heard but observed in other ways, and I do so in combination with my musical training in listening. The sounds of recovery and protest in the “Little Cities” reveal a set of rhythms that are directly opposed to the linear rhythms of untenable extraction, profit, and progress at all costs that have plagued the region over the past two centuries.

The sounds and rhythms of recovery and protest are at the forefront of my mind as I make a return visit to Robinson’s Cave, this time in late summer. I step onto the grassy field just outside the cave, and begin recording. I am once again drawn to the

cave’s immediate and historic soundscapes, and I listen to them together through field recordings and contextual research in the archive. On this day, the cave feels noticeably more intimate and secluded than in the winter; the dense overgrowth of the forest is more apparent, and muffles the sounds from below. The abundance of trees acts as a reminder of their absence in the recent past. Despite now being part of a national forest, the landscape and soundscape of the entire region in the nineteenth and into the twentieth century was significantly different due in part to the clear cutting of nearly all of the old-growth trees. Then, one may have seen and heard barren hills dotted with hundreds of derricks pumping for oil and gas in and through the towns. The past landscape and soundscape reflected how the energy industry and domestic life were intertwined, intensely affecting the residents who lived there.

Today, although industry and domestic life are still very much together, the presence and recovery of the forest has altered the soundscape. It has both limited and absorbed the sounds of the always-present energy industry in the region, but also has encouraged a host of sounds related to a forest ecology. As part of the forest, Robinson’s Cave is a site of recent efforts to refurbish it in an attempt to market it as a historic travel destination. Local residents have joined forces with non-profit historical societies and organizations to rebuild signage and a small bridge leading to the cave: these are small but significant changes to those who live in the region.

Mediated through headphones and microphone, I listen to animal and natural sounds close by, such as bees moving directly in front of me in the open meadow and the constant sound of dripping water inside the cave. These sounds are coupled with far off, yet remarkably clear sounds of intermittent traffic, a muffler-less car, ATVs, barking dogs, and children playing some distance away in the valley below. The cave’s “great acoustics,” its presence in the forest, its partially enclosed overhang, and the flat clearing in front of it combine to create a physical space akin to a large ear turned on its side, where sounds from the street below are clearly heard and yet sound does not easily travel out. Standing in the cave, I am listening to the acoustics of an underground space as it changes and amplifies sounds of natural and human environments.
It is this underground space that also carries an additional significance when imagining the secret meetings of many miners that took place here on several occasions to organize strikes. I also am reminded of other, later meetings of those (possibly miners, possibly mine operators) conspiring to send a car full of lit coal into the mines. In both cases, the cave becomes a site of resistance and protest. Brandon Labelle suggests that the underground world and its sounds function as “an explicit zone for transformation” (2010, 15). In this case, miners used the space to speak secretly to one another, to argue, to convince each another to act, even when those actions led to a mine fire that still burns today. Labelle sees the underground as a place of opposition, stating that, “outside the established system... ‘going underground’ is paramount to forging tactics of resistance, terrorism, and other forms of political agitation or escape” (32). The historical importance of Robinson’s cave shows that its physical and acoustic properties contributed to the events of protest that took place in New Straitsville and beyond. The cave symbolizes a place outside, set apart, removed from the realm and oversight of the mining companies, the town, and their laws; where actions could be conceived and employed on these institutions that resulted in both beneficial and dire consequences. Thus, the process of listening to Robinson’s cave unearths a set of sounds that highlight the recovery of the area at the same time as revealing the conflicts of its past. Not only is it a site of direct engagement with recovery and protest, it is also a place in which several distinct soundscapes emerge and are in conflict with one another, something that can be heard across the larger region.
Water connects and runs between the sounds and rhythms of recovery and protest. Water is sonically present throughout the chapter, and its use deeply affects those in the region. With this in mind, I listen to the ways in which recovery and protest—through water—might sonically intersect, run together, and leak into one another. The Wayne National Forest that surrounds the “Little Cities” (and the waterways that run through it) becomes a key factor in considering recovery and protest. The forest continues its 75-year cycle of recovery even as coal is dug from under it, threatening the watershed from beneath the earth’s surface. In addition, up to 130 hydraulic fracturing (“fracking”) gas wells on the forest’s public land have been approved for future drilling. With a regular, clock-like bang, “dosers” loudly pour alkaline lime into Monday Creek, successfully neutralizing acid mine drainage, while elsewhere radioactive fracking wastewater illegally spills back into streams. In listening to the present, it is apparent that these cycles are not following one after the other, but are concurrent, emerging and dissipating at different rates, flowing together, and in tension with each another. Amid these soundscapes another emerges, that of protest. Activists chain themselves to wells as a form of non-violent “direct action” against fracking amongst shouts of encouragement from their peers. Songs originally written as a form of resistance against coal mining are adapted to reflect new threats, in an effort to protect water supplies for generations to come.

Discerning localized meanings for the terms “recovery” and “protest” proves to be difficult, as booms and busts continually and often wildly impact them. Both encompass a web of environmental, economic, and social issues, and as such one sense of

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recovery or protest may inhibit or cause another. Job growth due to fracking impedes on many years of sustained efforts to rescue the watershed. “Geo-tourism” markets the region as a travel destination, while many residents still must commute to larger cities to find employment. The following explores the issues of recovery and protest with these co-present contradictions in mind, recognizing there is often local disagreement about their meaning.

_Environmental Restoration: Rhythms of Long Duration on Monday Creek_

As the Wayne National Forest reemerges and grows, the small cities within it also undergo continuous rhythms of change: of decline and of restoration. Many changes have occurred slowly, even quietly, over the past century. Likewise, restoration efforts within the forest are long-term, and projects taking place now may not realize their full impact for generations to come. Over the past century, the “Little Cities” have been in a state of economic and population decline as coal mining, clay, and the larger extraction industry withdrew and offered fewer and fewer jobs in their wake. Globalization and the permeable borders of transnationalism have also affected and will continue to affect even these remote places. For the moment, towns like Shawnee appear to be slowly moving in opposition to what Kearney describes as the “image of unilinear time informing theories of development, i.e. time running from lesser to greater development” (1995, 550). Rather than progressing toward more and more expansion, there is a sense of time not only standing still, but moving backward: populations decrease, buildings fall down, and the forest is conscientiously replanted and re-surrounds the town. The “Little Cities” as a
connected set of local places *appears* to be disappearing, as the forest slowly swallows them up. Shawnee and the other towns recede back into the hillsides; the “Little City” of San Toy vanishes all together and is silent.

In the fall of 2013, I join a large group of people on a tour of the Monday Creek watershed, located within the Wayne National Forest. The Monday Creek Restoration Project leads the tour, and it highlights the reclamation and recovery efforts in the region. I am also here to listen to, record, and analyze the sounds of recovery. As I move with the group, I listen to the sounds of their voices and conversations, of local animals, of water, and the larger environmental soundscape. Throughout, sounds reflect off the hills and trees absorb them; they resonate in buildings and bounce across water. I hear these sounds together, forming a sonic collage of embodied connections and temporalities.

The rhythms and sounds of water are revealed during this tour, and all recovery efforts are connected to the water of Monday Creek in some way. Water comes and goes through vernal pools; it flows through the hills and descends into the creek. These rhythms point to the immediate and long-term efforts to reverse environmental destruction. As the group gathers at the “Lost Run 3 East” site, there are several conversations at once, and there is a shuffle of feet along fresh gravel. Our guide is in charge of running rehabilitation efforts in the watershed. Across the region, rainwater filters through the mines before dumping out into streams, collecting and oxidizing minerals and creating chemical reactions along the way. This creates “acid mine drainage” (“AMD”), disrupting the Ph levels in the water. The guide takes us across a shallow streambed and we climb up a former gob pile to observe the recent reclamation
efforts. “Gob piles” consist of unusable materials such as sulfur coal, the refuse of coal mining left to sit for decades out in the open. Trees and plant life do not grow on them, and sometimes they even catch fire, smoldering and smoking. This gob pile, the size of a large hill, has been recently covered with a layer of topsoil—“twelve foot of fill,” says the guide—that volunteer students took from an adjacent valley, what he calls a “borrow area,” and grass is planted on top. In these “borrow areas,” the students built vernal, or ephemeral pools, and planted tall prairie grass. These temporary pools come and go, and host a variety of wildlife. The guide jokingly calls them, “infernal pools,” and much laughter follows from the group.

Figure 12. Monday Creek Restoration Project tour. Author is fourth from the left.
Water’s ability to flow and filter through the hills creates AMD, but recovery efforts also take advantage of these qualities. We step into a “blockhouse,” a small building built with cinder blocks to deter vandals from shooting the tipping unit contained within. As the guide climbs inside and begins to speak, his voice echoes and mixes with rushing water. A metal container fills with water siphoned off from an above freshwater dam, and makes a sudden loud noise as it tips over to an adjacent container. Another volume of water rushes down from the pond and into the blockhouse, obscuring his voice. “It’s flowing, there’s no question about it,” he says, “I just need to tweak my float system a little better yet.” Gravity moves the water down from the blockhouse to percolate through two “leach beds” (or “steel slag beds”), in which left over slag from steel production is reused as a filter for its alkaline properties. The alkaline water then drains downhill into the stream. “How do you control the water in the beds?” someone asks. Our guide responds, “With a siphon. It’s a predetermined elevation.” At this point, the stream becomes a “sacrifice zone,” where toxins are purposefully put into the water to combine with and combat other toxins. The extremely acidic water flowing out of the mined hills is deliberately joined with water moved across the Ph spectrum to become alkaline, equally inhospitable. Downstream, however, the water becomes balanced, and the ecosystem associated with the streams is rapidly changing.

The water constantly sounds and is continually in motion. It flows and percolates, it comes and goes, it is siphoned and moves downhill and downstream. The guide’s use of the phrase “infernal pools” instead of “vernal” or “ephemeral” may have been a joke, but it still points to the main environmental struggle the region is dealing with: water, its
necessity to the ecosystem, and its ability to flow both above and below ground. It changes, picking up metals or aquatic life according to what it flows through and across. “Infernal” can refer to something irritating or tiresome, but can also relate to being underground or the underworld. In these pools, the water mediates between worlds, bringing with it a spring habitat and disappearing again, an emergence and disappearance that echoes the rhythms of the miners traveling to and from their work, soundscapes of boom and bust, and of destruction and protest that have defined the region. Likewise, in the “leach beds” the water undergoes an extreme transformation across the acid-alkaline spectrum, from poison to poison, only to be transformed once again to become neutral as it moves downstream.

The above efforts are sounding the rhythms of mitigation. They show that recovery is a slow process, one that requires regular intervention. The rhythms of AMD mitigation are repeated with variations across the Monday Creek watershed. Several large metal “dosers” are positioned along headwaters that feed into multiple tributaries. They effectively dump portions of lime upstream, creating a similar neutralizing effect on the Ph levels as the slag beds. With names like “Essex” and “Jobs Hollow,” these rocket-shaped containers look odd in the areas in which they are placed, and to an unacquainted ear, sound just as strange. Inside, they run like water clocks, with water filling and tipping over a dosing mechanism. With each repetition, a loud clanking sound—bang!—is followed by a measured amount of lime and water rushing through a tube, and spilling out into the stream several feet below. The rust color of the streambed is immediately

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transformed to a milky white. Importantly, the transformation of the water is immediate, but like the slag beds its neutralization is not. This occurs as it moves downstream.

Figure 13. A “doser” pours alkaline water into an acidic stream.

It is not lost on the tour group that the means of reversing the devastating effects of acid mine drainage is to make use of the by-product of another extraction industry. To create “borrow areas” is to acknowledge the creativity and limitations of efforts to fix a badly scarred land. “Sacrifice zones,” too, carry with them an acknowledgement of limitations. The phrase is often used to highlight how the energy industry (and mining in particular) devastates entire regional areas, justified through cheap energy and large corporate profits. Here, however, the same phrase is used as a means to a very different end: a small-scale, “from below” reversal of the destruction created by making it a
sacrifice zone to begin with. “Counter-sacrifice zones” may be a more appropriate title for these places.

The rhythms of water and recovery come together in the Monday Creek Watershed. They resound the return of animal and plant life, as well as the renewed rhythms of old traditions and practices. The observation of recovery is not limited to tributaries and streams, and can be expanded to include an improving and sounding ecosystem. As we walk along the slag beds, I notice several small Eastern Hognose snakes warming themselves in the November sun. Laughter, excitement, and multiple conversations erupt upon finding the snakes. Later, I also observe a woman knocking off spores from what she describes as “club moss.” A flammable component of the plants, the spores were once used in magic tricks and early flash photography. She is distributing the spores to encourage more growth. Just up the path, someone spies “chicken of the woods” mushrooms. Gathering them off the side of a tree, we talk of different ways of preparing them for dinner.

As the watershed improves, the network of animal and plant life rhythmically returns and develops in tandem. Generations of people have lost the ability to fully be a part of the forest and watershed because of the remnants of mining, and are now excited to observe and take part in its reclamation. The people on this tour, and the generations that they represent, are recuperating something of the past: they are enacting and embodying recurring practices of making use of what the forest has to offer. They may not even be descendants of those that lived here before the environmental destruction deemed the area inhospitable, but they are now resounding old traditions and practices,
once again available to them. The people taking advantage of the forest and even the tour itself are part of the logic of watershed remediation, and, along with the return of flora and fauna, are evidence of its success.

Rhythms and sounds of water and the ecosystem come together at “Upper Rock Run,” a site that is part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. Water covers and restores past damage of the soundscape: bird calls echo across the surface of a pond, joined by overlapping rhythms of growing plants and trees. “Bat boxes” dot the slopes around the pond, bringing back endangered species that disappeared because of mining and clear-cutting. Together, a sonic assemblage of water, animals, humans, and plants are played out in this location, heard in its acoustics and observed in its rhythms of change and return. “Upper Rock Run” is a newly built pond on top of an abandoned mining area, three acres in size and ten feet deep. Our guide states that this area was filled with “subsidence pillars,” where underground coal mining rooms collapse but support pillars stay, creating a “moonscape.” Now, the guide explains, through federal stimulus funding, the region has moved “from devastation to destination.” He states, “engineering, wildlife, botany. You get goose bumps talking about this stuff.” As we stand at the pond, we hear the rattle of a bird’s call, then see it fly across the pond and swoop down to catch a fish. Tim, the man standing next to me, tells me it is a Kingfisher, a bird that has not been seen in this area for some time. He states that birds like the Kingfisher and the Blue Heron—as well other animals such as river otters—have begun to make use of the recovering streams. The Kingfishers are drawn to the fresh water and newly forming
aquatic life in it. An entire ecosystem and corresponding soundscape are beginning to return because of water that is no longer acidic.

The sounds of voices, Kingfishers, and water come together as a collage, echoing off the backside of the big pond. Adding to this mix are silent rhythms of growth, specifically of a sloping hill seeded with chestnut trees. American chestnuts have been missing from the landscape in the Eastern United States for nearly a century due to a blight caused by a fungus infestation from Asian chestnut trees. These new trees, a hybrid of American and Asian, are resistant to the blight, and symbolize yet another revenant rhythm. As we wander among the trees, I listen carefully as people catch up with one another, meet one another, or continue earlier conversations. “I don’t know what a chestnut tree even looks like,” says someone. “See how they have the barbs?” says another. All of these people are brought together here through efforts to reclaim a land once though completely destroyed. I pick up a conversation with a man recently retired from the restoration project, and ask him about the trees. He talks about the difficulty of walking through this area before reclamation, between the dense overgrowth and the remnants of mining. He also speaks of failures with planting the tress, and that this is the second planting. “The problem is compaction. The soil is just too bad from the mining, and we learned that we needed to auger them and replant them. Now, they have 60-70% survival odds.” The chestnut tree project points to the struggles and adaptation present in attempting to reverse or reclaim a part of the ecosystem previously damaged. In this way, repetition is used to help set the trees in motion, to restart their cycles of growth, production, decay, and return. The compaction of the soil from mining indicates a level

of deadness present in the land, the hardening of the environment. Those working on the project were able to listen to what worked and what did not, to open and loosen the soil as a creative act.

The rhythms of long duration are present in and connect the modes of recovery observed during this tour. They are often subtle, and patient in their unfolding. At the Monday Creek Restoration Project building in New Straitsville, I speak to a man from the Ohio EPA over a potluck lunch. I ask him about his work and the time it will take the streams to recover. I am impressed with his ability to think about these issues not in terms of years, but over many decades and even centuries. He estimates that the AMD recovery will take a century, give or take 50 years. He says that the mines need to “flush out” the acidic metals over time, and once this happens, they can recover fairly rapidly. However, this means that the recovery efforts are semi-permanent and will need to be maintained indefinitely until this process is complete. “You’ll probably still be taking your grandkids to see these dosers and slag beds, for sure, but eventually we hope that they won’t be needed.” As he states this, I imagine the generational efforts that are not fast, but calm and persistent. This sense of long durations of time indicates both an understanding of the complexity of the clean-up efforts, as well as implying a deep investment in the land and its people. This man’s long-term understanding of rainwater flushing out the mines, or the group’s delight in discovering Hognose snakes sunning themselves on a slag bed indicate subtle markers of time and energy—rhythms—and of change through that time. These observations also indicate that reclamation efforts are worth doing, even if they are not achievable in a single lifetime. This view is antithetical to the economic models for
extraction that have been used up to this point in the region that value untenable growth and profit regardless of the land and its people: reclamation is a different rhythm. Ironically, decades of industry exiting the region have allowed the forest and watershed to slow and even reverse its destruction, and begin to sound again. This is a distinct move away from a linear sense of extraction that continues until either there is no value left in the land or it becomes too expensive to take from.

Rhythms of an Unfinished Cultural Recovery

Against the tide of economic and population decline and in anticipation of another boom and bust cycle, residents of Shawnee and the “Little Cities” have joined together to encourage strategic community building projects focused on local history, ecotourism, children’s education, public spaces and gardens, festivals, and environmental reclamation. With each of these developments, the small organizations involve local residents as an integral part of their mission strategies (Bashaw et al. 2007, 54). Stuart Hall identifies a “return to the local” as often being a community’s “response to globalization,” as a means to “reclaim some form of representation for themselves” (1997, 33-4). For Hall, this entails either a response that veers toward an insular “cultural identity” that is infused with nationalism; or, a “from below” response that instead unearths and re-articulates histories that time, globalized economies, and global identities have obscured. The logic of the latter form of a return to the local informs groups such as the Sunday Creek Associates and Rural Action, who work to articulate and build on the “hidden histories” of the region in an attempt to redefine them, and to raise awareness of
and fight for the region’s survival. However, low incomes, the interests of encroaching large national and multi-national corporations, dwindling state and federal grant funds, and the need for many residents to work outside of the region all continue to complicate the effort to re-identify the “Little Cities” locally.

“It’s kind of a hopeful spring around here,” says a local business owner as I discuss with him and other residents about Shawnee’s efforts at revitalization and recovery. They are part of a group of locals aiming to keep the town active and alive through a variety of means, including businesses, community organization and outreach, architectural restoration, and tours. Through these efforts, they have become reluctant spokespeople, and they are constantly negotiating between openness and resentments that inevitably take place when acting in that role.

Though the town of Shawnee is on the National Register of Historical Places, to the outsider or visitor its buildings look worn down and abandoned. Much of the work that has taken place here over many years has been to hold these buildings up, to keep them from falling down. This process of “holding up” is not static or passive. It is a way to keep “the local” in motion, to resist its collapsing, and as such represents a long-term cultural rhythm of struggle and labor. When visitors comment to locals that they should “fix the buildings up,” there is resentment, as if this is a task that is easy and within the financial means of local residents. “That’s very humbling when people come in and say that,” states the business owner with a weary laugh. The Tecumseh Theater, the most prominent building on Main Street (as well as the tallest in Perry County at three stories), appears modest in appearance on the outside. Visitors may be hard pressed to see the
decades of work that have taken place on its infrastructure—new roofs, windows, and securing insurance and funding—that have kept the building from falling down. All of the years of work to hold up the architecture of the town are also an effort to prop up the community and the region, to imbue a sense of localness. The buildings become a metaphor of the active but often hidden work of the community to keep it alive, despite long-term economic and environmental decline.

As such, the Tecumseh Theater is not only a central restoration project in Shawnee, but also becomes the most prominent symbol of the local efforts to “hold up” the community against these destructive forces. On another visit to Shawnee, I take part in a tour of the theater. Our guide purchased the theater for $500 and has, along with several others, spent decades preserving it. As we climb the stairs to the upper floors, artifacts are scattered throughout: pianos, film projectors, trash. A woman accidentally knocks over an antique-looking beer bottle, and the sound echoes across the large, open room. To everyone’s laughter, our guide says, “Is it a Stroh’s? It’s probably mine. I’ve been working on this building long enough for my own beer bottles to become antiques.” His comment signals the length of the project and his commitment to it, long enough for a bottle to transform into an artifact.

Each rhythmic phase of saving the Tecumseh Theater has been a community effort. When replacing the roof, a group would get together every weekend to tear off and replace a section. On Friday nights, they would go out to the local bars and recruit friends and family to come over on Saturday to help with the roof. On Saturday, they would all climb up several stories and work, while an injured, professional roofer would sit up on
the roof with them and bark out orders, since the others did not know what they were doing. For lunch and again in the evening, family members would bring all kids of food to share. The workers would then go take a swim in the nearby Tecumseh Lake, and then head back out to the bars to recruit the next group for Sunday. This rhythmic pattern continued all summer long, until the entire roof was replaced. It becomes apparent that one of the ways in which a sense of space and time of Shawnee can be created is through understanding the scale of these restoration efforts. Following this process in terms of lifetimes and generations instead of months and years illustrates its slowness. It also shows the difficulty of recovery from below, without funds and in a community that is already expending its time and energy to survive. A local resident states, “That’s real hard for people to understand. Even for people who live here and appreciate to a certain extent what we’re doing, they really would like us to have the power to do it like a new Wal-Mart going up.” Those working to restore the buildings on Main Street would of course like the process to move more quickly. The scale of the projects constrains them against their own financial and time limitations as they also work for their own survival.

Along with these efforts, there is a constant negotiation between creating a public image of a place and of a people, and the resentment that arises from the misconceptions that occur both between locals and outsiders as well as between residents themselves. As I walk along the streets of Shawnee, it is palpable that I am not “from here.” The people I pass and meet do not recognize me in a town where everyone that lives there is known. It is hard to avoid the feeling that I am misplaced, not of this place. As “hosts” to people visiting the area, local residents bear both reluctance and openness to outsiders. With the
influx of visitors such as students and tourists, there is the chance to foster new connections and relationships that may deepen the visitor’s understanding of the “Little Cities.” At the same time, locals try to balance between this openness to new encounters and the frustration of “takers,” those who take your time, take the experience, and take it home without somehow giving back, without keeping the knowledge and experience in motion. This wariness of “takers” is an extension of a process that has happened many times over in the name of business, of progress, and of jobs. Still, the issue of hope guides these groups, becoming a mode of temporality across decades and generations. Hope is a long-term endeavor, and the projects of restoration and community building offer ways to “hold up” the architecture of Shawnee and the people who live there.

*Rhythms of Growth and Return: Elaine’s Garden, Farmer's Market, Forest Sounds*

Throughout the “Little Cities,” natural and plant life grow, thrive, and die off in tandem with economic, political, and social cycles. These events are all individual rhythms, and they tell us about the forest and its small cities as localized places. There is also a mix of human made and natural sounds and rhythms that are both native and non-native. “Elaine’s Garden” is a dedicated space that houses several “becoming” and “returning” temporal rhythms.83 The garden sits in an empty lot between two other buildings on Main Street in Shawnee, and is directly across the street from the Little Cities Archive. The building that once stood there is gone, but its front facade is still present. Glass windows have been broken out and pigeons roost in the upper rafters. As I

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83 For more information, see “Making the World a Beautiful Place One Garden at a Time,” Perry Daily Newspaper.
step inside, I hear these birds, wings flapping, angry with me for being too close. I also hear construction down the street, as the Desperado Bar is building an outdoor patio and the sounds of saws and hammers reverberate in the space. Technically, the garden is not open to the public because of the deteriorating buildings on either side, but it still offers a quiet place that makes use of otherwise unusable land. Standing in this space, there is a knowledge of its past as part of the forest, its transformation into a building, the building’s deterioration and destruction, and the new growth present today. The space contains both rhythms of return, and of linear time, pointing to the past and the present.

Elaine’s Garden also indicates conflicting desires about what it means to improve the aesthetic qualities of the town. I am told that the garden was created to house native plants and trees, such as wild ginger, dogwoods, and “Maiden’s Hair” ferns, and to have “native plant interpretation in a downtown area.” At the same time, volunteers that help to keep the garden clean also plant annuals and non-native plants. One local resident tells me that, “We may have to leave a corner for annuals or something for local people to feel like there really are flowers in the garden.” Even though there is much appreciation for the work done, there is still a tension present between differing interpretations of “local,” and “beautiful.” Another resident states that, “Every time I go through there I’m tempted to rip out everything that volunteers have put in. Oh, there’s a rose bush. Not native, not native...” This frustration points to different forms of “local,” different contrapuntal conceptions of how the town should recover, and ways that they are continually navigated. The tensions over Elaine’s Garden as a public space were further provoked during its recent restoration. “Community action workers” came together to fix the
broken elements of the garden, which was soon followed by vandalism. Volunteers scraped and painted buildings connected to and nearby the garden, only to receive formal complaints from other residents unhappy about the temporary mess. This push and pull between residents indicates clashing visions regarding the use of the public spaces on Main Street.

Bringing food grown locally to these small cities is another effort to make their centers more vital. A farmer’s market is set up in Shawnee on a bright Saturday spring morning, but it is small, only containing two tables. The tables are set up in the open spaces between buildings, empty lots where businesses once stood. One of the women selling goods tells me that this market is part of a larger group of farmer’s markets across the county. There was not a lot to offer: a few bags of strawberries, one bag of asparagus, some tomato and pepper plants, two pies, and cookies. Despite the modest size of the market, the women were optimistic, offering free heirloom seeds as part of a seed exchange. In New Straitsville, a small patch of land directly on Main Street contains the “Connie Dunkle Community Garden.” Divided into several plots for different families, it is well tended with vegetables already coming up in late spring. A local woman tells me that these gardens are for people who live in town but do not have any land, and that last year’s garden was very successful. Its prominent position in the middle of town is purposefully conspicuous. The woman says, “we’re just making use of the land in front of us,” but these plots also activate a public space allowing the larger community to observe and participate in the growing process. Both of these examples highlight the rhythms of farming, gardening, and plant life as a means of town renewal. They also
mark this renewal effort’s ebb and flow: while the community garden remains a success, the farmer’s market was unable to continue, eventually moving to another location in a larger city.

These rhythms of plant and animal growth can be heard across the Wayne National Forest, and the sounds of industry and recreation join them. Spring peeper frogs are heard every year, signaling the end of winter, and sounding from vernal pools in the forest. Over the past several decades, endangered black bears are returning. Their presence is another measure of the renewal of the forest and its ecosystem. They also bring an awareness of danger, as hikers are cautioned to travel in groups and sound their own presence to avoid any confrontation with a bear. The Forest Service states, “Make some noise as you hike. Talk, sing, or clap your hands so you don’t startle a bear. Some people wear bells to alert bears they are in the area.”

At the same time, other human-made sounds join these rhythms. ATV trails maze through the forest, and motorboats are heard across bodies of water. Hikers are apt to come across pump jacks and drill sites in the woods, a reminder of the interwoven polyrhythms of nature and industry. Quieter human rhythms are present, too. Groups like Rural Action bring wild ginseng planting to the forest, a potentially lucrative but scarce crop for small local farmers. This is a process that can take many seasons to come to fruition. Farmers seed hillsides in the forest, sweeping away leaves, scattering seeds, and then covering the area again.

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Silences: Spicy Yam, Library, Post Office

As public places disappear, there are fewer reasons to visit Main Street. Over a three-year period, Shawnee lost its library, post office, and a youth center. Nearly all of the needs of the residents of Shawnee must be purchased outside of town. Not only does this affect the idea of a local economy, it means fewer opportunities to connect with others, fewer chance meetings to say hello, have a conversation, check-in with neighbors. These sudden silences illustrate that notions of recovery, community, and sustainability are volatile, especially when the community relies on state and federal funding that can disappear at any moment.

“Probably one of the biggest successful and bittersweet stories we could tell you about Main Street is the Spicy Yam,” a local resident says to me. In 1999, a five-year grant was secured from the Ohio Arts Council for an art program for at-risk youth. Called the “Spicy Yam,” this youth center became one of the only places in Shawnee where kids could gather publicly and engage in creative work. In 2007, after diminishing state and federal funding, the Spicy Yam closed. The resident continues, “For five or six years it really rocked as a place for kids, and it changed the culture of Main Street for a while. The person running it was very good with children while at the same time being an artist. They made a lot of videos that got into the Athens Film Festival and in Cincinnati. It really changed the way kids saw downtown. A lot of their work was on the town, what it was like to live here. And we really went through a period where they were more hopeful.
It’s been closed now for three years and we’re starting to see the other side of kids being almost bitter."

Figure 14. Downtown Shawnee, Ohio.

The Shawnee library, located on the main floor of the Tecumseh Theater, also closed due to cuts in funding. “That was the only other place for kids to be. So now there is zero,” another resident tells me. The reasons that people came to town, and were actively engaged with the town, have disappeared. A third resident states, “When the funds were cut from the state library by 40% they had a choice to cut equally or to get rid of a branch. Shawnee had the lowest circulation, so they just closed it rather abruptly.” The Tecumseh Theater had already invested in fixing up a new space for the library, and was left to find new ways of paying off their debt. A cultural institution falls, and the
fallout affects others. The library’s “circulation” becomes the reason for its closure, but
the measurement of the movement of books and films alone fails to account for the use
and value of the exchange between people in town, the social circulation taking place
within the library building.

“And then the Post Office,” says another resident. “[The U.S. Postal Service]
came in—and this is one of the newer buildings on Main Street—and they claimed that it
was unsafe and condemned it and closed the Post Office. We’re much larger than many
other towns that have Post Offices.” In its place, an outdoor bank of mailboxes was
installed under a small open shelter up the hill, a block off of Main Street. Instead of
being part of the town, a public utility has been removed from the center and reduced to a
set of boxes on the periphery, without a person to talk to or even a building to dwell in. A
vital rhythmic center is thus both diminished and marginalized. “They claim that it’s still
a Post Office,” he says, with frustration. This may be true in a broad sense, but without
any employees it is a Post Office that has been stripped of human interaction, and without
a building it discourages any social exchange amongst townspeople.

In the “Little Cities,” these setbacks are felt deeply as they ripple and resonate
through the community. They point to the struggle of residents to maintain and expand a
notion of belonging and of place. On one hand, the struggle for cultural dignity and
recovery continues as a creative act, one that requires constant adjustment and renewal
albeit over a slower, longer duration. On the other hand, these efforts are against the
backdrop of economic models bound to fail, against the notion that the land and its
people are only of value if there is something that can be extracted or taken away. The
frustrations heard—in the voices of residents, and in the flux between “hopeful” and “bitter” in Shawnee’s youth as they are engaged in the community and then defunded—complicate the notions of “recovery” and “sustainability” in the region. Indeed, “sustainability” cannot be maintained or even applied as a term if the people who live here must abide by the linear rhythms of extraction, boom, bust, and destruction that have thus far defined the region. They must, out of necessity, allow the returning, cyclical rhythms of renewal and time to be secondary.

**Regional Economic Recovery and the Soundscapes of Protest**

The soundscapes of protest are entangled with the above sounds of recovery and destruction, acting as a volatile disruptor and agitator between the two. The process of mineral extraction that began after European settlement in the Hocking Valley brought with it exploitation, extra charges for mining supplies, and many other tactics that created an imbalance between wages of miners and profits of companies. Thus began the back-and-forth exchange—often contentious, sometimes violent—between striking miners and coal companies, an exchange that both brokered a tenuous prosperity, but also ultimately signaled the end of large-scale mining in the region. Local newspaper headlines from the Little Cities Archives sound these conflicts, and reveal that heated exchanges that ran parallel to the industry’s existence in the region. “The miners came out on Monday,” says the New Lexington Tribune in 1887, to protest the simultaneous stagnation of wages and the rising cost of “kegs of powder” explosives, creating a daily net loss for the miners. An 1874 Athens Messenger article describes more confrontation, stating, “We learn just

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86 “Sunday Creek Coal Strike,” Little Cities Archive.
as we go to press that a riotous spirit prevails among the mines in the locality of
Nelsonville, several non-strikers having been violently assaulted by the wives of the
strikers.” 87 Another 1874 report from the New York Times states, “Saturday and Sunday
the city was filled with all kinds of rumors, and to-day the information from trustworthy
sources is that riot and murder are the order of the day in the vicinity of Nelsonville,
Logan, and Straitsville.” 88 By 1927, the Zanesville Signal reports on a large strike, stating
that there is “no chance for work and home towns are almost depopulated.” 89 It is this
“great strike,” with its local version known as the “Great Hocking Valley Coal Strike,”
that helped to save mining labor rights nationally but devastated regional mining (Dishon
and Winnenberg 1998, 44). 1927 signaled the beginning of an era of continuous
economic decline, through the twentieth century and lasting to this day. Explosive,
riotous, and violent, dispersing and then silenced, a sonic arc is formed that maps the
many stages of conflict in the area. At the same time, the forest grows, thinly veiling the
scarred landscape as both employment and dissent recede.

Concurrent with the sounds of environmental recovery, an emerging economic
recovery is taking place in the larger region of eastern Ohio, largely due to the expansion
of natural gas extraction. With the past century of economic and population decline in the
“Little Cities,” the prospect of an influx of jobs for many is welcome news. “Energy
Companies: We Need Truckers,” reads the headline of a local news service. 90 “The

87 “Non-Strikers Assaulted by Wives of Strikers at Nelsonville,” Little Cities Archive.
89 “Great Mine Strike of 1921,” Little Cities Archive.
90 “Energy Companies: We Need Truckers,” CentralOhio.com, accessed February 15, 2014,
expected Ohio oil and gas boom is going to make roads near wells swarm with trucks like bees to a hive. It’s likely to cause headaches for at least a few, but for others the commotion is going to sound like opportunity beckoning.” 91 The “swarm” and “commotion” of the boom carries with it an excitement that taps into the longing for prosperity and is tempered by a weariness of an inevitable bust. Thus, the sounds of economic recovery point to both local and larger networks of natural, industrial, and social processes that extend far beyond the region, affecting national global commerce and capital (Hall 1997, Kearney 1995).

The boom within the Wayne National Forest complicates the land- and soundscape, where recovery, development, and recession all occur simultaneously. Despite being a national forest, much of its acreage is privately owned, as well as the majority of mineral rights beneath the surface. 92 According to the Forest Service, there are 1,283 active wells on the forest lands as of 2012. 93 There are also new sounds of the boom off in the distance, yet to come: the forest has been undergoing a contentious and divisive process of being opened to hydraulic fracturing, filled with political spectacle, delays, and protests, but ultimately continuing to move forward. As such, the present and potential future influx of companies and people to the forest creates a complex set of benefits and detractions.

91 ibid.
The flow and circulation of energy, employment, and money waxes and wanes in the region. As I listen, this movement parallels the sounds that come and go, revealing what is at stake in the forest: a clash between environmental recovery and an uncertain economic recovery. Trucks and equipment sound the increase of production, long-term jobs and prosperity are loudly and ceremoniously promised to great political acclaim, and new threats to the watershed are enacted before recovery is completed: even the repetitions of past mistakes and exploitations bear their own distinct rhythms. Once again residents must parse through the many layers of voices in an attempt to avoid the repeating chants of promise, and a one-way flow of energy and economic benefits out of the region follows.

The acts of both passionate and organized forms of protest based on mineral extraction, quiet for several decades in the “Little Cities,” have undergone a shift from labor to environment. Now, it is groups outside the energy industry who carry on the disruptive nature of the striking miners in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In an area with many seeking work, the new promise of employment, however temporary, further complicates tensions between industry, labor, and environmental activists. The wages of employees working in the hydraulic fracturing industry in the region today are relatively high, and once again the fracking boom brings the promise of prosperity to these counties that have been let down economically and environmentally many times over. According to Reuters, parts of Ohio anticipate a continued “boom in jobs for truck drivers, safety officers, welders, pipeline technicians and other industry jobs – many at
annual salaries of $60,000 to $70,000, nearly double the median household income.”

Once again, the region is asked to make a perhaps false choice between development and destruction, between employment that has the potential to provide a living wage and the knowledge that the region will continue to suffer environmental degradation for generations to come.

It is against this conflicted backdrop that local groups mount different strategies of protest, focusing on hydraulic fracturing in particular. In this way, clashing soundscapes of ecology and politics are revealed and we hear an arrhythmia of discord between the two. As the boom continues to reverberate, it is clear that water is the key resource as stake. Its removal, contamination, movement, and storage are all different components of water’s role in fracking. Ohio, in particular, has become not only a site for fracking, but also a central dumping ground of “frack waste” or “waste water,” for fracking taking place out of state. Outside of the “Little Cities,” Portage County, Ohio was recently deemed the “Fracking Waste Disposal Capital of Ohio,” importing wastewater mostly from adjacent states. As the efforts continue to bring back to life dead streams and rivers from acid mine drainage, a process that will be invested in for a century or more in the future, these new issues threaten to undermine or even worsen waterways in the region in a matter of years.

In the basement of a former church that is now a community center in Athens, Ohio, I join a group of a dozen women and men to form two lines facing one another. Over just a few minutes, one side moves quickly from curt conversation to confrontation to yelling. “What are you doing here?” screams a woman in the line, pointing her finger close to a man’s face. “Get the hell off my property! You’ve got no right to be here!” The room is reverberating with anger, shouting, pleading, and tension-filled voices. At the same time, some of the men and women are quiet, even calm. They do not say anything, despite the screaming that is directed toward them. My stomach is hurting, and I feel disoriented. The situation feels out of control to me. I cannot wait for this uncomfortable moment to be over. When the yelling tapers off and stops, there is still a tension in the room as everyone begins to assess what just took place.

In this moment, the sonic qualities of silence, repetition, and impassioned shouting are entwined, and perform the logic of resistance and “direct action.” As part of a “direct action” workshop, we were taking part in a “hassle line,” a role-playing exercise in which one line pretends to be construction workers confronting protesters at a fracking site. Protesters often work through these mock situations in order to mentally prepare for confrontations with workers, security guards, and police. It is a chance to practice “de-escalation,” a form of non-violent communication that focuses on staying calm and quiet in the face of antagonistic behavior. “You’ve got to know when to call out and when not to,” says the instructor. Controlling emotions, and even silence are used here as tools of protest, allowing the situation to not get out of hand, and to extend the process as long as
possible with the goal of generating disruption and more publicity. This silence is also used as a way of creating a unified message of the protest group, allowing them to speak with one voice, or simply through their physical presence without further explanation.

Appalachia Resist, the group offering this workshop, has engaged in “direct action” across southeastern Ohio and into West Virginia over the past several years. They began as a response to the escalation of the natural gas method of extraction called hydraulic fracturing, or “fracking,” in the region. Comprised of different ages and backgrounds, including farmers, students, business owners and organizers, Appalachia Resist members state that they are “residents of Athens and Meigs Counties who have come together to oppose fracking, injection wells, and the barging of frack waste on the Ohio River.” Over the past two years, they have held rallies, disrupted waste disposal sites, and blocked fracking injection wells. One such event, called the “Great Ohio River Relay,” took place along the Ohio River, where several protest groups were encouraged to “bring eerie noisemakers” and line the length of the river to protest proposed frack-waste barges. The noisemakers sound not only the resistance against fracking, but also act as sounded “harbingers” of disaster yet to come along the river.

Our instructor explains “direct action” as being a form of strategic, non-violent action “unmediated by the political process to stop an injustice where it happens.” Appalachia Resist see themselves as being part of a long line of historical protests, from Mother Jones’ “March of the Mill Children,” which protested child-labor, to the Black Panthers’ “Free Breakfast For Children Program,” to “MST,” a landless workers

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97 Ibid.
movement in Brazil. An activity meant to draw attention, the group understands “direct action” as a way of putting themselves in a position of power, and forcing other players in government and industry to allow them a seat at the table. In short, they desire to have a voice and to be heard, but are not waiting for an invitation or permission to speak.

Harkening back to Labelle’s distinction between “above” and “below” ground, our instructor is very careful to tell us that Appalachia Resist is an “above ground, above board organization.” On the subject of covert action or sabotage, one member states that they “neither condone or condemn, but can understand what would lead someone to this action.” They make a distinction between the “destruction of life versus the destruction of property,” and while they never condone the former, the latter “can work sometimes.”

When I ask what the difference is between “direct action” and civil disobedience, the instructor answers that there is much overlap between the two but with some differences. For them, “direct action” can go further, even including sabotage in some cases. “But we are absolutely not willing to blow things up,” says a member.

Both silence and repetition act as methods of resistance for Appalachia Resist. During a confrontation with police related to a protest, a “police liaison” is designated, and no one else in the group talks, remaining silent. This silence allows the group to stay unified in voice, and also protects members from saying anything that can be legally held against them. The instructor indicates that there are levels of “silence” to correspond with escalating levels of interaction between police and protester. During “casual conversation,” the protester states, “I don’t want to talk,” in a kind but firm voice. As conversation moves to being detained, or even arrest, the protester continues to not offer
information, only stating “I want to remain silent. I want to see my lawyer.” Importantly, the instructor emphasizes the importance of repetition in such a volatile situation, stating, “You need to say it over and over.”

Since “direct action” is essentially conspiring to occasionally non-violently break the law, this use of silence is also employed internally, as the group walks a line between “security culture” and “paranoia” directed toward those that see them as criminals. One member brings up a discussion on cell phones, how they can be monitored, stating, “They can be used as a microphone even when they are turned off. You’ve got to know when to say something, and when not to. We don’t know for sure how much they are listening to us.” This desire for a security culture and control of technology was extended to our meeting: when I ask permission to make a field recording of the workshop, the group put it to a vote, and permission is denied.

The group discusses their concerns about “direct action” as a form of “active listening” to one another. We break into pairs, as part of the workshop, and discuss individual fears. The person I speak with talks of not wanting to be arrested, because of being a parent to a young child. Other concerns include fear of jail, worries about toxins and radiation related to the fracking wastewater, being pepper sprayed, and damage to career. Overall, the group had a close knowledge of the repercussions of “direct action,” and each individual makes decisions based on this knowledge. The goal, therefore, is to maintain some form of control over the unpredictable events that unfold.

When asked what they could do in the “direct action” to disrupt the work taking place in a non-violent, non-destructive way, sound was immediately invoked as a
necessary and effective tool. A member of the group responded, “We could make a lot of noise!” “Or sing,” said another. “Let’s make a ruckus!” added a third. During the “direct action” protest process, each of the participants play a role, such as “arrestee,” “police liaison,” “crowd facilitator,” and “media liaison.” In the “horizontal structure” of the group, these roles allow for a concentrated and effective protest, and attempts to show that all parts are equal. Still, there are some roles that are more dangerous than others, such as those that may chain themselves to a structure and/or get arrested. The majority of other people there are part of the “green zone,” and they provide support for those taking the most dangerous roles. These “radical cheerleaders” are charged with making music and leading chants. “Resist! Resist! Show ‘em what they can kiss!” is a favorite of the group. These “green zone” members also spend time as “leaf letters,” talking to workers that may be present from the fracking industry, as well as locals who may be on-looking or living nearby. They are understood as providing a valuable part of the action, much like bringing a whole community to the site of resistance. In essence, these “extras” provide witness, support, and assistance, but also bring a celebratory atmosphere to an otherwise tension-filled situation.

The instructor shares additional “direct action” tools used to form “hard blockades.” These devices, including locks and chains, allow the protester to stay longer in a situation, to prolong the process, and eventually invite negotiation with police. Barrels filled with concrete weigh up to 600 pounds, bike locks, and modified PVC piped called “black bears,” are all devices in which protesters lock themselves into and police must saw through them in order to unlock them from the outside. A “goo box” is passed
around, in which small items are taped around a steel pipe that becomes dangerous when cut through with saws. All of these objects, being passed around the room, make me feel uncomfortable, claustrophobic. One member describes the sounds of a band saw being overwhelming, as it is dangerously close to arms and ears, with sparks flying off. Despite the violence of sawing through these devices, the instructor continually states that safety and trust are foremost on the minds of the protesters, who care for each other in these strained situations with “shared discomfort.”

The last exercise performed as a group is a “blockade mock action,” in which the group practices an intervention and occupation of a fictional office. As members confront one another, some are acting as “radical cheerleaders,” and I join others to form a “soft blockade,” interlocking hands and feet together. Once again, the scene escalates quickly, and shouting breaks out. There are sounds used to organize the group, to keep it focused, calm, and stable amidst a situation that I imagine could easily descend into chaos. I hear some singing and chants in the background, while next to me the “police liaison” tries to speak calmly and quietly. A member of the group pretending to be a police officer tries to forcibly tear my interlocked hands apart. When this doesn’t work, he pretends to douse us with pepper spray. After the “mock action,” we discuss our experiences. Even though it is a member of the group pretending to be the aggressor, my heart is still racing from our interaction. Members of the group speak of their experiences of being pepper sprayed, and of the pain and screaming that occurred as a result.

The “mock-actions” undergone during the workshop are tested out three months later when Appalachia Resist rallies a large number of protesters to lead a demonstration
that ends up blocking the entrance to an injection well storage site in Athens county. Chants such as, “Our water, our air, no fracking anywhere!” are shouted antiphonally amongst the group. Megaphones are used, and individuals are allowed time to speak to the group. “I’m pissed off because those tanks up there are filled with poison,” a local woman announces through the megaphone. As trucks drive by carrying the fracking waste, the group sing “We Shall Not Be Moved,” and a version of “We Shall Overcome” altered to “We’ll Protect Our Water.” Ultimately, eight farmers and local business leaders are arrested. Those being arrested are calm and quiet, while the protesting crowd continues an air of celebration around them. Much cheering and clapping erupts as the eight are led away. Words of encouragement are shouted to the arrestees. A woman calls out, “You look beautiful in cuffs!”

Throughout, the very prominent sonic qualities of shouting, speeches, chanting, and singing are acting as ways of literally and emotionally binding the group together. This, in turn, strengthens the group’s ability to react to and resist hostilities generated by those who seek to remove them from their protest. Finally, these sonic acts of resistance lend an air of celebration to a tension-filled moment. These sounds work simultaneously to bring together and diffuse, to meaningfully hold in suspension a situation that could otherwise easily descend into chaos and even violence.

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98 For documentation of the event, see: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=65rLt0WIwpE&list=UU9K2Q08wMuAYBOlE3weGxOg, accessed February 3, 2014.
“You Rulers of the Forest, this Song to you I’ll Tell”

On May 23, 2012, a group of 100 area residents gather outside at the Wayne National Forest headquarters to speak out against proposed hydraulic fracturing wells. Their purpose is to urge the forest authorities to delay issuing permits to drill wells, and instead perform additional evaluations on the environmental impacts of fracking. Many of the concerns expressed relate to environmental and economic damage to the region, including the disruption of the watershed. Among these concerns are the potential sounds of fracking in the form of noise pollution, which goes against the ethos of the forest being a public tourist site. Different groups and prominent community members are present

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100 ibid.
to speak out against fracking, including the Athens County Fracking Action Network and the mayor of the city of Athens.

Jack Wright, a musician, filmmaker, and recently retired professor at Ohio University, stands up in front of the group, holding a piece of paper. “Fresh off the press,” he says, to the laughter of the crowd. He begins to sing a modified, unaccompanied version of the well-known Florence Reece song, “Which Side Are You On?” that was originally written in response to striking coal miners in the 1930s. Wright sings,

You rulers of the forest, this song to you I’ll tell
Do the impact study, save us from fracking hell
Which side are you on boys, which side are you on?
Which side are you on girls, which side are you on?

Come all you good people, good news to you I’ll tell
If we stick together, we’ll save our water wells
Which side are you on boys, which side are you on?
Which side are you on girls, which side are you on?

We’re fighting for the future, and for our sons and daughters
To make our world secure, and leave them with clean water
Which side are you on boys, which side are you on?
Which side are you on girls, which side are you on?

101 A video documentation of the event is located here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KkHLAFoSyZo
Upon finishing, Wright references a 1967 Billy Edd Wheeler song against strip mining, saying, “One more thing: they can’t put it back!” This turns into a chant the entire crowd repeats several times over, each time getting louder and with more force: “They can’t put it back!”

Wright’s adjustments to the songs are a part of a larger folk tradition of localizing music to fit to a place, in this case the Wayne National Forest. It is also a form of musical borrowing with a historical awareness. Part of a continuum of adaptation, the Reece tune is also based upon a previous song, the Baptist hymn, “Lay the Lilly Low,” or “Jack Munro” (McGill 1918). Wright’s connection to the Reece song is also personal, as he was able to meet and know her before her death in 1986, thus adding another layer of human interaction to the history reveled in the reworked version. In this way, Wright’s live performance—that borrows from the Reece and Wheeler tunes and lyrics—is akin to a form of an embodied archival performance. He is purposefully making use of an archival reference and re-performing it in a new context, creating a complex mix of layers of memory and past resistance, and applying it to the present. The result of these experiences is an embodied knowledge of the archive, performed and re-performed under varying contexts.

To change aspects of a well-known song is to move in several spatial and temporal directions simultaneously. By directly referencing fracking in the forest, Wright makes a connection to a particular place, a deliberate attempt to make larger regional, national, and global issues smaller, personal, and local. Wright’s process of adaptation is also a way to absorb and comment on past and present issues at the same time, with each
influencing and altering the other. It is a way to carry the past experiences and present threats of destruction of the land together. By tapping into a pre-existing musical structure, Wright is able to work collaboratively and quickly to convey a message specific to the place and the issue faced that day. “My wife and I composed that on the way [to the gathering],” Wright tells me. “We knew what the issues were. We weren’t experts but we knew what was about to come down. My wife was driving and we were making up the verses as we went, and I think I wrote it down on a paper bag. It wasn’t something I set out to do. It was very spontaneous.”

Within the context of the newly reworked song, Wright seeks to give voice to those gathered to protest, but also to act as a mediator, singing both to the crowd and the forest authorities. When Reece begins her version of the song by stating, “Come all of you good workers/Good news to you I’ll tell,” she is directly addressing the miners, urging them to join the union and imploring them not to become “scabs.” She continues to do so throughout the entire song, and it is clearly meant to help organize, inspire, and encourage the miners to stay unified in the face of violence from the coal companies. Wright, however, first addresses those in power, the “rulers of the forest”—including the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service, Ohio Department of Natural Resources, and governor John Kasich—and asks them directly to go ahead with proposed environmental impact studies. When Wright then paraphrases from the Reece lyrics, singing “Come all you good people, good news to you I’ll tell,” he is opening his address to include both those in power as well as those meeting that day to protest against the
proposed wells. In doing so, Wright is asking his fellow protesters to shout together and the forest officials to listen and act upon their request.

For Wright, decades of resistance efforts—against environmental, social, and political injustice, including the Vietnam War and strip mining—preceded the event at the Wayne National Forest. Throughout these years, Wright continued the process of adaptation and musical borrowing, adjusted to fit a local situation. “Even in Vietnam I made songs up,” Wright tells me later during an interview.102 “I’d take tunes and just rework the words.” An early example of this process for Wright was the Larry Verne novelty song, “Mr. Custer,” popular in the early 1960s. The song is a parody of a foot soldier not wanting to fight in the Battle of the Little Bighorn, stating, “Please, Mr. Custer, I don’t want to go.” Wright transformed the novelty song to reflect his own involvement in the Vietnam War and his resistance against it, and did so while on active duty in Vietnam. “When we would get a break back at the tent, I had an old guitar and I’d pull that out. And I changed [Mr. Custer] to our division commander who was General Norton. And I’d have guys singing along with me, ‘Please, General Norton, I don’t want to go/There’s VC waitin’ out there.’ I just changed the whole thing to localize it.”

Wright’s process of choosing this particular piece is rooted both in the tradition of resistance music as well as his own involvement with it, and led to a focus on place and the local. After Wright left the Vietnam War, he began to actively protest against it. This, in combination with an involvement with the Civil Rights movement led Wright to “localize” once again, focusing on his home in Wise county, Virginia and the coal mining that took place in that region. He collected coal mining ballads and reflected on their

102 Personal interview with Jack Wright on February 15, 2014.
immediate function and larger contextual meanings. Musicians such as “Dock” Boggs (1898-1971), Mike Seeger (1933-2009), and Hazel Dickens (1935-2011) became mentors, exposing Wright to a body of musical, cultural, and political material, including what Wright refers to as “resistance music.” Seeger would make mix tapes of recorded “old time” music for Wright to listen to and educate himself with. Boggs in particular became a close mentor, one who would contribute a local knowledge to Wright. “Well, I got to know ‘Dock,’ he lived not too from me,” states Wright. “[Boggs] was instrumental in getting me focused on my local culture.” By meeting, befriending, and researching a group of active and outspoken musicians, Wright became part of a long tradition of connecting artistic expression to protest. Equally as important, he continues to take part in connecting himself to the land and to its people, turning his resistance toward issues that affect those around him, including his own family.

During Wright’s formative years, the Civil Rights movement also played a key part in his understanding of resistance music. Through a Ford Foundation grant, Wright became involved with the Highlander Center in Tennessee, and was exposed to contemporary musicians such as Guy Carowan who “cut his teeth in the civil rights movement.” Wright also developed a historical knowledge of an entire body of folk music related to protest and resistance including the movement in the 1930s of Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie, Aunt Molly Jackson, Sarah Ogan Gunning, and Jim Garland. Jackson, Gunning, and Garland, all siblings, were of particular significance to Wright, as their advocacy for unionization in Harlan County, Kentucky was just over the border from his home in Wise County, Virginia.
Wright describes these ballads as “resistance music,” and their lyrics are often no more than descriptions “just stating that fact that there’s been a horrible accident and a lot of men had been killed.” For Wright, “resistance” is a larger term that protest is only one component of. “Resistance,” states Wright, “encompasses much more of the feeling of why these songs are written. It’s just, ‘look what happened,’ look at this tragedy or this situation and look at what happened; look at the strengths or weaknesses, and sometimes it’s romanticized, sometimes not. Of course there is the element of protest in it, [but] not all resistance songs are protest songs.” In this way, these songs offer a poetic documentation of historical events. Despite being descriptive in nature or perhaps because of it, they also infer a social analysis and commentary on past events and allow emotion and action well up in the listener.

Coinciding with protest and resistance is a process of critical self-analysis, as well as the emotions of both despair and hope. The event at the Wayne National Forest was a gesture performed with only a small chance of meaningful dialogue with the “rulers of the forest.” As a result, its efficacy is uncertain in resisting the much larger and more powerful entities of government and corporations. Despite many decades of involvement with efforts to enact environmental and social justice, Wright struggles with the frustrations of resistance and the despair that can occur as a product of its failure to make change. Wright states,

I saw what [the Vietnam War and strip mining] were doing to my country and to my neighbors and then ultimately to my family. It makes you really question what kind of civil disobedience you want to do. What can you really do when at every
turn you try to use the system and the laws that are there, that should be enforced? And if they are not enforced and you bring it to the attention of the enforcers and they still don’t do anything, it makes you wonder what is the next step? If you don’t have a lot of money it’s not like you can take them to court and “law them,” as they say.

Berry directly addresses these very issues in his 1990 essay, “A Poem of Difficult Hope.” Berry states that much protest is naive; it expects quick, visible improvement and despairs and gives up when such improvement does not come. Protesters who hold out longer have perhaps understood that success is not the proper goal. If protest is dependent on success, there would be little protest of any durability or significance. History simply affords too little evidence that anyone’s individual protest is of any use. Protest that endures, I think, is moved by a hope far more modest than that of public success: namely, the hope of preserving qualities in one’s own heart and spirit that would be destroyed by acquiescence. (Berry 1990, 62)

Remaining in passive agreement with injustice is not an option. The act of raising one’s voice to sing or to shout may be futile, but the consequences of this action travels both outward and inward. In this way, Wright and others recognize their efforts may not have any impact on public policy, but still must insist on continuing, making their resistance long-term projects. The continued efforts of younger generations also temper the sense of despair that can result from the frustration associated with protest. Wright is able to find
solace and inspiration in groups such as Appalachia Resist and the Athens County Fracking Action Committee, seeing them as part of a continuation of a larger struggle. “That’s why I admire these Appalachia Resist people,” states Wright. “They’ve manage to stay focused, and I’m just so proud of them and so glad that they are here in our community.” This admiration perhaps best shows how those engaged in protest act in order to speak to those in power and to impact their public policy. Just as importantly, they are also actively resisting the destructive power of “acquiescence.” To act is to give voice, even if it is clearly a long term and intergenerational process. Just as reclamation efforts are planned over decades and centuries and not just months and years, acts of resistance are ongoing and must be shared, thereby building and adding to the strength of the relationships between people in the region.

Water continues to be a central issue in the region, and is even more so with the increase of fracking. Importantly, the fracking process not only makes use of millions of gallons of fresh water, but injecting it back down into spent oil wells also takes this water completely out of circulation. It can no longer be a part of the exchange between people and environment, unless its containment under the ground fails and it seeps back into the watershed as poison, replete with chemicals harmful to the ecosystem. “Right now it seems like the most pressing issue is fresh water, and keeping our water clean,” Wright comments. “I think there’s some people that have this strange view of how the world is and how it works in terms of how mysterious water is, [and] just how much we’re all in the same boat. It just horrifies me to think they can just shoot this poison back into the ground and nothing will ever happen to it. [They think] it will just be out of the way
forever.” Taking the water out of circulation is an act of silencing, removing the chance for its function in the environment and reducing it to poison. This silencing is also applied to political interaction connected to the water. In 2013, the chief of the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency’s division of surface water was forced to resign, “after the governor asked him to step down over disputes with the coal industry,” according to *The Columbus Dispatch*.103 The same article noted that since 2009, “Ohio coal interests have poured nearly $1 million into campaign coffers of statewide and legislative candidates,” with over $870,000 of the overall amount [coming] from just two coal families.”104 Water flows, and money and influence flows, too. Once the water or the voice of resistance is silenced, it is no longer able to be a part of circulation and exchange. Wright warning, “You can’t put it back!” now takes on additional meaning, referring to both the extraction of gas and the injection of the wastewater back into the wells.

“That was a good day,” states Wright about the gathering at the Wayne National Forest headquarters. “I wish they could have listened a little bit clearer to what we had to say. We still have to insist that what we believe be listened to.” Wright’s assessment of the event, tinged with a mix of emotions, points to the struggles of raising one’s voice to not only be heard, but to change the course of events. Singing becomes a forceful act of resistance and listening is the hoped for goal, but without any assurance of communication or success. Ultimately, in August of 2012, federal officials deemed that the proposed fracking sites would be allowed, with an estimated 234 wells to be drilled

104 ibid.
through 2016. Voice and listening, then, may be important tools in the battle over fracking in the forest, but are not enough to change policy. How loud must the voices be to be heard, how many times does their message need to be repeated? Wright continues, “It was just for the moment, to try to help get those people together and let the Wayne Forest people know we were there in force. If they could hear the force of the song and hear us shouting, that sort of made our crowd a little bit bigger. Even though in the long haul it didn’t change their minds, at least they knew we were there to contend with their violations.”

Conclusion

Present in all of the topics discussed in this chapter, water is and remains a defining element that connects the rhythms of destruction, recovery efforts, and protest taking place in the Wayne National Forest and beyond. Water also marks the fluidity and exchange between these three activities in various stages of cooperation and conflict. The soundscapes and rhythms of the region reflect and reverberate this urgent need to renew, use, and protect water. Jack Wright’s heterophonic act of leading many individual voices as they come together with variation and difference against further destruction of where they live is complemented and complicated by efforts at environmental and economic recovery. Direct action and physical resistance is another form of raising voices to be heard, even as other, more divisive acts of resistance still burn underground. The people of the “Little Cities” work to hold up their buildings, which in turn strengthens their sense of the local. Gardens are planted as other public sites on Main Streets continue to

disappear. As new industry expands into the region, trucks rumble through towns
bringing both hope of economic independence and a fear of more destruction. Aquatic
life returns to the water, and an entire ecosystem returns. Bitterness, hope, struggle, and
creativity all coalesce in counterpoint with one another in both conflict and accord,
flowing together downstream. Their “co-presence” signals a fragile recovery, one in
motion and in different stages of becoming and dissipation, with a far from certain
outcome.
CONCLUSION: “AN ARCHIVE THAT NEVER FINDS ITS END”

The project of this dissertation has been to critically engage sonic archives through performance and senses of place. I have used the primary method of listening as the means to navigate and find connections between sonic archives, place, knowledge, and power. Listening, applied to the methodologies of sonic ethnography and archival performance, opens a space of engagement with sonic archives that includes historical, social, temporal, and environmental contexts. These methodologies have allowed me to work within the archive, and increasingly outside the archive. The exchange between inside and outside the archive functions as a way of continually expanding the contexts of archival material. Recognizing the continually changing nature of the archive, observing and participating in actively performances of them, and engaging with those connected to them all strengthen and even alter my understanding of sonic archives and the people and places they serve.

I again return to Wendell Berry, whose writings on agriculture and land use offer a cogent way to consider the destruction and stewardship associated with sonic archives. In a recent interview, Berry spoke of becoming tied to a place in a similar manner that this dissertation has advocated fostering a connection with archives, especially those of the marginalized and oppressed. Berry states,

The important thing to do is to learn all you can about where you are, and if you’re gonna work there, it becomes even more important to learn everything you can about that place, to make common cause with that place. And, then, resigning
yourself, becoming patient enough to work with it, over a long period of time.

And then, what you do is increase the possibility that you’ll make a good example. And what we’re looking for in this is good examples.\textsuperscript{106}

Importantly, Berry is less concerned with definitive answers than strong models and the process of stewardship. To cultivate “common cause” with a sonic archive—in a similar manner to developing a sense of place—is to hold and engage it, without attempting to fix or possess it. Common cause has been evoked and moved toward in this dissertation’s three sonic archives—despite their differences—through archival interpretation and performance. As a result of this process, these sonic archives have revealed an archival agency, changing and influencing those that come into contact with them and listen to them.

To conclude this dissertation, I return once again to Robinson’s Cave to listen and record, in a deliberate act of repetition. It is Memorial Day weekend, signaling the beginning of summer, and the New Straitsville “Moonshine Festival” is taking place. The festival celebrates the town’s notoriety as a place where much illegal moonshine was (and perhaps still is) made and sold, an industry that arose here in part as a response to the underground fires that ended coal mining. I walk up Main Street amid a blaring Johnny Cash recording, and hear fragments of conversations of the people I pass by: “...so he sent a guy out there, see what goin’ on,” “...Ah, you know what we didn’t bring?” “...you know buddy, I’ve never been pulled over...” I walk past booths selling t-shirts and food trucks offering funnel cakes and onion petals. A parade begins, mostly of

local fire trucks, a few muscle cars, and a host of festival queens from around the state. The announcer’s sing-song baritone voice provides a running commentary that teeters on being inappropriate as he introduces each queen: “And here’s our very own Moonshine Queen! Hello ladies...that is one serious dress you’ve got on right now.” The festival highlights how the region attempts to remember and define itself, deriving names from different industries, histories, and attractions, such as the “Railroad Festival,” “Old Settlers Reunion,” “Ohio Hills Folk Festival,” “Coal Festival,” and “Indian Mound Festival.”

I walk toward the parking lot of Robinson’s Cave in which there are temporary carnival rides set up. As I move away from the parade, its sounds do not disappear all together, but rather merge and overlap into the noise of machinery, chains moving, and mostly empty cages whirling overhead. A man yells to me, “Hey, hey, hey! You ready to play? I’ll let you win today!” There are only a few children on the rides, and the attendants look bored as they latch and unlatch their riders. A child yells above the din of machinery, “I wanna go on the rocket! I wanna go on the rocket!” as another says, “Hey, can you buy me a wristband?”

I continue through the parking lot and walk up the steps to Robinson’s Cave. As I stand inside, the sounds from below become less pronounced. They drift up and are altered, resonating inside the ear of the cave. Carnival and country music join the shouts and laughter of the people below, merging into blurred echoes. They are in counterpoint with the drips of the cave and the sounds of the forest. Once again, I find myself paying attention to the present while trying to understand the past sounds of this place.
Harkening back again to Labelle’s (2010) observation that underground spaces act as “zones of transformation,” and with the carnival sounds still ringing in my ears, I am reminded how Robinson’s Cave has changed once again from a secret, outside place of rebellion, conspiracy, and protest to a public one. In the twentieth century, the cave became part of a local farm, with animals grazing on and moving throughout the space. And, echoing the events of the Moonshine Festival that I hear down below, the cave was even used for a time as an amusement park, with a merry-go-round installed inside the cave. Riders would spin around, half inside and half outside the cave’s mouth as its carousel tunes fill the cave and spill out onto the grassy field in front. As such, not only were the people who visited the cave transformed, but the space itself was dramatically altered from hidden to open, from a secret meeting place of resistance to a public playground of entertainment.

Robinson’s Cave as a zone of transformation reminds me that I, too, continually change as I return to listen to places over a long period of time. My evolving personal transformation is brought together with those who have listened in the past, and those who will listen into the future. The physical space of the cave changes, too, albeit at a slower rate. Contexts are altered, objects come and go, and even part of the roof came crashing down at one time (due to a weakened roof by the carousel), and all conspire to create an unfolding temporal soundscape of the cave. The repetition and gradual change of returning generates rhythms as a material for analysis. These rhythms, in turn, are enacted over and over, and along the way they absorb previous iterations.
Just as I return “again and again” to this place, so too does an archive become a place of return and transformation. During the course of this dissertation, archival and a sonic-ethnographic emplacement have become conflated, and as a result it has also become hard to distinguish between inside and outside the archive. Spieker (2008) states there is no distinction between the two: what appears to be outside is merely yet another archive. Spieker speaks of “an archive that never finds its end,” and in this case, there is “no mechanism for dispensing with knowledge,” no way of getting rid of “what is inessential,” and the archive thus remains always out of reach and always overwhelming (32).
However, it is the performative acts of interpretation—archival performances—that open a space of engagement between inside and outside (and as such they are still useful distinctions). Inside and outside are both needed, however fleeting, and are two sides of the same concept. Archival performances move between inside and outside the archive, actively and creatively revealing different forms of “essential.” They help to alleviate or even avoid the trap of not being able to navigate through the archival materials.

In Calvino’s *Mr. Palomar* (1985), the eponymous protagonist succumbs to the very trap Spiro describes. Palomar attempts to systematically understand and catalog every blade of grass in his yard, taste every cheese in a cheeseshop, describe every star in the sky. Each “archive” that he endeavors to move through invariably overwhelms him and, defeated, he gives up. Palomar’s downfall is his aim to possess these collections as fixed knowledge, and his attempt to do so in a singular, rigid manner by himself. He tries to comprehensively understand something that continues to change, grow, expand, and unfold even as it slips through his fingers. Every move he makes reveals yet another layer of complexity and potential analysis. However, if the opposite approach is taken—one that is not singular but multi-voiced, one that holds the archive but does not possess it, and one that contributes subjectively to the archive with the knowledge that this contribution itself will alter the archive as it continues to unfold into the future—then an archive opens up and is brought to light in new ways. This process is at the heart of what archival performances have to offer.
Together, and in relation to one another, these performances allow for not one singular “law” or frame of the archive, but many. Performing the sonic archive does not fix it into definitive interpretations, but rather spins it out into newly becoming clusters of waves and reverberations, projecting outward and bouncing against one another. They are acts of proliferation, rather than consolidation, yet they continue to remain tied to earlier iterations of the archive. Archival performances are brought into the fold of the archive, contributing to its continual expansion and movement, still never finding an end.
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