

Notes From the Archive: A Reflection on Listening

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This project will draw on theories of ritual and repetition, as well as the concepts of glitch music to examine repeated acts of listening. I will explore the ways in which interior space and habits of the body are created through these repeated acts of listening, in particular with the use of headphones. How does repetition affect the way a recording is heard? In what ways is the passage of time heard in each listening session? How is meaning created and transformed through repeated acts of listening?

Bascom Lunsford turns to me and says, "It's thought best to record these old fiddle tunes for their preservation though they are using the world's worst fiddler to do it with."¹ I laugh along with him, and secretly feel guilty because it's as if he knew I had been thinking about what a terrible player he was, and even worse, that I'd been telling people exactly how unskilled he was. I open my eyes and Bascom disappears. He has been dead for several decades and I am alone in my room listening to a set of recordings made by Lunsford more than seventy years ago, trying to grapple with the strange relationship that I have formed with Lunsford, or at least with his voice, through those recordings.

As Jonathan Sterne writes in his book *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*, "Headphones isolate their users in a private world of sounds" (Sterne 2002:88). The repeated act of placing a pair of headphones over one's ears becomes a ritualistic means for creating a liminal space of listening where the body can be both lost and intensely felt. Repeated acts of listening accrue layers of meaning and understanding while the physical degradation inherent in the act of replaying a particular musical object assures that no matter how imperceptibly, each act of listening is not like the last and will not be like the next.

There are of course as many ways of listening with headphones as there are headphone users, perhaps more. We use headphones at the gym, on the bus, at work, while reading, even with other people (think of sharing an iPod ear bud with a companion). Given this, it is necessary to narrow the focus of this article to a particular kind of headphone listening, that is, the private, individualized listening of the sound archive.

Headphones are often associated with a kind of mobile listening, facilitated in particular by the new lightweight music players like the iPod and its many imitators. Michael Bull has written an intriguing article exploring these habits of mobile listening and the ways in which portable music devices are used to create daily narratives, shape space, and transform feelings and perceptions about life. Similarly, Tyler Bickford has examined headphone use at a Vermont primary school, teasing out the ways in which social

relationships and networks are solidified by the shared use of headphone ear buds (Bickford, forthcoming).

In essence, Bull writes about a kind of listening that while private, is conducted in a public space. Bickford writes about a public kind of listening that is enacted publicly, in school gyms, in hallways, at lockers. But what about forms of listening that take place in private, i.e. private listening in private space? How do we listen when we are alone? How is this different from imposing a private bubble of sound on a public space?

How does one go about writing about the private sphere? It is after all, a private and subjective experience. And listening and hearing can be particularly nebulous topics to discuss, in part due to a dearth of language for discussing aspects of hearing and listening. Language used to discuss sound often hinges on visual metaphor rather than direct sound-to-sound description.² Part of writing about sound involves a certain kind of suspension of disbelief on the part of the reader. Aspects of the voice like timbre and inflection are next to impossible to notate in text, and it is often these qualities of the voice that render a speaker so unique. The writer must ask the reader to place a great deal of trust in his or her ability to “hear” for them, to mediate the sonic object through text. My approach to dealing with this subjective nature of hearing is to, in essence, “write what I know,”—how I have heard a particular set of archival recordings. I ask the reader to hear along with me not with the hope that they hear exactly what I did but that they will hear new things through both my ears and their own.

The raw material for this paper is highly personal, highly individualized, highly subjective, drawn from my own experiences of listening to a set of recordings made in 1935 at Columbia University by a musician and amateur folklorist named Bascom Lamar Lunsford. I first worked with the recordings as a way to make a little extra cash during the school year by simply cataloguing them, but my involvement with the recordings grew as they became the subject of my undergraduate thesis. This is not the first time I have written about these recordings, and it probably will not be the last. Much of the writing that I have done on these recordings has been an attempt to nail down exactly what drew me into these recordings so deeply, to discover why I became so emotionally attached to them, why they affected me so intensely. Thus, in part, this project is a reflection on the kind of listening that I did for this project as yet another angle of approach to this question of how and why I was so affected by these recordings.

But this deep reflection can also be a jumping off point for examining other broader issues, in particular the question of repetition and how repetition of an action can make it meaningful. How does technology affect the ways in which we conceive of time and interact with the past?

II. Background Notes

The performer in this particular set of recordings, Bascom Lamar Lunsford, was a musician and amateur folklorist from South Turkey Creek, North Carolina. Born in 1882, he learned to play the fiddle and the banjo as a young boy; he later picked up the guitar as well. Though he had a degree in law, as an adult Lunsford worked a number of odd jobs such as fruit tree salesman, honey seller and school teacher, that allowed him to travel the area collecting songs, tunes, jokes, stories, and other items of “folkloric” interest.

When New England folklorists began to take an interest in the region, Lunsford served as a guide and informant, introducing these academic folklorists to many of his contacts in the region. One of these folklorists was Robert Winslow Gordon, a Harvard folklorist, who later introduced Lunsford to Dorothy Scarborough, a folklore collector and writer with a PhD in English from Columbia University. Lunsford also served as a guide to Scarborough, and it is this relationship that later led to the recording sessions that produced the collection that I write about.³

On February 22, 1935 at Columbia University in New York City, Lunsford, who at times called himself the “Minstrel of the Appalachians,” or the “Squire of South Turkey Creek” sat down to record what he called his “Personal Memory Collection,” a treasury of more than three hundred “mountain songs, folk ballads, folk readings, poetry, white and negro spirituals and folk games” (Garwick and Hibbett Collection 1935) that he had personally collected over several decades in the mountains of Southern Appalachia. Over the next ten days, with the help of George W. Hibbett, a professor in the English Department at Columbia, and Walter C. Garwick, a recording engineer, Lunsford recorded three hundred twenty-five tracks on eighty twelve-inch aluminum disks, to be preserved for posterity in the Columbia University Library. On these recordings Lunsford sings, plays fiddle, banjo, and guitar, recites poetry, tells jokes and stories, reads sermons and speeches, and gives detailed background information for each recorded track such as where and from whom it was collected or perhaps a humorous anecdote related to the piece. His daughter Kern describes the Columbia recordings as some of Lunsford’s better recordings, saying that “his banjo playing on the Columbia recordings has more variation, his voice sounds better, and he does not stumble over a word as often as he did in 1949 [when he recorded much of the same material for the Library of Congress]” (Jones 1984:77). At some point the recordings were transferred to magnetic tape and are now preserved on twenty CDs and in a computer database in the Center for Ethnomusicology at Columbia University.

As an undergraduate I was hired to work with these recordings in preparation for putting them into an internet database in order to make them more available to the public. Until now, the recordings had only officially been available in the Center for Ethnomusicology at Columbia University and in the Li-

brary of Congress, though an unspecified number of bootleg recordings seem to also be circulating throughout academia (Aaron Fox, personal communication, 21 April, 2008). My initial task with the recordings was simply to listen to them and to make sure that the printed notes about each track corresponded to Lunsford's spoken commentary. However, as I listened to these tracks for hours on end, my computer and headphones became an intimate environment in which I felt myself beginning to be acquainted with Lunsford himself.

In his book *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*, Jonathan Sterne writes of the fascination that many Americans and Europeans in the wake of the Spiritualist movement had with the voices of the dead when recording technologies first became widespread in the early twentieth century. There was an idea that the dead lived on through their sound recordings, preserved forever on a recorded cylinder (Sterne 2003:288). I began to experience a similar feeling in listening to these recordings. I began to interact with the recordings as if Lunsford were in the room with me. I laughed when he said, "It's thought best to record these old fiddle tunes for their preservation though they are using the world's worst fiddler to do it with" (Garwick and Hibbett 08-11). I shook my head at my computer when Lunsford made spurious claims as to the white origins of African-American spirituals. I constantly had to remind myself that Lunsford had been dead for several decades and that the recordings I was listening to were more than seventy years old. I began to look forward to the next moment when I could sit down and again take up the one-way conversation that Lunsford and I were having through the wonders of technology. Time and space became both fuzzy and weighted when I entered that space between my headphones.

As I became more and more attached to these recordings, I wondered what exactly drew me into them so strongly. While I enjoyed the songs that Lunsford sang and found his fiddle playing interesting, what attracted me to the recordings was nothing so concrete as ballads or fiddle tunes. Initial reflections on this question focused on Lunsford himself. It is not that Lunsford is an exceptionally talented musician; on the recordings, he readily admits that he is not. Rather, Lunsford is an exceptionally talented showman, capable of switching hats at a moment's notice, readily taking on the roles of musician, lecturer, folklorist, mountaineer, promoter for his own Mountain Dance and Folk Festival and general promoter for Appalachia. In listening to and reflecting on the recordings I began to form a complex mental portrait of Lunsford.

In the end, however, this too proved unsatisfying. The more I felt that I "understood" Lunsford and attribute certain behaviors and beliefs to him, the guiltier I secretly felt for claiming to "know" him. Deep down, I knew that I was conflating Lunsford and myself, understanding him only through myself. So how else could I pin down the attraction of these recordings if not through the performer himself?

In his text *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes writes of the *punctum*, the “element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me” (Barthes 1981:26). Barthes describes this concept in the context of photography and presents many photographs as examples. The *punctum* is first illustrated through a family portrait of an African American family by James Van der Zee. For Barthes, for some reason, the most arresting detail of the portrait is the strapped pumps of the (presumed) daughter in the photograph, which “arouses great sympathy in me, almost a kind of tenderness” (Barthes 1981:43). Barthes is at a loss to explain why; he asks, “Why does this dated fashion touch me?” The word *punctum* references the ideas of both puncturing and punctuating, and Barthes claims that the photographs of which he writes are “punctuated, sometimes even speckled with these sensitive points” (Barthes 1981:26, 27) and so are Lunsford’s recordings. This led me to the idea that my attraction to the recordings could be located in the *sound* of the recordings themselves.

I’m not sure I can point to a single moment of wounding in these recordings that made them so meaningful to me. Rather, I experienced a slow accretion over time of various *puncta*: mistakes, intrusive outside noises, regional pronunciation, and the timbre of the voice in particular. These *puncta* pricked me with the pain of the past, the pain of nostalgia, the pain of almost, but not quite, being able to summon Lunsford’s spirit from my computer to my room. They drew me in, asked me to listen more closely, to hear more deeply, and to question the strange relationship I was building with Lunsford through these old faded recordings.

III. Ritual

In many ways, the means by which I listened to the Lunsford recordings were highly ritualistic. Listening to the Lunsford archive was preceded by the ceremony of arranging myself in front of the computer, carefully putting on my headphones, making sure that they were placed on my head in a way that was both comfortable and maximized my ability to do “close listening” to the material. This began of course as a practical activity. These were necessary considerations—I often listened to the collection for hours at a time, at the end of which my ears were usually sore. The tracks in the Lunsford collection are also frequently filled with skips, glitches, and general poor sound quality, making it difficult to discern what Lunsford is saying or singing at times. I often had to use a combination of extreme volume, repeated listening, and once or twice a computer application called the Amazing Slow Downer most frequently used by musicians who want to learn particular musical pieces by ear just to come up with an approximation of what Lunsford was saying. However, over time, these actions became a symbolic and meaningful way of entering into a particular space and time in which I was able to commune with Bascom Lamar Lunsford

In his classic text on ritual, *Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, Victor Turner writes of the liminal state, that which is “betwixt and between” (Turner 1967:93). Liminal space is “a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise” (Turner 1967:97). “Undoing, dissolution, decomposition are accompanied by processes of growth, transformation, and the reformulation of old elements in new patterns” (Turner 1967:99).

Listening to the sound archive provokes this feeling of being “betwixt and between.” It is a dually conscious experience where one is both intensely aware of the body and able to float away from it, phasing in and out of time, space and bodily self-awareness. In *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*, Jonathan Sterne examines the changing history of headphone use and the ways in which headphone use affects practices of hearing and listening. Sterne shows how the evolution of headphone use has shifted listening from a communal act into an interior activity.

Sterne claims that “The auditory field produced through technicized listening becomes a kind of personal space” (Sterne 2003:158). After a while the headphones began to feel like an extension of my body and I existed only in the mental space between them. At the time that I was most heavily involved with these recordings I was attending Columbia University, living in an old apartment building a few blocks from campus. I was intensely aware of the fact that the Lunsford recordings had been made at Columbia, and I felt a curious overlapping of space and place while sitting in my apartment listening to these recordings. Yet, none of the notes attached to the Lunsford file gave an indication of where exactly on the Columbia campus the recordings had been made; it is possible they weren’t made on campus at all.

In her article “Newly Betwixt and Between: Revising Liminality in the Context of a Teacher Preparation Program,” Allison Cook-Sather expands and updates Turner’s theories of liminality for a more urban, technologized setting, examining email as a liminal space. She describes liminal space as an “asynchronous and non-localized” space that “does not exist *instead of* the regular time and space in which participants live and move, as it did for Turner’s initiands, but rather *in addition to* them” (Cook-Sather 2006:115). This “allows for a kind of contemplation of mysteries particularly appropriate to contemporary times” (Cook-Sather 2006:116).

The space created by listening to the Lunsford recordings was certainly asynchronous and non-localized. Not knowing, not being able to place and plot the recording event into a known space allowed me to map it on to my own experiences and imagining of the Columbia campus in a way that made it possible for me to insert myself into the recording event itself. Spatially I was located in my apartment on 110th street and it was 2008. Mentally I was six blocks uptown on the top floor of the music building, in a room adjacent to where the Lunsford recordings are housed where I took many of my

classes and it was 1935. I contemplated the mysteries of the recordings by imagining the “off-camera” moments of the recording sessions, which played out in my mind in vivid detail, where I was an unseen and unheard participant in the sessions.

I even took evidence from the recordings to back up my mental image of where they took place. Some of the most poignant or “wounding” moments on the recordings are when outside noises cut in and break the recording frame for a millisecond or two. One of the most startling of these moments is when the listener suddenly hears the sounds of traffic rushing by in recordings that are normally free of background noise. What happened? Did someone move the microphone? Was a window open when it shouldn’t have been? Did someone accidentally open a door onto the recording session? Who knows? But the classes that I had in that room were frequently interrupted by the sounds of traffic going by on Broadway four floors below us and the sound of the car in the recording became the sounds of the cars I heard on a daily basis in that room. As Cook-Sather says, “Participants in this suspended space are released to imagine and enact the otherwise unimaginable or impossible” (Cook-Sather 2006:121). Listening to old sound recordings allows one to enact and imagine the possibility of slipping back in time to the event of the recording itself and invisibly hover over the imagined scene contained within and beyond those recordings.

IV. Repetition

In his article on “Public Administration as Ritual,” Charles T. Goodsell examines the ways in which the playing out of the day-to-day activities of public administration is like a “secular collective ritual” (Goodsell 1997:2). As a crucial component of ritual, Goodsell identifies the characteristic of “repetition,” i.e. “elements of the ritual as well as the holding of the ritual itself are repeated over and over again” (Goodsell 1997:6). Much of the meaning making and transformative experiences that I encountered with the sound archive is a product of repetition. I did not fall in love with Lunsford the first time I heard his voice; the first time I put on headphones to listen to him was not imbued with the deep transportative sense that I later associated with that act. It was through the repeated act of putting on headphones and listening that I began to have the strange displacing feelings described above.

My central premise is that repetition creates meaning. As Jamie Ferreira says in his article “Repetition, Concreteness, and Imagination,” “only what recurs again and again eternally ‘will become a solid mass, permanently protuberant’” (Ferreira 1989:13). It was through the act of listening to Lunsford’s voice over and over again that I became so firmly attached to it. It was through the repeatedly placing my headphones over my ears that the act of listening became a transportative ritual, a means for transcending both the present and my own presence.

But how does this “solid mass” form? How does meaning accrue through repetition? In *Rhythmanalysis*, Henri LeFebvre reminds us that “there is no identical absolute repetition” (LeFebvre 2004:6). The situations in which we enact and reenact events and processes can never be exactly the same. It was never exactly the same time of day that I sat down to listen to Lunsford, the sunlight in my room never the same. More importantly, I was never the same listener each time I placed those headphones over my ears. Something was always different. And that is exactly what LeFebvre tells us about repetition—“there is always something new and unforeseen that introduces itself into the repetitive: difference” (LeFebvre 2004:6). Ferreira concurs. As he says, “repetition is renewal,” and, “repetition is a development” (Ferreira 1989:24).

It is the interplay between this difference and repetition, sameness and newness that gives meaning to repeated action. In the realm of network theory, this interplay is a key mechanism for the transmission of information. This can provide us another model for looking at the ways in which repetition creates meaning. As Mark C. Taylor writes in *The Moment of Complexity: Emerging Network Culture*,

Redundancy functions as a constraint that increases the likelihood of the message’s arrival at its destination...by reducing the number of ways in which various parts of a system can be arranged and thereby reducing the number of possible messages, redundancy increases certainty while at the same time decreasing information. For information to be conveyed, there must be neither too much nor too little redundancy. If everything is predictable, no information is conveyed; if there is not redundancy, which can determine the parameters of possibility and probability, uncertainty cannot be resolved and once again no information is conveyed. (Taylor 2001:110)

In other words, if everything is new, no information is transmitted, and if everything is old, no information is transmitted. The interplay between repeated and new information makes the message coherent. It was my experience that each repeated listening session allowed me to hear something new, or to hear something old in a new way. Each repetition allowed me to cast something away in favor of something new. Each listening session was an exponentially figured composite of layers of previous sessions. Each time Lunsford tells me that he is recording his “Personal Memory Collection,” or his “Pers’nal Mem’ry Cuhlehction” as he does every few tracks, I think about the times that he has told me this before, I note the differences in timbre, accent, volume, pitch, tempo. I think about what it means to have a collection like this. I think about what it means to put one’s memories down in a book, to record them, to place them in a library collection for posterity. And I think about this again and again, each time he says it.

It is not merely in the realm of the metaphysical that repetition is impossible. Technology and media impose their own limitations to perfect repetition as well. While we may think of abstract recorded sound as immune to aging

and damage, the truth is that the media in which recorded sound is housed is a physical tangible object, subject to the physical manifestations of the passage of time as well as one time damage that is the risk of human use. Wax cylinders melt, vinyl warps, CDs get scratched, speakers blow out.

Glitch music is a relatively new form of electronic and experimental music that seeks to take advantage of these flaws in technology. In their discussions of the phenomenon of glitch music, Torben Sangild and Eliot Bates have shown that there is a beauty in the glitch, which adds its own meaning to the recorded object. It has a “fragile sensibility... a different kind of beauty. The beauty of computers crashing and CDs skipping, of clicks and cuts and bleeps and stutters” (Sangild *in* Washburne and Derno 2004:257). Glitch harnesses the natural degradation of technology to turn it into a beautiful object. This beautiful degradation is unavoidable; it is inherent in each repeated listening to a recorded object, i.e. playing a vinyl record wears it down, using speakers ages them a little bit each time. Bates argues that due to the inherent degradation in playing a recording, repeated listening is, in essence, not possible. “The highly distinctive analog scratches and pops of the twenties, or the digital skips and pops of a CD in the nineties, become sonic markers of the level of fidelity and the quality of sound characteristic of each era. With all the variables in the act of listening, we may conclude that each listening experience is a unique musical moment and not a repetition of a prior performance” (Bates *in* Washburne and Derno 2004:277).

Given their age, the Lunsford recordings have of necessity been subject to a great deal of this media degradation, which, interestingly enough has been captured on each subsequent version of the recordings. The recordings were originally made on twelve-inch aluminum discs, most likely on a Fairchild recorder. These were then transferred to magnetic tape, then to CD, and are now stored in an online database at the Center for Ethnomusicology at Columbia University. In their current incarnation, one can hear pops, hisses, static, skips, unintentional repetitions, warping, inconsistencies of record speed and any other number of technological flaws that have accrued over time on the various media on which the Lunsford archive has been preserved. My sense is that it is not until the technology has become obviously aged that the decision to transfer to new media was made. Thus each transfer preserves the flaws of the earlier medium. Just as each listening session for me was made up of layers of previous listening sessions, each new media “shelter” for the recordings is made up of layers of the signs of previous media and previous playings.

Visual anthropologist Craig Campbell has done a great deal of work with a particular photographic archive of Southern Siberian indigenous people peoples. The photographs are old, many are damaged, and some have been manipulated to the ends of Soviet propaganda. Still, Campbell states a preference for at times working with and presenting damaged photographs as

opposed to well-preserved ones because the rips, creases, discolorations and other forms of damage prevent the viewer from looking “through” the photograph, and accepting the image therein as “real.” The flaws remind the viewer that the photograph is itself an object.

I would like to borrow Campbell’s visual technique and transform it into an audile technique, a technique for listening to the sound recording archive. Accessing this technique in many ways requires a complete reversal of the ways I have listened to the archive in the past. When I was working with the archive with the goal of correcting the notes to the recordings, it was crucial to disregard the flaws, to listen through them to hear what was underneath. I now listen with the conscientious effort of holistically including those scratches, skips, repetitions and static as part of the entire composition of the recording. For example, on the fourteenth track of the eighth CD of material, which is a fiddle tune, the recording skips a number of times in one particular spot, forcing the repetition of a fragment of the tune. With this new technique of listening, I do not mentally erase these repetitions, rather, I actively include them as part of the tune, as an integral part of the recorded object. These glitches and artificial catches of the voice are more often than not a wounding part of the recording, one that marks a particular track as special.

It is in these glitches that one can “hear” the passage of time in the recordings. But the concept of time in the recordings is a strange one. In his own account of in-depth listening to a strange set of archival recordings, Michael Taussig emphasizes “the double action of being part of something yet distant from it, too, of being immersed in an experiential reality and being outside that experience” (Taussig 2006:63). There is a strange sense of temporal displacement that occurs when listening to a live sound recording, which comes from an awareness of the multiple layers of chronology occurring in the act of listening. The first layer is the unit of time encapsulated by the beginning and end of the track and the perhaps somewhat naïve sense that one is hearing things *just as they happened seventy years ago*. This layer plays over and over as an endless loop in the space of the recording. This layer of temporality has finite end points in a horizontal sense, a beginning and end, but vertically, it is infinite. When I hear Bascom Lamar Lunsford sitting at Columbia University and singing “The Mermaid,” what is my fourteen year-old grandmother doing in Pittsboro, North Carolina? Is she smoking her first cigarette behind the shed in her father’s lumberyard? Or sitting in class at St. Mary’s College? Can I hear her on the recording? I am very much tricked into thinking of the recording as a “window onto the past.”

There is also a sense of synchronicity to this layer of time. I am sitting in my apartment at the computer, while at the same time, Lunsford is up the street sitting at the recording device, telling stories about the man who taught him the next song he plans to record. But there is necessarily an instability

when listening to old recordings— one instant the subject is fully present, the next he or she has slipped away.

Ferreira addresses this tension of time in terms of repetition as well. As he says, “The distinguishing marker of repetition, we are told, is that ‘actuality, which has been, now comes into existence’” and that “bringing what *has been* into existence *now* is a paradoxical task” (Ferreira 1989:24), but one that seems very much akin to pressing play on my computer *now* to bring Lunsford’s voice to life as it *has been* recorded. Michael Taussig’s experience of being both part of something and outside of it is mirrored in Ferreira’s idea of “the ‘has been/now’ paradox of repetition” which is also “a ‘now/not yet’ paradox” (Ferreira 1989:24).

Barthes’ notion of the *punctum* is relevant here is well, for he also discusses a *punctum* with a different quality than those discussed before— a *punctum* that exists “other than the detail” (Barthes 1981:96). “This new *punctum*, which is no longer of form but of intensity, is Time...” As an example of this type of *punctum* Barthes presents a photograph of Lewis Payne, also known as Lewis Powell, a twenty-one year old man who was hanged as one of four conspirators in the assassination of Abraham Lincoln in which his role was the assassination of Secretary of State W. H. Seward. He was unsuccessful in his attempt and was subsequently apprehended and arrested (Steers 2003: xxi, lxxiii). Photographer Alexander Gardner photographed Payne/Powell in irons aboard the monitor USS *Saugus* where he was incarcerated. It is not the youth of the subject, nor his beauty, nor the beauty of the photograph that Barthes finds particularly appealing; it is that in regarding the photograph Barthes is overcome by a double sense that Payne is going to die, and is already dead. “I read at the same time: *This will be* and *this has been*” (Barthes 1981:96). In listening to these recordings, I too am *wounded* by this peculiar sense that in the space of the recordings, Lunsford is alive, but he also has died, and in the space of the recordings, he will die. This is Ferreira’s “‘has been/now’ paradox of repetition which is also a ‘now/not yet’ paradox” (Ferreira 1989:24).

For Barthes, much of what infuses the puncta, and photography in general, with so much meaning is the threat of death that hangs over every photograph, a threat which menaces not only the subject of the photograph but the viewer as well, because the viewer is reminded of his or her own mortality. This is also the drive behind the painful sweet feeling I get when listening to Lunsford’s recordings. The threat of death hangs over Lunsford’s head, or rather his voice, and having heard his mistakes, the catches in his voice, his memory slips, the thinness of the notes that stretch beyond his comfortable vocal range, I am afraid for him, and for myself. And hearing these things over and over only serves to increase that fear.

V. Conclusion

Repetition creates meaning, whether through the act of placing headphones over one's ears and listening to an untouchable voice for hours, or through the streaming of bits and bytes of information into and out of a computer. While in many ways this article is narrow in its focus, dealing mainly with one person's listening experience, with a sound archive that few have had or will have the chance to listen to moreover. However, it raises and approaches larger questions about the creation of meaning in the everyday, and how technology plays into this creation. Through the philosophies of glitch music it proposes ways of considering the intersection of time and technology and a means for considering the complications and fears that arise from that interaction. How do we as human beings and researchers cope with a mediated past? As the ability to preserve and prolong the life of various media and the capacity for information storage becomes greater and greater (who could have envisioned commercial use of the terabyte even ten years ago?), these questions and issues will become even more pressing. In writing this paper I hope to have presented ways of thinking about and coping with these issues of the intersection of the past and technology.

NOTES

- 1 Garwick and Hibbett 08-11
- 2 Some might argue that this is a false distinction, stemming from a way of thinking about the body that separates and walls off each of the senses as an information receptor rather than conceiving them as an integrated system for taking in the world. For more see Erlmann 2004.
- 3 For a more in-depth biography of Lunsford see *Jones, Minstrel of the Appalachians: The Story of Bascom Lamar Lunsford*, University Press of Kentucky, 2002.

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