Seeking Awareness of Our Selves and the Environment through Vocal Improvisation in *The Singing Field*

by

Nicola Oddy

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

In

**Cultural Mediations**

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario

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Nicola Oddy
Abstract

In this dissertation, I explore vocal improvisation as a practice of listening awareness. Stemming from my background as a vocalist, music therapist, and educator, I examine the use of the voice when singing in place as a way to change perceptions of the self and the environment. Building on Stephen Feld’s theory of *acoustemology*, Nina Sun Eidsheim’s discussion about *voice and music as intermaterial practices*, and R. Murray Schafer’s theory of *theatre of confluence*, I consider how singing in place can be a way of knowing by listening to the intermateriality between our bodies and the places in which we sing.

I explore these ideas through an improvisational performance practice that I call “environmental vocal exploration (EVE).” Through autoethnographic, ethnographic and research-creation methodologies, this dissertation revolves around a project entitled *The Singing Field: A Performance of Environmental Vocal Exploration*. This project required a summer-long commitment from five singers who joined me in six EVE performances in various locations. Through interviews, debriefs, and journal writing, the performers considered their experiences and shared their perspectives with me. We used vocal improvisation as our primary way to interact with different environments and with each other. To analyze our experiences, I developed the concepts of “environmental countertransference,” “environmental vocalist,” and “xeno-song.”

*The Singing Field* performances were filmed by Hasi Eldib of Carleton University and audio recorded by sound technician John Rosefield. In addition to providing audio-visual data for analysis, the resulting film, titled *The Singing Field: A Performance of Environmental Vocal Exploration*, is one of the three main outputs of this research-creation project, one being the performances themselves, another being the film, and the third being this dissertation.
Through autoethnography, fieldwork, and analysis of data, I show that singing with listening awareness in place can create a relationship between self and place, leading to a new awareness and attunement to both.
Acknowledgements

There are so many I wish to thank whose support was invaluable leading up to and during the completion of this research.

My committee members: Professor Jesse Stewart, thank you for your endless patience and support and for being there right from the beginning before I even applied to the program. Knowing that you have had my back throughout this process has been invaluable. To professor Ellen Waterman for helping me with the difficult phase of writing a dissertation proposal, for including me in your dissertation support group, for your constant support and feedback, for helping me to make so many connections with other scholars and students. Thanks to professor Yana Meerzon for your support, for so generously inviting me into your classroom to learn about the world of the dramaturge and into the world of The Canadian Association of Theatre Research. I would also like to thank professors Lauren Levesque and James McGowen for sitting as external examiners for my defence, and professor Steven Cooke for moderating.

I wish to thank everyone in the Institute for Comparative Studies in Literature, Art and Culture for this opportunity to bring my dream to life! Ming Tiampo and Sarah Casteel for taking a precarious leap and inviting me into the Cultural Mediations program in the first place and Dawn Schmidt for her behind-the-scenes support. Thanks to academic advisors and professors in Cultural Mediations: Sarah Casteel, Pascal Gin, Daniel O’Neil, and Paul Théberge. For support in READi at Carleton: Professors Adrian Chan and Lois Frankl, and READi program co-ordinator, Barbara Engels. What a privilege and honour it has been to be a READi trainee throughout my time at Carleton. It has added a dimension that I never expected and that has so
enriched my experience! Also, thanks to members of my cohort in Cultural Mediations—Adiba Faizi, Kelsey Perrault, Emily Putnam, Helen Roumeliotis and Steven Sundres.

I wish to thank Carleton University and the amazing administrative machine there. There was not a question I asked that was not speedily answered and resolved. To people at MacOdrum library, in the Educational Development Centre, in Research Ethics and the Technical Crew in the Media Commons at Carleton. You held it all up for us through COVID-19.

For support and for friendship along the way, for conversations about singing in environments, difficult questions and other facts of life. Thanks to Sarah Albu, Greg Allard, Marie-Catherine Allard, Patricia Bérubé, Vivian Corringham, Jake Faraday, Jack Horwitz, Jack Hurd, Eleanor James, Kim Kilpatrick, Michael MacDonald, Jacques Menard, Susan Gillis, Susie Osler, Antonia Pigot, R. Murray Schafer, Diana Smith, Jerrard Smith, Cara Tierney, Gayle Young, and Jing Xia. Thank you to organizers, instructors and fellow participants of “Musical Improvisation at Land’s End” in the summer of 2019 where I had the opportunity to dialogue and make music with others during the formative stage of designing my research. To The Wolf Project friends, and The Wolf Project for validating my path. To the field of music therapy and the Canadian Music Therapy community.

A huge thankyou to the production team for The Singing Field 2020. Hasi Eldib and John Rosefield, you made this a dream come true! To the five Singing Field performers who joined me: Ellen Goodman, Helen Mogford, Cait Morton, Fran Slingerland, and Kelly-Anne Vandermeer, I can not think of anyone else I would rather have gone on this journey with.
Thank you to Susie Osler, curator of Fieldwork, for giving me an opportunity during summer 2017-18 that planted one of the seeds for *The Singing Field*. For writing support I’d like to thank Susan Gillis, Cheryl O’Shea and Mary Rykov.

To friends, Dianne Czerwinski and Wendy Coombs for being with me on our important walk in Cornwall England in Sept. 2019 where we found the most amazing singing delights. To Antonia Pigot for Halifax explorations and Antonia and Kathleen Johnson for Montreal vocal explorations, Aidan Shenkman for discovering the Petri Lane tunnel and for singing with me there and everywhere! To Fran Slingerland and Walburga Maria Richter for Ottawa explorations, and to all of the Singwalk participants at Fieldwork who helped plant the seed.

To participants at conferences, workshops, the many hundreds who have trusted me to walk beside them during music therapy sessions, and students who have put their faith in my guidance. You have all been my mentors as I learned to trust how vocal perceptions can inform us.

Most importantly, thank you to my family. To Chuck for his endless support during the writing of this dissertation. To Aaron, and Aidan Shenkman for years of putting up with my singing to with and through everywhere. Thank you to my brother Phil Oddy for being there always.

This project was created, and dissertation written in memory of my mother and father, Betty Oddy and Russell Oddy, and my sister, Carole Forhan.
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Introduction: *The Singing Field, a Journey of Vocal Exploration*

“The singing field is everywhere.”

In the summer of 2020 just after the first wave of what was to become an extended pandemic, five performers joined me to engage in vocal improvisation in various locations around the region of Ottawa, Canada in order to find out how singing in place might change a person’s awareness of self and place. One day, after we had sung together, one of the performers walked with me across the parking lot and began some spontaneous vocal improvisation. She stopped suddenly and said, “Whoops! Am I allowed to sing here?” “Of course!” I said, "The singing field is everywhere.”

*The Singing Field* 2020 is a project in which six singers including myself improvised in six different environments: in a reverberant tunnel, beside the rushing waters of a dam site, in a pedestrian mall, at the side of a busy road, on a nature trail, and in marshland. We reflected on the locations, listened to them, and expressed our listening experience through singing. The project explored improvisation as both a musical and social process through a practice that I call “environmental vocal exploration (EVE).” EVE is a form of vocal improvisation in which singers engage with their surrounding environment through vocal improvisation. The purpose of EVE is not to perform for an audience; but to perform with and for each other. It is also to interact with a given place, through vocal improvisation.

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1 In this dissertation, “the singing field” is used in three ways. When uncapitalized and not italicized, I imply that the singing field is a descriptor of any experience which involves singing in place. When italicized and capitalized, I refer to a *performance* of *The Singing Field*. I sometimes clarify that I am referring only to the 2020 performance of *The Singing Field* by adding 2020 after the appellation.
Methodologies used in this study include ethnography, autoethnography, and research-creation. Performers in *The Singing Field* shared their experiences through improvisation, discussion, interviews, and journals. I use ethnography, as described by Harris Berger and Ruth Stone (2019), as a descriptive, interpretive, and theoretical approach in which fieldwork aids in “defining concepts, making arguments” (2) in order to make sense of social phenomena. Performers shared their writings and thoughts about the act of singing in place which I describe, interpret, and theorize in this dissertation. I also used an autoethnographic approach, since I engaged in the EVE experiences along with the other singers as co-performer, taking note of my own reactions and insights while also interviewing, videorecording, and observing others (Denzin 2003). Finally, I used research-creation as a collaborative methodology in which the creation itself was a necessary first step in the research. The interaction between the creation and the research was crucial to this project (Stévance and Lacasse 2020, 125).

I first developed EVE for an installation titled *Singwalk: An Experience of Environmental Vocal Exploration* that was presented at Fieldwork—a place-based gallery in Maberly, Ontario—in which singers joined me to sing in a meadow, on a path, by a pond, and in a forest. Over the course of five workshops and through independent visits to the site, over 100 people explored the land through their voices. In that project, the aim was to introduce people to the practice of singing in place to connect with the environment. The present study builds on my experiences with the *Singwalk* project, tracing the development and realization of *The Singing Field*, and analyzing the experience using qualitative research methods.

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2 http://fieldworkproject.com
EVE is a way for performers to know an environment and come to an “experiential truth” (Feld 1996, 97) through engagement with it. The Singing Field uses EVE to explore how the voice interacts with a given place—acoustically, materially, and emotionally. Performers shared their experiences of our environmental vocal explorations through interviews, debriefs, and journal entries, which enabled me to come to some understanding of how singing in place can be a way of knowing.

**Hypothesis and Research Questions**

The purpose of my study is to understand how using improvisational singing in different environments can change a person’s perception of self and the environments in which they are singing. When engaging in EVE, I sing “to” environments in the spirit of giving, “with” environments to acknowledge the sharing of a sound exchange with the environment, and “through” environments to indicate that the exchange of sound does not end abruptly but continues on, influencing the singer beyond the vocal exchange in a moment in time. At the outset of this study, I hypothesized that singing to, with, and through environments would encourage a different relationship with the environment and that, by engaging with the environment through active listening and vocal improvisation, performers in The Singing Field would become more attuned to those environments, including our impact on them and, crucially, their impact on us.³

To study my hypothesis, I asked two questions:

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³ From here on in, I will write “singing in environments” which will mean “to, with and through” throughout the dissertation.
1. Can performative vocal improvisation in different environments lead to a transformed relationship with those environments, and if so, with what effects?

2. What is the affective force of EVE (e.g., personal, emotional, spiritual) and what impact does it have on performers?

To examine these research questions, I chose to become a collaborator and co-creator during the fieldwork and to combine autoethnographic and ethnographic approaches, since this project stems from my own practice of EVE. Norman Denzin notes that by entering situations that connect our own experiences with culture, history, and social structure, we can experience and make sense of “epiphanies, or existential turning point moments” (Denzin 2003, 39). I was driven not only to understand what others learned through this experience, but also what I learned by participating.

This project contributes to scholarship in voice studies, critical studies in improvisation (CSI), performance studies, and studies of place. Given my professional experience as a music therapist, my sustained practice of singing in environments, and my experience leading vocal workshops, I believe that this study may have direct applications for the practice of music therapy. The field of community music may also benefit, although this is not my area of expertise; further research in collaboration with people who have experience in the field of community music would be necessary.

*The Singing Field* included intensive brainstorming, collaboration, and performance at the six chosen sites. Performers sang individually and in groups. When in groups, they sang together and in parallel with one another, meaning that they sometimes sang at the same time, but not together. Following each performance, people processed their experiences through a group discussion, helping me to see how perspectives emerged and changed from week to week. Analysis and learning was a cumulative process. How I led performances, where we sang, the
nature of the opening experiences, and the outcomes of the study evolved as we proceeded throughout the summer. Performers kept personal journals in which they recorded and reflected on their experiences. I also sought ethnographic data through semi-structured interviews with the performers before and after the research period, and by analyzing the audio/visual documentation of the project. The project was videorecorded throughout the entire process, including performances, interviews, and discussions. These recordings generated research data and led to the creation of a video documentary and deepened my understanding of the implications of singing in place, influencing not only this study, but also my future work as a music therapist.

Introducing the Players

This project included six singers (including myself), the filmmaker, and a sound engineer. In a sense, the six locations were participants in the study as well given the extent to which they shaped our vocal explorations. All participants played important collaborative roles during this research-creation project in which I analyse the experiences that this group of women had, and shared with me, through their words and music.

The Singers

The six singers (myself included) involved in The Singing Field were all university-educated, middle class, white, cisgendered women. All of them had the financial means to be able to devote time to the project. We all acknowledged our privilege that afforded us the time to participate. Five of the six of us had strong connections to some form of spirituality. All of us were curious about how this experience might change or inform us. The women were all insightful thinkers, providing me with statements and ideas that gave me much food for thought.

The participants spoke often about the importance of “adapting” to each environment and
to each other, a process that was facilitated, in part, because of the singers’ shared experiences as women. They spoke of the vulnerability women often experience and how this could be a factor in their comfort doing something out of the ordinary. There were substantial differences between the subject positions of the participants, but the fact that all the participants were women did impact the nature of the experience. I did not decide in advance to engage only women in The Singing Field for the summer 2020 performances. Nor did I decide that I would involve five other white women of European heritage, but it was these particular five women who volunteered. They came to know about the project through my own email lists and my contacts on social media. All of these factors impacted the nature of the experience.

The communications I used to recruit participants were not directed specifically to any particular “type” of person. The email accompanying the Carleton University ethics approved letter of invitation states: “I am writing to you to let you know that I'm about to start my doctoral research and am seeking out people who would like to participate in this project. I am attaching a letter of invitation for you read. Let me know what you think.” Some men came forward when I put out the call for participants, but those I spoke to felt that this project was outside their comfort zones and chose to forego the opportunity. One felt that he would not like to provide a journal, another wondered if he could use a score, and a third felt that as a professional musician, it would be uncomfortable for him to make music in such an unstructured way.

The fact that only women participated limited my study in certain ways, but it also narrowed the focus. Throughout the entire process, we felt a strong sense of shared identity as women that was empowering to those involved, delineating the positionality of the project as a whole.

Cait is a white woman in her thirties, born in Canada. She is a treatment coordinator at an orthodontic clinic and currently lives alone. When asked about her background and what she
brings to the project, she said that she identifies as a singer. Her musicality was “cultivated” by her family when it was clear that she had a natural gift for singing. She comes from a “strong background” with very supportive women in her life. She grew up in a military family and spent most of her formative years moving from place to place, not having a chance to truly settle anywhere. She feels that the music community in her rural town has given her a sense of home. She describes music as being the one place she feels comfortable no matter what she is going through in her life.

The kind of singing we did in The Singing Field was not her usual manner of singing; she had little prior experience with vocal improvisation or using unconventional vocal sounds. “Even though it’s a foreign concept to me,” she said, “I’m excited to explore and to dive into that part of myself and express some things that I haven’t been—through this project.”

When asked about her perspective on the word “explore,” she said that for her, it means to “take it as it comes…where every little thing brings me to something new.” She was hoping for a self-reflective experience. In the preparatory workshop she said, “I’m looking forward to that exploration—more like vocal expression versus the performance aspect of singing. I find that with the performance aspect of singing there are a lot of expectations to sound a certain way. People expect your music to sound a certain way. It’s a self-conscious thing.”

Cait studied arts at a university level because her family expected her to go to university. It was not her passion, but she completed her degree in order to meet those expectations. She felt it important to share that she had battled obesity in recent years, having lost one hundred pounds. This speaks to her determination and resolve to accomplish difficult, life-changing actions. She

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4 Cait, entrance interview with author, Ottawa, June 30, 2020.
5 Ibid.
feels that putting herself first is a struggle for her and that participating in *The Singing Field* is a way of practicing that. Her relationship with her voice is comfortable. She has tried call-and-response with birds. This act makes her feel as if she is a part of her surroundings. “I am a part of the wildlife. They are reacting to me and I’m reacting to them. The trees are rustling and I put my hand among the branches and let it rustle too. It brings me that connection.”

She feels that she is in a place of exploration as a singer, “and this [*The Singing Field*] is an exciting addition to that, and will influence how I approach singing.”

She commented that she would like to bring some freedom to her singing, and that is what inspired her to become involved with *The Singing Field* in the first place. She feels that singing in theatre, in bands, and with friends has been the core of her social world. She talked about the vulnerability she feels in vocal music—something she says she does not feel in her day-to-day life. “It’s not a vulnerability you would see having a game night with a friend. It’s not a vulnerability you would see at school. It’s a whole different relationship when you’re putting yourself out there with people in a way where you are being judged.”

Through this project, Cait hoped to learn more about herself while in the singing field. She said, “I’m a very emotional person and I’m very sensitive lately to what’s going on in the world. There’s a lot of garbage going on out there. A sad time in the world. I have some things to deal with so it might be more of an emotional experience than I anticipate.”

Ellen is a white woman in her sixties, born in Canada. She is a mother, grandmother, and daughter. She is Jewish and considers herself to have been privileged to have grown up in a

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6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
stable home with financial security throughout her life. At the beginning of her opening interview and at the end of her closing interview, she referred to a Jewish prayer known as the Sh’mah which literally means “hear” and begins with an entreaty to the people of Israel to listen. Ellen wrote, “Perhaps the most well-known piece of liturgy in Jewish life, the sh’ma is technically not a prayer at all but a declaration of faith in monotheistic divinity.” Ellen uses a contemporary, inclusive interpretation of this ancient Aramaic/Hebrew prayer as a daily meditation (Falk 1996, 24). Femininity is important to Ellen. She referenced femininity through the two triangles in the star of David. These intersecting triangles help her to define the concept of “Israel” which means “one who wrestles with God.” The downward triangle represents the more female side of the Divine—“The breathing, nurturing, caring God”—and the triangle pointing up represents the often more male version of God—“theoretical and perhaps hierarchical.” Ellen’s spirituality is influenced by her roots as a Jew as well as her more recent practice of Zen Buddhism. She believes that this perspective has led to her feeling that “God is in all of us, and God is in everything and so singing to the leaves seems compatible with that.”

She is aware that her view of the world has impacted how she reacted to The Singing Field.

For about a decade I was an active practitioner of Zen Buddhism. Zen is so much about being in the moment. It strikes me that what you’re trying to do is the same really. We don’t pay much attention to the present moment and yet that’s really all there is. Just this moment. That’s what there is right now. Sometimes we’re thinking about tomorrow or yesterday or what other people are thinking. It’s so misguided—a lost opportunity. I’m hoping that by singing in different venues and making noise with others—it will come down to the same thing, being fully there, in the moment. It’s almost sacred.”

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10 Ellen, email message to author, November 15, 2020.
11 Ellen, exit interview with author, video call, August 26, 2020.
Ellen is also influenced by her work teaching children who are blind or have low vision. She taught for thirty years, often finding herself trying to understand an encounter by using a multisensory approach that included touch and sound as well as sight. She was drawn to this work through her interest in communication and studies in psycholinguistics. She feels that the work she did with children could in some ways be similar to music, in that it could be a non-verbal way to “reach in.”

As a singer, Ellen feels that she is not very musical. She lost her voice as a child when she shouted repeatedly with excitement, causing the development of callouses on her vocal cords. Her voice has been quite deep since then. She sings regardless, stating that in most of her creative life, when drawing and writing, she has tried to express herself authentically without focusing on what others think about it. She uses singing as a way of communicating with the world around her when alone, and in her past work with non-verbal students. She sang when she was a young mother of two daughters and now with their children. She feels that when she sings in places, she is taking everything in and “distilling it in a little tune with words that come out randomly.” Ellen spoke about how her voice is a manifestation of her personality: “If someone said ‘I don’t like the way you laugh’—how can you say that? It’s who I am. How can I say I don’t like my voice? It just is.”

I think that sound is a reflection of my true state. What comes forth from me is the way I am feeling at that moment, so when I pay attention to the sounds I am making it helps me to better understand myself, how I’m doing, like doing a body scan. I’m interested in the exploration The Singing Field will bring. No expectations. I like my voice. I like my self. I’m comfortable in my own skin and my voice is a part of that.

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13 Ellen, entrance interview with author, Ottawa, June 30, 2020
14 Ellen, exit interview with author, video call, August 2020.
She also spoke of “learning to value my childlike wonder and give myself permission to enjoy it, feel good about it and share it.” During her exit interview, she stated, “I can sing to the bright leaves illuminated with light and notice the bits of water droplets on them. I am who I am, and if I can’t really enjoy who I am the way I am, what’s the point?”

Frances is a white woman in her fifties, born in Canada, who identifies as pansexual and lives in downtown Ottawa. She shares a close emotional and musical partnership with a dear friend, with whom she spent fifteen years sailing around the planet. During her entrance interview, she discussed her spirituality. The first thing she mentioned when asked what she brings to the project was that she grew up in an evangelical Christian family and “acquired an inkling of [her] spiritual self in that milieu.” She has done voice training and has spent many years singing in church and secular choirs. However, she soon perceived that the “rigid, closed, and essentially misogynistic philosophy” with which she grew up “was not true to the complexity and sensitivity of life as [she] experienced it.” This contributed to an enduring interest in epistemology which became the focus of both her undergraduate and graduate studies in philosophy. She has retained a strong spiritual life and mingles this with her intense relationship with the natural world. Frances studies Buddhism and maintains a meditation practice. She says that, among other things, her meditation practice brings about a knowing through the body, which contributes to her vocal work: “knowing the body, knowing emotion, trying to integrate mind, body, emotion, and soul.”

16 Ibid.
17 Ellen, exit interview with author, video call, August 26, 2020.
As a vocalist, Frances has extensive experience having been involved in R. Murray Schafer’s environmental music theatre works. She performed in *The Princess of the Stars* and was a participant in *And Wolf Shall Inherit the Moon* for many years, which affected her experience of vocalization. She said “Experimenting with the voice is so exploratory on all levels. It can be like when Bartók asked performers to whack the strings of a violin with the back of a bow. I feel free to do things with the voice that might be seen as unacceptable or ugly.”

She believes that this process of vocal exploration expands sense perception. She says improvising comes naturally to her, attributing this to her personality, which pushes boundaries and listens to and interacts with the world outside those boundaries. Frances has sung in unusual environments through her work with Schafer, but brings it to her everyday life, often singing and interacting in both human-made and natural environments. She feels that sound is an important part of relating to space kinaesthetically.

Frances is acutely aware of living as a white settler on unceded Algonquin territory, and in a culture that privileges white-skinned people. She experienced bullying in childhood and feels that “having had that sense of a diminished personhood and internalization opened my eyes, heart, and soul to the many oppressive and systemic dynamics around me.” She says that this has led her to connect with environments and with “what the land under our feet asks of us.”

Helen is in her sixties, retired after teaching at the elementary school level for twenty-three years. She is white, a mother and grandmother, and born in Canada. One of the points she made in her first statement during the opening interview is that she meditates every day. This

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20 Ibid.
dedicated practice followed her throughout her experience in *The Singing Field*. She relayed a story of a dream she had when she was a child:

> I was in the company of tall regal beings that were singing in incredible harmony, not rhythmic, and only lasted seconds. It was powerful, terrifying, amazing with levels of beauty and terror. It was one of the bedrock experiences of a spiritual reality for me … and they often include music. It was a powerful experience that I don’t take lightly.\(^{21}\)

Helen continues on her spiritual path through her daily practice of meditation, which she relies on for her sense of life balance.

Helen came to *The Singing Field* already having a love of singing in different places, such as in the ruins of an abbey while on holiday, at an underground salt mine in Colombia, and in the stairwells on her university campus. *The Singing Field* is now inviting her “to see how free I can be and unselfconscious.”\(^{22}\) She is interested in trying new things and pushing her boundaries. In order to prepare for participation in *The Singing Field*, she started singing in the woods when walking there. “There was a young crow—a raucous sounding individual. I sang to him for about fifteen minutes and it swooped in and we had eye contact. I just cawed back at him.”\(^{23}\) In another walk, she tried singing to a group of flowers and imagined that they were a choir which was singing back to her, saying that, “It drew me in to a different kind of relationship. And it was fun—like play. I like the idea of play. It can be profound.”\(^{24}\) One of her goals for her participation in *The Singing Field* was to be spontaneous.

Helen comes from a musical family. She loves to sing, saying that it can verge on ecstatic “when it works.” Similar to Ellen, Helen thinks of her singing voice as a “personal

\(^{21}\) Helen, entrance interview with author, Ottawa, June 30, 2020.
\(^{22}\) Ibid.
\(^{23}\) Ibid.
\(^{24}\) Ibid.
voice that expresses who she is. She feels that the quality of her singing can often be a metaphor for what is happening in her life at the time.

Kelly-Anne is a white woman in her thirties, born in Canada. She identifies as cisgender and heterosexual. She sees her work as a music therapist and ethnomusicologist as important elements in her experience that she brought to *The Singing Field*. She is bilingual and comes from a rural town in eastern Ontario. She noted that she came from a place of privilege in terms of her race, sexuality, and socio-economic status (having had the opportunity to pursue an MA), and being born in a wealthy country with access to essential services like health care.

Kelly-Anne grew up in a Protestant environment. She believes that it is her responsibility to continually grow her spirituality so that she can be a better and more grounded therapist, especially in palliative care. Her spirituality helps her move through challenging times in her life.

Musically she has had a broad background, having studied classical piano then focusing on Brazilian samba, performing widely throughout Ontario. She also plays accordion. Kelly-Anne feels good about her voice, as she feels it matches who she is: “It lets me express my thoughts, my needs, my ideas. I’ve enjoyed playing with it—making sounds and sound effects.” She entered *The Singing Field* hoping that she might learn something about her voice. When working as a music therapist, her voice is used in service to others: “It’s the number one way to connect with people and convey that I hear you and I see you and am reflecting back to you what I’m perceiving from you. I want to meet you in the middle with my voice.”

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25 Ibid.
26 At the beginning of the study Kelly-Anne asked to be given a pseudonym, so I named her Karen. After her viewing of the film and when the ethics consent form was revised so the film could be widely shared, she indicated that she had changed her mind, and wished to be identified. It was too late to do so on the film, but I have honoured her request in the writing of this dissertation. Thus, the two names.
28 Ibid.
comfortable with the idea of exploring resonant pitches in a given space and alternative vocal practices. She sees *The Singing Field* as a way to externalize her experience of each space.

In her work as a music therapist, Kelly-Anne has focused her creative energy on her music therapy clients. Her participation in *The Singing Field* was motivated by a desire to nurture her own creativity and to make “spontaneous creation without trying to structure a song and without trying to create lyrics that are going to be identifiable to an audience.”

Kelly-Anne saw *The Singing Field* as a form of deinstitutionalization and decommodification of creativity and of singing. She noted that people are policed when singing in the school system, in most choirs, and when performing on stage: “Depending on the body of work you’re performing, there are different rules for your voice. Even for people who do music in non-conventional settings like music therapists in a hospital, the sound is policed according to how loud you can be, where you can be, who can be around, who can hear.”

Because one of the methodologies I am using in this dissertation is autoethnographic, I will discuss my own singing background and how I came to *The Singing Field* in chapter three and what I hoped to gain from this experience. For now, I will note that I am a white woman in my sixties, and heterosexual. I have struggled with my identity as a Jew for my whole life. My family immigrated to Canada from the UK when I was a small child, and because of the effects of World War II, my Jewish heritage was minimalized, revealed only in small clues through bedtime stories told to me by my mother who had grown up in the Jewish ghetto in the east end of London. I became compelled to learn more about my heritage as an adult when I experienced a life-changing incident of anti-Semitism, driving me to know what it was about my heritage that

29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
would cause someone to express hate toward me. Only now am I beginning to explore Jewish spirituality. The strength of my hidden family roots showed itself in my family despite suppression of it, in the fact that myself and two of my three siblings were married to other Jews under a Chuppah\(^{31}\) although our parents did not raise us as Jews. The way this affects my relationship to *The Singing Field* is that I often find myself reverting to modal improvisations reminiscent of the nigun.\(^{32}\) The similarity between my own improvisatory singing and the nigun tradition may be a way to express a yearning for my roots as I sing to the land, sea, and sky, seeking belonging. In addition to my Jewish roots, my British heritage adds a sense of strong connection to the Devonshire and Cornish coast from where my father’s family originates.

The insightful nature of all six singers, our spirituality, our education, and our orientation as white, cisgendered women of European heritage, all influenced the outcomes of the project. Our experience (or lack of experience) with improvising in place and other musical experiences impacted how we were able to interact with environments and the self through our voices. Our work and life experiences along with the phases of life that we were in during the project affected how we responded to the task at hand.

**The Film Crew**

Hasi Eldib of Carleton University calls himself a “Lens-based Artist,” an independent documentary filmmaker and photographer. On his website he writes, “In my work, I aim to

\(^{31}\) A temporary shelter with four posts and no walls symbolizing the Jewish home that the couple will make together. The posts are often held up by family and friends to symbolize their support at times when both trouble and joys can come and go throughout life.

\(^{32}\) The Nigun is a Jewish vocal tradition that consists of improvised melodies sung to sounds such as “lai,” “yah,” “na.” They can be joyful or mournful and are important elements in many Jewish ceremonies. For more information, see [https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-nigun/](https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-nigun/)
spotlight our common humanity through stories of the heart.” He carefully selects opportunities that give him a chance to work ethically and thoughtfully. Hasi has a strong repertoire of documentaries and short films. I was very fortunate that Hasi joined me in my project, embracing its collaborative nature. I have often been warned that the effects of filming will change the outcomes of the research. In my attempt to minimize that effect, I integrated him in the ritual process as much as possible. He joined us in the preparatory workshop, the ritual openings and the debriefs. I believe it made a difference and that in the end he was so much more than the “guy with the camera.”

John Rosefield, also of Carleton University, is a recording arts specialist. He was a skilled addition to our team, providing mobile sound recording on difficult terrain, in searing heat, and in the pouring rain. His ingenuity and flexibility were remarkable as in some places we confronted difficulties with protecting his equipment while still providing the professional sound quality we were looking for in the film. John graciously joined us in the debriefs where he often shared his valuable insights.

I feel so fortunate that both Hasi and John were available and interested in The Singing Field. The quality of the final video is a tribute to their skill and commitment.

33 https://hazee.net/documentaries
The Locations

Figure 1.1. Map of the Locations. This map shows Ottawa, with Sparks Street Mall located near the Ottawa River, Hogs Back Falls located near Carleton University, and the tunnel and trail west of the city.

The occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic during the time frame in which the fieldwork took place meant that where we could sing was limited. Although restrictions had lightened in summer 2020, we were still relegated to outdoor sites. In many ways, the locations became characters in the project. Where they were, the materials at each location, what they represented, and who else was there were crucial elements in the study. Here is a summary and brief description of each location.
EVE One: The Tunnel at Petrie Lane (July 8, 2020)

Figure 1.2. The Tunnel at Petrie Lane. This still from the film shows the long six-sided concrete tunnel with sunlight glowing through at the end. The inside is also lit, but with electric bulbs. The six singers are in the tunnel, three on each side, looking at each other or at the wall.

The first site was a tunnel in Kanata, Ontario, just off Petrie Lane. This site is the only one that I had experienced prior to the fieldwork. The concrete tunnel is extremely reverberant and provided us with an excellent first experience. It is in the shape of a hexagon and is well lit, flanked by a mural on either side of the entrance to make it more inviting. It is 121 feet long and 12 feet wide, serving walkers, skateboarders and cyclists. It provides an underpass beneath the busy March Road, leading the traveller through a suburban neighbourhood. It is well used: many

34 This, and the following five photos are stills from the video.
commuters hurried by that evening, paying us little attention. The tunnel is a part of the extensive bicycle path that extends from downtown Ottawa to Kanata along the Ottawa River. It was a hot and humid day, and we were grateful for the coolness of the tunnel for our sing event and for shade cast by the tunnel itself for our opening and debrief.

*EVE Two: Hog’s Back Falls (July 22, 2020)*

Figure 1.3. *Hog's Back Falls*. Ellen is in a grey raincoat, shown leaning over the metal railing at the falls. She is singing down toward the water.

Our second sing event took place on a rainy day at Hog’s Back Falls—a dam site—where the noise of the falls dominated the soundscape and where there was clear human impact on the landscape. There was a picnic shelter at the site, which I thought could provide refuge from the weather and provide a space for us to meet during the opening and debrief, and where John could possibly set up his equipment. However, the falls themselves, where we wanted to sing, were too far away from the shelter for John to be able to record us. He was, however, able to create a
tarped shelter for himself in closer proximity to the falls. He covered the microphones with protective hoods. The sound of rain was included in recordings along with the roar of the falls, and our singing. Hasi’s equipment was waterproof. Singers wore rain gear and brought umbrellas. It turned out to be quite a contrast to the tunnel location of our first sing in terms of function, historical importance, and acoustics.

Hog’s Back Falls displayed multiple facets when we were there. It is a geologically and historically interesting location, being the place where the Rideau canal diverges from the Rideau River and where the built canal begins. There is a bridge over the dam with the falls on one side and Mooney’s Bay, a human-made lake created by the dam, on the other. Standing on the bridge and looking in one direction, we could see people engaged in recreational activities on the bay; looking the other way, we could see the dam-created gorge. At the time of our performance, the bridge was under construction and we could see the construction fence as well as the equipment sitting quietly at the end of the day. At different times of the year, the dam controls the water flow. On the day we were there, the river bottom was strangely exposed, creating pockets of water in which ducks paddled along. What looked (and sounded) wild and untamed was actually the direct result of human intervention.
Sparks Street Mall is a pedestrian area in downtown Ottawa where people pass by and linger. The street contains a complex array of architectural examples, some from as early as the mid 1800s through to the present day. The construction of new structures was still apparent when we sang there in summer 2020. We found a wide range of acoustic experiences in archways and under columns and overhangs, with the objects present (such as a construction fence and a phone booth) and in the street itself. The presence of passersby occurred at all our sing sites, but here it was most prevalent. The extensive width of the pavement gave onlookers a chance to skirt the performers at a distance that was more traditional from a concert experience perspective. This
may have been why they were more interactive with the performers than at the other sites. The nature of the place, too, created opportunities for what several of the singers experienced as street theatre, making it more of a conventional performance experience for us and the passersby.

EVE Four: Richmond Road (August 22, 2020)

Figure 1.5. Richmond Road. This still from the film shows the road with two cars driving on it. Three of the singers are standing at the side of the road. Two are singing toward the forest and one is singing toward the road. In the foreground, Frances expressively holds her hands up near her face.

The fourth sing took place on a section of Richmond Road (just north of Hunt Club Road). It is a busy thoroughfare which slices through the forest in Ottawa’s greenbelt, a horseshoe-shaped green space that surrounds the city. The road is busy but nothing is built there, causing a juxtaposition between the road and the presence of wildflowers and trees. A nearby intersection was under construction and a stoplight caused an ebb and flow of traffic sound that
gave us a chance to engage with the noise of the traffic, and to sing to the trees which surrounded the road.

*EVE Five: Sarsaparilla Trail* (August 22, 2020)

Figure 1.6. *Sarsaparilla Trail*. This still from the film shows the tree-lined pathway. There is sunlight shining through the trees. Three of the singers are seen. Nicola places her hand on a tree, Ellen sings upward to a tree and Frances can be seen walking toward the camera.

Sarsaparilla Trail is a 500-metre pathway through a forested area. It begins at a parking lot and winds through the trees where chickadees, squirrels, and chipmunks—used to human visitors—approached eagerly, looking for seeds or crumbs. It is a small piece of managed forest that shows signs of human engagement in items such as a small teepee made from sticks, a tree trunk worn from its use as a place to rest, and some benches and picnic tables. There were other
people there, walking the path, but in contrast to our previous locations they were there to rest instead of to hurry along to somewhere else.

_EVE Six: The Marsh at the Viewing Platform, Sarsaparilla Trail (August 22, 2020)_

Figure 1.7. The Marsh at the Viewing Platform, Sarsaparilla Trail. All six singers are on the wooden platform overlooking the marsh. There are wooden railings, and all are leaning on them, singing away from one another out toward the marsh. There are trees across from the marshland.

Our final sing took place at a viewing platform from the marshland where bullrushes, ducks, and wildflowers surrounded our final singing experience of the project. The marsh looked wild on first glance, but previous visits from humans showed their mark in things like a beer can in the water, a plastic bag, and a plastic bottle. Off to one side, we could see the main artery of a
hydro network. These items did not overshadow the quiet beauty of the location where there were photographers and families alongside us, taking refuge from their busy lives.

The six locations located throughout the Ottawa region provided opportunities to explore not only place, but also our voices. They varied acoustically, and in terms of natural versus built environments. We had opportunities to sing in the presence of incidental audience members and at times when no one was nearby. We sang in inclement weather and when the weather was optimal, and when small animals were nearby. All of the sites showed signs of human interference, even the most natural of them. We were always in outdoor places due to the presence of COVID-19, which had a considerable effect on the choices of location and the nature of the experiences.

Chapter Overview

This dissertation theorizes environmental vocal exploration and critically examines *The Singing Field* 2020, discussing the findings of this ethnographic research-creation project. Chapter One outlines the theoretical framework for this project and provides a literature review. I discuss the term “environmental vocal exploration” and examine what each word in that appellation brings to this project. “Environmental” refers to place from an acoustemological perspective. Defined by Stephen Feld, acoustemology combines the two words acoustics and epistemology, asking what we learn by sounding in place. I then focus on “vocal,” discussing elements of vocality necessary to my study including the voice itself and vocal improvisation. This discussion builds on the work of Nina Sun Eidsheim who explores singing as a multi-sensory experience including the body, vibration, and intermateriality between the body and place. I also consider the role of extralinguistics (Dolar 2006; Eidshiem 2015a; Tonelli 2020) in our performances and how we derive meaning from the act of using a whole range of vocal
sound. I then introduce the term “xeno-song” as a way of thinking about how we express emotion in our improvisational singing. Finally, I look at the word “exploration” as an element of performance. *The Singing Field* asked that we engage in performances that could be potentially transformative, immersive, “non-passive” for audience and performer alike, took place in unusual locations, and in which the audience was non-traditional. For these ideas, I am indebted to R. Murray Schafer’s (1933–2021) theory of theatre of confluence seen in the development of his Patria Cycle (1965–2013).

In chapter Two I discuss events in my own life that lead to the development of *The Singing Field* through an autoethnography, outlining the process by which this project came into being. The research questions have emerged from my personal practice of singing in varied environments over the past twenty years and from my work as a music therapist in which I use vocal improvisation extensively in voice-centred psychotherapy. Since this dissertation stems from a professional and personal perspective, I spend some time discussing my own experiences of singing in place that range from ineffective to profoundly life changing. I also discuss my process of studying voice, becoming a music therapist, and the influence that being a member of R. Murray Schafer’s epilogue to his Patria Cycle of environmental music theatre works (1966–2013), *And Wolf Shall Inherit the Moon* (1983), has had on me and on the development of EVE. I then reflect on my own experiences of EVE prior to this study as a way to position myself relative to this research-creation project. The chapter concludes by theorizing the possibility of environmental countertransference as a result of my personal practice of EVE. Environmental countertransference is the term I use to describe my own reaction to a place based on an ephemeral recognition of what occurred in a place before. I also discuss what it means to me to be a vocal environmentalist, developing a heightened awareness of environments by singing in
them. I have this experience in such intense ways that the act has changed my approach to day-to-day living.

Chapter Three focuses on the overall research process, beginning with an examination of two methodological tools I have used in this study. First, I look at research-creation (Stévance and Lacasse 2013), which is sometimes described as practice-based research or practice-led research (Candy 2006). This research depends crucially on co-creation in the form of the sing events and the video. Next, I discuss the role of ethnography in this study, including the process of finding performers. I then describe the arc of the performances and how ritual, singing, and group discussion created a reliable container for each of our sing events. All of this was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which provided both opportunities and barriers that I discuss in chapter three. I also discuss my ethnographic methods for gathering data including the development of the video, which plays a large role in this research-creation project. Finally, I write about how I analysed the data.

In chapters Four and Five I focus on dominant themes and subthemes that emerged from the data analysis. In chapter Four I discuss how the concept of the “soundwalk” informed EVE and The Singing Field through listening and a heightened awareness of what we perceive through listening. I then look at the concept of singing as a listening practice, exploring other vocalists who have incorporated this idea into their performances or studies. I consider how our listening positionality (Robinson 2020) affects the outcomes of our listening awareness, asking: who are we at our core? What do we bring to the project? And how does this affect our perceptions of self and place? In chapter Five, the focus shifts to an examination of how listening awareness paves the way for a relationship with place. I introduce the concept of the “vocal self.” When I refer to relationship with “vocal self,” I refer to the ways in which we perceived the self through our singing, including how our perceptions of what we saw, heard, and felt in places (both
sensorially and emotionally) changed through singing there. I then break down the findings and discuss each theme and subtheme using words of the performers.

The conclusion discusses limitations of the study and considers the implications of this work for future research, theorizing a new model of practice for music therapy.

In addition to this dissertation, this research-creation project includes a twenty-eight-minute video that includes audio and video documentation of the performances. Like The Singing Field project itself, the video was a co-creative effort that involved the singers and me, as well as Hasi Eldib of Carleton University (camera work and editing) and John Rosefield (audio recording). I suggest that the reader view the video before proceeding, as it will help to contextualize the project. It can be found at https://vimeo.com/488280046, or with described video at https://vimeo.com/492611276.
Chapter One: Environmental Vocal Exploration Shaping Perceptions of Self and Place, or Singing “as My Mentor”35

… please respect the land and all its inhabitants.
Don’t change the site, let the site change you.36

I encountered this inscription at the Boscawen-un stone circle while on a walk with companions in Cornwall, England in 2019. After a considerable search for the place, we entered a small walking path, maintained only by the treading of feet, and found the circle of ancient stones in an unassuming field. I vocalized with the stones adding my voice to the centuries-old energy of the site. When I sang there, I felt a strong connection with many of my ancestors. Each one of them felt alive, even those I had never met, as I walked around, touching each stone, finding sounds in my voice that I used to meet them. It was a highly emotional experience.

One of my companions wrote,

It's hard to even think about putting such a powerful experience into words. I felt transported . . . where to I don't know. It felt raw to me, it touched me deeply, right down to my very core. It felt wonderful and fragile at the same time. There was even a healing component to it. I knew it was precious, almost something to be revered. I know many things came together to create that experience: the heaviness in the air, the stone circle, the intensity of hiking the South West Coast Path, being there with two trusted friends, the weight of history and culture, and most assuredly the vocalizing. Your singing took me to the peak of the experience.37

35 This phrase is borrowed from Bernie Krause. In his book, The Great Animal Orchestra (2012), he calls chapter one “Sound as My Mentor.”
36 A part of the inscription at the Boscawen-un stone circle in Cornwall near Penzance.
37 Dianne Czerwinski, email message to author, September 15, 2021 (used with permission).
It was only as we were leaving that we saw the inscription, obscured by foliage by which time change had already taken place in us. We learned that day that engaging with the environment vocally can be significant way to allow places to change us.

Our time there reinforced my conviction that environmental vocal exploration, as I would come to call it, has the potential to shape our perception and even our consciousness. As Nina Sun Eidsheim (2015a) writes, “…by projecting music out into the air, we have an impact on the world around us. We do not engage with music at a distance, but, by definition, we do so by entering into a relationship that changes us” (180). The Boscawen-un stone circle is just one of hundreds of site-specific sings in which I have performed. I have, for the past twenty years, sung in environments in an attitude of singing to, with and through—giving, sharing and accepting—the teachings of place.

My practice of environmental vocal exploration is always informed by my experiences of, and assumptions about, each location. In return, the nature of the place influences my vocal intention and thus, my vocal sounds. I recognize that some places call for particular kinds of vocal sounds. I cannot imagine, for example, singing in the Boscawen-un stone circle with the kind of loud sounds that I might use in an expansive place. In an email exchange between myself and a friend, she reflected on a sing we had done together in the resonant World War II bunkers at Cape Spear in St. John’s, Newfoundland. Her comments reflect the impact that a given place can have on the ways we vocalize:

I inhabited my improvising voice in a totally different way than usual. I didn't use a lot of silliness or quick bursts of noise or fast strings of syllables. I felt "watched" in a way that made me profoundly uncomfortable. I felt a responsibility to be “serious,” and I felt very sad about the history and legacy of violence that place represents.³⁸

³⁸ Sara Albu, email message to author, April 27, 2021 (used with permission).
Although she came to the experience with an intention of engaging with her usual playful form of vocal improvisation, she was compelled toward “mournful lamenting and long, pure tones or phrases.”

In this chapter, I contextualize environmental vocal exploration as a way to explore place, and to discover how it can change our perceptions of both self and place. I review literature that informs and relates to some of the work of *The Singing Field* through an exploration of the three words in EVE. First, I consider the word “environmental” through the lens of place, more specifically through Stephen Feld’s concept of acoustemology. I then turn to “vocal,” offering a number of perspectives. I provide an overview of what being vocal means from an embodied perspective. Then, following Nina Sun Eidsheim, I consider the term “intermateriality” to express the interplay between body and the materiality of the places in which we sing. After this, I include a review of others who have engaged in acoustemological exploration through vocal improvisation. Finally, I explore the concept of extralinguistics, where, through the work of Eidsheim, Mladen Dolar, Anya Gannkeiser, and Roland Barthes, I look at the role of extralinguistics in vocality. Taking inspiration from Barthes, I propose a new term—“xenosong”—to describe the emotional experience of engaging in extralinguistic vocal production. Finally, I turn to “exploration” as seen through the lens of performance theory. To further contextualize *The Singing Field*, I consider the ideas of performance as a continual experience, immersive performance, and as an example of R. Murray Schafer’s theatre of confluence. Clarifying this terminology provides a theoretical frame from which to share the origins and outcomes of *The Singing Field*. 
Environmental: The Acoustemology of Singing in Place

“Environmental” is the first of the three words in the appellation I have chosen to describe the practice of singing in non-traditional places. By “environment,” I mean “place.” The environment or place in which we sing is at the heart of this study. The word “environment” comes from the French “environ,” referring to our surroundings or the “state of being environed.” Thus, the etymological origins of the term hint at the reciprocal experience that singing in environments can have on us. I use the word “place” as a blanket term to describe locations in which singing happens in EVE. A person can explore any environment through EVE. The Singing Field project placed a frame around the specific sequence of vocalizations in place that happened in the summer of 2020. The soundscape and the appearance of the environment are factors, but it is what we learn from singing in any given environment that is of interest to me in this project. In effect, when we sing in place, we engage in place-based sound-making and sound-based place-making, which is essentially EVE in action.

The places in which we sang influenced the EVE experience directly, not only because of how one sounded in the environment, but also because the physical and aesthetic qualities of the environment influenced the nature of the iteration and provided multisensory feedback. Whether we sang to a leafy trail or an urban structure, I was interested in the perspectives that each individual gained from the performances, including aural, visual, haptic, echolocative (Atkins 2018), and olfactory perspectives. I was also interested in how the qualities of the environment influenced emotion, spirit, and the physical body. I asked performers to describe how engaging

with the environment through vocal improvisation influenced their perception of those environments and their relationship to them.

Although the way in which I conceptualize EVE may be unique, the practice of singing as a way of engaging with, and knowing, a place, has a lengthy history in a wide variety of cultural locations. For this reason, I turned to the singing of those from other cultures to be informed about groups that use singing as a way to connect with their environments. I will illustrate this by referring to two groups who use singing in this way, and as a way to inform their lives. These are Suyá, a small indigenous community from Brazil, studied by ethnomusicologist and anthropologists Anthony Seeger in the 1970s, and the Kaluli people of Bosavi New Guinea, studied by Stephen Feld—also an ethnomusicologist and anthropologist—from 1976 through to the 1990s.

In 1972, Seeger (2004) visited the Suyá, who lived in a small village of only around 120 people. According to Seeger, the way the Suyá sing differs, depending on the kind of space they sing in. He writes, “the different parts of their cosmos were marked by the sounds performed there (or the silence observed)” (69). In the forest, they used shouts; they did not sing in gardens as those were places to cross through; and there were certain private places where the sung voice would never have been heard as these places beckoned low, soft, and contemplative sounds. He writes that the Suyá sang because singing made them happy. It was never the same, making it a creative and innovative practice. Seeger explains that whenever music is heard in lowland regions of South America, it means that something important is happening, such as the making of a connection between “different domains of life” (7)—between universe, the body, and the spirits. He describes music in these communities as a way to transcend time, space, and “existential levels of reality.” People often spend many hours of each day making music, especially during ceremonial periods. Singing does something for the individual, for social
relationships, and for the community. Seeger describes the village as resembling a theatre in the round (67) with someone perhaps orating, another grieving, and another shouting. He calls the village “acoustically transparent”—so different from our modern world where we keep our sounds secret from others in the realm of our homes. For the Suyá, the voice was their most important musical instrument (80), “musical performance [being] as much a part of the creation of social life as any other part of life, and the creation and recreation of relationships through the ceremonial singing creat[ing] a social context which influences other such contexts” (83). Most notably, the performance style is directly related to the intention and the context of the performance.

Stephen Feld (1996) gained a strong concept of sound in environments through his fieldwork with the Kaluli people of Bosavi, Papua New Guinea, where he first conceived of the idea of acoustemology. When he studied the Kaluli people they lived in the forest, where much that they heard, they could not see due to the density of their surroundings. The Kaluli people achieved a heightened kinship with their immediate surroundings through singing in their local environments. Feld wrote that “presences of forest places are sonically announced even when visually hidden away. There is a sense that objects and events are more than they appear to be” (98). Place and place names were important to the Kaluli’s everyday experience (102) and Feld focused on how they used these in song and lament, and the importance of these in terms of the emotional power of songs. The word “path,” or connection was one of the key elements in their songs. Songs incorporated sounds of such things as water, a bird’s flight, wind, or a tree. The songs were focused on connectedness rather than on individual quality of a place: “Through song, a Kaluli listener is suspended into places, passes along and through them, makes an interiorized macro-touch in the internalized micro-space-time of listening” (125). Feld noted a
kind of give and take: “as place is sensed, senses are placed: as places make sense, senses make place” (91).

Of course, my positionality is very different to that expressed in music by both the Suyá and Kaluli peoples. Although singing is influenced by place in both of these groups, I am not doing the same thing. EVE is not a practice that is entwined with my everyday life and community, but is, instead, a practice of sonic-spatial exploration. With both of these groups, connectivity is central and certainly the idea of singing in place to learn about place through an emotional connection resonates with me and with the aims of this study.

**Knowing through Sounding**

Feld (2015) came to the term “acoustemology” through his work with the Kaluli people. He combines the words “acoustic” and “epistemology,” so that he can “theorize sound as a way of knowing” (12) and clarify the process of inquiry into how sounding and listening can be used to enable an approach to the social study of sound. His influential work inspires me to think about EVE as a form of place-based sound-making/sound-based place-making. Feld describes a place-based, space-time dynamic that emphasizes attunement to environments as a whole, including to one’s own connection to what came before. Acoustemology indicates some sort of listening and consequent attunement through what he calls the “relational practices” (15) of listening and sounding. He suggests that we can attune in this way through the practices of listening and sounding (15). I follow his work as he also seeks to know what we can learn through sounding in place. His term acknowledges that we know through an ongoing cumulative process of participation and subsequent reflection. It is a way to think of sounding as both social and material, a way of “knowing with and knowing through the audible” (2017, 85). Through my understanding of “acoustemology of place relations” (1996, 89), I learned that performers in The
Singing Field experienced this kind of “knowing through sounding” (2015, 14) through vocal exploration in various kinds of acoustic, geographical, and atmospheric places.

Feld (2015) recognized that the acoustemology of Bosavi, Papua New Guinea asked, “what’s to be learned from taking seriously the sonic relationality of human voices to the sounding otherness of presences and subjectivities like water, birds, and insects” (19). Similarly, there is much to be learned about our own urban and wild environments here in Canada through the sonic relationality between human voices and our surrounding subjectivities as we sing in different environments. One of the performers in The Singing Field 2020 made the following illuminating statement:

I’m in my own personal project of becoming conscious of our disconnect with nature and sound. When we make [vocal] noise it reflects place and therefore when I sing in an environment it returns a message about what that place is. The amplitude or the largeness of that space—if it’s a small place—a well or a grain silo or something, it’s a very unique singular sound where if you’re in a big natural environment there are zillions of sounds and not only that, you don’t hear yourself as well, and you can hear how big nature is and how big an impact it could be having.40

Frances explains that she finds information about a place through singing there, which in turn informs her singing such that it reflects the place itself. She finds that when she is in a natural environment, there are many elements in the place that influence her output of sound and also what she receives from the environment. It gives her information about the vastness of nature and the impact it has on her life. In this way, Frances provides an example of Feld’s (1996) concept of acoustemology and “the potential of acoustic knowing, of sounding as a condition of and for knowing, of sonic presence and awareness as potent shaping forces in how people make sense of experiences” (97).

40 Frances, preparatory workshop, Ottawa, June 20, 2020.
In our singing experiences during the summer of 2020, we encountered not only place, but also animals that were in those places including ducks and birds, chipmunks, and other small creatures that attracted our attention each time we encountered them. According to Feld (2015), the term “acoustemology” also implies that “life is shared with others including human, nonhuman, living, non-living, organic, or technological” (15), indicating a kind of reciprocity. Sound studies scholar, Bernie Krause (2015), records natural sounds in order to learn from them. He perceives three kinds of aural environments in our world which include all the facets mentioned by Feld: biophony, referring to the collective sound made by the living organisms from a particular biome; geophony which refers to the sounds of the earth such as the wind, the sound of grasses moving, water travelling over stones in a stream, or the waves of the ocean; and anthrophony which refers to human-created sounds including controlled sounds such as language or music, and also what he calls the chaotic sounds we make (11). He believes that listening to the environment is important because the changing soundscape can reveal changes taking place in our surroundings (2012, 223). We too noticed a sense of reciprocity between self and the environment. This process is not unlike what Donna Haraway (2016a) calls “making kin” with the Chthulucene, a name she has dubbed for “diverse earthwide tentacular powers and forces” (101). Reciprocity between ourselves, the places, the small creatures, and each other in The Singing Field 2020 was central. The experiences were not a one-way street.

When singing in place, we also noticed that our memory influenced our knowing through sounding. We noticed how it influenced our experiences in the present and our sense of connection to what came before. Emily Keightly (2008) points out that remembering is a process that “exceeds the psychology of the individual” (176), speaking also to social and cultural relationships. The term “collective memory” focuses on the collective nature of social memory and demonstrates the fact that longevity plays a part in what societies remember or
commemorate (Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi and Levy 2011, 20). Barbara Zelizer (1998) writes that collective memory is not just about recall of the past, but also includes family stories and cultural stories. Collective memories lack identifiable beginnings, are ever changing, are not always predictable, and take on pieces of the past in unpredictable ways (3). She goes on to note that “collective” memories have texture, and that we can find memories in objects as well as narratives about the past (4).

There is no way that we can share the memories or experiences of others from a cross-cultural perspective. But there was a sense on Sparks Street Mall that, through our sounding, we were excavating the memory of colonial roots through the architecture there. This inspired us to imagine what existed in that place in pre-colonial times, but these were just imaginings. When singing among the varied architectural structures at Sparks Street Mall, the question of what came before (Frances) became a much-discussed element of our experience, encouraging us to consider the land from a settler perspective, and from a collective viewpoint. Our singing seemed to sensitize us to collective memories that exist in our culture and prompted us to question them. These kinds of memories or imaginings are shaped by a colonial history that is encoded into the built environment and the disruption of the natural landscape. Engaging with Sparks Street Mall, a commercial area of Canada’s national capital, and the other Singing Field sites through vocal improvisation seemed to open a space for critical reflection on our colonial history, collective memory, and the positions of privilege that this group of singers brought to the project 41.

41 The feelings some of us experienced in relation to evidence of settler colonialism at this and other sites during The Singing Field 2020 are explored further in chapter 5.
Stephen Feld’s concept of acoustemology provided me with foundational thinking in terms of how we can know through sounding when engaging in EVE.

**Vocal: Improvisatory Singing as an Act of Inquiry**

The second word in EVE is “vocal.” Since the voice is my area of inquiry, I anchor my project in existing knowledge about the implications of improvisational vocalizing. I first examine the voice itself, then consider the impact of the material environment in which one sings. Next, I explore extralinguistics in vocal improvisation, and finally explore what I call the “xeno-song” as a way to articulate the impact of emotion when improvising.

**The Embodied Voice**

When vocalizing, breath flows through the body from the lungs through the pharynx, then through the mouth, passing over the tongue, jaw and soft and hard palettes. As with the wind instrument family, breath is the activator of sound. Breathing, the source of life, is how we coax sound from our instruments (Gaynor 2002). Everything we do with our bodies supports that act and how we move the air affects the sound.

Singers will usually learn about breath as a first action when studying voice. Teachers often speak of inspiration as a mechanical act “in, down, and out,” seeking breath control and good posture to make an “appropriate” sound. Inspiratory and expiratory muscles are explored, and functions of the diaphragm, intercostal muscles, abdominal muscles and much more are the focus of early lessons—often reviewed throughout training (Vennard 1967). Learning how breathing works for a trained singer or for other wind instruments is akin to learning how to activate sound on a stringed instrument by drawing the bow across the strings or, for a pianist, activating sound by pressing the keys.
Where the breath vibrates the body of a wind instrument, for the singer, moving air causes vibration in parts of our instrument—the body—including the vocal folds and the bones in the face and skull. If we place our hands on our face, neck and chest when singing, we can feel the evidence of that. Although we feel those vibrations most prominently in the face, neck and chest, the whole body is the resonating chamber, much like the body of a cello is the resonating chamber for that instrument. The wood used to make a cello, the way the cellist holds the instrument, the kind of floor the endpin rests on, the kind of room the performer plays in, and how the performer pulls the bow across the string—all affect the vibration, enhancing or impeding it, and causing the instrument to resonate in a certain way. Likewise, for the singer, the whole body resonates according to a person’s individual body structure, how they hold their body, the kind of surface their feet are standing on, the kind of place they are in, and how the breath flows across the vocal cords. A singer vibrates, all the time sensing any resistance felt in the body and essentially making their body audible in the now (Järviö 2015). The work of The Singing Field is entrenched in the vibrating body of the singer.

Vocal pedagogues agree that the entire body is involved in singing (Cavarero 2005; Di Matteo 2015; Linklater 2006; Sataloff 1992). In addition to breath and vibration, so much more is in play, including how we hold ourselves, the strength of the abdomen, the strength of the intercostal muscles, the strength of the intricate muscles contained in the thyroid cartilage and the resilience of the vocal folds themselves (Vennard 1967). A world-class mezzo-soprano once told me how singing with her professional voice is an athletic act:42 The stability of the legs and pelvis and the action of the abdomen as it pushes against the diaphragm (which in turn pushes

42 Eleanor James, personal conversation with author, Indian River, April 2019, used with permission.
against the lungs) help us push the air through the vocal folds. Shoulders, back, and neck are also involved in the act of singing. A singer does not have another musical instrument to channel the breath through, so all of the sound comes from the body and how the singer uses it.

We invest a tremendous amount of our selves when training the voice to project, develop range, sustain a note, and develop a tone quality that might be suitable for classical style singing. It thus takes courage to allow another person to hear us sing. Päivi Jävriö (2015) is a mezzo-soprano and a scholar of embodied singing. She points out that when a person sings, the body’s “invisible life” is present, suggesting that as we sing, we gaze inside and listen to what is unfolding in our own bodies (26). Music therapist Sylka Uhlig (2006) writes that “there is no instrument so personal and rooted with the experience of individual life than the voice. When we scream, cry, and laugh, we do this with our bodies: the body is our instrument” (7). In a sense, we allow others to see beneath our skin when we sing, expressing who we see when we gaze inside through this invisible life. How we feel—our state of well-being and our emotions—are all vital parts of singing. This can include what we bring to the act of singing from our past, such as messages we have heard about the quality of our voices or the confidence we bring from vocal success (Coutinho et al. 2019). Vaughan Williams (1963) proposed that the voice is “the most intimate form of human expression” (58). He pointed out that while other instruments have changed through the ages, the voice remains the same. He realized that the human voice relates to our earliest selves “and inevitably turns our thoughts back to our real selves, to that sincerity of purpose” (58).

The use of emotion that influences and emerges from singing is a well-known source of therapeutic material and the basis of the work of many music therapists (Austin 2008; Chong 2011; Oddy 2011; Uhlig 2011). When a therapist uses the voice in therapy, it can upend resistance in the person with whom they are working since it is so physical and emotional.
Vocalizing with the therapist can lead to remarkable metaphors, as she helps the person with whom she is working, drawing meaning from the vocal sounds that could not be shared in words.

**Intermateriality**

Vocal improvisation depends on the body and the environment working together as one entity. The six locations chosen for *The Singing Field 2020* gave us a range of spaces in which to explore the relationship between voices and environments. The materiality of each environment changed how we sounded, how we sang, our self-perceptions, our sense of community, and our relationship with each of the places. The combination of materiality and voice provided a strong acoustemological experience. Singing in a highly resonant concrete tunnel was a very different experience from the struggle of singing against the overpowering sounds of the dam site.

Vocalist and ethnomusicologist, Nina Sun Eidsheim (2015a), sees singing and listening as a vibrational multisensory practice that changes with the materiality of the environment. She writes that although sound, body, and voice are separate entities, they are interconnected when sounding in place (2019, 38). She points out that vibrations have no boundaries and that “their relations are defined by process, articulation and change across material” (17). She adds that musicking (Small 1998)—that is, the act of listening to or making music—is a vibrational practice, ever changing with each moment in transmission. Most important to my study, she eloquently states: “In this model we are sound. Like sound, which comes into being through its material transmission, human beings are not stable and knowable prior to entering into a relationship; rather, we unfold and bring each other into being through relationships” (Eidsheim, 2015a, 24).

Eidsheim’s influential theory of sonic materialism and the voice helps explain how music does what it does. When she promotes her “vibrational” theory of music, she writes that
approaching music as such recognizes and encourages what she calls “idiosyncratic” experiences of, and with, music. Thinking of music from the perspective of vibration acknowledges that “it comes into being through an unfolding and dynamic material set of relations” (10) rather than from the “fixity” of traditional approaches. This theory offers us an opportunity to see how our interaction with music opens us to engage more effectively with the world and gives us the tools to articulate these experiences. She approaches her theory from six angles including from the perspective of the body (keeping culture and habituation in mind), the sensory complexity of voice (keeping cultural influences in mind), sound (including transmission due to intermateriality), method of performance (opening us to non-conventional approaches), how we analyse our experience, and from a metaphysical perspective looking at the ineffability of music (10). In order to explore her theory, she works with singers who sing in unconventional settings. This focus on vibration comes from Eidsheim’s desire to think about music as a practice rather than an object.

When Eidsheim turns to the concept “intermaterial vibration,” she proposes that music can take its character from materiality. She sees music as being interconnected with the materiality of the place where it is performed, showing that performance is not a singular experience but is in fact affected by the conditions of the performance. The same music can lead to a different experience each time it is performed depending upon where it is performed (155). She sees intermaterial vibration as an instrument in its own right, changing and directing our voices depending upon where we sing and which one of us is singing. That intermaterial experience in *The Singing Field*—of singing in varied environments—is fodder for the singers’ perceptions of both environment and the self. Her theory has had a profound influence on me, resonating with my work in *The Singing Field* 2020, where we considered the effect that the materiality of place and body had on our perceptions of self and place.
Free Vocal Improvisation: Extralinguistics

Free vocal improvisation is the use of the voice in any way that it can be used. It does not necessarily mean there is a melody, although there may be. It may not be based on tones or pitch at all. The term “extralinguistics” is often used when describing the full range of expression, one uses when communicating, “refer[ing] to anything in the world outside language that is relevant to the utterance.” In a wider sense, this term includes such elements as gesture, body language, and sign language. When singing, embracing extralinguistics means that we can use traditional elements of music such as melody, harmony, rhythm, and timbre. In addition, though, it can include percussive elements such as clicking or popping, dental sounds such as hissing, or the use of consonants such as “t-t-t-t” or “k-k-k-k.” It could be based on emotional elements such as wailing, roaring, laughing, or angry sounds. It can include laughing, shouting, sneezing, coughing, crying, panting, clicking, or buzzing. If it can be articulated, it can be included in vocal improvisatory expression.

This kind of singing is conceptualized and used by others in different ways. Although he rarely used the term improvisation, R. Murray Schafer (1970) used free vocal improvisation in education, asking people to explore sounds—for example, through onomatopoeia, considering words in which their sound is illustrative of the meaning of the word. In fact, Onomatopoeia is one of sixteen vocal experiences described in his book, When Words Sing (14) in which he asked students to discover words like “watery,” “metallic,” “bumpy,” or “syrupy.” He used these

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44 Words such as chaos, combustion, swirl, vroom, or bang.
experiences to help students break free of traditional vocal constructs to work with what he calls “raw vocable sound” (1). In his view, traditional singing focuses almost exclusively on smooth, tonal, melodic sounds, although there is so much more that the voice can do. Raw vocable sound includes other sounds the voice can make. Schafer’s reason for wishing to break vocal tradition is based in what he calls a “desperation” for people to use the whole voice in order to overcome inhibition and “to find the personality of each individual voiceprint” (1). His belief is that contemporary humans have put aside diversity in their singing methods in favour of the “flattened human vocal style” heard in traditional singing.

Vocal improvisor and researcher Christopher Tonelli (2020) also uses and encourages the use of a full range of vocal possibilities when singing, including extra-normal sounds that have been excluded from singing historically. He welcomes these sounds into his practice to break away from the use of “pure” pitches (3). He also critically examines the ways in which extra-normal sounds have been policed historically (2016). Philosopher psychoanalyst and cultural theorist, Mladen Dolar (2016), uses the term “non-voice” when referring to extralinguistic sounds such as coughing, screaming, laughing, and hiccupping. Tonelli (2016) would argue that these are not sounds of the “non-voice” but have been rendered as such by dominant assumptions and epistemological frameworks. They are, in fact, valid and important and powerful extensions of the singing voice (4). I couldn’t agree more.

Free vocal improvisation in jazz (Mbowa 2013) sometimes engages in extralinguistics. We can hear this kind of singing in vocalists such as Jeanne Lee, a jazz singer and improviser who was interested in using disjunct intonation and non-verbal sounds to relay emotional meaning through her voice (Porter 2006). She claimed that she wished to make use of space and silence, using poetry as a starting point for her vocalizations. She was one of the performers in Marion Brown’s Afternoon of a Georgia Faun where her use of extended vocal techniques
blended with the sounds of the other instruments. We can also hear an example of her work in “In These Last Days,” a piece improvised in 1979 by Jimmy Lyons, Andrew Cyrille, and Lee.\(^{45}\)

She incorporates repetitive sounds and lyrics, wavering in the back of her throat, breath, tremolo, and whistle tone. She uses the voice instrumentally. The lyrics become obscured as she uses them percussively as well as melodically to relay the emotion behind them. We can also hear this kind of jazz singing in the piercing screams of Abbey Lincoln,\(^{46}\) or, apart from jazz, in the wails of Diamanda Galas\(^{47}\) and in the improvisatory throat singing of Tanya Tagaq.\(^{48}\)

Paul Dutton began his career as a sound poet who added his poetry to improvisational music ensembles. He coined the term “soundsinging” to describe the use of extralinguistics in his vocal improvisation. His practice of soundsinging developed out of his own vocal work and out of the sound poetry, free jazz, and experimental performance scenes that took place in the 1950s and 1960s (Tonelli 2017, 150). Dutton uses soundsinging in choirs, in small groups, and in his solo work. The term soundsinging is now widely used among vocal improvisers. We can hear choral and small ensemble soundsinging in the work of others, such as Tonelli who leads an inclusive vocal exploration choir on a regular basis and invites anyone to join him. The advent of online video conferencing has enabled his far-reaching choral practice. Phil Minton is another soundsinger who leads a vocal improvisation choir called the “Feral Choir.”\(^{49}\) He includes bodily sounds in his singing such as retching, vomiting sounds, and burping. Christine Duncan, a singer

\(^{45}\) [https://open.spotify.com/album/0wIiHC9hpceS6jOEiO8OSh?si=RKlD-uV3SmnBz4WhIkb_Mw&dl_branch=1](https://open.spotify.com/album/0wIiHC9hpceS6jOEiO8OSh?si=RKlD-uV3SmnBz4WhIkb_Mw&dl_branch=1)

\(^{46}\) Hear the middle movement of the Max Roach Triptych: Prayer/Protest/Peace [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kMaUDAeiSiY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kMaUDAeiSiY)

\(^{47}\) [Hear an example of Galas’s extreme vocal at 1:00 in her Plague Mass](https://diamandagalas.bandcamp.com/album/plague-mass)

\(^{48}\) [Hear Tagaq’s powerful piece, Retribution](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q7rn7VQ-tHg)

\(^{49}\) [Phil Minton’s 1st Online Feral Choir (2020);](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E1aIQGp0B0o)
based in Toronto, Canada, also uses an extensive range of sounds in her solo singing and with the choir she leads, The Element Choir.⁵⁰

Maggie Nicols, originally a jazz singer, began using a wide range of improvisational vocal sounds early in her career. She can be heard singing with Minton, Dutton, and others in small group settings. In addition, we can hear this kind of singing in the creative sounds of Gabriel Dharmoo (Varty, n.d.) who performs what he calls a “fluidity of ideas between tradition and innovation” (Dharmoo 2021), and Sarah Albu of Montreal who performs improvisatory vocal music as well as voice work from 20th century and contemporary repertoire.⁵¹ The latter two, along with Kathy Kennedy and others, belong to an innovative vocal improvisation group named “Phth” in which there are no limits to the kinds of sounds used in improvisational performance.

**Vocal Improvisation in Place**

One reason that I favour free vocal improvisation over song is because I find that it allows for the most extensive expression of my experience in my own vocal work. Improvisation is an emergent phenomenon in the sense that something new emerges from the interaction of an improvising system’s constituent parts. Improvisation scholar Edgar Landgraf (2011) writes that improvisation “…can be understood as a self-organizing process [italics in original] that relies on and stages [italics in original] the particular constraints that encourage the emergence of something new and inventive” (5). During The Singing Field 2020, there was no pre-determined structure in our free vocal improvisations and how we interacted vocally with environments. The

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⁵⁰ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rt_8HXyLEac
⁵¹ http://www.sarahalbu.com/projects/current
community of singers co-developed musical structures in the moment in response to each site and each other. It required an open mind and the courage to move beyond tonality, melody, smooth vocal sounds, and regular rhythms in order to experience a full range of emotional involvement with the places in which we sang.

Other artists who have made improvising in unusual environments a part of their creative practice include David Rothenberg (2002) who does interspecies improvisation with the aim to communicate with animals. One recent example of his work is improvisation that takes place with whales in the middle of the ocean. Hildegaard Westercamp is another musician who improvises with the soundscape to raise awareness about environmental issues through the active act of listening. Some musicians have improvised in highly resonant spaces, responding to long reverberation times. The Deep Listening Band is one example. The original band consisted of Pauline Oliveros (accordion), Stuart Dempster (trombone and didjeridu), and Panaiotis (Peter Ward) on vocals. Their debut recording titled Deep Listening was recorded in an underground cistern with a remarkable 45-second reverberation time. Consider also, Paul Horn’s 1968 recording Inside that was recorded inside the highly reverberant Taj Mahal. More recently, saxophonist Armin Küpper (2020) explored the seemingly endless echo of a soon-to-be-installed pipeline (Hamer 2020). Some musicians have used improvisation to highlight environmental causes. Greenpeace, for example, sponsored a video of Ludovico Einaudi improvising a mournful

52 For example, https://news.njit.edu/professor-david-rothenberg-his-orca-straw-humpback-whales
53 https://www.hildegardwesterkamp.ca/sound/comp/1/soundscapespeaks/
54 https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/pauline-oliveros-stuart-dempster-pan-deep-listening/
55 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_GXcr_Me7yI
piece on a grand piano that had been placed on an ice flow to draw attention to a deteriorating glacier in the Arctic.\textsuperscript{56}

Vocalists who incorporate place into their creative practice include Meredith Monk, who often uses place as a springboard for the creation of her compositions. For example, her \textit{Songs of Ascension} has been performed in numerous evocative locations, including the remarkable and highly resonant spiral staircase of Ann Hamilton’s Tower sculpture in Geyserville, California.\textsuperscript{57} In his piece titled \textit{This is What Happens When We Perform the Memory of the Land}, Indigenous performance artist Peter Morin confronts colonialism through improvisation and song, illuminating the despair of the land and the alienation of the people who are displaced (Robinson 2018).

Those who focus strictly on vocal improvisation include Vivian Corringham (2014), who addresses memory when she improvises in her piece \textit{Shadow Walks} (2014). In this piece, she engages with the land through improvised singing based on the walking stories of others. Kathy Kennedy, in her work “HMMM,” encourages engagement with city places through the voice in conjunction with radio.\textsuperscript{58} Anne Bourne is an improviser and composer who improvises using her voice and cello to express her interest in “equity, environmental evolution and climate peace.”\textsuperscript{59} Interestingly, all three of these improvisors—Corringham, Kennedy, and Bourne—were mentored by Pauline Oliveros, who is known for music-making in different environments through her practice of Deep Listening (2005).

\textsuperscript{56} Greenpeace 2016. \url{https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2DLnhdnSUVs}
\textsuperscript{57} Meredith Monk, \textit{Songs of Ascension}, \url{https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e3mSVR3xtfU}
\textsuperscript{58} \url{https://kathykennedy.ca/sound-art/hmmm/}
\textsuperscript{59} \url{http://www.annebournemusic.com/about}
Although the motivations and aesthetic orientations of these performers may differ, their respective creative practices share an emphasis on sounding to, with, and through unusual performance environments.

Expressing Meaning beyond Extralinguistics: Introducing the Xeno-Song

To consider what is being communicated through the use of a full range of vocal sounds in singing, I will address the role that semiotics plays in sounds that go beyond words. Based on my experiences as a music therapist and with The Singing Field project, it is clear to me that singing with a full range of vocal sounds can have a significant impact on the communication of emotion. Nina Sun Eidsheim (2015a) looks at the role of semiotics in vocal sounds from the perspective of a vocal pedagogue, composer, and musicologist. In her discussion of semiotics related to vocalizing, she examines the effects of using extralinguistics and a wide spectrum of human vocal sounds when singing, including the act of finding meaning in the experience of singing, and the limitations of using codified sounds. She suggests that the act of finding meaning in the experience of singing is based on both the activity and the experience (129). We cannot separate the meaning from our experience when we vocalize because “the vocalization triggers an experience which in turn creates the ground for experience and the meaning we derive from it” (129). Eidsheim reminds us of an unnameable quality in the voice or music “which lies beyond the reach of understanding through fidelity to words or music” (126). She links the meaning of our experience to the place and other conditions in which we sing. Eidsheim believes that when we emphasize signifying sounds that are selected and notated, we “skew the reality of the full event that is music and voice” (127). In other words, we place a kind of barrier between ourselves and the experience.
Mladen Dolar (2006) also writes about a sense that voice goes beyond being simply the bearer of an utterance (15). He too suggests that the voice has an “inner relationship with meaning” (14), admitting that we can apply meaning to many kinds of sounds, but that vocal sound that has the ability to “say” something. He maintains that extralinguistic aspects of vocal production enable meaning (15), suggesting that “words fail us when we are faced with the infinite shades of the voice, which infinitely exceed meaning” (13). He adds that we incorporate elements of metaphysics, physics, ethics, and politics of the voice in our voicing. Dolar also looks at the “linguistics of the non-voice,” or the voice outside speech, including hiccups, coughing, a pre-linguistic child’s babble, laughter, or a scream (23). However, he does not refer to the use of such extralinguistic elements in the act of singing itself.

Anya Kanngieser (2012), geographer and sound artist, writes that both our voices and how we listen are political acts. She focuses on the spoken voice as opposed to our singing voice, but her observations are relevant to both. In her view, the way in which language is interpreted is less about what is said, but how it is said. She also writes about extralinguistic elements that create meaning and nuance. She writes that “voices and their linguistic articulations are produced by, and productive of, relations, geographies and subjectivities” (337). She believes (as does Eidsheim, 2019) that our voices and how we communicate with them are tied to our education, class, culture, social status, and gender. She discusses how vocal pitch, volume, pace, frequency, and accent affect our capacity to hear and be heard. She points out the nuances of how we change speech in different situations when, for example, we are attracted to someone or want to impress. She reminds us that no voice—silence—also communicates. It can, for example, be a refusal, a provocation, or an expression of wisdom, or it can be about fear or the inability to engage. Her insights are related to those of Christopher Tonelli (2020) who discusses the ways in which the voice is policed when it steps outside of cultural norms.
Semiotician and philosopher Roland Barthes (1985), writes about voice as a signifier in his quest to understand how language can describe music. He examines ways in which there can be an “encounter between a language and a voice” (181), asking what is heard in the voice beyond the meaning of the words? He describes the “grain” of the voice, which is a difficult to describe essence of a singing voice. He hears something in the voice, such as a stubbornness beyond the meaning of the words. He describes it as “hearing the body” in the voice (181) and refers to it as the “materiality of the body speaking its mother tongue” (182). Barthes describes his idea through concepts which he calls “pheno-song” and “geno-song”, based on the terms phenotext and genotext developed by semiotician and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva.  

“Pheno-song” refers to the phenomenon of singing. In much the same way that the term “phenotype” refers to all the observable traits or characteristics of an organism, pheno-song covers all the features of language in song, including rules of the genre, style of interpretation, representation, expression, and all else that serves to communicate meaning through the music. “He writes that it includes “everything in the performance which is in the service of communication, 

60 Julia Kristeva writes about genotext and phenotext in her thesis, Revolution in Poetic Language. In my attempt to understand why Barthes adopted these terms, I explored Kristeva’s approach which is very different to that of Barthes, although she was his student. She focuses on how language is undercut by what is happening in the psyche. She adds to formal linguistics by examining the ways in which we say things through “vocalics” (described in Collins Dictionary as “the non-verbal aspects of voice creation”), and intonation. There are non-verbal elements that are exclusively semiotic, such as music (with no words). Our meaning is also regulated by the pre-verbal which guides connections between body and family. It also depends upon who we are communicating with, and what our differences are (biological, family structures, genetics, for example). All language is affected by our positionality on the part of both the conveyor of language and the recipient (including gesture). Kristeva writes that “phenotext” is language that serves to communicate. It obeys rules of communication, including the rules of enunciation, and presupposes that there is an addressee (1986, 121). This relates to Barthes’s interpretation of pheno-song which is based in all of the phenonema related to language when it is being sung. “Genotext” is “the advent of the symbolic [including] drives, their disposition and their division of the body, plus the ecological and social system surrounding the body, such as objects…” (Kristeva 1986, 120). This seems very different to Barthes's "geno-song" in which meaning comes from the language itself (120).
representation, expression, everything which it is customary to talk about, which forms the tissue of cultural values…” (182). He even includes the personality of the performer in this definition.

In contrast, “geno-song” refers to aspects of vocal production in which meaning comes from within the language—in effect, it is the “diction” of the language itself that implies meaning. He writes that, musically speaking, it is about how melody explores language rather than what is being said linguistically (1985, 182). This means that the sound of the words themselves are performed rather than the meaning of the words. An example might be if the word “rise” is used in a lyric. Perhaps the singer or composer will languish on the “ah” vowel on a single note to allow the voice to enjoy expressing that vowel sound, rather than perhaps rising up in the melody to indicate the meaning of the word itself.

When defining pheno-song, Barthes suggests that expression is a part of how meaning occurs. But sonic expression includes far more than words, melody, and rhythm. When speaking, we have an expansive repertoire of ways to express ourselves that go far beyond the words. We can show “stubbornness” in the grain of our voice while speaking, but it is decidedly more difficult to do so while singing melodically. How can we truly make that progression from language to performance as Barthes suggests? In my view, extralinguistics play a crucial role in communicating emotion through vocal sound in music. When we appropriate extra-linguistic vocal elements that are usually associated with speech and incorporate them into the practice of EVE, we have the potential for a deeper expression of emotion when singing. In the writings of Eidsheim, Kanngieser, Dolar, and Barthes, there is strong agreement on the essential role that non-linguistic or extralinguistic signs play in communication. They seem to agree that we find

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61 The word “rise” contains a diphthong including “ah” and “ee” sounds within the vowel. A trained singer will choose where to turn the diphthong, focusing on one of the constituent vowels in particular. In most cases, a singer will choose the “ah” vowel in a word such as “rise.”
meaning when using a full range of vocal sounds in both speech and singing. When we sing, extralinguistics allow for nuances in meaning that cannot be effectively communicated through the words. Extralinguistic sounds help a singer expand their emotional and communicative expressive palette.

In addition to Barthes’ concepts of pheno-song and geno-song, I would like to suggest a third term to describe non-linguistic vocal utterances that are primarily emotional in nature: “xeno-song,” stemming from “xeno,” meaning “unknown other.”62 I use the term xeno-song to refer to the emotional experience of using extralinguistic vocal sound in improvisational singing. That experience is enhanced by the use of the full range of the voice, including all of the sounds a voice can make, untethered by codification. When in the singing field, the xeno-song holds special importance. As I engage with the place I am in, there is no way to predict the kind of experience that will unfold. I take some time to engage with the place, to truly see it and hear it, and then to voice it.

Christopher Tonelli (2020) discusses the gradual acceptance of emotion in vocal jazz, saying that at first it was rejected—some musicians would prefer to exclude singing rather than allow emotion to enter into the music (68). He suggests that an “emotional live voice” became accepted through the expansion of what people were allowed to do sonically (111). When I listen to the voice of Mahalia Jackson in the documentary film, Summer of Soul (Thompson 2021),63 I hear an example of profound emotional aliveness. She does not accomplish this through melody or even rhythm. To be sure, the pheno-song—including extensive ornamentation—plays an

62 Oxford Languages, https://languages.oup.com/dictionaries/#oed s.v. “xeno.” I would like to thank my advisor, Jesse Stewart, for suggesting this term to describe a concept that I was struggling to name, and for his collaboration while developing the concept.
63 Mahalia Jackson in the 1969 Harlem Cultural festival. She is singing Take My Hand Precious Lord https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9_4czwnxK-I
important part in her delivery of each word. Likewise, the quality of her voice and the rules of the genre in which she is singing contribute to her expression. But there is something else in her voice that is deeply affective, something that has very little to do with the words she is singing. In my view, her singing is a profound example of xeno-song where she goes beyond melody and rhythm to express emotion through non-linguistic vocal sound.

Xeno-song may be something that one decides to express such as when emotion drives the performance of an improvised or pre-composed work. Alternatively, it can be an emergent phenomenon (Landgraf 2011)—when, for example, a group of singers engage in vocal exploration with no expectation of intense emotion. The interaction between improvisers, the presence of the audience, as well as the intermateriality of the performing environment can all lead to an unexpected emotionally affective experience. Whether the vocal improvisation is emotionally driven or emotionally emergent, xeno-song can take the form of any sound that a voice can produce including, for example, weeping, laughter, or a roar. These types of sounds—these unknown sonic others—often express emotion in a way that goes beyond language.

We explored xeno-song extensively during The Singing Field 2020 wherein the singing was almost entirely non-linguistic, and used a wide range of vocal sounds. Meaning and emotion in our singing did not come through words, but rather through the ways in which we improvised and interacted with one another using those vocal sounds and textures in addition to melody and rhythm. We communicated through the music itself, leaving received rules associated with singing—the pheno-song—to one side.

**Exploration: Voice Performing Place**

The third and final word in EVE is “exploration.” In *The Singing Field 2020*, our primary mode of exploration was through vocal performance and co-creation. We performed in place to
understand how that act would affect our perceptions of self and place. Two elements of
performance that relate to this project are the ideas that performance can be continuous and it can
be immersive.

_The Singing Field as Continual Performance_

Throughout _The Singing Field_ 2020, we felt as though we were in a state of continual
performance, meaning that the performance did not begin as we started to sing, but rather from
the moment of arrival at the site with the sound set-up as John fitted us with our microphones, to
the opening ritual, the EVE experience, and to the final conclusive act of returning the
microphone back to him.

Erving Goffman (1956) describes performance as being all of the activity of an individual
which takes place in front of observers, and which has some influence on those observers (22).
He calls it the expressive equipment that we use either intentionally or unwittingly. He includes
the setting, which can range from our living room to “the scientific stage provided by a large
hospital” (23). He also includes what he calls “the personal front” (24) to mean other items that
we identify with the performer. In this category he includes the kind of clothing we wear, our
sex, our age, or our race. He also includes things like speech patterns and facial expressions.
Some elements vary, such as facial expression, and some are fixed, such as race. As well, he
includes the manner of an individual, which can dictate the relationship in which they are
performing. He calls these factors, the individual’s “front,” which he defines as “the expressive
equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his
performance.” (22). He points out that when an actor takes on an established role, the front has
already been established for them (27) and if an individual finds their self in a situation that is
new to them, there are probably well-established fronts in place for that role.
These fronts take place in every facet of our lives and while we try to make our activity significant to others, we must express ourselves during interaction in each moment (30). We can often be thwarted by our desire to appear to be playing the role, so that our energies are diverted from the task at hand. The example Goffman gives is that of a student who wishes to be attentive to their instructor so intently that they can no longer pay attention (33). He points out that our consciousness, in being observed, affects the performance (34). Goffman is one of the earliest thinkers who wrote about this kind of performance, discussing dimensions of performance in our day-to-day lives including, for example, how we display confidence, and the ways in which we accept (or do not accept) authority in our lives.

Performance theorist Richard Schechner (1985) defines performance as “restored behaviour” (35). He suggests that one of the defining characteristics of performance is that it involves some sort of behaviour that can be worn as one would wear a mask or costume. In a sense, we are all engaged in a performance of restored behaviour as we improvise our daily lives. Schechner notes that we can perform “ourselves,” other versions of ourselves, or imagined versions of ourselves.64 He describes it as “me behaving as if I am someone else” or as if we each have multiple “me’s” (37). Like Goffman, he points out that there is a continuum in the ways that we present our selves to others, including not only in formal acting, but in our social actions too (37). He adds that we are in a kind of feedback loop with others as we perform our selves and that this applies to both individuals and groups “offer[ing] a chance to rebecome what they once were—or even, and most often, to rebecome what they never were but wish to have

64 The idea that we can perform “ourselves” or versions of others is reminiscent of the “empty chair” in Gestalt Therapy (Perls et al. 1951), which is a technique that a therapist can use when working psychodynamically. When a music therapist uses this technique, improvisation is used to help clients to perform themselves in relation to others, and/or to perform the other in order to better understand that other.
been or wish to become” (38). According to Schechner, we can, through this process, become someone very unlike ourselves (41). A part of his theory includes the ways in which performers gauge the mood of an audience and shift accordingly to create a reflexive performance (44).

Our performances reflected the lives of each of the participants. For example, Kelly-Anne was on a highly personal medical and physical journey that summer, which impacted her approach to the project and Frances was committed to furthering her personal understanding of singing in place. We also encountered unexpected parts of our selves: Cait felt that she discovered a freer part of herself; Ellen was reminded of her memories; Helen was able to relinquish a sense of control. Through performance, we are able to try out other ways of being. In this way, performance can be transformational, asking us to think about our role in the larger picture and how it affects/reflects our own lives on a day-to-day basis.

**The Singing Field as Immersive Performance**

*The Singing Field* is a performance piece that takes place in non-traditional settings with a non-traditional audience–participant relationship. There were impacts of immersion for both performers and audience members in this piece. The focus was on the performers rather than the audience, but there was no way to ignore the presence and interaction of audience members when they occurred. In some instances, there was no one there at all, but this did not influence the immersive experience for performers. When passersby sang with us, acknowledged, observed, or just dismissed us, it impacted what we did in turn. It would be interesting to know if and how coming upon our performances impacted passersby, but pleasing others was not part of this project. When no one was there at all, the performances continued unheeded.

Literature about immersive theatre tends to focus on immersion for the audience, but some of the insights can be applied to performer immersion too. For Josephine Machon (2013), the immersive experience for audience is at the heart of her work. She includes audience
involvement, a prioritisation of the sensual world, an awareness of the significance of space and place, and a potential focus on geography, location, community, local culture, history, and politics (70). Although she does not apply these elements to the perspective of the performer, I find them useful when considering how all of these priorities were in play for the singers during The Singing Field 2020. In some respects, they were both the performers and the primary audience for the experience. Machon adds that in terms of audience involvement, people might make physical contact with performers (67). In the case of The Singing Field 2020, although audiences were in the performance areas with the performers, at no time did they physically interact with us. They certainly interacted, though, by vocalizing, waving, smiling, talking to us, and by remaining in the performance area to observe. For these reasons, I feel I cannot ignore their presence and their impact upon the project.

Other points that Machon makes in reference to audience immersion are useful when thinking about the kind of performer immersion that took place. We sought to engage in immersion as absorption (engaging the participant65 fully), as transportation (reorientation to another [metaphorical] place) and total immersion (where the participant creates their own narrative and journey). She compares immersive theatre to submerging oneself in water where the atmosphere and the rules change, making the situation potentially dangerous.

Adam Alston (2013) suggests that in immersive theatre the performance should surround the audience. This was not the case in The Singing Field 2020, although passersby could not really avoid our activities if they were in our general vicinity. The audience was always free to

65 When Machon uses the word “participant,” she refers to the audience member. Here, I am referring primarily to the performer in Schafer’s sense, although when audience members were present, “participant” refers to them as well.
participate if desired. The performances definitely broke down the “frontality” of traditional forms of performance (as in a traditional theatre setting with a proscenium stage). In a way, we imposed ourselves upon passersby, but this did not seem to be disturbing for anyone. At worst, they regarded us with curiosity or ignored us altogether. As Frances mentioned during the debrief after singing at the tunnel at Petrie Lane, they certainly had something to talk about over dinner!

Acoustic ecologist R. Murray Schafer (2002) and his concept of environmental, multi-media theatre that he calls the theatre of confluence is the theory that best describes the frame of mind I was in when designing and implementing *The Singing Field* 2020. The idea of immersion for performers as well as audience is central to his conception of theatre of confluence and, by extension, to my conception of the Singing Field.

Theatre of confluence is Schafer’s concept of environmental, multi-media theatre which he describes in three essays written in 1966, 1991, and 1997, entitled *The Theatre of Confluence* I, II, and III respectively (2002). The first two essays have been of particular interest to me as I have developed both the work of EVE and *The Singing Field*. The first shows the development of the idea, beginning with questions about how to clarify his thoughts. Here he describes “confluence” as a flowing together of the arts (e.g., music, acting, dance, visual elements), moving beyond the idea of hierarchical theatre where one art form takes precedence over another (31). It is not forced, but inevitable, “like the tributaries of a river at the precise moment of their joining” (26). In his first essay he lays out his definitions of “confluence,” positions his work in the context of other theatre of the time, discusses relationships he expected between audience and performer, and what the physical theatre itself implies. It is in this essay that he describes theatre of confluence as a “theatre of the senses” (31). The second essay most resonates with my own work. Here he writes about his concept of the purpose of art, how it can effect a change in
us, how we can recover the sacred and the ritualistic through it, and how the environment in which it takes place affects the outcome of the artistic piece.

Interestingly, he was not in favour of the blurring of the audience/performer roles when he wrote the first essay in 1966 (32), but by the time he wrote the second essay in 1991, his perspective changed. At that point, he criticized what he describes as the audience-tipping-performer scenario, writing that the audience should be a part of the ritual and the special time and place that constitutes a performance (93). His third essay was the least impactful for me in the context of my project. Here he expresses his disappointment with consumerism and the star system and argues that art needs to be changed on an ongoing basis in our changing society (171).

Schafer developed his ideas concerning the theatre of confluence while creating his series of twelve environmental music-dramas collectively called *Patria*. These pieces take place in unusual spaces outside of the concert hall, such as on a wilderness lake, in a national train station, and in a fairground. The walls of the concert hall are removed, the relationship between audience member and performer is muddied, and he seeks to create a transformational experience for all involved, including the performer, the audience member, and crew. His wish is that when an individual is a part of, or witness to, a performance, something shifts for them in their lives; the experience goes much deeper than the performance being a moment of entertainment or a way to fill a few hours.

My research was directly informed by five key elements, described by Schafer in his first two essays, that I consider to be important immersive qualities in theatre. First, *The Singing Field* reflects Schafer’s emphasis on participatory involvement in the arts, rejecting what he calls “passive digestion” (166). By “passive digestion,” he refers to modes of consumption that do not provide active mental and/or physical engagement (for either performer or audience member).
Second, most of Schafer’s *Patria* works take place in unusual locations outside of the concert hall.

Third, he seeks to create a transformational experience (83). He writes that “this must be the first purpose of art. To effect a change in our existential condition. This is the first purpose. To change us” (83) and make us “aware of the unity of all things material, spiritual, natural and divine” (83), describing how this is something humans should return to after a long period of time in which we have moved away from the magic circles, the drums, and masks, and have ceased to incorporate divinity into our lives (86).

The idea that art *must* be transformational is a lofty goal indeed and was not the intention with *The Singing Field*. One might aspire to a transformational experience, but this does not mean that the experience has failed if it does not create change in a singer. In my own personal experience, however, a work of art has had far more impact on me if I have been transformed by it in some way. As it happens, transformation did occur for all six of the singers in *The Singing Field 2020*, but this in itself does not imply success. It just means that the experience was relevant and insightful for each person in some way.

The fourth quality is immersion itself, especially for performers as they grapple with, for example, environments, performance times, and chaotic situations that do not fit the normal theatre experience. In *The Singing Field 2020* audience members were not a static presence, so the relationship between performer and audience member was muddied. They did not enter the performance space knowing that they were going to be witnessing a performance, leaving their reaction unpredictable. For this reason, performers often remained focused on their own music making and that of their co-performers, whereas audience members were an incidental presence that could be interacted with if the moment seemed right.
When considering that the audience was unintentional, one could question if they were actively engaged in Schafer’s sense, since at no point in Schafer’s *Patria* cycle do performances occur by chance. I suggest though, that all passersby were a part of our performances, but only those who actively engaged with us may have experienced that immersive quality.

A fifth element that is central to the theatre of confluence and *The Singing Field* is the idea that performance has the capacity to inspire awareness of, and engagement with, ecological imbalances. Although this did not emerge as a primary concern for all performers in *The Singing Field* 2020, it did arise for some. It was of definite interest to me. In the introduction to the script of *The Enchanted Forest*,<sup>66</sup> Schafer (1993) writes:

> For an artist to be engagé used to mean to be affiliated with some political cause or ideal. The engagement of this piece is with nature and its ideal is that the human beings participating in it as performer or audience may discover bonds with the natural environment they had not sensed before or had forgotten. (1)

Schafer’s theatre of the senses “involves all of its participants in new explorations of awareness … all art should lead to altered states of consciousness” (2002, 31).

All of the performances in *The Singing Field* 2020 took place outside in the elements. Although it was tempting to postpone due to searing heat or pouring rain, we persisted. The weather events changed the nature of the performances. Had it not been for my previous experiences with theatre of confluence, I may have waited for more favourable conditions. It was beneficial to follow through and did not deter the singers or film crew at all. It just required that we be flexible. In *Patria the Prologue: The Princess of the Stars*, Schafer (1981) addresses

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<sup>66</sup> The ninth work in Schafer’s *Patria* Cycle, a collection of twelve environmental music theatre works including a prologue and epilogue. A summary of the whole cycle may be seen at [http://www.patria.org/pdp/ORDER/OVERVIEW.HTM](http://www.patria.org/pdp/ORDER/OVERVIEW.HTM)
imbalances in human relationships with the environment simply by presenting the work at dawn on a wilderness lake where, as Schafer declares, the living environment shapes the success of the performance. It is important to him that the performers feel a humility in light of the natural forces that they must encounter under these conditions (2002, 106).

This awareness of the environment is central to Patria the Epilogue: And Wolf Shall Inherit the Moon (1987), which is colloquially called “The Wolf Project.” It is a nine-day performance during which the audience, creator, and performers are one and the same, and community, ritual, the environment, improvisation, and transformation are used to promote the concept that humans are just one part of the natural world. On the opening page of the script for And Wolf Shall Inherit the Moon, it is written that “Humanity is not the supreme triumph of nature but rather an element in a supreme activity called life.”

Schafer scholar Ellen Waterman (1998) highlights And Wolf Shall Inherit the Moon as a piece that is illustrative of the theatre of confluence. Approximately fifty artists retreat to the forest for nine days during which they become performer, audience member, creator, cook, wood gatherer, and more. As Waterman points out, The Wolf Project is the “apotheosis of Schafer’s theory of art” (74) in which all participants are actively involved in all aspects of camp life and performance. It takes place in the wilderness where participants engage with ritual and celebration, and where there is “an emphasis on provoking existential change in its participants” (74) and where Schafer “works towards breaking down the bifurcations of consumer/creator, amateur/professional, audience/performer, and nature/culture” (75). Waterman suggests that

67 Participants of The Wolf Project, Patria: The Epilogue and Wolf Shall Inherit the Moon, unpublished script (13th draft, Canada, 2005), 1. Since the script of The Wolf Project is a community effort, we cannot be sure who, exactly, wrote this statement.
singing, playing an instrument, dancing, making art, acting or story-telling is different in the wilderness, elements of which respond differently to sound than the four walls of a concert hall. She says that “the wilderness creates its own dynamic” (85).

Although much literature on immersive theatre theorizes immersion from the perspective of the audience, many of the authors insights are equally relevant for performers. I came to the understanding through this literature, that *The Singing Field 2020* was an example of immersive performance. Immersion may also have been the experience of audience members, but we will never know for sure. Schafer’s concept of theatre of confluence, in particular, is foundational to my understanding of the immersion that took place in *The Singing Field*.

**Three Words Together**

The three terms in “environmental vocal exploration” provide a framework for understanding the different fields and associated bodies of literature that inform this research-creation project, namely environment (place), vocality (including the intermateriality of vocal production), and exploration (performance). Feld’s concept of acoustemology is a useful way to theorize the use of voice in place and knowing through sounding. Eidsheim’s theory that voicing is an intermaterial practice posits the embodied voice as an instrument and highlights the ways in which our voices are shaped by the environments in which we sing. This idea has been put into practice by numerous creative practitioners who have explored unusual environments through music/sound; although they differ in intention and aesthetic orientation, their practices are important precursors to *The Singing Field*. In theorizing vocal improvisation in place, I have proposed a new term—xeno-song—to refer to expression of emotion through extralinguistic vocal sounds. I then looked at concepts of continual and immersive performance and at Schafer’s theatre of confluence, one of the seeds that helped to develop *The Singing Field* project.
Taken together, the three words that constitute EVE—and their fields of academic inquiry and creative practice—outline a way of interacting with the world through sound and opening ourselves to perceptions of self and place.
Chapter Two: Singing the World

I lay there in the back seat of the family car, as we returned home late in the evening. Our family regularly travelled long distances and when driving very late in the evening, I often drifted in and out of sleep, the humming engine sounding like a choir of voices to me—a child of five or six—who had never before heard a choir. Quietly, I joined my imaginary choir in what felt like a beautiful harmonic drone. My parents in the front seat and even my brother next to me would not have heard as I sang under my breath with my secret choir. I sang under my breath because if anyone knew what I was doing, they would have wanted to hear my performance, would have laughed or teased and the performance would have been spoiled. Secrecy was vital to its success.68

This epigraph comes from a journal entry about my earliest memory of singing in dialogue with an atypical environment when I was very young. I begin my autoethnography with this quote to illustrate the innateness of my interest in singing in unusual environments. There came a time when I discovered my passion for singing with others, but I will always remember my first secret choir. Only now do I realize how profound that experience was as an early example of environmental vocal exploration.

In retrospect, I ponder the source of my instinctive collaboration with the vehicle, which provided a sonic ground against which I could quietly superimpose vocal figures. The sound of the automobile was an element of the anthrophony referring to “all of the sounds we humans generate” (Krause 2015, 11). The anthrophony dominated the soundscape of my suburban upbringing. I had very little experience of the biophony as a child in that world except for occasional bird sound. Exceptions may have occurred when we walked along the Bruce Trail for an hour as Sunday dinner was roasting or during much anticipated camping trips to busy provincial parks, but it was on those rides home late in the evening that I found my choral inspiration in the sound of the anthropophonic humming engine of the automobile.

68 Nicola Oddy, journal entry, January 2020.
I share my opening vignette in order to provide a backdrop for this autoethnographic chapter. My discussion of research methodology spans two chapters, which outline three methodological approaches. They are, autoethnography, research-creation, and ethnography. I discuss the latter two in chapter three and present the autoethnography here, with more autoethnographic reflections scattered throughout the dissertation. Singing in different environments emerged in my later life as a daily practice, stemming from my work as a music therapist and when I examined the transformative potential of improvisational singing in various environments. In this chapter, I share events in my life related to improvisation and environmental vocal exploration, that led to this research.

My personal practice of singing in environments over the past twenty years has informed the research questions that I examine in this dissertation. The use of vocal improvisation in my work as a music therapist as well as my experiences as a performer, educator, workshop leader, and choir director also influenced the research questions. Autoethnography honours the value of inner knowing (Duncan 2004), and places oneself within the context of the research (Holt 2003). The autoethnographer is a co-performer who turns research into performative inquiry. Where ethnography is a method in which the researcher studies the “other” (Conquergood 2013, 20), an authoethnographer considers how their own presence in the research influences the outcome of the research (Wall 2008). The authoethnographic observations are crucial to this study since I was both a co-performer and researcher.

69 Music Therapy is a field in which a therapist uses music as their mode of intervention and connection to others in order to work toward therapeutic goals laid out by the recipient or their caregivers. Goals can be cognitive, emotional, physical, communicative, social, sense-based or spiritual. There are four ways that a music therapist works: improvisational, recreative (based on pre-composed music), compositional (music-writing) and receptive (music-listening practices) (Bruscia 2014). See www.musictherapy.ca or www.musictherapy.org for more information.
Writing about fieldwork within contemporary ethnomusicology, Michelle Kisliuk (2008) emphasizes that there is much we can know by doing (33). Since this practice stems from my personal experience I wanted to be a part of the co-creative process, seeking an understanding of how my own experience compared with that of the other participants. I felt a need to engage with the experience along with the others in a spirit of cocreation and participant observation. Otherwise, I may have slid into a comfortable place under an umbrella, or in the shade, not knowing what it was like to sing so openly in public places among passersby with a camera present. Norman Denzin (2003) refers to this mode of autoethnography as performative interpretive inquiry, which involves going back and forth between performance, process, and analysis, exactly how I would describe my summer of 2020. He encourages performing (rather than simply analyzing the performances of others), pointing out that by entering situations that connect our own experiences with culture, history and social structure, we discover “epiphanies, or existential turning point moments” (39). These epiphanies can create turning points in one’s life that can, in turn, connect us with more expansive public concerns (22). I am driven to understand what others experienced, as well as to understand my own experiences through this interpretive inquiry.

Autoethnography has been said to lack reliability and lead to generalized interpretation. As Denzin reminds us, memory is fallible. My stories may have changed over time. The fact is that when different people relay their stories, they remember various aspects of them differently. There really is no such thing as an objective interpretation of memory. By drawing on the experiences and recollections of all of the participants in this project, including my own, I have tried to provide an accurate description and interpretation of our time together in the Singing Field. Stepping in and out of performance in *The Singing Field* 2020 was a fluid experience for
me. As the researcher, I felt a sense of responsibility for the others, but I felt able to set that to one side once the singing began.

I wrote this chapter to prepare myself for the co-creative performances in *The Singing Field* (2020) and to prepare myself for my role as researcher in this project. I look at related snapshots of my own life leading up to the project, considering my history as a singer and improviser, and looking at how my work as a music therapist informs this research. I conclude by reflecting upon my experiences of environmental countertransference and as a vocal environmentalist.

**Exposing the Secret**

At a family gathering, everyone was having a turn singing with the pre-cursor to Karaoke—The Singing Machine. One by one people got up and sang their signature song, and then it was my turn. I was an adolescent with exaggerated self-consciousness and having had singing lessons did not help. In fact, if anything, it created more fear, since singing was something that everyone in my family could do. Having had lessons meant that I should be able to do it better, but from my own perspective (and what I imagined was the case with others) I could not. The looks on people’s faces seemed to me, to contain stark disapproval. My secret was exposed and they knew that I was not good enough. The magic was broken.\(^{70}\)

The voice, as often noted by music therapists, can be an effective window to a person’s inner world (Austin 2008; Kenny 1982; Priestley 1975). Perhaps this is why so often we hear that people are reticent to be heard, keeping their voice for their ears only (Oddy, 2001; Uhlig, 2006), and why so many are deeply hurt when told by others (or by their own inner critical voice as noted in the above quote) that their voice is not worthy or not “good enough.”

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\(^{70}\) Nicola Oddy, journal entry, January 2020.
being “good enough” was developed by psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott (1971) who writes about the importance of learning as children that we are indeed “good enough” (139). He believes that as small children we need an environment that teaches us that we are good enough in order for us to thrive and excel. If that is not provided, we must find ways to learn this vital quality in order to move forward in our lives. Music therapist Diane Austin (2008) applies Winnicott’s concept of the “good enough mother” to her role as vocal psychotherapist. Here, the therapist becomes the “good enough mother” while supporting a client through, for example, childhood issues (187), helping them to learn that they are good enough.

For many, being asked to sing strikes fear into their hearts, perhaps because at some point in their lives, they are told or somehow perceive that their voices are not good enough. If a person in authority such as a teacher or parent judges a young person, it can change a child’s perception of their voice for life. This may be true for other new skills as well, but one’s voice and vocal quality is an area of particular sensitivity. It stings when our voice is judged because it comes directly from our bodies. Our bodies are our instruments. There is no mediating factor between our selves and the sounds we make.

**My Voice, My Tool**

Circumstances in my life led me to study music in a competitive university atmosphere where instructors taught students in a way that led them to acquire similar vocal qualities. Although I developed technique for projection, vocal range, and dynamic range, my voice never fit satisfactorily into the mold required by classical training. For many years after music school, I felt that I was a voice student in recovery. It took time to accept my voice for what it was and ignore the critical voice inside my head with which I had come to my training, and which had further developed during that training. That acceptance finally took place when I entered the
field of music therapy, when my voice became a tool and the first way I connected to those with whom I worked. I often think that this career move saved my voice from myself because when working with people, it was no longer about my voice needing to fit a mold. My voice needed to be what the individual needed—not what I or anyone else needed. In my work as a music therapist, my voice has always exceeded “good enough,” becoming a conduit for reflecting any sound a person made in order to enter their world and create the therapeutic relationship necessary for successful progress. The xeno-song is important in these relationships where diverse vocal sounds in the service of emotional expression are common. When in a music therapy session, no matter what other instrument was involved, the voice was always there, front and centre, helping me to support others.

My work as a music therapist led me into the world of research. Considering my own vocal self-perception challenges, I was interested in perceptions that others had of their voices. My first research experience was grounded in a pilot project in which I worked with six people who had been told when they were young by a teacher or family member that they could not sing (2001). My research was designed to see if there was a way to help them overcome the fear that resulted from that judgement. I wanted to learn if there was a way to give them a chance to find their “good enough” voices. I wanted to help them rediscover their pre-judgement voices and feel assured of the validity and beauty of their voices regardless of real or perceived opinions of others or themselves. To do this, I designed a six-week workshop to see if how and where we sang could affect participants’ perceptions of their voices. We began by simply engaging with the body through a breathing imagery exercise that asked them to explore the breath as if it were penetrating all body parts. Next, participants sang their inner space, scanning the body and singing quietly under the breath so that no one else could hear them sing in their own secret choir. Third, participants sang together to share this re-found experience with the ears of others.
We began with a single note drone and moved toward toning freely\(^\text{71}\) and then toward sharing and singing songs that were meaningful to the participants. The fifth experience consisted of singing in a resonant place and the final one, in an outdoor environment. The last two experiences planted the seed for EVE and *The Singing Field*. I asked participants to make comparative observations about the differences and similarities in their voices, their connection to others, and connection to self when singing in the two environments.

After the workshops and the related research were complete, I continued to use this approach in my work as a music therapist, expanding upon it to bring participants into more varied locations (Oddy 2011). We continued to sing in resonant places, adding lakeside and forest. I asked them to sing both expansively and more intimately. This was my early exploration of what I have now come to know as the intermateriality between place and the vocal body (Eidsheim 2015b). I have now led dozens of workshops helping people to explore their voices and their selves in this way.

EVE stems from music therapy in a number of ways. In both, the music is a vehicle for learning as opposed to something that a person performs for someone else. In both, the musical output is a vehicle for something that may lead to an acoustemological experience including new information, learning, or growth. In both, there are no wrong sounds, no wrong notes; the therapist/group leader situates the session/sing event in an environment without judgement. The final way in which music therapy and EVE are similar is the fact that in both, xeno-song in vocal improvisation allows people to express emotion through a broad range of sounds and ideas. I find that performing a specific song can limit discovery due to the parameters of the lyrics, melody,

\(^{71}\) Toning is more varied, although it can include the drone. In toning, we explore a wider range of melody and rhythm (D’Angelo 2000) and can include unconventional, emotion-driven and emotion-emergent sounds (i.e. the xeno-song).
rhythm and form of the song. A song can be useful for memory, socialization, and awareness (in people with dementia, for example). But much more can be expressed through improvisation—particularly vocal improvisation, and particularly if xeno-song is encouraged.

**Participating in Patria, the Epilogue: And Wolf Shall Inherit the Moon (aka The Wolf Project)**

Between 2009 and 2014, I was fortunate to be a part of R. Murray Schafer’s epilogue to his Patria Cycle, *And Wolf Shall Inherit the Moon* (1983ff). This experience provided significant validation of what I would come to refer to as EVE. The Wolf Project is, in effect, an enactment of Schafer’s theatre of confluence and it in turn has deeply influenced my work, thought, and performance practice. Like EVE, it is immersive, has the potential to be transformative for participants, is performed in unusual locations, rejects passive involvement, and engages with the environment. The Wolf Project included both professional and amateur musician, dancers, actors, poets, story-tellers, and visual artists. Some who attended were not artists, but were there to support the project by clearing trails and/or assisting with the day-to-day tasks of maintaining the camps. All performers, regardless of their role, participate in all tasks of maintaining camp life. Attendees included a wide age-range. During my own years there, the youngest was three years old, and the eldest was Schafer himself at over 75 years of age. At that time, people attended

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72 It is not completely clear which dates are correct for *And Wolf Shall Inherit the Moon*. Schafer states that 1983 is the composition date (2002, 248), although composition is collaborative and continues throughout the years of its enactment. The year 1983 may refer to when he first began to conceptualize it. The first group of participants gathered to enact it in 1989 and it continues through to 2021.

73 Although we cannot expect a performance to be transformative, we can choose to judge the success of a performance by its ability to transform. Do the participants (performers, audience, crew) come away with new perspectives on their lives, or did the experience serve to simply fill a void?
from across Canada, the United States, Brazil, and Portugal. Participants camp in up to four sites, depending upon how many participants attend in a given year. The sites are a significant distance from one another, and to travel to another site one must canoe or hike through rough terrain for up to one and a half hours. During the week, three days are spent devising “encounters”\(^74\) that reflect certain aspects of the final story, a scripted piece performed on the final evening. The encounters are then presented, each group to the other groups, requiring that participants travel to each site to experience the creations. The script for the final performance on the last evening of the week is in a constant state of transformation. Although Schafer developed the original script, it changes yearly depending upon which instruments are brought by canoe to the site, and upon who arrives with what skills. It takes place in the Haliburton Forest—a privately owned forest—which is linked to the southern tip of Algonquin Provincial Park in Ontario, Canada.\(^75\)

During the nine-day-long performances in which I participated, each day began at dawn when a participant headed out onto the water or into the forest to create an aubade on their instrument of choice to awaken the other campers with an improvisation or a pre-composed piece of music. Likewise, the day ended during the nocturne after everyone was settled in their tents. Singing with the echo off lakeside cliffs was an exhilarating early morning wake-up call and a low soft improvisation echoing over the water was a calming bedtime ritual. In between the ritualized opening and closing of the days, creativity, improvisation, and singing freely with the environment was accepted and encouraged. The performance was not deterred by the presence of

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\(^74\) Encounters are performances that last approximately one hour, created by groups of five to eight people. The encounters are creative and often immersive experiences (for both audience and performer). Encounters include any skills that the members of that group possess.

\(^75\) For a story of one person’s experience of The Wolf Project, visit the account written by Rae Crossman (2007).
rain, wind, cold, or heat in that varied Haliburton August environment. On the contrary, weather events were integrated into the experience. One evening in summer 2009, the sky turned an otherworldly yellow and the wind and rain pummelled us as we all grouped together under the kitchen tarp, singing boisterously to the elements. It was not until we emerged from the site several days later that we learned a tornado had raged through the forest, slicing a path through it, missing us by only a kilometre or two, that we truly understood what had taken place that night. Schafer’s dictum that “Art Should Be Dangerous” rang true for us in that moment of awareness!

Each year, the performance carries on throughout the nine days and concretizes the ideas that Goffman, Schechner, and others theorized—that performance is present in everything done. In the theatre of confluence, there are no walls or traditional concert hall acoustics. The walls can be the forest. The acoustics are the echo over the water. And our audience (and occasional co-performers) are the loons and occasional wolf. This work is embodied (Galloway 2010) in that, for the entire nine days, participants engage in hard work, moving through the challenging terrain, creating theatrical/musical vignettes that use the entire body. Participants move through the woods, paddle their way across the bay, and engage with the world around them.

That experience validated my innate knowledge that there is no limitation to what can be expressed through vocal sound, and that metaphor can increase one’s awareness of underlying or subconscious stories and messages. Finding the metaphor in sound – hearing sound “as representative or symbolic of something else”76—is an important tool in a music therapy practice. I saw it applied at the wolf project when, for example, I used the night sky as a score, 

imagining that the constellations were guiding the direction of my melody and leading me to feel an inner collaboration/connection between myself and the world around me. This experience taught me that countertransference can be applied to my relationship with the land, that I can realize solutions to my concerns as a vocal environmentalist, and that the acoustic and energetic feedback of a place can be genuinely thrilling.

One of the most generative ideas I took away from The Wolf Project is the notion that performing in unusual places and engaging with different environments can lead to a new environmental awareness. From the moment I arrived at the boat landing and loaded up the canoes for the paddle to our home for the week, I experienced immersion in a performance that left me feeling challenged, inspired, creatively open, and passionate. Ellen Waterman (1998) suggests that Schafer’s work provides “a rejuvenescent relationship with nature” (145). The experience of singing with the rhythm of the paddle and finding delight in the sight and sound of raindrops colliding with lake water while kayaking through the pouring rain cultivated my belief that singing with environments can teach us something profound about them. Rae Crossman (2007), poet and a long-time Wolf Project member, writes:

Schafer takes music out of the concert hall and into the wild places where it was born. And not just music, but art out of the galleries and into meadows, grottos, and sun-dappled forest swales, theatre out from under the proscenium to a raw vitality under a rainbow or the northern lights. He shifts the context, and in so doing makes us look at lakes, rocks and stars differently, just as we hear music differently, regard art in fresh ways, and respond to theatrical performance with a new sense of relevance (np).

Crossman’s writings highlight aspects of the theatre of confluence that have so deeply influenced my path toward The Singing Field. Mezzo-soprano Eleanor James was also a Wolf Project member and avid performer of Schafer’s environmental works. She highlighted elements of the theatre of confluence during a conversation that we had, speaking about her first rehearsal when
preparing to sing the role of Princess in *Princess of the Stars* during the first performance in Banff, Alberta in 1985:

We went out into a forest one beautiful afternoon with big tall trees—lovely trees, mostly pine and he said, “so sing!” And I thought, “it will just be muffled?” He said “sing, sing” so I did. It was like being inside a Stradivarius violin. The resonance was incredibly beautiful. I was amazed and completely won over and wanted to try anywhere I could. We were up in the mountains, standing on top of hills, crouching down in little rivers. I was won over immediately. It only took the one try. What came back was luminous and beautiful and I was totally surprised. It only took the one try. What came back was luminous and beautiful and I was totally surprised. In the forest, there was some kind of resonance there—not an echo—a speaking back. My voice was given back to me somehow. There’s always something that comes back to you physically, some kind of interaction between you and the little river or brook.

My experience in *The Wolf Project* had a direct effect on the development of EVE, which has in turn changed my life and my awareness of the environment. It has changed how and where I live, how I throw away garbage, the water I drink, the way I listen, and the way I spend time in environments. To me, any valuable experience is one in which I feel transformed and in which my life has been informed. My experiences in *The Wolf Project* have heightened that knowledge.

**Environmental Vocal Exploration: The Development of a Personal Practice**

In the years since I started encouraging my music therapy clients to vocalize in different environments, EVE has become an integral part of my own creative practice. For example, when I leave a building and hear a drone in the exhaust system, I will often strike up a counter melody. Upon entering a tunnel, I want to try out the acoustics with my voice to see if someone at the other end will answer (they never do). When I am going for a walk in the woods, my experience is not complete until I have tested out the location and sent my voice out to reflect off the trees

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77 Eleanor James, personal conversation with author, Indian River, May 2019, used with permission.
and craggy granite. Vocalizing in environments—be they indoors, outdoors, in the city or in the wilderness—encourages me to consider my existence in relationship to that place. Michel De Certeau (1984) writes about the importance of the everyday practices of city dwellers such as walking, talking, and cooking. I would add the practice of singing—city places and spaces take on whole new meanings through the act of singing in them. When I sing on a bridge, in a tunnel, in a room or in a forest, I may experience an emotional response, an intuitive feeling about the history of the place, or memories. Whatever I experience—and sometimes it is nothing—the least that has happened is that I have engaged more fully with the environment around me.

It has taken some time for my personal EVE practice to move beyond my feelings of self-consciousness and secrecy; only recently have I been able to sing freely, improvising in public places without fear of others hearing. It has taken many years, but the good enough child has finally found her voice.
Singwalk: Bringing EVE to others

Figure 2.1. Singwalk Logo. The light blue and purple logo is round with a stylized staff and score around its perimeter with notes and squiggles on the staff. In the circle, the shapes evoke a sense of the movement of sound. The words “Singwalk” are placed at the bottom in the centre.

The next phase in my story is of bringing this practice to others, outside of the therapy studio and outside of my personal practice, when I developed an installation called Singwalk: An Experience of Environmental Exploration\textsuperscript{78} at Fieldwork, which was an outdoor art gallery in Maberly Ontario in 2017 and 2018.\textsuperscript{79} The name “Singwalk” is derived from the term “soundwalk,” which I will discuss in chapter four. My installation asked that participants sing in various natural environments to experience a connection to the environment through the voice. The aim in this case was to give people permission to sing in this site and to ask them to use their


\textsuperscript{79} See \url{http://www.fieldworkproject.com}. 
voices to connect with the ravine, forest, beaver pond, individual trees, the meadow and the other art exhibits on display. Instructions were given, such as:

Humans have left their mark on this land and here, your voice is as welcome as the art works you will see.

The quality of your voice is beautiful because it is a part of you.
Embrace it.
The forest, field and pond—the sky and the earth are already sounding.
You now have permission to join in the play.

Open your mind, heart and voice ... Experience your voice in this beautiful environment.
Listen, Walk, Sing.

I presented five Singwalk workshops over two summers to approximately fifty people. In addition, at least one hundred people visited the Singwalk installation outside of workshops. Singwalk became one of the beads on a string of events that have led me to my current study.

Indeed, all of the experiences described above have shaped my subject position, informed my approach to this dissertation, and provided me with tools with which to explore the voice as an object of knowledge. Eidsheim (2015a) suggests that we can gain insights from taking the voice seriously as an object of knowledge, adding that by doing so, we can “release music and sound from its containment within a limited set of senses and fixed meanings” (2). Doing this has the potential to open our minds to how the voice changes in the material environments in which it is used, and how it can inform or change us.

**Reflections on My Own EVE**

During a conversation I had with a music therapy colleague, she challenged my need to sing as a way of knowing, asking, “Why does it make a difference to be in a place and just look

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80 Lettering for introductory signage at the entrance to the outdoor gallery.
81 There were probably more, as people often visit in groups, but I had left 100 pamphlets and they were all gone by the end of the Fieldwork exhibition.
or listen, versus singing with the place?“82 The question was a poignant one that gave me pause as she skillfully teased the answer out of me. It was during that conversation that I came to a moment of realization that singing in different environments is not just about giving or receiving but is reciprocal in the way that communication is reciprocal. My colleague’s question led me to understand for the first time that when improvising in place, I am seeking a reciprocal relationship “to, with, and through” places when engaging in EVE, leading to some new knowledge about self and place from an acoustemological perspective. Knowing through EVE is at the heart of *The Singing Field*.

In recent years, I have practiced environmental singing in a wide variety of locations. I have recorded my improvisations, journaled about my impressions, and taken note of how the experiences affected me. Before the fieldwork began, I sang in the kinds of places to which I wanted to take singers. I did this because I wanted to gain a sense of my preconceptions of singing in various places and to explore how they affected me, prior to the beginning of the fieldwork. It did not quite work out the way I had planned. Changes made due to COVID-19 just as I began my research, meant that I needed to change my expectations of where to sing during the fieldwork. For that reason, all the experiences I share here which took place before COVID-19, do not necessarily line up with the kinds of experience we had during the summer of 2020. Nevertheless, they provided me with an increased sense of self-knowing as I entered *The Singing Field* 2020.

I have decided to share these pre-fieldwork singing experiences regardless, to situate myself and my own reactions to previous singing experiences. Each led to an epiphany of sorts.

82 Antonia Pigot, personal conversation with author, Halifax, January 2, 2020, used with permission.
To use a metaphor described by Barry Blesser and Ruth Salter (2007), the sonic events are raw ingredients. When those raw ingredients are mixed with the aural architecture and the soundscape of different locations, we can come to a new understanding of the world and of ourselves (15). The voice in conjunction with singing sites became an object of knowledge, taking me out of what I expected might happen and into an opening of my mind to receive the experience as an “unfolding phenomenon” (Eidsheim, 2015a, 2).

The only place I sang in, both before the fieldwork and during it, was the tunnel at Petrie Lane.

**A Highly Resonant Location**

Figure 2.2. *The Underpass at Petrie Lane in Kanata*. Photograph by Aidan Shenkman, April, 2018. The tunnel is pictured from the outside. It is evening, and the electric lights inside make the tunnel glow. There is a paved path leading to it is lined with grass. The wall of the tunnel around the entrance are painted with indistinguishable shapes of green and light blue.

The underpass at Petrie Lane in Kanata is a decorated hexagon. In the evening it is lit inside and is painted with bright colours. The length of reverberation inside is eight seconds long. I sang there today with a friend and our improvisation wove in and out of the resonance and between each other. It was strange when people moved through the

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83 All photos were captured by me unless otherwise indicated.
84 Photograph by Aidan Shenkman.
underpass. Some smiled, others looked embarrassed to have encountered this unusual experience. I was intrigued by the sound play and the blending of sounds. The environment is cement and steel and yet there was beauty there. It was definitely a place of human interference, yet powerfully intriguing. Perhaps its role as a passageway gave it a sense of moving on, moving forward, going somewhere, and gave it a purpose that was positive for me. Often a tunnel space like this with a roofline closely overhead feels constricting to me, but that was not the case here.85

Nina Sun Eidsheim (2015a) looks at the work of opera singer and voice researcher Juliana Snapper who has performed underwater. Eidsheim’s observations of Snapper’s work, where she “ejects music from concert spaces and institutions to showcase the sonorous possibilities of traditionally non-musical environments” (33) is an example of theatre of confluence, although Snapper does not give it that name. Eidsheim’s explorations helped me to understand my experience of singing in the underpass at Petrie Lane. Eidsheim observes that, “Sound does not exist in a vacuum, but is materially dependent” (49). The point she makes is illustrated in this tunnel where rigid construction materials lend themselves to a strong reverberation. These materials became a transmitting medium which then actualized the sound, asking me to think about place both materially and multi-sensorially. In that place, my singing highlighted the unlikely sensuousness of the place. I was transported to a state of bliss by that sensuous experience of singing in such a responsive environment.

A Forest or Dense Wood

Singing in a snowy forest on a winter day, the expansiveness was beautiful, but when I and my companion began to sing, it became apparent that one particular tree called to my attention. I will never forget its craggy bark, the shape of the mushrooms that it harbored, the woodpecker holes that in turn housed wintering creatures, and I became intensely aware of those wintering creatures hibernating within the bark. The sound of my voice that day was also craggly. The tree called for breaths, sighs, raspiness, and vocal fry.
Instead of singing with the expansive dip of the landscape down to the marsh or through the forest, it was this one ancient oak that took my attention and my breath away.\footnote{Nicola Oddy, journal entry, December 2019.}

That day, the xeno-song strongly emerged. Prior to that, I could not have imagined that engaging with a tree trunk though EVE could provide such a deep emotional experience.

I was without camera or recording device this day and for that reason, the memory is etched more clearly in my mind as I grappled with my determination not to forget. In some ways the memory is richer for that “in the moment” experience, albeit difficult to share with others. I am reminded of the directive for participants in *The Wolf Project* where we are asked to leave our cameras and audio technology at home. Schafer writes that because the project holds an ambience of privacy due to the restrictions on photographing and recording, this might in fact, “strengthen the sensation, real or illusory, that something profoundly important is being revealed to us …” (2002, 255). I chose to have performances of *The Singing Field* filmed to contextualize this dissertation and to provide further data for analysis. But in a sense, recording is, as Jacques Attali (1985) suggests, a forgetting or even a death of the foundational music-making experience (89). Perhaps it was for the best that I did not record that day in the forest, as it resulted in an experience that resonates with me very deeply each time I remember it. The experience remains unfettered by the criticism that can accompany a listening-back to one’s own recorded improvisation.

*A Place that is Expansive*

In *The Singing Field*, we did not have a chance to sing into an expansive place due to COVID, but I include a discussion of one such experience that I had because this particular EVE
experience was very significant for me, providing a strong example of xeno-song. I have sung in many places that fit the description of expansive, but this one stands out for me as life-changing.

Nazrijal Cove is located near Lands’ End on the South West Coast Path of Cornwall, England.

Figure 2.3. *EVE atop a pillar of rocks at Nazrijal Cove.* Photograph by Dianne Czerwinski, September 2019. Here we can see the ocean with a pillar of rocks in the foreground and the slitted cave in behind. Nicola is sitting atop the pillar of rocks.
Figure 2.4. *An audience member.* Photograph by Dianne Czerwinski, September 2019. The ocean is pictured, with a seal’s head poking up out of the water in the centre.

We came upon the cove at the start of our day after walking across farmland and small communities from our hostel. We approached the cave from a cliff top so saw it first from above. It was a slotted cave, large and predominant. There was a pillar of rocks in front of it, perhaps thirty feet high and the tide was out so they were accessible, and safe to climb. I placed my recording device on the ground near to the cliff wall, and climbed up to the top of the pillar, taking in the visual beauty of the place. It was beyond words to be there with the waves dashing around me and to be close to the cave with its timeless beauty and mystery. As soon as I sat, I noticed a seal watching me—curiously regarding my every move. I began to sing, and before long a flood of grief washed out of me. The seal stayed there watching and maintaining eye contact as I allowed the sounds to emerge.
and disperse into the environment. It took only seconds for the grief to pass but it was a cleansing that needed to take place.\(^\text{87}\)

As I sang there, I responded to the beauty, the seal’s presence, the grief, and the joy. My improvisation that day in that ancient place marked the first time when I experienced a loss of all fear and consciousness of those around me and what they might think. I felt compelled to use movement with my arms during this improvisation, wanting to physically embrace the scene and sensations in this expansive, open-hearted singing. How did singing here change my experience of the place? I could have just looked at it or listened to it and taken in the magnificent sounds of the ocean and the gulls. But singing here provided a depth that I did not feel just by looking or listening. It was a joining with the place, and with the seal.

This experience was perhaps the most engrossing EVE experience I have had to date, and I think that this might be due to the presence of a special audience member—an interested seal who stayed engaged with me through eye contact and by remaining in place throughout the improvisation. Although I find it difficult to maintain eye contact with another human being for extended periods except in the most intimate of situations, the seal and I remained connected through our eyes for the duration of the experience. Singing in this place made a lasting impression on me.

**A Place where the Natural Acoustic Ecology Is Bombarded with Other Sounds**

The recorded music coming through the loudspeaker was so loud that my companion and I needed to yell at each other to be heard. The restaurant was packed with people. In my frustration and desire to be heard by my companion and since I sing as a way of projecting my voice without hurting my vocal cords, I began to sing. Then it became a game to see how loudly I could sing and to find out at what point I could cause a reaction in those around me. I sang louder and louder until I was singing in a full voice—the kind

\(^{87}\) Nicola Oddy, journal entry, September 2019.
I would use at a cliff side. No one heard me and there was no reaction from anyone nearby.\footnote{Nicola Oddy, journal entry, February 2019.}

This experience took place in a restaurant where I was having dinner in the anthrophonic zone—a world of electromechanical and physiological sound (Krause 2012, 157). Everyone in that place was shouting over the blaring music to be able to communicate, adding to the extreme cacophony of the aural environment. The fine line between music and noise is a subjective one, as pointed out by R. Murray Schafer (1977) who writes that one person’s noise is another person’s music (182). To Jacques Attali (1985), music is the organization of noise, and a reflection of society. He calls it an “instrument of understanding” (4), prompting us to come to knowledge through sound. Bernie Krause (2012) thinks of noise as an acoustic event that clashes with expectation (158), reminding me that if I walk into a restaurant with hard floors and high ceilings, I should expect that I am walking into architecture that is designed to make me feel edgy (166), especially when loud music is added. I ask, “what am I to understand about society in an environment where communication is blocked by the sheer volume of the music itself?” My personal perception is that communication is not desired when one places oneself in an environment such as this. Singing here led me to ponder the meaning of that place and wonder if such an environment, highly frustrating to me, could be pleasant for someone else.
Places of Human Interference

Figure 2.5. Remains of a Cornish mine site. Photograph by Nicola Oddy, September 2019. The ocean is in the background. In the foreground we can see walls of a deteriorating structure and rubble on the ground. It is a clear day.

This mine, like all of the mines along this stretch of coastline, has taken a toll on the landscape. The improvisation reflects my interpretation of the contrast between the human created moonscape and the beautiful cliffs beyond. Then, when a swallow flitted by, she incorporated a strange magic. Broken rubble, depleted soil, decrepit structures, and blocked off mine shafts all tell the tale of centuries of abuse to the land. At a mine shaft, the singing revealed a low energy which I interpreted as the drudgery of that work—the repetition, boredom, and hopelessness of that life—going into the darkness day after day. Living a life of servitude and numbness.  

89 Nicola Oddy, journal entry, September 2019.
The Geevor Tin Mine at Pendeen, Cornwall, UK is a mine that went out of operation in 1990. Most of the mining sites along the Cornish coastline date back to the late 1700s and into the 1800s. Officials are aware of activity at this site dating back to 1791. I sang in many of the sites along this stretch of coastline, fascinated by the sad and mournful energy that I received from them through EVE and how that experience contrasted to that of my companions. So many other visitors we met along the way, including my companions, thought that these were beautiful sites which led me to wonder how that could be. I was grateful for EVE in that section of the path, because it exposed the true nature of the place for me.

Figure 2.6. Entrance to a Cornish Mine Shaft. Photograph by Nicola Oddy, September 2019. The mine enters through a wide slit in the cliffside. The entrance is approximately five feet wide. It is blocked by wire ropes.

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Through these five EVE snapshots, I share my own background and highlight how I prepared for performances of *The Singing Field* 2020, providing a lens into my own reactions when engaging in EVE. Prior to that, I examined how I arrived at this point, looking at my own relationship to my voice, my early research, my work as a music therapist, and the use of EVE as a personal practice. This authoethnographic study as a whole has led me to two pertinent concepts. One is the idea of a kind of environmental countertransference that I have noticed when singing in place, and the other is my experience as a vocal environmentalist.

**Environmental Countertransference**

Countertransference is a term that is used in psychotherapeutic practice to describe the unspoken and underlying feelings and moods that a therapist experiences as a result of the therapeutic relationship in therapy (Austin 2008; Priestley 1994; Bruscia 1998). I have come to know the term as either relational or intuitive. Relational countertransference is something that happens due to the reminder of another relationship in one’s life. For example, another person might evoke similar feelings to that which I felt between myself and my mother when I was a teenager. Those feelings are transferred onto us by the client or other person. When countertransference is intuitive, the therapist is asked to look at a feeling they are encountering during a session and look at it as a kind of mirror, asking “what is it about that feeling that can inform this therapeutic relationship?” Diane Austin (2008) suggests that in this process, “the therapist resonates or feels the patient’s feelings, often before these feelings are available to the patient’s conscious awareness” (89).

I raise this point because, as a therapist myself, I am very familiar with the concept of countertransference. Thus, when I sang into the mine shaft, I empathized with the drudgery and
the life of servitude of the miners who had worked there.91 Through that experience and others I have had since, I have come to feel as though countertransference can be applied to a place—the energy of a place can be interpreted through a kind of environmental countertransference. I return to my email exchange with Sarah Albu (mentioned on p. 31) when she referred to singing in the highly reverberant bunkers at Cape Spear in St. John’s Newfoundland. Her comments indicating that she felt a responsibility to be “serious” and that she felt a sense of sadness about the history and legacy of violence that the place represented make me wonder if she was experiencing environmental countertransference. I also recall a time when I sang with friends at the Rideau Canal system in Ottawa. We found a large grate in which the trapped water was rushing through a small channel. While singing there, all three of us felt a sense of the struggle of the builders of that deep grated recess and pondered the dangers that they faced when building it and the canal as a whole. Shortly afterwards, we came upon a plaque that commemorated the deaths of a thousand people during the six years that it took to build the canal system. None of us had thought of that before, but it came clearly into our awareness by singing there.

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91 Only in retrospect did it occur to me that as much as mining was an arduous and dangerous way of life, the loss of the mines must have caused a terrible difficulty for those who worked there.
Figure 2.7. Singing into the Grates at the Rideau Canal. Photograph by Nicola Oddy, April 2019. Figured here, are the backs of the heads and shoulders of two people as they look down and sing into the deep grate. The grate is made of wide slats of iron. The canal is in the background with a stone wall in behind.

Keith Basso (1996b) notes that people can experience increased awareness of places when they stop what they are doing and “actively sense them.” “For it is on these occasions of focused thought and quickened emotion that places are encountered most directly [and] experienced most robustly …” (54). In my experience, singing in place is one way of actively sensing a place and developing a relationship with it. Basso refers to self-reflection here, but in another instance refers to that exchange that can happen between self and place:
The experience of sensing places, then, is thus both roundly reciprocal and incorrigibly dynamic. As places animate the ideas and feeling of persons who attend to them, these same ideas and feelings animate the places on which attention has been bestowed. … When places are actively sensed, the physical landscape becomes wedded to the landscape of the mind, to the roving imagination…. (1996a, 107).

I suggest that through environmental countertransference, this kind of awareness not only leads to a sense of conversation with place in the here and now, but also in relation to what came before in that place. Ethnographer Angela Impey (2018) also notes this phenomenon: “Sound … evokes memories with an intensity, power, and simplicity that are unmatched by any other social activity. Its enveloping character makes us especially aware of feelings, proximities, and connection, and its affective ‘presencing’ reintegrates us with an embodied and situated past” (26). By sounding in a place and interacting in a focused way through singing, we can come to a place of knowing (Feld 2015).

**The Vocal Environmentalist**

Through the autoethnographic portion of this study, I came to recognize that my vocal practice of EVE fostered an environmentalist impulse in my own life. However, throughout *The Singing Field* 2020, I kept my environmentalist convictions largely to myself to avoid overdetermining the research findings and to stay open and responsive to the experiences of others.

Being an environmentalist means that I strive to reduce my negative impact on other creatures, on landscapes, and on the earth (Boyle and Waterman 2016, 26). As a vocal environmentalist, I experience a heightened level of attunement to the environment through EVE (Morton 2018). When I sing in place, I become more attuned to objects in the location, to the materials with which the site was constructed, and my own relationship with the site. In addition, I become attuned to the experience of other animals (or the lack of animals) in an environment. I
notice details about the trees and what lies on the ground. My listening is also heightened when I sing in place, as I sing in duet with the sounds around me. I experience a greater sense of compassion for the environment through my engagement with it during EVE.

David Jackson (2017) sound studies scholar, suggests (although not specifically in relation to the voice) that our sonic experience can become an expression of the whole environment. Although he writes in relation to acoustic ecology, I feel that his observations resonate with my stance as a vocal environmentalist in that we can “recogniz[e] the soundscape as a material process in which complex weavings of the temporal, spatial, biological and geographical mix and combine in its sonic makup” (46). Being a vocal environmentalist means that I seek awareness of all of these facets of the environment and of the effect that the materiality of the environment has on me.

This kind of awareness exposes environmental realities, and asks me to take action in my own life as a result. Stephen Feld (2017) learned through Bosavi acoustemology that there is much to be learned from taking “sonic relationality” seriously when it comes to sounding with the presence of everything that is around us (93). Acoustemology is “grounded in the basic assumption that life is shared with others-in-relation” (86). It is through this kind of heightened awareness of my relationship to all aspects of the world around me that my conception of vocal environmentalism emerged.

Through Eidsheim (2015a), I learned of Aldo Leopold, philosopher and environmentalist, who saw the need for a land ethic as far back as 1949. Riffing on his writing, Eidsheim makes a statement that resonates with me: “Approaching sound, music, and voices as vibrational practice changes the role of Homo Sapiens from conqueror of the figure of sound, to plain member and transmitter of a vibrational field” (21). By singing in place, I become a plain member and transmitter of sound. These experiences “put me in my place.” Being a vocal environmentalist
means reducing my negative impact on the world. Singing in place is the path that has led me there. It is with the perspective of a vocal environmentalist that I performed in *The Singing Field* during the summer of 2020.

I wrote this autoethnography before beginning the fieldwork for this study—indeed, before I knew who my fellow performers would be. I felt that it was important for me to take this personal inventory before we began. By critically examining my own experiences and preconceptions through the autoethnographic process, I have come to a deeper understanding of my own priorities, convictions, and point of view. Each participant came to the project with their own banquet of experiences, much like those who were in the noisy restaurant the day I was there, with experiences, presumably, completely different to my own. Through this awareness I adopted an “expect nothing, receive everything”\(^{92}\) approach. Writing this autoethnography and critically examining my own experiences while singing in place reminded me that I could not expect the intentions or experiences of others to be the same as my own. Autoethnographic reflection led me toward a dialogic process of co-creative inquiry in which I embraced a collaborative, research-creation approach, valuing the perceptions of the participants on par with my own. I wanted to draw on my experiences as a music therapist to cultivate an atmosphere of openness in which everyone had a voice and were able to express their thoughts freely. As a result, I entered the fieldwork phase of the study knowing that I would be responsive to the ideas of the other performers and would avoid leading them toward expressing what I hoped to hear.

\(^{92}\) An expression used by an elderly lady that I once knew. It was her philosophy in a life of challenges and successes and I often return to it when considering my own expectations.
Chapter Three: The Singing Field as a Pathway to Discovery

The natural world is much bigger than the human world … the more we are able to understand our place in the world instead of our place acting upon the world with the right to do whatever we want to. To become a member of the world. A member of the community of nature. Then what would we be doing with ourselves as human beings if we really had that consciousness? Singing in that context, for me, immediately connects me to the world.

In her exit interview, Frances shared this thought. Her comment illustrates the roles of both research-creation and ethnography in this project. Through vocal improvisation she becomes connected to the natural world and through ethnography she shares her experience with me. Through ethnographic research, the five performers aided my research by sharing their experiences openly and thoughtfully.

In this chapter, I discuss two other methodologies that were central to this project—research-creation and ethnography—as I describe the path that I followed to take The Singing Field from conception to reality. I summarize the procedures for recruitment, the format for each sing event, and how I gathered data. I then discuss the video and its role in the research. The chapter concludes with an overview of analysis procedures.

Researching the Creation

Research-creation is also known as practice-as-research (Nelson 2013), arts-based research (Barone and Eisner 2012), and practice-based research (Candy and Edmonds 2018), among other terms used in different countries. The concepts vary slightly, but each combines academic research and creative practice in the pursuit of new knowledge. The name “research-creation” is used primarily in Canada and is recognized by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) as “an approach to research that combines creative and academic research practices, and supports the development of knowledge and innovation through artistic
expression, scholarly investigation, and experimentation” (SSHRC 2020).93 The hyphen between the two words—research and creation—points to an exchange between them in which each influences the other in the quest for new knowledge. Michael MacDonald (2020), who uses film as a modality of research-creation, suggests that while the hyphen joins the two words, it can also be an indicator of a dichotomy that an individual can experience when working in this modality: “a single body moving back and forth between two worlds, trying in vain to bridge the often-contradictory demands while struggling against the self-criticism and sometimes professional criticism, that one is not entirely either” (78). As MacDonald suggests, research-creation is a relatively new methodology and still struggles with finding a foothold in traditional research communities.

The term “practice-based research” is often used instead of “research-creation.” This is the case with Candy and Edmonds (2006), who describe it as research that takes place when something such as a work of art is created and then becomes the basis for producing new knowledge. Practice-based research is not to be confused with practice-led research which is research that advances knowledge about practice. There needs not be an actual creative outcome in that kind of research. Sophie Stévance and Serge Lacasse (2020) write that in research-creation, there is close interaction between the research and the creation, meaning that “the research [leads] to a creative output that could not have existed without the research [and is a] creation that [leads] to a research discovery that could not have emerged without the creative element” (125). In my quest to understand how singing in environments changes our perceptions of the environment and of ourselves, a creative approach was necessary in order to experiment

directly with the effects of singing in place. To theorize without the creation would have led to a very limited study.

Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuck (2012) outline four subcategories of research-creation: Research-for-creation in which the research leads toward a future artistic perception; research-from-creation where the work is used to generate information on user responses (for example, presentations in which traditional academic research is presented creatively); creative presentation of research in which traditional academic research is presented in a creative way; and creation-as-research where creation is required in order for the research to emerge. *The Singing Field* is an example of the fourth subcategory, “creation-as-research,” in which research is the end goal and results produced include the creative production itself (14). Research-creation as methodology and the use of vocal improvisation as the mode of creation, worked together to enable collaboration (relationship), knowledge creation through embodiment (awareness), and listening through vocal improvisation.

Collaboration can be an important factor in research-creation (Stévance and Lacasse 2013). It certainly figures prominently in *The Singing Field*, which involved performers coming together to sing and share the effects that singing in various locations had on them. Without collaboration, the nuanced and varied findings of this study would not have been possible. Collaboration was central to both the research (i.e. this study) and the creation (i.e. *The Singing Field* performances and the video). Collaboration took place between the six singers (including myself as singer); between myself (as researcher) and the other singers; between the filmmaker (Hasi), sound technician (John) and myself as researcher; and among members of the entire group. When reflection and evaluation took place through collaboration, they fed directly back into the production itself and consequently the video, creating a learning loop that was cumulative.
As a research-creation project, The Singing Field is based on the acoustemological concept of improvisation as a “form of knowledge creation through expressive practice” (Siddall and Waterman 2016, 3). Improvisation is both a musical and social practice that helps people to focus on the “here and now” (McMullen 2016, 122; Oliveros 2016, 82), provides opportunities for performers to engage their intuition, allows the music itself to be an agent of change (Rothenberg 2002), and provides a way of negotiating differences (Waterman 2016). Rebecca Caines states that improvisation promotes collaboration, trust, a re-evaluation of “mistake” and “failure,” and expanded listening. In social terms, she sees improvisation as a way to understand the world through both conscious and unconscious processes. Improvisation was central to both the research and creative aspects of The Singing Field in each of these ways.

Vocal improvisation is described by Nina Sun Eidsheim (2015b) as an embodied act, allowing for a “materialistic epistemology centred on the human body” (115). Participating in The Singing Field allowed performers to interact with different environments and seek physical, cognitive, acoustic, and emotional knowledge. Existing songs could have been sung (and a song was used on at least one occasion during The Singing Field) and might enable an environmental connection (as it did on that occasion). Singing a song in a given environment has the potential to introduce the affective and semantic properties of that song into the experience, which could influence the relationship that the person has with the place. However, generally speaking, vocal improvisation offered the xeno-song, a larger musical vocabulary and thus a greater range of expression with which to become acquainted with the locations. Improvisation gave the singers freedom to explore the acoustic qualities of each site such as the length of the reverberation and

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94 From Rebecca Caines’s presentation multiPLAY: Improvised Art Practice as Living Heritage—a part of the Living Heritage Research Cluster presented on October 28, 2020, offered through the University of Regina.
the effects that the shapes of the landscape and built environment had on the vocal sound. It was an embodied practice that inspired the gaining of knowledge through exploration of in-between elements of environments, such as the feeling of silence there, the quality of one’s own relationship with the environment, how singing the environment enhanced one’s relationship to the self and other factors that were not easily described.

In this research-creation project, improvisation helped performers to engage in active or “expanded” listening as we listened not only to one another, but also to the soundscape of each environment, sparking “envisionings of possibilities normally excluded from conventional systems of thought” (Fischlin and Heble 2004, 11), as participants' responses to our conversations and interviews suggest.

**Ethnographic Perspectives**

In addition to autoethnography and research-creation, ethnography was an important methodological tool in this study. Through improvisation, discussion, interviews, and journals, performers in *The Singing Field* shared their experiences. I employed ethnography as described by Harris Berger and Ruth Stone (2019), using descriptive, interpretive, and theoretical approaches to make sense of the data obtained during fieldwork. An ethnographic approach also enabled the evaluation of data that emerged, allowing me to make sense of the outcomes. In traditional ethnography, the researcher may be interested in observing language, customs, and expressive practices of a group (Waterman 2019, 151). In *The Singing Field*, I observed individuals and patterns of interaction among the group as a whole to learn how the vocal improvisations of performers contributed to their understanding of place and self. The kind of ethnography used in *The Singing Field* 2020 could be interpreted as performative ethnography or a co-performative witnessing (151). In this kind of ethnography there is a purposeful breaking
down of the bifurcation between researcher and participant and there is an intentional treatment of the performance as knowledge producing, often including an autoethnographic element in the research (151).

When interpreting the recordings, journal writings, and interviews, I endeavoured to analyze the materials with care and honesty (Kisliuk 2008, 33) while maintaining a degree of critical distance. I can relate to Keith Basso (1996) when he humorously states that when interpreting narrative data, he often goes from “moments of anxious puzzlement (“What the devil is going on here?”) to subsequent ones of cautious insight (“I think perhaps I see”)” (57). Unlike many earlier ethnographic studies which focus on a people outside of the researcher’s culture, this study focuses on a group of people whose race, gender, and class backgrounds are similar to my own—white, Canadian, female, middle-class—and, as ethnographer Dwight Conquergood (2013) suggests, “culture possesses us as much as we possess it; culture performs and articulates us as much as we enact and embody its evanescent qualities” (17). Despite our similarities, the group was diverse in several ways. In order for me to understand the changing perceptions of The Singing Field participants, I needed to pay close attention to those differences.

Since I was both researcher/participant and leader in this project, I needed to be extra vigilant in being as objective as possible. Ethnographer Angela Impey (2018) writes that “ethnography has the possibility—sometimes the obligation—to hold spaces to allow for other stories to emerge, to promote new ways of thinking, and to make known alternative forms of communication” (220). In that spirit, I needed to be careful to allow the stories of my collaborators to unfold and take shape. I recognized what Conquergood (2013) describes, as a “doubling of consciousness” when, during this process, I was entrenched as both subject and object (21). There were admittedly times when it was difficult to remain distanced as researcher and group leader. But I endeavoured to keep my own perspectives secret so that I would not
influence the others, particularly during the debriefs. When we improvised together, I found it helpful to do some modelling of extended techniques and to model confidence in approaching the places as at first, some of the singers were not used to this kind of improvisation. Those moments challenged my dual role as participant and leader.

*The Singing Field Becomes Reality*

After years of preparation, *The Singing Field* finally became a reality in the summer of 2020. The simple premise of asking other performers to join me, to improvise using their voices in locations where it is not usual to sing, and to reflect on how the experience might change their perception of place and self, did not seem onerous at first. However, I soon learned that by asking others to do something not usually done, I was requesting a considerable level of courage. I was asking performers to allow themselves to become vulnerable through the act of vocal improvisation in public places where other people were sure to be present. When I first decided I wanted to perform in *The Singing Field* with at least five other singers, I knew that I was asking not only for courage, but also for a significant commitment. I needed people who would be willing to volunteer approximately twenty hours to my project—a request not to be taken lightly. I knew that it would not be easy to find five singers who would have that kind of time, who would have the desire to do improvisational singing in unusual locations, who would spend further time reflecting between performances in their journals, who would feel motivated to spend even more time discussing their experiences with the group and with me, who would be willing to engage in two one-on-one interviews, and who would also be willing to be filmed during the whole process—all so that I could learn from their (and my own) experiences. I was asking a lot. All I could offer in return was the chance to participate in a co-creative group project, the results of which were unknown. It was a leap of faith for all of us.
Each singer came to me through a different avenue. I invited people from my Jewish community, my choral community, my music therapy community, my Wolf Project community, my student community, the music department at my university, and my former students. I sought performers through invitation emails and Facebook posts, both public and group-centric.

In total, ten people expressed curiosity about the project, and I began the process by speaking with each one on the telephone. I chose a phone conversation for the first contact so that I could maintain a kind of distance and people would feel more comfortable declining if they chose to do so when they heard more about the project. It also gave me a chance to be selective. During that conversation, I discussed the criteria for participation including a commitment to all the hours involved, a comfort level with the voice that would allow them to sing freely during our performances, and a commitment to learning with one another through vocal improvisation in different public places. In addition, they needed to live in the Ottawa area or be willing to travel to Ottawa for the sing events. I spoke to seven women and three men and, of those, half who expressed curiosity came forward. Those who declined did so for a number of reasons, including a fear of contracting COVID-19, a feeling of discomfort with the public nature of the performances, a fear of vocal improvisation, and hesitation about journal writing. As it happened, all the people who came forward were women of European descent, which created both opportunities and limitations in the research.

The Format for Sing Events

Sing events all followed the same performance arc of ritual opening, singing, and ending with a debrief. The actual content of each section was different depending upon the site, the weather, and other unforeseen restrictions. Hasi, John, and I arrived 1.5 hours early to set up the
equipment and to stake-out the location. Performers arrived early to be set up with their lapel microphones. Once we were all together and prepared, we formed a circle for an opening ritual.

The ritual was important for establishing a grounding, intention, and link from one performance to the next throughout the project. The use of ritual is an important factor in my work as a music therapist and going into the project I was aware of its benefits as a way to establish the beginning and ending of an experience and to guide the process of creating order in our small community (Kenny 1982). In a music therapy experience, the therapist begins by “provid[ing] some ritual which will allow the participants to accept the experience on a high and deep level of sense perception”(47). The ritual is a liminal experience that provides separation (from the day’s events), transition (into the singing field), and incorporation (of their artistic selves) (Turner 1986, 24), all providing what Schafer (2002) calls an “encasement” for the performance (83). Andra McCartney (2016), a scholar of soundwalking, began her workshops with an “Overture,” during which there was an explanation of the procedure and a meditation. She did this to “to remember that the walk [was] part of a larger conversation” (42). Similar to McCartney’s overtures, I asked participants to notice how they felt upon arrival at the site, if they felt a need for grounding, or a need for energy, and to notice their perceptions of the existing sound in the environments. During each opening I also reminded them to consider the changes in perception of self and place during their improvisations.

The unchanging ritual element in The Singing Field was the simple formation of a community circle at the beginning and end of each sing event. Three of the four performance gatherings took place in the evening to accommodate work schedules and the day’s activities. After a busy day, it was necessary to allow people time and resources to prepare both physically and emotionally for the sing events. The opening ritual was different each time, depending on my interpretation of what the group needed in that moment. Sometimes, it was something
grounding, energizing, or peaceful. During three of the ritual openings, I asked each person to think of two words to describe how they felt at the beginning of that sing event. During the third sing event at Sparks Street Mall, we needed a grounding experience to offset the stressful start to the evening. Here, I offered a grounding visualization, asking performers to consider the project as they had experienced it to that point. Improvised movement emerged during the opening improvisation that day, in which performers improvised vocally while tossing an imaginary ball around the circle. Playfulness ensued, causing laughter and enhancing the connections to one another that we were already beginning to feel and it certainly allowed the stress of the day to fall away.

The final three sing events took place over the course of a one-day intensive. That day we began with a body scan to take stock of where each of us was at physically and emotionally since the day ahead was going to be long and tiring.

After the ritual openings, we sang with one another in an unscripted and improvisational manner. We sang as a group, in solos and alone-but-together in what I would describe as parallel play. In these instances, participants sang at the same time throughout the place, not necessarily engaging with each other. During the first sing at the tunnel, we began individually, allowing people to experience the extreme resonance of the place on their own. We followed this by two rounds of group singing. During the second sing at Hog’s Back Falls, we attempted to sing as a group, but the awesome noise level of the dam site prevented us from hearing one another, which led us to engage in parallel play. Later in the evening when we sang closer together in an attempt to engage in group singing, the falls still dominated our experience. During the sing at Sparks Street Mall, we had intended to sing together to continue in the vein of our playful opening, but the playful ritual opening that day seemed to inspire courage in the singers. A sense of playfulness permeated our sing leading to a parallel singing experience as each performer
discovered different locations in which to sing. Playfulness inspired freer creativity than in previous sings. People explored the objects in the place and the upward movement of sound, exploring corners and alcoves. During the fourth sing on Richmond Road, we sang as a group throughout—interacting with each other and with the environment. During the fifth sing on Sarsaparilla Trail, we sang parallel to one another. During the sixth sing at the marsh, we sang parallel to one another and concluded with a group sing to each other as a closing gesture.

The final closing circle and debrief after each sing provided necessary processing time and closure in our performance arc. It was also a crucial time for sharing, in which I learned significant insights from the performers.

**Influences of COVID-19**

The COVID-19 pandemic influenced the choice of locations, the presence of passersby, and the nature of our interactions with one another and with passersby. When the pandemic started, I saw the need to alter my dissertation proposal to reflect Ontario health guidelines. The province went into lock-down on March 13, 2020 and my choices were to alter my proposal or wait until the pandemic was over, which of course was not predictable. Originally, I had chosen to sing in a public place such as the atrium of the Ottawa City Hall, in the Carleton University Art Gallery, or under the spire of the National Gallery of Art. I wished to sing in an anechoic chamber such as the one on display at the Canada Museum of Science and Technology or the one at the Canadian Research Council. I was denied access to all these locations due to COVID-19 and closure of indoor places. I wished to sing in an expansive place such as the Champlain Lookout in Gatineau Park, but COVID-19 prevented this due to difficulty with transportation. Those who could not drive could not travel there, and to share a car at such close proximity was ill-advised. I wished to sing in a place tended and made beautiful by human hands but public
gardens throughout Ottawa had not been tended due to restrictions during the full lock-down of COVID-19. The gardens had not been planted and in July when I sought places to sing, I found that garden beds remained empty.

There was also a question of increased surveillance and fear due to the virus. In lieu of being able to sing indoors, I chose a location in the city centre at the World Exchange Plaza where there is a stage and amphitheatre-style seating designated for informal gatherings.95 I have always seen that place used for public gatherings. One visitor remarked that in normal times, “The outside has steps leading down where people like to sit during nice weather to eat their lunches. There is also an outdoor amphitheatre. When I went by today there was a group playing music for the lunch crowd.”96 The day we were there, however, informal gatherings, and certainly singing, were prohibited. The sing was to take place after 6 p.m., and there was no one around to disturb in this large outdoor location. Almost immediately though, when setting up to begin, two security guards asked us to leave, telling us that they would call the police and charge us with trespassing if we proceeded. I have to assume that this was due to COVID-19 given the public nature of the venue in normal times. When we found ourselves ousted from this location, we found an admittedly private courtyard one block over. A security attendant there gave us permission to sing. However, after 10 minutes they became agitated and asked us to leave, saying that we were staying for too long. The benefit of this situation was that the next option we explored was Sparks Street Mall in the next block, which turned out to be a fruitful location in which to sing. I had not planned on a place this overtly public, but in keeping with the improvisatory nature of the project, we carried on.

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95 https://www.worldexchangeplaza.com/ABOUT.php#
96 https://www.yelp.ca/biz/world-exchange-plaza-ottawa
Although COVID-19 imposed some limitations, it proved beneficial in some ways too. While it prevented us from singing in the variety of locations I had hoped for, the restrictions focused the project and honed it such that it became a study of singing in outdoor locations specifically, which makes the range of performance experiences more congruent with one another. Also, the pandemic meant that the project could take place earlier than planned; it had canceled many life events for the participants which meant that everyone, including Hasi, John and the performers, had time to participate in the summer. It allowed me to move up the performances by two months, and to condense them so that it took only eight weeks in total to complete the project including the preparatory workshop, one-to-one entrance interviews, performances, and follow up exit interviews.

Another serendipitous bonus was that COVID-19 concerns dropped drastically over the summer, while people’s schedules remained open. The city of Ottawa partially lifted restrictions during the lull between the first and second waves of COVID-19, reducing the risks associated with singing together outside as long as we maintained our distance from one another and masked ourselves if we needed to be in close proximity. If it had taken place just one month before or one month after, health measures would have been more stringent, meaning that I might have had to be more prescriptive about the use of masks and face shields even when we distanced, or I might have had to select locations where there were no passersby at all. All performers provided their own masks to comply with COVID-19 regulations, and I supplied them with face shields to give them the option of further protection. I did not police the use of this equipment but allowed people to use them based on their own judgement in terms of proximity and risk. Often, the singers chose not to use them, especially by the final sing on August 22, 2020, when the virus appeared to be on a considerable downswing. Nonetheless, I
chose locations in which we could maintain the two-metre distance from one another, and/or sing facing away from each other and passersby.

The Gathering of Data

I gathered data through the fieldwork in six ways.

First, all five singers joined me in an online preparatory workshop during which singers shared something about who they were. Hasi also joined us for the preparatory workshop to ensure that he was considered a part of the project from the outset. The workshop was largely a training experience, but it also included time for people to share their initial impressions of the project, including their curiosity, fear, and excitement.

During the workshop, I asked each person to bring an object that they would either physically or symbolically carry with them throughout the project. We discussed the choice of object as a way to help them see something about themselves that inspired them to become a part of The Singing Field and as a way for me to learn something about them. Cait brought a necklace that her mother had given her as a wedding gift. The necklace contains a small locket in which a note was placed, which read: “I didn’t give you the gift of life, you gave me the gift of your life.” She expressed that she had a special relationship with her mother and that she wanted to carry that with her through the experience. Ellen brought her small tub of “Silly Putty.” The tub is shaped like an egg and is small enough to fit in the palm of the hand. Silly Putty was a popular toy when Ellen was a child and she equates it with the playfulness of childhood. She wished to bring that playfulness into her Singing Field experience. “I’ll see what’s unleashed when I take

97 The workshop outline can be seen in the Appendix.
off the lid from my silly putty” she said.98 Frances brought a stone that she gathered from a riverbed in Fiji during her fifteen-year sailing experience around the world. She finds the rock to be grounding and reflects on its ancient quality and its durability. Helen brought a rock from her home province of Ontario that a friend had painted. She relates it to her meditation practice and carried it with her throughout. Kelly-Anne brought a Mala prayer necklace—a meditation garland that she made and uses in her spiritual practice. Hasi brought a Rubik’s cube, saying that it was a reminder that so much about daily life is showing up and trying. John was not with us that day, but at the first sing when we revisited our objects, he spoke of the significance of a special ring he was wearing that was meaningful to him in his relationship with his life partner. I brought my small woven basket filled with stones. When in nature I look for those that are varied in texture, shape, and colour, symbolizing the diversity of parts of myself and parts of those with whom I work.

The second way in which I gathered data was through an interview with each singer. I wanted this opening interview to be as casual as possible, using the following questions as a framework for discussion:

1. Is there anything about your background that you would like to discuss (musical, cultural, or educational, for example)?
2. Have you ever sung in unusual environments before? What do you think of voicing in environments at this point?
3. What do you think might happen during this project?
4. How do you think you might feel physically and/or emotionally when you perform in a beautiful place? A quiet place? A resonant place? A public place? A noisy place?
5. What do you think about your singing voice?
6. Anything else?

98 Ellen, Preparatory workshop, video call, June 20, 2020.
I added a ritualistic element to the entrance interview by producing my little woven basket full of stones, asking each participant to select a stone by touch and then to examine the texture, shape, and colour of the stone to determine if their choice had any meaning or message for them in that time and place. I invited them to add it to the object they had brought to the preparatory workshop, and to bring them both along to each sing event as a point of reflection on where they were at the beginning of the project.

Third, the group engaged in a closing circle for a debrief after every sing event. During the debriefs, we engaged in open discussion about the experience of the performance we had just completed. We talked about what we noticed, how we felt, how we perceived the environment, how we perceived ourselves, and how we perceived each other. They were rich discussions, occurring directly after the sing events while impressions of the experience were still clear.

Fourth, I asked singers to write in their journals, sharing information that might come to them between sing events. Some singers asked for guidelines for the journal-writing, so I created the following list of suggestions to guide them if required:

- Did anything about your impressions of self change?
- Did anything about your impressions of voice change?
- Did anything about your impressions of the environment change?
- Did anything else change?
- What did the environment say to you?

Fifth, I interviewed the singers during two exit interviews. The first was a short interview conducted at the site of the final debrief. I interviewed each person for only fifteen minutes at that point to give Hasi a chance to record the impressions of the singers before they departed the project. It had been a long day and time constraints did not allow for the full interviews to take place at that time. At that short interview I asked two questions: 1) When you think back on the
six sings, is there a particular moment that keeps coming back to you? 2) Can you talk about if/how the experience overall has changed your perception of the environment and/or your self as a whole?

The final exit interview took place online after the performances were all complete, using the following questions:

1. Is there anything about your background and who you are that you think might have affected your experience now that we have done our sings?
2. How would you compare how you felt when you performed in the various places with what you thought you might feel at the beginning of the project?
3. What did you notice about your perception of the environments?
4. What did you notice about your perception of self?
5. Can you talk about if/how the experience overall has changed your perception of the environment as a whole?
6. Do you think it will change how you interact with/regard the world?
7. Any final thoughts, words, insights?

Through research-creation and ethnographic practices, performers in *The Singing Field* provided me with 139 single-spaced pages of data from interviews, journals, and debriefs.

The sixth and final method of data collection was through the video and audio recording. Hasi was there throughout, joining the group of singers from beginning to end, at every sing event. We brought John into the group after the preparatory workshop, when we acknowledged that added audio support would be effective. The filmmaking process not only provided visual and audio data but also told the story of the fieldwork as a whole.

From the outset, I felt that it would be important to document the project through video in order to highlight the performers and the places, and to yield additional data for analysis—things that I might have missed during the sing events themselves. A by-product of filming was that it highlighted the fact that each place was a character in its own right, creating links to emotions and histories. When Hasi spent time in each location filming them before singing took place, it
highlighted for us too that we should take time to consider the personality of each location, and to acknowledge what might make singing there challenging or successful.

There were four main reasons that I felt the use of video to be important to this project.

First, improvising vocally in unusual places is not a common activity. It is an ephemeral, fleeting experience, here now and gone in the next moment. When I engage in environmental vocal exploration on my own or with others, I usually choose uninhabited locations, as there is an underlying concern that we will embarrass, annoy, or be mocked by others. In *The Singing Field*, we sang together in public places. Reactions from passersby became a significant part of the experience. Filming the singing validated our actions. It helped us to be in the places and to feel that we were, in a way, authorized to be there.

Second, for the dissertation itself, it was necessary to have a product that readers could see and hear; otherwise, there would be no way for them to know the nature of the performances. Without the video and/or an audio recording, I would be asking the reader to imagine. Since this is not an everyday act, I could not expect the reader to imagine what I was writing about.

Third, the recording gave me sonic data that I could not have known about otherwise, since I was one of the singers.

Fourth, I want to bring my doctoral research to the public eye. This is important to me, as I am hoping that this work will not only inspire other vocal improvisors, but also inspire anyone to find the courage to explore place with their voices. In this regard the video is an important research output that will have greater reach than the written dissertation. The process of making the video was one of the two primary modes of research-creation in this project (the other being the performances themselves).

The video was premiered on February 28, 2021 for a group of approximately 150 people during an online launch, and was presented for an appreciative group of scholars at the Canadian
Association for Theatre Research in July of 2021 who gave me substantial feedback. I did not imagine this end result when first planning to make a video with Hasi Eldib, but his creative and sensitive work gave the video a life of its own beyond the work of my dissertation. My hope is that one day, others might think of this kind of interaction with environments as an everyday, non-transgressive act in which anyone can enter the singing field and explore their relationship to self and place through singing as a way to listen with a heightened awareness of what they are perceiving.

Cine-ethnomusicologist Michael MacDonald spent some time in conversation with me in summer 2020. In an email exchange following our conversation, he suggested that I try not to think of the filming as an addition but instead as a matrix or as an intersection of musicking and environment and audiovisual technology. I reviewed his perspective just before my viewing of Hasi’s first cut on November 2, 2020 and it helped me to see the film with a critical eye. Michael asked, “how is the poetry of filmmaking capable of showing what you want to show of this matrix? And by extension, how will the filmic experience draw the viewer into a poetic frame of mind allowing them to see/hear a new way of musicking?”

This question illustrates exactly what I was seeking as I viewed the film for the first time. Initially, I had thought that the film should simply document the singing in an objective and neutral way. But Michael reminded me that of course the singers would be influenced by the presence of the film and audio crew; as hard as I tried to integrate Hasi and John, they still wielded a camera and microphone, and their presence certainly would affect the singers’ performances. Plus, the film became an integral part of my research-creation project. Michael suggested that I “embrace the filming-as-process, as

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99 https://www.michaelbmacdonaldfilms.ca
100 Michael MacDonald, personal communication with author, video call, August 11, 2020.
part of the ecology that [I] have in mind,” continuing, “think of cinema as a way of thinking in percepts and affects and not just as a document or a collection of concepts.” By learning to think cinematically (through percepts and affects) it truly has become a part of my research-creation project and so much more than “exhibit A.”

The post-production phase of creating the film was a four-month process. First, I transcribed my data, determined dominant themes and subthemes, prepared several pages of quotes from the interviews and debriefs that I would like to see incorporated and sent that to Hasi. I wanted him to have the creative freedom to make the first cut with that material in mind.

We met three times to go through the versions Hasi created based on my feedback. After three major revisions, we settled on the film as it is, with only minor revisions to follow. I had the film subtitled and converted to Described Video\(^1\) in order to make it more broadly accessible. In mid-December, 2020 we had a preview showing for the performers, Hasi, John, myself, our families and my advisors. This meant two things. First, there was time left to make changes where necessary, with feedback from the key players and from my advisors. Second, I wanted to determine if I could share the film beyond its originally intended role as part of my doctoral dissertation that would help to contextualize my research for readers. After the preview, all performers agreed that it could be shared. Subsequently, I applied for a change of protocol with the Carleton University Research Ethics Board, revised the consent forms and waited for them to be signed. We launched the video publicly on February 28, 2021.

\(^{101}\) Described video includes a verbal underlay of the visual content for blind and visually impaired viewers
Data Analysis

After the performances and filming, my first task was to analyze the data collected. I transcribed everything, read it through carefully, and colour coded the documents line-by-line according to ideas and expressions that emerged. I repeated this process until I was satisfied that I had acknowledged all that was important to the singers. In this process of “analytical coding of fieldnotes” (Emerson et al. 2011), all fieldnotes are reviewed as a single document to identify apparent themes and patterns. Next, I entered the “open coding” phase in which I named significant elements found in the data according to the patterns that I noticed. I found twenty-two points in the text during the open coding phase of study, all of which intertwine with one another. Then I entered the focused coding phase when I sought dominant themes, created headings of them and placed many of the initial twenty-two points under those headings. Here, the development of categories began to unfold. Finally, I added “integrative memos” (172). These are memos that helped me to link codes and data together. I did this by identifying relationships between observations within the work or through the examination of a theme or issue. This final phase included reorganizing code memos to help with the identification of a theme or an issue, helping to pull together relevant materials (Emerson et al. 2011).

In order to organize my thoughts regarding fieldnotes, and to acknowledge the inter-relationship between the dominant elements, I created the diagram seen in Figure 3.1. I learned this field theory approach for the study of qualitative data from music therapist, scholar, and mentor Carolyn Kenny (1989), whose book The Field of Play has been a guiding inspiration throughout my career. Kenny taught that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. In field theory, one seeks patterns and forces in systems, recognizing that a multitude of factors affect any given event. Kenny writes, “The concept of ‘the field’ allows us to focus and appreciate that which is in the field, and the conditions and relationships among the participants contained
within this space” (72). According to Kenny (1985), the whole systems approach (of which field theory is a part) “upholds the importance of experience-based knowledge” (4). I chose the title of this project—*The Singing Field*—in part to honour her profound influence on me as a scholar and music therapist.

Both “analytical coding of field notes” and Kenny’s interpretation of field theory were useful for the organizing of qualitative data in this study. Throughout the months of analysis, categorizations were fluid and ever changing until I settled on a way of conceptualizing the project that was true to my understanding of *The Singing Field*, namely the idea that singing acted as a practice of listening awareness in which performers experienced heightened understanding of their multi-layered relationships to self and place.
This diagram represents *The Singing Field* project within a circle that contains the whole. Singing is at the top of the diagram. It was the catalyst for an increase in listening awareness.
which then led to transformed relationships with the vocal self and place. Singing, listening awareness, and relationship are grouped together because they work together to affect a singer’s perceptions. An arrow between the two shows that listening and awareness affect each other. Singing, listening, awareness, and relationship all combine to filter through our emotional responses, and then divide into the two main themes: vocal self and place. Improvising vocally in unusual environments changed our perceptions of ourselves and of the environments in which we sang. From the perspective of the vocal self, the diagram shows singers experiencing a listening awareness in relation to acoustics, spirituality, community, incidental audience, vulnerability, and playfulness. From the perspective of place, singers listened through their awareness of history and environment, including the impact of humans, the impact of colonialization, and connections to built and natural environments. In the diagram, these elements feed back into the vocal self and place, indicating reciprocity.

The diagram is not meant to minimize the complexities of our interactions within The Singing Field nor to suggest a set of static relations. Rather, the diagram is meant to communicate key elements and relationships in a highly fluid and dynamic process. Originally, I created this diagram to aid in my own thinking about this project and to help me understand and organize the rich data yielded by the ethnography and because it was instrumental in helping me to identify two primary themes in The Singing Field 2020. I have included it here in the hope that it will be helpful for readers when navigating the following analysis-discussion of the material. The diagram does not simply illustrate findings. It is a tool for discovery.
Chapter Four: Singing as a Practice of Listening Awareness

The singing changed me. Because it became one more thing. The leaves and the wind and the rain drops and the sun and the wood chips under my feet are all external to me. But once I tried to interact with those factors, I become another factor. That’s what ended up happening. Singing caused me to have a physical manifestation of sponge-likeness.

These are words spoken by Ellen during the exit interview, illustrating singing as a practice of listening awareness, a vehicle through which we can experience a deepened relationship with the environment. She eloquently shows how EVE can take us beyond an experience of the acoustic phenomenon in a given location and toward something more. It was this kind of remark from the performers that inspired the oval situated at the top of the field diagram in Figure 3.1.

Figure 4.1. Listening Awareness

Through the process of improvising vocally with one another and with the environments in which we sang, we engaged in a heightened form of listening awareness which, in turn, led to a heightened relationship—filtered through our emotional responses—with vocal self and place.
Through that relationship, determined by our positionalities as individuals, the nine subthemes became clear.

My analysis and discussion of the research findings take place over two chapters. In this chapter, I focus on singing as a practice of listening awareness. I also examine the role of listening positionality (Robinson 2020) in that awareness, stemming from an extended debrief during which we discussed our identities as women and white settlers and how those things shaped our practices of singing with listening awareness. In chapter five, I continue the discussion by focusing on the nine subthemes that emerged from the study.

**Listening Awareness**

Listening and awareness became a useful pairing of words that emerged in the diagram when studying the data from the fieldwork. One of the fundamental differences between speaking and singing is that when speaking, it is difficult, if not impossible, to listen simultaneously to someone else, whereas singing in a group setting depends crucially on listening to one another while we sing. In *The Singing Field*, our singing was underpinned by—and cultivated—both listening and awareness. The two work together in combination as they have done before in other fields such as choral pedagogy (Bernaducci 2018), in architecture studies (Wallace 2019), and in listening comprehension (Vandergrift et al. 2006).

Listening was a vital part of our practice of EVE during *The Singing Field*. We listened to how the environment sounded, how the environment affected our singing, how our voices affected the environment, how conversations took place between our voices and the environment, how we affected each other, and how we listened inwardly. Some listeners, scholars, and performers use singing as a part of their practice or share other insights related to seeking awareness through listening. In this section I consider how listening and a heightened
awareness of what we are perceiving\textsuperscript{102} is derived from soundwalking and Pauline Oliveros’s concept of Deep Listening or as Heidi von Gunden names it, sonic awareness (1980). I also discuss the work of other creative practitioners who listen to the environment and discuss the relationship between the body and sounds around us.

The idea that listening goes beyond hearing to include awareness is evident in a dictionary definition which states that listening simply means to pay attention to sound, to hear something with thoughtful attention, \textit{or to be alert to something}.\textsuperscript{103} As Tom Rice (2015) notes, listening is a “deliberate channeling of attention toward a sound” (99). He considers the ways we listen, including “listening out” for a sound (endeavouring to hear it), “listening to” a sound (attending to a sound with focus), “listening in” to a sound (implying that a person may be listening to something they should not be hearing), or “listening up” (a demand for attention) (99-100). Performing in \textit{The Singing Field} 2020 involved each of these modes of listening, as we tried to be alert to the vocal self and to our surroundings through listening awareness by singing in place. The acoustemology of \textit{The Singing Field}—knowing through sounding (Feld 2015)—is a multi-varied exploration including listening awareness, leading to a relationship with the vocal self and place.

I encouraged singers to listen and sing with intention and to open their awareness to what might not have entered their minds otherwise. In her exit interview, Ellen stated, “I was no longer a passive observer of my environment. I was called upon to act with my environment. And I think that made me more intimate with it by stopping, looking, feeling and then interacting

\textsuperscript{102} I have used the words together in the context of this dissertation (listening awareness) to indicate listening with a heightened awareness of what we are perceiving. Listening does not just imply hearing. It also means to listen in a metaphorical sense as we listen to our emotions, our intuition, our positionality, and so forth.
\textsuperscript{103} \url{https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/listen}
in an overt way.” Similarly, Frances said, “It always brings me into how complex the natural world is and how I’m only a tiny part of that …. In fact there’s so much more that we are unaware of most of the time, that is deeply, deeply flowing within us.”

Listening as a practice of awareness can be seen in the act of “soundwalking,” which similarly aims to keep participants “open to the possibilities of the moment” (McCartney 2016, 38). Soundwalking is the act of listening with intention while moving through a place to engage in what McCartney calls, “intimate listening” (40). It originated in multiple contexts. Among the first recorded examples of soundwalks were those of Max Neuhaus beginning in 1966, although he did not label them as such at the time. Neuhaus led his audience around New York City neighbourhoods to listen to the sounds of the city in his “Concert of Traveled and Traveling Music,” a part of his “Listen” series (Murph 2019; Neuhaus 1990). Neuhaus wanted listeners to embrace urban sounds in the keeping with John Cage’s (1961) idea of music as sounds that one hears. Following this, R. Murray Schafer coined the term “soundwalk” in the early days of the World Soundscape Project when Schafer (1977) asked people to engage in aural explorations of place to consider the implications of sounds found in those places. Initially, the leader asked participants to focus on specific sounds often including a score containing sounds which to listen for. It was often used as an educational experience, asking students or participants to practice their ear training by, for example, noting the pitches of sounds heard in the area (213).

A type of factor that soundwalk leaders may use in an educational soundwalk is the use of singing to discover acoustic phenomena such as the eigentone. When searching for the

eigentone, the singer seeks a sympathetic tone which seems amplified when sung in a place. Small places with straight walls such as a shower stall make this phenomenon easily noticed, but one can also hear it in larger spaces. Sometimes one can hear several eigentones, depending upon the shape of the place. The tunnel at Petrie Lane is an excellent location in which to listen for eigentone. John, our location sound engineer, pointed out that, “There’s definitely a standing wave [eigentone] in this space and sometimes when you hit on that wave it would just resonate longer than other notes. That’s the key that everyone tuned to … there was a common thread, sonically.” Although we did not discuss it beforehand, we noticed the eigentone naturally and focused our singing on it.

In July 2018 at The Sound Symposium in St. John’s, Newfoundland, I attended a soundwalk led by Hildegard Westerkamp who was a research assistant for the World Soundscape Project in its early days and remains a practitioner, proponent, and important authority on listening and soundwalking to this day. Westerkamp’s (2021) soundwalk is now closer to what Schafer originally called a listening walk, in which the participant concentrated on sounds heard rather than on the seeking of predetermined sounds as in Schafer’s original educational experiences. She often focuses on the perspective of the microphone, searching for intimate sounds that only a microphone can project (Westerkamp 2021). Westerkamp presented an event in which listeners walked together, aiming primarily to engage with the environment

105 Described on https://www.sfu.ca/~gotfrit/ZAP_Sept.3_99/r/resonance.html as “an acoustical resonance or standing wave in an enclosed space caused by parallel surfaces.” The eigentone can be found by standing in a resonant place, and by sliding the voice from one’s lowest range to the highest. At some point, the sound of the voice sounds amplified. That occurs because the voice has touched on a pitch that is sympathetic (is a note within the harmonic series) to the room in which the singer is located.

106 John Rosefield, during the group debrief, Kanata, July 8, 2020.


108 https://www.hildegardwesterkamp.ca/writings/writingsby/?post_id=13&title=soundwalking
through listening. When I joined Westerkamp on the soundwalk that day, we listened to the ambience as well as to specific sounds in the hollow of a steel fence rail, to the sound of flagpoles in the wind and the sounds inside a bustling gallery. We even did a little singing to the sounds we encountered. Soundwalking is geared toward “waking up a listening perception” (Corrigan 2018), a way to strengthen the ear and a way to understand more about the environment through the sounds made in it.

Andra McCartney (2016) was a soundwalking leader and scholar who considered the intimacy and ethics of listening, asking participants to remain alert and open. She thought of listening as a form of improvisation in which “the future is not composed or prescribed; [but] must remain unsealed, as in improvisational music that is open to the possibilities of the moment” (38). She did not include singing in her listening practice, but the sensibility of her impassioned listening resonates with my own commitment to singing in environments. In The Singing Field, we engaged with the environments through our voices, often resonating with the kind of intimacy McCartney describes. For example, during her exit interview, Frances talked about singing at the powerful dam falls at Hog’s Back saying, “To be deeply involved in singing at a site like that overwhelms me nicely. A powerful lover or powerful partner in wrestling. Something that allows you interact with everything you have.” Frances’s comment illustrates McCartney’s idea of “intimate listening,” that she describes, following feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray (1996), as “listening to the sound environment as if it were a dear friend or lover” (McCartney 2016, 40). In the spirit of that metaphor, McCartney adds that the feeling can include the sensation of touching and being touched, a sense of resonance, and intimate risk.

Singing was central to the work of Pauline Oliveros (2005) who used the voice in her practice of Deep Listening. She developed the practice of listening to the world around us and within us, saying that to listen is to “give attention to what is perceived both acoustically and psychologically” (xxiii). Similar to McCartney, Oliveros wrote about the importance of “listening inclusively to all that can be perceived in the moment” (2016, 82) with no prior commitment to any sound. Deep Listening is about the participant learning to open themselves to the complexity of sound, and to expanding their awareness of this complexity. Heidi Von Gunden has entitled Oliveros’s theory, “sonic awareness” which is characterized by a continual alertness to sound and an inclination to be always listening (1980, 409). In the theory of sonic awareness, the naturalness of vocal sound is promoted. According to Von Gunden, ritualism, healing and humanism becomes the goal of sonic awareness. Although that was not the goal of *The Singing Field* 2020, some of these elements were outcomes.

In her book, *Deep Listening: A Composer’s Sound Practice*, Oliveros outlines twenty-four deep listening pieces, or *Sonic Meditations* that date back to 1974 111 when she started doing meditations alone at her home. She began by singing long tones, listening to them, and making discoveries about what there was to listen to (Bell 2017). She calls her sonic meditations, “attention strategies” that she describes as “nothing more than ways of listening and responding in consideration of oneself, others and the environment” (Oliveros 2005, 29). Out of the twenty-four attention strategies in the Sonic Meditations, eight of them include vocal sounding, providing a foundation for work done in *The Singing Field*. Some vocalists who have earned Oliveros’s Deep Listening certificates have also created vocal practices based on listening. This

include Vivian Corringham (2014) and her vocal strolls, urban song paths, and shadow-walks. In the latter, she learns of the stories that develop related to people’s regular daily walks, and then engages with the stories through vocal improvisation. Kathy Kennedy also includes singing in her soundwalks, asking participants in one of her projects to hum to the cityscape “creating a wash of vocal sound across a noisy urban area” (n.d.).

In his discussion of listening, philosopher Jean Luc Nancy (2007) does not mention singing but does evoke a sense of listening awareness. He takes an elastic approach to the concept of listening, first narrowing it down to sonority, rhythm, and melody, but then taking it to the “edge of meaning”—a shared space of meaning and sound (7). He, like Oliveros and McCartney, advocates for listening as a form of awareness by saying that to listen is to stretch the ear—“an intensification, a concern, a curiosity or an anxiety” (5). When we listen, we enter into tension “to be on the lookout for a relation to self” (12). In this regard, Nancy’s conception of listening is similar to that in music therapy—the therapist is always looking beyond the most apparent of meanings when listening to and engaging in improvisation. Similarly, in The Singing Field, I was looking to find new knowledge at “the edge of meaning” through our performances. Words we used to describe our experiences did not always grasp the essence of them, although we tried. For Kelly-Anne, it was a particularly emotional experience. She said, “The Singing Field was this beautiful way of bringing my internal experience outside. It empowered me to use my voice in all sorts of ways to wake up, express joy, experience emotion and to have them flow.”

Helen also noticed experiences on the “edge of meaning” when she said,

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112 Kelly-Anne, exit interview with author, video call, August 24, 2020.
The environment felt like it was listening, which may be my imagination, but the living plants and animals undoubtedly perceived the singing at some level. I was quieter and more respectful of being in their place, a visitor, perhaps welcomed, but not necessarily. I was listening to the life and responding, echoing, joining in. Listening and singing in The Singing Field is like a new form of art. I feel like a beginner sounding out the environment, finding what sounds work when and where, by listening and feeling.\textsuperscript{113}

Schafer's (1977) work has influenced my conception of listening awareness. His eminent work, \textit{The Tuning of the World},\textsuperscript{114} looks at the changing “soundscape,” a term first coined by Michael Southworth, professor of urban planning (Axelsson et al. 2019), adopted and adapted by Schafer, and now in common usage. Schafer, Barry Truax, Hildegard Westerkamp and others in the World Soundscape Project (WSP) worked to understand the changing soundscape of the world, based on “ear-witness” accounts of soundscapes in the natural world (the sea, wind, and land).\textsuperscript{115} Schafer does not discuss the use of singing when listening to environments, but it does play a role. He discusses the unique tones of each natural soundscape, including sounds that other creatures make such as bird song, insect sounds, the sounds of water, creatures and animals. He writes, “the soundscape is far too complex for human speech to duplicate, and so it is in music alone that man [sic] finds that true harmony of the inner and outer world” (42). He goes on to note sounds that can be used to imitate the sounds of nature, including growling, howling, whimpering, grunting, roaring, and screaming. We tried many of those vocalizations.

\textsuperscript{113} Helen, exit interview with author, video call, August 26, 2020.
\textsuperscript{114} There is more recent reissue of the book titled \textit{The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World} (Schafer 1993b).
\textsuperscript{115} The WSP focuses on how sounds have changed and continue to change in the world. It is an exploration of the soundscape including that of natural sources, the sounds that enter as civilization takes hold, sounds of the industrial revolution, and into modern times with such sounds as that of traffic, fans, and electrical currents. In the WSP, the focus is on asking people to listen critically to the sounds around us. The WSP took on projects such as a study of five villages in northern Europe, comparing it to an earlier project centred around the Vancouver soundscape (Davis, Truax, and Schafer 1977). For more information, visit \url{https://www.sfu.ca/~truax/wsp.html}
throughout *The Singing Field* 2020 and many more when engaging with the tunnel, the falls, the sounds of the street, the sounds of the highway, the nature trail, and the marsh.

David Rothenberg (2002), composer, clarinettist, and author, also engages with the soundscape as an improvisor. He suggests that we can inhabit a bird’s song by responding to it through listening and improvising along with it. Hearkening back to McCartney’s reference to the intimacy of listening, to Nancy’s “edge of meaning,” and to Feld’s work with the Bosavi people (1991), Rothenberg poignantly promotes ways to “be the music” (21), by writing that “ecstasy inside the art of sound is not so much pure pleasure as escape from individual meandering into an essential oneness with the unspeakable meaning of the world” (48). He refers to the voice and the power of environmental interaction and purpose in, for example, the effect of an echo: “Take your ax and go stand in the bottom of a canyon. Blow in the instrument, pluck it, strike it, let out a piercing wail. Listen to what the world gives back. Play with the response, question it, explore the sonic shape of the land” (70). His words fill me with anticipation for the next time I am in the singing field. Bernie Krause thinks along these same lines too, writing that we need to embrace an awareness of the world around us by being an active listener through what he calls “careful listening” (223). He feels that by being a careful listener our connection to the biosphere will intensify.

Stephen Feld (2015) engages in a kind of listening awareness when he looks at sounding and listening as a way of “knowing in action”, regarding sound as situational (12). He was driven to understand how the Kaluli people listened, in relation to where they lived and the birds in the vicinity, indicating that listening practices can only be understood within the context of the sound and the listener (Rice, 102). In his theory of acoustemology, he sees listening not just as a way of acquiring knowledge, but a way of knowing through participation and reflection. He sees the knowledge gained as being influenced by a range of personal factors such as personal
perception, memory, or how one problem-solves. He considers listening in the acoustemological sense as a relational practice, from a perspective of sharing with others including nonhuman, nonliving, and the technological (15).

Eidsheim (2015a; 2015b) expands the concept of listening to highlight that singing along with listening, making sound and music, are intermaterial practices. She does not call singing a listening practice per se but theorizes connections between the two. She sees singing as one element of aurality that includes tactile, spatial, physical, material, and vibrational sensations. She suggests that these sensations can help us articulate how our music-making encourages us to interact and participate in the world.

Listening awareness took on a significant role in *The Singing Field*. The experience of reciprocity between listening and awareness through singing in place was evident through the improvisations themselves. Just as soundwalking can be a practice of awareness or an educational tool, EVE can be used as a modality of listening awareness: for community groups, it can be a way to connect people to each other; it can be an educational tool in school settings to raise awareness of the self in relation to surrounding environments; it can raise awareness in support of environmental activism; and it can be a therapeutic tool for increasing awareness of the self. If used with the kind of intention that is employed in Pauline Oliveros’s practice of Deep Listening, EVE could inspire further vocal arts endeavours. Developing listening awareness through EVE can perhaps bring us to the “edge of meaning,” encouraging us to question our selves in relation to the intermateriality between our bodies and our surrounding natural and built environments.

The pairing of the two words, listening and awareness, implies that listening can go beyond what one can hear with one’s ears. As we gain the awareness to be alert to something, we find that we can listen to the environment, but also listen to how the environment affects us in
return. We can notice how we affect each other, how we listen inwardly, and how we listen to what is implied by what we hear with our ears. We can listen along the lines of McCartney who listens intimately. We can listen with inquiring ears as does Westercamp, or with a sense of wonder and discovery as do Rothenberg and Schafer. We can listen with the ears of a phenomenologist as does Nancy (2007) who considers how listening is an intensification—a straining in an approach to the self (9). We can listen with the ears of a storyteller, as does Corrington or from a position of relationality as does Stephen Feld. When in the singing field, listening awareness is a way to listen in all of these ways. There are no limits to how or what one can hear. It can be a metaphysical experience, including being potentially spiritual, psychological, or transformational. It can include an experience of listening for the pleasure of hearing more intensely, can be simply thrilling, or give us philosophical insights. And, it can be therapeutic.

Much like Oliveros’ concept of Deep Listening, listening awareness means listening to all that can be perceived in the moment. This is what I have learned through first-hand experience in the singing field.

**Listening Positionality in Performers in The Singing Field**

As Jean Luc Nancy suggests, to listen is to experience a kind of tension that places us in a position of being on the lookout for a relation to self. In order to do that, we must be aware of our own positionality. Cultural background directly affected the experience of the performers in *The Singing Field* 2020. The fact that we were all white women of middle class and privilege affected how we experienced the performances. Within that realm, there was considerable diversity within our ranks, affecting how we were able to open ourselves to listening with
awareness. Differences in age, religious background, sexuality, and life experience were important elements as well. As we listened through our singing, all of these factors played a part in what we gave to the environments and to each other, as well as what we received from them. In short, they affected our positionality.

The concept of positionality emerged within a feminist context with the work of Linda Alcoff (1988), who writes about feminism from a political-social context that exceeds the scope of my project. She conceives of “woman” from a positional perspective in which our identity is shaped by our gender, economic, and cultural background (among other things), making our positionality a relative phenomenon rather than an innate one. We are who we are because of where we have been, what we have done, and what our beliefs are, both positive and negative. She writes that “the identity of a woman is the product of her own interpretation and reconstruction of her history, as mediated through the cultural discursive context to which she has access” (434).

Improvisers and improvisation scholars have written about the importance of knowing how our histories, cultures, geographical foundations, and experiences affect our improvisations (Cook and Pettengill 2013; Goldman 2016; Nettl and Russell 1998; Nachmanovich 1990). Gillian Siddall and Ellen Waterman (2016) state that “we cannot escape from our enculturation and our histories: indeed, improvisation is often a means of narrating the past through the filter of the present” (3). Eidsheim (2015a) discusses how her awareness of her culture and history can provide limitations to her vocal experiences. She considers how there can be limitations created by our body’s culture and habituation, going so far as to suggest that they have the ability to “entrap” us. She writes that she reaches beyond her training to unconventional singing, because of her need to disrupt her orientation or to reach beyond the entrapment. She refers to the “lived body” (Moi 1999) and to the body being “a perceptual system tuned by a given culture, that is
the perceiving conduit of sound” (49). In addition to cultural identity, history and geographical orientation, performers brought their politics, education, physical states, spiritual practices, musicality, and self-knowledge to the experience of performing in The Singing Field 2020.

Dylan Robinson’s (2020) work, Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies, enhanced my understanding of “positionality” by extending the term to listening positionality. Robinson discusses the colonization of Indigenous music and examines the expropriation of song from Indigenous groups during early years of ethnomusicology and its subsequent use by settlers in, for example, compositions, without permission from the people to whom those songs belonged. In relation to this work, he extends the term yet one step further to critical listening positionality, asking us to alert ourselves to how our ears might be attuned to certain interpretations of sound due to our history, geography, and race. He discusses issues of power and privilege and how they shape the way that we listen, providing the example of the sound of a siren as suggested by Gus Stadler (2015). What does the sound of the siren mean to the listener? Does it bring a feeling of relief, or does it bring a feeling of foreboding? In The Singing Field, we critically examined what singing in place brought into our listening awareness, including issues of colonialism, the built environment, and history.

For the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss the listening positionality of the different participants in The Singing Field and how positionality affected listening in The Singing Field. I adopt Robinson’s first extension of the word positionality, referring to the notion of listening positionality as “normative and unmarked forms of listening privilege within settler colonial listening positionality” (10). Robinson points out that we each come to a listening experience with listening biases, listening privilege, and listening ability. If we are aware of how we listen normatively, we may be able to “listen otherwise”(62), engaging more critically with our listening experiences, treating them as political and cultural acts (Sterne in Couture et al. 2020).
Inspired by this multi-layered concept, I was prompted to ask performers to consider their listening positionality as white women of European descent. During the final debrief on the last day of the project, this became the topic of an engaged discussion.

I move between Alcoff’s term positionality and Robinson’s concept of listening positionality, exploring some of the factors that influenced how performers in *The Singing Field* 2020 listened to themselves, to the places in which they sang, and to each other. During the discussion, we each shared our own positionality (the backgrounds we brought to the project) and some of us also shared our listening positionality (how being who we are influenced how we listened). We included thoughts about our freedom to make choices, our vulnerability as women, our whiteness, our privilege, being privileged enough to explore outside of our comfort zone, and a feeling of safety that stems from our shared whiteness.

Frances reflected on her travels around the world\(^\text{116}\) when she experienced people in the lands she visited, many of whom told her that they wanted nothing other than freedom. During these encounters, she became acutely aware of her own freedoms as a Canadian and, in particular, as a white woman of European descent. The freedom she noticed was as simple as being free to come and go as she pleased, and freedom in such personal matters as being able to choose her own identity. She could decide, for example, not to be married, to be pansexual, and to choose her own career path. These privileges were not afforded to many she met along the way. This positionality affected her listening awareness when she viewed her involvement in *The Singing Field*. To sing in nature, in the city or on a roadway is uncommon, but she remarked that she would not be demonized if she decided to put her lips to a tree and try to get a sound,

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\(^{116}\) Frances circumnavigated the world on a boat, Ninth Charm, built by her partner. They spent fifteen years making many extended visits to areas of the world. This experience has had a significant influence on her world view.
although some might think it strange. Frances added, “I don’t have anything to lose. I’m a privileged person so it’s not going to hurt me.” And then she turned it around, raising thoughts about viewing privilege from another angle. She commented that in being this free to choose, it was not enough to be privileged, referring to those who had something to lose by engaging in unusual activity. She said, “I’m not a big-time lawyer downtown, a politician or a professional singer who’s trying to prove my worth so of course I’ll stick my head down the toilet and sing [laughter]”.

During this discussion, Cait discussed having been pressured to use her sexuality in musical performance where she was often expected to be sexy and cute despite her musical talent. Cait’s experience highlights that we need to consider ways that women are demeaned in the music industry and find ways to re-vision that stigma (Heble and Siddall, 2000, 144). Cait experienced that which Susan McClary (2002) refers to when she writes, “women on the stage are viewed as sexual commodities regardless of their appearance or seriousness” (151). In relation to those experiences, Cait was able to find safety outside of expectation among the other women in *The Singing Field*. She was relieved to find that here, outside of her usual musical world, she had the freedom to be not only whoever she wanted to be, but also to *sound* however she wanted to sound. For her, being among other women performers offered comfort and community. Singing in place with other women reduced her feelings of vulnerability.

Ellen also felt that her womanhood affected her listening positionality, but her experience of being a woman included a certain level of comfort or familiarity with being vulnerable both

117 Frances, group debrief at Sarasparilla Trail, Ottawa, August 22, 2020.
physically and socially. She is used to feeling vulnerable and thus thought that she was not worried about losing something or embarrassing herself when singing in *The Singing Field*. Ellen attributed that to being a middle-class, white woman of privilege which, she said, made it easier to take a risk like this.

Issues of driving while black, looking at birds while black, are big issues in the news these days [with the Black Lives Matter movement]. Many people of colour don’t feel the safety that we feel in doing charming frivolous activities. We don’t have to ask those questions about “how will we be seen?” That says everything about our privilege … in some ways we are comfortable enough to agree to do this, and in some degree curious enough. Those aren’t qualities everyone has the luxury of feeling, or the inclination to feel.\textsuperscript{118}

Singing in place heightened Ellen’s awareness of the privilege she brought to the singing field.

Kelly-Anne said that her listening positionality began with her privilege of having had a master’s level music education. She grew up in a rural area where access to music or arts education was not a given and she attributed her good fortune to a family that valued music and education, making it a priority even though financial resources were not always readily available. She recognized her privilege in the fact that she had enough financial security in her adult life to support a less lucrative career in the arts. Kelly-Anne acknowledged the same comfort with vulnerability as Ellen, by saying that she too was used to stepping outside of her comfort zone. “I feel intimidated right now and there’s nothing I can do about it, so let’s go! I experience this in my workplace, on the street, and when I’m travelling.”\textsuperscript{119} An important part of Kelly-Anne’s positionality was influenced by her preparation for imminent In Vitro Fertilization (IVF)

\textsuperscript{118} Ellen, group debrief at Sarasparilla Trail, Ottawa, August 22, 2020.
\textsuperscript{119} Kelly-Anne, group debrief at Sarasparilla Trail, Ottawa, August 22, 2020.
Her singing experiences served to help her express some of the bodily experiences she was focused on that summer. She actively opened herself to possibilities, since stepping outside of her comfort zone was a fact of life for her. She said, “What a great way of processing this change in my voice and body … this is an improvised exploration. Life is out of my comfort zone.”

Helen focused on her musical background as a basis for her listening positionality. She said, “I learned to play South Indian music knowing that it wasn’t mine. Knowing that it could never be mine.” She acknowledges that her training in classical music “persuaded” her ear, toward how she listens and hears things and improvises. She acknowledged the privilege of having had parents who provided musical education and to have “freedom—financial and everything else—to just explore, and push my limits, and to really stretch, and to say ‘I really want to try something different.’” Helen’s painting also influenced her. She felt that she learned from how she saw light and patterns. She compared this with singing in environments, noting that was “engaging another part of me which is really fascinating … We can’t separate all these parts of ourselves, they are so intricately intertwined. Everything that I do, we do, comes out in this …. It’s such a protected world that I live in.”

My own listening positionality is based on my long-time experience with EVE and how I have learned to listen through singing to, with, and through the environment. When I go into the

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120 Given the deeply personal and sensitive nature of this information, I hesitated to include it in this dissertation. However, Kelly-Anne indicated that she wanted to share this information in order to break the silence and shame associated with IVF treatment.
121 Kelly-Anne, exit interview with author, video call, August 24, 2020.
122 Helen, group debrief at Sarasparilla Trail, Ottawa, August 22, 2020.
123 Ibid.
environment and sing, I experience so much more than what I hear or see. My listening positionality is based on being a woman, a Jew, white, middle-class, educated and privileged. However, life has not always been easy. Perhaps my struggles earlier in life have informed my openness—indeed hunger—for awareness and a path of learning. Being white and privileged, I have been able to follow through on opportunities that have come my way. In addition, my experience as a music therapist is a significant part of my listening positionality as it encourages me to join with whatever or whomever I am in the presence of. It also explains why improvisation calls to me as the medium through which I join others musically. I am impelled to join the environment with my own music and with my own voice, and to seek the change that it might inspire in my thoughts and actions. My listening positionality as a settler-Canadian gives me the privilege to engage in EVE in the first place but could I be so brave if my difference were made visible through dark skin? Or by being made to pin a yellow star on my jacket?
Chapter Five: Relationship With, in Their Own Words

I have a new sense of what a place sounds like, what to listen for when I sing or make sounds. Are there echoes or resonance? Does it soak up the voice, or overwhelm it? How do those interactions feel to me? Do I feel at one with it, or rejected by it? Do I feel powerful or tiny, or somewhere in between? Am I invading the space or welcomed?124

The statement by Helen in the epigraph above is characteristic of the kinds of questions we asked during the fieldwork. Over the course of the summer, we opened our awareness to new kinds of relationship.

As shown in Figure 3.1, the idea of “relationship-with” stems from listening awareness that developed during the *The Singing Field*. In the diagram, I show “Vocal Self” and “Place” as the two dominant themes that emerged from the fieldwork, branching out from the concept of “relationship-with,” filtered through emotion. In this chapter, I discuss those dominant themes and the subthemes that emerged from them. I do this from the perspective of the performers and what they said in conversations, interviews, and journal entries. I share their perceptions in their own words, examining participants’ relationships with their vocal selves and place.

When I refer to relationship with “Vocal self,” I refer to the ways in which we perceived the self through our singing, including how our perceptions of what we saw, heard, and felt in places (both sensorially and emotionally) changed through singing there. We used vocal improvisation, including what I have called xeno-song, as we used our voices to develop a listening practice. Performers highlighted relationships with their vocal selves by discussing a

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124 Helen, exit interview with author, video call, August 26, 2020.
series of interrelated concepts including acoustics, spirit, community, audience (passersby), vulnerability, and playfulness (including curiosity and creativity).

When I refer to relationship with place, I refer to how perceptions changed about place when we sang with listening awareness in chosen locations. The environment or place in which we sang is at the heart of the study. It was as if the sites were added performers at each location, creating a reciprocal experience in many cases. Performers highlighted relationship with place by discussing topics including the environmental impact of humans, the built environment, natural environments, and settler culture. Throughout the discussion of both dominant themes and subthemes, positionality and listening positionality influences the perceptions of performers.

Although I discuss each concept individually in this chapter, there is significant cross-over among them. In Figure 5.1, I have represented that fluidity by using connecting lines that have arrows on both ends to show a reciprocal influence between subthemes and themes. In addition, there is a junction between all arrows indicating that each influences the other, depicting the complexity that took place.
Emotion

In the diagram, the subthemes “vocal self” and “place” move “through emotion.” Experiencing emotion when singing is addressed in music therapy (Austin 2008; Bruscia 1998; Sokolov 1987; Uhlig 2006), in therapeutic voicework (Newham 1998), the study of vocality (Coutinho et al. 2019; Pisanski and Bryant 2019) and in the voice lesson (Patteson 1999). It was difficult to separate it from any of the other elements as it permeated most experiences throughout the summer. At first, I tried to separate emotion from the other subthemes, but through the fluid process of analysis, I realized that the other recurrent subthemes all filtered through emotion. Thus, on the diagram I placed it on the path between “relationship-with” and the dominant
themes, showing that emotion had an impact on everything. Ellen wrote, “I can’t be sure how my singing changed from one venue to the other, but my feelings in their midst certainly did.”

And at Hog’s Back, Kelly-Anne experienced:

… a lot of unease, loneliness and tension with moments of rebellion, or overwhelm. At first I only wanted to take in the sights, sounds and smells around me. Afterwards I became acutely aware of the roaring white water below me. I tried to sing the froth, the roar, the feelings of overwhelm, but I felt I came up short. My voice was no competition for the power of that water. This created a certain level of tension for me.

And Helen alluded to a connection with emotion when Hasi asked about her greatest insight during the performances.

They [the insights] are merged to having feelings of calm and stillness there that can then adjust and be flexible so that I could be a part of the environment, whatever the environment was. I could respond to that without getting rattled. Just to find that spot that works in some way. It’s all part of the path. All a part of the journey along the path.

These are three isolated examples, but the two dominant themes and eight subthemes sift through this kind of emotional filter; they were integral to people’s experiences with The Singing Field.

**Relationship with the Vocal Self**

**Acoustics**

Before the time in my life when I realized that singing in place affected my own perception of place and self, I experienced the acoustic environment by singing playfully. When riding my bicycle through an underpass, for example, or along a river’s edge, or when walking in the forest or along a path, I wanted to know how my voice fit in with the surrounding acoustic

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125 Ellen, journal entry, summer 2020.
environment. I wanted to know how my own voice could be a part of the scene before me, how singing from a cliff or across a lake would sound in relation to the structure of a place. It was not until much later that I learned I could experience insights about myself and about place through this practice. This is why I chose the tunnel as the first experience for performers. I wanted to give them a chance to play with the structure of the place, enjoy the acoustics, and to help them overcome the shyness of singing this way for the first time. Cait’s first experience at Petrie Lane was similar to my own early experiences. She engaged with the acoustics in a playful way, learning, for example, that she could experiment with her voice to learn how the reverberance responded to her volume and pitch:

I went in there with the intention of playing with breath and see what the difference was of having great breath support and being with a more separate sound …. When I walked in there—right away—I was shocked by the sound and the feedback and how all the different things sounded as I got to the end …. It was a lot more dynamic than I was expecting. I felt a lot more in general than I anticipated. I felt that there was a connection between the space and how I perceived my own voice. I tried to build and pull back and see how the echo responded. Also start loud and come down in volume and see how the echo responded to that.  

Besides playfulness, performers noticed other connections in how they perceived their vocal selves through the acoustic environment. As previously mentioned, the eigentone can be used as an educational tool, but one can also hear the eigentone as a relational tool when singing in highly reverberant places. Barry Blesser and Linda-Ruth Salter (2007) suggest that a place can provide an acoustic dialogue. They use the example of the acoustics of a shower stall that may induce an individual to sing. A small room, especially one with hard walls, “has numerous discrete resonances [and] when the pitch and overtones of your voice coincide with these

128 Cait, group debrief after the tunnel, Ottawa, July 8, 2020.
resonances, its loudness is greatly enhanced” (63). I often play with that phenomenon when in an elevator or a stairwell, letting my voice slide up and down until I find the pitch that seems to be amplified. We noticed it in the tunnel where there were several eigentones. Frances noticed that too, saying that the tunnel to her was “like an organ tube with all of its fundamentals and mutations”. 129

For Frances, the eigentones in the tunnel gave her an aural thrill. The eigentones also encouraged her to think beyond the ear to the metaphor she experienced in the highly reverberant acoustics of the tunnel at Petrie Lane:

The extreme length of the sound reverberation and its play-back to the sound-source (me/other singers) distorted [my] usual and habitual sense of space and time and [my] existence within it. I tried to sing just a usual arpeggio, and what happened was that I heard the entire arpeggio playing back in a chord to my ears and then—on top of that chord—I re-heard my own enactment of the arpeggio and the chord again, and then the original enactment of the arpeggio and the chord again, each layered on top of the other. So there were six tracks, and after that, I lost track! But this sense that I was singing three times, when in fact I’d only sung the arpeggio once, was already surprising and gave me a ghostly sense of my existence in a time just before the time I was actually in … as well as a sense that my effect on the universe had repercussions in the future of a time in which I’d acted. This was not at all like being “recorded,” and then hearing a loop pedal repeating one’s voice. The experience as a metaphor for [my] own existence and for the existence of the environment was beautiful and poetic and spiritual, very emotional and moving in so many ways. At times, I even felt dizzy or slightly nauseous from the effect on a physical level, while my emotional self was given a gift of a recurring mirror of my own sound. I love these moments in life, when greater possibility of self is experienced. It is this sense of personal power, and also a merging with the environment, that changes [my] sense of reality. 130

Blesser and Salter (2007) comment, “A singer is an aural detective, exploring an environment the way a child explores a toy” (63). In the tunnel, Frances became quite the aural detective indeed!

The intermateriality of Frances’s body and the tunnel created an acoustemological experience

129 Frances, journal entry, summer 2020.
130 Ibid.
that included both her future and past selves in the now. Brandon LaBelle (2010) notes that singing in a reverberant space like the tunnel makes a voice feel more powerful—it can sound other worldly. He writes that “the echo is a sound that comes back to haunt, returning as transformed through its diffusion and ultimate regrouping into an altogether different expression. *The echo delivers our own alter-ego* [italics in original]” (15). Jean Luc Nancy calls it “sound referring” describing how the sound spreads in the internal or external space, and resounds back onto itself (2007, 8). For Frances, that sounding transformed her perspective of self, offering her a personal sense of power.

Likewise, Ellen was in exploration mode at Petrie Lane, wanting to discover how the site created a specific vocal response. She had certain preconceptions about singing in a structure made of concrete, but she was surprised at how satisfying it was to sing in the tunnel. “Seeing a cement tunnel—an overpass in the suburb by the highway, you think it’s going to be one thing and it’s completely another thing. I think it’s a bit like ‘the proof of the pudding is in the tasting.’” During that same conversation, John, our sound engineer, slipped in a comment confirming Ellen’s point by saying, “it’s so interesting that some of the warmest and most lush and inviting sounds come from the harshest environments. Just the way that sound works—you get deflection off hard surfaces. That’s where the reverberation comes from. In some more pleasing places where there’s no reflection it can be very stark sounding.” The difference between preconceptions of how a vocal sound will respond to an environment compared to how it actually sounds can be surprising. Once, for example, I sang in an ancient cave and even there,

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131 Ellen, group debrief at the tunnel, Kanata, July 6, 2020.
132 John Rosefield, group debrief at the tunnel, Kanata, July 6, 2020.
the reverberation was not as generous as it was in the tunnel at Petrie Lane where first-time
singer-listeners may be taken by surprise.

In this same location, Helen’s experience of the reverberant acoustic environment helped
her relax. It being our inaugural sing, she felt shy and nervous about people listening at first. But
“in the moment that I made a sound in the hexagonal concrete tunnel at Petrie Lane I was
ecstatic. Sound hung in the air, bounced off six surfaces and echoed for seconds. It was so
rewarding, such a gift of sound from these hard walls.”\(^\text{133}\) In her exit interview, she added that “it
surrounded me and took my entire attention away from any kind of anxiety or uncertainty and
was totally strong and safe. It was beautiful.”\(^\text{134}\)

At Hog’s Back Falls, our second location, the acoustic environment was very different
than the first. Petrie Lane was a resonant, sympathetic space. At Hog’s Back, we experienced
aural challenges. The ambient sound of the rushing water consumed our voices, denying us that
feeling of joining with the place vocally. This had a powerful effect on Kelly-Anne who said,

I found it challenging to match [the sound of the falls] when I was expressing, and I
couldn’t. I was standing above the big swirling, frothing, angry water — roar! — and all
the power there and I could not get my voice to match it …. I kept running up against
these limitations — being overpowered by the nature.\(^\text{135}\)

Frances had a similar experience, but with a more positive consequence. She commented:
“This place speaks to us because it has so much inherent noise and it demands that we listen to
that. I felt it was important to let myself become a part of the sound and the river. Let the river
speak in my body”.\(^\text{136}\) Helen also felt drowned out but reacted to that sensation differently from

\(^{133}\) Helen, journal entry, summer 2020.
\(^{134}\) Helen, exit interview with author, video call, August 26, 2020.
\(^{135}\) Kelly-Anne, group debrief at Hog’s Back, Ottawa, July 22, 2020.
\(^{136}\) Frances, group debrief at Hog’s back, Ottawa, July 22, 2020.
both Kelly-Anne and Frances. She wrote in her journal, “I felt small, drowned out by the water, disconnected from the others, but still part of the huge loudness.” In that entry she included words that she improvised by the falls. “I am so small, I am not tall, I am a dot upon the wall.”¹³⁷ These words came to her, reflecting just how unheard she felt there at the falls.

The way different places responded to us acoustically significantly shaped our improvisations and our perceptions of place and of ourselves. When we could not easily be heard, our responses ranged from singing powerfully in an attempt to be heard to pulling back in deference to the environment’s voice.

**Spirituality**

Four of the five performers reported strong spiritual practices in their entrance interviews. I also bring a strong sense of spirituality to the project. The five of us brought these perspectives to The Singing Field, informing our experiences of singing in place in a variety of ways. Furthermore, all of the singers discussed having spiritual experiences from singing at several of the sites. The atmosphere that I brought to the project may have impacted their openness about both their spiritual philosophies and their spiritual experiences while in the singing field, especially with the incorporation of ritualistic elements beginning each sing.

By spiritual, I mean an experience that shows us there is more to life than what we see in front of us. Spirit is as ephemeral as breath and as intangible as the feeling of being inspired by something. When singing, breath is the activator of sound for any player of a wind instrument, including voice. To breathe in is to inspire, to be inspired, to connect with inspiration and spirit. These words are all related, tracing back to the Latin *inspirare* (“to breathe or blow into”). Its

¹³⁷ Helen, journal entry, summer 2020.
meaning includes the act of influencing, moving, or guiding. The word “spirit” shares the same root. In the late 14th century, it meant to “breathe or blow upon,” as well as to breathe in and “to infuse (as life) by breathing” (Merriam-Webster 2020). It can also mean to prompt or induce, to excite, to inflame or to “influence or animate with an idea or purpose.”

When I discuss spirituality, I do not mean religion, although religion features strongly in the lives of four of the six participants. Those religious roots did inspire feelings of spirituality in them, but all of the participants said that they felt a sense of numinosity during The Singing Field 2020.

In music therapy, spirituality is addressed by eminent scholars such as Helen Bonny (2002), Carolyn Kenny (1982), Gary Andsell, (2005) and many others. Music therapists often try to nurture a sense of spirituality when making music with clients. When working in palliative care, for example, with people who may not be able to engage in verbal communication, music can be both comforting and powerfully expressive, connecting the therapist to the one receiving therapy and acknowledging the profound and numinous nature of life and death. Spirituality, then, is most certainly a vital part of the work that music therapists do (Lauzon 2020).

I describe spirituality through the lens of music therapy, but the six singers in The Singing Field 2020 were not singing in order to work through therapeutic issues. Nonetheless, a sense of numinosity emerged through the music making. Acoustics, nature, and even elements of the city inspired feelings of spirituality for the singers. In several instances, singers compared the act of singing in place to that of meditation. In the tunnel at Petrie Lane, several performers noted that singing in a place that reflected our voices back onto us was a spiritual experience. But performers commented on the spiritual dimensions of their experiences in all of the locations.

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138 https://www.etymonline.com/word/inspire
For example, in a journal entry about her experience on the Sparks Street Mall, Ellen reflected on her spiritual life:

At the start there was a cohesive physical place with a name—Sparks Street Mall. There were buildings, a street, people and sky. During and afterwards, my experience of place was much much smaller [or more defined]: the crack in the sidewalk, a board on the wall, the edge of a doorway, the unusual or interesting sounds of the group, the look on a passerby’s face, and my auditory responses to each one. It’s like the environment broke into many many tiny, connected pieces that I experienced sequentially, separately and completely until moving on. By investing myself for an hour or two to this process, this place and these people, I am changed. It feels like I have just meditated and have emptied myself of much of the inner chatter that otherwise often occupies my head, the remembering and planning of an adult life. This sound-making empties me of all of the past and future and I am engrossed in the now.139

When writing about singing on the nature trail, Ellen noted,

It is much like my experiences over the years with Zen meditation, where my silent sitting for days on end stripped me (temporarily) of ego and identity and the busy story-telling that occurs as I remember the past or plan for the future. This quieting of my “monkey mind” is very nurturing, it leaves me renewed, in the same way that my singing to sun and rain-dappled leaves, blowing in a light breeze, has done.140

During the exit interview, Ellen added, “everything is in everything. I think that that’s what this project is about … that’s what resonated with me. Everything is in everything. When I was really hanging out with those leaves, when the leaves opened like palms, all I could do was open my palms back. We were all presenting this place with an offering [of ourselves].” 141

Helen referred to her spiritual practice in her exit interview, saying “my meditation background is hugely important—especially when you led the openings—I just became really grounded and it moved from there.”142 In response to Helen’s remark, I asked if she thought

139 Ellen, journal entry, summer 2020.
140 Ibid.
141 Ellen, exit interview with author, video call, August 26, 2020.
142 Helen, exit interview with author, video call, August 26, 2020.
there was a spiritual element to *The Singing Field* at all, or if she thought her spirituality helped her engage with it. She replied:

> Whether it’s spirituality or the stillness—there’s a very still quiet place that’s in nature—to be part of it—just to be there. That’s a spiritual practice. Those moments were very intensely present. Singing is generally intensely present. It passes so quickly, including the space between the notes. It’s very much being in the moment.¹⁴³

During the debrief after singing in the tunnel at Petrie Lane, I too expressed surprise to find that in a cold concrete tunnel I did not feel like I was in a cold concrete tunnel. When we sang together, it was a numinous experience for me. Frances agreed, saying that “I just let it affect me deeply in a sacred way,” adding “but isn’t singing always sacred?”¹⁴⁴

The feeling of sacredness when singing in reverberant places, in particular, is a notable experience. The satisfaction of singing in a stark stairwell, an empty tunnel, or a magnificent cathedral all have that in common. Do we need the visual elements of a cathedral or spire? A blind friend once told me that in her world of sound, the reverberance is enough. I suggest that for sighted people it is also enough (to create that feeling of sacredness). If I were blindfolded and placed in a tunnel or a cathedral to sing, which would I find to be a more spiritual experience (Kramer 2021)? Most performers felt a sense of sacredness or spirituality in each place, regardless of the resonance or reverberation time, but all of us experienced a sense of numinosity at some point during *The Singing Field* 2020.

**Community**

In *Community and Everyday Life*, Graham Day (2006) suggests that the term community “refers to those things which people have in common, which bind them together, and give them a

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¹⁴³ Ibid.
¹⁴⁴ Frances, group debrief at the tunnel, Kanata, July 6, 2020.
sense of belonging with one another” (1). As reinforced through *The Singing Field*, a group music-making experience can be a powerful driver of community. Singing together gave us a common experience that bound us together.145 Eidsheim (2015a) proposes that “an investigation into music is an investigation into relationships and community” (157). Our experiences in *The Singing Field* 2020 brought Eidsheim’s proposition to life. The sense of community between the six performers and Hasi and John had a significant impact on our experience of singing in place. This was not altogether surprising. The connections between music and community are well documented in community music therapy (Ansdell and De Nora 2014; Stige 2004) and community music practices (Cohen and Silverman 2013). Christopher Small’s (1998) theory of musicking also stresses the importance of community in music-making. These accounts often focus on the positive aspects of community music-making. In *The Singing Field* 2020, the sense of community was often positive, but not always. We felt the support within our small community, but also felt a certain nervousness that stemmed from a fear of being judged, even by each other at times.

Cait expressed a positive experience of community created by music-making with each other, right from the first sing. During the Petrie Lane debrief she commented,

> When we sang together—I was on the end [of the group] and it felt like a hug. I actually *felt* the sound. It was like an embrace, like our own little bubble that we were in together. I focused on harmonizing and wanting to be in tandem and having that connection and have everything sound really good, but I actually really relished the moments when we accidently all came together. 146

145 Members of this small community of six singers have expressed interest in continuing to engage in EVE together once the COVID19 pandemic has subsided.
146 Cait, group debrief at the tunnel, Kanata, July 6, 2020.
Kelly-Anne reflected upon the effect of community support at Hog’s Back. Her singing in the moment that she describes here was solitary, but her experience of the presence of the others was poignant:

I followed the water worn pathways of the rocks, meandering as far as I could go. I stepped at a slow pace and sang my way along their contours. At this point I think I had surrendered to all the feelings of unease and loneliness. This is when I sang my last note, satisfied with a feeling of completion. It was at this moment that I turned around and experienced pure joy. Every member of the group was standing on the rocks behind me perfectly spaced. I could see everyone perfectly—silent support, like angels at my back. I felt perfectly held. The feeling of completion was instantly shifted into a spark of pure joy.  

When Kelly-Anne had spoken about this during the debrief at Hogsback, Ellen responded, “I saw that moment when you turned around and smiled and you were so radiant. At first I turned around to see what you were smiling at.” And Kelly-Anne said, “I was smiling at you! That was my expression of joy! The tension and emotion were not easy to feel. I was not comfortable through all of it but then I ended on this spontaneous joy explosion.”

Helen’s experience of our small community at Hog’s Back in her journal entry was not as positive. She did not find comfort in the xeno-song at Hog’s Back. “I am watching discomfort, judgments and opinions that rise up. These can be about fellow participants or myself, or about what we are doing in the project. I am letting them go quickly to keep open”.  

Occasionally I heard other women in the group singing very loudly, high, operatically, lots of vibrato. It sounded like an alien wail, a momentary scream into the oblivion of water noise. It didn’t fit, to my sensibilities. Embarrassing, uncomfortable ... why? Such high art sound in a public place? Was it because others walking through would be uncomfortable? I tried some loud singing, in a lower range, threw it out there, got nothing back. Was it a gift or an insult?

147 Kelly-Anne, journal entry, summer 2020.
149 Helen, journal entry, summer 2020.
150 Ibid.
Conversely, it took the presence of our community to bring the positive to the fore for Helen, who added, “When we came back to the bridge in a circle, we did start to interact, to listen to each other. For a moment we held a perfect harmony. I felt so grateful and renewed. I don’t think we were in the river connection, but in the human connection”.  

For Ellen, singing with others was a new experience. She enjoyed the community singing but added that she did not necessarily need it in order to grow. “I liked singing on my own, hearing myself. But I also learned a lot from other people, and I felt that we were all in this together. I thought there was a nice blend of both. During our walk on the trail, I was the last one and there were certain times when I couldn’t hear anyone else. I really like that too. If I want to unearth what is in me though, the easiest way to do that is to be alone”.  

Our small community provided the freedom to allow for playfulness. Helen wrote about her experience during our improvisation on Sparks Street Mall. “Our group coalesced into street theatre, almost. The physical and sound passing of balls, bubbles, energy and animals was delightful. I laughed. I felt completely at home, free and spontaneous. I enjoyed the imaginative play of everyone. I loved everyone”.  

Where much of the Sparks Street Mall sing was predominantly about our relationship with each other and the built environment, our experience on the Sarsaparilla Trail seemed to focus more on the relationship between the singers. There, Cait had a profound musical experience. She noted that the communal sound helped her to identify with everyone. “There were pockets when we were all doing different things, where my melody would fit in with

151 Ibid.
152 Ellen, exit interview with author, video call, August 26, 2020.
153 Helen, journal entry, summer 2020.
everything else with no planning whatsoever. I love those moments of harmony.” In her exit interview she added, “Some people were really wild, but then there were times when we’re just trying to relate to each other. It inspired me to play, but as I went on I wanted to relate and blend to create random harmony between us. It was powerful—that community experience.”

The final moments of the entire project took place in what felt to me to be the strongest moment of community. In those last fifteen minutes of the project, we spontaneously formed a circle and improvised in a small range together, an improvisation style often called “toning” (Austin 2008). During the debrief Cait said, “… being on the outside of the circle when someone was on the inside—I had the mentality of ‘I want to give you this sound.’ I wanted to resonate in a certain way so you could all feel that connection. I wanted to give that to you.” Kelly-Anne added, “When I was in the middle of the circle it felt so good to just stand with an open-heart posture and be in that space and be in the beautiful happiness that I was feeling. My heart felt so full and I was just happy. Beautiful.”

During the exit interview, Cait expressed how her sense of community emboldened her to experiment and discard the opinions of others:

Even if we’re not relating or being perfectly conscious of each other, having that community feel and knowing that the support is there, is important. Even if I am doing my own thing, in fact trying to find my own voice, there are people there that support and are looking for the same kind of thing. I never would’ve gone as far as I went on my own. But now I would have the confidence to sing on the trail. I’ll sing and touch the trees and feel the flow of the wind and do all of those things, and who cares what anyone else thinks. If the environment dictates it, why not do what affects you and inspires you? It’s nice to have the influence of different perspectives from other people where I would never have had the opportunity to get there on my own. It’s been a very unique experience for me.

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154 Cait, group debrief at Sarasparilla Trail, Ottawa, August 22, 2020.
156 Cait and Kelly-Anne, group debrief at Sarasparilla Trail, Ottawa, August 22, 2020.
Frances talked about her feeling of belonging when doing something so unusual: “Another important thing that happened throughout all of the sings was the interaction with the other singers. I felt a belonging with all of you. That’s a beautiful thing. Wonderful to feel that valuing of this off-the-wall thing to do (in terms of our culture)”.

She eloquently expanded upon this idea:

It further encourages that interconnection. Say a tree has a mycelial network with other trees. The mushroom underground network. If you are singing alone, you are reaching out to whatever your environment is—rebounding off of the environment. But if there are other singers doing the same thing, it’s a far more complex experience because you’re reaching out emotionally, spiritually and in every other way possible. We’d be working with rhythms and sounds and what a complex structure there was! It wasn’t just an individual “enjoying themselves in nature”—we were creating a beautiful structure there. It was more intense and more affirming of a value that I have—to have other people validating that value and me personally too. I have those values and it’s nice to feel someone saying that “you’re not this nutter” who goes and sings in nature. But rather, let’s do this together—Yes!

Despite occasional feelings of discomfort or self-consciousness, we felt a strong sense of community with each other. Perhaps it was the xeno-song or the sharing of something “off the wall” as Frances said. Victor Turner (1982) may have called it spontaneous communitas in which intense personal interaction takes place with “a flash of lucid mutual understanding” (48). He writes that “when spontaneous communitas is upon us, we place a high value on personal honesty, openness, and lack of pretentions” (48). Ellen illustrated this idea perfectly during an email exchange:

We six women came together, strangers mostly, and evolved into a community through shared experience. It wasn’t really through talking together, though we did, but I think more from ‘being’ together, breathing and feeling and expressing in unison with our environment. This sense of us putting our egos aside to merge with one another, vocally, but also in so many other ways, to engage as fully as we could, alone and collectively

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159 Ibid.
with our environment, … in an essential way, in an open and safe and joyful engagement of our voices and our beings with each other and the environment around us.\textsuperscript{160}

\textit{Incidental Audience (Passersby)}

Something that influenced us during our performances were the passersby. We did not want or ask for an audience, but they were there nonetheless. Although the aim for most of us was not to engage the audience, they often did engage with us. Just as often, they whirred past on their bicycles, ignoring us completely. Sometimes they seemed embarrassed by us and took a wide berth or sped up as they passed. Some stopped to listen and watch, but most were on their way to somewhere else and this unexpected occurrence was a momentary distraction on their journey.

Just as immersion took place for the performers, it also took place for some passersby, although not in the same way that it would have if an audience been an integral part of the performance. In a traditional performance, the audience enters knowing that a performance is about to take place and plans to take on the role of observer/receiver.

In Schafer’s theatre of confluence, immersion is an important element, however it does not look the same from one opus to the next. In Schafer’s \textit{The Wolf Project} there is no outside audience at all—not even an incidental audience. In fact, it is an extremely private event. Participants are performer and audience alike, and the nine-day performance is completely integrated. Immersion happens between those directly involved. In Schafer’s \textit{Asterion}, however, audience is placed inside the piece, immersed through direct one-on-one contact with the performer and surrounded by the set (Smith 2014). Audience members enter the performance

\textsuperscript{160} Ellen, email exchange with author, December 21, 2020.
space one at a time, traversing a built environment that is guided along a path, such as is the case with a labyrinth. They encounter performances along the way and have no escape (except for in the case of an emergency) and must engage with/be engaged by performers in order to experience the whole piece. What the audience member says or does can shift the dramatic action. In *The Greatest Show*, the audience is immersed in the action of the piece and responses to performers can change the performance in the action of the carnival setting. In other works, such as *Princess of the Stars*, *The Enchanted Forest* and *Spirit Garden*, the audience takes on the role of observer/receiver of an experience rather than a participant in it. There is an element of immersion in these latter works. The audience is guided to the location and greeted by costumed ushers once they arrive. The audience is there, following the story and being part of the scene, but they are largely observers/receivers rather than actors.

In *The Singing Field*, the audience does not really fall into any of these categories or distinctions. We were the performers, and we were the audience. But some passersby became part of the audience and, in some cases, co-performers when they responded to our sounds, which in turn affected what we did. They were not immersed in any of the ways that Machon (2013) suggests—they were not absorbed or transported or totally immersed. They could have fashioned their own narrative and journey as in total immersion, but no one chose to. The audience could come and go and pass by and interact and even join in as they wished, which maybe had immersive qualities, but it was not immersion in the true sense of the word. Cait reflected on the passersby, commenting on how disconnected they seemed:

> It seemed like we all entered with an idea of what we expected to hear and then we left with a changed perspective on the other side. The people passing through may not have had that same experience. They are not going through and being changed by the
environment as we were. It was interesting to see them whipping by and I wanted to say “You don’t know what you’re missing!”

Frances added a comment about the seeming disconnectedness of the passersby during the Petrie Lane debrief:

I liked the cyclists zooming through. I didn’t want them to stop necessarily. What it highlighted for me is what happens when you really slow down and stop the busyness. And then when they went by it was like—oh yeah—that happens too! You have to stop in an environment and really feel it [to realize how it can be] entirely transformed by the human voice. I think a place is made sacred by the interaction and relationship.

Ellen saw passersby as a part of our performance:

I liked the idea that it was a thoroughfare. There was something interesting about people on bikes whooshing through—like—taking our sound with them or trying to not hear a sound. They were part of it—they were bit actors coming and going. I felt [the tunnel] was like a blank slate that was so generous to us, and [included] this other variable of people coming and going.

When writing about the passersby in her journal, Helen expressed considerable discomfort. She felt policed even when we sang together in front of the camera and microphones which clearly indicated that it was a performance. Even the support of our community did not always help her.

Lots of people walked and biked through the space we were in, which was a narrow bridge over the dam. I had my back to them almost always, because of Covid-19 but also to be invisible, to avoid their eyes because I was a bit embarrassed. Weird singing and sounds, alien to other performers, pushing against the huge wall of water sound. Sometimes I sang quietly to disappear a bit more.

161 Cait, group debrief at the tunnel, Kanata, July 6, 2020.
162 Frances, group debrief at the tunnel, Kanata, July 6, 2020.
163 Ellen, group debrief at the tunnel, Kanata, July 6, 2020.
164 Helen, journal entry, summer 2020.
During her exit interview, Helen expanded on her perspective. She noted that passersby were walking through our singing in each place and although she did not feel comfortable with them, she did not feel at risk. “Their opinions did not matter. We’ll never know what they thought, or ever see them again”.

Cait, though, shared how the presence of the passersby gave her a feeling of being policed while singing in unusual places when she said:

I did find myself feeling nervous being in such a public space—I had a shaky lower jaw—something I don’t usually get when performing. So it shows that this whole thing in general—being out in public—experiencing it in a public environment is a little different when it’s people who are not expecting you to be singing.

Cait noted that the experience of singing on Sparks Street Mall was the most playful, and the most fun. She said that she connected with both our performance community and passersby there. “I feel a part of it all with the people and the hubbub—life in the city. You can see [the direction from which] all the people are coming and where they are going to and see all the changes [in the streetscape]—we’re just part of the flow.”

This remark led to a conversation about social expectations when we are in public places. Ellen pointed out that “everybody’s doing something. We’re doing something, they’re doing something. Looking at their cell phones and walking their dogs. We’re doing something like they are and they’re not really looking at us.” Cait answered, “And they don’t stop to focus. Everyone is doing their own thing, including us. ‘Something’s happening—whatever! No big deal’” And she added, “It’s strange that it feels friendly. I don’t always feel the city to feel friendly. Like

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165 Helen, exit interview with author, Kanata, August 26, 2020.
166 Cait, group debrief, the Tunnel, Kanata, July 6, 2020.
167 Cait, group debrief at Sparks Street Mall, August 5, 2020.
when you go on a bus. [At Sparks Street], there was no one walking by with weird faces—they were all so receptive.” Frances validated Cait and Ellen’s remarks by saying, “Maybe the pedestrian mall is part of that. You’re not on a mission in a pedestrian mall. You’re just in a place that’s meant to be inhabited by people”.168

During her exit interview, Ellen raised the topic of acting “normal.” In response to my remark that we were at ease on the Sparks Street Mall, she said, “And not just at ease, but because we are usually so contained—that’s an urban phenomenon. We don’t really want to make asses of ourselves. There’s a lot of prescribed behaviour on Sparks Street Mall. In most of those places. Like being in an elevator, we know what to do in those places … we departed from that.”169

For me, the presence of the five other singers was essential to my own feelings of courage and safety in The Singing Field, particularly in the presence of an incidental audience. I often sing on my own in different places, but I always make sure there is no one else around to bother, annoy, or who might criticize. When other people are present, solo singing becomes a performance in a more traditional sense. I feel more of a need in such settings for costumes or staging so that passersby are clear about what they are seeing. I do not think I have the courage to face the vulnerability of solo performance as in The Singing Field. Community was important to all of us during The Singing Field 2020, making us feel both safe and vulnerable at different times.

168 Ellen, Cait and Frances, group debrief at Sparks Street Mall, Ottawa, August 6, 2020.
169 Ellen, exit interview with author, video call, August 26, 2020.
Vulnerability

The Singing Field tested our sense of vulnerability and caused us to question that feeling. Was it negative? Positive? Did it exist at all? Why? And why not?

Perhaps it is not surprising that the six women in the group felt vulnerable at times. By placing ourselves in public places and making unusual sounds in the presence of others, we placed ourselves at risk of being policed. Our experience of being policed highlights a concept put forward by Christopher Tonelli (2020) who, in turn, had borrowed it from philosopher Jacques Rancière (126). We spoke about these conditions and their effects on how we felt vulnerable, on how being in a community of women afforded us a feeling of protection in most cases, on how they affected our vocalizations, and on how we protected ourselves. Despite the unusual nature of what we did, singing in public in an unconventional manner with a mutually supportive group of women was, for some of us, less threatening than being a woman in many of the male-dominated spaces in which we work and live. Cait, for example, felt that if there had been a man in the group, she would have felt more vulnerable, saying, “I think if the group were different, I might not have felt that same comfort …. All women … it does offer that comfort.”

The fact that women improvising together is not an everyday occurrence (Smith 2004) led us to discuss how, because we were women, we were used to feelings of vulnerability, giving us an extra boost of courage to be creative in these unusual circumstances.

Kelly-Anne spoke about vulnerability in terms of her voice and vocal training, and of the importance of letting go of received ideas about proper vocal technique in order to feel a sense of freedom. In her exit interview, she said:

170 Cait, group debrief at Sarasparilla Trail, Ottawa, August 22, 2020.
Using the voice in such experimental ways, it creates a vulnerability, especially the
growling and letting my voice crack, and not being concerned about the quality of my
voice. Where’s my tongue, jaw—am I breathing properly, into my back? The technical
side was gone. There was lot of freedom. 171

She was able to break through her feelings of vulnerability caused by singing in unusual
ways. Kelly-Anne explained this breakthrough by quoting from Terry Tempest Williams’s
(2012) When Women Were Birds: “We all have our secrets. I hold mine. To withhold words is
power. But to share our words with others, openly and honestly, is also power” (16). Kelly-Anne
said, “That explains my experience of vulnerability when using my voice, of telling my story,
and the experience of being vulnerable with the voice.”172

For Kelly-Anne, these were poignant words since she was soon to embark on IVF
treatment and felt silenced and shamed regarding the coming procedure. She was the only
performer who spoke about vulnerability in terms of the relationship between her singing and her
body as she prepared both mentally and physically for that treatment. In summer 2020, she used
her experience in The Singing Field to help with that process:

I wanted to feel connected with my body. This process with the environment—because of
where I am internally the physical is such an important thing to me right now. The voice
and all of our sings has been moving my internal energy. It’s been preparing me
internally for the process. A process that has changed my voice. And a process that will
change my body in ways that I don’t know. So it’s scary. It made me more vulnerable.
I’m working through personal issues about being able to control or not control certain
things about the environment around me and my circumstances. 173

Ellen also expressed a feeling of vulnerability, but in her case, it stemmed from her lack
of previous vocal experience. She also recognized that her lack of musical training was an asset
in certain ways:

172 Ibid.
It took several sings to get rid of all the stuff about other people and the camera and I just really resonated with the place. I was very aware of my lack of singing experience. I also felt that my lack of musical experience was an asset because I didn’t have a lot of baggage about training and how I should sound. The minus is that I don’t have the skills. I couldn’t always mesh with somebody else. I would try to do what they were doing and then realized I couldn’t. It was in my head what I intended to do. But if I didn’t think about the finished product, if I didn’t try to manipulate myself or control myself then a very authentic expression of the environment came out.\textsuperscript{174}

She worked through her feelings of vulnerability by interacting with the passersby.

I’m a connector, so I couldn’t help but make eye contact with lots of people. Not always—if I was deep in doing my own thing—but other times, I made a point of connecting, smiling, exchanging looks as if to say, “you know what I’m doing, and what do you think?” I made eye contact with someone and I tried to put them at ease [which in turn] let them put me at ease. Those were nice little moments. Like the other day there was a woman who looked like “that’s weird” and I looked back with “yes—it’s fun!” just with our eyes. A bit like how we were [connecting] with the leaves and the trees. I was just going to connect with her and say “what I’m doing is ok” and then she could say to me visually “yes everything is ok” and that made me feel safe in doing it.\textsuperscript{175}

During her exit interview, Ellen pointed out that her feelings of vulnerability stemmed less from a lack of courage than from a sense of self-protection.

Maybe it’s not a lack of courage—maybe it’s instinct. I don’t want to share my true feelings [or allow for] true expression in places that feel unsafe. That’s not lack of courage—that might be good judgement. We’ve talked about sexism and racism—I’ve had anti-Semitism in my life too—we probably all do as Jews. So I don’t necessarily share my Jewishness with people when I pick up that “this is weird” energy. And that’s not because I’m ashamed of who I am. It’s that I don’t want to expose myself—make myself vulnerable with people I don’t trust. So maybe it’s the same with singing or any goofy thing I might do alone. It’s actually self-protection.\textsuperscript{176}

Her comment gave me pause to consider when in my own life I have felt similarly vulnerable due to being in environments where I felt unsafe. I can certainly relate to holding

\textsuperscript{174} Ellen, exit interview with author, video call, August 26, 2020.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{176} Ibid.
back on sharing my Jewishness with others. And I recognize this same feeling in my own practice of *EVE*.

In contrast to Ellen, Helen kept her eyes to herself as her mode of protection. Like Cait, Helen found safety in our community of women.

Because it was a human structured environment in which people can do all sorts of things, street theatre was nothing there [At the Sparks Street Mall]. The buildings were very neutral whereas in nature the plants have being—they have life—they are entities. They’re much more humble in a way and I don’t want to impose myself. Whereas at the Sparks Street Mall— I was surprised how easy I found that. I still wouldn’t make eye contact with people. Some of the group were watching people as they went by but I just still kept my eyes down. *The Singing Field* participants helped me feel safe. We were an official looking group with sound and video, so that was reassuring and worthy of pride. The women singers especially felt like a team of like-minded, thoughtful, playful people.177

Being vulnerable as women was both comfortable and uncomfortable. We are used to it and perhaps that increased our freedom. Maybe it held us back at times. It certainly led us to discuss it and to consider its implications.

**Playfulness, Curiosity, and Creativity**

Playfulness, curiosity and creativity are concepts that emerged separately in my discussions with the participants, but I have combined them here to reflect their connections to each other. A sense of play, curiosity, and creativity permeated our activities at all of the sites.

Through vocal and rhythmic play, we felt a sense of curiosity and creativity in terms of the sounds we made, and the ways in which we interacted with one another and with the sites. Play offered possibilities for new insight. Rebecca Caines and Ajay Heble (2015) write that spontaneous acts of creativity can offer “resources for hope and social transformation” (2).

177 Helen, exit interview with author, video call, August 26, 2020.
Caines states that “we seek and are changed by surprises arising from working and playing together” (384). Expressing ourselves creatively helped to soften any feelings of vulnerability that we experienced. It helped us keep our minds open to changes in the way we perceived one another, the environment, and our selves. Experiences of playfulness stood out, especially at Sparks Street Mall. After our sing there, we had a conversation about our shared feelings of playfulness, curiosity and creativity in terms of the sounds we made and how we sang together.

Ellen: I like how we played together, to catch something and pass it on.  
Nicola: It was nice to connect with each other because we haven’t had a chance to do that yet.  
Ellen: And other places didn’t allow it. We couldn’t do it at a waterfall, and we couldn’t do it in the tunnel so much either.  
Helen: We were the most physical too. You [Frances] danced everywhere you went. It’s nice to get our bodies involved.  
Cait: This place doesn’t dictate the sound as much as the tunnel did.  
Helen: And the waterfall swallowed us up, so this was a happy medium.  
Cait: It dictates the sound you’re trying to give—when the environment is receptive or not receptive. Here there are all sorts of areas—some receptive and some not. I found my favourite places and kept gravitating back to them.  

As Cait pointed out, the degree to which different environments were receptive to vocal exploration was, in part, a function of the acoustics of the spaces in which we sang. The materiality, shape, and function of the places also impacted our music-making and the extent to which we felt free to engage in exploratory forms of vocal play as evidenced by the following exchange:

Ellen: I was wondering about the function. For the tunnel, the function was a pathway under a road. It was very much transportation. Last week it was very much about water [damming the water to create a canal]. And this time it’s very much about people.  
Nicola: And things that people have made.  
Ellen: I think we feel very “people” too.

178 Ellen, Helen and Cait, group debrief, Sparks Street Mall, Ottawa, August 5, 2020.
Helen: I felt it was fun. Fun and crazy and anything goes. In the city you can do crazy and fun things.\(^{179}\)

Ellen experienced playfulness at the Sparks Street Mall where she made rhythmic sounds with her hands and feet as she sang. “It feels very child-like (in a good way),” she said, “to approach all these surfaces with curiosity to see what will come of it.”\(^{180}\) At Petrie Lane, she gave herself more permission to play. She said, “I had less concern about measuring my vocal offerings and instead, let my intuition guide my noise-making”.\(^{181}\)

At Hog’s Back, Kelly-Anne noticed “… a space between two rocks that you couldn’t see down in between. And I wanted to be a part of it. I wanted to sing to that. It was like a hidden special place that I connected to even though it was one place where I wasn’t getting all of the visual stimulation. It was a secret hidden spot, and I sang into that quite a bit.”\(^{182}\) There is a childlike playfulness in Kelly-Anne’s comment, in which one can imagine being a small child inhabiting their solitude in a special corner. For her, something special occupied that secret spot, bringing to mind the words of Gaston Bachelard (1958) who writes, “for to great dreamers of corners and holes, nothing is ever empty” (159).

In our debrief after the final day at Sarsaparilla Trail, Kelly-Anne described her feelings of curiosity and play that led to an intensely creative process which, in turn, led to an insight about the significance of transition:

I had three distinct phases of transition. They were receiving in silence, energizing and integrating, and finally, creation. At the beginning I was in silence giving myself time to just be. My body did not create or make sound. If I had done so, it would have felt forced, so I let the silence live. When we came into the sunny clearing, the tone that came out seemed to gather everything and synthesize it, and then as I changed the vowel it felt like

\(^{179}\) Ellen, Nicola and Helen, group debrief at Sparks Street Mall, Ottawa, August 5, 2020.
\(^{180}\) Ellen, group debrief at Sparks Street Mall, Ottawa, August 5, 2020.
\(^{181}\) Ellen, journal entry, summer 2020.
\(^{182}\) Kelly-Anne, group debrief at Hog’s Back, July 22, 2020.
I was scooping everything in, taking in the sun energy and letting it resonate inside. After that, melody just came and it felt natural. When there was density in the forest, I felt that I could express more intensity in my voice and that’s when the melody was created. It made me think about how important transitions are. This walk with time and mindfulness and paying attention made me realize how critical and beautiful and creative these transitions in time can be. That was significant for me.\(^{183}\)

Cait commented on playfulness in relation to singing on Richmond Road:

A kid doesn’t care. They just sing .... It’s about getting back to that place. I don’t usually want to make weird noises, but then the motorcycle goes by and it was totally—I’m going to make a motorcycle noise! There were some moments when the environment did inspire that play ability and the ability to let that structure go. It’s given me the opportunity to be aware that I can be more of a spontaneous singer.\(^{184}\)

Kelly-Anne felt that at the beginning she was experimenting vocally in a somewhat conscious manner. As the summer went on, she learned to be in the moment more fully and trust the co-creative process.

I developed my singing field to where I was able to be in the moment and I was able to get to the place of creation in melody. Prior to that I did sing tones, but I also did growls and groans. I did a lot with my voice because I was trying to see what I can let this voice do when it’s not in a song form. At the beginning it was more of an exploration—what can I do? Towards the end it was more spontaneous creation with less effort required.\(^{185}\)

Kelly-Anne also experimented with rhythm. She felt that when she did something rhythmic with her voice, it helped her when she “needed a bit of space” from her emotional response to the experience. She also used rhythmic tones to ground herself when the environment was more stimulating to her senses than was comfortable in that moment. I noticed Helen working with rhythm also, especially in Sparks Street Mall—less with her voice and more in an exploration of items around her. Ellen speaks about this exploration in relation to her love of dance, saying, “I

\(^{183}\) Kelly-Anne, group debrief at Sarasparilla Trail, Ottawa, August 22, 2020.
\(^{184}\) Cait, exit interview with author, video call, Ottawa, August 29, 2020.
\(^{185}\) Kelly-Anne, exit interview with author, video call, August 24, 2020.
would have danced, and I would have made beats and tried to jump on the trees more, but I try to keep it in check. My musicality comes from rhythm rather than singing”. Some felt inspired to move playfully. I regret that I did not invite people to dance if they felt inspired to do so. A rhythmic body percussion segment took place spontaneously in Sparks Street Mall. This was born out of pure playfulness, a playfulness that extended to the extraordinary vocal improvisation afterward.

*The Singing Field* gave us much to consider. Our perceptions of our vocal selves changed through our experiences with the acoustics of the locations in which we sang, our feelings of spirituality and community, the presence of incidental audience, and our shared feelings of vulnerability and playfulness. Our perceptions of place were similarly transformed.

**Relationship with Place**

The environments or places in which we sang were at the heart of the study. Places were, in a sense, characters in the play and improvising partners in our performances. Performers highlighted their changing perceptions of place by discussing topics including the environmental impact of humans, the built environment, the natural environment, and settler culture. We also discussed our perceptions of history and industrialization and changing relationships between humans and environments.

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186 Ellen, exit interview with author, video call, August 26, 2020.
187 A short clip of the body percussion that emerged can be heard here: [https://soundcloud.com/nicola-rose-55/body-percussion-in-the-singing](https://soundcloud.com/nicola-rose-55/body-percussion-in-the-singing)
Our experiences in *The Singing Field* highlighted the impact of humans on places. That impact was evident even when we sang in more natural locations such as the trail and marsh where we could still hear the road and the occasional airplane flying overhead and could see the hydro lines near the marsh and the refuse left behind by former visitors to the site. All of this affected our experience and our perception of ourselves and of the places in which we sang.

*The Built Environment (Architecture, Structure, and Materials)*

The six sites offered an array of built environments in which to sing. The built environment had a significant impact on each of our sings, ranging from the stark, reverberant walls of the tunnel to
the rushing water and concrete dam at the falls, to the architectural variety of the pedestrian mall, the asphalt juxtaposed by forest on the busy roadway, the gentle forested pathway and the viewing platform overlooking marshland framed by hydro lines. Built elements were everywhere and inspired much conversation about the impact that humans have on the natural world. The discussion about human impact ranged from acceptance to expressions of feeling overwhelmed. Some even felt empowered and inspired. I will discuss two perspectives in this section. The first is our experience of intermateriality between ourselves and places. The second relates to the relative comfort we felt at the sites in which we sang despite the evidence of human impact we experienced at each location.

Eidsheim (2015a) discusses the effect that intermateriality has on the experience of singing and how we experience sounds. Returning to her study of the work of underwater opera singer Juliana Snapper, she writes: “In its unfamiliarity, listening underwater brings the relationship between sound, matter and eardrum—which, in air, we take for granted—into relief” (45). In The Singing Field, the places in which we sang were unfamiliar to most of us, and we noticed a similar change in our awareness of matter, sound, and our bodies. This recognition was instrumental in changing our perceptions of place as noted in the following examples.

Several of us felt the impact of the built environment by singing in the tunnel with its reverberant acoustics. Ellen describes her experience of intermateriality changing her perception at Petrie Lane:

I began by growling, trying to echo the motors above, but once inside, there was no exterior. It was just me and the angled walls. Slowly advancing, step by breath [sic], and exhaling magnified sounds, felt as expansive as the space. I was not aware of time or place just noise I emitted, some low gravely sounds others sliding upwards softly and
drifting back to a deep rumble, all of them reverberating inside my body as they bounced off the tunnel sides. 188

Frances’s initial thoughts at Petrie Lane were about the cement from which the tunnel was made, and how it is “a nightmare material.” But then, “when I got to the end, I felt an overwhelming gratitude to be able to sing there. So much is given by a bike tunnel. That seems a windfall—one of those things that happens that is so generous—to be given that space”. 189 In her journal, she added, “It seemed to me that we were in an enormous organ pipe with fundamentals and mutations in the harmonic series set in motion by the fundamental.” 190

For Frances, the acoustics of the tunnel were such that it became a partner in the music-making. “We were singing in duet with the tunnel,” 191 she noted. Kelly-Anne had a similar experience at the Petrie Lane tunnel. Her experience of intermateriality there gave her a feeling that the tunnel became personified—that it actively engaged with her. During the debrief afterward, she commented,

The space is in relationship to you—it’s so attuned. Everything that I put into the space—it came back to me. I could hear overtones of my voice that the acoustics gave me, that I wouldn’t hear if I were to do the same sound out here. Rhythmically it embellished anything I did. So to have that kind of “what I put out comes out enhanced” from the place puts me in a relationship with that place. 192

The dam site at Hog’s Back included a broader range of surfaces, sounds, and materials including lake water, rushing water, rock, concrete, steel, and wood. In addition to the built elements, there was a raft of ducks there, taking advantage of the ponds created by water that

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188 Ellen, journal entry, summer 2020.
189 Frances, group debrief at the tunnel, July 6, 2020.
190 Frances, journal entry, summer 2020.
191 Ibid.
192 Kelly-Anne, group debrief at the tunnel, July 6, 2020.
pooled in the rock formations exposed by the dam. Ellen shared that each material evoked a
different response for her:

It was thrilling to travel through so many locations within the location (waterfalls,
whirling river, flat lake, layered rock) and share it not only with our group (who were
mostly hard to hear but comforting none the less) but with ducks and seagulls and
walkers and cyclists. Over the hour or so we traversed the falls, my feelings went from
excited (keen to start) to stimulated (standing over the rushing water) to calm (travelling
on the far aside on the rocks) to somber or even sad (when we reached the end of the
route) …. Matching the loud roar of the falls with my voice, high and low, humming,
breathy or emphatic felt quite different than how the flat water with paddle-boarders on
the lake made me sing. Talk about 180 degrees! Just by turning around, the sound in my
ears, the view, and my response to them changed how I sang.  

Kelly-Anne’s response to the experience of intermateriality at Hog’s Back was full of mixed
feelings. “I find it challenging to put this into words. It almost feels like the environment has a
direct link to my nervous system—it can ramp it up or calm it down. I don’t feel like I have
much agency over the impact the environment has on my body”.  

Some were inspired by the impact of humans on that site while singing there. Ellen, for
example, wrote:

Even though these falls were created by the channeling and damming of ancient
waterways, I still thrilled at their force and fluidity. The tunnel and bike path were heavy
and static, the falls were the opposite, almost alive … the water, in all its different forms
(lake, river and falls) demanded that I engage with it, not perform on it. Hogs Back was
dynamic and as result I was drawn to interact with it (not upon it).  

And in her journal, Helen expressed a completely different reaction to her experience of
intermateriality at Hog’s Back:

193 Ellen, journal entry, summer 2020.
194 Kelly-Anne, journal entry, summer 2020.
It is indifferent to my small sounds. It is huge and old and worn into beautiful shapes. Its place and experience of time is completely different from mine. It does not notice. However, the bigness of it all includes me and all the people walking and riding over the bridge. We are all connected in the still centre, even if we can’t get there easily.\textsuperscript{196}

Later, during the exit interview, she noted that even though it was not always easy, something positive could come from the experience of singing by the falls:

It was the whole geology of that place—the gorge and the rocks and the volume of water and the loudness of it. But looking back, that was an important occasion. I found what worked, and just because I felt tiny, doesn’t mean that experience was negative … there was a huge amount of ancient energy there. I was singing a lullaby and improvised on it. It gave structure to this amazing chaos and energy. I found the way to be there and counterbalance it.\textsuperscript{197}

Ellen compared her experience at Hog’s Back to her experience of the world at large:

I thought it was a bit like the current situation in the world too. Life now is chaotic and unpredictable, and there’s a lot of noise and complication. Then when we came down [below the falls], there was some kind of resolution. And there were ducks and rain and people paddling. Everything balanced out. It wasn’t just a shit show. There are balances in the struggles. 

\textit{Helen:} [in response to the above] And beauty.\textsuperscript{198}

During the debrief at Hog’s Back, I noted that I had a strong emotional reaction to the impact of humans on the site:

A big sense of melancholy came out in my singing. I wanted to cry. I really got into thinking about what’s going on here with the water and the capturing of the water and this incredible river just being stopped. All those rocks in there were formed by this raging river and now they’re all just exposed because the water can’t go over them anymore. Then I was looking out over the part here [the lake] and all that trapped water and how it is held back. There’s a sense of taming this wildness and humans just do that … It really sunk in.\textsuperscript{199}

\textsuperscript{196} Helen, journal entry, summer 2020, August 24, 2020. 
\textsuperscript{197} Helen, exit interview with author, Ottawa, 
\textsuperscript{198} Ellen, group debrief at Hog’s Back, Ottawa, July 22, 2020. 
\textsuperscript{199} Nicola, group debrief at Hog’s Back, Ottawa, July 22, 2020.
Being at Sparks Street Mall was a completely different experience, in which nothing at all was natural; humans had built everything including buildings and the street, with construction still ongoing. As in many cityscapes, humans even chose the placement of the few trees that were there. Ellen wrote about Sparks Street in her journal saying,

It is becoming evident to me that the environment is much more than how it ‘looks.’ It is speaking to me AND I am speaking to it. It’s more like a conversation rather than a monologue, and it’s on a multi-sensory level. Although the visual qualities of a place are relevant, like judgements about “how” it looks, such as “pretty” or “natural” or “chaotic,” so are the sounds a place makes, and the air quality, and the people I am sharing the space with, and what the environment is made of.200

In the debrief at the Sparks Street Mall, Helen said, “I just became more aware of it all. City, city, and then ‘oh! Look at it over there!’ Everything’s different. Every little bit you look at. So much variety and differences in colour and shape. It’s all very human. Totally human!” “Our human habitat,” I added. “We’re very comfortable in the city. It’s not a foreign entity for those of us who have experienced it.” And Helen responded:

I see it as a positive thing rather than worrying. There’s so much good and so much awful. So much beauty in human endeavours. Cities are great examples of both those extremes. The most beautiful human constructions are there, and the worst pollution and ruining of the environment.201

Helen found that she became more aware of the intermateriality of the place through singing there:

In this city-scape, my voice felt natural. It was a human part of a completely human environment. I could explore all kinds of sounds very loudly or quietly. My voice was happy to blend with other singers, find their sounds, mimic them, take their sounds and play with them. I played with different textures, tried rhythms on some surfaces and edges. I knew it as a pedestrian street where people walk and visit, and shop in the day. I never looked at the details as much before. This environment was made of hard surfaces

200 Ellen, journal entry, summer 2020.
201 Helen and Nicola, group debrief at Sparks Street Mall, Ottawa, August 5, 2020.
of many kinds, sizes, shapes. Each had a huge amount of energy that came with its history, the building, maintenance, use, solidity of its presence totally created by humans for humans. It was a passive kind of strength, hoping to last forever in some form (restored, rebuilt). Kind of impossible, but that is what the humans had planned. Here were these hard shapes, bouncing a variety of sounds in so many different ways. The environment tells me I am familiar, one of a huge number of people who have passed that way over a long time (for a city). I fit there; I can do crazy creative things because the scope of humans is vast for what we can create in the moment. Every moment is over so quickly, let go, done, ready for the next.\textsuperscript{202}

Yi-Fu Tuan (1974) takes what can be a person’s experience of the city beyond comfort to a sense of liberation, claiming that this kind of response to the city is a cultural phenomenon. He writes that the city “liberates its citizens from the need for incessant toil to maintain their bodies and from the feeling of impotence before nature’s vagaries” (150). As much as the industrial and post-industrial city is a sign of the destruction of the natural world, it is where the majority of the world’s population lives, so we are comfortable there. In her exit interview, Kelly-Anne remarked on her place in the human world: “I didn’t feel sad in the urban environments. I don’t think humans make very good choices to protect the environments, but at the same time in those particular spaces I didn’t feel very sad.”\textsuperscript{203} I responded to Kelly-Anne’s remark by saying,

We’re humans in a human place, so it makes sense that we’re comfortable there. That’s been a new awareness for me in this project. Sparks Street evoked a lot of playfulness. It was inspiring to think about the diversity of the architecture there, and we did discuss the fact that this was once a village for a First Nations community and how weird it is that Europeans just marched in and changed it all. But no, I didn’t feel sad that day either. The fact that I felt playful there was a surprise. I expected to feel the grief and the losses. I felt very much in community even with the people walking by. We made eye contact, smiled at each other and shared the occasional thumbs-up. An interesting phenomenon that I didn’t expect.\textsuperscript{204}

\textsuperscript{202} Helen, journal entry, summer 2020.
\textsuperscript{203} Kelly-Anne, group debrief at Sparks Street Mall, Ottawa, August 5, 2020.
\textsuperscript{204} Nicola, group debrief at Sparks St. Mall, Ottawa, August 5, 2020.
Cait made an observation about evolution, change and the passage of time that was apparent in the various locations:

I like the heritage aspect of the area, but also the industrialness of the buildings and the renovations. There’s such a timeline and an evolution to that place. I feel that this is applicable to all of the places where we sang. Even the forest has evolution and change. Especially with the road coming in and all the construction that was going on there. Even the viewing platform wasn’t there forever. And in the pond—how much wildlife was there enjoying the space before that was created. How many trees were there before the path was created in the forest?205

We responded to these sites with a kind of acceptance, allowing ourselves to express ourselves freely as a way to simply “be” with perceptions that arose. This sense of acceptance was evident in the responses to singing at the side of Richmond Road. Helen found it comfortable, saying, “I was reacting to the sound of vehicles coming and going and added a little swoosh to them. The human environment—like last time—made it acceptable to do anything. The humans are making a noise already, so we can do what we want.”206

For Kelly-Anne, the rushing traffic and her way of interacting with the vehicles was akin to “putting them in their place”:

I was repeatedly telling off the cars and just unloading on them. I was responding to my internal environment that was stressed by the sound of vehicles and I instantly released my voice in response. It was so satisfying to have that self-regulation through my voice. It was satisfying to be able to tell them off and not really have a consequence to it.207

In her journal, Ellen wrote that she found the sing on the roadside comical, and in the debrief she said,

I was working on synthesis. I was thinking “there go the cars!” They’re just doing what they’re doing and then you turn around and there were these flowers and trees and

206 Helen, group debrief at Richmond Road, Ottawa, August 22, 2020.
207 Kelly-Anne, group debrief at Richmond Road, Ottawa, August 22, 2020.
everything just there and these power lines, and the pavement and the way as humans we just make a slash through the environment, but the environment just carries on. I actually had a good time going “there go the cars.” It is what it is. There was the chorus behind me. An orchestra in the sunshine of these flowers. They don’t care about the cars. I was going back and forth between whoosh! And Ah! [when singing to the flowers]. The cars didn’t bug me an ounce. They usually do but I decided they were just punctuation. I enjoyed the dichotomy of it. The complexity—the juxtaposition. 208

Singing at the roadside next to the forest gave us the opportunity to consider the connection between the human and natural world. That slash of pavement through the forest placed the two in direct contrast to each other. Frances poetically said that “As singers we’re halfway in between. We’re kind of interacting—both the human and natural environment. So, we’re like a little bridge.” 209 When singing in that place where one world intersected with the other, we were able to experience a connection between the force of nature and human influence.

Ellen summarized her views on the complex relationship between humanity and the environment as follows:

We’ve been destroying our environment for a long time. It’s the human condition and I don’t condone it. I think we’re stewards, so if we can, honour it. If by being more attentive to the environment we honour it more we might not be so destructive. It doesn’t change the fact that we destroy things. Our very existence makes us destroy things. Every footprint after we’ve walked there—it’s not the same as before. I don’t want to be self-negating. “We lousy humans screwed up.” I don’t think that. I think we’re human. 210

**Settler Culture, History, and Industrialization**

There is a clear crossover between the built environment and settler culture, history, and industrialization. We found an array of experiences in the built environment ranging from gratitude to surprise, and even a thrill when singing in some places. Sometimes it felt natural to

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208 Ellen, journal entry, summer 2020.
209 Frances, group debrief at Richmond Road, Ottawa, August 22, 2020.
210 Ellen, exit interview with author, video call, August 26, 2020.
sing in these places. We felt a strange juxtaposition, feeling the impact of humans from both positive and negative viewpoints.

There is beauty in the built environment, in history and industrialization. But it is also, literally, concrete evidence of settler culture, around us all the time. Dylan Robinson (2020) created a piece with curator, writer, and researcher Candice Hopkins, entitled “Event Score for Guest Listening,” in which a large score was placed in various locations to elicit awareness on the part of visitor, asking them to rethink how they listened to place. At Queen’s University, the score points out that the living limestone, made immovable by having been turned into walls, goes against Anishninaabe tradition in which limestone “has life and existence as an ancestor” (100).

Limestone hums
   with audible-inaudible sound of quarry, cut and chisel
The subfrequency of colonial labour
   resonates your body.

As these walls declare their immovability,
Listen instead to the seepage of water through stone

As these walls declare their necessary structure
Listen instead to the singe and sear of their structures burn down

As these structures declare themselves walls
Hear these stones, as still the land (99)

This score is a reminder of the beauty and life that lies within each resource that is taken from the earth. When in a city, I will often marvel at the architecture, the amenities, the other people, or the storefronts. It was when singing in place that I became acutely aware of what came before, and the means by which the city became what it is. Our experience at Sparks Street Mall prompted discussion about settler culture, history, and industrialization as it is an environment
completely taken over by colonial architecture, displaying a microcosm of the history of settler colonialism in Ottawa. In a conversation during the debrief there, Frances asked:

What was it like before settler culture came here? Was it a big forest? What was going on? That’s here too.

_Helen:_ Would it have been a first nations community?

_Ellen:_ It was an encampment here where the parliament buildings are. [She remembered] a beautiful painting in the Museum of History [showing] what it looked like 300 years ago. It was an indigenous village all along the river. Right here.

Frances continued by expanding on her thoughts:

There were lots of different feelings in some of those doorways or in the pillared building plus the place in general. I wasn’t thinking about the environment in there. I was thinking about human history—settler history. A human history environment.

Frances noted that it was curious, that the only vestige of the original First Nations presence was a craft shop selling Indigenous crafts there. She commented, “that’s all we’ve allowed to remain. It was all just taken from them.”

I felt the effects of colonialism in every site we visited. From the functional tunnel built at Petrie Lane, to the dammed-up waters of Hog’s Back, the built-up street at Sparks Street Mall, the slash of pavement through the forest at Sarsaparilla Trail, and the trail itself which is a vestige of what was once there. To sing in those places was, for me, to imagine what was there before. Before intellectualizing the experience, I felt the same kind of environmental countertransference that I experienced when singing at the mine site in Cornwall when I sensed the miner’s drudgery. This was my most impactful and surprising take-away from my experience in _The Singing Field._

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211 Frances, Ellen and Helen, group debrief at Sparks Street Mall, Ottawa, August 5, 2020.
In her lecture “Making Oddkin: Story Telling for Earthly Survival” (2017) and in her writings (Haraway 2016a; 2016b), Donna Haraway advocates for compassion for both the environment and self, stating that we can “follow [our] curiosity” as we work toward “[living] in a thick way now—taking care of each other—human and non-human” to “strengthen the art of living on a damaged planet”. These statements were illuminating while I dwelt in the phase of analysis and discovery.

We had two opportunities to sing in relatively natural environments: at the Sarsaparilla Trail, and on the viewing deck over the marsh. Humans have established these locations and have allowed the forest to grow up around the trail largely unimpeded. In addition, forest surrounded us where we sang at the highway and this evoked an unexpected discussion about positive perceptions of natural environments. In her journal, Ellen reflected on her singing at Richmond Road:

Turning around and facing the trees and plants quietly growing roadside. I appreciated their matter-of-fact resilience in spite of the urban development that sliced in front of them: asphalt, power lines, streetlights. I was quite aware that a short time before, I was a motorist too, passing on this same route, oblivious of the entrance to the trail. Although I love pristine nature, I also know that everywhere I’ve been, is impacted by humans, myself included. In fact, were it not for the developed infrastructure, I/we would not have been able to access this spot.212

During the debrief, Helen similarly noted that the presence of the roadside flora impacted her highway singing experience:

I had no perception of people in those cars, and I wasn’t taking them personally. I felt like I was in a listening zone. So it was more the noises. The sounds that were coming at

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212 Ellen, journal entry, summer 2020.
me from the cars. I played with it in a cheerful way. I think because you started off with an energetic crazy sound—we can be crazy here—this is fine. But still listening and echoing. And it was nice when it was quiet and we could hear each other. But then I turned around and then there were these two beautiful little spruce trees forever there. That’s their life. And then there was this one little yellow flower. It just [intake of breath—wonder, awe, amazement] this little flower—all the time, it’s here! But it was just beautiful. A beautiful perfect little yellow flower and other little flowers and they all have life and they’re all just being there. They’re all just being. It’s not a struggle, and they don’t complain. I took that—“that’s where I am, that’s what I’m doing, this is what’s happening” and accepted it without struggle.  

Cait also reflected on the presence of nature there:

And you can look through and see the depth of the forest. We’re so trespassing on all this beautiful nature. The road just cuts through and you can see there’s so much construction widening it, continuing to infringe on it. We just get to be a part of nature, and how lucky are we to have that opportunity—this beautiful forest.

After engaging in EVE on Sarasparilla trail we continued our conversation, segueing into a discussion about the natural parts of this urban trail.

_Helen:_ Everything here is an artificial forest. Years ago this was all fields. There are noxious weeds, trees dying of various things. The ash trees. It’s not a pristine untouched wilderness here. And that’s sad. How do I add to this?  
_Ellen:_ I’m thinking of little compromises. It’s not pristine and nor are we. We’re not pristine or natural or childlike. We come with all our complexity. I was thinking too about responding to the chipmunks but to each other too. We’re part of the furniture—part of the geography.  
_Helen:_ This is the way it is. It’s beautiful. No one is complaining. We’re just alive.  
_Ellen:_ We take what we can get. Be here in this beauty.  
_Frances:_ And we’re part of it. Are natural after all.  
_Ellen:_ It is life, and life isn’t a straight line. Every time I put my attention to something it was a whole new environment, even if it was an inch farther over. And somehow I became attached to the environmental elements. The sun, when there was a breeze, and with the cut trees I could really smell. I was in a sensory thing. It was interesting. I didn’t feel like it was a pathway for me. It was just a moving place. And then I’d have my little sunny spot song. The shady little breezy spot song.  

213 Helen, group debrief at Richmond Road, Ottawa, August 22, 2020.  
214 Cait, group debrief at Richmond Road, Ottawa, August 22, 2020.  
215 Helen, Ellen and Frances, group debrief at Richmond Road, Ottawa, August 22, 2020.
When debriefing about the marsh, Ellen noted that an airplane flew overhead right at the end of our improvisation. Instead of feeling or expressing frustration at the plane, she welcomed its sound into the aural experience as a kind of counterpoint to the sound of birds singing.

During her exit interview, Frances reflected on the fraught relationships between settler colonialism and the natural world. Her comments are worth quoting at length:

We have abstracted ourselves from nature in supremacist culture and in colonial culture. We’ve become these beings that have wonderful and wondrous inventions and technologically our society is mind blowing. We have abstracted ourselves to such a degree that I believe we have cut off just about every other faculty as a human being, other than our intellects. Our hearts, our souls, our bodies. I think we long for a deeper sense of self, a deeper sense of community and a deeper sense of connection with the world—the non-human world. So when we get out in nature, it’s almost a compulsive, addictive looking for connection to it. And connection to death and immortality—we’re death phobic. I think that getting out into our natural world, or even perceiving a deeper history or an intellectual or engineering history of a place like that tunnel or Sparks Street or hearing the water and being impacted by the sound of the water, and then singing back to it. I felt a little possessed by the sound. For once, natural sound was overwhelming my soul and my body. I think we have a compulsive longing—the culture in general. It revives the body, so hence the addictive drive of humans in sexuality, pop culture, eating too much, of sensual experiences. We’re just longing to reconnect.

This is part of moving forward from objectifying nature, and seeing nature as inert, as something we can take advantage of in whatever way we want—any tree we want to chop down. It’s not inert. It’s so intensely alive. We humans have reduced it from an ability to be so much more perceptive, spiritual, emotional than we are. Nature has all that already. We have the potential to be so much more sensitive and deep. We have cut off our lives. This project is a part of that. Is examining that.216

Singing in the urban nature trail and marsh platform also evoked a strong reaction from Frances:

Always, singing in nature is a deeper experience and makes me aware of the larger world. It always brings me into how complex the natural world is and how I’m only a

tiny part of that .... In fact, there’s so much that we are unaware of most of the time that is deeply, deeply flowing within us.²¹⁷

In her journal, Ellen discussed her experience on the platform where she became engrossed in a cluster of greenery slightly shifting in the breeze, speckled with water and light. “The leaves presented themselves like open palms and I responded in kind,” she writes. “I think I may have begun with a call and response with the vegetation but it evolved into my feeling like we were performing together, in sync, as a whole. This feeling of unity with my environment was very powerful.”²¹⁸

Performers in *The Singing Field* experienced, and commented on, a broader range of relationships than I expected when I began this study including relationships between vocal self and acoustics, spirituality, community, incidental audience, vulnerability and playfulness. In addition, participants developed an increased awareness of the environmental impact of humans through the built environment and settler culture and increased connections with natural environments. All of this filtered through emotion, which played a part in all the responses. The performers were remarkably insightful, providing informative material from which to learn how the act of singing in place affected their perceptions of place and self.

²¹⁷ Frances, exit interview with author, video call, August 2020.
²¹⁸ Ellen, journal entry, August 2020.
Conclusion: Singing Our Way Forward

The World is already split open, and it is in our destiny to heal it, each in our own way, each in our own time, with the gifts that are ours. (Williams 2012, 228).

This quote comes from Terry Tempest Williams’ (2012) book When Women Were Birds: Fifty-Four Variations on Voice, a collection that inspired me throughout our summer 2020 performances in The Singing Field. On the last day of our sing, I gave a copy of the book to everyone as a thank you gift. I highlighted the epigraph used at the beginning of this chapter by writing it on the front page of each individual’s book, revealing my own positionality on this study—that: “the world is already split open and it is in our destiny to heal it, each in our own way each in our own time and with the gifts that are ours” (228). I had necessarily kept my own purpose in creating The Singing Field hidden from the other performers until the last debrief, in order to make sure my own opinion as a vocal environmentalist did not create a sense that I expected something from them.

The Singing Field was an ethnographic, research-creation project that explored environmental vocal exploration. Six women, including myself, improvised together during the summer of 2020 in six different locations to determine if and how the act of singing in situ would change their perception of self and place. Ethnographic and autoethnographic methodologies joined with research-creation to help me learn from this experience in dialogue with the other participants. I interviewed performers at the beginning and end of the study; they participated in debriefs after singing in each location; and they provided me with journals in which they wrote after each sing. Hasi Eldib filmed the process, resulting in the accompanying mini-documentary.

I analyzed the interviews and writings through the use of thematic coding, assisted by the use of a fluid field diagram to determine dominant themes and subthemes and the relationships
between them. Through the acoustemology of place, singers experienced a heightened listening awareness. A relationship was created between the vocal self and place, which both filtered through emotion. Singers discussed their acoustemological experiences related to the vocal self, from the perspectives of acoustics, spirit, community, incidental audience, vulnerability, and playfulness. They also discussed their experiences of place in relation to settler culture, the built environment, and nature.

Our use of vocal improvisation rather than song was important to this study. We used the whole voice in our improvisations, finding unexpected emotional responses through singing and leading to my awareness of the importance of what I have called xeno-song in this work. We encountered xeno-song throughout summer 2020. Our vocal improvisations in place resonated as vibrational practices influenced by intermateriality between our bodies and their surroundings. Eidshiem’s work on vocality and Feld’s ideas around acoustemology informed my approach to this project and my understanding that we expand our listening awareness by singing in place, to “know” through sounding. The intermateriality between our bodies and the environments played a significant role in all the subthemes.

Informed by the practice of soundwalking and by the philosophy of Deep Listening, our immersive improvisations resembled Schafer’s theatre of confluence in that our sings were not passive experiences, they took place in unusual locations, and the entire process was transformational for the participants. We “listened on the edge” as suggested by Jean Luc Nancy, opening our minds to the inclusion of voices in environmental interaction as suggested by Schafer and Rothenberg. This study has strengthened my conviction that singing in place using environmental vocal exploration can be a transformative practice of listening awareness. I learned that through the embodied act of singing in place, we can indeed learn about place and ourselves. Our experiences were affected by our positionalities including all that has made us
who we are as individuals and as a group. It also included our listening positionality—how who we are guides how we listen. We experienced a sense of spirituality in a variety of sites including both a highly reverberant space (the tunnel) and the challenging place (the dam site) for different reasons. My findings confirmed the importance of community when making music in public places, and that we can move through vulnerability when supported by others. We learned that playfulness through EVE is accessible to us despite being adults. We learned that relationship with place is impacted by perceptions of settler culture, history, and the architecture at a given site.

The phenomenon of emergence, so integral to improvisation, was central to this project as a whole. The interaction of all of the participants throughout the study led to the emergence of new forms of knowledge including not only the music that we made together, but also new insights about the transformative effects of singing in place, and about ourselves. The idea of environmental countertransference emerged through this co-creative research-creation process, the sense that through EVE, our intuitions can teach us something profound, maybe even spiritual, about a given place. In addition, the idea of the vocal environmentalist emerged through the autoethnography, and the concept, “xeno-song” emerged in response to my search for a way to express the significance of extralinguistics when expressing emotion through EVE.

As much as I feel that this study was successful in providing me with both information I had hoped to gain and new insights, there were limitations, which in turn created opportunities. From the beginning of the project, various factors—including the way in which I recruited participants, who came forward, how I began with the preparatory workshop, the ritualistic elements, the kind of experience I offered to people—meant that, to a certain degree, the outcomes were not over-determined, but certainly influenced in some ways. People came to the experience knowing about my background as a music therapist and performer, and with a sense
that a certain type of experience would ensue. They claimed that this did not affect their decision to be a part of it, but it no doubt shaped the nature of the experience. Some of them knew about my ongoing work, and my interest in, and love of, singing in environments. I hoped for a transformative experience for people, and that did indeed occur for each individual in their own way. Additionally, I asked them to share their experiences with each other, which may have affected the results as they perhaps wanted to fit into the group.

My aim in this project was to provide a kind of leadership that would invite collaboration. My involvement as a co-performer as well as researcher broke down some of the barriers typically associated with academic research. While it was clear that I had developed the project, rituals, preparatory workshop, and had organized the sings, it was also clear that the job of participants was to not only sing with one another, but also to share their thoughts, ideas, and impressions through the debriefs, interviews, and journals. That delineation provided a collaborative environment despite the differences in our roles. Although I was clearly a member of the group, there were some incidences when my role as leader was more prominent and may have affected the outcomes of the research. For example, my choice of singing at the tunnel at Petri Lane was designed to ensure that the participants had a satisfying and rewarding first experience of singing in place. Another example was on Richmond Road, which was an unusual and highly performative singing experience where we were positioned by the road facing the vehicles as they went by. Here, I initiated the group improvisation in order to break the ice and encourage others to begin.

There were other limitations to this study as well that related to the six women who joined me in this endeavour. For example, all of the singers were cisgendered women, which meant that perspectives on gender were limited and perspectival. Although there were
differences among the six women in sexual orientation, religious roots, and age, there was a notable lack of racial diversity. Furthermore, English was the first language of all the performers. Two of the singers were bilingual, speaking French as their second language, but all spoke English as their first language. All six singers had received post-secondary education—two at the bachelor’s level, three a master’s level and one the PhD level. This posed a limitation in terms of knowing how a person who has not studied at a post-secondary level would have responded to *The Singing Field*. Another limitation stems from the fact that I was not able to provide compensation for involvement, which limited who could participate. The six singers including myself were all people who could afford the time and the transportation, and had the privilege of participating in something non-essential in their lives. COVID-19 created limitations in terms of the choices of location. There were always other people around in the outdoor locations, meaning that I did not have a chance to explore how unobserved singing would have affected the experience. Likewise, I was unable to see how freedom of movement and closer proximity might have affected the outcome.

*The Singing Field* can (and, I hope, will) be repeated and provide a model for other artists, scholars, and researchers. There is no doubt that it would be different each time depending upon the locations visited and performers involved. No doubt the findings are very particular to the group of people that participated in this study. They are particular to where we sang and when we sang (during the first summer of COVID-19). They are particular to the fact that all of us were women, that all were adventurous and willing to think deeply about the experience. To truly understand the full impact of *The Singing Field*, there would need to be many iterations of the project. Although I cannot come to any set of universal conclusions from
this one set of experiences, there is much to learn about the potential of EVE to transform perceptions of self and place from the summer 2020 edition of The Singing Field.

In the exit interview I asked people if they had any final observations to offer. Ellen said that this experience amplified her “being in the moment,” helping her to appreciate her environment as a partner and strengthening her commitment to be a steward of the land. It “heightened my ability to engage more fully with my environment”219 she stated. Cait also referenced being in the here and now, saying, “I don’t always give myself the opportunity to enjoy the moment. That’s something that changed over the course of this. Especially in the final sing—by the time we got to the dock it was all about feeling it and doing what came natural in the moment. That’s something I struggle with.”220 Frances felt it explained something about her experience growing up: “I was someone who was silenced a lot as a child. I am validated here in that I’m the same as any other element of nature. I have a right to exist. I know when I sing now, it will have permanently changed the intensity with which I perceive my voice as an instrument in an environment.”221 Helen felt it helped with her ability to communicate: “Because of the courage and playfulness needed for the singing field, I am a bit more able to speak with my own voice about other things. Maybe I can converse more playfully with people who do not agree with me. Maybe I’ll be able to listen better in conversation and interactions, and be flexible with the tone, the texture of the speaking and feeling.”222 Kelly-Ann thinks, “It will have an impact on the world because people who participate in The Singing Field will grow and become more in

219 Ellen, exit interview with author, video call, August 26, 2020.
221 Frances, exit interview with author, video call, August 29, 2020.
222 Helen, exit interview with author, video call, August 24, 2020.
tune, connected with their environment and themselves. So that has a ripple effect on changing the world."223

When the film, *The Singing Field: A Performance of Environmental Vocal Exploration* was premiered, the feedback was very encouraging. Thirteen pages of kudos and questions were generated from the zoom chat. The feedback I have had from that evening and from so many with whom I have talked about this work validates my knowledge that the embodied practice of *EVE* can lead us to new awareness about self and place.

Seeing that the idea resonates with others, I regard this research as a building block that may be useful for scholars and practitioners in the fields of community music, education, and musical/theatrical performance. For community music, EVE can bring people together to explore the environments within their communities and to inspire connections between community and place. With that aim in mind, I can envision leading workshops and teaching others to do so, bringing people to various locations to engage with the voice. A singing trip to the Rideau Canal or a sing at the local construction site might inspire a deeper awareness of, and engagement with, the aural and visual elements of those places. I can envision using EVE as a tool to help educators in their work to raise awareness of the environment for both children and adults. A visit to a landfill site would be impactful on its own, but I can imagine that using singing as a listening practice in a place like that would dramatically increase the impact of the experience. In performance, I envision more iterations of *The Singing Field*, inviting others to take the concept and bring it into their performance practice to engage more fully with the environments in which they perform.

223 Kelly-Anne, exit interview with author, video call, August 24, 2020.
In my own work, EVE lays the groundwork for a new model of music therapy practice that I will call *Environmental Music Therapy*. Four music therapists who have seen the film have already envisioned this modality as being a source of inspiration for their work. One who works with children feels it could help them as they seek ways to open up children to their senses. Another has pointed out the benefit of using this modality for working with people who have mobility issues, and a third therapist for blind people. Yet another has already used it as an improvisational technique with students in a university classroom setting. Kelly-Anne, a music therapist herself, noted “I can see this being used in rehabilitation, and for those who are having to learn all about themselves without drugs and alcohol. I could see this happening in wilderness classes, environmental classes—even urban planning. The singing field could be a part of that!”

For me it would be a way to work with people in psychotherapeutic settings where themes such as spirituality, community, vulnerability, and playfulness can be engaged through *EVE*. I believe this practice will provide opportunities for them to learn more about themselves by sounding in built and natural environments. I can envision using this practice with both children and adults to heighten awareness of, and inspire conversation about, colonialism and the impact that humans have on the environment. I can envision using it with the kinds of people suggested by my colleagues above, with psychotherapy as a grounding tool. I envision a group practice that would follow the same structure laid out for *The Singing Field* 2020 with ritual, discussion, singing, and reflection. In a therapeutic setting, I envision the use of a more diverse selection of artistic resources with which to help people process their experiences, such as art

Ibid.
materials, mandala making exercises, and movement. In the music therapy setting, I would use improvisation not only to explore environments, but also to process the experiences. I envision breaking the code of “distanced leader” in this modality. As in *The Singing Field* 2020, I would choose to be an integrated part of the group, sharing my own viewpoint as part of the group dynamic. I would need to remain in a leadership role but would participate in the process as I did in this research project. This would be a stark departure from established therapy practice, and I will have some work to do to justify it. I envision creating a pilot project to help me develop this idea and put it into practice.

I sincerely hope that this study will inspire others to explore singing in place to see (and hear) what they might find out about the world around us and about themselves. I also hope that it will provide a springboard for musicians who may have never tried free vocal improvisation before. This study adds to the small, but growing, body of literature about vocal improvisation. I hope it will provide a resource for myself and other researchers who delve into the realm of the acoustemology of vocal improvisation. In addition to the concept of “environmental vocal exploration,” this study introduces and theorizes the terms “environmental countertransference,” “vocal environmentalist,” and “xeno-song,” all of which could be useful concepts that might be applied to other circumstances and/or explored further.

The singing field is everywhere, or as Kelly-Anne pointed out, it will keep expanding. I do not think that singing in place will change the world, but I do think it changes perceptions of the world and can increase our awareness of environmental issues, perhaps moving us to heal it with the gifts that are ours. I feel grateful for this practice because it has raised my own awareness and my own sensibility about the world around me. I am grateful for the community of performers that came together in *The Singing Field*. 
Appendix

The Singing Field: Preparatory Workshop, Saturday, June 20, 2020, 9a.m-12p.m. on Zoom

1. Introductions (bringing in the symbolic object they have chosen to join them throughout the project) Ask them to describe their object and tell why it’s important to them.

2. Premise behind the project
The idea that more is to be learned from singing in a place, than the acoustics and the sound of the place. These are wonderful, and we will indulge in that recognition, but I’m interested in learning what else you learn by singing in a place.

3. How the performances are a forum for capturing information;
Through the video and debriefs, we will use the performances to learn about your thoughts, your experiences, your trepidations, your joy, your scepticism, your openness.

4. Practical vocal improvisation techniques
   a. laughter
   b. vocal fry
   c. screaming
   d. breathing
   e. panting
   f. squealing

5. My role as co-performer/researcher
   a. I am performing with you. By being a part of the creation, I may learn more than if I step back into a singular role of observer.
   b. This choice is also supported through the concept of performative interpretive inquiry as Norman Denzin calls it, in which authoethnography can work back and forth between performance, process and analysis.
   c. I am driven not only to understand what others will learn through this experience, but what I too will learn through this interpretive inquiry of my own

6. Premises behind research-creation, reminding them that this is a collaborative performance;
   a. If a creative artefact is the basis of the contribution to knowledge, the research is practice-based.
   b. An original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice
   c. It can take place through design, music, digital media, performances and exhibitions. Whilst the significance and context of the claims are described in words, a full understanding can only be obtained with direct reference to the outcomes.
d. “A PhD describes knowledge that is new (in the world), can be shared with others and can be tested in some way. Accepting that much of what we know is known tentatively rather than absolutely, the properties of being sharable and challengeable are more important than the absolute certain truth of the new knowledge.” (Candy and Edmonds 2018, 3) The piece of art is vital to gaining new understandings that arise.

e. In A. J. Ayer’s “The Problem of Knowledge”. He argues, that we needed to find a “right to be sure” to support a belief in order to call it knowledge (Ayer, 1956).

f. The main thing is to be open to, and even invite, criticism and attempts to disprove our theories.

g. Collaboration.

7. Concepts of vocality such as resonance, sounding, embodiment, and vocal perceptions

a. What do you think about your body in terms of resonance?

b. What do you think of your body in terms of your singing voice?

c. What do you think of your own voice?

d. What do you think of alternate sounds for voice?

e. What do you think of voicing in environments so far?

8. Their perspectives about what they might discover.

9. Process of building collaboration, including trust and a sense of common purpose.

10. Scheduling

11. Q&A wrap up.
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