

SITUATING PERSONAL VALUES IN ARTISTIC  
PRACTICE: TOWARDS A REFLECTIVE AND  
REFLEXIVE FRAMEWORK

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## SITUATING PERSONAL VALUES IN ARTISTIC PRACTICE

### Abstract

In what ways can a musician use reflexivity and reflection to situate her personal values in her artistic practice? To answer this question and put the results into practice, the author combined archival and digital research, interviews, and fieldwork. By combining new and found materials inspired by Appalachian folk music and the state of West Virginia, the connected auto-ethnographic case study is a reflective attempt of the author to engage critically with her personal values of empathy, inclusion, and equity in her artistic practice. Using the reflective lenses of the author's autobiography as an artist, the audience's reactions, fellow artists comments, and literature review, she was better able to reflexively see her own assumptions and missteps, better allowing her to situate her personal values within her artistic practice. Besides creating a reflective framework by which other artists could consider their own artistic practice, she also found that by taking on new roles outside that of the traditional classically trained performer, she had a greater agency to influence and understand performance elements such as design and form, materials, context, audience, and production process.

Keywords: artistic practice, performance, personal values, reflection, reflexivity, empathy, inclusion, equity, Appalachia



## SITUATING PERSONAL VALUES IN ARTISTIC PRACTICE

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## FOREWORD

### *This Artist's Perspective*

I first became interested in connecting my music making to my personal values when I was living in Michigan and Minnie's Cooperative Houses of the Inter-cooperative Council at the University of Michigan. These houses were experiments created by students during the Great Depression. By sharing ownership of the houses, they put social values such as equity and inclusion into practice while lowering cost of living in order to be able to continue to attend the University of Michigan (Mericle, Wilson, & Jones, 1994). While I lived in the cooperative, arguments and mistakes abounded between housemates, but the intentional consideration of social values could be seen in almost all decision-making processes. Furthermore, while it was an imperfect system, this experiment clearly showed the positive consequences of reflection, dialogue, listening, and being an active bystander when practicing values such as empathy, inclusion, and equity. Seeing these social values so clearly, if messily, attempting to be lived out under one roof drove me to begin thinking about how I could better situate those same values in my own artistic practice.

I began to question my role as a musician in society and how my personal values, highly connected to the aforementioned social values, might be more present in my chosen profession. On stage, I was usually one of many freelance musicians hired in last minute to play well-known works from the Classical canon in regional orchestras. Other times, I was in a hastily arranged crossover pop-classical performance hoping to bring a new audience to the orchestra hall. Even when I was quite happy with the aesthetic quality of a performance, something was missing. I rarely felt agency in the role of a traditional classical musician performing in a large ensemble.

I was a performer, and other than in the small interpretative creativity I could show, I did not feel that *I* was present on the stage. Instead, I was a double bassist or a clarinetist, paid to play a part, and expected to only bring my musical technique, good work ethic, and general amiability. Offstage, I supported other artists' work that connected to my own personal values, and I had tools to question societal inequity and other personal concerns through music workshops and education

programs. On stage, I was not able to connect fully to those same values or concerns. By moving towards new roles in my artistic practice I hoped to feel more agency.

When playing chamber music, I more often felt that my own opinions, personality, and values were shared when I was on stage or in rehearsal. I was able to take on more roles in the creation of the performance, as the ensemble would often choose the music collectively, discuss program content, organize venues, and send out all event communications. It was empowering to have roles outside of what I will term the traditional classical musician. Many traditional classical musicians also do this kind of chamber music work, and I imagine they find similar joy in the freedom and variety of the work. In my chamber group, I was now also doing work related to curation, organization, promotion, and presentation of performances in addition to being a performer in the ensemble.

Still, something was missing. I was interested in connecting the issues I saw in music to the issues I saw in the world. In my search for agency and connection with my personal values, I started working with composers to create new music. By taking part in the production process of the material I would perform, I hoped there would be more chances to connect to current issues. Meanwhile, I also dipped my toes into the realms of folk and pop music. Something about those very different worlds called me in, perhaps it was also their topical nature. I was looking for a link between the life I lead off stage and the life I shared with an audience on stage. It seemed that new contemporary classical music, folk music, and pop music were the sound worlds that openly tapped into politics and discussed current issues.

I felt that I as an artist had the power and therefore responsibility to influence the world in a small way. I did not want to leave the world of classical music because of these issues. Many of these issues were structural and societal issues that I often could not control, especially when playing a performer's role in a large ensemble. This led to my own artistic practice often being at odds with my personal values and interest in fighting for equity, empathy, and inclusion. I was interested in relating the music I was making to the world around me rather than trying to relate to a world I saw as outdated and in need of change. I considered how I might put new narratives next to the ones I

listened to so often that I was tired of hearing. How could I talk about the issues that were dear to my heart? I wanted to discuss topics such as women's rights, systemic poverty, and environmental destruction.

This takes me to my current work. I believe that the actions that form my artistic practice are inherently political. As such, I must consider these actions and how they connect to my underlying personal values. Musicians are engaging every day with societal issues, either by accepting the status quo or by pushing back. While asserting their voices and values in their artistic practice is critical at times, I am very inspired by seeing how subtle changes in elements of a performance might also be used in making an artistic practice more socially just. I am searching for ways to use my artistic practice to push against social systems and structures that uphold inequality, that only allow some select groups to be in the community, or that work to make us unwilling to listen to one another.

Through the framework of reflection and reflexivity described in this paper, I suggest that it is possible to situate one's personal values into one's artistic practice. Values are shared in one's art whether the artist is aware of those values or not and whether they believe in those values or not. In my own work, I feel a huge responsibility to develop an awareness of the values underlying all elements of my performances. Through awareness of these values and elements in which they might be situated or missing from my artistic practice, I believe I will be better equipped to take suitable action. By better understanding these elements, many invisible to the audience, I can create spaces to engage with my own personal values. It is my hope that by using reflection and reflexivity to consider my own identity and experiences and how they play a role in my assumptions and subconscious actions, I can be a part of creating a more equitable, inclusive, empathetic community. While I am not an expert on ethics, politics, philosophy, or the many societal issues I am engaging with, involving myself in the conversation is a necessary step to learning and affecting change. I hope that by engaging with these topics, I can draw attention to the questions I have and that I can engage with others in the community who have those same questions.

My suggested framework is only one possible method and is itself still a work in progress. Still, I hope that other artists will be both more intentional in their reflections on the power they have to change their performances to better situate their own personal values. I also hope that these artists will in turn be more open with other artists in their communities about the intentionality in their work. I want to emphasize that other artists need not hold the same personal values or enact them in the same way in their artistic practice.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

While personal concerns about my own artistic led me to the topic of this research, I also became interested because the implicit and explicit situation of personal values within performance was often not a visible aspect of many of the artists' work around me. This was especially true of the artistic practices of many young musicians I have met who are being trained at conservatoires.

Many of these young artists may in fact already have well thought out personal values and may already be working to connect these values with their artistic practice implicitly or explicitly; however, it seemed to me that young artists in training might be lacking a reflective, reflexive framework with which to grow and become more aware of their own assumptions and viewpoint. As socially engaged practice becomes more popular and as more artists lead portfolio careers requiring them to work in a range of areas in the arts, it may be time for these young artists to be asked to place their artistic practices under a magnifying glass, giving special consideration to their own personal values. I argue that an awareness of where one's personal values might be situated in performances, coupled with critical reflection on which specific, direct actions one can take to situate these values in one's practice, will create more agency to actually make changes to one's artistic practice.

Personal values are often embodied in the work of artists. Many artists act and make work from a specific set of personal values, but do not necessarily articulate them very clearly or consider their own assumptions and place in changing their context; this sometimes can lead to the misunderstanding that there are no clear values underlying an artist's work. Moreover, it makes it quite challenging for young artists to grow into that aspect of their profession.

### 1.1 Research Question

- In what ways can an artist use reflection and reflexivity to situate her personal values in her artistic practice?

In order to be able to explore one's own personal values and how they can be situated in one's artistic practice, one needs a reflexive, reflective framework along with an understanding of elements of artistic practice within which personal values might be situated. In order to actively explore these personal values and their situation within artistic practice, new roles may need to be taken by the artist in order to have agency to actually connect values and artistic practice. Thus, sub-questions needing to be answered in order to understand the main question are as follows:

- What frameworks of reflection and reflexivity could be used to consider the situation of an artist's personal values within the artist's artistic practice?
- In which elements of artistic practice can personal values be situated?

## **1.2 Objective**

The objective of this research is to create and test a reflective, reflexive framework with which an artist might consider the situation of their personal values within elements of their artistic practice.

## **1.3 Significance of the Research**

This research considers how an artist might intentionally reflect on personal values while going through the process of creating and putting on a performance. In order to have the agency to explore these values, it might be necessary to explore new roles, thereby expanding the traditional role of performer. In describing my own process of thinking, making, and reflecting, I hope to share a possible framework through which artists, especially fellow classically trained musicians, might be better able to connect their personal values and their artistic practice.

## **1.4 Structure of the Paper**

In the first half of the research, I will define key concepts that are critical for the rest of the research, and then I will describe my methodology and propose a reflective, reflexive framework that might be used for artists to connect their personal values and artistic values. I will finish the first portion by analyzing results and suggesting next steps in the research.



In the second half of my research, I share my own project *West Virginia, My Home*, in which I use the framework in my own artistic practice. I offer my own experience of working to connect my personal values of empathy, inclusion, and equity as a contribution and invite others to take it and improve upon it. My working reflections are shared, all the time aiming to take in new information unseating my own assumptions. I also share my artistic results.

## 1.5 Defining Terms

Below I share some of the definitions of key terms, such as values, reflection, reflexivity, and artistic practice, as they will be used throughout the rest of this paper.

### 1.5.1 Values

*Values* can be considered cognitive representations of basic motivations (Schwartz, 1992). Shalom H. Schwartz, a social psychologist who created the Theory of Basic Human Values, points out six main features of values (Schwartz, 2010). He states that values are linked to affect, meaning that when a value someone holds is threatened, the person feels negative emotions calling them to protect that value. On the other hand, if a value someone holds is experienced, that person would feel positive emotions. Additionally, Schwartz says that values refer to “desirable goals that motivate action” (p. 3) and that values are relevant to more than one action or situation, unlike norms or attitudes. Schwartz says that values also serve as guides to selecting or evaluating actions, policies, events, and people, including the self. Values are ordered in a system of priorities, unlike norms and attitudes. Lastly, he says that this relative importance of these multiple values guides an action.

Based on the research of social psychologists Sonia Sagiv and Lilach Roccas, I have decided to use the word value, as these values act as my own moral compass, helping me to decide whether or not to take certain actions. Sagiv and Roccas state the following:

People can explain their behavior by referring to their traits (“I helped her because I’m an agreeable person”) or interests (“I like helping people”) as well as their values (“I think it’s important to help”), but they refer to their values only, when they wish to justify choices or

actions as legitimate or worthy. (Roccas et al. 2002; Sagiv 2002 as quoted in Sagiv & Roccas, 2017, p. 5)

Roccas and Sagiv (2017) go on to point out that political activists often use values to frame issues. They mention another study (Brewer & Gross, 2005) in which the authors point out that the value of equality is used by the American political context to both argue for and against affirmative action.

Ethics provide “a framework for understanding and interpreting right and wrong in society” and can be described as “the investigation and analysis of moral principles and dilemmas” (McCombs School of Business, 2018a). I chose to focus on personal values, as they are “individual beliefs that motivate people to act one way or another. They serve as a guide for human behavior” (McCombs School of Business, 2018b). An artistic practice is a set of behaviors grouped together across time, parts of which are shared in performance. I decided that considering personal values, rather than ethics, social values, or morals, would better lead an artist to make decisions and actions in practice that connected to their own reflection and reflexivity.

### **1.5.2 Reflection and Reflexivity**

In order to be more intentional and aware of how these personal values can lead to such different actions, I argue that musicians need to use reflection and reflexivity as tools in their artistic practice. Based on the descriptions of both terms as shared below, I believe both need to be used together for the strongest results, hence why I will often refer to reflection and reflexivity as a pair.

*Reflection* is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “the action of turning (back) or fixing the thoughts on some subject; meditation, deep or serious consideration” (Molander, 2008). Gillie Bolton (2009), a freelance consultant in therapeutic writing and reflective practice writing, warns that it is best not to be critical during the initial writing process of reflections. Proponents of reflection and reflexivity often highlight the importance of writing to reflect, specifically in first person using ‘I’ (M. Ryan, 2015).

She states that the narratives shared through the process of reflection are told from the narrator's point of view; however, only through self-critical, reflexive reflection does she believe "individual perspectives, values and understanding can be widened and deepened" (p. 16).

Bolton also points to a danger of reflection, saying, "Practitioners need to take responsibility for all their own actions and values, and their share of responsibility for the political, social and cultural situations within which they live and work. [...] Reflective practice can fall into the trap of becoming only confession. [...] it passes responsibility onto others" (Bolton, 2009, p. 11).

*Reflexivity* can be defined as "taking account of itself or of the effect of the personality or presence of the researcher on what is being investigated" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2018).

Margaret Archer (2012) defines reflexivity as "the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa" (as cited in Akram & Hogan, 2015, p. 607). In this research, I do not take reflexivity to mean an action that is performed as "a reflex without conscious thought" (Merriam-Webster, 2018c). Neither do I refer to "habitual and unthinking behavior." Gillie Bolton (2009, p.13) sees critical reflection, or reflexivity, as "learning and developing through examining what we think happened on any occasion, and how we think others perceived the event and us, opening our practice to scrutiny by others, and studying data and texts from the wider sphere."

Bolton (2009, p. 13) defines reflexivity as "finding strategies to question our own attitudes, thought processes, values, assumptions, prejudices and habitual actions, to strive to understand our complex roles in relation to others." She shares that reflexivity could be used to consider how we unknowingly or through assumptions create and support social or professional structures that go against our own values.

Mary Ryan (2014, p. 133) shares the following based on her work with creative writers and her understanding of Margaret S. Archer's theory of reflexivity (Archer, 2007, 2010) which "discusses the concerns of the individual and the social structures or 'expected' ways of acting in a particular context." I believe that this same issue of expectation exists for artists and as such the

importance of using reflexivity and reflection doubles when students leave school and enter the world. Ryan has a similar concern:

“In contextually congruent or static conditions (such as highly structured and formulaic [...] conditions in some classrooms), students have less need to reflexively weigh up their options. However in contextually incongruent or unpredictable conditions that have less formal structure and/or privacy and/or more potential for misinterpretation [...], Archer argues that reflexive processes, which go beyond reflective thought to include action and reaction, are more important than ever in weighing up good decisions. If students only ever write in contextually congruent conditions, with no opportunities to deliberate about the influences on and effects of their writing decision-making, they will lack the skills to write effectively and appropriately in other contexts. Making oneself the object of study through reflexivity is a powerful way to interrogate the decisions one makes and the ensuing effects or implications.” (2014, p. 133)

Considering how we unknowingly counter our personal values is an important aspect of reflexivity; for example, Bolton (2009, p. 14) shares:

“Reflexivity is making aspects of the self strange: focusing close attention upon one’s own actions, thoughts, feelings, values, identity, and their effect upon others, situations, and professional and social structures. The reflexive thinker has to stand back from belief and value systems, habitual ways of thinking and relating to others, structures of understanding themselves and their relationship to the world, their assumptions about the way the world impinges upon them. [...] This critical focus upon beliefs, values, professional identities, and how they affect and are affected by the surrounding cultural structures, is a highly responsible social and political activity.”

Additionally, Bolton highlights the importance of being comfortable with ambiguity together with a delay in closure when considering the best method of action. This comfort with ambiguity leads to a need to accept the time it may take one to consider an issue from multiple points of view. This

delay of action and closure may in turn help one to have more time to focus on one's experience and how it can affect one's research or art making. Bengt Molander (2008) states a similar idea stating that delay of action is often helpful in reflection. He also adds that collaboration and others' points of view may be necessary. He says:

“A main idea of reflection is a meeting or confrontation with yourself and your experiences, not least through how others see you and your experiences. Sometimes a precondition for a meeting with oneself is that there should be no necessity of acting immediately (or immediate action). However, what is immediate or not depends very much on the practice in question.” (p. 21)

Moreover, Stephen Brookfield, a scholar in adult education, (2000) writes about the collaborative nature of ‘critical reflection,’ a term, which I consider equivalent to reflexivity based on his description, which involves seeing others' points of view rather than merely reflecting on their own experience. He states:

“I am unable to see how [critical reflection] can be anything other than an irreducibly social process. Any critically reflective effort we undertake can only be accomplished with the help of critical friends. We need others to serve as critical mirrors who highlight our assumptions for us and reflect them back to us in unfamiliar, surprising, and disturbing ways.” (pp. 146–47)

Gary Spruce (2017), a music education researcher, points to critical reflection as a tool through which we become conscious of our place in society and are consequently able to act upon our awareness. He starts:

“Such awareness is rooted in an understanding that social structures and discourses are not always as they seem – self-evident and neutral – but function as the means by which hegemonic groups sustain their influence and interests. Spruce shares that interrogating the normative discourses of music, music education and social justice is a key part of such conscientisation for artists.” (p. 721)

Both reflection and reflexivity are considered by many researchers to be critical elements not only of music education, but also of all kinds of learning. In experiential learning, an educational approach described by David Kolb, an American educational theorist (Kolb, 1984). John Dewey, an American philosopher and education reformer, also wrote a great deal about learning from experience, interaction, and reflection, often in connection to art. Dewey shares that reflection is the “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends” (1933, p. 9). Dewey states that there are certain specific phases of reflection. These states of reflection highlight the importance of delaying action until having gone through the other phases, which consider ambiguity. Dewey’s phases include: perplexity when encountering a problem, elaboration when connecting comparable previous experiences, developing several hypotheses, comparing hypotheses, and taking action (Dewey, 1933, pp. 106-115).

Several researchers point out that taking action is a critical phase in reflection, lest reflection become deflection of responsibility. Reflecting through action is common practice for artists in their own work (Schön, 1983). Sengers et al. (2005, p. 50), as cited by Barton (2014), emphasize that in creative areas reflection is “folded into all our ways of seeing and experiencing the world...[it] opens opportunities to experience the world and oneself in a fundamentally different way.” As cited by Barton (2014), Steinberg and Kincheloe (1999) note that “meaning making through performative expression allows for personal transformation through acute awareness of and reflection on one’s own beliefs, knowledges and values through the process of creating artistic work.” Many artists, including musicians, focus on the technical ways in which they create art and how they can improve this. While this is of course a critical concern, other issues can also impact an artist’s work or performance. As cited by Georgina Barton (2015), Bolton (2001) states that addressing these concerns through ‘practical actions’ is necessary in order to make progress. Barton says that to “reach an ultimate performance standard, critical reflection is essential and moves the novice to expert, the student to professional.”

Donald Schön, a philosopher who created a theory and practice of reflective professional learning, points out:

“It is rare that the designer has the design all in her head in advance, and then merely translates it. Most of the time she is in a progressive relationship-as she goes along, she is making judgments. Sometimes the designer's judgments have the intimacy of a conversational relationship, where she is getting some response back from the medium.” (Schön, 1983, p. 4)

Stephen Brookfield, an education researcher, proposes that by using four lenses, professional practitioners are able to see different pictures of who they are and what they do. He sees these as crucial parts of critically reflective practice, “a process of inquiry involving practitioners in trying to discover, and research, the assumptions that frame how they work.” His lenses are 1) autobiographical experiences of learning, 2) learners’ eyes, 3) our colleagues’ perceptions, and 4) theoretical, philosophical, and research literature.

Brookfield says the following about the importance of being critically reflective, which I see as the same as reflexivity:

“To some extent, we are all prisoners trapped within the perceptual frameworks that determine how we view our experiences. A self-confirming cycle often develops whereby our uncritically accepted assumptions shape actions that then only serve to confirm the truth of those assumptions. We find it very difficult to stand outside ourselves and see how some of our most deeply held values and beliefs lead us into distorted and constrained ways of being. To become critically reflective, we need to find some lenses that reflect back to us a stark and differently highlighted picture of who we are and what we do.” (Brookfield, 1998, p. 197)

When interested in better connecting values to artistic practice, it becomes particularly relevant to be critically reflective, as at times we may not even be aware of the elements where values may be hiding in our own work. If we are not aware of these values, or do nothing to strengthen or weaken

the situation of these values' presence in our work, we are still furthering them through our artistic practice.

### **1.5.3 Artistic Practice**

Using a framework of reflective and reflexive practice, I use my own artistic practice, specifically the project, *West Virginia, My Home*, as a case study. This project's reflections and results will be shared in the second half of this research.

When speaking about *artistic practice*, I am referring to the ways in which an artist, including visual artists, dancers, musicians, and actors, might go about their work. This goes beyond the physical activities of making artistic products and can include influences, ideas, materials, tools, and skills (Doğantan-Dack, n.d.; Frasz & Sidford, 2017; Spronck, 2016; Toro-Pérez, 2009). Within the artistic practice of a musician, elements of specific performances such as materials, context, and presentation design may be taken into account. I myself have been moving away from being a musician in the role of a classically trained performer of music, and therefore I often use the term artist, which I find much more open. Elements of artistic practice will be defined under Tanja Orning's relational model described within the methodology.



## CHAPTER 2: APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

Using Stephen Brookfield's critically reflective model (1998) and Tanja Orning's relational model of a performance's relation to society (Orning, 2018), I suggest a framework in two parts with which one can reflect on one's artistic practice and the situation of personal values in one's performances. In order to test this framework for use by artists in considering their personal values, I turned to my own practice. By looking at the creation and performance of one specific project *West Virginia, My Home*, I explore this framework, which could be adapted in consideration of other projects within one's artistic practice. Through intentional and critical consideration of this project, focusing on a thorough investigation of choices, assumptions, and actions, I use reflection and reflexivity when considering elements of performance in order to better situate my personal values in my artistic practice.

Throughout the process of going through Brookfield's lenses, I also considered Tanja Orning's model (2018). However, due to the linearity of this manuscript, I have added those descriptions below in section 3.1. As interaction with society is so closely tied to many personal values, a relational model of connecting performers to society, created by Tanja Orning (2018), was used as a starting point. I made several changes based on the desire to prioritize personal values in decision-making processes in the model.

Additionally, throughout the process of creating *West Virginia, My Home*, elements were reorganized, and new elements were accounted for which I had felt were missing in Orning's draft model. Her model was still a work in progress when I saw it, so it may have changed compared to the draft that I saw in the spring of 2018. While completely separating out these elements is not always possible, attempting to distinguish them from one another can aid in

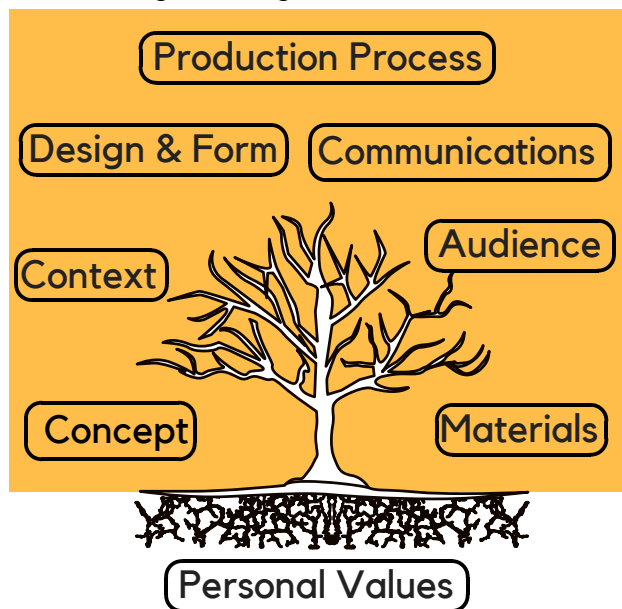


Figure 1 A visualization of how I operationalize Orning's model.

clarification and help to guide and regulate artistic practice. My own case study helped me categorize seven common elements of performance: concept, materials, audience, context, communications, design and form, and production process. Underlying all of these would be the personal values I aimed to intentionally take into account.

Personal values could be critically examined under the magnifying glass of each of these elements of artistic practice; separating aspects of artistic practice into distinct elements allows a way to consider decisions one might not have thought of otherwise. There could be numerous layers within these elements connecting one's personal values and artistic practice. An artist could consider not only the act of performing itself, but also all of the activities that go into creating and documenting a performance.

Brookfield's model (1998) seemed fitting; it could be modified to help a performer consider their role as practitioner from other perspectives. Brookfield's model is particularly useful in beginning to explore the role of reflexivity in one's artistic practice as it foregrounds several different perspectives through which one can explore his or her practice. By adjusting the model to more explicitly refer to the practice of an artist, specifically a musician, I operationalize the framework in my own practice.

I examined my own artistic practice under Brookfield's reflective and reflexive lenses in order to better understand what unsettled me about certain musical experiences and what personal values were threatened by those experiences. These lenses can be used before beginning a project as a way of both clarifying one's thoughts about certain issues and exploring what other performers in the field are doing. The lenses might also be used in the process of making and sharing a project along with the final reflections on the finished product. Within these lenses, the artist can intentionally consider their own personal values, from their own perspective, from fellow artists' perspectives, and from other sources.

By being critically reflective about the situation of values in artistic practice, I examine how awareness and intentionality of considering my personal values might impact my own artistic

practice. Using descriptive and analytic writing, dialogue, and literature review, I explored underlying assumptions and attitudes that were often unintentionally played out in my artistic practice. A critical aspect of the reflection and reflexivity is taking an action based on those reflections; in my case, these actions were musical activities and the creation of a performance called *West Virginia, My Home*. In my own project, my autobiography was the first lens that I explored, closely followed by fellow artists and literature review. The audience lens was used sporadically as a testing ground and will be used at the end of the experience to further test my assumptions in creating my performance.

### **2.1 Lens One: The artist's autobiography**

The artist's autobiography is a significant foundation upon which to build further insight into the artist's own practice. Analyzing one's own stories allows one to draw subjective insight and meanings for practice on a deeply emotional level. Through personal and critical self-reflection, the artist can become more cognizant of the assumptions that frame their practice. Only once the artist knows what these assumptions are, can investigation of those assumptions' legitimacy begin through the use of other lenses such as dialogue with the audience, fellow artists, and literature review. As those lenses are explored, a return and reinterpretation of one's experiences and values as well as connected actions can evolve.

### **2.2 Lens Two: Fellow artists**

By asking collaborators and fellow artists to observe what the artist does, the artist is able to notice aspects of his or her practice that might not otherwise be noticed. As others describe their understanding of and response to the artist's practice, the artist can gain a new perspective on his or her own work. This lens is often used by artists-in-training with respect to taking private lessons specific to instrumental or other artistic techniques. This lens can also be widened to critique and receive feedback on the explicit or implicit personal values in one's artistic practice. Oftentimes,

fellow artists will have differing opinions on another person's artistic practice. This leads one to need to deliberate on the feedback and synthesize it into one's own actionable steps.

### **2.3 Lens Three: Literature review**

Through this lens, the artist can look at interviews and the work of fellow artists that the artist might not be able to directly contact. This might include listening to recordings, reading non-fiction and fiction, as well as reading theory about connected practices. An examination of written and recorded material can provide the artist with various interpretations of well-known situations that feel impossible to name. It can help the artist describe his or her practice by revealing the common elements of what might otherwise be seen as situations only experienced by the artist. This lens can also bring novel inquiries and links to mind that would otherwise never be reflected upon.

### **2.4 Lens Four: Audience**

Considering ourselves through our audiences' eyes, we can become more aware of the actions and assumptions that endorse or contest prevailing power relationships in performances. An artist may find that audiences are reading the artist's actions in the way intended. The artist might also be surprised by the plurality of meanings people read into the artist's work. In this lens one can better understand how an audience sees and experiences the artist's personal values in the resulting performance. The artist may either explicitly or implicitly ask about the audiences' experience or reading of values, but it may sometimes be more useful for the artist to infer based on the descriptions and comments about the artwork.

## CHAPTER 3: DATA AND ANALYSIS

My own project *West Virginia, My Home* acted as an initial testing ground to explore the framework in my own artistic practice. Through this project, I realized that taking on new roles in performance could be a key aspect allowing one to have the agency to affect the elements of a performance. By having a clear sense of my own personal values prior to beginning the process of starting the project, I was better able to situate those values in all of the different aspects of my performance. I considered my personal values as a strong foundation on which I might build my artistic practice; the project of *West Virginia, My Home* is one of the many directions considering those values could have taken me in.

### 3.1 Elements of Artistic Practice

I take time here to describe these different elements. In the second half of my research, I discuss these elements in relation to my own project *West Virginia, My Home*.

#### 3.1.1 Concept

This element is the idea or concept behind an artistic project, including a vision of what a final work might look like. Furthermore, if one is interested in exploring socially engaged art, exploring the resource “Mapping the Landscape of Socially Engaged Artistic Practice” (Frasz & Sidford, 2017) may prove fruitful in the endeavor of locating how one’s concept is situated within the greater socially engaged art scene. The concept is the initial plan. I found that in my own project, *West Virginia, My Home*, it changed quite a lot throughout the process of creation. Being flexible and allowing the process of reflection and particularly reflexivity to change one’s concept allows for a more thoughtful concept, even if action is delayed. I found that beginning with a very clear, well-thought out concept allowed me to receive the most feedback and to know more clearly who I could or should look to in respect to Brookfield’s lenses.

### 3.1.2 Performers and materials

Under this element one can consider both the materials and the performers that will be on stage in a performance. This process may happen at different times as new materials are added or as new performers are engaged. Materials can refer to all kinds of artistic mediums, musical, visual, theatrical or otherwise, that might be used in a performance. Sometimes the music might include text, either in the form of a title or within the piece. It can be quite literal and overt in its opinion. This is common in many protest songs, topical songs, and political songs (Little, 2011; Miyakawa, 2015; Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 2006). Context about specific materials can be further explored, and is discussed as its own specific element.

The roles of commissioner, composer, collector, and curator are especially involved in the consideration of this section in *West Virginia, My Home*. In order to include empathy, inclusion, and equity as values within my work, the identities of the performers' and any other individuals connected to the performance should be considered from the outset of the project. Care must be taken not to tokenize these individuals based on their visible identities; however, being aware of lack of diversity of a team of collaborators allows for better representation and inclusion, leading to greater equity in who is invited to be involved in one's artistic work. I believe strongly that by including people with different identities, the finished product can be a stronger product.

In the case of *West Virginia, My Home*, I failed to have a racially or ethnically diverse group of collaborators, in part due to my own lack of personal connections, the time pressure of putting on the project, and the relative minority of classically trained composers of color who also are from Appalachia or are interested in Appalachian folk music. I did work tirelessly to ensure that I had West Virginian voices present, as well as LGBT and women's voices. I also worked to have folk musicians and classical musicians equally represented. In my literature review, I look at the history of whitewashing American folk music, and consider ways in which I can be more aware of my own assumptions in the future. Additionally, through literature review, I have become aware of more minority composers with whom I might collaborate in the future. By working with composers who are also considering issues of equity and inclusion in classical music, I was able as

a commissioner to have materials created that shared reflections on diverse viewpoints. One such example is Perry Maddox's texts in "October Drought in a Toxic River Valley."

### **3.1.3 Context**

I define context as the setting and circumstances in which a material, concept, design, or some other element of a performance was created and exists presently. In this paper I chiefly focus on the context of materials, although through Brookfield's lenses, one can consider other elements as well.

Each material was made in a specific context and has a certain history. In order to discover the context, one often must search extensively to find information and recordings of previous performances. Often, much of the context pertaining to materials can be found online, but one may also need to interview those who were alive or even directly involved in the creation of the material. When looking for context, the cultural and historical context a material was created in can be taken into account along with the industry dynamics of that time. All material tells us something about where it originated and about the society that was in existence when it was created. In *West Virginia, My Home*, the roles of performer, composer, commissioner, collector, and curator were all involved the consideration of this section.

When deliberating about the use of certain found materials, consideration can be given both to the contexts materials were made in and currently exist in. The artist can consider both in order to better understand how the historical and modern-day context might interact. When considering new materials, the context can change or evolve as time goes on.

### **3.1.4 Production process**

Under this element the following sub-elements are placed: working process with collaborators and the process of creating or collecting materials. One might consider commissioning, collecting, and co-creative working as possible production processes. Sometimes the process of the work is more important than the product itself; this is especially common in socially engaged art (Frasz &

Sidford, 2017). In these cases, the production process may even be quite present in the element of concept. Even when the product is the goal, production process is a key area where personal values can be situated and shared through actions.

Deciding upon criteria to be used in choosing collaborators prior to starting the production process may help the artist ensure their personal values and the project's concept can align with the collaborator's personal values and concept. Having face-to-face interaction is not always possible, but in general, I have found that email and other text communications make it challenging to start on the same page. Even if the collaborators start on the same page, frequent check-ins can be scheduled to ensure that the process stays clear. Furthermore, reflection and reflexivity can be used throughout the process by all involved in order to better consider differences of opinion and different experiences. As personal values can often lead to very different behaviors for different people, frequent discussions about the production process, including other elements of the performance, are crucial to ensure that personal values stay present in the process leading to the resulting work. Each collaboration brings new opportunities and points of view; at the same time, each collaboration also brings new difficulties and differences. These all will need to be discussed and resolved in some way. In addition to having initial criteria guiding the choice of collaborators, a mutual working process should be decided upon by the parties involved in the collaboration in order to make these resolutions more clear.

In *West Virginia, My Home*, I was the only one explicitly using the framework described in this project. I did this mostly in the roles of commissioner, collector, and curator. It would be interesting to attempt this with multiple people. In my own project, this was a section where I spent the most time and where I was able to situate my own personal values of empathy, inclusion, and equity. I worked to include a diverse group of people with diverse experiences by including composers and folk musicians. Additionally, in the production process, I used the lenses of Brookfield to ask for feedback throughout the process, course correcting and evolving in my own thoughts on my concept, design, form, and other elements of the resulting performance. More information about the working process is found in the second half of my research.



### 3.1.5 Design and form

Design is defined as “the way in which something is arranged or shaped” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2018a). Form is defined by Cambridge Dictionary (2018a) as “the particular way in which something exists.”

Included in this section are presentation considerations such as medium, lighting design, seating arrangements, order of pieces, staging, venue, time of day. These might be broken into sub-categories of the presentation of the performance, venue-based decisions, and socio-economic considerations.

I found that many of these choices had direct impact on accessibility of my performance, specifically my own aim to provide a performance that would include a diverse audience’s attendance. Many of my own personal values, such as inclusion and equity, could be very clearly situated in this section in a way that audience would visibly see or quietly experience. The audience’s ultimate experience can also be greatly affected in this element. For instance, seating choices might result in a more equal feeling between performer and audience. A concert might be placed in a venue with a clear distinction of seating for the audience versus staging for the performer. The venue might be a small place for a small audience; this could create a feeling of intimacy for the audience to experience the performance *with* the performer. A small space might then also allow for a breaking down of the barrier between audience and performer. In order to further break down this barrier, a performance might also be framed as a participatory discussion or be interactive in some way, rather than being a static, quiet listening experience. These feelings of closeness would be much harder to create in a large space, particularly one with a clear division between stage and audience seating. On the other hand, a large venue might allow more people to attend. This could make the event more accessible. Accessibility could also be considered in the ease of access for those with mobility concern. For instance, one might consider whether there is an elevator or if stairs must be used.

Many of these designs are most visible the day of the performance. Still, they will need to be taken into account leading up to the performance. All decisions play a distinct role in the possibility of situating personal values.

### **3.1.6 Audience**

In this element, I consider the target audience, in other words who I hope will attend my performance. This element is quite connected to and influenced by many other elements discussed. This element differs from Brookfield's lens as it is a consideration on the part of the artist, rather than a place to get feedback and new ideas based on an audience's experience of the artist's work.

Design and form, including venue location, ticketing structure, price point, and time of the performance may play a large role in the ability of the target audience to attend. We may forget the barriers of access that are keeping our desired target audience from being able or interested in attending a performance. For instance, the cost of a ticket may be too high or may be inaccessible to people with mobility concerns. One can consider if charging different prices for different target audiences would be one solution.

The concept as shared through marketing and other communications may also influence whether the target audience is interested in attending. Often times in classical music, there is an emphasis on finding a new audience or developing an audience. This can bleed into a desire to dumb down marketing materials or to make flashy claims. In my own project, I considered why this might be elitist, and how I might fight against my own assumptions about what an Appalachian audience or non-Appalachian audience would expect of my work and how to bring both target audiences into the experience without demeaning them.

### **3.1.7 Marketing and communications**

In this element I place communications with the intent to inform an audience about the performance or sell tickets to a performance. Within those kinds of communications, the following can be placed: marketing, performance program notes, pre- or post-show discussions or lectures,

merchandizing, and any text accompanying performance recordings or archival material. Communications can be on different placed on online platforms such as Facebook, Wordpress, Snap Chat, SoundCloud, Bandcamp, or Instagram. Traditional print mediums like posters, press releases or flyers may also be used. Newspaper articles or events sections and radio announcements or interviews can be considered as well.

Communications are important to consider both leading up to a performance and post-performance. They can set expectations for a performance and help an artist connect with their target audience prior to the event. Additionally, after a performance they can be a way to keep in contact with past audience members, to find new audience members for future events, and to archive one's work.

It is possible for an artist's personal values to be situated in these communications and in marketing, both in their visible content and in their production process which may not be visible to those seeing them. Despite best attempts at communicating certain values or using certain values in communication, these values may not be readable given the context of the audience and the interaction with other elements of the performance.






I myself have mostly considered marketing and communications in prior employment rather than in my own artistic practice. In the months leading up to the United States performances of *West Virginia, My Home*, I will consider this element more deeply. As of now, I have considered it in the communications accompanying recordings of materials hosted online. I will share aspects of my concept and of the materials' contexts. Credit will be given to creators of new material as well as folk musicians who shared old material with me. To reach my target audience, a broad subsection of those living in the United States, and invite them to attend live performances, I will be careful to partner with local news outlets.





In order to have a connection with one's audience on social media, one may be sharing behind-the-scenes information. In these cases, one might consider what should remain private and what can be more broadly shared. This could be where information about context or concept is shared, for

instance. Through online marketing and communications, one can also listen to what their audience says. It can create an opportunity for one to engage and react. It may look different depending on the format a piece is being shared in. For instance, if being shared on a streaming service, it is more difficult to add context, but also more easy for the audience to share their point of view than it would be on one's web presence.

### **3.2 Questions for Elements of Performance**

I realized that the categorized elements and Brookfield's lenses could still leave me prey to my own assumptions and internalized behaviors. As such, I created questions that I would consider within each element of the artistic performance to ask me to question quickly made decisions. These can be found below. These questions may not be relatable to other artists, as their artistic practices may differ greatly from my own. Still, I found that writing down my own questions helped me consider what I had forgotten or assumed, and helped me set time aside to reflect and consider my own identity's role in how I saw those reflections. I formulated questions that I could also reuse with new projects of my own once I finished *West Virginia, My Home*. I focused on questions that would ask me to reflect critically on my own position in the project as well as questions that would drive me to take action after reflection. I share many of the answers to these questions in the second half of my research, my case study.

PERSONAL VALUES	IDENTITY AND PRIVILEGE
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Using free writing, conversation, or reflective thought, come up with a list of personal values.</li> <li>▶ Which experiences in my artistic or personal life really upset me or make me very happy?</li> <li>▶ In these experiences, which personal values are threatened or bolstered?</li> <li>▶ How can these values be situated in my artistic practice?</li> </ul>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ What identities do I hold? Which of these are visible to others?</li> <li>▶ Which of these are invisible?</li> <li>▶ In what ways am I ashamed or proud of some of these identities? Why is that?</li> <li>▶ What privileges do I have in my society? In what ways do I advertently or inadvertently make use of these privileges?</li> <li>▶ How are these identities situated in my artistic practice?</li> </ul>
IDEA/CONCEPT	DESIGN & FORM
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ How does my performance concept connect to my personal values?</li> <li>▶ What is my performance concept?</li> <li>▶ What assumptions or prejudices are connected to my concept or idea?</li> <li>▶ How will I deal with issues that arise as I learn more about my underlying assumptions?</li> </ul>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ How does my project design and form connect to my personal values?</li> <li>▶ What am I trying to achieve?</li> <li>▶ How do aspects like choice of venue, location, and timing affect the performance, including the audience's experience?</li> <li>▶ Who can I collaborate with to achieve these goals?</li> </ul>
PRODUCTION PROCESS	CONTEXT
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ How does my production process connect to my personal values?</li> <li>▶ What production process(es) will I use?</li> <li>▶ Will I collaborate with others to create materials, to perform, et cetera?</li> <li>▶ What will my criteria be to work with them? How does this connect to my personal values?</li> </ul>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ How does the context of my performance connect to my personal values?</li> <li>▶ Who created the material I will use? When?</li> <li>▶ What was the context of the material's creation?</li> <li>▶ What changes were made to the material before it reached its current form?</li> <li>▶ In what ways will I share the context of my performance?</li> </ul>

MATERIALS	AUDIENCE
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ How do the materials I am using connect to my personal values?</li> <li>▶ What kinds of materials (music, visuals, choreography, scripts, et cetera) do I want to use?</li> <li>▶ Are there aspects of using these materials that go against my values? If yes, how will I deal with this issue?</li> </ul>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ How does my chosen target audience connect to my values?</li> <li>▶ Who is my target audience?</li> <li>▶ Who may I be forgetting when I consider my target audience?</li> <li>▶ How can I best connect to my target audience?</li> <li>▶ What barriers to access may I be forgetting when I consider my target audience?</li> </ul>
COMMUNICATIONS	FINAL REFLECTIONS
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ How does my communication connect with my values?</li> <li>▶ What methods of communication will I use? (i.e. online, in person, pre or post performance.)</li> <li>▶ What will I communicate about the materials in archival and recorded material?</li> </ul>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Did I take my values into account during all aspects of the project? How?</li> <li>▶ Are there aspects of the performance where I failed to connect my values?</li> <li>▶ Why did this happen? Which values are implicit versus explicit? Why? How can I keep this from happening again?</li> </ul>

### 3.3 Roles in a Performance

While reflecting on the various elements in creating and putting on a performance, I came to see that one might only have the agency to change some of these elements based on the roles they had in within a performance. This could also be turned around; an artist can consider which roles they can take in their artistic practice and how their control over values considered in the performance would be affected based on those choices. Reflecting on the possible roles one can take, and considering reflexively how being in these roles could change the project, can be an invigorating and useful process. By attempting to see how one's own identity affects one's fulfillment of one's role(s) and therefore the project, it is possible to further reflect on one's personal values. Archer draws a direct link between reflexivity and agency to affect change. In my experience, while awareness of one's position and accompanying assumptions is a crucial first step, taking on new

roles in projects and even in one's greater artistic practice can be a necessary second step in order to be able to situate one's own values rather than portray another person's or organization's values.

Falk Hübner, a composer, music theatre maker and researcher, talks about 'extension' and 'reduction' as a way of exploring the roles that an artist, specifically a musician, might take on in their artistic practice.

"Extension is marked by performative elements that the musician is asked to do which do not belong to her core profession, which are added to it, while reduction is understood as the denial of performative elements that the musician is accustomed to or even dependent on." (Hübner, 2013)

This importance of flexibility in roles and blurring of roles has already been seen by the numbers of composer-performers in existence (Yip, 2015), but often they have had training in composition in addition to performance. It seems rarer for performers to begin to compose than the other way around. This concept of the hyphenated or hybrid musician is a way to create more potential for new kinds of art to be created (Reeder, 2012; Tobias, 2012).

While I am attempting to divide roles in performance in a clean way, in current day practice, there are already many examples of artists who have multiple roles in their artistic practice. Dividing aspects of a performance into roles is therefore quite reductive, but as a classically trained performer who was used to only having minute interpretive agency in a performance, it was a helpful exercise to consider where I could find the agency within a performance to affect elements and therefore the situation of my values.

In *West Virginia, My Home*, the roles of performer, composer/creator, collector, commissioner, and curator were considered, even though the process did not begin by explicitly deciding on roles to take. Below the working definitions of these roles, as considered in this research, are shared.

### 3.3.1 Performer

Performers are defined by arts researcher Phillip Auslander as “human beings presenting themselves to other human beings in the latter’s capacity as audience” (2015, p. 68). I find this definition much closer to my experience as a performer than that of the Cambridge Dictionary, which defines a performer as “a person who entertains people by acting, singing, dancing, or playing music” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2018c). I prefer Auslander’s definition to that of the Cambridge Dictionary; performers are not always entertaining, and I also find that so clearly listing these four possibilities of entertainment greatly reduces a performer’s agency in defining a performance.

As Hübner shares, the difficulty of defining a performer may be due to the material-centered weight often placed on musicology in the past. He states, “The observation and analysis of performers as creators of (musical) meaning, but also their professions, creative strategies, problems, struggles, activities and so on demand extraordinary attention, not only in the field of music, but also in those of theatre and every other live art form” (Hübner, 2013, p. 33).

Performers, in most Western traditions, do have some agency in how they perform material; however, Britannica Encyclopedia (Carr & Thomas, 2011), points out the following:

“Performers as musical interpreters operate within a range of limitations imposed upon them by their understanding of the printed page, whatever knowledge may be available concerning the tradition that surrounds the music at hand, and the extent to which their personal tastes coincide with this information.”

According to music philosopher Marcel Cobussen’s review of music researcher and philosopher Jeff R. Warren’s book *Music and Ethical Responsibility*:

“Arguing against the obsolete idea that a performer’s primary responsibility lies in respecting the score, Warren contends that ethical responsibility, in the Levinasian sense, emerges in contact with others (composers, fellow artists, audiences, but also people not



participating in or present at a musical performance as well as non-human agents). A performer thus has responsibilities for the past (previous performances, reliable sources, composers, whether deceased or not), the unfolding present (other performers, audiences) and the future (current performances alter the meaning of music, and music that is not performed ceases to exist) (pp. 172–3). [...] But, Warren stresses again, what this responsibility concretely means can change and is subject to constant negotiation (p. 170).” (Cobussen, 2015)

Even in the most reductive sense of the role, where a performer has little creative or organizational input, a performer can work to understand the materials they are using and the context of those materials in the past, present, and future. Using reflection and especially reflexivity can help a performer decide which material to perform or in what way to perform the material. Depending on the size of the ensemble he or she plays in, the working relationship with the ensemble, and many other factors, a performer may find the agency to address issues that are contradictory to their personal values or his or her understanding of ethical behavior within certain elements of a performance. The first step must however be to realize there are inconsistencies or assumptions in their own artistic practice.

### **3.3.2 Curator**

According to the visual art curator Hans Ulrich Obrist, “Curating as a profession means at least four things. It means to preserve, in the sense of safeguarding the heritage of art. It means to be the selector of new work. It means to connect to art history. And it means displaying or arranging the work” (Jeffries & Groves, 2014).

Obrist believes that curators are “junction-makers”; they bring people together to collaborate around and for art. He says, “I, for example, bring together an artist and an architect, or an artist and a scientist, or a composer and an artist, and they do an opera together. That’s also curating” (Amirsadeghi, 2015).

According to *The Curator's Handbook* (George, 2015), "The social engagement aspect of curatorial practice seems to be a core feature of 21<sup>st</sup>-century curatorial practice." Also, George mentions that one important aspect of the curator's role is the "potential it offers to focus on a particular subject and bring it to the public's attention at a specific moment." He states that through juxtaposition and interpretation of music, curators can select, assemble, arrange, and oversee ideas, which can generate dialogue (p. 13). Furthermore, George shares that 'risk,' a challenge for the curator and the composer or artist, is important as it can lead to dialogue and new developments in both fields.

George goes on to state, "Ideas are key to good curatorial practice, as are thorough research and an awareness of the potential audience for the project" (p. 30). He suggests that the process of reflection is key; a curator needs to experience as many other performances as possible, have a conversation with other curators, academics, and artists (p. 33). These are the similar lenses suggested by the modification of Brookfield's model which includes literature review and fellow artists.

When situating personal values in the curation aspects of one's artistic practice, considering the audience's experience is important. George believes that one should allow an audience member the freedom to direct their experience in a way that reading a book or text would not allow, and one should strive to avoid being didactic. There is a danger that elements of one's performance may become negatively pedagogic or dogmatic; therefore, it might be wise to consider when values can be situated implicitly or in the working process rather than (only) in the aspects visible to the audience. For instance, the concept or material of a performance could be seemingly unrelated to one's own values in content, even though those values might be very present in the one's design or production process. In *West Virginia, My Home*, I explored how I might re-contextualize materials through their order in the performance and through overlapping certain visual and audio materials. I believe that by avoiding a dogmatic nature in the performance, it would be easier to achieve empathy. Additionally, when being pushy about a value, there is a risk that the space will no longer be inclusive to those who do not place a lot of worth in that value.

### 3.3.3 Composer or creator

I use the terms ‘composer’ and ‘creator’ to differentiate from the generally interpretive nature of the role of a classically trained musician or other performer. For some genres of music or art, the creator can often be the performer; there is a long history of this in classical music. This blending of roles seems to be one way to see one’s own values in more elements of a performance or larger artistic practice.

To compose can be defined as “creating by mental or artistic labor” and as “arranging in a proper form” (Merriam-Webster, 2018a). One of the definitions of a composer is a “person who writes music,” which leaves out compositions that are not written out, and moves away from the verb’s definition. Therefore, I found that creator is a more general term that gets closer to the role’s importance. A creator is one that “produces through imaginative skill, usually by bringing something new or original into being” (Merriam-Webster, 2018b). Additionally, this describes creativity in art forms outside of music and allows for roles such as arranging.

As the creator of material, there are many ways values can be situated. The inspiration of the material, the method of working with the performers of the material or with other collaborators, and the understanding of the context of one’s material are all possible aspects to consider. Furthermore, being aware of one’s identity, or of collaborator’s identities can be an important aspect to consider. In *West Virginia, My Home*, I was not the creator of most of the material. This meant that who I chose initially to collaborate with had an extremely large influence on the values that were seen in the material I was delivered as a commissioner.

### 3.3.4 Commissioner

If the performer does not feel able or interested in creating their own new material for a performance, they may commission material to be made by someone else. A commissioner can be defined as someone asks “a composer to write a particular composition for a specific purpose or event” (Meet the Composer, 2009). In general, it is expected that fair compensation is provided for

this exchange of skills. In some cases, a composer may not ask for a fee if they are still studying or are interested in collaborating with the commissioner and/or performer. Still, methods for compensation should be considered, even not directly involving money. Some suggestions of how to begin working with composers, and recommended compensation, can be found online at CutCommon (Blackshaw, 2017).

Traditionally, a composer is given some essential information at the outset of the project about the requirements for the piece. Then, at a decided upon time, the composer will return with a finished product. This can lead to misunderstandings between commissioners and composers and leads to quite a solitary work environment for both parties. More recently in answer to the negative feelings of isolation and misinterpretation, many composers and performers have explored more collaborative work where frequent feedback and even co-creation can be a part of the process. When beginning to consider which creators to ask to make materials for a project, commissioners can consider what their criteria could be in choosing collaborators. These criteria could, for instance, be based on connection to personal values in the concept or production process of the material.

### **3.3.5 Collector**

I use the term ‘collector’ to refer to someone collecting already existing materials to be used in a performance. The term of folk song collector is often used for folklorists collecting musical material; an example is Cecil Sharp, who went to Appalachia four times between 1916 and 1918 collecting material (Gold & Revill, 2006; Sharp, 1932). In the case of *West Virginia, My Home*, this role was quite important as much of the project involved collecting and learning old material, specifically folk songs, in person from other artists or through field recordings.

Taking on this role provides many opportunities to intentionally and critically reflect on one’s personal values and how they will play out in the actions required of a collector. As such, this role can bring up many ethical questions that played a role in my consideration of empathy, equity, and inclusion. One suggestion of reflexivity and reflection is “inquiry into how recordings are made,

how recordists interact with the environment they record, and the messages conveyed through the recording process and social relationships formed within the recorded event” (Rosenblum, 2018).

A lot of critical writing exists already discussing the practices of folk song collectors. When engaging in these practices of collecting material, it is critical to be aware of the historically unequal aspects of collecting material, selling field recordings, and other methods of preserving and collecting culture. Often times, in the past and even today, musicians and community members who were recorded in the field recordings were not given monetary benefits for the recordings. When approaching a folk musician, one can consider how one will offer to compensate for the effort of the folk musician to teach the material that the artist collects. In an effort to be equitable, it is best to offer compensation to all those who material is taken from. In my own project *West Virginia, My Home*, I made sure to buy all recordings used in learning folk songs I would later perform. Additionally, some songs were learned in folk festivals at jam sessions and in passing and thus were not compensated; in those cases, at performances, I say the names of the musicians who taught me the folk songs I perform. I will do the same in online archives and streaming services.

Access to recordings is also a large concern related to equity of collections. According to the Centre for Imaginative Ethnography, it is considered best practice, for instance, to make any recordings or collections available and accessible to the communities from which they are taken. Some organizations, such as Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, which do have ethnomusicological field recordings taken a long time ago are now attempting repatriation of the music that was taken from a community and placed, often without context, somewhere else (NPR Staff, 2015; Reddy & Sonneborn, 2013). Another example of a best practice is enacted in the policy outlined by the Association for Cultural Equity; they “work to return artists’ rights and royalties to their estates and families and return [their] media collections to those who created them and their places of origin” (Lomax, 2018). In the case of *West Virginia, My Home*, I will return to West Virginia this summer to perform the pieces I learned for those who taught me the folk songs. I will also share the new compositions with them. This history of inequity in access to music has

made me emphasize this aspect of performing the music in West Virginia as a critical factor by which to judge the project's ultimate success.

In the role of collector, one can consider assumptions and the place of one's own identity and preferences in choosing which music to collect and which to pass by. Reflexivity and frequent reflection during the process of collecting can help a collector take in other's perspectives and better understand their own identity and assumptions in the process. Within the context of collecting, many consider a responsibility to preserve folk songs for posterity's sake (Bhriain, 1973) in order to pass along tradition. In history, most movements to preserve folk songs have been tied to a nationalistic ideology. In the past, collecting folk songs has often been a part of a political pressure to look at cultural establishments in order to strengthen national identities (Hayes, 2018; Knevett, 2015).

The definition and frequent goal of authenticity is also a critical aspect to be considered in collecting materials. In the case of folk music, authenticity is ambiguous and defined by most in a very subjective way connected very closely with quality. Most traditional songs change as time goes by; they are passed down in communities and because of this many variations occur. When imposing notation on an oral tradition, it can become inauthentic and static. Additionally, notation changes the community process of learning the music as well as the importance of memory by erasing the opportunity for a musician's memory to fail. This memory failure is part of what allows new variations to be born. This leaves questions for the collector to consider; how will they decide upon the authenticity of the material gathered and to what extent is it important to know the context of the people and community of the area where the music is collected? As singing is a social activity, old songs are often known and shared in the community in social gatherings; this might be in the pub, for instance (Bhriain, 1973). Often times, amongst folklorists in particular, the stories behind the songs are even more important than the quality of the singers. In *West Virginia, My Home*, I decided to work with the stories I heard myself in the process of learning folk songs. I found links between songs that I could use in the final performances.

## CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

This research was inspired by a desire to consider ways in which an artist could situate their artistic practice and personal values using reflection and reflexivity. During this process, a working framework was built to use as a guide for *West Virginia, My Home*. The project is discussed in detail in the second half of my research. This framework was based on models created by Stephen Brookfield and Tanja Orning.

The process of reflection and reflexivity consisted in part of looking through several lenses: the artist's autobiography, fellow artists' responses, the audiences' reactions, and a literature review. While these lenses could be focused on any aspect of the artist's practice, specific focus was given in this research to personal values and how they might be situated in an artist's work. Focus might also have instead been given directly to technical or aesthetic aspects of an artist's work; in the case of *West Virginia, My Home*, I started with my autobiography which included my consideration of personal values, then moved to decide upon a concept through literature review and my own experiences. Then, I found fellow artists to work with and learn from based on the skills I realized I would need to complete the project. As those skills were tied directly to how I would define the success of my project in connecting to my values, they were always on my mind, even though not often explicitly discussed in this paper.

### 4.1 Reflection and Reflexivity

By going through a reflective and reflexive process, it is possible to step out of one's own work and discover unintentional flaws or assumptions made in decision-making involved in their artistic practice. It can greatly impact the connection of personal values in both current and future projects, as well as in one's own general artistic practice. It is important to build moments specific for reflection and reflexivity into one's artistic practice, possibly by creating or finding a series of questions to ask oneself as an artist. Despite having built in these moments, an artistic practice is not infallible just because it is deeply reflective. Reflexivity, or critical reflection, is a crucial addition, as it supports growth and agency by allowing an artist to take time to understand how

their participation affects the performance. Particularly within a socially engaged practice, consideration of necessary technical skills, an openness for learning, the ability to collaboratively work with a community, a willingness to act deliberately after thought, and frequent contemplation of ethics are all additional aspects that may add to the quality of an artistic practice and an ability to deeply connect to personal values.

It is my hope that the questions I formulated to help me be reflexive while creating *West Virginia, My Home* might act as a starting point for other artists in developing their own projects; even if they choose not to use the specific questions I created, they might formulate similar questions based on their own specific personal values and artistic practices.

#### **4.2 Situating personal values**

Due to the very ambiguity of action and behavior connected to personal values (Gross & Brewer, 2005), I argue it is all the more necessary to consider how personal values are implicitly and explicitly embodied in one's artistic practice. Then, an artist is able to also examine whether they are unintentionally playing out values at odds with their own. Only at this point in the process can an artist then make an informed decision about whether they will change their artistic practice or not.

Throughout the process of putting on a performance, personal values and resulting behavior, for instance one's artistic practice, may not always be in sync. This may in part be due to a lack of awareness of the underlying values reflected in one's behavior. It might also be because the artist follows traditional, pre-organized structures and pathways rather than his or her own instincts and motivations. Even those instincts and motivations may be guided by unintentional assumptions the artist had never before questioned. Reflection and reflexivity are not infallible, but they do help assure that an artist spends time considering their own artistic practice and personal values, and perhaps most importantly reflexivity asks an artist to consider their own role in the decision-making process.



It can be very difficult to decide which actions most closely connected to certain personal values; if an artist considers one of their values for a long enough time, he or she may find that countless paths and actions could be taken. This difficulty and ambiguity is not necessarily a bad outcome, I found, as long as actionable steps can be taken. Realizing there were so many paths may be liberating and empowering for an artist.

In many ways, in my own work in *West Virginia, My Home*, I found that as I accepted the myriad of paths and possible answers, I was more easily able to choose one and trust I would find my way by continuing to search out my underlying values in possible actions. Better understanding my own values allowed me to visualize the many actions I could take in many situations. This connected as well to the different elements and artistic roles in which I might place these actions. The large number of solutions I could visualize through my own reflections helped give me agency to make small changes in almost all of my current activities so that my own personal values were better situated in my artistic practice. Better understanding my personal values also brought me more energy to continue to explore elements and roles in future projects and in my larger artistic practice.

Lastly, by considering the situation of personal values in my work, I became more articulate in describing the values I see underlying many of the performances I see. While my understanding of the underlying values may not be the values intentionally portrayed by those artists, I have become more aware of the connections I see between values and artistic action when dissecting my own artistic practice. I realized there was a danger of being pedagogic or too explicit about my own personal values, which in many ways might push others away from listening and formulating their own opinions. As one of my three key personal values for the project in the case study was empathy, I felt that I was more easily able to remember that I wanted to avoid this pedagogic path. I opted in favor of a pensive, thoughtful presentation of many narratives told by others, some of whom had values that I did not myself hold. In those cases, I used my role as curator and commissioner to connect to other artists to re-contextualize or problematize those materials.

### **4.3 Elements of a performance**

Trying to look at different elements of a performance under a magnifying glass can be dizzying. It is a challenge to make these elements distinct and simplified, as many elements are impacted based on decisions made about other elements of a performance. While it was impossible to completely separate the elements, on paper or in practice, attempting to consider them separately can be a useful exercise. I was able to explore both new ways of putting on a performance and implied connections of those actions to one's personal values. By splitting a performance into different ingredients, the task of considering values implicitly or explicitly in my work became a manageable rather than gargantuan task. Perhaps most powerfully, seeing these different elements laid out clarified many different ways that personal values could be situated in an artistic practice.

### **4.4 Roles in a performance**

In the process of exploring different elements of a performance, an artist might need to take on different roles or collaborate with others in order to have the agency to affect these elements. Every musician need not take on all these roles, and one that would does not need to have the same roles in each performance. Instead, a flexibility of roles might be a solution (Hübner, 2013). By having a hybrid role in the creation of a performance, artists may be more likely to find agency in connecting their personal values to their artistic practice. By considering these different roles being held by one person, there is an opportunity to develop new directions in music making, but it also does open up new concerns for quality of work and the kind of training an artist would need. While training all musicians to go from being 'performer to performer-curator-commissioner-collector-creator' may be outside of the scope of reality, students in a conservatoire might spend time discussing these different roles and how they can be blurred.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

I close by sharing a hope that more fellow artists will join in intentionally using reflexivity and reflection during the connection of their personal values to their artistic practice. Having more awareness about the mechanisms at play when creating a performance and being more intentional in my choices were extremely useful in my own process. I believe many artists, perhaps current students at conservatoires especially, might benefit from using a reflexive, reflective framework. While reflection is most often used in respect to aesthetic and technical considerations, an artist could also use it to better understand and make changes in the situation of his or her personal values in artistic practice.

While I approached this topic from a personal interest in situating my personal values in my artistic practice, there are many other reasons that this topic can also be interesting to discuss. I believe these findings can add to the artistic field, especially for classically trained musicians. I hope they might take this process as inspiration to think about their own connection to their personal values. Artists are already quite well trained to consider their aesthetic choices and technical skills; I would like to more visibly see young artists considering the situation of their values in their artistic practice.

Other reflexive and reflective frameworks already exist. Many concerned artists, including classically trained musicians, already intentionally connect their personal values to their artistic practice using reflection and reflexivity. This is particularly visible in the case of socially engaged artists who are loudly political activists. It would be quite interesting to discover what frameworks these artists are using and what their artistic practices look like. It would be fascinating to discover how this might vary depending on the roles these artists take in their own practice. Are they performers, composers, and/or curators? Perhaps there are additional roles not considered in this research that are frequently taken by artists. I am intrigued to know if these roles allow artists to feel more agency in connecting to their personal values.

In the future, Orning's model, Brookfield's lenses, and my guiding questions might be better streamlined into one process. I followed the three in a simultaneous, wandering way. I feel that in moving to different lenses at the moments when I was motivated to do so allowed me to stay active rather than deflecting action. I do wonder what a more clearly defined order of reflection and reflexivity through the process would do for the resulting situation of values in artistic practice.

Further consideration of how implicitly or explicitly one's artistic practice might be in showing their personal values is also called for. It is my hope that by further considering my current framework, it will be easier to decide which aspects of a performance can be focused on to best connect to my personal values, no matter what role I am able to take in a performance.

In this framework, neither funding nor organization were openly taken into account and given focus. These are key elements that should be considered in future research. The definition of resulting quality or aesthetics of a performance using this framework was not explicitly considered, nor was a way of measuring success or growth of the artist.

In *West Virginia, My Home*, I took on the roles of performer, commissioner, collector, curator, and creator. Collaboration was crucial in my own project. It would be intriguing to discuss other roles that are present in some artistic practices and to continue to look for a blurring of these roles in my own practice. It became clear through my research that one's roles could change frequently, even within the duration of one project. In a lifetime of art making, one might take on many projects and explore various roles within their artistic practice. Within these roles then, they would have varying degrees of control and agency over the elements of the performance or product.

Please continue on to read the second half of my research, in which I share my case study, *West Virginia, My Home*.

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**WEST VIRGINIA, MY HOME:**

**A CASE STUDY USING A REFLECTIVE AND REFLEXIVE FRAMEWORK TO  
SITUATE PERSONAL VALUES IN ARTISTIC PRACTICE**



by

Annick C. Odom

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## CHAPTER 6: INTRODUCTION

I have provided my own project *West Virginia, My Home* as a case study testing the reflexive and reflective framework outlined in the first half of this research. I hope that by making my own personal thoughts and work process accessible, I might provide food for thought to others who want to be intentional in their connection of their own personal values and artistic practices, even if their personal values do not mirror my own and if their resulting actions present an entirely different outcome.

In the following section I will take myself through a modified version of the four critically reflective lenses outlined by Brookfield (1998), 1) my autobiography, 2) fellow artists, 3) literature review, and 4) audience. Additionally, using a modified version of Orning's relational model of elements of performance, I inspected concept, production process, context, materials, design and form, audience, and communications. I also created and answered my own set of questions, focusing on my own identity and personal values, frequently considering which assumptions I might be making. Many of the answers to those questions are written in this manuscript.



## 6.1 Lens One: My Autobiography

I do not share an entire autobiography here, however in 2016 at the suggestion of my program director, Renee Jonker, I was already writing down moments in my life that had deeply affected my goals in my musical profession. The result was that I was already thinking critically about which of my own experiences and stories had brought me to my current interest in situating my personal values in my artistic practice even before I had started considering my project *West Virginia, My Home*.

In 2016, as the presidential elections were revving up in the United States, I saw my home state's name scroll across news networks during the election coverage. West Virginia was turning red as vote after vote came in, loudly proclaiming Trump the winner. News reports shared interviews of West Virginians saying they voted for Trump because of his honesty. This supposed 'Trumpland' was my home. I felt responsible in representing the many other opinions of the state. Still, I also believed based on the election results, we needed to listen to the other side. I hoped to gain a better understanding of West Virginia, and the larger region of Appalachia, by listening and sharing the perspectives of insiders and outsiders. Using my own artistic practice, I inspected my own layers of subconscious and conscious prejudice and assumptions about Appalachia; I had to do this first if I was hoping to ask the same of an audience.

This past summer, I traveled back to West Virginia for nearly two months. It was the first time I had been back in several years for an extended period, and it was the first time I traveled around the state alone. Since leaving at eighteen, I had worked hard to distance myself from the state, and as a result, I did not know what to expect. I kept a notebook and wrote in it diligently each day about my thought on what I had experienced. Additionally, I sketched and painted every day; this was a way for me to be less critical and more precise in storing my visual experience of West Virginia. These moments of reflection helped me to focus in the moment on what I was experiencing, and were also interesting to look back on after I began my literature review on West Virginia.

Once I came back to the Netherlands, part of my process was to write stories about my trip during the summer. I also wrote about older memories from growing up in West Virginia. Bas Maassen, a

theatre coach I was taking lessons from, suggested this as a way to find new material. This method was most useful as a way of connecting multiple experiences that upset me and discerning values that were threatened in each of those scenarios. In my free writes, I reflected on what upset me about the political and social climate in the United States, specifically in Appalachia. I considered why my artistic practice seemed so disconnected from these feelings.

Through the first step of this autobiographical reflection, I identified many historical and political markers, such as the 2016 election, that were also connected to my experience. Having a sense of place and regional culture was imperative in this project. The nature of West Virginia, the rolling mountains, the mist in the air, all of it reminded me of home. In bringing the stories of Appalachia to the table, nature would need to play a big part. The people in West Virginia also needed to be involved.

I realized that at least several underlying values were threatened when a situation or experience upset me: equity, inclusion, and empathy. I do not suggest that these values need to be the most important values to my readers; even if the same values are held, the behaviors and decisions made will be very different as they are based on varied experiences and contexts. Additionally, the same value can lead two people to very different resulting behaviors and viewpoints on the same issue. I hope that by looking at my process one might be able to consider their own values and see how they might consider them in their artistic practice. I do not want to use these values as buzzwords, which might mean any number of things to my readers and audience. If I was not clear on what these values meant to me, then I would not be able to adequately consider when my value was threatened, much less how I might solve the issue. By looking through my practice using a single project and exploring the many ways in which I could interact with these values, I would dive into the specifics requiring me to be more accurate in the meaning behind these values. By following a reflective process I would be lead towards more precise conversations and more direct strategies in how I might connect with personal values in my artistic practice.

Although I knew that I experienced a lot of cognitive dissonance when I was playing most music that I performed, when it came to discussing why, I felt quite inarticulate. I realized that I needed to be comfortable with sitting in discomfort, and that I needed to be close by. I could not solve any problems from a distance, as I would miss the nuances to the problem unless I was close enough to

see detail. While this was not possible in many ways, as I was far away from my home state, by continuing this reflection I aimed to come closer to empathizing. By finding empathy I would have more of a chance to change the narratives that sustain these problems I was seeing. If I did not accurately portray the reality, then I would only be perpetuating the issues. Fear and anger could not be the way forward, but I thought that hope and empathy could be a way to end large and small injustice that upset me. I also hoped to make music that was less about specific political ideologies and more about how individuals can function within a group to deal with unfair distributions of power in society.

Despite considering myself a West Virginian and therefore an insider, I needed to take into account the many aspects of my upbringing that had kept me from experiencing many of these issues. I come from a more privileged background compared to many West Virginians; I grew up in a stable household, with an ophthalmologist as a mother and a researcher as a father. Additionally, as a child of immigrants, one from nearby North Carolina and one from across the ocean in Belgium, I was concerned about being seen as an outsider, as I did not have the same multi-generational ties to the state that many other West Virginians had. As a white family, despite being an outsider in many ways, I could blend in and appeared to completely belong. This allowed me in many ways to grow up very proud of my identities, as I could hide them when I felt I needed to.

### **6.1.1 MY VALUES**

Below, I summarize three personal values that I chose to focus on after free writes and other reflections. I share what those values mean to me, especially in the context of the USA political system and the initial stages of my project. I include them in case it is beneficial for the reader to understand more about my thoughts when working on *West Virginia, My Home*.

Through this reflective process and the experience of creating a project from the ground up, I have a better understanding of how I can work in the future and how I can present my project while considering my values in different elements of a performance as well as in the roles I might take in the creation of the performance. One unexpected outcome is that I dare to create my own materials in the future.

Social justice is an umbrella term for many buzzwords like equity, equality inclusion, diversity, and representation. It is more and more often connected to discourse around music; many classical music educational programs and performances attempt nowadays to be considered under this umbrella. I often am left questioning the intent and the quality of these projects. The results of their desire to do good often need to be put under a magnifying glass. As my stated values are quite similar to many existing artistic performance, I wanted to take the time to really critically reflect on what I meant by their use.

#### ***6.1.1.1 Equity***

Equity is an approach that aims to ensure that everyone can access the same opportunities. It acknowledges that some social groups have advantages and some have barriers. It can relate to many different topics; for instance, related to education it would mean that personal identities or circumstances such as sexual orientation, ethnicity or race, gender, income, or family background would not be obstacles in the way of reaching at least a basic level of skills and educational potential.

While the belief that everyone should be treated equally seems sound at first glance, I believe that equality is not enough until there is equity. Focusing on providing equal resources does not account for the fact that often people are not starting from the same vantage point and may need unequal amounts of resources to end up with the same basic level. This is especially important to consider when thinking about the systemic effects of centuries of discrimination in race relations in the United States, but I would also argue that the working class has experienced these same problems. One issue with the aim of equity is that it is almost impossible to imagine a world where everyone would have access to the same opportunities.

Still, I felt more strongly than ever that people were not being treated equally in the United States. My perceived threat to this value brought up a need for action. This feeling was triggered in large part to folks in Appalachia, the place I connected to most, having voted for Donald Trump. Women, the LGBT community, those with disabilities, and minority groups including African Americans and Latinxs (a gender-neutral term for people of Latin American origin) had never been treated equally in the United States. While I could change that reality on my own or only through music, the consequences of my silence and acceptance of norms and structural inequality within

my artistic practice felt more and more like compliance to the larger system. I needed to be active in changing the narrative, and as a musician I could take some immediate steps.

What kinds of efforts could I make at a small level to work towards creating equal access or at least increase equal access to opportunities? Focusing on telling a multi-faceted story of West Virginia and especially of the women there, as well as working as closely as possible with women and other minorities was one way that I could consider equity through this project and connected to identities I could speak about in my own art through my own experience.

In the context of *West Virginia, My Home*, I considered what it meant to be Appalachian, but also to be an outsider. I understood people in this region could be constituted as a social economic minority; they felt ignored and forgotten by the government. Having grown up in West Virginia, I see that this feeling was not unfounded. While I did not support those in the region who had been responsible for electing Donald Trump as the President of the United States of America, I believe the only way forward is to welcome the people who voted for him into my community. If we learn to care about each other, then we can build a country where everyone feels included and can also receive the opportunities they need to succeed.

More generally, in my artistic practice, I wanted to present strong women at the forefront and in the background. I wanted to tell stories of those whose voices were rarely heard on a stage. This stemmed from myself being a woman and frequently feeling underrepresented and unwelcome in many situations, not only in the arts.

If all music is social, all music must then be political, and my art could be a political statement. If I did not question authority, I was accepting authority. I decided what I did and said mattered. I would need to show a willingness to change, to grow, to try new things, and to innovate not for innovations sake but for social change.

#### **6.1.1.2 Inclusion**

To me, inclusion means people with different identities feel and are valued in a given setting. As my American grandmother would have expressed this, “Everybody has the right to be proud.”



Originally, I had written down ‘diversity’ as one of my key personal values. Upon further critical reflection, I decided that was not the right word. Diversity is the presence of difference within a given setting. It could be the diversity of identities, like race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, sexuality, sexual orientation, or abled-ness. However, having a diverse group of people does not mean that the society is equitable, equal, or inclusive.

Next, I thought about representation. I would define this as having different identities present in a giving setting. Those identities might be seen as representing others of their identity by being present. Asking one or more individuals to speak for their identity group only because of that identity is not ethically acceptable or even realistic, tokenizing one person’s experience to mean the same for everyone, would be a grave misstep on the part of the project organizer. Still, I believe that by working to have minority identities present and represented in all aspects of society, we will have reached the first step to creating an equal society. In terms of a project, including diverse identities without the expectation that any one person speaks for more people than themselves is a positive step towards a more inclusive, equitable project, artistic practice, or arts organization. I have often thought in my work in music education as well as in performance about the importance of representation; for instance, when sharing music with students, I consider which geographic area the piece is from, the identity of the performer(s), the time period the music was created in, and the music’s style.

For instance, when I was working for the Sphinx Organization as a teacher, I made sure the videos I showed included performers with the same ethnic identities as the children in my class. I still remember that I started doing this after telling a student to be sure to practice that week at home. I said that hard practice was the only way to keep improving. He exclaimed, “Why!? I’ll never be like you. There are not any Black violinists anyways.” He missed the point that I was in fact a terrible violinist myself, because he had never heard a real violinist play, much less a Black violinist. I realized I was the only ‘professional’ he had seen. The next week, I took time to show the class recordings of Black classical musicians on YouTube; hearing this boy’s excitement to go home and get to work was a huge lesson to me about the power of representation. I have myself experienced similar feelings when seeing women take on leadership roles or when meeting other Appalachians who are successfully working in classical music.

While I highly value diversity and representation, neither of these are enough in the search for social change and social justice. Having multiple opinions in one room does not account for the needs and concerns of each of those groups. We need to respect and embrace difference but we also need to look at what we have in common. While diversity is a necessary part of inclusion, it is not a natural consequence that a diverse place will become inclusive. To be inclusive, a space needed to feel like a community, with its own traditions. It also needed to have the flexibility to change and innovate, welcoming new people as they came. In my own practice, I took this to mean that collaboration might help me come into contact with new points of view, strengthening the work of art produced but also asking me to reframe my assumptions.

I believe in the immense power of words to frame our reality and to reinforce bias and discrimination. Still, often instead of truly understanding why a word is best left out of the lexicon, a person may feel policed. Political correctness is a learned phenomenon that was in many ways not accessible, especially to those without many educational opportunities or experiences interacting with people different from them. I considered how many people were feeling cut out by ‘PC culture.’ Since moving to the Netherlands for instance, I have had so many white Europeans complain to me about not being *allowed* to say certain words or sing certain songs.

This points to a desire to continue those actions except for feeling of being policed and restrained and the fear of being called out. I wondered if that was bringing us any closer to equality. I believe I need to embrace complexity and ambiguity of many of the issues I am tackling, and that by focusing on my value of empathy I will continue to better understand although not necessarily sympathize with others’ points of view.

#### **6.1.1.3 Empathy**

My research was inspired by a desire to ‘do good’ and to create music that was inspired by and was connected to the community of Appalachia. I wondered, how I might do this in practice? It seemed that one of the answers was by emphasizing time for reflection and dialogue. To begin this kind of work, understanding oppression and privilege in the context of my life and greater society was necessary.

I would call this understanding empathy. By building connections between social groups, by having dialogues, and by understanding what people think, I believe that we can become closer to

taking collective action. If we do not interact with people different from us, there will be no chance for real equality between social groups. We will need to empathize, although perhaps not sympathize, with those we disagree with. We can still show that we do not accept or tolerate the hate speech, sexism, racism, xenophobia, or any of the other social issues rampant in Appalachia and the greater United States. I asked myself how could I find better understand where this fear and hate was coming from when talking with fellow West Virginians. I wanted to find a balance between valuing tradition and existing community while making space for newcomers and new ideas using dialogue and active listening.

In thinking how I might best resist many of the current political administration's policies in my own community, I was inspired by past leaders of nonviolent revolutions. One such person is Martin Luther King. His writing on love, looking at Ancient Greek philosophy, the word 'agape' which he writes is not a sentimental or affectionate love, an understanding (C. A. Hunt, 2005). I do not see the love he mentions as an apathy or quiet acceptance. Instead, I believe this love is a difficult struggle that requires strength and persistence. It would require understanding, or empathizing, even, and perhaps particularly, with people who may not understand my opinions, my actions, my personal values, or me. I decided that the first place to start in any project, but specifically *West Virginia, My Home*, would be to empathize myself with people who did not have the same opinions as me.

## 6.2 Lens Two: Fellow Artists

I reached out to fellow artists in multiple ways throughout the creation of *West Virginia, My Home*. Coaches and mentors in addition to collaborators and colleagues were asked for feedback and commentary.

After considering the project's initial concept on my own, I requested coaching and mentorship from artists in and out of my own specialization of double bass. I did this in part because I needed to gain some additional specific skills I had not ever worked on as a classically trained double bassist. I also reached out to them because I wanted feedback and critique of the project as a whole. As I was in the Netherlands and connected to a conservatoire, I believe that while extremely helpful, a lot of this critique differed quite a bit from the kind of feedback I might get in the United States from artists more connected to the political scene, folk music, or socially engaged art. I spoke with performers as well as researchers, among them being Katinka Marac, Bas Maassen, Renee Jonker, Falk Hübner, Heloisa Amaral, Tom Dommissie, and Anne LeBerge as well as colleagues completing masters at the Koninklijk Conservatorium in Den Haag. One of the more experienced performer-composers I talked to assured me my work was "deeply political." This was really important for me to hear because I had doubted whether it was, despite having done a large literature review about politics and music. Much of their feedback has been incorporated into the framing of this manuscript as well as in the literature reviews I have completed. As such, their mentorship can be indirectly seen in my finished product.

I found talking to colleagues at the conservatoire mystifying, as many had sworn of political involvement in their art. It was a very interesting experience and brought a lot of questions to someone like me, who saw politics and music as forever intertwined. Still, I received a lot of helpful feedback that often pointed out assumptions or unconscious decisions I made. For instance, a colleague shared they felt my practice was very connected to community and shared I had based a lot of my decisions to work with collaborators based on how well I had gotten to know them in the process. Hearing this feedback helped me realize I did this because it showed the composer or creator was invested, and helped me invest in them as people as well. Knowing the people I was working with helped me create a community. This realization did bring up questions for me about whether I was creating barriers to being in the project that I had not intended.

As a part of this lens, I also took these collaborators into account and asked them about their views of the project. These collaborators were mostly friends and fellow alumni of the University of Michigan. As they were creating material for the project, they played the role of composer/creator as well as providing an additional lens for my own reflexivity. Some of their thoughts from our personal email exchanges are shared below with permission. It was heartening to hear their positive feedback and to see that both felt my encouragement of their work through frequent communication and close involvement supported the experience.

Jacob Sandridge shared, “I’m grateful for the opportunity to work with an artist like you that have similar experiences to my own. Making deeply personal art about problems in one’s background is not easy, and your support and constructive criticism throughout the process has been invaluable. My story does not always speak for my contemporaries, but I hope that my story in addition to the other stories in your collection helps to articulate the struggle of our corner of contemporary society.”

Christine Hedden shared, “I was really excited that you asked to collaborate, because I knew your playing enough to know how amazing you are at what you do. I also knew how hard working you are. The best collaborations are when both parties throw all in and really work together - you were there from the very beginning, when I was really nervous about even sharing the idea for the piece. You spent so much time at the beginning helping me to learn about the bass and along the way, trying a million ideas and helping me to find solutions from vague ideas that I had to notations for very specific solutions for those ideas. There are plenty of ‘collaborations’ where the composer simply hands the performer something, or where the performer ends up playing something unnatural/detached to their instrument. This was anything but that - for one of the only times in my musical career, I felt like there was someone sharing the weight with me throughout the creation of the piece. For such a (usually) solitary creative process as composition, this was a wonderful experience. It also felt really connected to the message of the piece - healing through community.”

Other feedback from collaborators is also interspersed throughout the section in which each specific piece of material is discussed in detail.

### 6.3 Lens Three: Literature Review

Below are summaries and reflections on literature reviews that I completed both in preparation for and throughout the process of creating *West Virginia, My Home*. I decided instead of only focusing on theory and academic literature, I also wanted to include the artistic practices of other artists that inspired me. I did this by watching live performances, reading non-fiction and fiction, listening to archival recordings, and perhaps most importantly, by having in-person conversations. I explored West Virginia and Appalachia more deeply in person, by attending some folk festivals such as Augusta Heritage Center's Old Time Week, and Clifftop's Appalachian String Band Festival. I also read several books on old-time music and many more books on feminism, coalmining, politics, art, and education in Appalachia. Additionally, I studied the connection of music to politics, the concept of pluralist populism, and best practices of socially engaged practice. Additional context may be found in the section on performance elements under materials; there, I connect specific historically relevant information to the materials I used in the project. In the effort to be empathetic, inclusive, and equitable myself, I aimed to read and listen to work of women and men, with special attention paid to work of ethnic minorities, LGBT individuals, and others that I might not consider when thinking of Appalachia.

I also looked at the work of artists that I found inspiring, both in and out of classical music. Since classical musicians were not often creators or curators, composers created most of the examples of mediation and social engagement that I found. A performer or ensemble may have commissioned them to create the work, but this kind of information was rarely available. The performers who did take a step to curate their own performances were often chamber groups or well-established soloists.

I created a list of current and past musicians, composers, theatre makers, and other artists that inspired me. As a side note, during this process I found it very difficult to know the intent behind most composers' compositions based on their personal websites and documentation. Due to this experience, I resolved to provide information about material's contexts and my thought process of *West Virginia, My Home* online whenever possible. Only some musicians in the list I created were classical musicians; many blurred genres and many others were folk musicians. Many of these

musicians, particularly those outside of the field of classical music, considered themselves activists. This activism was caused by strong values driving them into action.

There is a strong history of using music to move people to action in West Virginia. During the election I started listening to a lot of folk music created by musicians from Appalachia, especially women like Jean Richie, Florence Reece, and Hazel Dickens who were active in voicing concern over coal mining and union rights. In their use of music as a form of protest, they make use of their raw honesty, their drive to improve their communities, and their support of creative freedom and social equality. These strong women mixed the creation of newly written music with old folk songs that they had learned from family. In modern day West Virginia, Elaine Purkey and Kate Long spring to mind when considering activist-musicians. These performer's activist roles are carried with them on and off-stage. They wrote their music based on their own lived experiences and tell stories of the places and events they saw.

Many of these artists have created and/or performed materials and/or performances attempt to tackle social issues, often by sharing new narratives. Through their artistic practices, they dealt implicitly and sometimes explicitly with social issues that connected to their personal values. Most artists listed below are American; this is in part because of my own point of entry and my interest in seeing how fellow Americans were dealing with social issues in the United States. There are quite a few examples of music written with social justice themes. These composers, performing artists, and organizations have all in some way actively disrupted power structures in their own art-making process or performances. In new old time folk music from Appalachia, my visit back to West Virginia this summer proved a fruitful way to meet more activist-musicians taking strong steps towards equity, inclusion, and empathy.

I have written a bit about my perceptions of them, some based on personal interviews or encounters and some based on reading articles and interviews they gave online. Additionally, in my process of reflection, I took most of the artists listed below and pulled them through the nine attributes of socially engaged art mentioned by Helicon (Frasz & Sidford, 2017). It was helpful so see the different ways that these artists dealt with the issues they were tackling through their art. I hope that I can continue to learn more about their work, perhaps interviewing those I have not been

able to talk with yet and finding out what they think about my attempt to connect values and artistic practice.

Below are performing arts organizations, musicians, composers, and visual artists that were most inspiring in considering *West Virginia, My Home* and how I might better connect my values and my music.

### 6.3.1 FOLK MUSICIANS

#### *Hazel Dickens*

While I never had the chance to meet her, I have listened to Hazel Dickens' songs since my childhood. I remember hearing a song of hers in the movie "Matewan," and coming home to look her up and listen to more of her singing. Something about the color of her voice felt so true. In an interview, Dickens laughingly shared "Oh, I never hit the right pitch. I go for that feel, I go for the jugular. I can't even think about [the pitch]. When I'm singing, I'm thinking about the real things" (Harrington, 1996). She said that when she sang, it was like "that old mountain stuff where you just rear back and let it go – beltin', as some people call it" (Russell, 2011).

An inspiring West Virginian songwriter and musician, "she wrote about migrant workers, women being wronged, whatever hit her ... that needed to be addressed," said Ken Irwin, a founder of Rounder Records, her longtime label. "She was largely the social conscience of the bluegrass world" (Thursby, 2011). "I had," she asserted, "one thing that most of the good old boys didn't have. I had a mind. I had every song that you could think of in my head, and they didn't. People were always asking me for the words of songs, and I could sing them authentically, just the way they were supposed to be sung" (K. Hunt, 2011). Melding contemporary issues to the sounds of traditional music, Dickens has written about many types of struggles and how they've impacted people's lives (Dickens & Malone, 2008; Harrington, 1996).

#### *Alice Gerard*

The famed Bluegrass musician Alice Gerrard is particularly known for her groundbreaking collaboration with Appalachian singer Hazel Dickens during the 1960s and '70s (Gerard, 2017)



I met her in the summer 2017 at Augusta Heritage Center. Alice is outspoken about her own beliefs and has often acted on her values in her performances. In her class at Augusta Heritage Center she shared, “There is a strain of racism in Old Time. Having spent a lot of time with Black and white musicians. They become aware that they should not say this word. But you know they changed it because they’ve become conscious. A lot of musicians learned songs from Black folks. Tommy Jarrell is one example. The main thing is that for a long time, no credence was given to the Black influence in mountain music. It was just a total myth. Nobody talked about the banjo’s roots in Africa,” said Alice. “It has always been important to counteract that [these myths and racism], and especially important right now, when our administration is giving credence to a lot of those feelings.”

### ***Jean Ritchie***

I first came across Jean Ritchie by listening to her recording of the folk song “Cedar Swamp.” A folk singer, songwriter, and mountain dulcimer player from Kentucky, she was instrumental in the revival of American folk music in the late twentieth century. She wrote several songs against strip mining in Appalachia in addition to singing older folk songs. She was closely connected to Hindman Settlement School, a folk school in Kentucky, and learned many songs in the oral tradition from her family.

### ***Anna Roberts-Gevalt and Elizabeth LaPrelle***

The duo Anna & Elizabeth, made up of Anna Roberts-Gevalt and Elizabeth LaPrelle, finds ways to be innovative while using music from the past. They allow the music to change, and keep the feel of authenticity even while turning the music inside out. They do not necessarily take a loud political stance, or use their music to protest, but in their actions and process of choosing and learning the music, they are socially engaged in the process of empathizing and including voices of those often forgotten (M. Adams, 2015; N. Adams, 2012; Boilen, 2018; Ed, 2015; Kimmel, 2016).

Anna Roberts-Gevalt has also started curating a series at Jacoby Music School in New York City. There she brings contemporary classical and experimental musicians together with older old time musicians to play sets at the same concert. This showed me a way that I might bring about equity and inclusion and empathy without changing anything about my own artistic practice other than collaborating with other artists and providing space at concerts for them to show their work.

Prior to *West Virginia, My Home*, I spent quite a bit of time thinking about the different ways I might engage with an audience, with the surrounding environment, with my instrument, and with my own body and mind while on the stage. Roberts-Gevalt, who is quite inspired by Pauline Oliveros, brought a model of awareness to a workshop at Augusta Heritage Center in the summer of 2017. Roberts-Gevalt discussed how she considered her energy during performances as fluctuating between being inwards focused, duo focused, or towards the entire audience.

### ***Phyllis Marks***

Phyllis Marks was born at Sand Fork on June the 5th, 1927. She learned songs mostly from her mother and grandmother (Milnes, 2015). Marks talked about learning songs from her mom. She shared that her mom would sing all the time. She'd sing as she walked through town and sometimes people would say, "Arlene, are you happy?" And she'd say, "No, just a-whistling to keep up my courage" (Hilliard, 2018).

When I talked to Phyllis Marks during the summer of 2017 (Marks, 2017). I asked her why there were not many songs where the woman character was the winner. Her remark was, "They liked to put the women down, and they still do." She shared that when she is in church, if they are putting the women down, she will stand up and say something. In the two times I met with her this summer, as well as the hundreds of times I have listened to her recordings since, I have been amazed by her quick-witted, somewhat dark humor as well as her resilience.

She mentioned more than once to me that she felt that women were the makers of the folk songs. In this interview, she says the same:

"Now, I think that the women made the folk songs. I think that the men come home after being out deadin'-around with their foot in the road like the men likes to do, and told their wives these stories and she had to make up the songs to entertain the older children while she churned and rocked the cradle with the other foot. But now that's just my guess. And now all these little riddle-dy diddle-dies can entertain the children." (West Virginia Folklife Program, 2016)

In speaking to Marks, I gained a greater understanding of the tradition of folk singing in West Virginia. I also was able to consider the importance of the words and story. For most of the songs I learned from Marks, the music existed to tell the story, it seemed, not the other way around.

***Rich Kirby and Addie Graham***

Rich Kirby is from eastern Kentucky, not West Virginia, but I met him at Augusta Heritage Center.

In a class he visited there, Kirby spent a lot of time talking about his grandmother, Addie Graham, who is also from eastern Kentucky. Graham learned a lot of songs from her own mother, including a number of abolitionists' songs that were preserved after the end of slavery. "She picked up [music] from everywhere," Rich Kirby said (Kirby, 2017). "For instance, she'd play the pentatonic theme of Maverick on the piano. She listened and soaked in everything. She would play the lead in octaves in left hand, and the right hand played the offbeat. So she would be playing usually in A flat, pentatonic, with her hands on the black keys. That's a banjo way, a two fingered banjo way. She just did it by ear." In the 1930s, Addie Graham was able to make a small living by performing. Only informal recordings of her singing this song exist, because when Kirby was younger, he did not care much for this kind of music.

Graham was a bit isolated as a young wife, living on a farm away from her family. Kirby shared a story of hers about that time. "One day after doing chores, she came into the house. Well, while she had been gone, their cow had come up onto the porch, busted into the kitchen and thrown everything around, leaving a mess. She decided that was it, it was time to pull out and go back home and live with her parents. She was just about to do that and get on the train and leave. But then she saw her husband get off and start unloading a great big crate. She came back to the house to see what it was, and it was a piano. Her husband had went and bought her a piano. So she stayed around for a little while."

Kirby is one of the folk musicians considering how to deal with issues of racism and sexism when performing old time folk music. His reflections on and ethical questions about issues of inclusion and equity were very influential in showing me different options of adapting material.

***Gerry Milnes***

Gerry Milnes is a folklorist and folk musician who has lived in West Virginia for over forty years. I met him this past summer at the Augusta Heritage Center, where he worked as Folk Arts Coordinator until his retirement in 2013. I found his generosity of spirit and love of West Virginia folklore and folk music to be inspiring. He is a walking encyclopedia of all the amazing fiddlers and ballad singers in West Virginia, and he has been a huge resource for music from the area. According to *The Old Time Herald* (Prouty, 2014), Milnes has “conducted extensive fieldwork in music, crafts, and folk culture in parts of the state that had not been as thoroughly documented prior to his arrival.”

***Jake Blount***

There are more radical examples, such as Jake Blount. In 2016, Blount became the first Black person to make the finals at the prestigious Appalachian String Band Music Festival in Clifftop, WV, and the first to win in the traditional band category. His EP *Reparations* is a “reclamation and resurrection of traditional Black and Native American fiddle, banjo and vocal music” (DeWhitt, 2017).

***Sam Gleaves and Tyler Hughes***

Other examples of young musicians making a stand are Tyler Hughes and Sam Gleaves. Tyler Hughes just won a place in the city council of his hometown in Virginia, where he is actively working to rejuvenate the state’s economy. He performs on Sam Gleaves debut record, “Ain’t We Brothers,” which tells contemporary stories from Appalachia. Its title song was built from the story of Sam Williams, a West Virginian coalminer who was openly gay and underwent a lot of discrimination and abuse (Gleaves, 2016; Hughes, 2018). Sam has shared that he is “less interested in performing for people than in teaching and sharing, and singing with people” (Garringer, 2017).

**ARTS ORGANIZATIONS**

I am extremely lucky to have worked for University Musical Society in Ann Arbor, Michigan from 2014 to 2016. There I experienced performances of dancers, actors, and musicians that made me think and question my own commitment to my art. Many of these artists were influential in my considerations in this project. The organization of UMS has also been a key influence; the people

working their have showed me that an organization can consider its values at multiple levels, through programming practice, marketing, and the performances themselves. Their “No Safety Net Festival” further emphasizes this socially engaged practice. Their website shares the following about the festival:

“Through artistic presentation on stage, and an equal helping of discussion and inquiry off the stage, UMS will create a community platform for important [...] From racism in America to terrorism to transgender identity to radical wellness and healing, these theater pieces will ask us to confront our own opinions and biases, with an eye toward better understanding and a greater resilience to face the world we currently live in” (UMS, 2018).

Additionally, in my recent list of employers is the Sphinx Organization. They have shown me that who is performing can create a statement about equality and inclusion. This is seen by the existence of the Chineke! Orchestra (Chineke! Foundation, 2018) and the Sphinx Virtuosi (Sphinx Organization, 2018), where the purposeful creation of a Black and Minority Ethnic orchestra playing the same repertoire almost exclusively performed by white orchestras already provides strong commentary about the changes needed in the setup of our cultural institutions. Any minority’s presence on a stage is a commentary on the status quo, just as the purposeful inclusion of minorities tries to right previous exclusionary policies; the lack of inclusion of minorities is in my mind also a political statement.

Lastly, Community MusicWorks, based in Rhode Island, has been an inspiration for community focused art making that includes performers in multiple roles, especially that of teaching artist. It is an example showing that reflective practice is not uncommon when working towards musicians’ social engagement (Wolf & Panitch, 2016).

### **6.3.2 CLASSICALLY-TRAINED MUSICIANS**

By looking through printed materials, performance organizations’ archives, and new music blogs, I searched for examples of art, especially music written in the last fifty years that might be classified as socially engaged or political.

Similar to the variety of attributes assigned by Alexis Frasz and Holly Sidford to socially engaged art in "Mapping the Landscape of Socially Engaged Artistic Practice" (2017), the scope of my findings included both community-created art with social aesthetics and fine art. Many examples exist of composers writing topical music about critical social issues such as the environmental destruction, gun violence, racism, and unfair immigration policies. Artists often act as the creative agent, with the resulting product as 'the work.' On the other hand, there are quite a few opera companies and socially motivated youth education projects participating in art rooted in the community. In these projects, the organizing artist is in the role of facilitator and the process is in many ways more essential than the product.

To better understand different ways an artist with similar values to mine might situate those concerns in their own performances, I gathered over eighty examples of composers whose music I consider to be socially engaged<sup>1</sup>. Most of these examples' concept or material content is political. It was more difficult to find examples of other elements of performance, such as production process or design and form, as they were often not clearly documented in the sources I found. These sources were news articles, new music journals and blogs, composers' own websites, and music streaming services.

### ***Julia Wolfe***

One example of a classical composer connecting to Appalachia is Julia Wolfe, co-founder of the new-music collective Bang on a Can. She draws from folk, classical, and rock genres and has a genuine interest in sharing many voices through her music.

She grew up, like me, surrounded by coal mining without knowing much about it. She is the composer of "Anthracite Fields," an hour-long oratorio about Pennsylvania coal miners, which won the 2015 Pulitzer Prize in music. It draws on oral histories, interview and speeches, to honor the people who persevered and endured in the Pennsylvania Anthracite Coal Region. The last movement of the piece is called "appliances" and looks at the list of things we do each day that still use coal (NPR Staff, 2015). Wolfe's environmentalist approach spoke to me, as I strongly believe that the environment must be protected for the future quality of life of all humans, not only those with the money to move to safe areas that are clean.

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<sup>1</sup> [This working list can be found here.](#)

Wolfe's anthropological use of found material collected from the area of Pennsylvania inspired my consideration of how I might use all the archival material I had gathered for *West Virginia, My Home* in future iterations of the project or in a new project. A consideration of ethics in collecting materials would be an important part of continuing the process. The role of collector is discussed in the first half of this research.

### ***David Lang***

Also a co-founder of Bang on a Can, David Lang has made some very thought-provoking statements about power and music. Lang points out that music making, specifically composing, is a very powerful profession that can result in terrible consequences. As an example of this danger, he points to Simon Bikindi, a Rwandan singer-songwriter who wrote patriotic songs played on the national radio station during the war in the 1990s. To this day, Simon Bikindi is in prison for inciting genocide using music (McNeil, 2002).

In a presentation titled "Music and Its Secret Powers for Good and Evil" at the University of Iowa, David Lang states the following:

"We like to think music is good, but actually music is very neutral, it's a pathway between people, to communicate things that can't be communicated with language. Music can be used in politics, in advertising, in religion. Music cannot tell you if something is good or bad, but it opens you up to receive a message. What that message is, is up to the composer. If what I am doing, whether I want to or not, is opening up people to receive a message, I have to know what that message is, to think about it. In music, there are certain messages we accept without questioning. [I wondered how I could] remove manipulation from the music, to make it possible for people to feel whatever they felt in the moment. I want to be in a place where I can listen and be meditative. I want to make it open enough to make it possible for you to think what you would like to think." (D. Lang, 2015)

While I did want to orient audience to consider a specific topic, hearing Lang's thoughts made me consider how I could make a process that might convey a certain idea of openness to opinion. He focuses on small subversive ways of connecting to values, often by creating spaces for reflection. His concerns about the power of music to influence thought are in many ways the opposing view to many proponents of music as a tool for social change.

***Pauline Oliveros***

I was introduced to Pauline Oliveros' work several years ago, and she was again brought to my attention when I attended a deep listening workshop led by Gayle Young in 2016 at the Koninklijk Conservatorium.

According to The New Yorker (O'Brien, 2016), Oliveros, an outspoken activist and feminist, believed "listening could be transformational, even therapeutic, enacting lasting changes on the body and mind." Her wish for the upcoming millennium, as collected in "Prayers for a Thousand Years" (Roberts & Amidon, 1999), was "to create an atmosphere of opening for all to be heard, with the understanding that listening is healing."

In addition to being vocal about the importance of listening in all aspects of life, she also proudly took on the role of musician-activist. For instance, in the Occupy Wall Street movement in 2011, she provided a piece that could be performed by Occupiers at any time (Oliveros, 2011).

Her perspective on listening is highly influential in my own practice time, although it might not be visible in the live performances of my work. Many of my most influential mentors also emphasized listening. For instance, Diana Gannett, my double bass professor at the University of Michigan, would talk about deep listening and later inspired me to do Tai Chi to attain better balance and awareness. I always saw many similarities to Oliveros and Gannett, and realized much later that Oliveros was also a huge proponent of Tai Chi.

***John Luther Adams***

Composer John Luther Adams lived in Alaska for a long time and wrote many pieces inspired by the wilderness. I could not help but consider his work when I was looking at the place of West Virginia, which has always been connected in my mind to a feeling of wilderness and roughness. In an article Adams wrote for Slate Magazine, he shares how artists should engage with times of crisis. In his own work he asks how music can be connected to social issues while also creating its own world.

He also shares "If a listener feels constrained by any words I may offer along with the music, then I encourage her to ignore them. And few things make me happier than a listener who hears something, experiences something, discovers something in the music that the composer didn't



know was there. It's only through the presence, awareness, and creative engagement of the listener that the music is complete" (J. L. Adams, 2015). This focus on an openness of interpretation was difficult but important to consider in my own project. I wanted to avoid being dogmatic by pressuring an audience to see a specific viewpoint. Still, I wanted to call attention to very specific issues such as lack of empathy between opposing sides in and outside of West Virginia, the bad treatment of women in history and today, and the importance of protecting nature.

### ***Håkon Thelin***

The arrangement for many of the bass parts I made were very much inspired by Norwegian bassist Håkon Thelin's "Folk Music of the Double Bass." There, he states the following (Scodanibbio, 1976):

"What we might see as the clearest characteristic in this music is the reinstatement of improvisation in every part of the creative act. In the many portrayals of improvisation, it is the spontaneous character of expression that we meet in all kinds of folk and traditional music that attracts me the most. The concept of a folk music for the double bass, as a true goal for expression and recreation, constitutes the same prepared spontaneity and rehearsed freedom as a folk fiddler's performance, with the accumulation of thoughts and experiences through an unrestrained sound. We can even take a step further, and say that other factors that usually constitute a folk performance – the storytelling, the intimacy, the nearness to the performer and the piece – should also belong to the communication of contemporary music."

I took a lesson with him in the winter of 2018, and we worked on "The Spitting Contest" and "Black Lung." In addition to technical and aesthetic suggestions for my bass part, Thelin left me with the impression that my own interest in exploring empathy necessitated a flexibility of spontaneity. In my musical performance of "Black Lung" and "We'll Camp a Little While," I began to explore micro-improvisations in overtones, harmonics, double stops, and multiphonics. These are sounds that Thelin considers to be the bass's natural sounds.

### ***John Cage***

John Cage has many ideas about the division of politics and music, which at first seemed to be at odds with my intentions in my project. Still, I am inspired by much of his work, and I ultimately found his wisdom tied in with my aims for my project.

Cage felt music could model alternative ways of social conduct by showing ways of organizing how people work together, of respecting each other or going against hierarchies. He saw art as a form of constructive anarchy and believed one might model this in the way music was organized, arranged, and presented. Cage felt strongly that music should not have a text telling someone to go and do something, but that through the way it was made and presented it could show an alternative kind of social life (Wolff, Polansky, Dong, Asplund, & Hicks, 2007).

Cage also shares in numerous letters his misgivings about the power of music to change society. In a letter with Christian Wolff, he says he was devoted to politics in the sense of it being “all of the actions of all of the people.” He believed that providing a space with sounds and silences, but no words, allowed us to live in a world without barriers and power, even if for a few hours (Kuhn, 2006). I am still considering his thoughts on using text, as I am drawn to the narrative, storytelling aspects and text’s ability to share perspective. For now, I am still using text in all of the pieces for *West Virginia, My Home*.

### ***Meredith Monk***

I first saw Meredith Monk at a UMS performance in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Work of hers such as “The Politics of Quiet,” “On Behalf of Nature,” “Mercy,” “Impermanence,” “Water/Sky Rant,” and “New York Requiem” are all profoundly connected to society, sometimes to specific people and sometimes to larger issues. These pieces reach deep emotions and yet do not feel like propaganda. Perhaps it is because her art is so difficult to quantify or describe.

A composer, performer and producer, the artist Meredith Monk is difficult to define as well. She brings in so many different styles of music, resulting in an altogether unique sound, part old and new.

In one of her newest works “On Behalf of Nature,” Monk cites an essay by the poet Gary Snyder (Charney, 2017). In the essay, he discusses how important it is for artists to create artwork that

draws on the wilderness of natural environments. He says that it is important to protect the environment not only for the sake of survival, but also because of the creation of stories and art that inspiration of nature has brought into being. According to The Guardian (Service, 2012) her music “belongs in the present, because [...] she wants her pieces to give her listeners an alternative vision of concentration and attention amid the ever-diminishing and ever-increasing speed of the world around us.”

In an interview with Tricycle, Monk discusses how important it is to “listen to different views in a polarizing time.” She shares some thoughts on what she hopes her audience might make of “On Behalf of Nature.”

“Just through your own practice, you could say, a little light is already starting to shine. It’s like throwing a stone into a pond and watching the water start to ripple out. If you haven’t done that inner work, these things become less meaningful in the long run. It seems like a small thing, but ultimately I think it’s the way that inspiration gets conveyed.” (Martin, 2016)

These are in my mind a large part of how I hope my audience might connect to my own project. I also hope that more artists consider how in their own practice they might take these concepts into account.

### 6.3.3 OTHER ARTISTS AND CREATORS

#### *Adel Abdin*

I saw Adel Abdin’s work at an exhibition at the Ateneum Art Museum in Helsinki in the winter of 2018. An Iraqi visual artist based in Helsinki and Amman, Abdin’s work questions the influence of history in sharing one-sided narratives, wiped clean of mess and ambiguity (Miller, 2018). Much of Abdin’s multimedia artwork, such as *History Wipes*, portrays the war and prejudice happening today that we so often file away and hide from ourselves. He questions the ethics of political correctness and whether that is actually the best way to reach equality.

In a recent YouTube clip (Ateneum Art Museum, 2018), Abdin states:

Being politically correct is almost like being a hypocrite. History is all about manipulation; as Napoleon said, it's like a set of lies we all agreed upon. I always ask myself [about] how we could live without history. And how can we rely on a history which is written by the victor?

I very much resonated with his questions about how to show inequity and all the terrors happening in the world today. He had the ability to touch his audience and ask questions by showing multiple truths and often-unheard narratives. Experiencing his art left me thinking about how I might also peel away layers of meaning in my own work.

### *Young Jean Lee*

In 2015 I saw playwright and director Young Jean Lee's presentations of "Straight White Men" and "Untitled Feminist Show" back to back. It was a confronting experience and has stayed with me.

She is known for her feminist works, and I found her approach of showing stereotypes on stage and allowing the audience to wince and see how terribly inaccurate those prejudices are to be very powerful. She tells *The New Yorker* (Als, 2014), "I've found that the only way to make theatre that gets the audience thinking is when I feel uncomfortable making it."

I wanted to show my discomfort with certain aspects of Appalachian culture, but also with the discomfort of how other people see Appalachia. I considered that quite often in my work.

### *Taylor Mac*

In addition to classical performers, I was also quite inspired by some theatre I had seen in the last few years, including works by Young Jean Lee and Taylor Mac. Mac's stage persona is a drag queen and in a latest large-scale performance mercilessly scrutinizes decade after decade from a gay perspective in an outrageously elaborate attack on the heteronormative narrative (Swed, 2018). While many of Mac's choices are quite different from my desired aesthetic of a performance, including their extensive reliance on audience interaction, I considered how I might focus on the experience of the audience and the connection to social issues in my performance to the same level as they did.

Taylor Mac says, “I think of art as a seditious act... so I chose a form that would allow us to manifest the world that we wanted rather than wish for it.” Mac also talks about the idea of the performer being a collaborator with the audience, rather than the strict division between artist and listener. Their performance “A 24-Decade History of Popular Music” shows each decade as being about a different community, being built because it’s being torn apart. Another quote that was inspiring was that Taylor Mac’s goal was not to provide answers, but to provide the audience questions (Kane, 2017).

“Taylor Mac is fundamentally a trickster, and you gradually come to understand that judy’s not using music to fight racism, sexism, homophobia and other forms of injustice, judy’s tracing the lineage by which popular music is a vehicle for those evils and the insidious degree to which they’re encoded in white supremacy, heteronormativity, and the very construction of the Americans’ self-understanding” (Kane, 2017)

In “From Where I Stand”, a symposium at the Under the Radar Festival 2013 (Mac, 2013), Taylor Mac also says, “I believe, as a theater artist, I’m not telling you anything you don’t already know. Because I believe, as a theater artist, I’m not a teacher; I’m a reminder. I’m just trying to remind you of things you’ve dismissed, forgotten, or buried.” Their manifesto was influential in my own free writing, as I also spent one afternoon exploring what I might write down if I were asked to boldly state my beliefs.

#### **6.3.4 WEST VIRGINIA AND THE REGION OF APPALACHIA**

As a part of this project, I investigated topics such as West Virginia’s history and culture, coal mining, and nature. I also spent several days in the Appalachia section of West Virginia University’s library reading periodicals and first person accounts of growing up in West Virginia. Through my process of reflection, I continued to learn about the diversity of experiences present in West Virginia. With each reading, I searched for similarities and differences to my experience, as well as how I could empathize with those that I did not see eye to eye with. What I thought I knew about the state and the people living there sometimes checked out, but often times there were many more thoughts than I had expected. In addition to reading current news articles about the area, I

looked at academic literature. I started with non-fiction books about West Virginia's history, as well as fiction connected to West Virginia. I focused on books written by West Virginians, paying special attention to those written by or about women and other minorities.

By reading this literature about West Virginia, I was able to see many viewpoints that were both similar and different. This literature provided multiple interpretations of familiar but impossible to name situations and helped describe my artistic practice by revealing the general elements of what I originally thought of as individual, unique experiences.

The geographical area of Appalachia, as defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission, is a cultural region in the United States that stretches from southern New York to northern Mississippi ("The Appalachian Region," 2015). All of the state of West Virginia is included in this region. (Haskell & Abramson, 2006) includes information about the history of the classification of Appalachia and how this has influenced stereotypes about the region. The region's favored pronunciation, at least by those living in the region of Appalachia, uses a short 'a' on the third syllable (Puckett, 2000), /'æpə'lætʃ(i)ə/. Appalachia is both romanticized and stigmatized (Burriss, 2013; Clark, 2013; Hayward & Clark, 2013; Snyder, 2014). It is seen as a place that is untouched and pure, full of beautiful wilderness; at the same time, it is considered a place full of backwards hillbillies stuck in the past and uncivilized rednecks living sequestered in hollers.

Additionally, a lot of sources could be found discussing the social construction of Appalachia, its reality today. This gave me an insight into my shame and pride about being Appalachian, the construction of the idea of Appalachia (Arderly, 2018; Boyer, 2008; Clark, 2013; Hayes, 2018; Smith, 2015; Snyder, 2014). I might connect this shame to the concept of 'covering,' a term coined in 1963 by sociologist Erving Goffman, which describes how individuals with known stigmatized identities make a "great effort to keep the stigma from looming large." This ability to hide a stigmatized identity and downplay its significance is a huge privilege that many other people with stigmatized identities do not have (Yoshino, Justice, Warren, & Smith, 2013). I realized that I participate often in advocacy based covering, by not sticking up for other Appalachians and in the USA I also was worried about being associated with Appalachia, so I would almost never discuss being from the area, and would often rely on being Belgian to prove that I was not a real West Virginian. I had a fear of not being included, a fear of not being welcome. This a very small

amount of covering, often with no real negative consequences attached, but this fear that I may not be respected if I share my West Virginian identity was real.

Additionally, I read fiction written by Appalachian writers. Some books, such as *Hillbilly Elegy* (Vance, n.d.), faced critical acclaim outside of Appalachia along with derision from the area as some felt that it did not accurately portray Appalachia (Rader, 2017). When I read the book myself, I found Vance's views to be quite conservative; his writing seemed to claim that the poor he describes were trapped because of their own bad choices and attitudes.

I was quite interested in the history of tall tales and scary stories. I remembered reading a book, *The Tell Tale Lilac Bush and Other West Virginia Ghost Tales*, as a part of a West Virginia History class I took in high school. When reading it again this past summer, what stood out to me was that all the stories were bare-bone, left to be filled in by the reader (Musick, 1965). This encourages the folk process of retelling the story with one's own flavor, and I attempt to do the same with Phyllis Marks' story "The Spitting Contest."

When discussing West Virginia, it is impossible to ignore the effect that coal mining has had on the region. Additionally, I read a lot about how religion has played a key role in the resistance of mountaintop removal in West Virginia (Barry, 2012; Rice & Tedesco, n.d.-a; Witt, 2016).

As I was especially attentive to finding women's voices in West Virginia to include them in my understanding of the state (Barry, 2012; Engelhardt, 2005; Kahn, 1973; Kaye, 2013; Moody, 2014; "Mountain Feminist: Helen Matthews Lewis, Appalachian Studies, and the Long Women's Movement," n.d.; Rice & Tedesco, n.d.-b; Sohn, 2006). Additionally, I searched for books about the history of the indigenous peoples who lived in the area of what is now West Virginia, as well as books about other minorities in the area after its colonization and settlement so I could be more aware about the history and context of music coming from the region (Hayden, 2015; Rice, 1999).

### **6.3.5 OLD TIME FOLK MUSIC AND FOLKLORE IN APPALACHIA**

Another line of thought I considered was the history of Appalachian folk music.

Old-Time Music is a kind of North American folk music developed along with various folk dances, and played on acoustic instruments, often centering on a combination of fiddle and other string instruments like guitar, banjo, bass, and/or mandolin. It includes old unaccompanied English ballads, new American songs, and old fiddle tunes and banjo tunes. It is rooted in traditional music of England, Scotland, Ireland and Africa (Gartner, 2013; New World Encyclopedia contributors, 2015; M. Seeger, 1997; Wells, 2018). Old-time music is music from the home and community. Much of this music predates recordings. It consists of traditional instrumental fiddle tunes from the Old World as well as original American ballads, some based on real events, and popular music and poems that passed into oral tradition (Gartner, 2013). Also incorporated into much of the repertoire is gospel singing, heavily influenced by African American culture (Gartner, 2016). I read a bit more about the mountain dulcimer, an instrument used in much Appalachian folk music (D. Williams, 2012). I had bought one in the summer of 2017 and started listening to Jean Ritchie albums.

Today's Appalachian folk music community skews to the political Left, thanks in part to the 1970s countercultural folk revival. This phenomenon is also seen in countries with lively folk scenes like Sweden (Kaminsky, 2012; Whisnant, n.d.). Just as in Sweden, it is important to remember that the world of folk music was originally established on nationalistic foundations, when there was a lot of national romanticism.

Rich Kirby (Kirby, 2017) had pointed out this very issue in Appalachian folk music when talking about his grandmother, Addie Graham, "The music that [she] represents was at one point in time held up as an example of whiteness in America. It was supposed to be pure Anglo-Saxon music made by mountaineers, talking pure Elizabethan English. There's a great deal of nonsense to that." Rich Kirby pointed out in this visit how the understanding of traditional, old time mountain music has shifted a lot recently. It is now generally understood to be "a long, ancient, deep blend of, as somebody put it, two mighty rivers, the European and the African. [...] Like rivers flowing together, it very quickly becomes near impossible to tell which piece of water came from which river. [...] Many songs come out of the Black tradition."



I found several books of West Virginia folk music and other old time collections. In these books I was often able to find examples of the music I learned in the summer (Gainer, 1975, 2008; Marshall, 2006; Milnes, 1999).

According to fiddler Erynn Marshall, (Marshall, 2006) while women might often have felt shut out of the instrumental Old Time music scene, in many ways the singing tradition in West Virginia may have been run by women. This fits with Phyllis Marks' thoughts on the matter.

### **6.3.6 MUSIC AND POLITICS**

Inspired in part by comments from fellow artists who considered my work to be quite political, I also investigated the connection of music and politics. Through this review, I was able to formulate some ideas about music and its connection to politics. I also decided that I felt comfortable calling my project deeply political, and I realized that while my values shaping this project were personal, they very much related to society and were brought into question by recent political events.

For the sake of this research, while I did find myself in many theoretical discussions about whether music can or cannot be political, I decided not to focus on whether or not my artistic practice was political. The ability of music to be political has been discussed at length by composers and philosophers alike (Andrewes, 2015; Cox, 2015; Holter, 2011; B. Lang, n.d.; Little, 2011; Redhead, 2015; Spahlinger, 2015; Spahlinger & Paddison, 2015; Whisnant, n.d.; N. Williams, 2015; Zaldua, 2015). Additionally, I realized that I had already decided through my own experiences in art and life that I tend to agree with the idea that art is political, but possibly not successful or effective when attempting to share a specific message.

Given this idea, I propose looking from a practical angle at how a classically trained musician can disrupt power structures endemic and ever present in their performances. Andrewes (2015) suggests different intervention points where the political might be situated in a performance. He suggests the intervention of the conditions of production, intervention in the ideology of the production (expression), the intervention in the work's character, intervention in the ideology of realization (communication), and intervention in the conditions of reception and interpretation. As I continued to try and approach more self-awareness in connecting of certain aspects of the

political, I ran across many issues. Many artists' songs observe political objects, not only those that offer a partisan opinion or advocate for a specific action. While some of my project material is overtly political, I attempted through my artistic practice, especially in this project, to create spaces that connected to my values, which happen to be quite politically engaged. I aimed to create spaces that are more politically engaged through my artistic practice. I did this in part because there were already many people loudly saying what they felt, and those in Appalachia or outside had not thus far been received very openly.

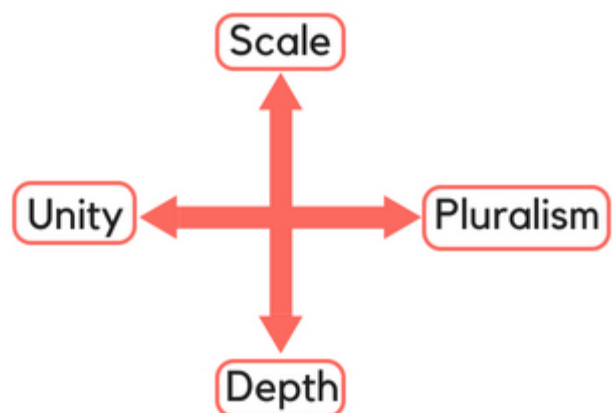
In my mind, all performances are of themselves political, and the question for the artist becomes whether they will accept the status quo or shake the structure. I suggest looking at different elements of a performance that can carry social structures and meaning. I explored the small and large steps an artist might take to create critical art.

“Musicking,” as defined by Christopher Small, is “to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance, or by dancing” (Small, 1998). He goes on to say, “Musicking [...] is an important component of our understanding ourselves and of our relationships with other people and the other creatures with which we share our planet. It is a political matter in the widest sense.”

The title of a piece of music, the words in the song, and the intended audience are only some ways that music might be considered political (La Rose, 2012). La Rose shares her perspective on how musicking might be considered political on many different levels that can be experienced by composers, performers, and listeners.

### 6.3.7 PLURALIST POPULISM

Realizing my personal values was not enough; I still needed to ask myself what I was doing that was negatively impacting my values and how I might create art that connected to these values on a larger level. In searching for



answers, I stumbled upon Peter Levine's thoughts on how to build a social movement. He points out that one should strive for scale, pluralism, unity, and depth. He says that for one, many people are needed to have a chance to reshape a political landscape. He says that the movement needs to incorporate a plurality of perspectives. It does not in his opinion need to represent all the opinions of American people as a whole, but it should not be homogenous or too narrow. He shares that there must be a sense of unity for a social movement to be effective. Lastly, there needs to be a transformative aspect of depth in the social movement. It needs to change those engaged, and provide space for responsibility and ethics while developing agency and purpose. He points out that these values are conflicting at times; for instance, when trying to have a larger scale, it can be hard to provide depth. Again, when trying to show a diversity of opinions, it is difficult to unify. His thought is that this conflict is important. The tradeoffs and tensions the goal is populist pluralism, where people might be treated as highly diverse and still be united in a common interest. He sees this as an antidote to Trump's form of populism (Levine, 2017a, 2017b). Laura Grattan writes, that successful social movements have "cultivated peoples' rebellious aspirations not just to resist power, but to share in power, and to do so in pluralistic, egalitarian ways across social and geographic borders." Grattan points out that people need to participate in deep, sustained, repeated practices of deliberating and building relationships across social differences, especially in a place with as many cultures as the USA.

In this way, I saw a strong connection to building direct, grassroots, horizontal, participatory power through my music. I wanted to treat people as highly diverse but to suggest that they might find a common interest. I also realized that at this point in my artistic practice, I would not focus on scale, but rather on depth of the experience. This came naturally as I did not have access to a large public and also as I was looking for meaningful experiences with individuals to create moments of empathy.

### **6.3.8 SOCIALLY ENGAGED ARTISTIC PRACTICE**

Initially, I was reticent to call my work political, as it is quite a loaded term. I decided that my work could easily be labeled as socially engaged, so I decided to investigate more about what that might mean and how quality might be measured in the context of socially engaged artistic practice.

According to Helicon (Frasz & Sidford, 2017, p. 11), socially engaged art while being difficult to define, often had similar attributes such as:

- 1) believing in the agency and responsibility of art and artists
- 2) using forms and materials beyond those used in studio art
- 3) involving artists working in collaboration,
- 4) including subject-matter that addresses social, political, or economic issues

Intention, skill, and ethics were three important aspects of a successful socially engaged practice according to Frasz and Sidford. The authors also discussed how current systems of training and supporting artists very often did not serve those interested in making socially engaged art. The focus of many academic training programs on aesthetic technique to the point of excluding collaborative mindset was one key point.

Important guidelines and other considerations for socially engaged artistic practices are well-documented in the following literature (C. Bishop, n.d.; Cornfield, 2015; Frasz & Sidford, 2017; Kim, 2018; Rosenberg, 2016; “Socially Engaged Art Education: The Impact of Contemporary Art,” 2014; Wehbi, McCormick, & Angelucci, 2016).

## 6.4 Lens Four: Audience

This lens was especially important, and also difficult, for me to consider given I was removed from the American communities with whom I intended to share my project. I have had the chance to perform several parts of this project around the globe. This year I did have the chance to perform some parts of my project in Chile, in Norway, in The Netherlands, and in Finland.

The entirety of the project has not yet been performed for an audience. When I do perform the full project in the United States this summer 2018, I will return to this lens. It will be a chance to review this lens and critically evaluate the effectiveness of my project in the goals that related to my American target audience's reactions.

Through performing in these countries for non-native English-speakers, I realized that listeners attributed a huge diversity of meaning to the materials I used in *West Virginia, My Home*. This was true for both found and new materials I used in the project. These are described more in depth in the section about elements of performance; there, lyrics, score samples, and recordings are also shared when available. While diverse meanings would also have been attributed in a country, like the United States, where English is a main language spoken natively, the large diversity of interpretations may not have been as obvious or varied. I do think that the lyrics and spoken word used in the performance in certain materials would be more readily understandable to Appalachians specifically, especially text using dialect from the area. Still, I felt strongly that I wanted to be inclusive of Appalachian dialect in my art, and I while I redoubled my efforts on diction and speaking clearly and slowly, for the most part I avoided changing words or accent for the understandability of a non-American audience.

Perhaps the most personally motivating performance was one I gave in Niebla, Chile, to a large auditorium of about one hundred young musicians. I had translated



introductions to the material I would perform, but otherwise the audience did not understand any of the text. I had to rely purely on my delivery of the performance and on the music itself.

In Oslo, Norway, I played for ten people in a small, cozy bookstore. There I realized venue and setting were very important to me. In that store, the small space led to a comfortable atmosphere and fed into the intimate experience I shared with the audience. After the performance, members of the audience easily came up to me and we had real conversations about West Virginia's issues, about situations similar in Norway, and about all other kinds of topics. This showed me that communication post-performance needed to be a consideration on my part.

In a following performance in The Netherlands, at Helicopter in Den Haag, I was able to perform for a small audience, all seated on pillows on the floor. Again, this feeling of connection and familiarity was there, as well as the post-concert conversation. I realized based on these informal concerts, where I also did my best to move more or less seamlessly through the musical material, that I would need to work to balance storytelling with music. This was especially crucial



given feedback from audience that they were not always clear which pieces were 'mine' and which others composed. I very much want to give credit where it is due, so I am continuing to explore how I best can clearly show ownership and hard work from the stage in a less presentational style.



I gave an informal performance at my own home, attended by about thirty fellow artists from the conservatoire. While I also asked them about their experience of my performance as artists, their thoughts about my performance as an audience were also intriguing. This was the group that included the most Americans, and it was also the group where laughter fell where I expected it to in "The Spitting Story" and where I had the most conversations afterwards about

Appalachia. This was a good sign to me that when I go back to the United States this summer I am creating a performance that has the potential to introduce those outside of Appalachia to new narratives.

Another realization I had came in The Netherlands. Many of the reactions I had when I played the music showed that audience outside of the USA thought Appalachian folk music had an exotic quality. In some ways, I was activating the very thoughts I had wanted to call into question. I had intended to problematize the one-sided picture I saw of West Virginia, and instead the music I was making seemed at times to emphasize the nostalgic, folk qualities so often attributed to the area.

A struggle I have had in synthesizing and trying out my project has been that I am currently living in The Netherlands. It was never my plan to perform for a primarily international audience, most of which were not from the United States. In performing this past year for international audiences, among them Dutch, Canadian, Spanish, Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, and Chilean audience members, I quickly realized I made held many assumptions as an American and as an Appalachian. One such assumption was the power of language to connect people. Through my experiences performing, I realized I would need to accept that people might take away something very different from what I expected from my performance. Due to this, I also decided to take out some songs that I had previously considered, such as “Dandoo” and “Sarah;” at this time I did not feel like the heaviness of the topics could be adequately presented within the format I had chosen. I also decided to change the order of some pieces so as to be able to add introductions of some kind in the form of storytelling. Another assumption was that my performance and the topics I tackled would be specific to the United States; on the contrary, I found so much common ground with people from small, poor regions in other countries, with interests in folk music, and/or with a desire to speak out against hate through their music. Many comments from audience members bolstered my courage to continue with the project.

By having these experiences at performance try outs, I saw my assumptions in working with text were wrong in many cases, and I began to consider how I might further elucidate my own thoughts on my artistic practice. This also connects to how I might share my opinions and context connected to the project on my own website, and on music streaming services like SoundCloud, on YouTube videos, in CD liner notes if I were to record my music, and even in this paper.

## **CHAPTER 7: ELEMENTS OF THE PERFORMANCE**

In this section I take my project about West Virginia through the elements of concept, materials, context, production process, audience, communications, and performance design and form.

Within each of these elements, I considered the four lenses I might look through: my autobiography, my audience, other artists' work, and literature review. These elements below are not necessarily in order of importance. The linearity with which these are described was not my own working process; at many points in my own process, I returned to reconsider elements and my decisions and opinions changed.

### **7.1 CONCEPT**

My concept is to create a performance of about one hour, inspired in large part by West Virginia, including new and found materials by working with composers and folk musicians, where through storytelling and song, I would aim to create a space with a plurality of narratives. I would create a project that allowed for ambiguity and contradiction.

The goal would be to find a way through my performance to emotionally feel heritage and connection to personal history, to engage listeners in the region of Appalachia. Listeners might be from outside of Appalachia, or might be Appalachian, but either way they would be engaged in experiencing a view of West Virginia that might be new to them. I would explore how we might break with tradition while holding it dear at the same time.

I would build a performance that included personal, cultural history, fine art, and folk art and that touched listeners to bring them together through questions and diverse viewpoints. I thought about which values had been threatened by the 2016 presidential election and digging deeper, what aspects of West Virginia I wanted to share or discover myself. Through this project, I would introduce people to more sides of West Virginia than they had previously considered.

As I continued the reflective process of looking through lenses, which was outlined above, I amended certain aspects of my concept and changed ideas. Finding examples of folk artists like



Anna & Elizabeth, Sam Gleaves, and Tyler Hughes working to change the image Appalachia and old time music especially was influential in my thought process.

Based upon work by Alexis Frasz and Holly Sidford of the Helicon Collaborative (Frasz & Sidford, 2017), there are nine attributes along which socially engaged art often varies in practice. I took my project through these attributes and considered where I thought my project might fall. Below I share where I placed my project on the scale. I plan to consider this in future projects I am a part of as it was quite helpful to think about which balance of attributes would be most effective for the kind of effect I wanted to have. Based on my answers on the sliding scales, I was able to change and modify the concept of my project to better reflect my values.



## ATTRIBUTES OF Socially Engaged Art

*Is the art more about social or fine art aesthetics?*

**Social art**

**Fine art**

*Is the artist facilitating a co-creative process or is she the primary creative agent?*

**Facilitator**

**Creative Agent**

*Is the artist from the community or has the artist never been there before?*

**Rooted in**

**From outside**

*Is "the work" the process or the final product?*

**Process-focused**

**Product-focused**

*Is the influence directed inward to serve the community itself or directed outward to reach others?*

**Inward**

**Outward**

*Is the material generated within the community itself or by an artist based outside of the community?*

**Community**

**Outside**

*Is the work inseparable from a particular place or is it not geographically specific?*

**Place specific**

**Non-place specific**

*Is the work toughing on one issue or addressing multiple issues?*

**Single issue**

**Multi-issue**

*Is the work a one time project or a long term commitment over many years?*

**Short term**

**Long term**

Graphic created by Annick Odom, based on Helicon Collaborative's "Mapping the Landscape of Socially Engaged Artistic Practice" <http://artmakingchange.org>

## 7.2 PRODUCTION PROCESS

My general process could be distilled into the following:

- 1) reflection, which included reflexive writing, interviews, reading, watching, and listening
- 2) synthesizing
- 3) processing material
- 4) performing try outs
- 5) synthesizing II
- 6) performing “finalized” product

In many ways, this reflective practice was focused on my perspective, or my understanding of others’ perspectives based on interviews and literature review. Tryout performances, even those where I was only able to perform one or two of the materials, were an important way to test assumptions that I held about the flow of the pieces and the audience’s reception.

As I had chosen to work with many different collaborators, I needed to choose them quite carefully. I had criteria in choosing who to work with so I could connect the production process to my values as well. I chose people who I thought would work collaboratively and be interested in the project.

I left the instructions for the creation of the pieces quite open, in part because I was not able to compensate the composers for their work and because I wanted to hear their musical thoughts reflected in the pieces rather than my own. I did have many conversations with most of the composers about topics surrounding West Virginia, including environmental and women’s issues. I talked about my passion in this project and also shared the concerns and vulnerability I felt in singing, in playing music from the folk tradition, in playing music connected to West Virginia, as in many ways I have never felt that I fully belonged there. I talked also a lot about what it was like in the Netherlands; the inequality I saw here, how the discourse surrounding discrimination often seemed absent here, especially at the conservatoire. We decided that for the composers to write music inspired by West Virginia while not appropriating a sound and style they did not have a connection to, we would attempt to work closely together, and be inspired more by our conversations. In addition to our conversations, I also sent some composers photos, videos, sound recordings, and books about Appalachia that I found thought provoking.

When it came to the process of gathering folk music to use for the project, it was extremely important to learn the music as best as I could in the traditional way. I learned by ear and from people in person as much as possible, rather than using notation or recordings of musicians that I had no personal connection to. For that reason, I made a large effort to spend the last summer in West Virginia, learning from leaders in the field such as Phyllis Marks, Gerry Milnes, Emily Miller, Kate Long, and Alice Gerrard. I will be headed there again this summer to continue learning.

I thought about how I could best show respect to those I collected material from. I compensated them for their work by buying recordings when possible, and gave them credit in all of my own online material. I also considered how I would creatively give them credit within the framework of my performance without each piece of material needing a lengthy introduction and without their being printed booklets.

Additionally, I was interested in the folk process, the way material transforms and becomes adapted during the process of being passed on from one person to another. This is particularly common in music and stories. To avoid ruining this process, as I was learning folk music I worked very hard to sidestep writing down material. I worked to learn the music by ear as much as possible, even if the texts were sometimes written down to help my memory.

### **7.3 CONTEXT**

A lot of this context was discovered and considered from my autobiographical lens and through reading literature about West Virginia, Appalachia, and socially engaged art.

In relation to the specific performance, context was most difficult for me to consider when I was working with found materials, as there was a lot of history that was connected to each song and story that I did not know. For instance the racial slurs and other derogatory terms appeared in quite a few American folk songs. Many of these words have often already replaced with other words in American folk songs when they are performed today. As a newcomer to Old Time folk music I rarely knew whether the song had replaced words, but most experienced folk musicians, especially

those a generation or two older also know the older lyrics. One example of this was “Oh Come All You Virginia Girls,” based on a minstrel stage song written in 1841 (Cohen, 2005, 2008).

Getting context for my new materials started with a lot of reading, as described in the lenses above, talking to family and friends when I went back home, and talking with people at the folk festivals I went to. At every decision I have tried to be more aware of the various contextual issues present in my work, and to acknowledge them and continue to search for solutions in tackling those issues and how I might present them to an audience.

## 7.4 MATERIALS

I decided to attempt to develop a project in solidarity with the struggles of Appalachians while being attached to the outside world and having a dissimilar experience of Appalachia at times. The contradictions in my experience moved me to action, in addition to the contemporary social urgencies I felt. The issues that I aim to explore in my current project are not only present in Appalachia, or even in the USA. I hope that by looking closely at my own region, I have been able to create material that speaks to issues present in many other places.

I contemplated how the materials might change based on the fact that I was performing them or based on who created them. In these cases, I considered roles and the identities of those people. For instance, through taking voice lessons with Manon Heijne and by working with an actor, Bas Maassen, I was able to more closely consider how to use my voice. In addition to technical aspects that would effect how I connected with the audience, I also needed to consider my accent and dialect. I was conscientious of whether I was putting on an accent or using my own. I decided as much as possible that instead of acting the part of someone else, I would rather retell their story using my own voice. This was especially important in the narrative story, “The Spitting Contest” which was told to me by Phyllis Marks. I struggled with the urge to replicate it identically as I loved her inflections and word choice. Additionally, as I learned it by listening to a recording of her, it was difficult to avoid copying all aspects of her version of the story.

Listed below is the material that I have collected or commissioned for this project in the past year. In addition to attempting to provide a part of the context that I learned and experienced along the

way, I also did my best to share more specifically which values I was interested in connecting with through use of each of these materials. These are included so the readers can see the process I went through when considering my values in connection to the working process and context of each specific piece of material. Also included are the lyrics and links to recordings of the pieces when available.

At times in this project, I chose to stop working with certain materials, both new and found, because in some way they went against my values. In those materials, I could not find a connection to another person or did not have a chance for dialogue in the preparation of the material. At other moments, the material swung the balance of my performance too far in the representation of an already strong point of view; for instance, I had several songs that from my view were very violent towards women, see “Dandoo” and “Sarah.” I did not have the bandwidth to consider how I might continue to use them in the project at this moment, but perhaps I will attempt to re-contextualize them at a later date.

Name	New/Found Material	Composer/Folk Musician Lineage
Ivy Leaf	Found	Traditional, learned from Russ
Oh Come All You Virginia Girls	Found	Traditional, learned from Elizabeth LaPrelle recordings
Black Lung	Found	Hazel Dickens
Get Up and Bar the Door	Found	Traditional, learned from Gerry Milnes and Phyllis Marks
We’ll Camp a Little While in the Wilderness	Found	Traditional, learned from Gerry Milnes
Cedar Swamp	Found	Traditional, learned from recordings of Jean Ritchie

Dandoo	Found	Traditional, learned from Gerry Milnes and Phyllis Marks, who learned from her family
The Spitting Contest	Found	Traditional, learned from Phyllis Marks, who learned from another storyteller at the Glennville Folk Festival
Wild Bill Jones	Found	Traditional, learned from Rich Kirby, who learned from Addie Graham
Crankie accompanying Wild Bill Jones	New	Visuals by Sarah Schwendeman
Sarah	New	Music by Annika Socolofsky & lyrics by Anders Villani
Untapped Potential	New	Jacob Sandridge
Ivory Bones	New	Christine Hedden
October Drought in a Toxic River Valley	New	Music by Nadine Dyskant-Miller & lyrics by Perry Maddox
Dust to Dust and In-between	New	Music by Clay Gonzalez & lyrics by Perry Maddox

Table 1 Found and New Materials for Appalachia Project

***Found Material******“Ivy Leaf”***

What shall I give to thee? Dear, we must part.  
 Something to hide away, close to the heart.

|Give me an ivy leaf, fresh from the vine.  
Give me an ivy leaf, green as the pine.| (Chorus)

What shall I give to thee? Life is so strange.  
All I would offer thee, surely must change.

This is an Appalachian folk song I learned in August 2017 from a man named Russ originally from Southern West Virginia. Like me, he was attending the Augusta Heritage Center in Elkins, West Virginia. He was a self-taught mountain dulcimer player, as was his late wife, Gayle.

I happened to have acquired a mountain dulcimer earlier that month at the Appalachian String Band Festival in West Virginia. I had yet to play anything more complex than “Hot Cross Buns,” which the saleswoman had assured me everyone could play. She said it was the easiest instrument in existence. Persuaded by her cajoling and my own vision of learning all of Jean Ritchie’s folk songs, I bought the mountain dulcimer I found the most beautiful, covered in small wormholes.

When I realized Russ played mountain dulcimer, I asked if he would spend some time teaching me some basics. He replied with a curt “sure,” so I brought it along one evening to a jam session. It was far too loud to join in, and I was far too much of a beginner, so we went and sat in the covered entryway to the house. Before I knew it, I had three eager mountain dulcimer instructors sitting with me in the doorway, sequestered away from the rest of the jam session. Each of the musicians had a different style of playing, and they were all eager to compare their instruments and picking styles.

Later that evening I asked Russ if he would teach me this folk song, which he had played earlier in the week during class. Nestled in the corner and sitting on the ground, I listened through the sound of other tunes. Through the din of high fiddles, ringing banjos, rhythmic bass, I focused my attention on the quiet, delicate sound of the dulcimer and his baritone voice.

When he had originally played the song for the class, Russ introduced it as a “real West Virginia song.” According to Russ, West Virginia is the only known source of this tune. He has known it for many years and did not know from whom he had learned it. According to Russ, Dr. Patrick Gainer, founder of the West Virginia State Festival, was the only one ever to record the song. The



song under the name “What Shall I Give to Thee?” is able to be found in “Folk Songs of the Alleghenies” (Gainer, 1963) and “Folk Songs of the West Virginia Hills” (Gainer, 1975).

Finally, after many years, he shared that he had figured out what the song was about. Before singing it, he shared, “I always wondered why it was so short, but I realized it only needs two verses.” Gerry Milnes asked, “So what do you think it is about?” to which Russ said, “Ok, I thought it was a typical parting song, where two people are parting. What normally happens is that they swear they will remain true to each other.” He said it was a kind of “broken token song” where the two lovers would give a token to prove they had remained true. He continued to share that once he finally listened to the words, he decided it was not about a pledge of eternal love after all. He said, “The key is in the lyrics, ‘Life is so strange, all I would offer you surely would change’ ... including my love. If at some future time we still have a relationship, that’s cool. It’s not a gold ring, it is an ivy leaf, which will soon dry, and crumble, and disappear. That is the symbol for the future of that relationship. In the real world, that is what happens.”

As a rejoinder, Gerry Milnes, the instructor of the West Virginia Folk Music course at Augusta Heritage Center, begged to differ. He shared that ivy leaves were often used in mythology to symbolize fidelity and everlasting love. He pointed out that in the area nearby there were many old gravestones with ivy intertwining, along with ferns (Milnes, 2017). I looked this up later and also found examples. For instance, Greek priests often presented a wreath of ivy to newlyweds (“Ivy Leaf,” 2015). While Russ deferred to Milnes’ expertise, I found his story endearing and loved hearing such different takes on the same song.

I am attempting to play this piece exactly as I learned it from Russ as a way of valuing the oral tradition and the experience I had this summer meeting such lovely and giving people. Originally, rather than translate the accompaniment to the double bass, I decided to perform it on the mountain dulcimer. I learned the entire piece by rote, even more so than the other found materials I am using. This was a way for me to explore my value of tradition by learning a song supposedly from West Virginia. Since having learned it on the mountain dulcimer, I also have started exploring how I can translate the accompaniment to the double bass. Additionally, the multiple views around the meaning of the song felt like an opportunity to share the experience of plurality and the importance of dialogue.



*"Get Up and Bar the Door"*

<https://youtu.be/rei3GdHmB0w>

Oh the wind blew high.  
The wind blew low,  
It blew all over the floor  
When John Jones said to Jane, his wife,  
"Get up and bar the door."

"Oh I have worked so hard," said she.  
"I've washed and scrubbed the floor.  
Get up, get up, you lazy man,  
Get up and bar the door."

"Oh I have worked so hard," said he.  
"I'm sure I can't do more.  
Get up, get up, my darling wife.  
Get up and bar the door."

And so, between the two they made a pact.  
A solemn vow they swore,  
That the very first one to say a word,  
Would have to bar the door.

So, the wind blew high.

The wind blew low.  
It blew all over the floor.  
But still no one would say a word,  
For barring of the door

Three robbers came along that way.  
They came across the moor.  
They saw a light and walked right in,  
Right through the open door.

“Oh who’s the good man of this house?  
Is he rich or is he poor?”  
But still no one would say a word,  
For barring of the door.

So, they ate their bread.  
They drank their ale.  
They said come give us more.  
But still no one would say a word,  
For barring of the door.

“I’ll pull the old mans beard,” said one.  
“I’ll beat him ‘til he’s sore.”  
But still no one would say a word,  
For barring of the door.

“I’ll kiss his pretty wife,” said one.  
“Of her I would adore.”  
And then the old man shook his fist,  
And gave a mighty roar.

“Oh you’ll not kiss my wife,” said he,  
“I’ll throw you on the floor.”

Said Jane, “Now, John, you spoke a word.  
Get up and bar the door.”  
Said Jane, “Now, John, you spoke a word.  
Get up and bar the door.”

This song describes the comedies of married life (Atkinson, 1999). It shares a marital dispute about who should get up and shut the front door. A West Virginian ballad singer Phyllis Marks taught it to me the summer of 2017. One version of the song is found in Cecil Sharp’s collection of English folk songs (Sharp, 1932), as well as in Frances Child’s book of Scottish and English ballads (Child, Sargent, & In Kittredge, 1904).

In most of Child's ballads, women characters rely on their wittiness to win something in a relationship with a man. "Get Up and Bar the Door" belongs to the widespread motif where characters follow traditional gender roles; however, in contrast to the norm, in this ballad it is the man who speaks out and has to shut the door. This may seem quite open-minded, but the reason he speaks out is because he is jealous of the attention his wife is getting (Atkinson, 1999).

According to Marks, this was one of the few songs she knew where the woman character 'won.' Even though the woman wins the argument, I put it in quotes because the only reason she wins is that her husband feels the need to claim ownership of her when the robber says he will kiss her. Still, it was the song that was mentioned over and over again, along with a song called "The Devil and the Old Woman." In this genre, I keep looking for old time songs I can sing where women can come out as heroes, but it seems to be quite difficult to find. In that sense, it was an uncommon song, and even though I found the underlying reasons for her winning problematic, I decided I needed to use it as it was more connected to my values than most of the other songs I learned that were showed women winning. This concept of showing a woman win on stage became more and more important to me as I realized that women so rarely were given that opportunity in the songs told in the folk tradition. I wanted to include this representation of a strong woman.

*"Black Lung" by Hazel Dickens*

He's had more hard luck than most men could stand.  
The mine was his first love, but never his friend.  
He's lived a hard life, and hard he'll die.  
Black lung's done got him. His time is nigh.

Black lung, black lung, you're just biding your time.  
Soon all this suffering, I'll leave behind.  
But I can't help but wonder what God had in mind  
To send such a devil to claim this soul of mine.

I went to the boss man, but he closed the door.  
It seems you're not wanted when you're sick and you're poor.  
You're not even covered in their medical plans,  
And your life depends on the favors of man.

Down in the poorhouse on starvation's plan,  
Where pride is a stranger and doomed is a man,  
His soul full of coal dust 'till his body's decayed.

Everyone but black lung's done turned him away.

Black lung, black lung, your hand's icy cold.  
As you reach for my life, you torture my soul.  
Cold as that waterhole down in the dark cave  
Where I spent my life's blood, digging my grave.

Down at the graveyard, the boss man came  
With his little bunch of flowers. Dear God! What a shame.  
Take back those flowers. Don't sing no sad songs.  
The die has been cast now. A good man is gone.

The song is a protest song written by well-known bluegrass musician from WV, Hazel Dickens (also discussed more in Lens 3 in this paper). It was written during the mine unionization struggles in WV. Her oldest brother died of the dread black lung disease from his years of working in the mines, and the family had to depend on public assistance—welfare—to pay for his burial. These struggles are far from over. In fact, black lung has been increasing in the Appalachian coal mines; some speculate this is due to changes in mining practices (Blackley et al., 2018).

While I have known this song for longer than I can remember, I began listening to it again in 2016 during the political elections. I also sung it with a group in class at Augusta Heritage Center taught by Kate Long, a community activist and songwriter. I've arranged it for double bass and voice.

I looked at some other songs before deciding on this one. For instance, I also explored songs from Industrial Workers of the World and other songs connected to coal mining (Green & Rosemont, 1886; Wright, n.d.), but I did not have enough of a personal connection to the songs to sing them. Additionally, I was really inspired by Hazel Dickens, her story and her work. In the piece I wanted to share the roughness and honesty of Hazel Dickens' voice. I explored ways to share this in the sound of the double bass, which is gravelly, broken, and hard. I go in and out of the C-G drone to a B and play along with the voice during the chorus, trying to meld the voice and bass parts together to be one voice.

*"Camp a Little While in the Wilderness"*

<https://youtu.be/5ypU1RcG0fs>

We'll camp a little while in the wilderness. In wilderness. In the wilderness. We'll camp a little while in the wilderness. Then, we'll all journey home.

|We'll all journey home. We'll all journey home.  
We'll camp a little while in the wilderness. Then, we'll all journey home. | (Chorus)

Oh mothers are you ready? Ready, oh ready. Oh mothers are you ready?  
Then we'll all journey home.

Oh sisters are you ready? Ready oh ready. Oh fathers are you ready?  
Then we'll all journey home.

We'll camp a little while in the wilderness. In wilderness. In the wilderness.  
We'll camp a little while in the wilderness. Then, we'll all journey home.

I wanted to create something that reminded me of Sacred Harp singing, and in the search I found this meeting song this past summer. This is a spiritual that I am considering singing unaccompanied, as Gerry Milnes, a folklorist in WV, taught it to me.

“It doesn't have a lot of rhythm; it's free with meter; it has long, drawn-out phrases and lots of ornaments,” Elizabeth LaPrelle, a modern Appalachian folk singer, shares, “so the ornaments are like the *yip* or trilling around the note — sliding up into the note instead of just stepping on it.” To LaPrelle, the volume and the force and effort of pushing out the sound is a part of the style (N. Adams, 2012). Ruth Seeger talks about the heterophony of American folk music, showing that allows for people to sing together but not feel obligated to sing exactly together. They were free to be themselves in a group experience (R. C. Seeger, 2001). This kind of feeling is also present in this song when sung in a group context.

Additionally, I love the unique melodic phrases in the song, which point towards African American and gospel influences. I found this song important to include especially because of this connection.

In singing this song, I wanted to sing in the Appalachian tradition, which is full of embellishment and interpretation. I love that this piece has kind of breaking to it and I wanted to pay homage to one of my bass teachers, Gary Karr; he is an avid supporter of playing as close to the bridge as possible, so as to get vibrant sounds that can cut through the volume of an orchestra. I start every day of practice with my bass on open strings, a kind of meditation. I wanted to bring that feeling and connection to the double bass on stage. I have always admired how Gary Karr sticks to his

belief in this, even when it causes his sometimes to squeak or crack a note. He does not play it safe. It reminds me of older opera singers I listened to when I was younger. They sang as though they did not worry about having a voice the next day. In that way, it also reminds me of Hazel Dickens, or of a lot of shape note singing practices, which also involved singing loud and free, with the hope that God would hear.

Additionally, I have tried to consciously include the mention of the women of the family, mothers and sisters, in the beginning of the song rather than at the end of the song. This connected to my desire to show women as belonging not as after-thoughts, but as the heroine in their own story. This aspect of inclusion and representation was very important to me.

*“Oh Come All You Virginia Gals”*

Oh come all you Virginia girls and listen to my noise  
Don't you court no West Virginia boys  
If you do your fortune'll be Johnny cake and venison and sassafras tea  
Johnny cake and venison and sassafras tea

Well, when they come a courtin' I'll tell you what they'll wear  
Old black suit just about to tear  
Old straw hat more brim than crown  
A pair of woolen socks they wear the whole year round  
A pair of woolen socks they wear the whole year round

And when they come a courtin' I'll tell you what they'll say  
First they'll say, has your daddy shot a bear?  
Then they'll say as they sit down,  
Honey can you bake your Johnny cake brown  
Honey can you bake your Johnny cake brown

Oh come all you Virginia girls and listen to my noise  
Don't you court no West Virginia boys  
If you do your fortune'll be Johnny cake and venison and sassafras tea  
Johnny cake and venison and sassafras tea

I learned this song from several recordings, including one by Elizabeth LaPrelle (LaPrelle, 2004). The song is also known as “Cousin Emmy’s Blues,” which was based on a minstrel stage song “Free Nigger” published in 1841 by R. W. Pelham (Cohen, 2005, 2008).

We had a stimulating conversation in one of Alice Gerrard's classes at Augusta Heritage Center. We asked if replacing a derogatory and extremely hurtful word like "nigger" with a more respectful word was a good solution. Someone shared, "I feel that is scratching around the issue. I feel like I'm trying to re-write history all the time, trying to sing things that could be construed as empowering." Another shared, "Well, you know, I think it is good to substitute words. I am not going to go out and sing the n-word at any time, because I don't want to give any validity to anyone who would use it in a racist way. [...] You've got to put it in context if you use it. People change words all the time. Hazel Dickens used the term 'dear Christian brother' in one of her songs. Later, as she became more conscious she changed it to 'dear sisters and brothers.' You can change something like that."

I am not performing this piece anymore because I did not feel a strong connection to people or purpose when playing it. I did already record it in my own arrangement for double bass and voice. While I met LaPrelle this past year, I did not learn the song from her myself. Additionally, the song was more about the negative perceptions about West Virginians, which contributed to an "us-versus-the-world" mentality. It seemed that most performers I found ignored the song's minstrel history, or at least did not present it publicly in their performances. I found the historical context very problematic; it tipped the scales and made me decide to take this song out of my project for the time being. I might add it back if I choose to frame the performance in a way where this can be a part of the dialogue. I do find it important, and I am happy I came across this song and had this uncovering experience, as it was one of the first songs where I was forced to reflect on issues of race in Appalachia.

From the moment I heard the song, the text connected to my experience as a West Virginian living outside of West Virginia. I have lost count of the number of times I have been met with, I hope sarcastic, quips of surprise that I was wearing shoes, that I was nicely dressed, and that I was not a hillbilly. While some references in the song are outdated and foreign to me, the mention of venison for instance brings me right back home.

*"Dandoo"*

A little man come in from the plow. Dandoo, dandoo.

A little old man come in from the plow, and he said "Old woman, my breakfast now."



|Come a kludel-ay, come a clingo, come lamberry,  
come a derry-mi, derry-mingo, derry O. | (Chorus)

There's a piece of cold cornbread layin' on the shelf. Dandoo, dandoo.  
There's a piece of cold cornbread layin' on the shelf. If you don't eat it I'll eat it myself.

That little old man went down the sheepfold. Dandoo, dandoo.  
That little old man went down the sheepfold. And he killed an old whether both fat and old.

He hung it up on two little pins. Dandoo, dandoo.  
He hung it up on two little pins and one or two jerks, well he had it skinned.

He stretched that leather skin on the old woman's back. Dandoo, dandoo.  
He stretched that leather skin on the old woman's back.  
And two little stacks went wickety-wack.

"I'll tell my people and all my kin." Dandoo, dandoo.  
"I'll tell my people and all my kin. You whipped me over with a naked skin."

"I'll tell them all that you have lied." Dandoo, dandoo.  
"I'll tell them all that you have lied, 'cause I never whipped nothing but an old sheep's hide."

That old man he ran away. Dandoo, dandoo.  
That old man he ran away, ran 14 miles in 15 days.

Above is a transcription of Phyllis Marks' recording of the folk song, as it was sung to me during our interview in the summer of 2017.

In the text the husband wraps animal hide on the back of his wife before beating her. In doing this, he beats her into submissive obedience to preserve the conventional gender roles within marriage while avoiding her family's anger, since he can now say he never beat her, he only beat the hide (Atkinson, 1999).

This song, a version of Child Ballad 277 "The Wife Wrapt in Wether's Skin," is about domestic abuse. Still, it is a song Phyllis Marks sang quite frequently. It is a silly song, in her opinion, and is not based on fact. For her it was a kind of joke, a battle of the wits. In today's context, however, it feels utterly unacceptable for me to perform it with humor.

What makes me wonder particularly is how Phyllis Marks can hear this song as silly and ignore the very sinister undertone of the lyrics.

I am still considering if I should or should not perform this song, and it is still not arranged for the double bass. I wonder if the idea that it was written by a woman could change anything. I have currently put it on the shelf, but may decide to use it if I find that the horror of the text could bring to light the nonchalance with which violence against women is still committed every day.

*"The Spitting Contest"*

I come up here , today to tell ya , bout the time I won the , , spitting contest ,  
in New York City , at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel,

I was sittin' over there the other day, chawin' with the boys.  
Spittin' in the pot-bellied stove door ,

Feller come in governor come in , to talk to the store keep ,  
and he chewed, turned around and , spit right out the open store door

I watched him. I didn't say nothing ,  
You know me I don't talk much ,

Well I chewed up , and took aim and I spit right around the store keep right around the bass  
player , right around that pot-bellied stove, around the coal bucket right through the open store  
door , on the other side.

Feller said "Stranger ... you sure can spit" , I didn't say nothing. I don't talk much ,

He said and how'd you like to go to the spitting convention in NYC , next week ,  
There'll be spitters there from all the United States ,  
its territories and possessions , and parts of Texas

I didn't say nothin' , then the next week I got my clothes and flower coat,  
Got on the bus , and headed off to NYC , to the Waldorf Astoria ,

I got up there , in that big sitting room and \_\_\_\_\_ ,  
There was some good spitters there too , \_\_\_\_\_  
from all the United States , its territories and possessions , and parts of Texas  
I didn't say nothin , I stood there , They was spitting around \_\_\_\_\_  
spittin around the chairs and spittin around the curtain , I didn't say nothin ,

Finally the , Finally the clerk said  
"Stranger did you come up here to spit?"  
And I said "yep."

He said “whelp , just a minute and I'll get ya , a bell hop , ,”  
After a while a little man with a little red hat , come.  
I never heard no bells , and he wasn't hoppin' ,

Then when he took me upstairs to the room , ,  
there was papers all around the room , Spitting for the best results ,  
Plain and fancy spittin , Spittin' in biblical times , Spittin' profound profit , ,  
But I didn't go up there to read. I went up there to spit

So next morning I went down and the spitters had all ganged up in that big sittin' room , Spitters  
there from all the United States, Its territories and possessions , and parts of Texas. There was  
good spitters there too ,

Finally the clerk said, “Stranger , , you still gonna spit? After you seen all these good spitters?”  
And I said “yep.” You know me I don't talk much.

And I chewed up , took aim went right around the clerk  
Right around that velvet string , Right around that velvet curtain ,  
Round to the chair and back around through that other chair  
Back through the rungs of the table ,  
And round the rubber plant and , sprang right into the brass platoon on the other side

Feller said “Stranger you sure can spit”  
I didn't say nothin' . I don't talk much

They give me my ribbons and my money and I started off home ,  
I got on the bus and there sat Jody and her friends from , Tennessee and California ,  
I always knew who they was , but they thought they was better than me  
so I didn't say nothing. They didn't say nothing. They was reading the paper ,

Well I chewed up and took aim and , spit  
and it went right twixt the eyeglasses and the paper.  
I didn't say nothing , I don't talk much , I chewed up  
and I took aim again And it went , right between her eyeglasses and her eye.

Right then they noticed me. They come over and wanted to talk.  
And we been the best of friends ever since ,  
Now friends I'll tell ya ,  
That's the best way to strike up an acquaintance ,  
Not just plain old ordinary spitting , but fancy spitting

We rode on into Glennville and the band , was playing and  
People was hollering “Speech speech” , I didn't say nothing  
Finally I come out on the platform and I said  
“Now friends ain't done nothing here today ,

that any upstanding young feller couldn't do ,  
I had enough gumption , and stick-to-itness.”  
Now this is not plain old ordinary spitting , it's fancy spitting.

Just wanna give you one tip.  
Just get you some old hickory chaw on to knacker  
so it don't string and it don't splatter.

Above is a transcription of “The Spitting Contest” based on a recording of an interview with Phyllis Marks in the summer of 2017. Some words were not intelligible when listening back to the recording; those words have been replaced with best guesses and are underlined. Additionally, in this story she ‘spits’ almost every other word. Those spitting sounds have been transcribed; those are delineated using commas. Recordings of Marks telling the story can be heard on SoundCloud (Marks, 2016). She said she learned the story from another folk storyteller who shared it at the Glennville Folk Festival some years ago.

She shared that while she enjoyed telling the story, her son especially did not enjoy hearing it. Spitting is quite an unladylike action. She shared that she had been a sassy child, and that along with the hymns she learned from her moth, she learned some dirty jokes and stories that ladies should not tell (Marks, 2017).

“The Spitting Contest” reminds me of the tradition of telling tall tales (Kelley, 2010), described by Encyclopaedia Britannica as “narratives that depict the adventures of extravagantly exaggerated folk heroes” (Promeeet, 2009). I am also reminded of the Liars Contests that still take place in West Virginia. Bil Lepp, a five time winner of the Vandalia Gathering Liar’s Contest, says, “It usually starts with a kernel of truth and just gets bigger and bigger from there” (Rulon, 2000).

I decided to learn “The Spitting Contest” in part because of the personal connection I had after talking with Marks. I also particularly enjoyed the idea of being a woman and “spitting” on stage, which even now is considered an unacceptable social behavior, especially for women. Originally, I was so drawn to the way Marks shared the story that I had the urge to try and copy her voice. In some aspects she herself was playing up an “Appalachian accent”; she made seemingly purposeful errors in her speech that were not there during other non-performative storytelling moments in our interview. While I am still considering her inflections and in some ways taking her way of telling

the story on as my own, I attempt to tell the story in a way that feels authentic to my own way of speaking. I have since created my own double bass part to underpin the story. I decided that it would be ill advised to attempt to represent a part of West Virginia, which I am not a part of. Additionally, I did not want to make that the focus of the story, or hold up an accent as a reason to laugh at West Virginians.

*“Wild Bill Jones”*

One Friday evening,  
I went ramblin’ around,  
When I met with that Wild Bill Jones.  
Walking and a talking with my little doney-gal,  
And I bid him to leave her alone.

Some say that love is a pleasure, lord.  
No pleasure do I see.  
For one that I love as dear as my life  
Has done gone back on me

I got mixed up in an awful fight,  
And I fell into the county jail.  
The saddest words that ever I heard  
Was when she wouldn’t go my bail.

I wrote my love a letter, lord,  
Asking her to pay my fine.  
She wrote me back in a week or so sayin’,  
“Darlin’ do come home some time.”

One dollar in my pocket book  
And a forty gun in my hand,  
Gonna go and get that gal that I love,  
Or I’m gonna go get her man.

Some say my age is 21,  
Too old for to be controlled.  
I took my revolver from my side,  
And destroyed that poor boy’s soul.

He strangled and he struggled  
All over the ground.  
He gave a dyin’ moan.  
He throw’d up his hands all around her neck  
Saying, “Darling, you’re now left alone.”

Some say that love is a pleasure, lord,  
No pleasure do I see.  
Today was the last of that wild Bill Jones,  
and tomorrow'll be the last of me.

So pass around that long neck bottle, my lord.  
We'll all go out on a spree.  
Today was the last of that wild Bill Jones  
And tomorrow be the last of me.

I first heard this cowboy song in a class called "Women & Community in Old-Time Music" taught by Alice Gerard. Rich Kirby, the grandson of banjo player Addie Graham, came to visit the class and shared this song and its context in his family.

He said, "I never did get a really good recording of [Addie Graham] playing this. I played it for years in a standard timing until I was sent some tapes from a cousin who had died." Some years ago, he heard a recording of her playing it on a piano in a banjo style, dropping a beat at the end of every phrase. Since then, he has been playing it that way as well. Rich Kirby also confided, "I have to admit I added that last verse in about the long neck bottle. She would not have done that."

This was not the only mention of women avoiding or being told to avoid the topic of drinking alcohol in my week at Augusta Heritage Center. Other activities that were thought of as immoral at the time were also strictly off-limits for women. Another anecdote that I have currently forgotten the source for, but which I heard at Augusta Heritage Center, was that a woman asked her mother why she was allowed to sing murder ballads but not cowboy songs, which often included mention of alcohol. The mother told her that the women would never have been murdered in the first place if it had not been for them associating with drunk men. As such pieces like this were considered taboo for women to perform.

Although I wanted to sing a cowboy song as a way of singing a song that women used to not have access to, I still considered the graphicness of the murder, as well as the objectification of the woman in the story, to be problematic. Ultimately, I decided against changing the lyrics, as I wanted to see what I could do by adding visuals that told a different story without changing the initial material.

***New Material******Wild Bill Jones Crankie by Sarah Schwendeman***

I reached out to a friend and visual artist, Sarah Schwendeman, who currently lives in Detroit, Michigan to make a crankie for the piece “Wild Bill Jones.” A crankie is a moving panorama painting, or scrolling story, once popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Spears, n.d.). The painting is rolled on scroll, which is then attached to a wooden dowel; this is then rotated and the picture is steadily unrolled as the story is told in a performance.

I met Schwendeman when I was in my bachelors at the University of Michigan. We were both a part of the Inter-cooperative Council, although we never lived in the same house. After college we began working together at a socially engaged art project working with Covenant House Michigan. Through projects like these I really connected with Schwendeman on a personal level. There, I also saw some of her artwork for the first time. The detail in her portraits was very human and emotive. When I started thinking about collaborators, she seemed like a wonderful fit.

In our conversations, Schwendeman and I talked about what it was like being in Michigan and being in The Netherlands at this moment in history. The gun violence and the consequent protests in the USA this past winter and fall again made us consider how “Wild Bill Jones” might be re-contextualized visually to show our own opinions against gun violence. By focusing on the woman’s part in the story, we decided to also re-contextualize the focus of the song to being on the woman. Schwendeman added more color to the woman in the crankie and made the murder washed out and gray.

We wanted to place the story in the landscape of West Virginia, in part to connect it to some other songs in the project. Perry Maddox had already mentioned several plants and animals such as black gum trees and bittersweet in his lyrics and texts for “October Drought in a Toxic River Valley” and “Dust to Dust and In-between,” so I passed those along to Schwendeman as well. Moreover, I gave a list of plants that I could remember from my childhood, such as pine trees and honey suckles. To learn more about the ecology of West Virginia, I also found several books on plant life in Appalachia. As a result, West Virginian fauna and flora are visible throughout the crankie.

*“October Drought in a Toxic River Valley” by Nadine Dyskant-Miller and Perry Maddox*  
<https://youtu.be/LxiyXhvIm2g>

i.  
 memory grows thick  
 in occupied territory. history pools  
 in old foundations and tumbling walls,  
 runs down  
 empty wandering stairways.  
 apple trees grow thickets,  
 bittersweet shrouds the sidewalk,  
 and the august drought  
 comes in October. but at night  
 the city frees itself from the present  
 we drift off  
 in the strange heat

ii.  
 summer sinks into grey august haze:  
 ancient swamplands  
 hauled out burning  
 from the fevered earth. myla rae



goes slow up the river, body full of coal, and we are told  
whose deaths  
are acceptable.

Nadine Dyskant-Miller is a composer and flutist from a small town in western New York State. Her music<sup>2</sup> draws on her background in classical music, the traditional music of Québec, Ireland, and New England, and free improvisation, as well as her belief in a lifestyle that allows space for breath and observation (Dyskant-Miller, 2018). Perry Maddox, the lyricist, is an oboist and anthropologist, lives in Chicago as well and plays in a Suburban Piano Quartet, which Nadine Dyskant-Miller and Clay Gonzalez also play with.

The piece was very much inspired by conversations the composer and I had about environmental issues in WV. Meanwhile, Maddox had been in West Virginia for several months, and he himself grew up in Virginia. He did an Environmental Science bachelors degree and as such is passionate about food justice, farming practices, and coal mining issues. This piece is multimedia and is accompanied by a video Maddox took this past summer where a coal barge is slowly taking coal upriver.

In the process of talking to the composer and lyricist, I started looking up more about coal mining. I was really surprised when I found that my home was so close by to surface mining and underground mining. I used an interactive map that shows mining near my childhood home (West Virginia Geological & Economic Survey, 2018).

We had issues talking about the original name of the piece, because the term “Indian Summer” has a derogatory meaning behind it connected to indigenous peoples in the USA. It also means a period of time that is especially dry and hot, but comes during the season of fall. In the place we chose another name that still touched on the feeling we meant by the original title but without the veiled meanings. An instructor was leading a workshop on collaborative process and about pitfalls, and she said something like “If there’s an issue you don’t want to talk about, it is probably the thing that you most need to discuss.” I took her advice, and asked Perry Maddox and Nadine Dyskant-

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Miller about this concern. We realized that we all were having the same question about whether we should use the term or not, and jointly we decided to come up with a new title. Through talking about these concerns, a renewed sense of hope grew; through dialogue we found an underlying connection.

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urban farm in Huntington, WV. Maddox was thinking a lot about the layers of history in the area, the nature that exists there, the ruins of mines, the abandoned houses as the economy crumbles, and the feeling of autumn. Kathleen Stewart's *A Space On The Side of the Road*, Keith Basso's *Wisdom Sits In Places*, and Kamal Aljafari's reflections on *Recollection* also influenced Maddox and can be seen when their writing is referred to in certain lines of Maddox's text. Working with Clay Gonzalez and Perry Maddox was a way to represent West Virginia from the eyes of outsiders who had some experience with the state. Both consider themselves Appalachian, albeit from a part with less hills. Like me they also have moved away from Appalachia. When I close my eyes and sing the words, I can see my house in front of me, and I can feel the calmness of a Sunday morning. Clay shared with me that all he knew of West Virginia was what he saw on the drive through on his way to visit family further south. When writing the piece, he tried to get those visuals across, of misty mountains, rolling hills, and the bright colors of fall. To me, this piece represents West Virginia's ability to regrow. Nature overtakes the damage from coalmines and hides the ravages of time. I had several phone conversations with the composer and the lyricist. Perry Maddox talked about the walks he took in Huntington in the summer of 2017.

This was the first new material that I received, and in many ways it fit so perfectly into what I wanted to share about my home state. Many of the trees and plants mentioned by Perry Maddox were not known to me, even once I looked up pictures of them, and it made me interested in finding them this summer when I go back to West Virginia. It showed me the diversity of the area on a level outside of the humans living there. While I loved the text, talking to Clay about his experience of West Virginia, driving through to visit his grandmother was a high point. He shared that he wanted to have a sense of calmness and lack of urgency in his writing, which was a feeling I had often when at home with family. I was happy to have that narrative included in my project and to get to share that part of West Virginia with the world. Getting to talk with Maddox about his nature walks while he was in Wheeling was another. Maddox shared some thoughts about his piece (Maddox, 2018). About part one of the composition, Maddox says he thought of "finding a sense of stillness within and alongside the waves of 'history' washing through a place, noticing plants from here and elsewhere growing up through what remains of a housing project demolished in the 1990s, demolished as its foundations crumbled." Maddox continues on to say, "I would not want the nature and ruins to read as an image of a place abandoned, out of time. There

is much work to do and many lives intertwined here.” About the second part of the composition, Maddox notes that while the term ‘Indian summer’ was removed, the term did bring to mind “how often some (white) people referred to specific scenes of genocidal violence marking the landscape, how deeply the memory of settler colonial conquest is woven through the collective imaginary of (some in) this place, from a painting in the Wheeling Nailers Hockey Arena to the name of a local property law firm.”

Slowly, out of time. With no urgency.  
**p**  
 dust to dust, and in be - tween.

Loop this passage. Calmly, ambiently.  
**pp**

(Bass material does not align with vocal material, play the two as independently as possible.)

Figure 1

**F** Wildly.  
**ff**  
 sul G & D sul D & A sul G & D sul D & A sul G & D sul D & A sul G & D

**G** More subdued. **ppp**  
 seh seh seh seh In  
**mp**  
 sul D & A sul G & D sul D & A sul G & D sul G & D sul D & A

**f**  
 the old house, in the old house, rac-coon kits are nearly grown. In the old house, in the old house, rac-coon kits nearly grown.  
 sul G & D sul G & D sul D & A sul G & D sul G & D sul G & D sul D & A sul G & D

Figure 2

*"The Spitting Contest" Visual*

An additional part of this reflection was working with a visual artist and pianist Anni Rorke. Her artwork helped me create a clear image in my mind that I could focus on when I perform the piece. I will probably not share this image during the performance, although I am considering using it as promotional material or in the program book.

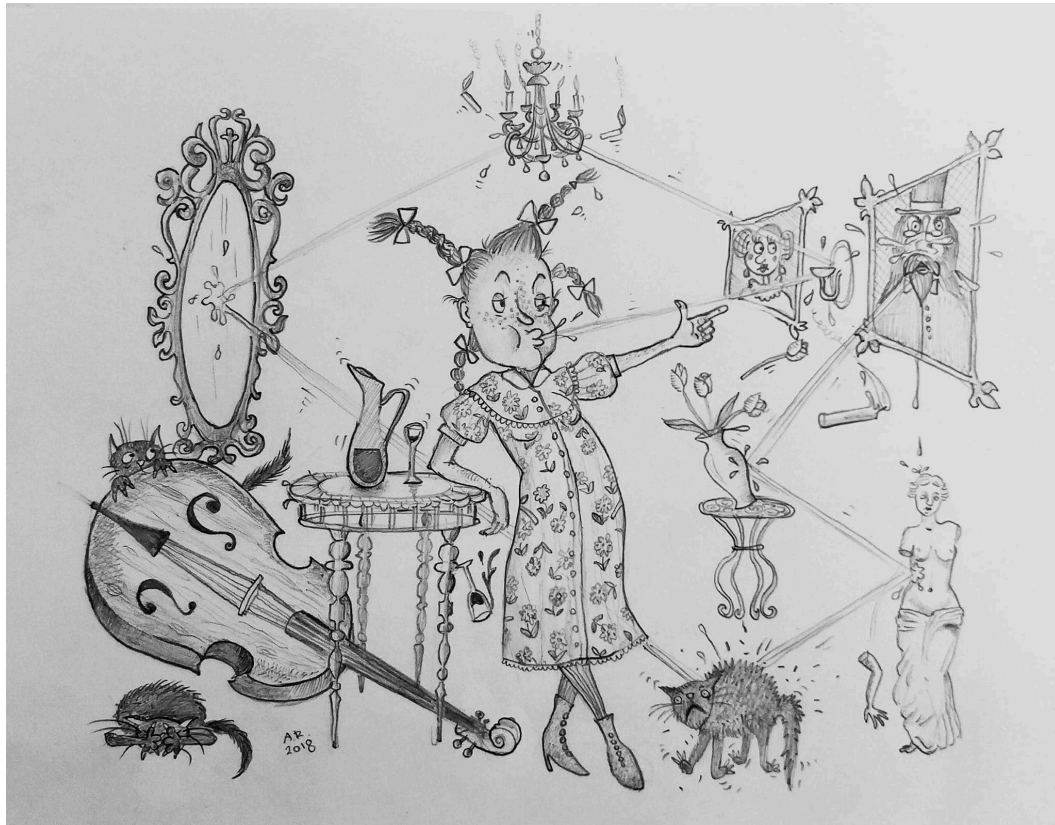


Figure 3 Anni Rorke's visual for 'The Spitting Contest'

*"Ivory Bones" by Christine Hedden*

<https://youtu.be/jPHkjgC6fqM>

Casting lots with iv'ry bones  
Acorns flowers and old pinecones  
You left me here upon the sea

With only angels wings for company

As I look back at that new year  
I cannot find a laugh nor tear  
All I see is wash'd out white  
Lost in manes of mares that reign the night

In the dark I know I was in pain  
Thunderstorms of summer rain  
Snow and wind upon the trees  
Drown'd out cries to God upon my knees

In disbelief that these were wounds  
Far too long I hid the ruins  
For fear of being held as weak  
Silence stole the words that strength would speak

Of late I've wonder'd how to heal  
All these ruins where once I kneel'd  
All these stories left untold  
All these iv'ry bones I've come to hold

The healer finds me by surprise  
Opens up my blinded eyes  
Gives me strength that I may see  
Yours were the hands that wounded me

My ship returns to my homeland  
Where once I pray'd on desert sands  
There healing flows from hands I know  
Where love is deep, new seeds may grow

I will choose the empty path  
Mark'd by neither tear nor laugh  
Cast these bones away at sea  
Your hands are gone and I am free!

The composer, Christine Hedden, is an artist who draws upon traditional, classical and contemporary music (Hedden, 2018a). She is a composer, a fiddle player and violist, a percussive dancer, an improviser and a storyteller in spoken word and song. We communicated over email and Skype, talking about our feelings in general about music, about relationships, and about letting go of things that were meaningful to us. We talked about how to put the bass in an equal role as the

voice, and how to work with colors and timbres of the string instrument in combination with the voice.

It is important to note that the melody was already in her mind before we began talking about collaborating. I had asked her if she would be interested in writing something for double bass and voice, and she shared she had these words and melody in her mind for a while already and would be interested in collaborating to set them for my instrumentation.

I dearly wanted to find a way to include a narrative about a woman protagonist written by a woman and sung by a woman. The folk song “Oh the Wind Blew High” was one of the instigators of this desire; its placement of the woman as an object in need of claiming required a counterbalance, which I decided might be this song. In my mind, “Ivory Bones” is written about relationship that ended badly and about the time and community’s love that was required to heal. The woman singing is clearly the protagonist. The story ends with her finally being free from the emotional and psychological pain that she had been carrying.

In Heddens’ own words (Hedden, 2018b), “‘Ivory Bones’ began as a simple lament at the end of a relationship. At the time, I was trying to follow societal pressure to be strong in the relationship’s aftermath. The writing of the original words and melody followed a very slow discovery of the harm done in that relationship, through a series of PTSD symptoms that are referenced in the song’s metaphors and imagery. Writing this piece helped me to reflect and to heal in a visceral way - there were times in the writing process that felt like ripping off calluses covering deep wounds. I found that I was able to recognize these wounds unabashedly. I was able to feel clarity and strength, not defeat, in this recognition. One of the key characteristics of many destructive relationships is that the relationship isolates you from the people who care about you. In that way, the end of this relationship really felt similar to the feeling of returning home - to be with loved ones again. Throughout the healing process, friends and family gave me their love, whether I was reflectively silent or ripping off calluses and helped me find the vulnerability to love again. The most challenging part of the piece was the ending - a dear friend told me that part of healing would be that I had to write my own ending to the story. I went

through endings that spoke of defeat, justice, revenge, and forgiveness. I thought that I would just find freedom at the end of all this - maybe by the time memories became distant, or whenever I became stronger, or after the piece was finished. I found, instead, that I had to choose this freedom, even before I felt ready to make this choice.”

The song’s themes about women empowerment very much connect to the conversations happening in the USA about domestic abuse, the need for equality, independence, dialogue, and respect in relationships. The need for equality of all genders needed to start for me with the practice of asking a woman to write her experience. It also connected very much to my desire to represent a style and tradition of folk music being made in Appalachia, as the composer comes from a strong tradition of Irish fiddling. While she did not grow up with the tradition of Appalachian fiddle music, and while the music is quite different from that in the Irish tradition, Hedden started “dabbling with singing and playing through another song ‘All We Have.’ Ironically, another political song... I was inspired by Tim O’Brien, especially, when trying this out for the first time. As I was first writing the melody that became ‘Ivory Bones,’ before our collaboration, I was singing and playing with my viola. I wanted to transfer some of the same gestures over to this version with bass, even though the gestures aren’t entirely traditional Americana, nor necessarily bass-like.”

I do not yet have the material memorized, but I plan to do so, especially as I want to be able to connect more openly with my audience and I believe by not having a stand in between us that will be more possible.



The musical score is for the song "West Virginia, My Home". It consists of two systems of music. The first system starts at measure 13 and the second at measure 15. Both systems feature a vocal soloist (A. Solo) and a cello (Cb.).

**System 1 (Measures 13-14):**

- A. Solo:** The melody begins with a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5. The lyrics are "All I see is wash'd out white". The dynamic is *f* (forte). There is a fermata over the word "white".
- Cb.:** The cello part features a complex, rapid sixteenth-note pattern. It includes triplets and is marked with *mf* (mezzo-forte) and *p* (piano).

**System 2 (Measures 15-16):**

- A. Solo:** The melody continues with a half note D5, followed by quarter notes E5, F5, and G5. The lyrics are "Lost in manes of mares that reign the night". The dynamic is *p* (piano).
- Cb.:** The cello part continues with the same rapid sixteenth-note pattern, marked with *mf* and *p*.

Figure 4

*"Untapped Potential" by Jacob Sandridge*

dark and humid  
 on the other side of the screen door,  
 cool humid air clings to the branches and holds my mind motionless  
 wrapping me in familiarity  
 but, familiar is two-faced  
 an anesthetic  
 that lets us set the rest of the world aside  
 -- the summer night lulls us back to false innocence

on this side of the screen door,  
 the local news sputters and grease sizzles  
 listening to statistics only slows the secondhand -  
 on the local news, the helped talk about addicts  
 in a resigned, matter-of fact way  
 the way one talks about distant things  
 "untapped potential" they buzzword, offering a quick fix  
 without understanding the time it takes to turn a ship

in making a decision to leave or stay  
 I consider the dime  
 promised to teachers; the pension  
 promised to miners; the apology letters  
 promised to valley streams

and I run.

Jacob Sandridge composed this piece. He was also the only fellow West Virginian I was able to work with on *West Virginia, My Home*. When I visited my hometown, Morgantown, West Virginia this summer, I had a chance encounter with him while he was sitting in the Creative Arts Center at West Virginia University, preparing his lessons in the hallway. I originally met Jacob at a summer course called West Virginia Governors School for the Arts when I was still in high school. I had not seen him in several years. When we meet for coffee a while later, we talked about what it is like to grow up in West Virginia, and to leave. We discussed that we were interested in exploring a plurality of and we wished more voices and narratives were audible in the echo chambers we found ourselves in online on social media. He had recently come back and was applying for doctoral degrees that would again take him away.

His story is not uncommon. Many young people are forced to leave West Virginia to find jobs and better lives. I hear often from friends that they have left because they had to, not because they wanted to. They spend their lives looking over their shoulder and missing home. It is something that many West Virginians experience, and is often sung about in traditional music from the state. West Virginia has the oldest median population of any state, and from 1990 to 2000 it had a net loss of about 18,000 people in the 18 to 22 age group area (Urbina, 2006). While there are many who want to stay in West Virginia, those who do stay are often seen as ‘less than,’ primarily because they are assumed to have not had the opportunity to have left (Adducchio & Mistich, 2014). “As West Virginia's population has shrunk, so has its economy. It placed No. 49 for its economy and No. 50 for employment, with some of the lowest unemployment rates and labor force participation rates, in U.S. News' Best States rankings” (Leins, 2017).

One of the lines in his text, “the helped talk about addicts,” points out the opioid epidemic in the country. West Virginia has the highest economic burden per person, in addition to it being a huge strain on families. This epidemic has cost taxpayers billions (A. Bishop, 2018). West Virginia University even launched a minor in addiction studies in March 2018 to help fight the nation’s rising opioid crisis (“West Virginia University launches minor in addiction studies to combat the nation’s opioid crisis,” 2018).

Since graduating from my public high school, more than several classmates have died due to drug overdose. In a conversation over lunch with a high school friend this summer, we talked about them number of people we knew struggling with this issue. I told her I felt far away since moving out of Morgantown. I felt like more often than not, lately I was logging into Facebook and seeing a post about a classmate who was dead. She made the sobering comment, “Whenever you hear that someone’s died, and no reason is given, it was drug overdose.” I have not been able to get that thought out of my head all year. Even since I have been gone, I have had two people that I knew die. I would haphazard the guess that most people in the state know not one but several people struggling with opioid addiction. While I want to have the courage to stay in West Virginia and work to change the state’s course, I made the same decision as Jacob: to run.

This piece was the only chance for me to work on new material in this project with another West Virginian. I definitely wanted to include and represent West Virginians in a project about West Virginia, so this was a key partnership for me. I believe that this material most clearly speaks to my own experience; it shares how I am drawn to the familiarity of West Virginia but at the same time need to leave because of the future I see for others and myself there. This is an experience I want people to empathize with when they think about West Virginia. I want this narrative to be present, as it shares a lot about the experiences of many Appalachians. Sandridge’s own suggested program notes highlight his experience as a West Virginian along with his openness to there being many experiences different to his (2018).

Figure 5 shows measures 28-31 of the musical score. The score is for Voice and Bass. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: "But on this side of the screen door the lo - cal news sput - ters and grease siz - zles". The Voice part starts at measure 28 with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The Bass part starts at measure 28 with a *ppp* dynamic, marked *molto sul pont.* and *arco*. The Bass part has a *sub. f* dynamic at measure 29. The Voice part has a *p* dynamic at measure 31. The Bass part has a *pp* dynamic at measure 31. The Bass part ends at measure 31 with a *q* (quarter note) marking.

Figure 5

Figure 6 shows measures 68-72 of the musical score. The score is for Voice and Bass. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: "not un-der - stand - ing the time it takes to turn a ship". The Voice part starts at measure 68 with a *ff* dynamic. The Bass part starts at measure 68 with a *ff* dynamic. The Voice part has a *rit.* (ritardando) marking at measure 70. The Voice part has a *mf* dynamic at measure 70. The Bass part has a *mf* dynamic at measure 70. The Voice part starts at measure 72 with a tempo marking of  $\text{♩} = 72$ . The Bass part starts at measure 72 with a *mp* dynamic. The Voice part ends at measure 72. The Bass part ends at measure 72.

Figure 6

## 7.5 DESIGN AND FORM

When considering staging and lighting, I thought about whether to put attention on the words of a song, on me as a performer, or on visual material I was using. Through experimentation over the course of three days under the guidance of Katinka Marac, I was able to begin my journey as a classically trained performer with no prior experience in considering such elements. Through trial and error I discovered how I might change the experience of the audience and how they felt included and welcomed to participate in the performance based on simple changes in when, where, and how I lighted the stage. As far as presentation style, through the act of videoing the workshop with Marac, I realized I need to memorize material as much as possible, making as much eye contact, or at least being open and relaxed.

In addition to venue location, I looked for venues that would provide intimate spaces to perform where I could connect with the audience before, during and after the performance portion. I also took care to find a variety of performances in a variety of locations, so that I could play for different subgroups of my target audience. In addition to the try-out performances of portions of *West Virginia, My Home* in The Netherlands, I focused on finding venues in West Virginia and in Michigan, where I lived for several years. I perform in the USA. Based on the experience of those, I will consider creating more performances in The Netherlands and elsewhere. I want to avoid changing aspects specific to the international population I am performing for here, but rather build on the skills that I can grow from here. For instance, I have noticed that I have had to work on enunciation of my words, and this issue is exaggerated as I am now performing mostly for non-native English speakers. However, I do not want to change my own dialect or accent just to be better understood in The Netherlands, as that would in my opinion negatively affect the project as far as authenticity and ability to connect back in the United States.



## 7.6 AUDIENCE

I especially want to perform the music for Americans, in and outside of West Virginia. Since my premise was to create a dialogue around West Virginia, I especially do not want to forget those living in the region. They need to be the first to be included and invited to the performances.

## 7.7 MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

This element was the last one I considered, as I needed to set dates and venues for the performances. Still, based on my difficulty in finding examples of other artists doing similar work to me, it is important not to forget about the kinds of communications I create.

In marketing the event, I have been thinking about how I will reach out to my target audience. Being accessible in my communications is key to considering equity and inclusivity in my project. In the performances I have scheduled thus far, I will have no control of communications leading up to the day of other than the short biography and description I will share to be posted in the Facebook events promoting the event. I hope that by sharing self-written description with the organizations producing my performance I will be able to mitigate this issue. I will also try to get

some local newspapers in the towns where I am performing in West Virginia to post the performance in their events page so that people not connected to these organizations might also find out. I believe that putting announcements on the radio, despite seeming old fashioned to me, will be a way to increase the older populations' attendance. In the communications I will not discuss my own political views; instead, I plan to talk more about the mixing of folk music and classical music with storytelling elements. I hope to get as many people, with different views, to attend.

My success also will be tied to the locations I choose and the crowd that would normally attend an event at those venues. So far I have found several churches and local arts organizations to host my events. I believe that by choosing these two kinds of venues I will be able to reach a broader section of the audience, including people who might not normally attend 'classical' performances with new music. On the other hand, in this way, I believe that I also might be able to play folk music for an audience that generally mostly hears new music. I believe that by mixing these elements, I can be inclusive in providing new material to the kind of middle class, liberal audience I generally might perform for outside of West Virginia, while also being able to play in a generally more conservative location. This is an assumption that will be tested during the summer of 2018.

I have decided against program notes for the event, as I want to focus on storytelling on stage, and as I want many things to be left in the air and discussed afterward. Additionally, I did not want to waste paper when possible.

Some recordings made of material in *West Virginia, My Home* will be located on my website, on YouTube, and on SoundCloud. Along with these recordings, wherever possible, I will provide some text sharing who made the material or where I learned it, where the piece came from, and how I found or commissioned it. I will also not plan to share my own political views more clearly than they have been stated in the texts of the materials I perform. I have not yet added these descriptive notes to all the online locations hosting information about my project.

## CHAPTER 8: ROLES IN THE PERFORMANCE

Through these roles I was able to collaborate with folk musicians, composers, visual artists, and presenters to create a unique performance that was more in touch with my values than any artistic project I had been involved with before. As such I felt more motivated, engaged, and passionate about the project and my future artistic practice.

In many ways I did find working with others a challenge when it came to following my own interpretation of my values in the actions I took; I could not take only my own values and interpretations of equity, empathy, and inclusion into account. Still, it was important to accept the challenge, as it required me to have dialogues about these values in order to empathize with different perspectives, to include others' perspectives in the final project, and to provide opportunities for other young artists work to be heard and seen.

I was able to work through most of the challenges using my reflective and reflexive processes, many of which I took into account before deciding the roles I would take or the collaborators I would ask.

### 8.1 PERFORMER

In the case of *West Virginia, My Home*, I decided I would be the only performer. This was in large part because I started working on this project outside of the USA in the Netherlands, at the Royal Conservatoire of The Hague. No one I knew in the Netherlands fit the criteria I had set for myself when deciding who I would work with. If I worked with other performers, I wanted to work with people who had an interest in Appalachian folk music, who would sing and play an instrument as well, and who felt they had a stake in the American political system. Most of all I needed stability in knowing that I could work with someone who would have the same fervor and excitement for the project as me. While it was inconvenient in many ways to be in The Netherlands for the duration of this project, it also pushed me to try my and at being a solo performer, something I might not have otherwise had the courage to try. It also pushed me to take many new roles other



than performer. If I had been in the USA, I might well have never come to the same decisions as I did in The Netherlands.

At one point I was in Finland and had the opportunity to perform but had no double bass. I decided to work with an accordionist to perform two of the found materials, “Oh the Wind Blows High” and “Wild Bill Jones,” both folk songs I learned in West Virginia. While playing with a new instrument and having the additional personality of a second performer on stage was exciting, the experience, although fulfilling in many ways, left me surer that I needed to continue this project on my own. Playing with the accordionist was very helpful in that it gave me more ideas about accompaniment and timbre of some found materials I was arranging myself.

There are many layers of meaning in contemporary performance. The lack of inclusion is not only who is on the stage, but which pieces are performed, and who is off the stage managing lights, or benefitting from the performance. This requires a lot of thought and awareness on the part of the performer about their own identity and privilege in society.

The identity and values of performers should also be taken into account in what it can mean for an audience, I would argue. While the foundations above are focused on inclusion and representation, I believe, especially in songs with problematic text, there may be a way of pointing out inequity by being the same identity of the person mistreated in the text. For instance, I considered the fact that I was a woman in several of the found materials I used, in the hope that by being represented, visually and audibly, in a story written from a man’s perspective, I could point out inequity and inequality. Examples of this consideration can be seen in “Wild Bill Jones” and “Sarah.” There are many layers of meaning in contemporary performance. The lack of inclusion is not only who is on the stage, but which pieces are performed, and who is off the stage managing lights, or benefitting from the performance. This can require a lot of thought and awareness on the part of the performer about their own identity and privilege in society. I argue that the identity and values of performers should also be taken into account in what it can mean for an audience. While the foundations above are focused on inclusion and representation, I believe, especially in songs with problematic text, there may be a way of pointing out inequity by being the same identity of the person mistreated in the text.

This role was the most natural one for me to take in a performance, given my own training; however, I quickly realized that all of my training had prepared me to be a musician in the very specific roles of chamber or orchestral Western classical music. I also had played in several folk and pop bands and improvised quite a lot, but these were very different kinds of being when presenting a solo performance aimed at connecting with an audience through narrative and storytelling. I needed to be more aware than ever of my stage presence. I decided that in this role I would also need to broaden my awareness of performance, especially of being on a stage and using my voice. In order to prepare this role, I started taking vocal lessons alongside my instrumental lessons; there we worked on aspects of stage presence, of making eye contact, and of being vulnerable on stage. I am continuing to realize more and more ways that I can take these considerations into account when working on projects other than this one.

## **8.2 CURATOR**

According to *The Curator's Handbook* (George, 2015), “The social engagement aspect of curatorial practice seems to be a core feature of 21<sup>st</sup>-century curatorial practice. Hans Ulrich Obrist has commented that ‘the whole curatorial thing has to do not only with exhibitions, it has a lot to do with bringing people together.’” In this sense, it seems to fit well into my values of inclusion and might also be a way to build empathy. Also, George mentions that one important aspect of the curator’s role is the “potential it offers to focus on a particular subject and bring it to the public’s attention at a specific moment.” Through juxtaposition and interpretation of music, curators can select, assemble, arrange, and oversee ideas, which can generate dialogue (p. 13). George shares that ‘risk,’ a challenge for the curator and the composer or artist, is important as it can lead to dialogue and new developments in both fields. I found in my project that when there was a foundation of trust, I felt much more comfortable taking a risk working with composers and visual artists in creating material unlike what they might have made before. According to George, “Ideas are key to good curatorial practice, as are thorough research and an awareness of the potential audience for the project” (p. 30). Additionally, George shares that one should allow an audience member the freedom to direct their experience in a way that reading a book or text would not

allow, and one should strive to avoid being didactic. He suggests that the process of reflection is key; a curator needs to experience as many other performances as possible, have a conversation with other curators, academics, and artists (p. 33).

### **8.3 COMPOSER OR CREATOR**

This is not a role I took on myself in the process of making this performance, but it was a key role in creating material that shared different viewpoints, by increasing inclusion of Appalachian narratives in new contemporary music. In my role as commissioner, discussed below, I thought a lot about whom I would ask to compose pieces for me. It was not an achievable goal to create my own material, as I did not have the skills, time or confidence to create my own music. Instead, I used my strengths as a performer and my interest in collaboration in order to be socially engaged and connect to my values.

Many of the composers work together frequently as performers. Annika Socolofsky, Christine Hedden, Nadine Dyskant-Miller, and Tanner Porter all play together as 'Ensoleil', a folk group especially playing music from the British Isles and Scotland. Clay Gonzalez, Perry Maddox, and Nadine Dyskant-Miller also play together in a new music group called Suburban Piano Quartet. I had originally wanted Appalachian and non-Appalachian composers to be equally represented in my project. I did not succeed in this goal, as I was not able to find many West Virginian composers, and those I did find were already too busy to take on an additional project or were not able to commit to creating something without compensation. I was able to collaborate with one West Virginian composer, Jake Sandridge.

I worked hard to find composers who fit most if not all these criteria; 1) knew folk music well and would treat it with respect, 2) made music I enjoyed listening to or performing, 3) were interested in the project from a personal perspective and wanted to have conversations around issues happening in the USA, 4) represented a diverse group of people who were perhaps less heard in new music, 5) who I felt I could trust to work lovingly on a piece connecting to a place I loved deeply, or 6) were from Appalachia. These criteria also held true for my choice to work with Sarah

Schwendeman on the crankie for “Wild Bill Jones.” In addition, I worked hard to ask an equal number of composers who did not identify as men.

I am still considering where I would put my role of arranger of the folk music or stories I learned. I would not call it composition, and perhaps it falls within the role of curator, but I did create a double bass part as a second voice or accompaniment for the folk melodies. For now, I considered it within this section.

## **8.4 COMMISSIONER**

I was not able to create new material on my own at the starting point of this project, so I used my role as curator of the project to collaborate with composers and visual artists and request them to create materials for use in the performance.

When possible, I wanted to avoid the standard role of commissioner, where I as the performer would suggest the kind of composed material that I would prefer, and the composer would go away to write the material, bringing it back only at the final stage. Rather than my creative work being to realize the composer’s preexisting material, I wanted to be a part of the creative process when possible. Quite often this can lead to issues of power balance and lack of trust between the composer and performer.

In my role as commissioner, I attempted to highlight the importance of awareness of diversity and of issues of equity. I wanted to share the relationship between nationhood and place identity, which I felt were very present in West Virginia.

Based on past experiences of working with composers, I wanted to avoid the lack of communication that often occurred between the initiation and the reception of the final product. In some ways I succeeded, but there were still quite a few times where I caught myself in an uncomfortable position, wondering what I could claim ownership of and what I was not able to change or discuss. I consistently found that when I had the courage to start a dialogue, to empathize with where the composer was coming from, that I learned a lot more about my own opinions and values, whether or not we were able to reach an agreement. As a result of some

standstills or differing opinions I did decide to take some materials out of the project, at least for the time being.

I was interested in the hegemonic binary that often occurred between composers and performers, which I felt was often emphasized by the lack of contact between the two groups, and the lack of understanding of each group's needs. Due to past negative experiences working with composers where I felt there was no importance placed on dialogue or communication between the two roles, I attempted to create open pathways for communication. This varied extremely depending on who I was working with, but for the most part I felt that I had deep conversations about ideas connected and disconnected to the new musical and visual material that was being created for the project.

This openness was especially important when composers came with concepts for material that at first felt at odds with my own goals. In all cases but one, I came to understand and respect their concepts. Personal interactions helped me remember my initial intentions, to hear new thoughts, to empathize with differing ideas, and this calmed my occasional urge to discard material because it did not connect to my initial gut feeling. Face-to-face, or in many cases, phone and Skype conversations, allowed us to connect with each other, outside of our roles and to empathize with the issues each creative role dealt with, which in turn helped us find solutions. Additionally, in my roles of performer and commissioner and their roles as composers and creators, we were able to clarify goals and intentions on both side and to check in often. In all cases, taking time to reflect on my own role in the process was key. Often part of the solutions were in the curation of the pieces, how they were placed next to each other, or on top of each other in the case of mixing visual and musical materials.

## **8.5 COLLECTOR**

Through my role as curator I decided to also consider the collection of found material, in this case visuals, folk music, and stories. I separate this as a role in that the decision to go to West Virginia and learn songs and stories by ear seems to be outside the scope of the average curator in classical music. Additionally, the term of collector was often used for folklorists like Cecil Sharp, who went to Appalachia four times between 1916 and 1918 collecting material (Gold & Revill, 2006; Sharp,

1932). Taking on this role brought up a lot of ethical questions for me, especially when considering the production process, as discussed in the section below.

While the role of curator may often be combined with that of collector, especially in the world of visual arts, this seemed to be a different kind of role.

I might have also curated without having collected already existing materials, except I was interested in connecting to the place and people of West Virginia. I also had the desire to explore tradition in the midst of innovation and change. Because of this, I turned towards folk music as a way to begin conversations and learn more about where I was from. Through learning folk music, I engaged in another kind of reflection about my upbringing and how little I had known about the music surrounding me but unheard during my childhood. In my role as collector, I needed to be cognizant of the preferences I might have in how I gathered folk music. I actively tried to find a mix of songs with British roots and with American roots. I wanted as much as possible to avoid the pitfalls of searching for a 'pure' kind of folk music.

Additionally, as a collector, I had a lot of field recordings I had considered that I might use. Reflexive ethical debates in sampling (Born & Hesmondhalgh, 2000) kept me from trying to sample the original recordings of some folk singers and fiddlers I was inspired by.

I aimed for equal representation of found and new material, hoping to build empathy in and outside of West Virginia by playing music that both would not have heard but that would show different perspectives and narratives.

As I am not trained as a folk musician, I needed to consider how I could avoid butchering a beautiful style or appropriating a pain that was not my own. As a classical musician, I was also concerned about the elitism that came with that label, and how I could mix the two genres in a way that did not cheapen either. I decided upon a rejection of simple notions of authenticity and instead thought about the plurality of possibilities. I wanted to avoid copying a piece completely and wanted to find a way to be authentic to myself while giving credence to the tradition. The aim was to find living and breathing pieces, and to keep them alive in my performance, so I also chose to create semi-improvised sections, even if the improvisations were in the kind of timbre used or were about chance and lack of predictability, as in "Camp a Little While in the Wilderness." I also

learned the folk songs by heart from recordings, rather than writing down the text, even though as a classical musician I was much more comfortable with notated material. The lyrics are all written down in this research, but these are transcriptions from the recordings, only written down after I had memorized the words from listening. In the collection of all materials I took part in a dialogue about the values connected with these pieces with those I was collecting from.

## **CHAPTER 9: FINAL REFLECTIONS ON *WEST VIRGINIA, MY HOME***

By going through a process of reflection and reflexivity, I came away from this project with a lot to consider. This was the first time in my life I could consider my own values throughout the entirety of a project. As such, I learned a lot about the process and the decisions I made. I gained so much personally by diving into a project with so many roles and elements. These thoughts are shared below.

### **9.1 CONNECTING TO VALUES THROUGH REFLECTION AND REFLEXIVITY**

Versions of Brookfield's four lenses and Orning's model were important frameworks to look at my own project. Throughout the process of critically reflecting, I considered how my own point of view and assumptions were playing a role in my decisions about elements of the performance.

Through Brookfield's lenses, I worked to get as many opinions on the project as I could, pulling from other artists' feedback, my autobiography as a musician and as a West Virginian, as well as audience's reactions. The process of getting all of this advice and feedback, as well as constant ideas and doubts, was tiring and energizing at the same time. The influx of fresh ideas and new concerns that reflexivity brought to light made it difficult to come to a decision about a lot of aspects of the project. This uncertainty was a needed emotion in the process towards making my work stronger and more cohesive in its connection to my personal values at multiple levels and through different elements of the performance.

The framework of reflection worked towards my own values, Brookfield's lenses asked me to include different opinions in considering my work and to empathize with others' thoughts. The division of a performance into different elements, based on Orning's model, provided me the foresight to structure my project with equitable opportunities for those I wanted to include and empathize with. It allowed me to see where I was forgetting my values or simplifying them. Through her model, I also realized that I was able to make my production process a part of my concept, by doing my best to have conversations with all the composers and collaborators I worked with.



Through reflection, specifically the literature review, I found explanations for why some performances I attend or perform in do not sit well with me. Also, I found more practical solutions, sometimes quite small, that would make the performance connect to personal values I held. Some solutions I used myself in *West Virginia, My Home* were reframing materials I found problematic, considering my identity and experiences as well as those of my collaborators, and asking fellow artists, especially collaborators, to check my own opinions and provide feedback.

## 9.2 TAKING ON NEW ROLES & FINDING AGENCY

At this point in time I need to move away from being a performer in the traditional sense of the word. In most projects within my artistic practice I was stuck in the role of a performer with little to no role in creating or deciding upon the concept, the production process, or any other element of the performance. This left me feeling that I had very little agency in creating art connected with my own values. For future projects where I do only play the role of performer, I will search for like-minded people and organizations holding similar personal values, even if their decisions and behaviors sometimes were different than mine. I would look for people and groups who value inclusion, empathy, and equity. I hope that these people will be interested in equal collaboration and in dialogue. I would like to continue to find ways to be a bigger part of the creative process, either by continuing to arrange and curate my performances in a more deliberate manner, or by improvising, arranging, or composing my own music.

For me, the experience of thinking about the curation and performance of an event was transformative. I had to think about layers of meaning I was conveying assumptions I had made. The process of considering which roles I was and was not taking made me interested in exploring how it would be to take the other roles, to not be a performer, and much more. Sharing these roles with others brings a lot of responsibility in connecting with the collaborators one chooses to work with.

The combined experience of creating, collecting, and commissioning materials as well as performing helped me understand the importance in my own artistic practice of taking on new roles in order to have agency to connect with my personal values in *West Virginia, My Home*. I

need to further consider how collaborators can both positively and negatively affect my ability to connect to my values. I enjoyed the process of collaborating with composers and visual artists to make a performance that attempted to be cohesive in theme. One difficulty I had during this project was that composers who had produced material felt a certain ownership of it, which made it impossible to have free rein in combining all the material into a cohesive performance. This was not a failure of the project, as I had wanted to explore various voices, those of insiders and outsiders. In future projects, I would need to further clarify the final uses of material or to find ways to make the process more collaborative. It could also be that by working with one composer, I might be able to have a more cohesive performance.

### **9.3 MIXING NEW AND FOUND MATERIALS**

This process of commissioning material from composers and visual artists while also collecting materials from West Virginia was fascinating for me. It opened up a lot of issues to think about, by letting me compare the treatment of classical music and folk music. Adding new materials allowed me to balance old materials when considering my personal values. Examples of trying to provide balance are often involved incorporating women into the narrative. Examples are “Ivory Bones,” a story of a woman’s empowerment, and “Wild Bill Jones,” whose visuals were an attempt of the visual artist to show the female character in high resolution while showing the men in faded black and white.

I was surprised at how nostalgic a lot of the new materials felt. I wonder if I unintentionally sparked this by requesting that it all be connected to West Virginia. Since many of the composers were not from West Virginia, they may have had a specific image in their mind of what Appalachia was, the same image I was working to question. I had hoped that the new materials would balance the old materials and provide new sounds and ways of experiencing West Virginia. There were many difficulties in combining so many different narratives and also combining all the different collaborations, but it also provided new opportunities.

## 9.4 USING MY VOICE AS AN INSTRUMENTALIST

Since embarking on this project I have found that adding my voice helped me connect to the place of Appalachia, through use of narrative and lyrics. The sound of my voice has been shaped by where I grew up, and as such it was impossible to take ‘the West Virginia’ out of me.

Still, using my voice does not come without its own set of problems. As all of my material was in English, I had originally thought it would mean that almost everywhere I went the musical narrative would be understood. With the use of words came my expectation that people would better understand my work and the meaning I felt behind the songs; this has not always been the case. I still believe it was important for me to use my voice and to use my words, as it helped me to go more deeply into the stories and narratives existing in West Virginia.

Using my voice also complicates matters by adding expectation and responsibility. Once I began using words, I felt free but also an extreme weight and accountability to use them well. Having words in all the materials meant that I also interpreted them myself in a way that I could not have done with only instrumental works. This interpretation required reflexivity and empathy, as some words in the materials did not always connect with my values. I needed to find ways to interpret them and place them with context in order to be willing to perform them.

## 9.5 LEARNING ABOUT DESIGN AND FORM

Some elements of performance had heretofore been out of my reach. By using my voice, I became more aware of the importance of connecting to the audience and as such placed much more consideration on the design and form of the performance. There were suddenly seemingly more ways to be connected than I had ever considered before as a classically trained instrumentalist. I began to think about staging, lighting, and stage presence in much more detail. Working with Katinka Marac, Bas Maassen, and Manon Heijne was essential in considering how *I* could exist on a stage without putting on a character. Exploring more theatrical forms, aided by lighting design and staging, gave me so many new ideas to put into practice and to continue to explore.

## **9.6 CONNECTING WITH PEOPLE AND PLACE**

I wanted to connect to people and place. As someone who grew up thinking I was not quite West Virginian enough to be a West Virginian, in part due to parents from outside of the region, I was nervous to connect back to the area. I had left nearly seven years ago and had not looked back until now. I believe this project will not be my last one to connect to West Virginia. Even if that is not the place I choose to connect with in future projects, I have a strong urge to connect to and build on feelings of community and the stories that community tells. I found by focusing so intently on West Virginia that I began to find connections to stories of people around the world. I am interested in the universals and the particulars of a place and how to tell stories that share the unique characteristics of home without shutting others out.

## **9.7 EMPATHIZING BY LISTENING**

Pauline Oliveros, John Cage, and many other musicians and composers have explored the possibilities of listening. I found the quiet repetition of many of the materials I commissioned, collected, and/or created to fit extremely well with the hope of creating a place to quietly contemplate and have an inner dialogue. This aesthetic of the music was interesting especially as it connected to my desire to empathize and to understand.

Many of the materials I used asked me as a performer to listen in ways I had not before. I created some of these myself to accompany old materials, such as the bass accompaniment for “Camp A Little While in the Wilderness” and “Oh the Wind Blew High,” which asked me to listen to changes in timbre and pitch that were almost impossible to predict even as the performer. New material such as the introduction of “Dust to Dust and In-between” created a meditative calm where I could hear small changes in timbre. All of “October Drought in a Toxic River Valley” asked me as a performer to listen to the background sounds of the coal barge and of the insects. By instructing me to blend with the insects, and to allow the barge to take over the voice, I needed to be extremely aware of each and every noise.

Additionally, by using words, I found that as a performer I could focus on the sounds of the words, the feeling of the words, or the meaning of the words. Most of all, my accent belonged to the places I had been, foremost among them West Virginia. This left me listening to them in an entirely new way by the end of the process of putting together the project.

## **9.8 LEARNING FROM ASSUMPTIONS AND ACCEPTING DISCOMFORT**

I had many assumptions going into the project, and many proved untrue or at least more complex than I had guessed. Based on the small try out performances I have completed so far, I have found that people from outside of Appalachia hold distinct prejudices for the area, not all seemingly negative. The same held true for West Virginians and other Appalachians. I believe there needs to continue to be more balance between tradition and innovation; rather than holding onto an old-time feeling mixed with nostalgia, we need to move on. I realized that other parts of the globe are experiencing the same pains in West Virginia. I want to continue to consider how I as an artist can engage in these changes.

There are still many unanswered questions for me about this specific project, and my larger artistic practice. I have tried to be comfortable with the idea that at many times in the presentation of my work, I may feel discomfort. I put myself in a situation that is not easy; I am asking a lot from myself as a performer, and have put myself into many new roles. Additionally, as I am interested in this project being socially engaged, I need to remember to empathize and listen when I receive feedback on the project. This must be a part of my work if I am to stay open to other points of view.

Key to the success of my performance is in many ways the audience, and yet I have not been able to perform for my target audience yet. This has left me with many assumptions. Now, I wonder if I have been courageous in whom I seek out to be my audience. Will I be able to perform the project in front of both liberal and conservative audiences? How can I foster dialogue before and after the performances? These questions have yet to be answered.

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