

A CULTURAL ECOLOGY OF APPALACHIAN MUSIC

Expressive Transitions in an Industrializing Region

Perry Maddox
University of Michigan
Program in the Environment
Phil D'Anieri, Ph. D., Advisor
February 26, 2015

ABSTRACT

This study examines Appalachian music between the Reconstruction and World War II from an environmental perspective, in order to better understand the ways in which music reflects and expresses cultural ecology. During this time, two lineages of music diverge and coexist: an oral tradition, with agrarian roots, and a commercially recorded lineage, with roots in the emerging industrial, extractivist economy. Important differences in content and musical structure were found between these lineages, and these distinctions in turn offer insight into how cultural modes of production change in tandem with material modes of production. Music produced for commercial consumption during this time shows the influence of the industrial, extractivist project as a whole. It expresses a narrower range of emotions, is dislocated from particular people and places, and provides very limited social critique or questioning. These changes reflect a broader alienation between human ecology and natural ecology, as well as between people and production.

INTRODUCTION

At the heart of this study is the following question: how does music interconnect with a society's cultural ecology? The decades between the Reconstruction and WWII in Appalachia were chosen as a microcosm in which to ask this question for several reasons.

One is the abundance of available documentation, both of the region's music and of its cultural ecology, from this period. Secondly, during these decades the region experienced a very rapid transition from an agrarian economy to an industrial, extractive economy. At the same time, its musical culture began to diverge into two distinct strands, an oral lineage commonly referred to as folk music and a recorded lineage that would go on to become both bluegrass and country. These concurrent changes in cultural ecology and musical culture offer a particularly rich opportunity to explore how the two are connected. Lastly, I grew up on the edge of the Appalachian region in Virginia, in a family actively involved in the region's musical culture, so from the outset I was somewhat familiar with the musical environment in question. Because of this, there are a few minor pieces of information that are not cited because I know them from firsthand experience, for instance the context of a few of the songs in question.

There is a moderate amount of background information required to begin to discuss the relationship between music and cultural ecology. I will first define cultural ecology and discuss prior ecomusicological research. Then I will go on to provide background on the context of Appalachia, with a brief overview of the region's history, its cultural ecology, the changes that took place during the decades in question, and the musical culture of the region. After laying out all this information, I will move on to the methods and findings of this study.

DEFINING CULTURAL ECOLOGY

The nature of a society's relationship to its environment is reflected in a number of practices; some more obvious of these include how resources such as food, medicine, and material goods are obtained, how and to what degree the environment is built, and how

people move between more intensely built settlements or patches and the surrounding matrix. Taken as a whole, all of the practices, behaviors, and beliefs that comprise the society-nature interaction are referred to as cultural ecology. Through the lens of cultural ecology one can see that, while the environment does not strictly determine culture, culture does arise in part as an adaptation to the environment. Elements of culture that may on the surface seem not to have an immediate adaptive advantage, such as art, music, and spirituality, can nonetheless reflect upon the nature-society relationship; further, they serve to shape and perpetuate ideas on the nature of this interaction. It is important to note that, in this context, “environment” refers not only to society’s natural surroundings, but rather to the systems of relationships within and between human and natural ecosystems.¹

ECOMUSICOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

There has been a good deal of ethnomusicological research on the connections between music and the environment. Nature has been considered as a source of music at least as early as classical times.² More recently, researchers have considered the way that naturally-occurring soundscapes shape and are shaped by humans, and in turn influence the musical consciousness of a society.³ Steven Feld’s research on the importance of metaphors involving waterfalls and bird sounds in Kaluli musical culture is a prominent example of this type of approach.⁴ So too is R. Murray Schafer’s *The Tuning of the World*, a thorough study of how soundscapes have been altered by changes in human technology and behavior, and how this can be related to music.⁵

¹ Bates 2005; Sutton and Anderson 2010

² Allen 2012; Head 1997; Schafer 1977; Turner and Freedman 2004

³ Adams 2009; Allen 2012; Schafer 1977

⁴ Feld 1981

⁵ Schafer 1977

There is, however, very little research that approaches the relationship between music and the environment using the more holistic, structural understanding of “environment” that is derived from the framework of cultural ecology. At the same time, there is very little ecomusicological research that examines musical structure rather than musical sounds, while the research exploring lyrics tends to focus on explicitly environmental content rather than implicit or indirect expression of environmental ideas. The approach of this study is to connect a holistic approach to “environment” with a holistic approach to “music” in order to untangle some of the more subtle, structural ways in which music can offer insights into environmental relationships.

APPALACHIAN CONTEXT

HISTORY

Appalachia has a distinctive cultural and environmental history, too intricate and complex to be adequately discussed here. That said, a rough historical understanding is necessary in order to approach Appalachian cultural ecology and musical expression; the following paragraphs will provide a sketch of this context.

The Appalachian region includes mountainous areas stretching all the way from New York to Mississippi; the Appalachian Regional Commission’s official area includes 13 states and 406 counties.⁶ However, the core of the region that is generally considered to be culturally Appalachia is centered on the border of southwestern Virginia and eastern Kentucky, including parts of those states as well as West Virginia, east Tennessee, western

⁶ Williams 2002

North Carolina, and northern Georgia. For the purposes of this study, Appalachia will refer to this latter geographic area.⁷

European immigrants first began to displace this region's native inhabitants in the early 18th century. The most common route into the mountains was the path leading down the Great Valley from Pennsylvania. Bordered by the Blue Ridge on the east and the rest of the Appalachians on the west, this valley stretches southwest from its mouth near Philadelphia through Maryland, Virginia and western North Carolina, opening out into northern Georgia and Alabama. German and Swiss farmers were the bulk of the first wave of migration; many of them came to North America to escape persecution as Anabaptists. Following them, beginning in the 1730s and continuing after the Revolution, came an influx of Protestant and Catholic immigrants from Ireland. These immigrants were also often driven to the New World by social marginalization, either directly for religious reasons or indirectly through economic hardship that afflicted Irish peasants during the time of British colonialism, the birth of industry, and the enclosure movement. This is significant because, from its outset, the Appalachian region was culturally distinct and topographically separated from the lowland South, and largely settled by people fleeing marginalization in Europe. Historic separation and marginalization would set the stage for the region to become a somewhat distinct entity in later years.⁸

By the end of the 18th century, this distinction began to solidify in the form of structural inequality. The mountains were split by political boundaries, and in each state the mountainous areas became hinterlands under the control of more prosperous lowland planters, farmers and merchants who dominated state governments. It is in this political

⁷ Raitz and Ulack 1984

⁸ Williams 2002, Batteau 1990, Raitz and Ulack 1984

environment that a boom in land speculation took place, and given that land titles were administered by the state, well-connected lowland speculators often won out over the land's actual inhabitants, leading to very high levels of landlessness and absentee land ownership. The mess of land claims would become a boon to lumber and coal companies in succeeding decades, allowing corporations to claim land or at least mineral and timber rights over the people actually living there. All of this history is important in order to understand why Appalachia had become a distinct cultural and socioeconomic entity by the time of Reconstruction.⁹

However, it is important to recognize that the category of Appalachia has a somewhat problematic history. Conceptual Appalachia did not begin to exist until the mid-19th century, and in some respects it is the product of coastal, urban imaginations more than it is a concrete, monolithic reality; the early creation of Appalachia in America mirrors the European Romantic idealization of peasants and "gypsies," the *volk*, as the source of true national identity. From the late 19th century going forward to the present, the concept of Appalachia has not infrequently been used as a tool to perpetuate marginalization and to create an Other as a matter of expediency for various outside interests.¹⁰

Recognizing this problematic history, there is still some validity to understanding Appalachia as a culturally distinct part of the US. As discussed above, there are historical distinctions between inhabitants of the mountains and inhabitants of the lowlands, and there are unifying features within the mountain region. While the formation of the region as a concept in part had ideological drivers, the mid-19th century also coincides with the large-scale expansion of capitalism in the US. This entailed the transformation from

⁹ Williams 2002, Batteau 1990

¹⁰ Batteau 1990

localized, somewhat autonomous economies to a national economy with a structure broken into prosperous cores and marginalized peripheral zones. Accordingly, the emergence of the concept of Appalachia reflects changing economic realities as much as urban imaginings. It is also true that the region's geography has over time influenced the economic decisions of its inhabitants, leading to the prevalence of the forest-and-farm economy and later the importance of lumber and coal.¹¹

CULTURAL ECOLOGY

In order to begin to explore the relationship between Appalachian music and cultural ecology, it is important to discuss the modes of production existing during the time in question. Before the advent of the industrial era in Appalachia, the region's settlers developed a distinct cultural ecology that differed both from what they had practiced in Europe and from practices in the surrounding lowlands. The settlers who moved up the Great Valley and from there into the mountains carried with them an eclectic mix of technologies and knowledge from their hearth in Pennsylvania, drawing from a mix of European, Native American and African influences. The regional economy was what would be characterized as a farm-and-forest economy, for reasons implicit in the name. The forest provided important edible and medicinal plants which would have been learned from the native inhabitants of the mountains, while hunting was an essential source of protein. Household farming and was a vital food source; it would be common for the clearing around a house to include a large garden dominated by Native American crops along with an orchard. Individual smallholders would also commonly keep animals, usually at least chickens and hogs if not cattle and sheep. All of these food sources, wild and domestic,

¹¹ Williams 2002, Batteau 1990, Raitz and Ulack 1984

required a high level of local ecological knowledge and followed their own annual and daily rhythms and cycles.¹²

Household manufacturing was very important in the region, more so than in contemporary farms in other parts of the country. Drawing upon European and Native American knowledge, inhabitants of the rural southern Appalachian Mountains through the nineteenth century would frequently produce their own textiles, furniture, baskets, leather, and wax. The most important form of transportation and power for farm work would have been animals—mules, oxen, and horses. This meant that the pace of travel would have been governed by the physicality of these animals and further constrained by weather. In short, prior to Reconstruction, Appalachian human ecology was more tightly connected to natural ecosystems than to a large-scale industrial economy.¹³

ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION

The period from the Reconstruction to WWII was one of profound and disruptive transformation in Appalachia. It is during this time that much of the region shifted from the farm-and-forest economy to an extractive economy dominated by lumber and, especially in eastern Kentucky, southwest Virginia and southern West Virginia, coal mining.¹⁴ The events of these turbulent decades, marked by severely exploitative labor practices and environmental destruction on the part of the coal industry and complicit state and county governments, are too complicated to be thoroughly discussed here. But what is important to understand for the purposes of this study is the way that this transition changed regional and household economies, and therefore the way of life of the people involved.

¹² Williams 2002, Raitz and Ulack 1990

¹³ Williams 2002, Batteau 1990, Raitz and Ulack 1984

¹⁴ Raitz and Ulack 1984

In essence, these changes are a particularly rapid version of the change that unfolded throughout Europe and North America beginning in the 18th century, the Industrial Revolution. Rural Appalachia shifted away from the largely autonomous, localized economic structure described above to become integrated into the emerging national economy as a peripheral sacrifice zone, producing predominately raw materials.¹⁵ As part of this process, connections to local natural ecosystems were replaced by connections to a large-scale human ecosystem. Households shifted from making to purchasing food and goods, resulting in alienation from both natural ecology and material production. One part of this ecological transition involved a restructuring of the social organization of time. The elastic seasonal and daily rhythms of farming, hunting and gathering were replaced with mechanized time on a schedule that was fixed, regardless of season or anything else. It is difficult to imagine the profundity of this change; as Williams writes, “rural people were not used to working by the clock... [and] had trouble getting used to industrial discipline.”¹⁶ It is within this context of abrupt change in social and ecological structures that two distinct musical lineages began to emerge.

MUSIC

Prior to the turn of the century, Appalachian musical culture was rooted in oral folk traditions that combined German, Anglo, and Irish balladry with African musical influences. Instruments used reflected the New World cultural mix; European fiddles, guitars, and dulcimers were played alongside West African banjo.¹⁷ During the period of industrialization, music making began to undergo a deep change. In part because of two

¹⁵ Batteau 1990

¹⁶ Williams 2002 p. 219

¹⁷ Williams 2002; Newman, Davidson and Finch 1968

products of industry, the radio and the phonograph, musical performances became something that could be pinned down and marketed as a commodity to a mass audience. When people began to have the option to hear music in their own homes that they did not make themselves, music became professionalized on an unprecedented scale. This, in turn, had huge ramifications for the role of music—how, why and for whom it is made. Like virtually any cultural transition, this shift took place slowly. In Appalachia, the decades leading up to WWII saw the gradual divergence of a new lineage of commercially recorded music from the older oral lineage. The new commercial lineage, spread from urban centers and made for mass marketing, would eventually become country and bluegrass. During the time in question, though, the boundaries between folk, country and bluegrass are so fluid that the terms are not really helpful, so for the purposes of this study I will refer to an oral lineage and a recorded lineage rather than using genre names.

Like any dichotomy, the distinction between oral and recorded lineages is an oversimplification of a complex, dynamic reality. Individual musicians readily moved back and forth between the two, and many of the earliest commercially-recorded performers had their musical roots firmly in the oral world. Further complicating the situation, musicians would sometimes perform songs derived from the oral lineage in a commercial style and, more rarely, vice versa. Meanwhile, especially early on in the divergence of the two, the audiences for each strand overlap heavily. However, it is true that oral and recorded musics derive predominately from different cultural ecologies. The former is firmly rooted in an agrarian world, while the latter would not exist without the urban, industrial world. In the context of this study's question, distinguishing between the two is both valid and highly illustrative.

METHODOLOGY

In order to examine Appalachian music during this time through the lens of cultural ecology, it was necessary to approach the research in four loosely defined phases: looking to previous research exploring music from this angle, understanding the social and environmental context of the region during this time, closely studying the music in question, and finding patterns in the music that reflect or intersect with the regional context.

The first phase of the research consisted of reading a number of sources dealing with music and environmental relationships. Some of these sources were scholarly books and articles dealing with the question from a musicological vantage point directly; others, such as Karol Berger's work, touch on relevant musical ideas without connecting them explicitly to the environment.¹⁸ One less scholarly source worth mentioning is a treatise by composer John Luther Adams which discusses his own framework for understanding how his and others' music reflect and perpetuate environmental awareness.¹⁹

The second involved reading a number of historical sources on Appalachia to understand the regional context at the beginning of the twentieth century and how it changed in the following decades. An important side area of this topic is the construction of conceptual Appalachia—how, for what and by whom it has been created and shaped.²⁰

To gain an understanding of the music itself, I listened to around two hundred songs from the region. I then selected two Smithsonian Folkways albums and one from Asch Records, a precursor of Smithsonian Folkways, as broadly representative of the body of the

¹⁸ Berger 2007

¹⁹ Adams 2009

²⁰ Batteau 1990

region's musical expression between 1880 and 1940: *Mountain Music of Kentucky*, recorded in and around Perry County, Kentucky in 1959, *Classic Mountain Songs*, compiled from around southwestern Virginia, western North Carolina, eastern Kentucky, and eastern Tennessee in the middle decades of the century, and *Ballads and Songs of the Blue Ridge Mountains: Persistence and Change*, recorded in 1968 in southwestern Virginia and western North Carolina. These recordings were chosen for several reasons. Between the three albums, the locations included represent the heart of the Appalachian cultural region.²¹ While each of these albums were recorded after 1940, the ages of the performers are such that they do represent the region's music in the first half of the twentieth century; further, they may do so more accurately than earlier recordings for two key reasons. The first is simply that recording quality is higher than that of earlier compilations, so one can hear more clearly what is happening musically and textually. The second is that earlier recordings from the region, such as those of Cecil Sharp, were strongly shaped by the collectors' interests in finding musical connections between Appalachia and the British Isles, while later collections are more representative of the musical environment as a whole.²² While there are always questions as to what collectors choose to record and what performers choose to play for them, the collectors for these albums were very sensitive to this dilemma and did what they could to minimize it, to be trusted by the performers and to deal openly and conscientiously with them.²³

After selecting these three recordings, I listened closely to each song and took notes on the recording's background, the structural features of the music, and the lyrical content

²¹ Raitz and Ulack 1984

²² Gold and Revill 2006

²³ Place 2002; Newman, Davidson and Finch 1968; Cohen 1959

of the song. After breaking down the songs by lineage using a combination of the song's history and certain key musical elements, I analyzed the information collected for musical and lyrical patterns and deviations within and across the two lineages. I then examined these patterns for potential relationships or parallels with the region's changing cultural ecology. It would be absurd for me to claim to have discovered any definite causal relationships. Rather, in the following sections, I will point out certain patterns that emerged and discuss how they suggest connections between music and cultural ecology in the time and place in question, and how this in turn suggests certain broader patterns connecting the two areas in general.

RESULTS

MUSICAL STRUCTURE

The two strains of music that diverge in Appalachia during this time, the oral lineage and the commercially recorded lineage, differ markedly in the way that harmony and rhythm structure time. In the former tradition, musical timing is flexible and organic while harmony is static; there is not typically a strong sense of goal-oriented motion. In the recorded lineage, time is usually organized by a set, regular meter, while harmonic progressions create a definite beginning and end to each melody.

Songs from the oral lineage organize time predominately by the text of the lyrics, stretching and shifting to accommodate them; the most important words or the highest notes of the melody are often drawn out for emphasis. Any accompaniment that is used under the voice organically stretches to accommodate this flexibility. If the accompanying instrument is a fiddle it will join the voice in unison or parallel intervals. Chordal instruments, such as banjo or guitar, will typically provide steady but flexible rhythmic

propulsion, usually with no fixed metrical pattern of strong and weak beats. Harmony most often consists of a single static chord, embellished with other tones from the scale. The combination of tonal stasis and rhythmic but nonmetric propulsion creates a sense of cycling motion, something very clearly living and moving but not going to or from someplace, not oriented towards some goal, following a rigidly fixed pattern, or with a defined beginning and end.

In solo banjo playing of the oral lineage, time works similarly. There is a steady, driving pulse, but without a fixed metric pattern of stronger and weaker beats. Tonality is fixed over a single unchanging chord or drone; over this, the musician typically alternates between picking out a melody with rolling, cascading ornamentation and repeating driving rhythmic figures. There is usually no fixed number of repetitions or amount of time spent on a melody. For a listener accustomed to the set meters and harmonic patterns that dominate most contemporary western music, the effect is to change the way of listening from expecting a pattern to being mesmerized by a steady rhythm and subtle, unexpected changes in sound.

Oral lineage fiddle tunes are consistently short, with either two or three sections between which the performer cycles repeatedly (ABABABAB... or ABCABCABCABC...). When other instruments join the fiddle, they typically play propulsive rhythms underneath on a steady tonic chord. These tunes are the only subset of the oral tradition that almost always has a clear and consistent meter, but the continuous looping repetition of the tune over one harmony still creates a sense of cyclical rather than linear time, again without a set beginning or end.

Music derived from the commercial, recorded lineage, on the other hand, is nearly always in a set meter (with the pulse in clear, hierarchical groupings of four or occasionally three beats). In vocal music the timing of the text is adjusted to conform with the meter, rather than vice versa. The accompaniment underneath typically has less elaborate embellishment of the chords and more harmonic structure than the oral lineage, involving progressions of multiple different chords. Most songs from this lineage are in a major key and include at least three different chords: I, IV, and V. The combined effects of a set meter, less of the ornamentation that creates a sense of rolling propulsion, and larger-scale harmonic structure create a defined sense of linear motion, with a clear beginning and end. Musical time is constrained and scheduled in a more fixed way.

LYRICAL CONTENT

One striking and obviously relevant distinction between the lineages is in how animals and the environment appear in lyrics. They appear frequently in oral lineage songs. Among domestic animals, horses are mentioned most often; examples include as the objects stolen in “The Hanging of Georgie” and metaphorically in the line “my horses aren’t hungry, they won’t eat your hay,” which appears in Mr. and Mrs. Sams’ rendition of “The Wagoner’s Lad” as well as Clarence Ashley’s performance of “The Cuckoo.” They are also frequently mentioned incidentally as a means of transportation, as in “Pretty Polly” or “Little Omie.” The song “Cluck Old Hen,” as rendered by Bill Cornett, talks about the fate of a hen that won’t lay anymore—the dinner table.

Wild animals also appear, either as themselves, as anthropomorphized characters, or as metaphors. Some songs talk of hunting or fishing, such as “Fox Chase,” performed by James Crase, and “Hook and Line,” performed by Bill Cornett. Wild birds, especially turtle

doves, are sometimes depicted mourning for people suffering unjust fates; Mr. and Mrs. Sams' "The Wagoner's Lad" ends with the distraught protagonist saying that she will go build herself a cabin where the bluebirds and turtle doves will hear her cry. Sarah Hawkes, in her rendition of "Little Sparrow," sings about wishing she were a sparrow so that she would know if her lover is courting someone else, while the song titled variously "Mole in the Ground" or "Baby Let Your Hair Roll Down" includes the lines "I wish a was a mole in the ground...if I was a mole in the ground I'd root this mountain down" and "I wish a was a lizard in the spring...if I was a lizard in the spring I could hear my darling sing." "Kitty Alone," here performed by Martha Hall, tells the story of Miss Mouse and her suitor the frog, whose wedding ends in tragedy when they all tumble down the brook to be swallowed by the duck.*

Other songs refer to various elements of their singers' natural surroundings. In "Little Sparrow," Sarah Hawkes compares young men to a star on a summer morning that appears and then is gone. Bill Cornett's rendition of "Born in Old Kentucky" includes the verse "I'd rather be in some dark hollow, where the sun does never shine..." to express sorrow for love that cannot be fulfilled. A few songs refer to environmental indications of the seasons or months. "The Cuckoo," as performed by Clarence Ashley, includes the line "the cuckoo...never says cuckoo til the fourth day of July." Mr. John Sams' rendition of the song goes into more detail, saying that the bird "never says cuckoo til the spring of the year; when she says cuckoo the summer draws nigh..." Jean Ritchie's "Barbara Allen" starts with the verse "All in the merry month of May, when the green buds they were swelling," as does

* It is worth noting that, while the intent of the song as performed here is likely as a children's ballad about animals, its origins are in fact political, referring to the marriage between Mary I of England (the mouse) and Philip II of Spain (the frog).

Bill Cornett's version. Mrs. Porter's version refers to the same seasonal cue in May, and then in the next verse says "early in the month of June, when the flowers were a-blooming."

On the other hand, this sample only included two songs in the recorded lineage that made any mention of animals or the environment. One of these, "Pig in a Pen" performed by Spud Gravely and Glen Smith, mentions the singer has "a pig, home in a pen, corn to feed him on." The other instance is in "High on a Mountain," in which Ola Belle Reed sings about standing "high on the mountain, wind blowing free, thinking about the days that used to be...as I looked at the valleys down below, they were green just as far as I could see..."

Another striking difference in lyrics that emerges after breaking down the songs into the two musical lineages is the way in which mortality is depicted. Death appears frequently in songs of the oral lineage, in a number of different contexts. Generally speaking, though, it is negative, to be avoided; specific depictions range from mildly sad, to tragic, to viscerally dark and powerful. Some of the lighter references mention it in passing; in "The Hanging of Georgie," performed by Paul Joines on *Ballads and Songs of the Blue Ridge*, the story tells of Georgie's trial and hanging, and while the tension of the song comes from the trial and hanging, there is no strong emotion attached to his death other than one of injustice.

A number of songs involve death in connection with love; only one of these ("Young Men and Maids", performed by Paul Joines) mentions the lovers meeting again in the afterlife, and even in this song the overall affect is tragic. Some involve death from unrequited love, including various versions of two common songs, "Barbara Allen" and "East Virginia" (in one instance titled "Old Kentucky"). The version of "Barbara Allen" performed by Jean Ritchie on *Classic Mountain Songs* involves some redemption in the end,

as the rose growing from William's grave twines into a lovers' knot with the brier growing from Barbara Allen's, but there is no promise of eternal bliss together. The other two recordings of the song included in this study do not include this hint of respite. The versions of "East Virginia" included are darker; Bill Cornett's version, "Born in Old Kentucky," says "When I'm dead and in my coffin, and my pale face to the sun, I want you to come sit down by me, think about the way you done." Other songs tell of killings related to love. Most of these involve the male protagonist killing the female protagonist, to avoid marriage in the case of the versions of "Pretty Polly" and "Little Omie" or in response to alleged mistreatment in "Rain and Snow." The killers' fates are dark; "Pretty Polly" and "Little Omie" end with the implication of damnation for the killer, while "Rain and Snow" concludes by saying that killer "trembled with cold fear."

The other most common context for death to appear in the oral lineage is in religious songs. In one, "Conversation with Death," performed by Berzilla Wallin, the singer encounters death and pleads to be spared, given more time to lead a godly life, but is faced with fate's inexorability for "the old, the young, the rich, the poor;" the song ends with the line "as long as God in heaven shall dwell, my soul...shall scream in hell." In other religious songs death offers an escape from the darkness of earthly life. But even in this light, death is somber and serious. In the words of "I am a Poor Pilgrim of Sorrow," sung by a congregation of Old Regular Baptists, death is "bright glory" to be remembered when "troubles roll around...so high." In only one song, "Wayfaring Stranger," sung by Roscoe Holcomb, is death a sweet reward where loved ones are reunited.

Only one oral lineage song in the sample, "John Henry," involves death in the context of industrial work, but because of its popularity and for the sake of comparison with the

recorded lineage it is worth noting. The song tells the story of John Henry's legendary prowess driving steel for building railroads, and involves him dying at work. One rendition of the song, performed by Lesley Riddle, ends with John Henry, confronted with an impossible task, laying down his hammer and dying. In the other rendition in the sample, by Bill Cornett, once John Henry dies white and black people mourn together while his wife accuses the steel driving team of working him to death.

Death makes some unexpected appearances in some otherwise light songs of the oral lineage, even in this context as a dark danger. John Sam's version of "The Coo-coo" begins as a song about the cuckoo heralding the coming of summer, and becomes instead a warning that "...a false-hearted lover will trouble you to grave. The grave, it will rot you and turn you to dust..." Similarly, Bascom Lamar Lunsford's rendition of "Mole in the Ground" mentions casually in passing that "a railroad man will kill you when he can and drink up your blood like wine."

Songs of the recorded lineage mentioned death just as often as those of the oral lineage on the three albums sampled, but in a strikingly different light. All but two of them explicitly depict it in rosy tones as a sweet place to rejoin earthly loves. In Spud Gravelly's performance of "George Allen," his lover "weeps and moans" at his death until her mother reassures her that she will "meet him again someday." Glen Neaves ends the story of "The Death of the Lawson Family," in which Charlie Lawson kills his wife and children, with the angels watching the burial, saying "come home, come home, you little ones, to the land of peace and love." Even stories of industrial accidents, such as "The Wreck of the Number Nine," performed by Pop Stoneman, and "Red Jacket Mine Explosion," performed by the Phipps Family, end with reassuring reminders of the afterlife, explicit in "The Wreck of the

Number Nine” and implicit in “Red Jacket Mine Explosion.” Other than “Red Jacket Mine Explosion”, the only song without an explicit reference to the sweet afterlife is “Lonesome Day,” performed by Ruby Vass. In this song she sings about how lonely she is after her mother’s death, and instructs her audience to dig her a grave with a silver spade and keep her grave clean, implying that she will soon join her mother. While there is no explicit statement that they will meet again, the overall tone of the song is sweet and nostalgic.

The two lineages are also consistently distinct in the way that they address social or political issues. Songs of the oral lineage often take a somewhat populist bent. There is a long tradition of Robin Hood ballads that survived in the region, some telling stories of Robin Hood literally but many telling of other more recent characters exemplifying the same trope. “The Hanging of Georgie,” rendered by Paul Joines, is one such song. Georgie is to be hanged for stealing six of the king’s horses and selling them, although he has not committed any crime that caused actual harm to anyone; he proclaims in the last verse “I have not rode on the king’s highways and I have not murdered any...”, riding on the king’s highways meaning being a highway robber. The song “Green Willow Tree,” sung by Paul Joines, also ends with tragic injustice along class lines. A cabin boy agrees to sink a ship in turn for the captain’s promise of gold, money, and his daughter’s hand in marriage, but once the ship is sunk the captain leaves the cabin boy to drown. “John Henry” is a prominent and widespread example of a song with populist undertones. This is especially clear in Bill Cornett’s rendition, which concludes with his wife claiming that he has been worked to death.

Beyond general class-based iniquities, oral lineage songs will sometimes explicitly confront contemporary political issues. Three songs in this sample do so directly. George

Davis' "The Death of the Blue Eagle" bemoans the end of the National Recovery Administration and advocates for the United Mine Workers' Association. "Old Age Pension Blues," by Bill Cornett, denounces Kentucky's legislation removing pensions for the elderly. "Sixteen Tons," performed here by Danny Davis, protests against the exploitative practices of the coal industry. Specifically, it refers to the practice of fixing wages and prices to keep miners perpetually indebted to the companies' own stores, the only source of food and general goods in coal camps; the chorus ends with the line "St. Peter don't you call me for I can't go, 'cause I owe my soul at the company store."

The recorded lineage songs in this sample, on the other hand, do not make political statements even when telling the stories of contemporary issues. "Red Jacket Mine Explosion" tells the story of the eponymous mining disaster. But rather than connect the tragedy to the actions of the coal company, it uses the event to make a moralizing statement which implies that such disasters are to be expected: "may we all be at peace with our maker, we may answer our call at any time." The performance by Hazel Dickens and Alice Gerrard of "Coal Miner Blues" bemoans the special kind of "coal black blues" faced by miners. It does not, however, go so far as to suggest that coal miners' lives could be any better, or that anyone bears any kind of culpability for their sad situation.

DISCUSSION

The clear distinctions in structure and content found between oral lineage and recorded lineage songs are most important in that they illustrate the interconnections between changes in material modes of production and changes in the production of culture. The significance of these connections, then, is in how they shed light on the industrial, extractivist project as a whole and specifically on the concomitant alienation that occurs

between human and natural ecosystems, between individual people, and between people and production. In order to show this, I will first briefly discuss some of the defining features of this alienation. I will then relate specific distinctions in structure and content with specific elements of cultural ecology, and suggest how these changes could be seen to reflect this alienation in three ways: cultural dislocation from people and place; a reduction in emotional depth and breadth; and expression of contemporary social challenges.

It is well-understood that one of the defining features of a society is who owns the means of production. In Appalachia prior to industrialization, with a farm-and-forest economy and a high level of household manufacturing, the means of production were predominately in the hands of the community using the end product. While the issue of absentee land ownership might make the situation somewhat more legally complicated, prior to the rise of the lumber and coal industries the people physically occupying the land would have enjoyed unchallenged usufruct, for all intents and purposes owning the land.

This of course changed with the industrialization of the region. People accustomed to working under their own control, following the rhythms of their environment, became labor operating under the authority of coal and lumber companies who owned mineral and timber rights as well as the machinery needed to extract those materials. Those same people also shifted from making to buying much of their food and household goods, often from company-owned stores. In short, industrialization meant a seismic restructuring of the region's social order and human ecology, accompanied by decades of often violent conflict. It is in this turbulent context that the two lineages of music in question diverge.

CULTURAL DISLOCATION

The clearest structural distinction between the two lineages of music is the way in which they use rhythm and harmony to organize time. Appalachian music of the oral lineage organizes time flexibly and organically, through the structural means laid out above. There is usually not a clear beginning, middle and end inherent in the musical structure; rather, the combination of rhythm and harmony employed create a sense of time that is cyclical, ever ongoing. The listener's experience does not depend on a set of expectations for the unfolding of musical events.

The recorded lineage of music that begins to diverge from the oral lineage at this time uses harmony and rhythm to organize time in a very different way. Having a regular meter means that there is a set hierarchy of the importance of each beat; this is more or less fixed regardless of any lyrics that may be present. At the same time, having a clearly structured harmonic progression that takes place over the course of the entire melody gives the music a defined linear structure of beginning, middle, and end. In combination, these two structural elements shape the experience of the listener to have an unconscious expectation of a regular, set pattern to be reliably followed.

While it would be fallacious and overly deterministic to argue a definable causality, the parallels between music's temporal structure and the concurrent changes in the ordering of social time are clear. There is a substantial body of research supporting the idea that concepts of time are shaped by cultural ecology. Different rhythms of life arise along with the timing of natural events, and different ways of using the environment require different ways of apprehending the passage of time.²⁴ The timing of natural events, in patterns of interlocking cycles, is central in shaping the way that many nonindustrial

²⁴ Albert 2002; Capek 1973

societies conceive of time.²⁵ In Appalachia specifically, the farm-and-forest economy that preceded industrialization was governed by a number of different environmental and social rhythms cycling flexibly over the course of days, seasons, and years. The industrial economy, on the other hand, was governed by clock time and set schedules. It is well-established that the transition between the two temporalities was more difficult and far-reaching than simply buying a clock.²⁶

Given the inherently temporal nature of music, it is hardly surprising that a musical lineage arising from an oral tradition in an agrarian society would structure time in a way that is fundamentally different from music produced by an urban, industrial world. What makes this change significant is that it reflects cultural dislocation in two ways.

The more clear, concrete of these is seen in the origins of the two different cultural conceptions of time. Agrarian time is dominated by layers of different natural cycles operating on different time scales. These cycles are flexible and organic, and simply noticing them would require an intimate attunement to myriads of biotic and abiotic temporal cues specific to a particular place. Industrial time, on the other hand, is monolithic and universal. Rather than being derived from local environmental cues, it is derived from an international human system that is not tied to any one place and does not fluctuate with diurnal or seasonal rhythms. In light of the sources of these two distinct temporal systems, one can see how the organic temporal structure of the oral lineage parallels a very different kind of environmental awareness than the linear, mechanistic temporal structure of the recorded lineage. The former is firmly situated in local ecological systems, while the latter is dislocated from them and tied to large-scale human systems divorced from the specifics

²⁵ Birth 2012

²⁶ Birth 2012; Williams 2002

of any one place. Again, I am not arguing a definable, deterministic causality, but the clear parallel suggests some degree of interconnection.

On a more abstract level, the very different way of listening that these two temporal approaches demand is also illustrative. The way in which the oral lineage structures time, especially in instrumental music, emphasizes listening in the moment. The listener is drawn in and mesmerized by a steady rhythm and subtle changes in sound and pitch that are not necessarily predictable. Recorded lineage music, on the other hand, is structured linearly, and the listener develops conscious or subconscious expectations for a predictable way in which the music will unfold from beginning to end. A similar temporal transition is seen around the time that the world of educated European elites began to experience the beginning of industrialization; Karol Berger discusses this in great depth in the work *Bach's Cycle, Mozart's Arrow: an essay on the origins of musical modernity*, which examines a transition in the structuring of musical time that occurred within Western art music in the middle of the eighteenth century. Berger describes this as music adding “the experience of linear time...to its essential subject matter”, and situates the change within the larger context of the educated European world shifting to a predominately secular, scientific consciousness.²⁷ The significance of this change for the purposes of this study is that listening with a set of linear expectations reflects a more mechanistic relationship to ones surroundings, while listening without those expectations demands a kind of sensitivity and openness not dissimilar to the kind of sensitivity found in a consciousness situated within the complex and dynamic local environmental cues that are essential to a nonindustrial agrarian way of life.

²⁷ Berger 2007 p. 9

Cultural dislocation from place and production is also evidenced in some of the differences in lyrical content between the two lineages. On a surface level, the implications of lyrical treatment of animals are so clear that they hardly need mentioning—animals are much more present in an agrarian consciousness than in an industrial one, and people singing in the oral lineage would of course be more familiar with them and their habits. Somewhat more significantly, the prominence of animals in oral lineage music and the variety of ways in which they are depicted show a more intimate relationship between people and their surroundings. When songs refer to wild animals providing seasonal cues, or even simply as having their own character traits, they show the prevalence of local ecological knowledge as well as the role of living things other than humans in the cultural imagination. The prominence of domestic animals, apart from showing that the people singing were farmers, also illustrates a closer connection to means of production and transportation not mediated through a large-scale human ecosystem.

Differences in the way that songs refer the environment also illustrate the kind of dislocation that occurred with the region's economic transition. In the oral lineage, the surrounding environment is living and dynamic. The morning star is a metaphor for ephemerality; a dark hollow is imbued with a strong mood; buds and flowers show what season and month it is. In contrast, the environment is a static when it is referred to in the recorded lineage, whether it is the pig that is in a pen (without doing anything) or the mountain that is nothing more than a nostalgia-inducing backdrop. This reflects a real difference in agrarian and industrial relationships with the larger environment. In the former consciousness the surrounding environment is dynamic and familiar, while in the latter it is a degree removed, more setting than actor.

Changes in the social role of music reflect dislocation not from place but from other people. Oral lineage music serves in part to strengthen the social fabric of a community. It provides cultural continuity, offering a living, dynamic performance of tradition. Some songs, like “Pretty Polly”, “The Cuckoo”, and “Barbara Allen”, are old and widespread, with roots going back over centuries to Europe. Their performance would reinforce community cohesion across generations, expressing a living shared history. Recorded lineage music does not provide this same kind of connection across generations; further, it is a part of the larger dislocation of the means of production from the same people doing the producing and consuming to the smaller number of urban elites referred to as capital. When music becomes integrated into the larger capitalist system of exchange as a commodity, it becomes dislocated from the communities listening to it and no longer serves as such a powerful source of cohesion. This change both reflects and compounds the social dislocation that occurred as the region was rendered an extractive sacrifice zone.

EMOTIONAL BREADTH AND DEPTH

A very important way in which the social role of music changed with the advent of the recorded lineage in Appalachia is in terms of how music communicates and addresses a wide range of lived emotions. This change is especially apparent in the musical treatment of death. To summarize the results laid out above, death is abundantly present in music from the oral lineage. When it is given more than a passing reference, it is almost invariably treated as something to be taken seriously; it is dark, painful, visceral. Sometimes sad, sometimes grisly, sometimes inexorable, death comes with a range of emotions that would actually be felt. In the recorded lineage, the treatment it receives is markedly different.

Death's sting is dulled with visions of sweet eternity, where the departed will be together once more.

Again, the parallel between the change in musical content and the change in cultural ecology is readily apparent. Death would have been an all-too-present figure in the life of the region's rural inhabitants during the time of the farm-and-forest economy. Access to medicine was limited, with high rates of preventable death and infant mortality. Care would often be administered in homes, so death of age, disease or childbirth was very much part of the lived experience. Death would be seen in all its horror, but also acknowledged as simply a part of life. In a more urbanized, industrial way of life, death of course still happens; indeed, in the beginnings of industrialization, it may in fact become more common. But to an extent it was also becoming sanitized, with the actual event taking place in hospitals and the burial being done by an undertaker. In light of these changes, it would make sense for death to be cleaned up and mentioned less because it would be easier for most people to simply avoid encountering it firsthand.

But beyond this literal relationship, the significance of this change is that it shows how the recorded lineage fulfills a more narrow social purpose, restricted by the demands of marketability. A song like "Conversation with Death", with its grisly representation of mortality and grim warning of damnation, expresses an unresolvable fear of death that is inevitably felt at times. But dark, inescapable fears are not readily marketable, and so death, when it must be mentioned, becomes bittersweet if not tritely rosy. This means that the community loses an important avenue to express and share its lived experience. Heavy, dark emotions are to be dealt with in private. In the absence of the communication and

catharsis that music provides, individuals become more alienated both from the community around them and from their own feelings.

EXPRESSION OF CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

Just as oral lineage music offers an avenue of expression for the emotional lived experience, it also communicates political and social concerns of the communities that produce it. While some songs in the tradition are ancient, the oral lineage is also an inherently dynamic expression of the lives of its practitioners. This is evidenced in a number of songs that challenge existing social power structures discussed earlier in the results, including “The Hanging of Georgie” and “The Green Willow Tree.” It is also shown notably in the populist ballad “John Henry” which was widespread in Appalachia and in working communities around the country. Perhaps most importantly, the ability of oral lineage music to be a tool for social resistance is shown in songs that explicitly confront particular contemporary issues, such as “The Death of the Blue Eagle” and “Sixteen Tons.” The striking contrast between these songs and recorded lineage songs such as “Coal Miner Blues” or “Red Jacket Mine Explosion” makes clear how songs that are the product of the industrial, extractivist project are complicit with its injustices.

It makes sense that those controlling the means of production of commercial culture are unlikely to disseminate songs that are expressly political or implicitly challenging to the established social order. But the real change runs deeper than any one institution or social group actively seeking to control the production of culture. When the changes in expression of social issues are considered along with changes in the expression of emotions, one begins to see underlying alienation between individuals and communities. Music for pain,

sorrow, anger, and frustration would bring people together to share in these experiences, strengthening the social fabric and sense of human connection. But as the production of music, along with material production, becomes part of a large-scale economy governed by industrial, extractive logic, it ceases to play this role. Changes in musical production both parallel and compound the social changes that come with the transition from agrarian to extractive ways of being.

CONCLUSION

This last point leads to the larger significance of this study. Taken together, all of these changes demonstrate how music is situated within the larger fabric of culture, how it expresses and perpetuates existing world views and social structures. Transitions that are defined by the way in which they restructure the nature-society interaction, such as the Industrial Revolution, have far-reaching implications for how culture is produced, and more specifically for what role music fills in society.

Understanding these interconnections can be very important for music practitioners; for those who seek to create socially or politically engaged work the implications are obvious. But for those not creating explicitly political work, it is important to understand that any music either reinforces or challenges existing social structures and value systems. Just as it is impossible to be neutral on a moving train, it is impossible to create new work that exists in a vacuum cut off from social realities.

Outside of the realm of music-making, understanding the connections between changes in cultural ecology and music has interesting implications for other facets of expressive culture. Further research could seek to untangle this relationship in greater detail, or to understand how changes in artistic culture, during these periods of flux, come

to influence the nature of society going forward. The implications of changing relations around the production of culture are also particularly important to understand in our own historical moment, given the immense restructuring of cultural production that the world is experiencing today at the same time that we face unprecedented and perhaps existential socioenvironmental challenges.

REFERENCES

- Adams, John Luther. *The Place Where You Go to Listen: in search of an ecology of music*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2009.
- Albert, Bernhard. "'Temporal Diversity': a note on the 9th Tutzing Time Ecology Conference." *Time & Society*, 2002: 89-104.
- Allen, Aaron S. "Ecomusicology: music, culture, nature...and change in environmental studies?" *Journal of Environment Studies and Sciences*, 2012: 192-201.
- Bates, Daniel G. *Human Adaptive Strategies: Ecology, Culture, and Politics*. 3rd. US: Pearson Education, 2005.
- Batteau, Allen. *The Invention of Appalachia*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1990.
- Berger, Karol. *Bach's Cycle, Mozart's Arrow: an essay on the origins of musical modernity*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007.
- Birth, Kevin K. *Objects of Time: How Things Shape Temporality*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012.
- Capek, Milic. "Time." In *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, by Philip P. Winer, 389-398. US: Scribner and Sons, 1973.
- Cohen, John. *Mountain Music of Kentucky*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Folkways, 1959.
- Feld, Steven. "'Flow like a Waterfall': The Metaphors of Kaluli Musical Theory." *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, 1981: 22-47.
- Gold, John R., and George Revill. "Gathering the voices of the people? Cecil Sharp, cultural hybridity, and the folk music of Appalachia." *GeoJournal* 65 (2006): 55-66.
- Head, Matthew. "Birdsong and the Origins of Music." *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 1997: 1-23.

- Kisliuk, Michelle. *Sieze the Dance!: BaAka Musical Life and the Ethnography of Performance*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Kramer, Jonathan D. "New Temporalities in Music." *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1981): 539-556.
- Newman, Paul, Eric Davidson, and Caleb Finch. *Ballads and Songs of the Blue Ridge Mountains: Persistence and Change*. New York City: Asch Records, 1968.
- Place, Jeff. *Classic Mountain Songs from Smithsonian Folkways*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Folkways, 2002.
- Raitz, Karl B., and Richard Ulack. *Appalachia: a regional geography*. Boulder: Westview Books, 1984.
- Schafer, R. Murray. *The Tuning of the World*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1977.
- Stimeling, Travis D. "Music, Place, and Identity in the Central Appalachian Mountaintop Removal Mining Debate." *American Music* 30, no. 1 (2012): 1-29.
- Sutton, Mark Q., and E. N. Anderson. *Introduction to Cultural Ecology*. 2nd. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2010.
- Turnbull, Colin M. *The Forest People*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1961.
- Turner, Kate, and Bill Freedman. "Music and Environmental Studies." *Journal of Environmental Education*, 2004: 45-52.
- Williams, John Alexander. *Appalachia: a history*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.