MINE EYES HAVE SEEN THE COMING OF THE LORD: A BRIEF HISTORY OF APPALACHIAN MUSIC AND MASS CONSUMER CAPITALISM

A Thesis

by

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Abstract

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The commodification of Appalachian music coincided with the commodification of the Appalachian natural world in the 20th century. Mass consumer capitalism has come to direct human activities in Appalachia via the expropriation of Appalachian land and Appalachian labor. The mass consumption of the Appalachian natural world has taken place alongside the mass consumption of Appalachian culture, which has greatly affected the development of communities within the region. As of the 1920s, Appalachian music has been marketed and sold to a growing population of expropriated Appalachians, who leave home in search of an economic freedom that could not be found in the mountains. Oftentimes, Appalachian musicians must also flee their home communities in order to achieve a certain level of success in a capitalist hierarchy. This mass disconnection from place has allowed for the widespread consumption of the Appalachian natural world, which has in turn led to human and environmental disasters that occur in the name of wealth accumulation. Capitalism has created a culture of consumption in Appalachia, and this temporary economic structure threatens to fully consume the Appalachian environment at the same time that it consumes the culture that Appalachia would bring into the world.

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I want to thank me. I want to thank me, for believing in me. I want to thank me for doing all this hard work. I want to thank me for having no days off. I want to thank me for never quitting. I want to thank me for being a giver, who tries to give more than I receive. I want to thank me for trying to do more right than wrong. I just want to thank me for being me at all times.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to everyone that helped me along the way.

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Introduction

-Meme by Author.

I

One smokey evening at The Burl in Lexington, Kentucky, Katie Didit was performing with Mama Said String Band, a local bluegrass outfit, when she displayed a skill rarely seen from musicians who play the double bass. Didit gently tilted the heavy bass to one side, shifting the weight, so that the endpin was given a respite from its job of keeping everything upright. While still maintaining the beat for her compatriots, Katie stood atop her instrument, so that she was looking down at both the crowd and the microphone, a feat of entertainment that cannot easily be replicated by the average musician who plays the bluegrass double bass. Standing in at a towering 5'4", Didit can climb atop her bass with little fear of structurally damaging the priceless piece of equipment. After the show, Katie and her bandmates packed up their gear in order to load everything into the van, which awaited like a sort of parking lot chariot for the night's VIP entertainment.

Didit, a native of Isom, Kentucky, could not have displayed such showmanship at a bar in Lexington unless she had first made a business decision that drew her away from Letcher County. Residing now in southern Indiana, Katie earns a living by playing a majority of her shows in Louisville and Lexington, the two largest cities in the commonwealth. Although still connected to Eastern Kentucky through familial ties, Katie makes her home closer to where she earns her survival. Like many Appalachian people before her, Katie has chosen to make her life in the place that she believes to be most beneficial for her career, her career just happens to be the reproduction of Appalachian music. Geographic movement has remained a constant aspect of humanity's presence on the earth, and relocation to southern Indiana for Katie Didit came

easily because she was born into a society where disconnecting from one's place in the world has become the norm for over a century.

Katie's father worked as a coal miner for most of her life, meaning that her family's relationship with the natural world could become complicated at times. On the one hand, laboring towards the consumption of call ladened mountains in southwestern Virginia provided a sustained life for Katie and the rest of her family during her time spent in Eastern Kentucky. On the other hand, the reality of the environmental ramifications that affected conditions in her place in the world were hard to ignore whenever brown water would come out of the sink. Once Katie fell in love with music, it would become apparent that she would have to leave Eastern Kentucky in order to secure her survival through performance. Survival has inspired the movement of millions of people long before mass consumer capitalism would deal such an ultimatum to Appalachian musicians. Survival also inspired the movement of philosopher Hannah Arendt, who experienced the threat more directly than modern bluegrass musicians.

Hannah Arendt, a German-Jewish philosopher, had to leave her place in the world during the events that preceded the Holocaust in the 1930s. Politically forced to flee Germany, Arendt began meditating on the concept of expropriation, defined by her and other philosophers as a forced loss of place. Expropriation cannot be simplified as merely a random disconnection from one's home, as it constitutes a sort of manufactured loneliness and isolation brought on by the collective work of mass consumer capitalism, an artifice that has existed in the world for nearly 200 years.[1] Starting by disconnecting human beings from the natural world, a world meant to

[1] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 41.

sustain the appetites of humans and other living creatures, mass consumer capitalism has isolated and disconnected humanity in ways that still have drastic effects on the planet.

Prior to the industrial expansion, the persistence of human beings was dependent upon the natural world. Labor, a repetitive action meant to ensure survival, includes the consumption of resources like food and water as well as any actions that support humans' struggle for existence. The natural world was consumed by the labor of the individual and sometimes by the familial unit in an agrarian setting. The consumption or survival of the familial unit depended upon the labor that the family could perform in the private realm of their home property. Labor's connection to consumption fundamentally differentiates it from work, and the two concepts are often mistaken for one another in the modern age.[2]

While labor can be defined by its relationship to the biological life process of human beings and other living creatures, work is defined by its relationship to anything that transforms nature into a new and more lasting form, what Hannah Arendt calls "The Human World."[3] Culture, law, architecture, politics, and art are all products of work and have existed solely within the metaphorical "city walls" of humanity since people began creating lasting impressions on the earth. Work cannot exist in the private realm because the products of work require the cooperation of two individuals in order to be fully rendered into a shared human experience, one to produce the work, and one to admire it. Works of art or literature cannot remain in the private realm if they are recognized by humankind as outstanding examples of human achievement.[4]

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[2] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 10.
[3] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 9.
[4] Arendt, *The Human Condition*., 7-15.

According to Arendt, this division between a private realm, where labor was meant to reside, and a public realm that was reserved for the great works of humankind, dates back to the ancient Greeks, who used slavery as a way to circumvent the laboring process. In ancient Athens, for instance, citizenship was restricted to a land-owning class of men who were free to leave the private realm of their home and enter the public sphere to participate in Greek political life.[5] Slavery, as well as the subjugation of Greek women, made the separation between the public and private realm in ancient Greece possible because the labor of the household sustained an existence for everyone within it. Slavery, a human institution that has long since been deemed immoral, came about partially as a way for human beings to circumvent the laboring process for themselves by exploiting the labor of another person through a method of coercion.

In addition to slavery, technology has existed as a way for human beings to circumvent the laboring process for thousands of years.[6] The development of new farming techniques, the process of water collection and distribution, and complex and simple machines all represent technological works that freed humanity from one step in the laboring process. The consumption of what was produced by these advancements in technology constitute labor, since direct consumption is so closely connected to the laboring process. Once technology began transforming and consuming the natural world in mass, the lines between the public and private realm soon became blurred, and laboring no longer existed solely as a private means of survival.[7]

Known by Arendt as "The Social Realm," this new reality makes the private appetites of humanity a matter of public mass consumption, an exploitative concept that drives much of the

[5] Arendt, The Human Condition. 13-14.
[6] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 148-153.
[7] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 38-40.

world's economy.[8] The infusion of capital into human community structures during the industrial expansion allowed production levels to supersede a single human appetite. This extra capital, what Arendt calls "Superfluous capital," is often extracted from the working class by the owning class during the production process.[9] The owning class then uses superfluous capital to improve the production process, thereby allowing for access to higher levels of superfluous capital. Eventually, the acquisition of capital became necessary for hands-on political involvement in the neoliberal capitalist state. The laboring classes also gained access to levels of superfluous capital during the ascendency of mass consumerism and used this capital to purchase produced goods like clothing and electronics.[10] These acts constitute consumption, a concept that was once restricted solely to the private realm due to its close relationship with the biological life process. Once consumable items became available through a process of mass production, the onset of mass consumption soon followed, leaving a devastating imprint on the human world.

Human genocides like the Holocaust in Europe and Native American removal in the United States are direct results of the effects of mass consumer capitalism. White supremacy had dictated that the American Indians were not properly using the resources found on the North American continent, and that only white society was capable of properly utilizing the vast amounts of superfluous wealth that could be found and exploited in the land.[11] The Germans were obsessed with consumption, even labeling certain individuals as "useless eaters," which began the justification for the mass killing of human beings. Even in the concentration camps, the Nazis glorified labor, often permitting extra time in the world for certain prisoners who could

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[8] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 38.
[9] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 68.
[10] Ronald Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), 188.
[11] Theda Purdue, *Cherokee Removal: A Brief History with Documents (Boston: Bedford/ St. Martins, 2005),15-19.*

provide an essential service to the operation of mass genocide.[12] Disconnection from a place can mean disconnection from people who share that place, making it easier to see certain people as impediments to one's consumption, instead of fellow humans capable of cooperating in this world with the rest of humanity.

According to Arendt, another effect of mass expropriation has been the destruction of the natural environment in the name of superfluous capital. Disconnection from place can also mean a disconnection from the natural world, leaving one to not care for an environment that was meant to satiate the appetite of human communities. The mass consumption of the natural environment has left behind a trail of ecological destruction that has negatively impacted the course of human history. These levels of consumption would not be possible without the cooperation of the laboring class, who have maintained the machine by reifying the status quo through their daily actions. Although the owning class benefits most by acquiring a majority of the superfluous capital, the rhythms of mass consumption would not be possible without a mass collaboration of labor, who understand that their survival and ability to labor are conjoined through this economic hierarchy.[13]

Since laboring allows for the existence of a mass consumer economic system, Arendt believes that modern humans are living in a mass consumer society, where laboring has become considered one of the greatest achievements for an individual since their survival depends upon the ability to labor. Laboring is a process of production and consumption, meant to have a simple and finite purpose and to free humankind from the biological aspects of life, thereby allowing them to participate in the political world, where lasting creations can forever impact the course of

[12] Levi, Survival in Auschwitz: *If This is a Man (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986), 78-86*
[13] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 104

history.[14] In a society obsessed with laboring, participation in political actions become secondary to securing the survival of the individual. A member of the owning class, one who refrains from performing public labor, is free to participate in state politics, much like land owners were free to participate in ancient Greek political society if a class of slave laborers produced a massive amount of value for the household.[15]

II

Labor, a repetitive action meant to satisfy the appetite of a human being, has consumed the natural world in Appalachia for more than 100 years. Disconnection from place has destroyed many environments in places where extraction came to be understood as a necessary function of the common good. Expropriation has also contributed to decades of emigration out of Appalachia, which in turn allows for greater exploitation of the natural world by individuals who ultimately were disconnected from the environments that surrounded mountain communities. World alienation, a phrase which means that humans understand the finality of the earth, allows for disconnection from place, since people who believe that the planet is close to an end point are less likely to be invested in the world. Instead, these connections to the world have been replaced by mass consumerism, and the goal now for a human being in a world that is finite involves maximizing individual levels of consumption.[16]

Practically speaking, these concepts of expropriation and world alienation are born directly of the writings of German-Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt (1906-1975), who by no means was involved in Appalachian scholarship during her lifetime. Arendt's ideas are relevant

[14] Arendt, *The Human Condition*,19.
[15] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 14-18.
[16] Joseph Betz, "An Introduction to the Thought of Hannah Arendt," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 28, No. 3 (1992): 401-402.

to the developments in Appalachian history, given that the beginnings of Appalachia came into existence at the turn of the 20th century when modern mass society was beset upon the entirety of the mountain region in one way or another. Such widespread adaptation of modern mass society is not strictly a characteristic of conditions in Appalachia, but rather these Arendtian theories are universal and, as such, can be molded to fit the historical analysis of a given subject. It is the universality of Arendt's ideas, due to the universal tendency for modern mass society to constantly expand further and further into the human world, that gives them permanence and relevance to Appalachian history.

It is here that I will criticize Ronald Eller. This is unfortunate at a time when so many writers who once made their living by explicit or tactic borrowing from the great wealth of Eller's ideas have decided to reject his foundational work. It can be said then that being a critic of Eller has been the primary occupation for many Appalachian historians, seeing as how the tearing down of his *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers* has supported the careers of many who followed Eller's inquiry into the histories of the extraction industry. In this difficulty, I may recall a statement Benjamin Constant made when he felt compelled to attack Rousseau: "Certainly, I shall avoid the company of detractors of a great man. If I happen to agree with them on a single point, I grow suspicious of myself; and in order to console myself for having seemed to be of their opinion…I feel I must disavow and keep these false friends away from me as much as I can."[17]

Scholars of Appalachian history have neglected to include the writings of Arendt into their explanations for the actions that helped to develop human conditions in Appalachia since

[17] Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 79.

the turn of the 20th century. While it is true that a philosopher most closely associated with the events that took place in Germany during the 1930s and 1940s, most notably, the Holocaust and the proceedings that laid the groundwork for such a mass expropriation event, was not an Appalachian philosopher, the ideas presented in Arendt's works reflect conditions that are not necessarily confined to 20th-century western Europe. Forcing a loss of place on communities may be a uniquely European approach to the human world; however, such a prescription would come to encompass the entire planet due to the white man's propensity to assume ownership over land and the wealth that it represents in a European economic hegemony.

In fact, such recognition of land wealth is what drove white people to colonize the world in the first place, as a byproduct of the newly minted reality where the entire planet was now free to be consumed in a way that has gone unchecked for more than 200 years. The motivations for these events can rightfully be explained by Arendtian concepts of human expropriation, given that they would be required to stem from worldlessness due to the labor and lack of permanence associated with both historic atrocities. However, Appalachian scholars have failed to incorporate a linking principal for the white man's crimes in Appalachia, and this lack of creativity has meant that these same connecting principals have not also been applied to other instances of economic exploitation throughout all Appalachian communities.

Using the philosophical works of Hannah Arendt to better understand Appalachian history requires the creativity to find a place where theory can be applied to the conditions experienced by mountain residents since the early 20th century. Although many Appalachian scholars discuss the process of expropriation, they never outright define the overarching motivator for human actions. And while they have documented and analyzed several accounts of laboring activities, chief among them being the fascination with coal and timber extractions,

none have examined the way in which Appalachian music has come to interact with mass consumer society. Arendt refers to artists as the "last workers left in a laboring society"; however, at this time, obscurity between art and entertainment muddles the definition of Appalachian music.[18]

As of the 1920s, the Appalachian natural world would be consumed in mass by both a capitalist ruling class and a class of Appalachian laborers who would understand laboring to be an action that generated capital. Ralph Peer's Bristol sessions would also take place during the 1920s, setting this decade as a line of demarcation for capitalism's involvement in Appalachian culture. Although there can be no doubt that Appalachian old time music endured a relationship with capitalism prior to this time, the proliferation of the radio and vinyl record in the 1920's and beyond would ensure a widespread consumption of mountain music. Almost working hand in hand to ensure the full consumption of the Appalachian region, the mass extraction industry and the music industry exist in the 20th century with similar trajectories.

Born into a world where mass consumer capitalism already directed the flow of human activities, bluegrass and old-time string music have existed in this world only as functions of entertainment consumed by the laboring masses. This propensity for a mass consumer society to transform everything into a consumable item through the production process has affected the way that the human world has experienced Appalachian music. Many people who make Appalachian music are faced with an expropriation dilemma when the places of their origin cannot sustain their career in music. Society has deemed that the action of making music falls

[18] Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (New York: The Viking Press, 1961), 207.

more closely related to the playfulness of leisure time, unless the creation of music sustains the biological process for the individual entertainer.[19]

Since the creation of Appalachian music finds itself closely linked to the biological life process of those who create it, the primary function of such music would involve its mass consumption. Entertainment is meant to be consumed and reified by a mass entertainment industry that has a seemingly insatiable appetite. Art was meant as an object of permanence, left behind for humanity to enjoy long after the artist shuffles off this mortal coil.[20] The effect that this has on Appalachian musicians in the past and present represents the expropriation of the artist in Appalachia, only to be replaced by the entertainer whose survival is linked to the recreation of Appalachian culture. To better understand these effects of expropriation, one must understand Appalachian entertainers who have only known a world where the exploitation of their own culture can be used to circumvent aspects of the laboring process.

I have collected several oral history interviews with Appalachian musicians in order to explore the idea of Appalachian expropriation. Musicians are not unique in the way in which they experience expropriation; however, artists are uniquely visible in the public sphere, making them easily accessible examples of the effects that the conditions in Appalachian communities can have on the individual. Attempts to quantify or measure expropriation in Appalachian communities can manifest by examining numbers like emigration rates out of Appalachia. However, with little extant personal histories of the Appalachian working classes, settling on a visible representation of an Appalachian who exists in a laboring society allows for critical examination of the larger theoretical framework. Many Appalachian musicians are involved in

[19] Arendt, *The Human Condition*,127.
[20] Arendt, *Between Past and Fututre*, 208-210.

secondary forms of labor to supplement the income required to provide for their necessities and desires. Even famous Appalachian musicians like Johnny Cash and Loretta Lynn have described the connection to labor in the lives they lived before becoming producers of consumed music.[21]

Most respondents have relocated from the places of their origin in order to pursue a career in music. One is more likely to find work as a bluegrass musician in Central Kentucky cities like Louisville and Lexington, or even other places adjacent to Appalachia such as Cincinnati, Ohio. Following the dream of being freed from the laboring process through works of art can perceptively only be done in collaboration with other artists who share similar desires as one another. Individuals within a band may work collaboratively towards a common goal, while also competing with other artists for shows that generate revenue. In this way, the work of the artist in places like central and southern Appalachia only connects the individual with those who share a common goal. A connection to all of humanity is severed by the competition inherent in a consumptive society. Indeed, Appalachian musicians who were interviewed admit to some base level of disconnection from place, meaning that a disconnection from self is likely not far off base when discussing the lived experiences of the individual artist.

When completing oral history interviews with musicians, the importance lies in staying on topic. As individuals who may be conditioned to their idea of an interview, the establishing groundwork must provide the narrators with context without fully exposing the reason for conducting the interview. For the purposes of this research, oral history responses read more as conversational discussions, rather than the traditional question/response nature of oral histories. While still relying on a traditional framework, discussions of isolation and disconnection from

[21] Ken Burns Country Music, Episode 4, "I Can't Stop Loving You," Directed by Ken Burns. 9/18/2019.

place would need to be properly articulated between two equals, rather than a domination from the question asker.

III

Chapter One discusses the coal town of Holden, West Virginia, a monument to consumption, constructed in the early 20th century, which would eventually fade from the human world as a functioning coal town by the 1970s. Several coal corporations adopted the company town model, and many respected Holden as the pinnacle of a well-run company town. The way in which Holden came into the world reflects the creation of a mass consumer society in Appalachia during the early 20th century. The creation of a mass consumer society in the mountain region became necessary in order to further extract from communities of people who would experience expropriation by losing their place in the world and finding it again within the structure of mass consumer capitalism. By the late 1920s, mass consumer capitalism had extracted millions of tons of natural resources from Appalachian communities, an act that happened simultaneously with the creation of the Appalachian music industry.

Chapter Two examines the effects of mass consumer capitalism on Appalachian music. According to most scholars, the history of Appalachian music began with the Bristol sessions in 1927, where Ralph Peer mass produced recordings of early mountain artists. These recordings were then sold to the American public, who had recently managed to acquire superfluous capital and increasingly used it to consume entertainment. As the consumption of the Appalachian natural world intensified during the 20th century, the consumption of Appalachian culture also increased through the mass production of the radio and vinyl record. Now having become a fully mass consumer society, Appalachia and the broader United States began to commodify the

mountain region's music, transforming what could have been a lasting art form into a product of entertainment that was not meant to have staying power beyond its intent of being sold.

Chapter Three explores how the expropriation of Appalachian musicians manifests itself into actions that further the expropriation of individuals from mountain communities. Musicians are not unique in the way that they experience expropriation. In fact, all members of a mass consumer society are subject to being disconnected from their place in the world. Musicians, however, expropriate very visibly, thereby making them an ideal example to show how the loss of place can affect an individual and community. Some Appalachian musicians are forced to leave their homes in order to participate in mass consumer capitalism, while others manage to acquire enough superfluous capital to create more chances for consumption in their home communities.

Chapter Four discusses the far-reaching effects that capitalism has had on the music industry by examining the expropriation of two local musicians who live in central Kentucky. It would be considered easy to make the case that Dolly Parton is disconnected from her place in the world, and that she willfully extends the reach of capitalism in order to acquire personal profit. Less simple is the task of connecting parochial musicians to this larger concept of world alienation, as these musicians are often viewed as sort of "culture bearers" who possess deep ties to the community through the continuation of a local art form. The fact remains that these local musicians, although talented beyond all belief, ultimately engage in the production of entertainment when they perform bluegrass on the stage. Because Appalachian music was always packaged and sold since its introduction into a mass consumer construct, its artfulness has eroded due to the mass consumption of mountain music over the past 100 years.

In the Conclusion, we will compare the full effects of Appalachian expropriation by exploring the damage done to the natural environment as well as the damage done to the lasting effect of Appalachian culture, and how it is perceived by the human world. Because of the relationship that bluegrass and old-time string music have with capitalism, it is possible that Appalachian culture will be someday be consumed completely once the world has no use for such a label.

Chapter One

We Gonna Make It:

Coal Towns and the Creation of an Appalachian Consumer Society

I

In 1901, Colonel William A. Coolidge and Albert F. Holden purchased nearly 30,000 acres of coal bearing land in Logan County, West Virginia, population 200, and incorporated their U.S. Coal and Oil Company, later changing the name to Island Creek Coal Company (ICCC), in order to exploit the local environment to satisfy their private desires for capital.[22] By 1902, Coolidge and Holden began building an extension to the Ohio section of the Norfolk and Western (N&W) Railroad to efficiently extract Appalachian mineral wealth from a coalfield that harbored an estimated three billion tons of coal.[23] The corporate mining town of Holden became established by 1903, further cementing a new political reality that supplanted private economic structures that once characterized nineteenth century agriculture. In 1910, Holden's population had ballooned to over 2,400 people, the vast majority of whom had given up their places in the world to secure their private necessity in these new social conditions.[24]

Coolidge and Holden used their capital to bring a town into existence, a town whose sole purpose equated to the destruction of the surrounding natural environment. Once thought of as a form of political organization through mutual association by previous human societies, a new consumer society would fundamentally change the function of these political entities. These corporate company towns were meant to circumvent the political autonomies of those who earned their living within the walls of the very place that would disenfranchise them. Such

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[22] Walter Thurmond, *The Logan Coal Field of West Virginia: A Brief History* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 1964), 54.
[23] Phil Conley, *History of the West Virginia Coal Industry* (Charleston: The Education Foundation, 1960), 248.
[24] Manufacturer's report cited from Thurmond, *The Logan Coal Field of West Virginia*, 60.

places were not constructed to separate humanity from nature, as towns and cities had been previously throughout human history. The construction of such a town meant the commodification of humanities' relationship with the natural world, a world that ultimately sustained the existence of all living things. Corporate housing and laboring structures, better known in Appalachian history as the coal company town, were nothing more than monolithic physical monuments to human consumption. Established by corporate interests, the purpose of these towns was solely apolitical in their function, as they existed only to accumulate capital for wealthy white men like Coolidge and Holden.

The ascendency of coal in central Appalachia after the American Civil War coincided with the rise of a mass consumer society that remains prevalent in the both Appalachia and the United States. Consumption became the uniting characteristic in coal company towns simply because consumption would be the sole means of extending the existence of one's own life during the period of industrial expansion. Consumption also ensured the continuation of the mining operation's life, which indirectly provided the continuation of existence for Appalachian miners through the opportunity to continuously labor for their own survival. Continued growth in the mining industry during the 20th century not only produced more labor for its productivity, it also provided mine owners with excessive amounts of superfluous capital that they used to further accumulate wealth. A society of laborers continuing their labor process in a never-ending pattern brings nothing into the world but the chance to labor further, thereby rendering humanity slaves to the need to labor for survival.

The formation of a consumer society in the Appalachian coalfields was not born solely from the whims of American bourgeoisie, whose liberation from the laboring process freed them to accumulate the mountain region's mineral wealth. Many Appalachian laborers themselves

fully embraced mass consumer society when they abandoned their own private property in order to tie their very existences to the laboring and consumption process that directed their political and social lives. This unnatural extension of the natural took a collective effort to keep the rapidly increasing rhythms of mass consumer capitalism flowing during the ascendancy of coal in central Appalachia. Exploitation on the part of an absentee class of landowners was only possible through the consent given by the Appalachian proletariat, who would need to find a place in consumer society after the subsistence economy of agriculture began to dissipate following the American Civil War.

Human beings organized into socially engineered existences by the directors of capital only began to question their conditions when they believed that doing so would affect what was known as the "greater good." Once tangibly linked to a social group like the United Mine Workers Association or the National Miners Union, the common good for Appalachian laborers had been perverted to mean the extension of their own laboring. However, labor is temporary and serves only to create more laboring in the future, meaning that a society of laborers has to seek labor in perpetuity until the natural end of existence for both the laborer and the society.[25] Having so far outlived all of those who reside within its paradoxical structure, modern consumer society will seemingly end when there is no natural world left for humanity to consume, unless the human capacity to create can artificially extend this deadline in order to sustain the desires of mass populations. Complacency means death to an economy organized with capitalistic hierarchies, meaning that fresh streams of capital always remain necessary to sustain the mass laboring process.

[25] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 129.

For this reason, 20th-century energy corporations began to direct the flow of capital, labor, and human movement in order to further serve their own wants and desires during early periods of mass consumption. Supervising political and social realities by the 1900s, human relationships toward labor came to direct the lifestyles of all people who existed within the confines of such an insidious human construct, going so far as to inspire mass human movement on a scale never witnessed before in the United States.

II

Coal production in the Logan coalfield was dominated by the Island Creek Coal Company during the 1900s.[26] By 1923, the ICCC had produced over 10,000,000 tons of coal in Logan county, easily hoarding an inadequate share of the county's natural resources for themselves. Such coal production required the construction of Holden to keep up with the increasing demand for bituminous coal. The rapid growth in the Island Creek Coal Company coincided with a rise in population in Logan County, since a massive operation required an influx of superfluous labor. The county's population was little over 200 when industrial capitalists Coolidge and Holden visited their newly acquired mining lands in 1902. By 1910, its population had risen to over 2,400 residents, many of them living in the Holden coal town.[27] This economic boom quickly established Holden and the Island Creek Coal Company as a major consumer of the natural world.

Prior to the 1920s, the Holden coal town did not extract more than 10 million tons of coke in a single year.[28] by this time, technology had become infused with the production process

[26] West Virginia Department of Mines, *Statistical Report of the Department of Mines, 1920-1921*, 145.
[27] Cited from Thurmond, *The Logan Coal Field of West Virginia*, 60.
[28] West Virginia Department of Mines, *Statistical Report of the Department of Mines, 1920-1921*, 145.

in large scale mining operations, allowing for increased extraction levels that would only be halted by the Great Depression. Also during the 1920s, Appalachian music would be recorded and sold less than 200 miles away in Bristol, a community that consumed some of the energy being produced by coal towns like Holden. This alongside improvements in other technologies, namely the technologies that allowed for the mass distribution of Appalachian music, designates the 1920s as a time when the consumption of the Appalachian environment and the Appalachian natural world would exponentially increase.

As of 1903, the ICCC was not registered in the annual report that was commissioned by the West Virginia Department of Mines. In fact, all of Logan County went unregistered in versions of the report that were published prior to 1905 due to the lack of industrial expansion in the area during the late 19th century.[29] Some eight years after the purchase of the coal rich lands, Island Creek Coal had inspired the movement of over 2,000 laborers into Logan county, making it a destination for laborers seeking to "make a living."[30] These 2,000 laborers included many African Americans who left the racist American South in search of the freedom to generate capital at the expense of the labor that had historically been violently exploited by white landlords.

Many black mine workers who arrived in Logan County originally came from neighboring McDowell County, eventually giving Logan the highest concentration of African Americans in the state of West Virginia.[31] Life other African Americans throughout the South and elsewhere in the nation, these black miners often faced discrimination. Mine operators labeled African Americans employees as lazy and entitled in an effort to undercut their wages.

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[29] West Virginia Department of Mines, *Statistical Report of the Department of Mines, 1904-1905, 7*
[30] Thurmond, *The Logan Coal Field of West Virginia*, 60.
[31] Thurmond, *The Logan Coal Field of West Virginia*, 61.

Some black coal miners arrived in Logan County of their own volition, while others arrived on "transportation" as a result of underhanded recruiting trips to places like Alabama and Mississippi. African Americans who arrived via this so-called transportation had to cover the cost of their own transport from their places of origin into Logan, and many were discharged from their jobs before paying back their transportation debts.[32]

The existence of the debt-peonage system subjected black miners to the whims of consumption before they ever reached the Logan coal field. Prior to the necessity of mass human movement, laboring was usually performed in one place, and that place was typically the private realm of the household. Although emancipated from chattel slavery following the Civil War, most African American farmers in the South were forced to continue to labor exclusively on the property of their former masters via the sharecropping system. Black miners in the Holden coal town also had to accept a new form of economic slavery. By consenting to paying their employers a transportation fee, black mine workers demonstrated their desires for survival at any cost, and that cost would be their own capacity to labor once they arrived in West Virginia. Black labor would pay off their original travel debt, and the illusion of this new reality made it seem as though black labor in a new consumer society would change the realities of those who would accept an agreement. By 1911, about one-third of miners in McDowell county were African American, many of them relocating to Logan only to remain in perpetual debt until the time of their discharge from the job.[33]

Coal corporations had a multitude of creative ways to permanently indebt their labor force, thereby ensuring a constant cycle of production and consumption by all people involved

[32] Thurmond, *The Logan Coal Field of West Virginia,61.*
[33] Thurmond, *The Logan Coal Field of West Virginia,* 60.

with the extraction process. Notoriously low mine wages were undercut by monetary liabilities that would be accrued as a result of existence in a 20th-century West Virginia mining town. By 1921, deductions from miners' paychecks for expenses like store bills, rent, doctor's visits, and electricity could quickly add up to nearly a 20 percent deduction from a miner's pay in Logan County.[34] Miners in other parts of the state could expect deductions anywhere from 15 to 25 percent, depending on the mining operation that directed the labor of the given miner.[35] It should come as no surprise that all deductions from a miner's paycheck manifested in commodified goods or services that would not have been centralized by one capitalist entity during previous stages of human existence.

Perhaps the most glaring and insulting of these superfluous charges was the corporation's deductions for coal and electricity, services that these conglomerates specialized in due to the labor expended by those living in Holden. Coal and electricity, along with a mysterious "miscellaneous" category, often represented a 3.5 percent deduction from a miner's salary.[36] Given that the Island Creek Coal Company horded tons of coal and coke for energy production, the company's inclination to charge for the consumption of these services further highlights the rampant consumeristic mindset of the mining industry. Facing the threat of starvation and eviction, individual miners had little recourse to refuse participation in the consumerism that had increasingly ensnared them into a cycle of production, thereby allowing their employers to reclaim any excess capital by providing the laborers with commodified necessity.

This superfluous consumption would not have been made possible without massive strides in production and technological advancements in West Virginia's coal industry. Slightly

[34] Manufacturer's report cited from Thurmond, *The Logan Coal Field of West Virginia*, 67.
[35] Thurmond, *The Logan Coal Field of West Virginia*, 66.
[36] Manufacturer's report cited from Thurmond, *The Logan Coal Field of West Virginia*, 67.

over 3 million tons of coal were processed in Logan county in 1911, with the Island Creek Coal Company produced over a million and a half tons as a single entity.[37] Less than a decade after Coolidge and Holden purchased and developed their stake in the large coal field in 1903, their enterprise had become recognized as the model for production and profitability in the West Virginia mining industry.[38] By 1923, the increasing rotations of mass consumption had extracted over 10 million tons of coal in Logan county after a brief boom in coal production in 1922 that oversaw the extraction of over 13 million tons from the Logan coal field.[39]

III

The construction of a company town in the early 19th century cost anywhere from $30,000 to $50,000[40] depending on the size of the town and intended size of the mining operation.[41] Company towns included segregated housing for miners and their families in order to help provide the illusion of a private realm in this public bureaucratic structure. Roads were constructed to facilitate movement between housing, company store, and mine site, rather than for the purposes of coal or human transportation out of the town. Electricity was provided to corporate housing to keep the elaborate industrial machine running and to provide miners with what were considered to be adequate living conditions at the time. Appalachian labor would in turn produce obscene amounts of wealth for the bourgeois mine operators, who increasingly focused their emancipated attentions to the so-called greater good of perpetual acquisition of capital at the expense of the place that they legally owned.

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[37] West Virginia Department of Mines, *Statistical Report of the Department of Mines, 1910-1911*, 44.
[38] Thurmond, *The Logan Coal Field of West Virginia*, 56.
[39] West Virginia Department of Mines, *Statistical Report of the Department of Mines*, 103.
[40] Which would be of equal value of about $1.5 million dollars in 2021.
[41] Eller, *Miners, Millhand, and Mountaineers*, 95.

The rapid increase of coal production in Logan corresponded with the rise in coal mining technology. Producing growth demanded a subsequent need for electricity to power the new machines that ultimately enable the ICCC to extract over 30,000,000 tons of coal in a three year period during the 1920s.[42] Mining operations typically constructed their own power grids. However, Island Creek's enormous appetite for consumption led to the establishment of an electricity corporation aimed specifically at serving Logan County in 1914.[43] The newly minted power company placed an order through General Electric for two powerful generators, only to quickly double their desired order for energy consumption.[44] The electricity provided by these massive new energy sources not only powered the logistics of a mining operation, but also provided electricity to Logan County's increasing population. Demand for energy consumption came rapidly to Logan, and the only purpose it served in Appalachia's emerging consumer society was to facilitate the upcoming mass consumption of the natural environment.

After the arrival of the first automobile in 1915 and once modes of consumption allowed for new technology to make its way to the region, roads were constructed in the Logan coalfield. Major corporations were less eager to construct commercial roads given that the shipment of coal involved railroad cars, and roads out of town could result in a dip in the labor force. Although town of Logan had a few small roads by 1910, major road construction would only be developed by the state of West Virginia's state road commission in 1921.[45] Unless roads served the purpose of corporate consumption, companies like the ICCC did not see the value in creating roads for automobiles, although they had earlier threatened the C&O railroad with the construction of a private railway that would carry Island Creek coal to the river port of

[42] West Virginia Department of Mines, *Statistical Report of the Department of Mines 1922-1923*, 10.
[43] Thurmond, *The Logan Coal Field of West Virginia*, 78.
[44] Thurmond, *The Logan Coal Field of West Virginia*, 78.
[45] Cited from Thurmond, *The Logan Coal Field of West Virginia*, 80.

Huntington, West Virginia.[46] It was the prerogative of the state of West Virginia to provide roadways to citizens who lived and worked in the Logan coal towns, seeing as the construction of roads constituted a civil or political issue to a capitalist enterprise like Island Creek Coal.

Island Creek did have an interest in the construction of schools in Logan County, perhaps because education for a new generation of consumers was a step towards sustaining the culture of consumption that was being fostered in their corporate living structures. The town of Holden boasted three whites only middle schools and one segregated middle school meant for the African American children.[47] Logan County's high school also had parts of its budget supplemented by coal corporations who saw the value of providing an education, however biased, to the children of their labor force. Fostering environments that were sympathetic to the mining industry and its economic and social impacts on the Logan communities, schools funded by coal companies played a vital role in codifying Appalachian laborers by providing their children with a supposedly enhanced educational service.

What made Logan's educational condition different was the vast amount of capital that the ICCC and private donors invested in the local school system. Walter Thurmond, a fellow coal operator, estimated that over $100,000 had been invested in Logan County schools through the financing of teacher salaries, school buildings, and other administrative costs that apparently could not be covered by the county's tax base.[48] The prioritization of towns like Holden suggests that private donations often involved ulterior motives that benefited the coal corporations' ability to recruit labor and to keep the consumption machine spinning. The existence of a segregated school for black children reveals that coal operators believed that their labor force would be

[46] Thurmond, *The Logan Coal Field of West Virginia, 57.*
[47] Thurmond, *The Logan Coal Field of West Virginia, 57.*
[48] Thurmond, *The Logan Coal Field of West Virginia, 57.*

weakened without African American labor contributing to the mass consumption, meaning that the education of black students was considered to be in the best interest of the so-called greater good because it helped to facilitate capitalist extraction.

Lunch was not provided to students who attended school in Holden, and all children had to bring their lunch until the Holden central school hired a home economics teacher in the late 1950s, who also doubled as the school cook.[49] Despite the ICCC's exponential growth in coal production during its first decade of existence, the company's school did not provide other resources like books to students. Similar to the lunch policy, students had to purchase their own books, which they acquired at the company store with credit from their fathers' upcoming paycheck.[50] School in Holden ultimately became a creative way for the mine operators to undercut the wages of the miners by charging them for supplies that could have been afforded by the ICCC. Ironically, the white school in Holden was a model for other education systems that would eventually be built in corporate labor towns.

Segregated for most of its existence, the Holden Central School failed to provide a social education that encouraged the children of coal miners to dissent against the corporation. An educational board comprised of mine officials and other company representatives selected the faculty of the Holden Central School.[51] As a result, students there were well versed in the physical sciences, most likely because students' understanding of the physical sciences could be exploited by the ICCC or by another coal company, thereby furthering the desires of a coalition of mining operators whose private wealth had begun to influence politics in West Virginia by the

[49] Walden, *God, Mother, Island Creek*, 100.
[50] Walden, *God, Mother, Island Creek*, 100.
[51] Walden, *God, Mother, Island Creek*, 114.

early 20th century.[52] Students did not learn about the coal company's damage to the natural environment, nor did they learn about the social hierarchies that directed the mass extraction of minerals from the Logan Coalfield.

The main function of the Holden coal town was the consumption of the Logan coalfield, which required the consumption of other materials like food and educational supplies to the region's budding population. Miners in Logan had effectively given up their places in the world to serve the machine of mass consumption, and accepted the inadequate economic conditions presented in this hierarchy due to a lack of viable options for survival. Such a non-violent threat to mass human survival facilitated the destruction of the natural environment in Logan County, and a dependency to mass capitalism prioritized immediate human survival over long-term ecological damage.

IV

The expropriation of the individual in Holden coincided with the expansion of Logan County's coal industry, resulting in the creation of the excessive wealth that allowed for the continued destruction of the surrounding natural environment. The conversion from labor to capital to wealth allowed for the newly generated profits of the owning class to be superfluously placed back into the machine of mass consumption, generating greater expropriations, greater productivity, and more appropriation of Appalachian labor.[53] As evidenced by the rapid growth of the ICCC, the increasing supply of labor that trickled into the Holden coal town promoted

[52] Walden, *God, Mother, Island Creek,* 115.
[53] Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 255.

unfettered growth in coal production that would eventually surpass the 10,000,000 ton mark after only 15 years of operation.[54]

The reification of the laboring process in Holden meant that coal production for the ICCC was constantly exceeding previous extraction records well into the 1920s.[55] Such a laboring process was forced upon the laboring masses by the individual desire to preserve their own places in the world, even if they had lost their place in the agrarian economy. This new political reality fostered isolation from one's own self, because the life of the individual began to be directed by the need to find a niche of survival in a hyper capitalist political structure. Furthermore, the superfluous capital hoarded by men like Coolidge and Holden went on to be exchanged for political influence that allowed for further destruction of the natural world for private consumption. As of the 1900s, mass consumption has affected the lives and decisions of everyone who has existed after the rapid acceleration of industry.

Labor in Holden was not a homogenous concept, and a division of labor was prescribed from the top-down paternalistic nature of the capitalist operators of the town. This division denied women the access to capital, thereby not only limiting their labor to household roles and disconnecting women from the means of production, but also tethering them to the need to consume in this new economic structure. Although a monument to labor and production, women were not compensated for their private labor in Holden or any other town unless they served gendered labor roles, such as an educator at one of Holden's schools. By isolating women from their own ability to create a place in the world, these monuments to mass consumption

[54] West Virginia Department of Mines, *Statistical Report of the Department of Mines 1922-1923*, 151.
[55] West Virginia Department of Mines, *Statistical Report of the Department of Mines 1922-1923*, 151.

effectively garnered an apathy towards the specialized labor performed by women in these economic municipalities.

Destruction and consumption of the natural world in the Logan coalfield also lies at the heart of the labor/capital dilemma. By consenting to living in a consumer society, laborers and operators also consented to a mutual destruction of the natural world in Holden and beyond. Once expropriated from their homes, transient workers searching for a secured place in the new political reality poured into the Holden coal town by the thousands, resulting in the growth of both the consumption of coal production and the community's population. With little to no connection to the place that provided a means of survival to the laboring and owning classes, the destruction of this place meant security for those whose labor was used to accumulate wealth for the ICCC.

Operators of the Holden coal town ultimately did not have to resort to the threat of violence due to internal motivations for survival in an alien economic hierarchy which purposefully developed a paternalistic relationship between labor and operator. Violence was most likely to occur in the mine itself, as it became a part of the laboring process, as opposed to the motivation for such labor extraction under previously organized political and economic norms, namely in the case of slavery. Until the industrial expansion, violence was used to extract labor from unwilling participants in the wealth accumulation process. Once disconnected from land that can satisfy individual hungers for survival, people became directed by their own desire to survive and no longer required the threat of outright violence to consent to the exploitation of their labor. Labor became a commodity to be peddled and sold to whichever mining operation promised the stability of a place.

Walter Thurmond, a West Virginia coal operator, claimed that the Holden coal town was the model for a corporate settlement in the central Appalachian coalfields.[56] The size of Holden meant that a new reality of consumption had been imported to Logan County, which had boasted a population of only 200 by the end of the 19th century. The mining operators sought not to improve upon the human world for the greater good of humanity or for the sake of nature, but to accumulate wealth, believing that some of the wealth would spill over onto the laboring populations, thereby continuing this process of production and consumption well into the 1900s. By 1987, the ICCC was beginning to be liquidated, and the Holden Central School had long been abandoned and turned into a community meeting center for those who still lived and worked in the declining mining town.[57]

The ICCC did not leave anything positive for Logan County when it closed in the late 1980s, denoting the extractive and consumeristic characteristics of the mine operators who were disconnected from this place in the world. By importing and exporting labor at a rapid pace, the disconnection could be reified by traveling populations who cared little about the natural environment of a place that they were bound to eventually leave. Working in the Holden coal mines was not a safe venture, and many miners were physically consumed by the operation of extracting coal from underneath a mountain. Ironically, violence that was once used to inspire such obedience in previous stages of humanity would become accepted by those who went underground as a hazard of the labor that was being performed.

If a man perished underground, his family may or may not be subject to eviction from the Holden coal town, due to the inability for the household to produce for the ICCC. Such a blunt

[56] Thurmond, *The Logan Coal Field*, 56.
[57] Walden, *God, Mother, Island Creek*, 117.

example of how patriarchal hierarchy affected those in the camps who were disbarred from labor and capital as a means of corporate policy highlights the ruthlessness of capitalism and its ability to expropriate individuals and populations in the name of continued consumption of the natural environment. For this reason, women in coal towns like Holden were encouraged to produce male children in order to increase the productivity of the household, thereby increasing the income of the household. This unnatural distortion of the natural laboring process is indicative of how engrained modern mass society was by the early 1900s.

The natural world can never be rendered back to its original state after the actions of the ICCC, and the laborers who were trapped in the capitalist rotations that allowed this energy conglomerate also experienced a fundamental change in their humanity. Holden is not an isolated case, however. Many coal towns in places like Mingo and McDowell counties, as well as places throughout West Virginia and Kentucky, exhibit similar historic characteristics of mass consumption and income inequality that would lead one to believe that the problem of expropriation exists throughout Appalachia.

Chapter Two

Horses Don't Stop, They Keep Going:

A Brief History of the Expropriation of Appalachian Music

I

The release of "Country Music: A Film by Ken Burns" in 2019 was met with much anticipation during my first year of graduate school at Appalachian State University. Burns, widely known as America's leading documentary laureate, has attempted to record different examples of culture that exist in the varying communities that make up this nation. Country music was of importance to my immediate Appalachian Studies circle because of the connections between Appalachia and country music. Burns begins his sixteen-and-a-half-hour-long film by introducing the viewer to country music by way of Ralph Peer and his now famous "Bristol sessions" that began in 1927.[58] These early recording sessions of country stars like Jimmie Rodgers and the Carter Family seems to be where most historians have marked as the beginning of country music. There can be no doubt that certain songs were known in individual Appalachian communities before 1927, but historians seem to agree that nothing mattered until the recording industry became involved with mountain music.

Even Bill Malone, author of *Country Music U.S.A.*, cannot go five pages in the aforementioned work before mentioning that "blues records began making their way into the mountains by the mid-twenties."[59] Although Burns and Malone both acknowledge a time before the recording industry, neither of them successfully completed the task of demonstrating how

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[58] *Country Music: A Film by Ken Burns,* episode 1, "The Rub," directed by Ken Burns. Aired September 15, 2019 on PBS: https://www.pbs.org/kenburns/country-music/.
[59] Bill Malone, *Country Music U.S.A.* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 5.

country music existed during the 19th century. Certain songs from the 1920s are now known as "old time songs" in the modern age, and many of their lyrics have been changed in an effort to bury the history of cartoonish racism that exists in the United States. Other than these select tunes, much remains unknown about music that was made in Appalachian communities prior to Peer's Bristol sessions, and at this time, there appears to be a sort of pre-history for Appalachian music.

This period of pre-history has been labeled by scholars as the folk era of country music, an ironic title meant to delineate a period when music was more closely related to the private realm, or at the very least, the local community. The irony of the name "folk" derives from the consumption of the entire folk aesthetic by fans of country music in the modern age. Folk should be considered as nothing more than another label concocted by a mass consumer society, and for this reason, the label cannot simply be limited to music. Folkways, which are meant to be creations of certain communities, are now packaged and sold along with other produced items in a mass consumer society. The term folk, which is supposed to designate a proximity to private labor, has now become another categorization for mass consumption.

Novelist and poet Wendell Barry remembers a time when individuals could all be connected by a certain song that may have been often played in their community.[60] The folk era could be defined by its locality in places, which may be why scholars find it difficult to properly measure country music before the recording era. As Wendell Barry says of those who would have served to remind us of this time, "Now most of those people are absent…and gone with them are the local stories and songs."[61] The mass recording of Appalachian music aimed to take

[60] Barry, *Our Only World*, 135.
[61] Barry, *Our Only World*, 135.

these local ties and literally broadcast them to the rest of the colonized nation. This crossover, from community activity to consumptive act, is one of the places where the foundations of Appalachian culture began to be dismantled.

II

Fiddlin John Carson, the first proper musician in the Burns's documentary, became well known by performing for factory workers in Atlanta, a major hub of production which lies along the southern border of Appalachia.[62] With the help of a new form of mass communication, Carson started traveling throughout South in order to perform for anyone who would pay him. Prior to making money as a touring musician, Carson lived on a farm with his family, meaning that he still remained somewhat connected to the private realm through the labor that happened at his place of residence. Once John Carson began playing music for money, however, he became disconnected with the private realm because his labor was no longer confined to his home. In fact, his wife began to complain that she "knew what it was like to be a widow," since her husband had seemingly abandoned her alongside the private labor that had won their security in the decades prior.[63]

Early country music careers, like those of John Carson and the Carter Family, were largely made possible through inventions like the railroad and the personal radio. The railroad, which scholars have bandied about in Appalachian history for its purpose of extracting resources, allowed musicians to collect capital by quickly traveling from place to place in order to stage a performance. In this way, railroads exported both Appalachian resources and culture out of the mountain communities that produced these aspects of the human world. Instead of music

[62] *Ken Burns Country Music*, Episode 1, "The Rub," Directed by Ken Burns. Aired on September 15, 2019 on PBS.
[63] *Ken Burns Country Music*, Episode 1, "The Rub," Directed by Ken Burns. Aired on September 15, 2019 on PBS.

retaining a certain locality associated with the individuals that made up a community, the individual musicians now became available in several locations, with the goal of extracting capital from laborers whose leisure time had increasingly become commodified. Newspapers, perhaps the earliest form of mass media, made the scheduled performances of these individuals well known throughout several communities, allowing the popularity of the individual musician to grow.[64]

The mass production of the radio also fundamentally changed the history of American music and culture. Local music, by its very definition, must be heard locally, and radio would only serve as a wedge between a community and the music that would be meant to connect the individuals within that community. Early radio stations were frequently nothing more than marketing arms for large corporations, and many corporations rarely hid the fact that they were trafficking in nostalgia during a time when people were becoming fully expropriated from the land in Appalachia. "We Shield Millions," or WSM, for instance, was the brainchild of The National Life and Accident Insurance Company, whose primary concern was the sale of insurance, meaning that producers of their radio station cared little for the spreading or creation of any culture, Appalachian or otherwise.[65]

The Grand Ole Opry, perhaps the most famous country music show in American history, was born from the necessity to sell life insurance to a mass number of people and not of some altruistic vision of encapsulating the culture from which the music originated. Mass consumer capitalism lay at the root of the Grand Ole Opry's foundations, and capitalism would fuel the

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[64] *Ken Burns Country Music*, Episode 1, "The Rub," Directed by Ken Burns. Aired on September 15, 2019 on PBS.
[65] *Country Music: A Film by Ken Burns,* episode 2, "Hard Times," directed by Ken Burns. Aired September 15, 2019 on PBS: https://www.pbs.org/kenburns/country-music/.

globalization of music that was once the exclusive domain of the local community. Much like the mountain environment, Appalachian culture soon became exploited by capitalists who were disconnected from the communities that produced these musical commodities, leading to fundamental alterations in the way that the music would ultimately be performed.

Live advertisements quickly became embedded in the music that was played on WSM and other stations across the United States by the 1930s. Companies like Mothers Best Flour began to offer payment in return for an endorsement of their product on a show like the Grand Ole Opry. Early musicians like Hank Williams and Earl Scruggs can be forever be heard selling grocery items to households around the South, while their greatest hits are sprinkled throughout the advertisement.[66] Mass consumption had snuck into the leisure time of the American public via the commodification of Appalachian music during mid-20th century. Songs meant to inspire a type of nostalgia in the listener were simultaneously doing the work of affecting the consuming habits of an American public who found themselves with small amounts of superfluous capital and leisure time. The transistor radio, a newly formed invention, would fill the leisure hours for those with enough superfluous capital to afford such a luxury, and quickly became the largest purveyor of advertising in media during this time.

Radio itself also came to rely on another incarnation of mass consumer capitalism, the vinyl record. Records would come to represent the private ownership of cultural music in the United States by the mid-1920s.[67] Although now privately owned, this shift in music consumption signaled the transition of Appalachian music from the domain of the public community to the private property of the recording industry. Once this shift took place,

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[66] Williams, Hank. 1951. "Mothers Best Recordings." Mothers Best Flour.
[67] Malone, *Country Music U.S.A, 32.*

Appalachian music began to lose its artfulness through the mass reproduction of Appalachian culture.[68] Indeed, once a record becomes distributed in mass, it ceases being art, and has been forsaken to the realm of entertainment by its creator, who seeks to consume something that was meant to have permanence.

A.P. Carter of the Carter Family was a famous song thief who made a living from recording the songs of local communities for capital in the public realm. A real and true philistine, Carter had no use for the music that was created in the private realm of his home until he learned that he could make a profit by exploiting this private expression. After he and his family recorded many songs from communities throughout Appalachia, the Carters began accumulating wealth through the purchase of land. Having successfully sold their culture in order to gain access to a new pool of public wealth, they proceeded to leave Virginia to maintain their new relationship with capital. Traveling as far as Mexico before the band fell apart suggests that capital directed the movement of country music's first family, eventually landing them in Nashville, Tennessee, where Maybelle Carter and her daughters would continue to capitalize on the family name that was built during the early Bristol sessions.[69]

The foundations of Appalachian music are rooted in mass consumer capitalism. Any music that was recorded by Ralph Peer, the Carter Family, or even Jimmie Rogers was not brought into the world as art, but rather as a form of entertainment meant to be consumed by the newly formed laboring masses. Newly won leisure time, a result of a mass labor organization that took place prior to the turn of the 20th century, allowed the laboring classes the time to consume Appalachian music while they were not busy consuming the mountain environment.

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[68] Arendt, *Between Past and Future (*London: Penguin Books*, 1961), 209.*
[69] *Country Music: A Film by Ken Burns*, Episode 2, "Hard times," Directed by Ken Burns. Aired on September, 15, 2019.

One aspect of a mass consumer society involves the society's capacity to consume any and everything, or, to put it differently, in its ability to turn anything into an item that was meant to be consumed. Appalachia has always been a place synonymous with mass consumption and the effects that it can leave behind on a particular society, and these effects have extended beyond community and into the very culture of the places that house such communities.

III

Technology, which was meant to free humankind from the laboring process, ultimately injected capitalism into the roots of Appalachian music. Consequently, Appalachian musicians became sentenced to a lifetime of laboring in a space that was meant for working. Art was usually completed in one place prior to The Reformation period in Europe, and in many cases, these works remained in the places in which they were created. Technology, manifesting in the form of the radio and vinyl record, allowed Appalachian culture to become mobile, which expropriated it from Appalachian communities. Instead of freeing mountain musicians from the laboring process, technology and the music industry ensnared a class of artists into the web of mass consumer capitalism by connecting the act of recording to the survival of the musician.

In addition to promoting mass consumer culture, capitalist technology has also negatively affected the environment of mountain communities. The extraction of coal, timber, and other natural resources has resulted in the exodus of Appalachian people from communities that were actively destroyed throughout the 20th century. The resources extracted from Appalachia during this period will forever be linked to the wealth that was carried away along with them. In a similar fashion, wealth from the Appalachian music industry became concentrated in Nashville, Tennessee, a city which began to direct the ways in which audiences consumed Appalachian music. Much like coal barons who made their home in New England or in the West, capitalists

in Nashville successfully siphoned off vast amounts of Appalachian wealth by exploiting music that was made in the mountains.

Appalachia has always been synonymous with extraction ever since local color writers alerted white capitalists to the untapped natural wealth that existed in the region at the turn of the 20th century. It should come as no surprise, then, that extraction of all types would befall Appalachia, and even the culture found in mountain communities would become extracted from those places, along with the natural resources that represented wealth in a mass consumer society. In this way, Appalachian communities have had their music taken from them, only to be used for profit by philistines who live mostly in the western half of Tennessee. This should also come as no surprise given that A.P. Carter was present at the birth of the Appalachian music industry.[70] There has never been a time when Appalachian music was not recorded for profit, other than during the folk period that is often talked about by music historians. Largely due to mass industrialization, Appalachia as we know it may not have even existed in its current form during the time of this folk period. Ironically, scholars mention this era in Appalachian history only as a way of delineating an era before Appalachian music was bought and sold.[71]

This period of folk was lost to opportunists like A.P. Carter when private and community songs began to be recorded for profit in the late 1920s.[72] Although some tunes have remained popular throughout the decades, many were changed by the recording industry and have become the private property of a bureaucratic organization in Nashville. The expropriation of Appalachian musicians left a large hole in many Appalachian communities by carrying away individuals who were capable of bearing the culture of the place in which they were raised. In a

[70] *Ken Burns Country Music*, Episode 1, "The Rub," Directed by Ken Burns. Aired on September 15, 2019 on PBS.
[71] Malone, *Country Music U.S.A*, 3.
[72] Arendt, *Crisis in Culture*, 204.

similar fashion, songs that are known only by such culture bearers were likely recorded and transformed into entertainment by the same individuals who were meant to protect the art form that was local to their community. Another form of extraction, the extraction of Appalachian musicians from their places in the world, resulted in the inability to establish a local culture. As long as capital was used to lure Appalachian musicians away from their communities, any form of Appalachian culture faced an uphill battle in trying to establish itself in the human world.

One example of how outside capitalists continue to expropriate Appalachian music is the story of the old-time jam that routinely took place in Lansing, North Carolina, at the Phipps General Store. Locals at this weekly jam session freely called tunes to be played by the group until one day a cease and assist letter was sent to the owner of the general store, which hosted the event by providing a venue and $1.00 ice cream bowls to anyone willing to make the journey.[73] The major record label that sent the legal scare notice, RCA, was undoubtedly tipped off by a narc in the crowd. Locals ultimately stopped playing certain songs for fear of a retaliatory lawsuit from the recording conglomerate, bringing an end to the jam session. Mass consumption has become so prevalent in Appalachia that it was able to reach its claws all the way to Lansing, North Carolina, in an effort to stop the performing of privately owned songs for an audience who did not pay entry to the venue.[74] This also means that the songs played at the Sparta old-time jam were in fact property of a corporation, and not the property of the local community, which was barred from playing them again.

Appalachian communities no longer own songs that were once exclusively parochial, and mass consumer capitalism was used to expropriate Appalachian music by tethering this aspect of

[73] Rita Scott, interview by Brandon Zellers, April 20, 2020, in West Jefferson, North Carolina
[74] Rita Scott, interview by Brandon Zellers, April 20, 2020, in West jefferson, North Carolina

mountain culture to the recording industry. Appalachian music, which once had the potential to exude permanence through its capacity as art has been transformed into entertainment, altering its usage in the human world to be a consumable object. In this capitalist construct, Appalachian music may never achieve the permanence found in art and may always be relegated as a form of entertainment that will not have a lasting permanence in this world. Much like the superfluous labor inherent in the extraction industry, the production of Appalachian music exhibits a similar dedication to superfluous actions, like integrating advertisements into songs, and such actions ultimately build towards the goal of acquiring superfluous capital meant to free the individual from the laboring process.

Chapter Three

Cocaine Muzik 6:

The Unholy Union of Capital and Culture

I

Bobby Osborne was born in 1931 on a farm in Leslie County, Kentucky. Six years later, in 1937, his brother Sonny came into the world, and the siblings would begin collaborating on music projects together as teenagers. Prior to their musical success, the brother's childhood farmhouse tragically burnt down, forcing the family to move to Hyden, Kentucky, a nearby town that was constructed to satiate the appetites of the coal industry, much like Holden in Logan County, West Virginia. After working in the mine, the patriarch of the Osborne family relocated everyone to Dayton, Ohio, where the two brothers became familiar with the entertainment industry. After playing shows in Southwest Ohio, Bobby Osborne was drafted to serve in the Korean War. Upon Bobby's return to the United States, the Osborne brothers left Dayton to pursue musical careers in cities like Knoxville and Detroit.[75]

Like many musical family members, the Osborne brothers boasted a special harmony that can often only be achieved through kinship. The brothers were able to match each other's pitch, which made for a naturally smoother harmonization, a technique commonly known as "blood harmony."[76] This level of collaboration and understanding is a testament to the human capacity to cooperate with one another. In a mass consumer society, this skill is frequently marketed and sold in order to stand out from other musicians whose survival has also been linked to their ability to perform. Perfectly harmonizing with another human being is tantamount to a great

[75] Bobby Osborne, interview by Eddie Stubbs, December 19, 2004, in Nashville, Tennessee, Louie B. Nunn Oral History Center, University of Kentucky, Lexington.
[76] Bobby Osborne, interview by Eddie Stubbs, December 19, 2004, in Nashville, Tennessee, Louie B. Nunn Oral History Center, University of Kentucky, Lexington.

human achievement, which represents a lifetime's worth of work. By the time that the Osborne brothers had come to interact with the music industry, selling this lifetime of work came as a secondary thought to individuals who hoped to secure their survival by any means necessary.

Blood harmony was one way for the Osborne brothers to stand out during the boom times of bluegrass music, and they enjoyed successful careers partly due to this learned skill. Perhaps their most notable song continues to be heard during fall Saturdays in Knoxville, Tennessee. Rocky Top, written by Felice and Boudleaux Bryant, romanticizes life in the Great Smoky Mountains of East Tennessee. The University of Tennessee's football team has adopted this song as a sort of rallying cry, and Rocky Top can be heard echoing throughout Neyland Stadium whenever the Volunteers do anything positive on the field. Bobby and Sonny Osborne were the first artists to record Rocky Top in 1967, and their rendition of the song quickly charted on the Billboard Top 100 country songs that year. The Osborne brothers, obviously from Kentucky, recorded a hit bluegrass song about a specific place in eastern Tennessee, despite being wholly disconnected from the actual Rocky Top. Neither Felice nor Boudeleaux Bryant were also from Tennessee, meaning that Rocky Top was brought to consumers by people who existed their entire lives outside of that East Tennessean community.

Writing songs about places in which an artist never lived could only be possible in a world where such songs existed only as a product of consumption. An attempt to connect to people from places like Rocky Top is merely a way to capitalize on the lack of connections that are caused from residing in a mass consumer society. Ironically, this lack of connection stems from decades of expropriation from places like Rocky Top, expropriation that was directed by people who were not a part of the community. This same brand of capitalist seeks to disconnect the individual from their place in the world so that they may then profit off of this disconnection

in multiple ways, including repackaging nostalgia to give the consumer a fleeting glimpse of a re-connection to a place.

The Osborne brothers experienced expropriation in their lives in more ways than one. First, they were disconnected from an agricultural lifestyle when their childhood farmhouse burnt to the ground. They were then fully immersed in the rhythms of extractive capitalism when their family migrated a nearby coal town. Finally, they understood that in order to become successful entertainers, they had to leave their place in the world once more to acquire the capital necessary to free themselves from the laboring process. A lifetime of expropriation, culminating in their most notable song, a song that may in fact exude some staying power, so long as the University of Tennessee continues to utilize it on football Saturdays. However, the permanence of the Osborne Brothers seems subject to the whims of a college football program, and not the whims of the public, who usually get to determine what remains standing in the human world.

The expropriation that the Osborne brothers experienced was nothing new to Appalachian musicians by the mid-20th century, as the blueprint for "success" had been laid out by Bill Monroe, Earl Scruggs, and others who had served as trailblazers in this emerging industry. Even prior to their dalliance into music, the brothers had experienced forced loss of place, and their search for a new place in the would then become directed by capitalism when the patriarch began to move the family around the country. Given the history of Leslie County, Kentucky, this expropriation of the Osbourne's might possibly have saved one of, if not both, of their lives. The cycle of expropriation in the 20th century demanded that Appalachians leave their home communities in order to break free of a laboring process that was exponentially more dangerous than other forms of labor during the same period. For the Osbournes, leaving Hyden, Kentucky, was necessary to complete the task of becoming charting bluegrass musicians. Other

individuals who do not have the opportunity to play music for a living also have the propensity to leave a dangerous laboring situation like the one that existed in Hyden, Kentucky, during the mid-20th century. Here lies one of the most brutal realities of expropriation: forcing a loss of place on a population allows for further exploitation of that place and the people who could not afford to leave.

II

On December 30, 1970, an explosion ripped through an underground coal mine in Leslie County, Kentucky, killing 39 coal miners. The bodies of 15 men were recovered late into the night on the day of the explosion. The coal miners represented the day shift for a coal mine that was owned by the Finley Brothers Coal Company. According to the *New York Times*, the 39 men were trapped at the end of a 2,400-foot-long horizontal tunnel. An investigation of the mine revealed that company had failed to follow safety protocols, which led to the harrowing and avoidable industrial disaster.[77] A negligence trial was eventually set for the Finley brothers, who quickly assured everyone that they had followed all guidelines necessary to prevent such a tragedy from happening. But the truth remained. The Finley brothers mine was unsafe, and the disaster was a byproduct of their desire to accumulate capital without being checked by a government or bureaucratic institution.

Like other previous coal conglomerates, Finley Brothers Coal prioritized the accumulation of wealth over the well-being of the laborers who were generating that wealth for a select few. Prior to the explosion, the Finley Brothers mine site had briefly shut down due to

[77] George Vecsey, "Toll of 39 Feared Dead in Mine Explosion," *New York Times*, December 31, 1970,https://search-proquest-com.proxy006.nclive.org/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/118855317/873E00A1FDA447CEPQ/4?accountid=8337.

safety violations, but quickly reopened after operators claimed that they had remedied all hazards.[78] The Finley Brothers were notorious for their willingness to skirt safety guidelines when operating their Leslie County mine, sometimes prompting physical altercations with local officials.[79] The Finley brothers were not from Hyden, Kentucky, and this disconnection from the land allowed them to damage and consume it with little to no ethical dilemmas. Capitalist land expropriation in this part of Appalachia was the first step in expropriating the individual *from* the land, which eventually led to an expropriation from one's own self.

There can be no doubt that a massive mining operation was constructed with the goal of acquiring superfluous capital and resulting in the consumption of the environment itself. This same accumulation of capital also worked to inspire the newly formed laboring class to keep the machine of extraction functioning. Those who maintained the corrosive operation believed that participating in these actions would ultimately lighten the burden of the laboring process. By the 1920s, laboring became an admirable human quality, and social movements had begun to organize around humanity's relationship to labor. By then in Appalachia, those involved in the extraction industry were not seeking a way out of the machine, but rather desired more rewards for their role in the system, in the same way that the Osborne brothers expected a reward for their role in the machine that was operated by musicians like them.

Perhaps it was fate that Bobby and Sonny Osborne no longer lived in Hyden, Kentucky by the time of Leslie County's Hurricane Creek Mine Disaster. Expropriation on the part of the

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[78] Vecsey, "Toll of 39 Feared Dead in Mine Explosion," *New York Times*, December 31, 1970, https://search-proquest-com.proxy006.nclive.org/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/118855317/873E00A1FDA447CEPQ/4?accountid=8337.
[79] Vecsey, "Toll of 39 Feared Dead in Mine Explosion," *New York Times*, December 31, 1970, https://search-proquest-com.proxy006.nclive.org/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/118855317/873E00A1FDA447CEPQ/4?accountid=8337.

Osbournes quite possibly saved their lives, as both Bobby (39) and Sonny (33) were of working age by the time of the explosion. Ultimately, it was the allure of a career in professional music that drew the brothers out of Hyden, Kentucky, and more importantly, the quest for capital. The Osbournes would first travel to Ohio and eventually to Nashville, Tennessee, hoping to be exempt from laboring in a mine like the one owned by the Finley Brothers.

Certainly, there was no action that the Osbournes could have taken to prevent the Hurricane Creek Mine Disaster, but their expropriation happened alongside the expropriation of thousands of other Leslie County residents, who theoretically could have taken collective action to prevent the explosion. Humanity has the unique ability to greatly shape the world in which it exists. Generally speaking, the people operating the mines in Hyden during the mid-20th century were singularly focused on the goal of extraction, so long as it led to capital. The land-owning and the laboring classes worked hand in hand to consume the natural environment because both sides believed that doing so was in their best interest. The Finley brothers even prioritized their own ability to generate capital over the well-being of the laboring classes from whom they exploited.

The town of Hyden pushed forward with the extraction industry, regardless of this sobering reminder of what everyone's actions were marching towards, which constituted the complete consumption of Hyden itself. Once coal slightly relinquished its stranglehold on Hyden, Kentucky, a new consumptive industry began to steadily maturate in the shadows. In recent decades, tourism, an industry that slowly crept north from southern Appalachia, has begun to lay roots in the former coal community.[80] In the present day, one could plan a morbid vacation

[80] Martin, *Tourism in the Mountain South: A double edged sword* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 187-193.

around the Hurricane Creek Mine Disaster memorial, a historic landmark that exists on several travel websites. It seems as if it is not enough to forever alter the landscape of Leslie County, Kentucky. Capitalism now seeks to exploit the disconnection between human and nature by selling a consumable form of nature back to people who may have become expropriated from Appalachia due to the effects of mass consumer capitalism.

III

In 1982, Dolly Parton sat down with Barbara Walters for an interview, six months after Dolly had collapsed on stage during a performance.[81] In the interview, Parton laid out some of what she called her "big ideas," which included plans for a cosmetic line as well as a clothing line that would be made available to what Dolly called "your average American public." This line of dialogue inspired an incredulous "huh" from Walters, to which Dolly replied "The kind of people that would come to my concert, I know where they would go to buy their clothes before they came."[82] As early as 1982, Dolly Parton fully understood that being a recording artist would only accumulate a finite amount of capital. Ownership would become paramount to Parton's success after this time because it promised to give Dolly a certain level of control over the way in which the world would understand her.

Dolly then continued to explain to Barbara Walters that she had a dream, a dream which involved the construction of a city. "This will be like a fantasy city, sorta like a Disneyland, but like a mountain Disneyland, like a Smokey Mountain Fairyland," Parton told an astonished Barbara Walters, who was more interested in discussing Dolly's reclusive husband, Carl, than

[81] Dolly Parton, *ABC News*. 2016. Season 4, episode 1, "At Home with Dolly Parton." Interview by Barbara Walters. Aired December 14, 1982, on ABC.
[82] Parton, *ABC News*. 2016. Season 4, episode 1, "At Home with Dolly Parton." Interview by Barbara Walters. Aired December 14, 1982, on ABC.

hearing anymore about Dolly's notions of building her own city.[83] This idea would eventually manifest in the world as Dollywood, the popular Dolly themed tourist attraction near Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, with the help of corporate entertainment conglomerate Herchand Family Enterprises. Up until this time, Dolly Parton had spent most of her life on the laboring side of the entertainment equation, and she looked across the line into an ownership role that would ultimately generate superfluous capital for her, instead of the institutions that had profited before. Since Dolly began performing on local television stations in Knoxville as an adolescent, her labor had been exploited by the entertainment industry. Although this exploitation eventually changed the course of her life, she was still expropriated from eastern Tennessee during the course of her music and film career.

Shortly after the ABC interview aired, Parton's business team was contacted by Herschend Enterprises, now known as Herschend Family Entertainment, a corporation with a history of profiting from the mass tourism industry that exists in several parts of Appalachia. Herschend owns and operates other tourist attractions around the South, including the "Dolly Parton Stampede," formerly known as the "Dixie Stampede," a chain of dinner theaters which recreates the Civil War while patrons consume food while being entertained by a cast of mostly Appalachian thespians. Attractions like Stone Mountain, Georgia, and Dollywood allow for Herschend to further profit from the tourism industry through their various lodging sites found in southern Appalachia, as well as Branson, Missouri, a famous town where country music has been performed for over 100 years. Herschend also owns the Newport aquarium in Newport, Kentucky, which is the largest aquarium in the commonwealth, sitting across the Ohio River

[83] Parton, *ABC News*. 2016. Season 4, episode 1, "At Home with Dolly Parton." Interview by Barbara Walters. Aired December 14, 1982, on ABC.

from the major Cincinnati Metropolitan area. In addition, the entertainment conglomerate owns the Harlem globetrotters, an exhibition basketball team based out of Atlanta, Georgia, famous for their dazzling ballhandling.[84]

Based in Atlanta, the Herschend Family Entertainment Corporation is not in the business of preserving Appalachian culture, but is rather in the business of selling southern cultural nostalgia as well as connections to nature back to a mass public that was expropriated long ago. For this reason, the longing for a connection to nature, or to some forgotten past, are in fact one in the same. Dolly Parton and the Herschend Family Entertainment Corporation are simply selling a connection to a place in the world, a connection that was socially engineered out of human populations during the time of mass industrialization. These connections are now a consumable good, just like everything else in a mass consumer society. Dolly Parton's expropriation was orchestrated by a mass entertainment industry, which dictated that she relocate to Nashville if she wanted to taste the success that other country stars before her had achieved. By 1982, Dolly would be approached by another agent of the mass entertainment industry, who would negotiate to profit off of Dolly's own expropriation by offering to bring more consumption into the place that Dolly became disconnected from.

Opened in 1986, Dollywood hosts over 4,000,000 guests a year in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, and many of those guests travel from Kentucky, Georgia, and North Carolina. Others come from as far away as New York or California, simply to experience the Dolly Parton themed amusement park.[85] Communities near Pigeon Forge, such Gatlinburg and Chattanooga, Tennessee, have also embraced the mass tourism industry, and have even begun to lean into

[84] Our Properties," Herschend Family Entertainment, last modified 2021, https://www.hfecorp.com/our-businesses/.
[85]Jad Abumrad, *Dolly Parton's America*, podcast audio, October 29, 2019. https://www.npr.org/podcasts/765024913/dolly-parton-s-america.

hillbilly stereotypes in order to complete the experience for visitors who come from outside the mountains.[86] Many of those who labor in the tourism industry, including employees at Dollywood, are not paid adequately for the results of their production by institutions like the Herschend Family Entertainment Corporation.[87] In order for Dolly Parton's empire to flourish in East Tennessee, thousands of laborers must be compensated below what philosophers have often referred to as the "living wage."

Constructing a city and not paying employees a fair wage for their labor is nothing new in the history of central and southern Appalachia. Entities like the Island Creek Coal Company, for example, admittedly beat Dolly Parton to the punch in terms of exploiting the natural world for personal profit. Although Dolly and Herschend are not in the business of destroying the ecosystem that is required to sustain communities, they *are* guilty of extracting superfluous capital out of the Tennessee mountains and exploiting the labor of residents in order to bring to reality a capitalist empire that funnels the profits out of the communities that produced for the machine. On the other side of this dichotomy lays the consumption of Appalachian culture in a way that is done solely through the reification of Appalachian stereotypes. For example, bearded men wearing overalls are likely to invite tourists to the "Hatfield & McCoy dinner feud" in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, where patrons can enjoy the retelling of a land dispute that took place along the West Virginia and Kentucky border while enjoying a little bit of "feudin' fried chick'n," "smashed mashed taters," and "granny's famous specialty dessert." Dolly's idea to make her theme park a kind of "Appalachian Disneyland" fully transformed the areas around

[86] Martin, *Tourism in the Mountain South*, 187-190.
[87] Martin, *Tourism in the Mountain South*, 187-190.

Pigeon Forge into monuments of consumption, whose civic dedication to capital rivals only that of coal towns like Holden in West Virginia.

Tourism has come to supplant coal mining in places like East Tennessee as a new way to utilize nature in order to better serve human desires. In both Dollywood and Holden, these desires were not for the survival of the community, but were rather born of an individual quest for superfluous capital. Like those in Holden, residents of Pigeon Forge and the surrounding areas actively participate in the consumption of Appalachia's natural world as well as aspects of mountain culture that can be packaged and sold, such as music and food. Participation in both forms of mass consumption require a manufactured consent, generated and prescribed to the laborers by the landowning class; however, labor was required in both cases to keep operating the machine of mass consumption, which has been functioning for over 100 years in East Tennessee. Much like the destruction of the mountain environment was not possible without individuals willing to use their labor to consume mountain tops, the reification of Appalachian stereotypes in East Tennessee cannot be made possible without individuals who are willing to use their labor to entertain throngs of visitors from outside of the community.

Dolly Parton and her corporate partners combined the idea of using Appalachian entertainment to draw people into Appalachian nature so that they can continue to profit off of both. Dollywood aims to serve as a monument to the life and career of one of America's most beloved country singers. Instead, it has helped to birth a new extractive industry that now exists exclusively around Dolly's place in the world. Inside Dollywood, visitors can find the last coal powered train in North America as well as a full-size replica of Dolly's childhood Tennessee mountain home. All around the park are other small glimpses of Dolly's childhood in Appalachia, which are meant to evoke feelings of nostalgia in the consumers who pay an entry

fee to experience Dolly's vision. Patrons can also visit the gift shop located within Dollywood, where they can purchase mass produced items meant to bear the resemblance of Dolly or some aspect of her public persona.[88]

Dolly Parton was born into this world of mass consumption, and capitalism should by no means be considered a product of the Dollyverse. However, Dolly's commitment to the finite and to the accumulation of capital speaks to her lifetime spent as an entertainer who has not had to consider the permanence of the work that they have created. Indeed, Dolly Parton's entire empire is built upon a foundation of impermanence, since her music career was so greatly supervised by the recording industry, and was not directed by a sense of artistic responsibility to the rest of humankind. In fairness to Dolly, superfluous capital allowed her an economic upward mobility that was highly unlikely for other Appalachian woman with the same social status during the 1970s and 1980s. Here lies the fantasy of the laborer, to use labor so well and to such an extent that they are eventually freed from the laboring process itself. This may be why a consumer society values the role of the entertainer because it serves as an example of how laboring can liberate one from further labor. Dolly Parton even referred to herself as the "all American girl" in the 1982 interview with Barbara Walters, citing the details of her upbringing as evidence of having achieved the "American dream," which may in fact be the emancipation from labor.

The impact that exists goes as follows: in a society of laborers, laboring becomes known as one of humankind's greatest actions, one that can even free humanity from the laboring process itself and coincidentally free humanity from the natural processes of life. Once

[88] Martin, *Tourism in the Mountain South*, 187-190.

disconnected from the natural process of nature, the natural world ceases to become integral for human life and can be transformed into another consumable object. More simply put, once Dolly Parton became expropriated from east Tennessee, her place in the world became easier to be consumed for the profit of a select few individuals who already had access to capital. In the same vein, once individuals who lived in an agrarian Appalachian society over 100 years ago became expropriated from their places in the world, it became easier to see those places as consumable objects and not as the natural world which can provide humankind with its very survival.

Mass consumption can be found at the heart of all extractive industries, and the result of this extraction seldom benefits the individuals who make up the communities that were extracted from. Only individuals with access to capital can truly benefit from the economic evolution of places like Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, meaning that any remaining community in this part of the world likely serves as the laboring force that generates capital, which is then funneled out of the community and into large cities such as Atlanta and Nashville. These places also benefit from other consumptive industries that have extracted Appalachian music as well as Appalachian natural resources. This cycle of extraction, of production and consumption, represents the system that created and maintained the conditions necessary for exploitation to continue in Appalachia.

Chapter Four

What Have They Done to the Old Home Place?:

Parochialism and Appalachian Expropriation

I

In 2016, I attended Terrapin Hill music festival in Harrodsburg, Kentucky, where I was introduced to local bluegrass bands like Mamma Said String Band and Restless Leg String Band. Over the course of the next five years, I would regularly attend performances by these bands and others in the central Kentucky area. Although I did not grow up listening to bluegrass, country music was something that lied within my cultural capital. Growing up, listening to Brooks and Dunn or Vince Gill was a common occurrence in my household. I can recall watching old tapes of the television show Hee-Haw with my great grandma Ballard and uncle Jimmy Ballard, who was my grandfather's brother. Although I had spent much time in my youth visiting with family in the state of Indiana, I was unaware of the connections between Bill Monroe and the southern part of the Hoosier state. Monroe and many other Appalachian musicians experienced loss of place and disconnection from land in their lives, and most were forced to relocate as a result of America's mass consumption driven economy.

Although Hannah Arendt does not expressly exclude artists from the phenomena of expropriation, she does make the claim that artists are the last workers left in a laboring society. Arendt goes on to delineate the difference between entertainment and art in *A Culture in Crisis*, which further separates the role between artist and entertainer. While artists may be the last workers left in a laboring society, entertainers are not exempt from having their natural survival linked to their capacity to labor in a mass consumer capitalist construct. Art has always been

defined by its permanence and its ability to have a lasting effect on the human world.[89] The Sistine Chapel, the Parthenon, and the Mona Lisa, to name only a few, are enduring works that have survived for several centuries and remind humanity of what it is capable of accomplishing. Entertainment, on the other hand, is defined by its ability to be consumed, or its tendencies towards impermanence, which does not exist to leave a lasting mark on the human world.[90]

Art and culture have been linked together throughout the history of human civilization. People often refer to "culture" as any non-industrious product that has been produced by a group of people, or more simply put, culture is anything that is produced outside of the cycle of human survival. Art, architecture, and literature, for instance, are closely associated with culture because they are fundamentally disconnected from the biological life process. Animals that exist in nature do not have the capacity to create culture, nor can they create a world that exists outside of nature. The problem that humanity finds itself in now is that the world that humans have created, what was meant to free themselves from the laboring process, has resulted in the creation of a society of laborers, whose connection to the biological life process has always included an unnatural relationship with mass consumption.[91]

In many cases, the work of the artist has been disdained in a mass consumer society because anything that cannot be consumed, meaning that anything outside of the biological life process, is often considered a hobby in a world where laboring is one of the most desirable actions that a human being can perform.[92] However, to become an entertainer is to buy into a system of mass consumption by performing for the masses during their leisure time, which was

[89] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 167-168.
[90] Arendt, *Crisis in Culture*, 210.
[91] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 128.
[92] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 128.

only acquired some 100 years ago.[93] Bluegrass music, marketed during the 1930s as an upbeat variation of classic old-time tunes, would come to entertain generations of people during its almost 90-year existence. Bluegrass was not marketed by its alleged founder Bill Monroe as a new form of art that was meant to have staying power throughout the centuries. In fact, the opposite was true. Individuals like Monroe and his one-time banjo player Earl Scruggs were often heard selling life insurance or baking flour on records and on the radio. Bluegrass was created as a form of entertainment that was open for business from the moment that Bill Monroe stepped onto the Grand Ole Opry stage in Nashville, Tennessee.

These foundations of capitalism have influenced Appalachian music as well as the musicians who reify this music in the 21st century. Can Appalachian music be art if its foundations are rooted in the consumptive music industry? Does bluegrass music or any Appalachian music have any staying power in the human world if its primary function is to entertain the masses with no regard for permanence? The entertainment industry has an appetite that can never be satiated, and will always require more fuel be placed into the machine by way of more music that can be consumed. For bands like Mama Said String Band and Restless Leg String Band, this reality was something that they were born into. It would be considered easy to point out the inconsistencies in Dolly Parton's capitalist empire, an empire that continues the history of labor exploitation in East Tennessee. Musicians like Kaitlyn Caudill and Ishi Wooton are at the mercy of the now established entertainment industry and have become disconnected from their homes and their places of origin as a result.

[93] Arendt, *The Human Condition*,126-127.

Interviewing these two musicians, who now live in southern Indiana and Lexington, Kentucky, respectively, can give some insight into the decision making that goes into the expropriation of Appalachian musicians. By establishing the places of their origins and comparing it against their places of current residency, we can track how two prominent and talented Appalachian musicians experience a disconnection from place. Establishing that Appalachian musicians, as well as Appalachian music itself, have been expropriated from their home communities can lead to broader discussions about Appalachian expropriation, seeing as how these individuals who reify the culture that was created in a specific place are supposed to be more disconnected from the process of laboring in American consumer society than the average individual.

II

Kaitlyn Caudill, better known by her stage name, Katie Didit, grew up in Isom, Kentucky, a small unincorporated community that can be found on the way to Letcher County, if one were to come from Knott County, Kentucky. Didit learned how to play music in Eastern Kentucky, and eventually taught school children how to play it as an instructor for the Junior Appalachian Musicians (JAM) program. After she decided to try to become a professional musician, Katie realized that she would have to leave Isom in order to perform in front of different crowds on different nights. Although she lived on a farm in Eastern Kentucky for some time in her youth, Katie had never had to grow her own food, meaning she has never relied on the natural world for her survival.[94] Born into a world where everyone was expropriated, Katie's

[94] Kaitlyn Caudill, interview by Brandon Zellers, March 11, 2021.

relationship to the environment in Isom, Kentucky, was not one of survival, which was the first step towards disconnecting her from this place in the world.

Like many other previous Appalachian musicians, Katie faced it dilemma: she could fully disconnect from her place in the world, the only home she had ever known, or possibly give up her dream of playing music professionally. Like many who came before her, Katie's choice was simple, and she uprooted her life in order to free herself from superfluous labor in her Appalachian community. First, she moved to Lexington, Kentucky, to join with her current band, known as Mama Said String Band. The concept of the band was simple, a bluegrass band comprised solely of women who could both sing and play instruments. After a few incarnations, the modern version of the band exists as a mixed gendered musical experience; however, Katie and the other women band members can be heard most prominently as lead vocalists.[95] Affectionately known simply as Mama Said, the group plays a semi-traditional style that is enjoyed by older fans of the genre as well as a generation of young people who identify the central Kentucky bluegrass as an ongoing party that celebrates a style of music that is parochially named.

Mama Said mostly performs in larger Kentucky cities like Louisville and Lexington, while occasionally playing venues outside of these metropolitan areas of the bluegrass during music festival season. Alongside touring around parts of the South and Midwest, Mama Said does most of their work inside the Commonwealth of Kentucky. At this time, Katie lives in southern Indiana, the result of many decisions that carried her further and further away from Isom, Kentucky. In Katie's absence, the conditions in her community have deteriorated and she

[95] Kaitlyn Caudill, interview by Brandon Zellers, March 11, 2021.

acknowledges the effects of the ongoing opiate epidemic, an epidemic that plagues communities which are shifting away from their histories of mass industrialization. She also acknowledges the current destruction of the natural environment that surrounds her place in the world at the hands of the extractive coal industry. The fact that her father worked his whole life as a coal miner complicates matters for Katie, as this act of labor sustained her survival long enough for her to depart from Isom.

Like countless other Appalachians before her, Katie Didit was forced from her place in the world by the cold and unforgiving hand of mass consumer capitalism. Isom, Kentucky, no longer represented a connection to nature and certainly did not represent a connection to Katie's survival. As such, it was easy for Katie to leave her place in the world, believing that her survival would be met on the outside of the county line. The conditions that forced her to move from Eastern Kentucky are directly linked to the Arendtian phenomena of expropriation, as her part of the country has long been used as a source of consumption. One should sympathize with Katie Didit's dilemma to choose between a long-severed relationship with the world and the security that comes alongside a greater access to capital since members in a mass consumer society find themselves in similar circumstances of disconnection from their place in the world. In a modern mass society, people typically do not disconnect further as a means of improving the world; they usually make this decision in order to acquire capital, or to put it a different way, to free themselves from the laboring process.

Katie doesn't view this expropriation negatively, and still finds herself connected to Isom, even though she no longer resides in Letcher county. "I feel connected to it [Isom] because it is a part of me, and all of the good and all of the bad that that place is, all of those bad stereotypes that it's known for, that there's a duty inside of me from being there to go out into the

world and make sure that people know a different side of it,"[96] she says when asked about her connections to eastern Kentucky. In the modern age, Katie seems to consider herself a sort of ambassador for her place in the world, a proposition that requires her to constantly perform whether on stage or not.

As long as capital can free the individual from the laboring process, the expropriation of all of humanity will continue down its current path. In Appalachia, this proposition was forced upon almost everyone by the late 1920s. Appalachia is not the birth place of expropriation. However, in the United States, the region may have served as the testing ground after the turn of the 20th century. Mass extraction was only possible through the mass expropriation of the individuals that lived more harmoniously with the natural world, and such levels of extraction only led to more expropriation due to the destruction of the natural environment that was meant to sustain human life. Even those who make music, those who bear and continue a certain culture, are not immune to disconnecting from a place, which furthers the destruction of the place that the musician was disconnected from. In this way, contemporary bluegrass musicians in Appalachia have had their creativities limited by the idea that geography will provide monetary success.

When asked if she considered herself an artist or entertainer, Didit responded by asking if she could choose both. When given the opportunity to only pick one, she landed on artist with the caveat "I try to live my life through art…. Live in it, breathe it, try to make my money through it."[97] Although artists have been compensated for their work throughout human history, the goal of the contemporary Appalachian artist to acquire capital exists as a fairly new construct

[96] Kaitlyn Caudill, interview by Brandon Zellers, March 11, 2021.
[97] Kaitlyn Caudill, interview by Brandon Zellers, March 11, 2021.

in the human world since a functioning "music industry" has only existed for slightly over 100 years in its current form. Now indistinguishable to even the musician, art and entertainment in Appalachia have become intwined through the capital that can be acquired as a producer of Appalachian music. The perpensity to "make my money thorough it"[98] suggests a consumption of Didit's music rather than suggesting a permanence, and such consumption of music would ideally provide Katie with some level of capital, superfluous or otherwise.

III

Restless Leg String Band from Lexington, Kentucky, is one of the most consistent musical acts in the bluegrass genre. Many fans have seen the band perform so many times that shows can often blur together in a fast paced, psychedelic haze that lingers around the performers long after they have stepped off stage. The fiddle player for the band, Ishi Wooton, originally comes from Leslie County, Kentucky, the same place that Bobby and Sonny Osborne resided in before chasing the dream of making it in the music industry. Wooton shares this dream, and has left Leslie County for Lexington, Kentucky, a journey that many eastern Kentuckians have made since the events of the industrial expansion. Like the Osbournes, Wooton made this transition in place because of the allure of the music industry, which theoretically promises an exemption from labor.[99]

Much like Katie Didit, who happens to be Wooton's fourth cousin, Ishi grew up on a farm in his home county but did not grow his own food for survival. Because his father was a carpenter, Wooton understands the difference between work and labor enough to know about object permanence in the human world. Although not directly connected to the extraction

[98] Kaitlyn Caudill, interview by Brandon Zellers, March 11, 2021.
[99] Ishi Wooton, interview by Brandon Zellers, March 11, 2021.

industry, Wooton is familiar with the work of consumer capitalism, as it has been a function of life in Leslie County for more than a century. Wooton's relationship with capitalism has always been a transactional one, as he was born into a world of mass consumption, much like every other musician born after the late 1920s.

Neither Wooton nor Didit know any songs that are parochially unique to the county that they grew up in. While both admit that such songs most likely exist, neither could recall the name of such a tune, let alone how to play such a song on the instrument of choice.[100] This further illustrates the ways in which the ownership of Appalachian music has been either transferred to a faceless corporate entity that often exists in Nashville or has been lost altogether to a history of expropriation. Katie and Ishi both are musicians who are no longer connected to songs that are unique to their community; however, both are well versed in catalogues of recorded music that have entertained audiences long before their birth.

Wooton takes his reverence for Appalachian musicians that came before him to a different level when he tries to emulate a plan that was already executed by another Appalachian musician, Dolly Parton. Ishi has an idea to transform a portion of his childhood farm into a campground and tourist attraction, where individuals can pay money to experience nature and live music:

> I wanted to get back to Leslie County to see what I could do as a fall back plan, just because I have the resources available I wanted to go ahead and start working out a campsite, campground sort of area for people to go hiking and ride horses it seems possible, and then you gotta kind of figure out how you're going to pay for everything, so

[100] Ishi Wooton, interview by Brandon Zellers, March 11, 2021.

> I gotta come back to the city to work in concrete so I can make a little money to take back home and follow another kind of a dream.[101]

The combination of tourism and Appalachian music has already been worked to perfection by Dolly Parton and the Herschend Family Entertainment Corporation, who have centralized mass consumption into Parton's place in the world. Wooton wishes to emulate this business model by creating a monument to the consumption of Appalachian music as well as the consumption of Appalachian nature, further validating the idea that everything in Appalachia is subject to be consumed. In this way, the consumption of Appalachian culture and the consumption of the Appalachian natural environment have become indistinguishable, since the culture of a place and the environment surrounding it have both been transformed into consumable items. This consumption threatens to consume all aspects of live in Appalachia, leaving nothing permanent for future generations to remember the time that Appalachia spent in the human world.

[101] Ishi Wooton, interview by Brandon Zellers, March 11, 2021.

Conclusion

Labor has always generated the means of survival in every manifestation of human society. Labor alone is not capable of consuming the natural resources of the earth, because it was only meant to satisfy the natural appetites of humanity. Once these appetites grew to include the consumption of capital, labor became used in mass to consume the natural world in search of superfluous capital. The mass consumption of the Appalachian natural world as well as Appalachian culture began around the same time in the early 20th century. While millions of tons of coal were being extracted from Holden, West Virginia, the Carter Family was less than 200 miles away giving birth to country music. Only knowing a world where mass consumer capitalism had already provided the laboring classes with the capital to acquire personal radios, Appalachian music stood little chance of transcending its role as entertainment. Mass consumer capitalism ultimately replaced a connection with the natural world, because it had become responsible for the mass survival of people in Appalachia and beyond. At one time, human beings relied on nature to sustain their very survival, but after the events of industrial expansion, humans became increasingly disconnected from nature, due to the social engineering inherent in creating civic structures dedicated to the consumption of the natural world.

In order for humans to be disconnected from nature, they must first be disconnected from a certain place. The transition from agrarian farming to industrial coal mining did not take place overnight, and many Appalachians remained reluctant to commit to participation in mass consumer capitalism.[102] However, by the mid-1920s, one single coal corporation could extract over 13 million tons of coal from one county in West Virginia, suggesting a mass participation in

[102] Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*,165.

the expansive coal industry during this time.[103] Appalachia itself has only existed in its current form as a place that was reserved specifically for mass consumption, given that capitalism has informed decisions in the region since white people found gold in north Georgia, a historic event that eventually led to the massive expropriation of the Cherokee from Appalachia. The pipe dream of early color writers and capitalists, Appalachia has only existed in its current form to satiate the desires of a land-owning class who seek to expand their capital through mass industrialization once agriculture became an obsolete form of mass production.

Appalachia exists as a monument to consumption, and consumption of the natural world perpetuates the idea that the place that was consumed will be forever changed. Upon arrival in the human world, this place known as Appalachia came to represent a playground for industry, and that perception of the region only started to decline as those industries began fading from relevancy in mountain communities. In fact, much of Appalachian culture can be stripped down to nothing more than forms of consumption. Even the delivery of such messages was done through avenues of consumption that require a system of mass capitalism in order to function. Consequently, string band music can only exist in the social realm through its ability to be consumed.

Expropriation, or forced loss of place, has manifested itself in a variety of ways within Appalachian communities, each diverse community experiencing this feeling of worldlessness in their own similar yet unique ways. Feelings of isolation and loneliness are not created by one class of people and administered to another, they are generated through the interconnectivity of all human actions, specifically the actions of those in local communities.[104] Operating an

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[103] West Virginia Department of Mines, *Statistical Report of the Department of Mines*, 1920-1921, 145.
[104] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 160-162.

intricate and delicate endeavor like a deep underground coal mine during the early 20th century required a massive degree of human cooperation, levels of cooperation towards a common goal of capitalist extraction, and, ultimately, the destruction of a community or place. Such cooperation can exist outside of a system of mass extraction, however. When fully operational with mass consumer capitalism, these levels of human cooperation are capable of a staggering amount of extraction from the physical world, which in turn destroys the environment that has sustained human life in Appalachian communities.[105]

Human cooperation of this kind, the use of speech and actions, allowed for the Appalachian laboring classes to organize around the outset of the 20th century. However successful or unsuccessful these movements to be, their efforts to organize represented their own desire for more consumption of the human world, and not a desire to change the status quo.[106] On the contrary, labor movements, or political movements that seek to distill the entirety of the human experience down to individual relationships with labor, are dependent upon a mass consumer society because they know only a world in which mass consumption plays a major role in organizing human life. Unifying people by their relationship to labor pre-assumes the framework of a capitalist hierarchy and suggests that laboring is tantamount to one of the highest callings for a human being. Labor and the activities associated with labor are more closely connected to the natural world, due to the primary function of labor being the sustainment of the biological processes of life, meaning that the products of labor are meant to be consumed in order to sustain the life force of a human being. Even the very idea of success becomes temporary and tangible among various labor movements, given that the needs and desires of

[105] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 93-96.
[106] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 126-136.

humans are guaranteed to change with developments in mass consumer capitalism, which exists as an economic idea that, by its very nature, cannot sustain a permanence in the world because capitalism must always react to changes in human consumption.[107]

During the early 20th century in central Appalachian communities, the production process often took the form of large-scale coal mining or timber operations, which usually required the construction of an accompanying town. These towns supplied unwieldy corporate mechanisms with an almost endless supply of human labor, and that labor pool constantly recycled itself with individuals who were from Appalachian communities and those who recently entered the region to sell their labor.[108] In this case, Appalachian labor served only to exacerbate the process of production and consumption, an exacerbation that led to the organization of the central Appalachian working classes. This movement ultimately became characterized by its primary goal to acquire a piece of the produced results of the ever-expanding consumption taking place in the 20th century. This request for a fair and adequate split of their production value, one that would satisfy the consumptive desires of the laboring classes, manifested itself through the superfluous capital that was generated in an operation of mass production, such as a large scale mine.[109] Acquiring capital, which was fully ingratiated into the human survival process by the early 20th century, came to produce an abundance of wealth for the directors of capital, and the desire to rearrange the flow of such abundance are the foundations of seemingly all labor movements.[110]

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[107] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 126-136.
[108] Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*, 172.
[109] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 133.
[110] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 215-219.

These struggles to consume are what lie at the heart of Arendtian expropriation. Struggle should not merely be restricted to the historical Marxist ideas concerning class struggle, as viewing human history through such a singular lens restricts scholars' ability to understand problems that affect the entirety of the human world.[111] The human struggle for survival has become more individualized since the events of The Reformation and The French Revolution, both of which fundamentally shifted the relationship between the public and the private realms. Societal hierarchies derived from traditional familial structures were used before these events to establish the hierarchical nature of a human community.[112]

Upon the onset of mass capitalism, human consumption became tied to labor in ways that expanded into what Hannah Arendt calls "the unnatural growth of the natural."[113] Such growth refers to the ever-expanding characteristics of capitalism itself, which constantly needs to be fed by the individual actors of mass consumption, who keep the rhythms of the capitalist machine humming in the expected way. Stagnation amounts to death in a capitalist economic structure because anything less than continued expansion causes a breakdown in a capitalist operation. Any step backwards in the capitalist production process signals the inability to sustain the attempted venture due to the idea that the production of capital takes place at a lesser rate. The capitalist production process requires the transformation of the natural world into an artifice of the human world, and mass consumption that is directed by capitalism has resulted in the mass consumption of the planet that human beings inhabit.

A mass consumer society, in which labor is regarded as an admirable human achievement, had already existed in Appalachia by the late 1920s, as evidenced by the creation

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[111] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 79-83.
[112] Thomas Hobbes, *The Leviathan, 245-246*
[113] Arendt, *The Human Condition*,47.

of the Holden coal town around the turn of the century. In fact, some laborers in Holden managed to trade enough of their labor power to invest in personal entertainment machines like radios and vinyl records, which they enjoyed during their leisure time.[114] Even this leisure time, meant as the domain of the private realm, was capitalized upon as another means of extracting capital from the human world. As companies carried mineral wealth away from Appalachian communities during large scale extraction projects, Appalachian culture and the wealth that would be generated from its exploitation also left the mountains, inspiring generations of future musicians to do the same.

After establishing a mass consumer society in towns like Holden, West Virginia, and Hyden, Kentucky, the work of consuming Appalachia could begin in earnest, starting with the mass consumption of Appalachian culture. Music that could only previously be heard as a byproduct of living in a certain community could now be broadcasted throughout the nation, exposing more individuals to the idea of consuming Appalachian music in our capitalist society.[115] Leisure time, another consequence of mass consumer society, theoretically was understood as time spent when not engaging in labor.[116] Consumable products like vinyl records increasingly became widely available to the Appalachian laboring classes, who now had to negotiate with capitalism whenever trying to access aspects of their own culture.[117]

The production process involves the fundamental transformation of materials found in the world, and the mass production of Appalachian music undoubtedly changed its usage throughout the 20th century. Even though scholars agree that music was made in mountain communities

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[114] Shifflett, *Coal Towns (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Pres, 1991), 165-166.*
[115] Malone, *Country Music U.S.A.*, 32-34.
[116] Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 126-131.
[117] Shifflett, *Coal Towns, 166-168.*

prior to its mass recording, most recollections from those times only stay in the human world once entered into the machine of the mass entertainment industry.[118] Starting with the early recordings of Ralph Peer and the Carter Family, Appalachian music, as consumers have come to know it, exists with a sole purpose of being sold to the laboring masses, many of whom existed in Appalachia during the ascendancy of consumption in the region.[119]

The connections between mass consumption and Appalachia were established during the birth of the region into the human world, when capitalists began to beset upon central and southern Appalachia to satiate their appetites for superfluous capital. Appalachia has never existed without mass consumer capitalism, and only the shared work of people will determine whether or not the concept of Appalachia will exist after the need for mass consumption has passed through the human world. For this reason, any culture produced within Appalachia is a direct result of the effects of mass consumer capitalism and is forever linked to the unnatural growth of the natural, allowing for its constant consumption by a mass number of individuals inside and outside of Appalachia. Consequently, the playing of Appalachian music has transformed from leisurely playtime activity into an action that can possibly free the desires of the individual artist from the yoke of mass consumer capitalism. Once merely seen as the opposite of labor before the arrival of mass consumption to Appalachia, the playing of string instruments has come to represent a thriving entertainment business that has the potential to free the individual Appalachian artists from the laboring process.

Entertainment and art cannot exist in the same space, as the former was primarily a manufacturer of consumable and temporary products, while the latter was meant to permanently

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[118] *Country Music: A Film by Ken Burns,* episode 1, "The Rub," Directed by Ken Burns. 9/15/2019 on PBS.
[119] *Country Music: A Film by Ken Burns,* episode 1, "The Rub," Directed by Ken Burns. 9/15/2019 on PBS.

reflect aspects of our modern human condition. Usually stationary in their creation, works of art typically are bound to one place, or even a parochial region, meant to claim dominion over aspects of local cultures. Much like the mineral wealth that was extracted from the region during the 19th and 20th centuries in the name of superfluous capital, Appalachian culture was also carried away to be made the private property of capitalists in major American cities like Nashville, Tennessee. The irony of this reality is not lost on Appalachian musicians who understand the dichotomy of wealth being carried away from their home communities by massive extractive industries.[120] Although recognized as a function of capitalism's relationship with their place in the world, Appalachian musicians fully understand that survival as an entertainer is wholly dependent upon the superfluous capital of the consumer.

Because of its close relation to consumption, Appalachian music may not exhibit the same type of permanence that other forms of folk arts enjoy in the modern world. No longer a byproduct of ethnicity or place, the connections between Appalachian music and the rest of humanity are conjoined through modern mass consumer society. Just like the human reliance on nature has been replaced by mass consumption, the connection between the Appalachian individual and Appalachian culture has been supplanted by a paywall of capitalism. Over the past 100 years, human beings have often had to provide a certain level of superfluous capital in order to enjoy music that was once parochially Appalachian. Much like every aspect of the human world, our relationship to consumption has also been fundamentally changed by technology that was meant to free humanity from the laboring process. More accessible than

[120] Kaitlyn Caudill, interview by Brandon Zellers, March 11, 2021.

ever, music has become available to the global masses via institution of the digital age, making levels of music consumption higher now than at any point in human history.

Arendt's assessment of the consumption of human art was born of an era that has since passed. Time's passing has replaced this idea with a new reality in which the work of the artist becomes less synonymous with permanence as mass consumption continues its unabated cycle of destructive capitalist extraction. This current crisis facing Appalachian culture stems from the lack of permanence in the idea of Appalachia itself. Connecting culture to what ultimately can be considered a social identifier, and not legitimate human difference, almost guarantees an eventual end to that culture via the consumption that was necessary to bring Appalachia into the world in the first place. For this reason, the work of the Appalachian artist is even less connected to "work" and can be considered more closely connected to "labor" in the current incantation of modern mass society. Many bluegrass bands in central Kentucky are caught between playing traditionally and innovating the style to keep consumption of the genre fresh in the minds of the audience. Trapped by the opinions of the community that exist almost exclusively in the domain of the social realm, which almost ensures them no permanence in the human world, artists in Appalachia tend to exert less freedom over their work than artists who existed previous to this time.

The creations of the artist can only exist in public because the consumption of art requires the plurality of human experience for the work of art to remain in the human world. Which is to say, that attending a bluegrass festival reaffirms the reality of the world one resides in because that reality can be recognized by other people who also live in the conditions that have been

brought on by the onset of modern mass society.[121] This shared experience, or shared connection, does not merely happen between members of the audience, but also between those who make the art and those who create the works of art alongside them.[122] One reason for this connection is the ways in which humanity views artists within the capitalist hierarchy that presently exists in modern times. As Arendt argues:

> Whatever we do, we are supposed to do for the sake of "making a living"; such is the verdict of society, and the number of people, especially in the professions who might challenge it, has decreased rapidly. The only exception society is willing to grant is the artist, who, strictly speaking, is the only "worker" left in a laboring society. The same trend to level down all serious activities to the status of making a living is manifest in present-day labor theories, which almost unanimously define labor as the opposite of play. As a result, all serious activities, irrespective of their fruits, are called labor, and every activity which is not necessary either for the life of the individual or for the life process of society is subsumed under playfulness.[123]

Humans' desires to free themselves from the laboring process is what draw them to musicians, as they perceive their connections to capitalism as closely related to playfulness and not labor.[124] Such a connection is distinctly human, and for this reason, cultivating this connection through art also works to connect the artist to parts of their humanity that are consumed by capitalism. Ever present in the equation for the Appalachian artist, capitalism works to connect the artist to other individuals as well as to disconnect the artist from their own

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[121] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 50.
[122] Ishi Wooton, interview by Brandon Zellers, March 11, 2021.
[123] Arendt, *The Human Condition,*127.
[124] Arendt, *The Human Condition,*127.

selves and places in the world. It would not be possible for artists to sell tickets to massive concert venues without this connection of all human beings to the public realm, although the social realm is a more appropriate name for this shared connection during the modern era. According to Arendt, the public realm has become totally indistinguishable from the private realm, meaning that both the public and the private have become a new, third reality, known as the social realm. [125]

Because musicians and artists in Appalachia work with a creativity that cannot be found in a laboring society, the works produced by these individuals are subject to the same impermanence as Appalachia itself. Using Appalachian musicians to better understand how expropriation can affect a community and the individuals that live within a certain place directly allows for the scholar to understand how individuals become disconnected from Appalachian communities. Scholars can use expropriation and other Arendtian ideas to understand many events in Appalachian history, and it should be considered long past time that Hannah Arendt be formally introduced into Appalachian scholarship. Instead of a loose, post-modernist, amalgamation of misguided white scholars seeking to understand singular events in Appalachian history, a connected theory that can be applied to different events may inform actions that could be taken to further create the human world in Appalachia.

Human beings tend to continue to treat artists as "the only 'worker' left in a laboring society," despite a century of actions by mass consumption to ensnare the labor of all members of society. Appalachian artists who do not achieve certain levels of commercial success, meaning individuals who do not desire to free themselves from the laboring process through the

[125] Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 38-40.

use of music, are supposedly engaging in a form of play because their action is not generating them the capital necessary to free themselves from other forms of labor.[126] Contemporaries in a community often dispense such judgment to artists, and they can often include family members and other individuals close to the artist, reinforcing the view of music as a leisure activity and not a legitimate capital generating enterprise within the constructs of a capitalist hierarchy.

One way to break free of this cycle of capitalist consumption involves levels of creativity that would allow humanity to re conceptualize the world. Unfortunately for the masses, capitalism restricts creativity by coercing participation through subtle threats of violence, such as starvation and homelessness. The artist, who Arendt calls "the last workers left in a laboring society" has seemingly had their creativities restricted by the same capitalist system, due to the importance that geographic location seems to have on a music career. If the bearers of Appalachian culture find themselves lost for creativity, little hope exists for rest of the laboring masses to break free of the vicegrip of a mass consumer society. If musicians cease to be artists, and Appalachian culture becomes relegated as a form of entertainment, then the region threatens to leave one lasting impression on the world, namely the destruction of the natural environment. If no permanence can be achieved by Appalachian music or culture, then the lasting memory of the region could be exclusively associated with the remanence of capitalisms effects on the natural world, seeing as how the negative effects of the consumption of Appalachian culture would be less tangibly visible than a strip-mined mountain. For this reason, humanity may not remember Appalachia, except as a place that was meant to be superfluously consumed by modern mass society.

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[126] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 127.

The same process that allowed capitalists to extract millions of tons of natural resources from the Appalachian landscape was the same process that enabled them to exploit Appalachian music for massive amounts of profit during the 20th century. This process of mass production has also had the negative effects of destroying both the Appalachian culture and environment. Once a mass consumer society had been created in places like Holden, West Virginia, the working classes began organizing around the idea of superfluous capital and their access to this newly minted world reality, where capital secured survival in human populations. Since human beings have always desired to be freed from the laboring process, the perception of creating music as the ideal form of human production exists in a mass consumer society because of the connection between entertainment and human leisure time. If Appalachian musicians are only creating entertainment, then the creation of art has come secondary to the generation of capital. If the accumulation of superfluous capital has superseded the need to create works of art, it can then be fair to wonder how much longer Appalachian culture will continue to exist in the human world.

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Vita

Brandon Zellers was born in Louisville, Kentucky in 1991. He graduated from Indiana University in 2019, and was awarded a bachelor's degree in History, minoring in Sociology and Philosophy. In Spring of 2019, he accepted a graduate assistantship with Appalachian State University and began study toward a Masters of Arts Degree. The M.A. was awarded in May of 2021.