“Long live ear x-tacy!": an oral history study of rhetorics of nostalgia and place.

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“LONG LIVE EAR X-TACY!”: AN ORAL HISTORY STUDY OF RHETORICS OF NOSTALGIA AND PLACE

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M.A., Ball State University, 2013
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A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in English/Rhetoric and Composition

Department of English
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

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“LONG LIVE EAR X-TACY!”: AN ORAL HISTORY STUDY OF RHETORICS OF NOSTALGIA AND PLACE

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Lastly, thank you to my mom. You’ve supported me throughout my academic career, without question, even though you wanted a lawyer and got a poet instead.
This study aims to explore rhetorical placemaking through how people understand and construct narratives around places that no longer exist. In doing so, it examines the relationship between nostalgia and place — how rhetorical construction of place is influenced and/or informed by rhetorics of nostalgia, how our experiences influence our sense of place (past and present), and how we create continuity for ourselves in the construction and maintenance of particular narratives. This study contributes to the emerging field of rhetorics of nostalgia and places it in direct conversation with rhetorics of place and unpacks how these two are more connected than apparent on the surface.

Using the research site ear X-tacy, a former record store in Louisville, KY, which has been closed since 2011, the study uses a blend of oral history and qualitative interviewing. The primary data is collected from two rounds of interviews with eight participants, including former employees, former customers, and musicians, and other members of the Louisville music community. The methods and methodology were heavily influenced by community engagement research with rhetoric and composition studies to maintain relationships with participants and ethically analyze their narratives.
This study concludes that there is a strong link between rhetorical placemaking and an individual’s self-continuity and sense of identity. One’s sense of self strongly informs sense of place, which further emphasizes the role of nostalgia in rhetorical placemaking. Consequently, it means there may be further research to do in individual relationships between people and place, which also influences temporal and spatial relations within placemaking.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM AND LITERATURE

Whenever my partner and I travel to a new place, we look for a record store, a bookstore, and a good place to eat. So, in 2018, when I made my campus visit in Louisville, Kentucky, the first thing my partner and I did was go to a record store. Having married in a record store, we wanted to see what Louisville had to offer in vinyl selection if we were to possibly live in the city. At the time, the city boasted a total of seven record stores, and an employee at Guestroom Records walked us through what each had to offer—their niche genres and the types of records they sold. The conversation occasionally circled back to ear X-tacy, a store we had heard of in passing from record store owners back in Philadelphia.

In 2010, *Rolling Stone* named ear X-tacy as one of the best record stores in the country (Matos & Anderson). During ear X-tacy’s prime, it had been a local and national destination for collectors and musicians alike for its selection, in-store events, and shopping environment. Then, after being open for over 20 years, ear X-tacy closed in 2011 due to its inability to compete with the rise of online retail.

After moving to Louisville, I started to notice bumper stickers around town with the ear X-tacy logo—on cars, wrapped around light poles, even slapped on a municipal trash can in the alleyway behind my apartment. A local brewing company had a created a beer they called “Beer X-tacy.” The more I spoke with others about record stores in the city, the more the name popped up. The continued, persistent memory of the store
intrigued me, especially when so much time had passed and the city had a wealth of other record stores.

Then, around the decade anniversary of ear X-tacy’s closing, a series of happenings bubbled up around the city: In 2019, the Frazier History Museum launched an exhibit called “Celebrating the Sounds of Kentucky,” highlighting Kentucky’s musical history, that dedicated a sizeable portion of the exhibit to ear X-tacy. In 2021, Louisville Magazine published an oral history article featuring the owner, employees, and friends of the store, describing the store as “a beloved friend” (Burnette, para. 1). When I shared my growing interest in ear X-tacy with another Louisville transplant, she admitted she did not realize the store was closed because she saw evidence of it everywhere. The loss of ear X-tacy was palpable, and the store had become a staple of Louisville nostalgia.

**Statement of the Problem**

Studies of place acknowledge that our concept of place changes over time, but more often than not, they tend to examine places that still exist. And while there have been studies of how place and memory work together in specific contexts and within the lens of public memory (Dickenson et al., 2010), there has yet to be substantive study of how nostalgia and place work together within a rhetorical context.

Across disciplines, nostalgia has been critiqued as muddying memory and skewing a person’s understanding of past events, therefore making it unreliable/unsuitable for research (Shircliffe, 2001). However, oral historians such as Portelli argue that nostalgia can help us understand how people make sense and meaning out of events and critique the present through their longing for change or what has been loss (Helgren, 2015; Shircliffe, 2001). This perspective aligns with contemporary
psychology, which posits memory as a reconstruction that changes through time (Fernyhough, 2014). Additionally, cultural studies consider the ways in which nostalgia, originally deemed a homesickness, is a desire to return to a time and place, which can either cause one to reflect upon the longing itself or become determined to shape the future by past values and truths (Boym, 2007).

Within the field of rhetoric, Kurlinkus and Kurlinkus (2018) observe that there have been only a few full-length works dedicated to rhetorics of nostalgia. They make a call for further research, arguing, “Ultimately, nostalgia is an inescapable part of all identity formation and memory, and rhetoric studies seems well suited to understand, critique, and aid in the democratic movements that might stem from it” (p. 105). Kurlinkus and Kurlinkus’s research highlights the use of nostalgic rhetoric when describing a place and imagined “golden age” of the Appalachian coal industry—an intersection of time and place; however, they note that the collective and cultural nostalgia is felt strongest by those who did not have direct experience. This potentially further complicates narratives of place.

In their introduction to *Inventing Place: Writing Lone Star Rhetorics*, Boyle and Rice (2018) offer up perspectives and methods for considering the embodied experience of a body in place. While being *in* the place and close to the site does not necessarily guarantee the most accurate representation, Boyle and Rice place value in exploring the relationship between a body and place: “The impact of bodies and place together generate percepts and sensations that are independent from representational meanings held by either by the body or the place” (p. 5). This dissertation draws from and aims to build on their views of rhetoric in place to provide a fuller understanding of how bodies interact
with place and construct memories which further our individual and collective understanding of place.

Putting nostalgia and place into conversation with one another is productive, as it acknowledges their overlaps and shared interests in identity formation, narrative, and recursive acts of the present. Furthermore, it encourages consideration in how nostalgia may influence rhetorical placemaking, and how rhetorical placemaking may further foster rhetorics of nostalgia.

Within human geographies, Tuan (1979) argues that place has “personality” and “spirit,” which develops over time through repeated human engagement: “The emotion felt among human beings finds expression and anchorage in things and places. It can be said to create things and places to the extent that, in its glow, they acquire extra meaning” (p. 417). Record stores, which deal in vinyl records, a medium that embraces analog and the material thingness of music (and are marketed as items of nostalgia), make for more than suitable site for studying these intersections. In fact, Sonnichsen (2016) notes that while there are numerous studies across disciplines about vinyl record collecting, there are few studies that consider “the role of place in the development of emotions that guide the record collector” (p. 192). A key element of “record collecting subculture” includes “the ways in which places (both real and imaged) and the emotional attachments that collects have to them” (Sonnichsen, 2016, p. 192). Record stores often create community spaces and serve as champions for independent and local artists. The act of shopping for records is frequently described as ritual by both record store owners and collectors (Hanks, 2018), which would encourage repeated engagement with record stores as places.
Louisville is a city with a rich history of punk rock and do-it-yourself (DIY) culture. These histories have been documented in oral history archives such as the Louisville Underground Music Archive (LUMA) and through exhibits such as *The White Glove Test* at the KMAC in 2015, and more recently, The Frazier Museum’s exhibit. However, these archival efforts have been primarily for preservation, and documenting “what happened.” These archives are an important step toward preservation, but do not fully study the collective narratives and the ways those memories are formulated. In *Appetite for Self-Destruction: The Spectacular Crash of the Record Industry*, Knopper (2009), observes that different members of the music industry remember events differently—to the point it almost becomes mythos—and that “it's impossible to nail down the facts” (p. 11). These different, and sometimes conflicting perspectives enrich our understanding of place and narrative rather than hinder it.

Because a number of the key players surrounding ear X-tacy are still alive and in Louisville, I have the opportunity to record and archive multiple perspectives of those who have firsthand experience of being *in* the research site. Although Louisville is a deeply segregated city and the racial makeup of Louisville narratives likely influences the rhetorical placemaking of ear X-tacy, due to limitations of the study, graduate work, and COVID-19 pandemic conditions, this study does not go into depth about race and its influence in rhetorical placemaking.

This project is the start of a larger study and an opportunity to work with the community while there is momentum and investment in ear X-tacy. Eventually, this project will allow me to identify how ear X-tacy not only fits within a national context
and the narrative of the record industry, but consider the role independent arts shops like record stores play within communities and in local/independent artists lives.

Utilizing a blend of oral history and qualitative interviewing, this dissertation operates at the intersections of rhetorics of place and rhetorics of nostalgia, which draw from human geographies, cultural studies, and cognitive psychology. In doing so, this dissertation aims to examine *how* participants remember ear X-tacy, rather than *why*. More broadly, this dissertation is invested in how the absence of a place influences one’s understanding and articulation of the that place. It examines the way memories of a place are constructed, and how conflicts in memory and narration may reveal the role of role nostalgia plays in the rhetorical formation of place.

As such, Ear X-tacy is a useful site to explore the following research questions:

- How do nostalgia and the absence of a place inform rhetorical placemaking?
- How do narratives of place take shape and change over time when a place no longer exists?
- What influences individual and collective narratives of a place when it no longer exists?
- What role do artifacts play in nostalgia and memory reconstruction of place?

**Literature Review**

This literature review examines rhetorics of nostalgia and rhetorics of places, and their influences (e.g., cognitive psychology, cultural studies, and human geographies). The intersections of these disciplines will illuminate understandings of the construction of memory, nostalgia, and place. Furthermore, the intersections and synthesis of these disciplines provide the framework to not only explore my research questions but respond to the gaps in research identified by Kurlinkus and Kurlinkus (2018) and Sonnichsen (2016).
What Nostalgia and Place Share

Rhetorics of nostalgia and rhetorics of place, while distinct fields of study, have their share of commonalities. Within these rhetorical lenses, nostalgia and place: (1) change over time and therefore (2) are not static, (3) are acts of the present, (4) are selective, and (5) are influenced by our identity and experiences (often in relation to something else, making them social constructs). These commonalities serve as touchstones when navigating the intersection of these rhetorics.

These commonalities also make it difficult to discuss one without considering the other. Given the history of nostalgia is rooted in the longing for home, nostalgia has roots in perceptions of place. Meanwhile, since place is formed through human engagement, memory and nostalgia are part of place formation—through repeated experiences and reconstructing those experiences, a person forms an idea and feelings about a geographical space, which ultimately leads to the construction of place.

Additionally, while “rhetorics of place” argues that place is not static, the term itself is not active. Thus, in my own theorizing and analysis, I shift from “rhetorics of place” to a more active “rhetorical placemaking.” Through this, I feel as though I can more strongly emphasize rhetoric’s role in the recursive act of placemaking. In the cases of urban planning, memorials, and museums, we see that rhetorical placemaking can be a deliberate, conscious act. More broadly, picking and choosing and organizing a narrative that invents place within a particular moment or in a way that a speaker desires is part of the focus of this study, and shifting to the action itself also highlights the subjectivity involved. Thus, narrative is a vehicle or means for rhetorical placemaking. Within this multidisciplinary project, “narrative” as a term, is an umbrella to encompass a variety of
terms (e.g., storytelling, anecdotes, themes) that ultimately come down to a sequencing of events. Threads of ideas often appear in the form of narrative, making narrative not only a method. The progression and shaping of a place, especially a past place, requires a sequencing and organizing of past experiences in order to create a sense of continuity.

Recognizing and identifying the ever-changing nature of nostalgia and place, we can then focus on the rhetorical and narrative constructions that people use to create or invoke nostalgia and place, often simultaneously, in order to uncover the ways in which people rhetorically placemake. A recurring theme in the research is both the power of narrative (as a means of continuity, placemaking, etc.), as well as the questions of who is allowed to define place/what is worth remembering. These questions, concerns, and approaches align with oral history methodologies, as will be further addressed in the next chapter.

The following sections will examine these rhetorics and their influences.

**Rhetorics of Nostalgia**

At the start of this study, rhetorics of nostalgia were relatively understudied. News articles and publications such as *The Atlantic* had been reflecting on the role of nostalgia in Trump’s 2016 campaign and the subsequent correlations between racial prejudice and nostalgia. Rhetorics of nostalgia have touched on political and nationalist rhetoric (Day, 2009; Parry-Giles & Parry-Giles, 2000; Kurlinkus & Kurlinkus, 2018), regionalism (Day, 2009; Kurlinkus & Kurlinkus, 2018), race and white supremacy (Day, 2009; Mayne, 2018; Reyna et al., 2022), consumerism (Dickinson, 1997), place, as well as identity construction within these topics/fields. Despite these topics, rhetorics of nostalgia are not inherently about identifying propaganda, manipulation of memory, and/or political gain.
Most literature has also not taken the time to dissect what rhetorics of nostalgia are or their function.

Rhetorics of nostalgia provide a means to explore “what people are nostalgic for, why, and to which ends” (Kurlinkus & Kurlinkus, 2018, p. 88-89), especially during “times of instability” (p. 90), while also being mindful and respectful of those who are experiencing nostalgia. In doing so, nostalgia is a “acutely rhetorical” tool for rhetoricians to analyze defining (and possibly conflicting) memories and cultural expectations to identify gaps within desire and identity that may not otherwise be visible, revealing “who we think we wish we were” (Kurlinkus & Kurlinkus, 2018, p. 90).

Furthermore, rhetorics of nostalgia allow rhetoricians to:

- “study how past models of community (who were we?) stabilize the present (who are we?) and urge collective action in the future (who should we be?),” (p. 91)
- “catalog the ways that communities of nostalgia blame outsiders who have caused the community’s loss,” (p. 92)
- “examine the edges of communities of nostalgia for pride, longing, and hope that resist, counter, and/or appropriate the dominant nostalgia to create new traditional identities.” (p. 93)

In other words, rhetorics of nostalgia have the capacity to study both individual and collective nostalgia—which allows for the public and the political (Parry-Giles & Parry-Giles, 2000), and how they influence: (1) perceptions and reconstruction of past events and identities, (2) perceptions and actions toward shaping the future, and (3) “stabilize the present” (Kulinkus & Kurlinkus, p. 91). Kurlinkus and Kurlinkus (2018) argue that nostalgia can be socially and culturally learned, and while nostalgia is traditionally about loss, in his his studies of nostalgic design, Kurlinkus (2018) suggests that rhetorics of nostalgia, which are epideictic, can be extended to when someone or a culture feels threatened and/or there is the threat of loss (i.e., anticipatory nostalgia).
This framework is useful for this study because it allows me to consider not only how participants make sense of ear X-tacy as a place, but how they communicate the loss and longing, as well as how the construct their sense of pride and connection in relation to the place. Additionally, it creates opportunities to consider to how this shapes community narratives and expectations for the future. Ear X-tacy’s closing destabilized parts of the music community—some people no longer had jobs, some no longer had a community hub or familiar to place to brows and explore music. Rhetorics of nostalgia help in the analysis of how community members reconstruct the past to stabilize their present.

Although rhetorics of nostalgia can represent collective and community nostalgia, this does not mean that everyone within a community or population will share the same perspectives, nor does it mean that nostalgia is always in someone’s best interests. These dialogues and contradictions, as stated above, can create opportunities to highlight and explore more diverse and potentially conflicting traditions that recognize a range of "place based identities" (Kurlinkus & Kurlinkus, 2018, p. 91). The place, as will be discussed in the next section, is historically a sense of “home.” In response to dominate narratives, counter, emancipatory nostalgias may emerge. Counter nostalgias, as coined by Jennifer Ladino, envision “the ‘home’ as fractured, fragmented, complicated, and layered; to ‘return’ to this sort of home is to revisit a dynamic past and to invert or exploit official narratives in ways that challenge dominant histories” (91).” (p. 105). Alternative and counter nostalgias provide different avenues for rhetorical construction.

The rhetoric of nostalgia within Louisville's music community is complicated, containing layers of dominant and non-dominant threads. Given ear X-tacy's 25-year
existence and decade absence, there are those who grew up visiting ear X-tacy, and those who were only tangentially connected or are more familiar with it in passing. Additionally, due to generational nostalgia, there are now those who have grown up hearing stories about the store (or perhaps individual locations). Any one of these perspectives perpetuate the mythos and narratives surrounding the store. In doing so, they maintain perceived identities and understanding of the store, which potentially reflect both “place based identities” and what community members think they wish ear X-tacy was or long for it to have been.

In the following sections, I’ll cover two major influences on rhetorics of nostalgia, cultural studies and cognitive psychology. In addition to their influences on rhetorics of nostalgia, these disciplines influence how this dissertation frames and understands the formation of memory, which also intersects with oral history studies, which will be addressed in Chapter 2.

**Cultural Studies**

Historically, nostalgia began as a medical condition. Nostalgia, as a word, draws from the ancient Greek words *nostros* (home) and *algia* (longing); however, the term itself was not coined until 1688 by Johannes Hofer (Boym, 2007) to describe anyone from displaced peoples to soldiers stationed abroad to displaced peoples. In other words, the longing for home, or literal homesickness, was a treatable illness; the prescription was anything from opium to a trip to certain locations (Boym, 2007). Nostalgia has been connected to place from the beginning; however, nostalgia is also about a longing for a different time, such as childhood. In a similar vein, as hinted at in the previous section,
cultural nostalgia is often connected to collective memory, which also distinguishes nostalgia from melancholia (Boym, 2007).

The connection between place and time (and the longing for both) is a valuable perspective for this study. There is the loss and absence of ear X-tacy, but also the changes in Louisville (both as a city and within the music scene). This connection helps me to consider the context of which participants may desire to return to ear X-tacy, which may also me a return to a particular point within their lives within Louisville.

Cultural studies scholar Svetlana Boym (2007), whose work deeply informs Kurlinkus and Kurlinkus (2018), argues that “nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement” (p. 7). As noted in the previous paragraph, displacement can be a matter of place and time, but perhaps also a new understanding of time. In examining nostalgia and the relationship to home (and the desire to return to it), Boym describes the longing produced by nostalgia as a longing not for what was left behind, but what people imagine was left behind. For those who cannot return home, nostalgia is a means of sense-making, if not necessarily reconciliation. However, Boym warns that nostalgia and acting upon it does not come without consequences:

The danger of nostalgia is that it tends to confuse the actual home and the imaginary one. In extreme cases it can create a phantom homeland, for the sake of which one is ready to die or kill. Unreflective nostalgia can breed monsters. Yet the sentiment itself, the mourning of displacement and temporal irreversibility, is at the very core of the modern condition. While claiming a pure and clean homeland, nostalgic politics often produces a “glocal” hybrid of capitalism and religious fundamentalism, or of corporate state and Eurasian patriotism. The mix of nostalgia and politics can be explosive. (p. 9-10)

As noted in the previous section, rhetorics of nostalgia have been studying the ties between political rhetoric and nostalgia, as well as that of hate groups. Equally, nostalgia
can be used as a tool to criticize others’ perspectives and ways of life—a group may be perceived as “backwards” for certain traditions that do not align with what another group longs to return to (Boym, 2007; Kurlinkus, 2018). This is why Boym (2007), while acknowledging that nostalgia can shape the future, says that “it is preferable … to leave dreams alone” (p. 18). But perhaps in a less extreme fashion, and more relevant to this study, nostalgia that fails to reflect and be self-aware, struggles to move on or accept what may remain or has emerged in the absence of a homeland or a place such as a record store. It is worth considering what “phantom homeland” narratives have emerged in ear X-tacy’s wake, and what the consequences may be, such as the reproduction of dominant narratives.

To examine the different ways that nostalgia manifests, Boym (2007) categorizes nostalgia into two separate categories: restorative nostalgia and reflective nostalgia. Restorative nostalgia is a desire for the present and future to directly return to how a person imagines the past—to reconstruct what has been lost, including values and ways of life. Reflective nostalgia, however, is more open-ended, emphasizing the longing rather than return. In fact, reflective nostalgia “fears return” (p. 18). As such, reflective nostalgia allows room for contradictions whereas restorative nostalgia hinges upon a definitive sense of home, truth, and tradition, which can lead to paranoia (Boym, 2007). These manifestations likely influence the rhetoric of a person’s narrative—what they long for and in what way will determine what they share.

In our current society, it’s difficult to escape nostalgia. It shapes technological creation and marketing. Retro designs and the promise of being able recapture lost memories or preserve the present create anticipatory nostalgia (Boym, 2007; Kurlinkus,
2018). As such, Boym argues that we must be wary of nostalgia created for us: “The prepacked 'usable past' may be of no use to us if we want to co-create our future” (p. 18).

In considering individual and community narratives surrounding ear X-tacy, I am interested in what larger narratives may be shaping individual ones surrounding the store. While this study does not delve too deeply into the larger history of the record industry, it is important to consider how the CD boom of the 1980s along with the rise of the MP3s and online shopping cast a long shadow over the story of this individual store. On a smaller scale, it’s also important to consider the ways in which community narratives may be packaging nostalgia for individuals within and outside the community.

**Psychological Studies of Memory and Nostalgia**

Memory and nostalgia are both central to identity formation and self-continuity (and are, themselves, narrative constructs), but it’s important to note that these are not the same—memory is a reconstruction of how we understand past events; nostalgia, meanwhile, is longing and loss, but as previously noted, it does not necessarily have to be something personally experienced. The following sections consider how both memory and nostalgia have been studied within the field of psychology.

**Cognitive Psychology & Memory**

In everyday conversation, we talk about memory as something we possess, but cognitive psychology argues that memory is a reconstruction of the present—rather than a static memory bank that allow we can delve into at any time, we recreate the memory in the moment. Our memories change and shift each time they are reconstructed because they are influenced by emotions at the time. These emotional states influence our interpretation of reconstructed events, which influences future reconstructions. Thus,
cognitive psychologist Fernyhough (2014) describes memory “more like a habit, a
process of constructing something from its parts, in similar, but subtly changing ways
each time,” and recognizes that “vividness does not guarantee accuracy” (p. 6). Because
memories are constructed to meet “the demands of the present moment” (p. 6), the
habitual nature of reconstruction heightens memory’s unreliability.

Despite (or perhaps because of) their fallibility, memories and the formation of
memory influence identity formation and the way we make meaning in the world
(Fernyhough, 2014). Memory, specifically autographical memory, is highly dependent
upon and is shaped by a person’s beliefs (culturally and otherwise), understanding of the
world, and “sense of [their] own self as unfolding through time” (p. 8). The need to
maintain coherence with the rememberer’s worldview, expectations, and attempts to stay
true to what happen may mean that some details are encoded as irrelevant or imbued with
stronger emphasis. But because “the personal, subjective quality of memory has often
been ignored” (p. 15-16), Fernyhough also asks us to consider the way in which story and
narrative are a part of this memory process.

Narrative, Fernyhough (2014) argues, creates coherency—it’s the means by which
humans make sense of the events of their lives. Constructing memories within a narrative
sequence allows them to create a sense of continuity, which aids in memory recall. This
process is selective, and Fernyhough argues that part of the brain’s function is to
deliberately select what to remember and what to forget. Because it cannot hold every
experience and detail, the brain discards what does not seem necessary. While
Fernyhough admits this process can be influenced by biases, through this selection a
person can abstract key details that will aid in future-oriented thinking. For example, if
one has not been in a particular record store, they still will know some of what to expect based on upon past experience in other record stores.

As an oral history project, this dissertation is deeply invested in memory, and the ways that people relay their memories through narrative. Adopting memory as reconstruction pushes away from binaries of correct/incorrect or right/wrong ways of remembering and allows this proposed dissertation to focus on how research participants remember ear X-tacy, and consider what prompts them to remember it the way that they do. Memory as a reconstruction, as an act of the present, also aligns with oral history's belief (as well as some psychology studies) that nostalgia is a response and/or critique of the present. This dissertation project will apply these theories to study the way people remember place.

Furthermore, because memories are influenced by one’s beliefs and identity, it means that people will rhetorically construct place (especially places that are gone or they have not visited in some time) through these filters. This research, like rhetorics of place, helps to consider the role identity places in rhetorical placemaking, particularly from the identity and memory construction side. This informs the way that I interpret participants’ responses—their sense of themselves “unfolding through time” (p. 8) will shape the ways that they talk about ear X-tacy and their relationship to the place.

**Studies on Nostalgia**

In recent psychological studies, nostalgia, like memory, is typically “expressed in terms of narratives” (van Tilburg et al., 2019, p. 521) and connected to “momentous” occasions (p. 521) or times of great change. According to psychologists, nostalgia promotes a sense of self-continuity and is connected to promote meaning making of one’s
life (p. 522). In other words, a person is able to find meaning in the events in their life and make sense of the progression of their past to current self. This also has the potential to aid in finding connection with others. Nostalgia has shown potential to not only encourage and raise the self-esteem of the individual experiencing nostalgia, but to those around them. This includes generational nostalgia (Newman et al., 2020).

However, despite apparent benefits, there is some contention as to whether these positive associations with nostalgia are as frequent in daily life as they are in studies designed to intentionally trigger nostalgia. So, while studies such as van Tilburg et al. (2019)’s are more interested in the sweet of bittersweet, Newman et al. (2020)’s emphasizes the bitterness. According to Newman et al. (2020), people also tend to retain more positive nostalgic memories longer than those that create mixed or negative feelings. The positive nostalgic experiences demonstrated in van Tilburg et al.’s study may also be a product of intentionally prompting nostalgia (Newman et al., 2020). Meanwhile, one result in van Tilburg et al.’s 2019 study indicated that nostalgia during daily life is more likely to be triggered or experienced as a result of a negative experience—the person feels nostalgic for a point in time, a person, etc. As will be discussed in the methodology, psychological studies of nostalgia align with beliefs within oral history—nostalgia is as much a commentary of the present as it is a desire for the past. In van Tilburg et al.’s study, nostalgia indicates what may be lacking in the present, which, in this dissertation, is the research site itself ear X-tacy.

While this dissertation examines public, collective memory, I also value and draw upon the tensions of individual and collective memory, with the belief that individual accounts and experiences feed into the collective and may also disrupt it. Contemporary
psychology offers insight the more individualistic experience of nostalgia. Furthermore, it prompts me to consider whether participants may be responding negatively or positively when asked about nostalgia, or perhaps a mix of the two. Furthermore, I have to consider whether or not my research is a study that is designed to trigger nostalgia, and whether or not this skews the results. As a result, I have attempted to shape questions that may also allude to what encounters in daily life may trigger versus the study itself.

Rhetorics of Place

While rhetorics of place share some commonalities with public memory, for the purpose of this dissertation, I will be focusing on how geographical spaces become places, and the rhetorical construction of those places. In particular, for this study, I am interested in the ways in which rhetorical placemaking is a recursive, inventive act. In other words, rhetorics of place act from an understanding that “places are always imagined” (Giafanga, 2018, p. 32). Place is a rhetorical invention that is ever-changing. And because places are not static, they are never entirely cohesive (Giafanga, 2018), making them fragmented, selective, and sometimes exclusionary (Frith, 2018).

A rhetorical lens looks beyond the geographic space and considers how selective and fragmented, cultural, socio-political, and individual narratives shape our concepts of place. As with memory reconstruction, a person’s personal beliefs and culture influence the ways in which someone constructs their concepts of place. Furthermore, memories of a place reinforce, but also change our sense of place overtime, which is part of what makes both memory and place acts of the present.

This approach to rhetorical placemaking helps me frame and contextualize my participants’ responses. In recounting their experiences at ear X-tacy and perspectives of
what it was as a place, I am not hearing the same thoughts they may have had a decade or more ago—I am receiving their thoughts now that they have had time and experiences that have reframed and recontextualized those memories and ideas. Through rhetorics of place and rhetorics of nostalgia, I remind myself that I am receiving and analyzing my participants’ thoughts in the moment, which allows me to also consider what factors may be influencing their narratives. Frith (2018) argues that “Place is invented again and again” due to the passage of time and change in material realities (p. 126). I am looking at the inventions within a specific moment in time.

While this specific slice of time and rhetorical construction of place may feel limiting or too biased for a true sense of place, it’s the specificity that makes rhetorical placemaking possible (Frith, 2018). The temporality of the moment means that place will never be cohesive and longstanding. Place does not stay the same because we as people do not stay the same. Thus, our embodied experience of being in a place does not stay the same. Through interactions and with geographical spaces, both an individual and the space are transformed and become "situated in space” (Brown, 2018, p. 27). In these interactions, there is the potential for conflict and contradiction, but it’s by being in those spaces that we can understand those contradictions and address them and our sense of place. As aforementioned, this proposed project is invested in exploring contradictions, and the narratives that unfold from them.

Boyle and Rice (2018)’s collection *Inventing Place: Writing Lone Star Rhetorics* explores the sense of “being there,” or a body within a particular space. Influenced by human geographies, which will be covered in more detail below, this embodied knowledge is developed through not just being in the space, but an experiential
relationship between space and the body. The familiarity that leads to the development of place also involves memory and nostalgia, both of which are also felt through the body to create an “embodied knowledge of space” (Boyle and Rice, 2018, p. 2). Treating “being there” as an event, Boyle and Rice and their contributing authors focus primarily on singular encounters. A researcher can potentially avoid assumptions and be attentive to “new problems created by the encounter” (p. 4). If place is created through the experience of "being there" then a researcher has to separate the preconceived notions of place (or the memories created by others for us, as Fernyhough describes), and the experience of the moment. These encounters can be "inventional sites" (p. 8), but also have potential, as Boyle and Rice argue, to gain perspective “on how belonging happens between bodies and place” (p. 5).

An example of how the embodied experience and time shape rhetorical placemaking can be seen in an early chapter of this collection. Contributing author James J. Brown Jr. (2018) models this practice by framing his article with details of his experience walking through a neighborhood in Austin, where the Daniel Johnston’s frog mural *Jeremiah* is a focal point. Drawing on Lefebvre’s understanding “production of space” Brown reflects upon what the mural represents, or, more particular, what times and versions of Austin it represents. He argues that what the mural (and his own tattoo rendition of the mural) represents is “not separate from the physical space of the street corner that features Jeremiah’s greeting,” but rather, “there is something about Jeremiah (and about any space) that calls out for this type of engagement. We want to grab on to space, to freeze it in time, in order to make sense of it” (p. 19). Businesses around the mural appropriate its text “HI, HOW ARE YOU” as part of the community’s attempt to
reclaim a version of Austin that no longer exists. These attempts to reclaim a version of Austin—the nostalgia for this version of Austin if you will—rests on the assumption that a version of that Austin ever existed. Brown also argues that it matters how spaces are experienced, imagined and appropriated. This dissertation, in asking how people remember ear X-tacy, generates not just what versions of ear X-tacy are being reconstructed through memory, but what versions of Louisville participants may be looking to reclaim (or possibly forget).

While work in Boyle and Rice’s collection relies on the embodied experiences (both past and present) of its authors as a launching point, this dissertation does not have that privilege. As such, this project relies on the embodied experiences of the participants. In other words, the project embraces the value of “being there” and embodied knowledge but aims to know a place not through personal writing, but through oral history. In doing so, this project covers multiple, rather than singular encounters (or multiple singular encounters depending on the participant), which further creates contradictions.

A recurring theme in the literature, as suggested by embodied experience, is the role of human engagement with place. That does not mean that we are incapable of rhetorically constructing a sense of place or the idea of a place we have never visited. We construct ideas of place through media as well as art (Frith, 2018; Gianfanga, 2018). It is possible to rhetorically construct places that do not exist or a version of a place that only exists in the mind. Whether it be the idea that everyone in Texas attends rodeos and wears cowboy boots (Frith, 2018) or that record stores are exclusively full of music snobs, these rhetorical constructs reflect cultural values and ideas that can also be telling and further inform our sense of place. It is also a place where culturally learned nostalgia and
generational nostalgia can play a role in rhetorical placemaking—longing for what a place was or the values of a certain time can teach us as a society how we should perceive certain types of places.

Public Memory and Memorials (or, Place in the Face of Loss)

While this study is not about memorials, this research complements and informs this project because of the way that it engages with loss and memory. Public memory studies have considered how memorials are not just places for remembering, but also forgetting—they serve as a means of identifying what it was worth remembering, even if this can also be a point of contention (Walker, 2007). Like rhetorics of nostalgia, this research has asked, Who gets to remember what and why? Places such as memorials, and museums for that matter, create narratives and connections with who and what has been lost: “Such sites, whether physical or virtual, can be locations to express sorrow, to establish (or re-establish) community, to share (or re-construct) values, to remember, and also to forget” (Walker, 2007, p. 121). As such, memorials are sites that are deliberately and rhetorically constructed through highlighting and omitted “certain versions of history” (p. 122). These sites engage in selectivity and fragmentation—they will never capture the whole of history, especially as they function at multiple junctions, including the personal and the public (Walker, 2007).

This dissertation does not focus on ear X-tacy as a memorial or as being memorialized, but these ideas contribute to this project’s understanding of rhetorics of place and rhetorical placemaking because of the ways in which they acknowledge how place functions within time. Walker (2007) argues that “buildings and monuments are not particularly proficient as repositories of memory because their existence in time alters the
relationship they maintain with their human users and as a result alters their meaning” (p. 122). She goes on to acknowledge that memory, itself, is not static. Because memory and place are not static, the meaning these memorials are meant to have will also change over time, making it difficult for those grieving to “collapse the past and present” and to “maintain a relationship to the dead (Bradbury, 1996)” (p. 122). This aligns with the arguments presented at the beginning of this literature review. It also highlights the importance of the relationship between humans and geographical space in the making of place, which will be covered in the next section.

**Human Geographies**

Human and emotional geographies examine how humans conceptualize place; in particular, they tend to reflect on humans’ relationship with geographical space and the relationship between time, space, and the varied meanings of “place” within these contexts. As previously mentioned, these contexts can be influence by cultural and social values. Rhetorics of place regularly draw upon Yi-Fu Tuan’s work in particular. Yi-Fu Tuan (1979) gives attention to the relationship between space and time, which humans experience through their senses.

Our embodied experience influences our perceptions, just as the interactions with geographical space can inform behavior. From these experiences, we create “mental maps,” which differ among individuals and cultures (Tuan, 1979, p. 389). Tuan argues that “space coexists with the sentient body” (p. 389) and physical distance, in some cultures, may reflect “the idea of a distant past” (p. 390). That is to say that there is a relationship between geographical and temporal distance. Part of why we are wired to think this way comes back to narrative—we are “more interested in narratives than in
static pictures” (p. 391). These narratives and unfolding of sensory experience unfolding into the making of place, which can both be spatial location and status within one’s community/society (Tuan, 1979). Or, quite literally, our “sense” of place.

Repeated time spent within a spatial location builds sensory familiarity, which also builds attachment. Through sensory experiences, and our socio-cultural contexts, we categorize different spatial experiences (Brandenburg & Carroll, 1995). In an ecological study, Brandenburg and Carroll (1995) found that a person’s physical proximity to and personal experience in a location often influenced their attachment and understanding of the place-ness. Place, which they define as the physical space, the objects, organisms, and activities within it, is dependent upon “social and cultural contexts” and “the nature of a given space” (p. 384). These factors are heightened through repeated encounters and quality of those experiences (Brandenburg & Carroll, 1995). Brandenburg and Carroll also note that these interactions are reciprocal:

Places are both enabling and embedding, in that physical locations affect people and people affect and construct social meanings of those physical locations (Giddens, 1984). The creation of place consists of recurring patterns of interaction between individuals and their environment (p. 395). The study revealed that those who lived closest to the research site experienced the strongest emotional attachment. The emotional attachment was rooted in memory, which is felt (Fernyhough, 2014).

These repeated encounters and attachments are how we distinguish “home” from other places. Tuan (1979) states that: “The emotion felt among human beings finds expression and anchorage in things and places. It can be said to create things and places to the extent that, in its glow, they acquire extra meaning” (p. 417). The emphasis of proximity to meaning, and the formation of place equating to safety and a sense of home
reflects the repeated comments of record stores as a second home for collectors and music lovers. As an access point for the music community, record stores are sites where patrons frequent, which creates the potential for additional memories. However, Tuan (1979) argues that it’s only in being away or experience distance that we recognize these attachments, which reflects Boyle and Rice’s (2018) argument that proximity does not guarantee accuracy. Yet, this does reveal the role of memories, which are reconstructions of those previous encounters.

The role of human meaning in the making of place is essential to understanding the rhetorical construction of place. Furthermore, meaning and value can be reflected in what people are nostalgic for—in a place, in a time, in a record store or community. These intersections and this literature inform the ways I look not only at the narratives are being constructed at one point in time, but the emotional connection participants express (or don’t express) for ear X-tacy as a place. While rhetorics of place provide me the attention toward individual moments and perspectives, its roots in human geographies also draws attention to the repetition of experiences and how the accumulation of those experiences inform placemaking.

Niche stores, like record stores, often have a community component, which, as the community grows, creates a series of repeat encounters as people return to participate in personal rituals and engage with others with similar interests. The niche, such as music, itself can also influence the way place takes shape; meanwhile, the intersections of space and time influence music, which can further influence the sense of place within record stores. The following section narrows in on how placemaking manifests within record stores.
**Human Geographies, Record Stores, and Material Artifacts**

Gibson and Connell (2002) argue that there is a lack of music studies within the field of geography, which ignores the fact that music is inherently linked to place. A sense of place and identity can influence a songwriter's lyrics; certain sounds have regional associations and/or cultural expectations may encourage certain sounds and types of music. Performances bring people together in the act of playing and listening to music, while advances in technology have increased music’s capacity to be mobile, making it both local and global (Gibson & Connell, 2002).

When it comes to record stores, Tuan's association of place with home is echoed in Sonnichsen’s (2016) identification of record stores often serving as a "home away from home" for both collectors and employees alike. Record shops, Sonnichsen argues, engage in a sense of the "private 'home' dynamic within public space" (p. 191). They are "'highly textured place[s] with multiple layers of meaning' (Cosgrove 1989, 199) and 'full of internal conflicts' (Massey 1994, 155)" (p. 190). These shops are gathering spaces for specific demographics (even within vinyl collectors), and often specialize in a certain genre. It is near impossible to please everyone and "depending on a host of factors (gender, race, class, sexual identity, tastes, political beliefs) most individuals' sense of the place regarding interpersonal connections and emotional constructs will vary (Massey 1994)" (p. 190). In Sonnichsen’s case study of three record stores in Los Angeles, he observed that these stores were all designed with “their customers’ emotional connection to place (both real and imagined)” in mind (p. 191).

Customers and collectors find emotional satisfaction of going to a store to find an object, as it’s where they also find a sense of belonging. Part of this is due to newer
stores’ attempts to create inclusive spaces; another part is due to the cultural capital that comes with setting foot in a store because one is in search of particular artifacts (Sonnichsen, 2016). Going to a record store is experiential:

This inclusionary record shopping experience is largely the end goal of two overlapping spatial dynamics. The first involves creatively engineering a de facto “home away from home” for customers through designing “recognizable architectural persona and patterns of behavior of [certain amenities]” (Tuan 1992, 37). The second dynamic focuses on recreation of places (idealized, imagined, and concrete) to supplement the clientele’s emotional attachment to the music itself. These dynamics overlap because both emphasize collecting consumers' emotional geographies as best as possible and "synthesizing those emotions into design” (Ettlinger 2004, 27). (Sonnichsen, 2016, pp. 199-200).

These emotional ties to a place ultimately project human attributes to stores. When these stores close, people mourn them as if losing a friend (Sonnichsen, 2016), which is nearly verbatim the description provided in the Louisville Magazine ear X-tacy oral history.

Sonnichsen’s research brings attention to the way nostalgia and place intersect within record stores, which serve a multitude of functions (as I’ll detail further in the methodology). In some cases, stores may intentionally curate and fabricate a particular “body in place” experience, but the embodied experience is not just within the design of the store itself, but within the merchandise. Thus, vinyl create both additional layers of nostalgia within record stores and additional layers of loss when they close—access to these objects and the experience of coming to discover them are no longer available. These layers of memory and longing make record stores, especially one that is no longer open such as ear X-tacy, rich research sites.

Sonnichsen (2016) argues that, “Humans channel their emotions and passions through tactile things” (p. 191). Vinyl records are no exception. However, as previously noted, the vinyl industry is also highly dependent on the intersection of emotions and
place. When considering the nature of vinyl collecting, Sonnichsen (2016) draws from Clouse (2008) to describe records as material objects that are "multifaced, dynamic, and filled with certain intangible qualities ... such as emotional encounters with the historical past [that] will almost always escape a valuation system that works to render all things measurable and comparable" (Clouse 2008, p. 15, quoted in Sonnichsen, 2016, p. 192). In particular, certain pressings, especially first pressings, hold a "point of origin" of the music (Osborne quoted in Sonnichsen, 2016, p. 193)—a point that cannot be replicated, which is "the point (in time and place) of origin upon which humans naturally fixate" (p. 193). Records and analog music mediums can establish and enhance “interpersonal relationships with the home space” (Sonnichsen, 2016, p. 199). Undoubtedly, the material nature of vinyl records and analog music culture plays a role in the narratives surrounding record stores, and Sonnichsen’s research resonates with rhetoric and composition’s own study of materialism.

The world is material and the embodied experience of moving through the world requires engagement with objects and artifacts. Building upon the New London Group’s argument that literacy is multimodal, Pahl and Roswell (2010) make the argument that multimodal should also include objects and artifacts, and that, in actuality, “Literacy, as a multimodal practice, is material” (p. 5). While their intention for this is to explore the way in which objects aid in the study of literacy practices as students move between school and home, I want to emphasize the traits that Pahl and Roswell attribute to objects, primarily their emphasis on the embodied nature of materiality. Leaning into the idea that “every object tells a story,” Pahl and Roswell observe that artifacts can spark memory or
prompt storytelling, which make them a means of engaging the community: “Artifactual literacy is about exchange; it is participatory and collaborative, visual and sensory. It is a radical understanding of meaning making in a human and embodied way” (p. 134). In other words, for this dissertation, in considering the embodied experience and the reconstruction of memories of place, I must also consider the embodied experience of engaging with the material objects within place, especially when vinyl, as mentioned above, can trigger memory and aid in memory reconstruction. Additionally, I have to consider the role these objects may play in the creation of narrative.

**Conclusion**

As the literature shows, there is not only an established bed of research about memory, place, emotion, and narratives across the disciplines, but a clear connection between nostalgia and place. Rhetorical studies have entered these conversations through rhetorics of place and rhetorics of nostalgia (along with public memory), but while the two areas of study have commonalities, they are not often in direct conversation with one another.

More broadly, although these threads all point toward a connection between nostalgia and place, they have yet to come together to investigate how nostalgia—especially nostalgia as a longing for what no longer exists—may influence the formation of place. This has also yet to be explored through record stores. By focusing on the site ear X-tacy, I aim to close the gap by braiding these theories together to capture the multidisciplinary nature of my questions. Rhetoric is well-suited for this because of its history of drawing upon other disciplines, but also for its capacity to analyze narrative and rhetorical situations, which serve as the building blocks for rhetorical placemaking.
The disciplines and literature highlighted help me create a lens and framework for my analysis, both of individual interviews and the collective interviews I have gathered as part of this dissertation.

In putting these two areas in conversation with one another, this dissertation contributes to current scholarship by: (1) Adding to the limited research on rhetorics of nostalgia; (2) building upon rhetorics of place to consider rhetorical placemaking when a place no longer exists. These contributions aim to reveal not only how people make sense of a place when it no longer exists, but how they sense-make their own self and identity and communicate these concepts and narratives.

The following chapter will expand upon the methodology for this dissertation, illustrating the theoretical underpinnings and practice I brought to the research. Then, in engaging with my research questions, the first data chapter will reflect on rhetorics of nostalgia’s role in rhetorical placemaking and the supporting narratives; then, the second data chapter will examine how these narratives and the artifacts produced in the wake of ear X-tacy’s closing are appeals to authenticity. The concluding chapter’s discussion will reflect on the implications of this research, as well as next steps and room for future research.
CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

As described in the previous chapter, this project is interested in exploring how people rhetorically placemake when a place no longer exists. Through the lens of rhetorics of nostalgia and rhetorics of place and using the research site ear X-tacy, I am interested in not only the types of narratives that are constructed around place, but why people construct the narratives they do in order to do that rhetorical placemaking.

In order to answer my research questions, I will be using a blend of oral history methodology, which acknowledges and places emphasis on the subjectivity of memory, and qualitative interviewing, which is interested in “‘thick’ descriptive data” (Hsiung, 2010, n.p.). Reflecting on feminist perspectives in oral history, Geiger (1990) states, “Oral history only becomes a method in the hands of persons whose interests in it go beyond the immediate pleasure of hearing/learning the history being told” (p. 170). By shifting focus away from looking for the “truth” or “what really happened,” this approach allows for the attention to individual community members’ unique experiences, which can reveal details about the formation of the collective narratives, values, and understandings of events and places. This shift reflects the questions posed by the literature review, namely: Who gets to remember what? What is deemed worth remembering, and by who?

Additionally, because my research involves community member participants, my theoretical framework will draw from shared values within rhetoric and composition
digital storytelling and community engagement research. Collectively, these methodologies place importance on a shift in power dynamics and researcher and participant as collaborators. This study was created and performed within the context and intention of a larger oral history process to follow. In other words, some practices conducted in this project were to look ahead to future relationships and work with community members and beyond the dissertation.

This chapter will outline the informing methodological frameworks and methods used to conduct this study, and how they align with the literature covered in Chapter 1. Additionally, it will address the ethics of conducting research involving community member participants, my potential biases, the limitations, and how I navigated the research accordingly.

**Theoretical Framework**

This research uses a blend of qualitative interviewing practices—oral history and qualitative interviewing as seen within the discipline of rhetoric. Furthermore, this study draws upon rhetoric scholarship that addresses community engagement. These frameworks were chosen both because they meet the needs of the larger project, but also their shared sensibilities with rhetorics of nostalgia and rhetorics of place. In the following section, oral history and digital storytelling are collapsed into one section under “oral history” because the digital storytelling research used in this project aligns with oral history methodologies, particularly in combination with community engagement.

Digital storytelling not only closely aligns with oral history, but also influences my practices as a researcher. The examples and literature provided in the following section discuss practices for engaging in community-based research. This research has
prompted me to consider the ways I interact with my research participants—ensuring that courtesy, care, and ethics are not just to university, but community standards. Furthermore, digital storytelling has emphasized the importance of the community having access to their stories once the project is complete, in a mode that works best for them. This is part of the motivation behind continuing the larger project—to ensure that the community has access to the stories they have so generously shared.

**Oral History**

Oral history, which dates back to the 1940s (Ward, 2019), has been utilized across the disciplines including journalism, psychology, ethnography, folklore, anthropology, linguistics, and literature and language studies (Russell, n.d.; Portelli, 1991; West, 2019). Part of what makes oral history so universal is that, as Italian oral historian Portelli (1991) argues, “Humans do not belong to any one field of scholarly inquiry” (p. xi). While some oral historians stress the importance of collecting historical “fact” and verified information that can add to historical archives and documentation, contemporary oral history practices emphasize the import of all people telling their stories (as opposed to those in power) and considering the way their narratives "open to the possibilities of the untold, the symbolic, the implicit, and the ambiguous" (Portelli, 1991, p. xii). A common theme through both oral history and digital storytelling is shifting the question from what stories are being told to who is being heard (Burgess, 2006; Ward, 2019). This shift not only connects it to the literature in the previous chapter, but is valuable to this project—keeping this in mind, I attempted to recruit a range of participants to represent a range of community members and avoid analyzing/promoting only the dominate narrative; however, the dominate narrative is not entirely avoidable, especially when
considering the way cultural influences inform memory reconstruction and thus rhetorical placemaking.

The oral history interview process is a collaborative space between interviewer and interviewee, which contains both subjectivity and tensions in agendas (Portelli, 2018). Portelli (1991) defines subjectivity as “the study of cultural forms and processes by which individuals express their sense of themselves in history” (p. ix). Rather than viewing oral history as testimony, Portelli (2018) suggests viewing it as “a tool for research, and the opening of narrative space” that operates as “an exchange of gazes” (p. 241). This perspective does two things: (1) shifts focus from events to a person's story and their “relationship to these events” (p. 246, emphasis added); (2) changes the dynamic of the interviewer and interviewee relationship. This perspective acknowledges the researcher's presence within the interview—it becomes a dialogue rather than a monologue. This dialogic space also acknowledges that there is a difference between the interviewer and interviewee, and that part of the purpose of the interview is that difference: “Similarity makes the interview possible; difference makes it meaningful” (Portelli, 2018, p. 242). My position as a vinyl record collector and music fan, in some cases, helped to find some common ground; meanwhile, as a Louisville transplant offered even more potential for dialogue as the majority of the participants grew up in Louisville or have spent a large portion of their lives there.

Although someone may agree to an interview, this does not always guarantee full trust; the willingness to speak is a form of trust itself and can also be telling. Portelli (2018) points out that an interviewer’s role is not "merely to extract information, but to open up narrative spaces” (p. 243). This may mean modifying our agenda to follow the
stories interviewees volunteer, which, Portelli (2018) argues, is the the point of the oral history interview:

The heart of the oral history interview, then, is the relationship. The interview is about the past—like all over historical sources, it provides us with factual information that can be verified and critically scrutinized—but is of the present. (p. 245, emphasis in original)

The storytelling will not provide direct access to the past, but it does give insight to the experience and memories of the narrator as they view them in that moment. Because memory changes over time, and life experiences change a person’s perspective, oral history researchers have to be mindful of the contributor or contributors’ positionally (Allenmann & Dudeck, 2019). In this we learn not just about the past, but “about the narrator's world and about ourselves” (Portelli, 2018, p. 247). By embracing subjectivity, oral history can spend less time worrying about factual reliability and ask what happens when we attempt to reconstruct the past and what we can learn by the way we reconstruct. This is useful when considering both memory and place are acts of the present.

When it comes to nostalgia in oral history, there are conflicting perspectives. Nostalgia has been described as “unreliable data” or “false historical consciousness” (Shircliffe, 2001, p. 61-62), and something that ultimately skews historical fact and memory (Helgren, 2015). In studies focusing on politically sensitive subject matter, such as segregated schools and women’s rights, there have been concerns of whether nostalgia might undermine problematic realities (Helgren, 2015; Shircliffe, 2001) However, given that oral historians such as Portelli are not interested in "historical fact,” nostalgia has the potential to “enhance… the use of oral history for understanding how we use historical consciousness to make sense of and comment on the present” (Shircliffe, 2001, p. 60),
and that it may inadvertently be a critique of the present (Helgren, 2015; Shircliffe, 2001). Shircliffe (2001), who draws from Portelli, describes nostalgia as “a yearning for something past that is no longer recoverable,” which may be an “informal way we comment and make sense of history, revealing our responses to and desires for social change” (p. 62). Meanwhile, Helgren (2015) argues that nostalgia may represent an attempt to construct and reconstruct identities: “It helps people positively value themselves as they create coherent life narratives” (p. 54). In other words, as discussed in the previous chapter, nostalgia aids in self-continuity. Oral history interviews are not specifically designed to generate nostalgic responses, but certain approaches and values may further encourage nostalgia; nostalgia also seems to have a specific function in memory and reconstruction of events, which may also influence the shaping of one’s identity.

**Oral History & Community Engagement**

There is power in recording and collecting stories. Although Russell (n.d.), as an oral historian, seems to be more concerned with “evidence” that presents historical events accurately, he describes oral history as an opportunity for participants to “address the historical record directly, to clarify what they see as misconceptions in third-person accounts...” (p. 1). Within marginalized communities, such as indigenous populations, oral history can also be a way of taking control of or complicating their public representations, and challenging dominant narratives (Brittenham et al., 2018; Fernheimer, Boyd, Goldstein, & Dorpinghaus, 2018; Willcox et al., 2012). Because public or collective memory does not always include all memories, oral history and digital storytelling often consider where the gaps are, and how to highlight voices that
may be left out of dominant narratives (Ward, 2019). Additionally, this may also require asking, “Who has had agency to tell such tales?” (Ward, 2019, p. 381). Thus, these projects are often a social justice or “underlying activist endeavour” (Tebeau, 2013, p. 28). Projects find their strength or are improved when the project is led by the community and for the community (Iseke & Moore, 2011). Through these practices and projects, communities have the opportunity to contribute to “scholarly production” (Tebeau, 2013, p. 28) through collecting information and their own voices. Engaging in and inviting community to collect oral histories “emphasizes active human curation as being vital to understanding place and community identity” (Tebeau, 2013, p. 27). In other words, oral history not only presents an opportunity for community members to share their stories on their terms, it opens the door to connecting community narratives and memories to place.

As a rhetoric and composition scholar engaged in community research, I align myself with Mathieu's (2005) emphasis on tactical — creating spaces of possibility where something may happen — and Alvarez’s (2018) concept of confianza. In many situations, maintaining and sustaining relationships with community members can become the project itself. Maintaining and attending to community relationships creates possibilities and sustainability for future opportunities. So, while parts of this dissertation manifested more as writing “about” the community, I hope that these relationships will build towards writing “for” or even "with" (Deans, 2010), where time and participant interest allow. Carter and Dunbar-Odom (2018) argue that oral history is a "rhetorical invention in public memory" and a “highly political act” (p. 116); at times communities may need or want someone to bear witness: “They must tell their stories and be heard” (p. 121, emphasis in original). In other words, recording and documenting stories is perhaps the
most tactical possibility at this moment. Since this dissertation is the start of a larger project, in conducting this research, I had to balance the immediate demands with the larger scope, and this played a role in my engagement and communication with research participants. However, this also means it is important to be mindful of friendliness versus being friends with community members (Kirsch, 2005); while this is not always possible (since some participants are friends by the nature of being in the same community), it makes it all the more important to make distinct boundaries surrounding the functions of different engagements (e.g., not blurring the lines around the purpose of talking or spending time together).

**Oral History’s Affordances for this Project**

When it comes to the research site, oral history is a natural fit. Oral history has been extensively used to record music history, including the highly praised *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk* (McNeil & McCain, 1996). While music oral histories are often around specific genres, movements, or bands, *No Slam Dancing, No Stage Diving, No Spikes: An Oral History of the Legendary City Gardens* (Wuelfing & DiLodovico, 2014) is centered around a New Jersey venue that was popular in the 1980s, which sets a precedent for talking about place within music history.

More broadly, for this dissertation and for me as a researcher, as shown above, oral history intimately engages with the human experience, memory reconstruction, and accounts for the memory, nostalgia, and place as acts as the present. It provides me a framework that helps me to be mindful of these facts, to pose questions in anticipation of answers that are constructed within the present. It also affords me to be able to witness reconstruction in the moment. Meanwhile, I can consider the human beings on the other
side of the table or screen as I ask my questions. In other words, my decision to approach this project through oral history is not just about the research site or its alignment with rhetorics of place and rhetorics of nostalgia—it is about the human element.

By engaging in oral history, I feel more accountable to the community. It holds me accountable for not only my engagement and relationships with participants, but how I present them on the page, knowing there will be a time where they read the work and the work will someday be presented publicly. While qualitative research, as described below, is also concerned with empathy, oral history shifts my attention beyond the institution. Part of the privilege of this project is to engage in something that the community has expressed interested and excitement for, which keeps me kind even when being critical.

**Qualitative Research and Interviewing**

Qualitative research often involves an interview to gather participant perspectives and narratives, which are both complex and complicated due to the reconstructive nature of memory. Also like oral history, it’s in the complexity and contradictions where meaning happens, along with the researcher’s “social characteristics,” which “shape topic selection, observational processes, relationships and interpretation” (n.p.). In the interview space, Hsiung (2010) notes that the researcher has a “role in the creation of knowledge” (n.p.). The emphasis is on theoretical concepts and insights rather than quantity and numbers as would be seen in quantitative research.

The open-ended questioning of qualitative interviewing promotes the opportunity for community members to share and reflect on what they personally value (along with wider cultural values). Interviews should not only aim for long answers, but answers that
are narrative-driven and first-person accounts that provide description that the participant has some emotional investment in (Hsiung, 2010). While these answers and their meanings are not fixed nor stable—qualitative interviewing recognizes that a person’s answers and “construction of meaning” are shaped by their “shifting social locations” (Hsiung, 2010, n.p.), as well as their identity and material realities.

The following sections review the methods and procedures that I followed, much of which is heavily influenced by best practices in qualitative interviewing.

**Methods & Research Process**

Before any outreach to potential participants, this study, its recruitment materials, waiver (Appendix A), and interview questions (Appendix B) were approved by University of Louisville’s Internal Review Board (IRB). I began recruitment with community members whom I shared networks with. Additional participants were gathered through snowball sampling. Potential participants were recruited via email; those who expressed interest were sent a waiver to sign, acknowledging the study, commitment, and their rights as research participants.

I aimed for 10 participants, and was able to acquire eight, six of which were able to commit to two one-hour interviews (the other two only participated in the first round due to scheduling conflicts). These participants included ear X-tacy’s founder, former employees, former customers, and members of the Louisville music community. Brief profiles of the participants can be found in Appendix C.

The majority of interviews were held and recorded over Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic (see “Limitations” at the end of this chapter); two interviews were held at my home at the participants’ requests and were recorded using my cell phone.
Conducting online interviews offered convenience of remote conversations and recording capabilities. However, being on camera can cause people to become self-conscious, so I offered the option for participants to turn off their camera or talk over the phone as an alternative.

**Interview Process**

Interviews were scheduled for one hour. Both rounds of interviews opened with a reminder of the participants’ rights and the focus of the study. I allowed time for questions and made sure to get verbal confirmation of their understanding of the rights and permission to record. Participants were told/reminded that there were no “right” or “wrong” answers, and that while they were talking I may give non-verbal responses such as nodding or hand-gestures to avoid interrupting them.

Questions drew from both oral history and qualitative interviewing methods. According to Hsiung (2010), like oral history, “An interview is a conversation in which the interviewer and respondent cooperate to ‘give voice’ to knowledge that would not otherwise exist” (n.p.). Questions were open-ended to allow participants to respond without being led to one answer; follow-up questions for clarification and additional information were asked as needed. A list of the pre-determined questions from both rounds can be found in Appendix B.

During the interviews, I took only minimal field notes to avoid diverting my attention during the interviews as this can distract from trust and investment in participants. Meanwhile, after each interview, I shared next steps with the participants to be transparent about the study’s progress and expectations about their participation.
Transcription and Analysis

I edited automated transcripts for clarity, using the Columbia University Center for Oral History Research (CCOHR)’s Oral History Transcription Style Guide (Strong, 2018) as reference. This guide covers the process of transcription, the value of fact-checking, a guide for editing parts of speech, and style guide for punctuation, which draws from the Chicago Manual of Style. While the CCOHR acknowledges that one transcription will not meet all needs, and that transcription is an act of translation, this style guide, “is designed to provide readers with the tools they need to fully interrogate the oral history record, and to understand the reasoning and methods behind its construction” (Strong, 2018, p. 2). Thus, the guide emphasizes accessibility (in terms of clarity), consistency, transparency, and capturing “what a speaker intended to say” (p. 2). CCOHR makes a distinction between written and spoken language and focuses on the use of syntax and punctuation over phonetic spelling, but notes that it can be useful to refer to the audio for inflections, pronunciations, etc.

I want to recognize the tensions in using texts as method analysis for oral history, which is an oral tradition, rather than audio itself (Webb et al., 2017). Increased access to digital media has made it easier to access the original voice and raw audio—allowing us to be “brought closer to the human voice than ever before” (Tebeau, 2013, p. 33); that being said, transcripts do still have their value as long as there is an ethical consideration for how the oral history or digital story is recorded (Fernheimer et al., 2018; Tebeau, 2013). As will be discussed in latter sections, participants of this study had the opportunity to review how they were quoted for factual accuracy and representation, to encourage an “exchange of the interviewer(s) and narrator(s)” (Strong, 2018, p. 1).
In reviewing and analyzing the transcripts, I focused primarily on questions that received the most robust or detailed responses, especially if participants took the time to reflect or tell stories. I read the interviews separately, then the answers to individual questions collectively. This allowed me to track patterns (in topics and word choice) while also making sure I didn’t lose context of individual participants’ responses.

After initial open-coding, I looked for and noted passages from the interviews that included:

- Descriptions of the physical space
- Descriptions of the surrounding area (e.g., Bardstown Road, Louisville)
- Activities, routines, and/or work tasks conducted at the place
- Attitudes and behaviors surrounding the place
- Descriptions of the store’s qualities/identity
- Descriptions of the qualities/identity of those who frequented the store
- Feelings (or the absence of feelings) toward the place and physical space

These details were often found in questions that required participants to rhetorically reconstruct their memories and sense of place, thus illustrating how they were rhetorically placemaking and/or utilizing rhetorics of nostalgia. For Chapter 3, this was then narrowed down the values I center the analysis around: Community, passion for music, and discovery.

**Research Site**

The research site ear X-tacy was a store in Louisville, the largest city in Kentucky. Located along the Ohio River, this city sits on the state’s shared border with Indiana, roughly two hours drive away from Indianapolis, Indiana, Nashville, Tennessee, and Cincinnati, Ohio. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Louisville has a rich punk history.

Ear X-tacy was open from 1985-2011 and occupied multiple storefronts during its existence; a list of the locations and corresponding shorthand names (which are used in
Chapters 3 and 4) can be found in Appendix D. Most of these locations were on Bardstown Road, a road heavily populated with restaurants, bars, coffee shops, and boutiques, with a plethora of music venues in nearby neighborhoods. In the past, this road also hosted live music venues such as Tewligans Tavern.

While ear X-tacy began as a niche store, like its local contemporaries, ear X-tacy eventually focused on offering a wide selection. It was a place where “anyone could shop” (Shuffitt, 2012). The sheer volume of music drew record collectors and traveling bands. The store was also a favorite of Louisville-native musicians such as Jack Harlow and the band My Morning Jacket.

Maintaining a large store with a large stock proved to be a challenge to maintain with the rise of online shopping and music streaming. As described in the documentary *Brick and Mortar and Love* (Shuffitt, 2012), owner John Timmons made several public pleas for community support, announcing the store was at risk of closing due to loss of sales. The calls to action were met with mixed reception, and ultimately were not enough to keep the store afloat, even after an attempt to downsize the store (Shuffitt, 2012). Timmons announced the store’s closing in October, 2011, through the store’s Facebook page.

The largest, next to last location of ear X-tacy still resonates with Louisville locals. Four years after ear X-tacy’s closing, someone had tagged the side of the building with an "ear X-tacy" stencil (Myers, 2015); these sites have the capacity to spark and heighten memory recall and reconstruction. When WLKY News announced in 2020 that Panera Bread, which filled the space after ear X-tacy downsized, was closing, multiple people commented with questions and requests that ear X-tacy return (WLKY News,
Equally, Timmons mentions in the documentary that he is nostalgic for the iconic storefront with its large cathedral-esque windows (Shuffit, 2012).

*High Fidelity* (Frears, 2000), as will be discussed in the following chapters, cemented record stores in popular culture as a place for collector obsessiveness and snobbery. While there is a glimmer of truth in this portrayal—I have been in the middle of my fair share of what I call “High Fidelity moments” in record stores—record stores can offer a more personable approach to music shopping. Employees are passionate and knowledgeable individuals who can make recommendations and offer services that, arguably, an algorithm cannot. However, record stores are not only places of commerce and distribution—they serve as community hubs for local events, for youth to gather, and for independent local artists can find champions of their work.

Independent local artists can frequently depend on record stores to hold in-store events, take product on consignment, and offer valuable retail space in prominent places within the store (Basu & Hatch-Miller, 2019). With additional common features of shops such as listening stations and browsing racks, record stores are communal spaces for people with similar interests to gather, as will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

In documentaries such as *Other Music* (Basu & Hatch-Miller 2019) and *Walls of Sound* (Gracon, 2012), record stores are described as sacred or holy places, and the visit to a record store (as well as playing records) is described as “ritual” (Basu & Hatch-Miller, 2019; Boone & Smokler, 2020). Coworkers are described as “family” (Gracon, 2012), making these places home away from home. These relationships and attachments to place cultivate the emotional landscape that Sonnichsen (2016) described in Chapter 1.
Ethics

While I used the IRB as a baseline for approval, I also checked in with my participants before and after interviews to make sure their participation aligned with their comfort level and preferences. Both Iseke and Moore (2011) and Allen and Dudeck (2019) note that, culturally, ethical standards and expectations of community members may vary from academic standards. In order to be truly responsible in community research, one should go beyond academic standards to ensure that community members feel comfortable with the project and what they are asked to do. Comfort levels makes it more feasible for community members to “participate meaningfully” (Iseke & Moore, p. 27), and this makes it easier to maintain relationships and build trust. If community-based protocols aren’t already in place, then it should be a collaborative effort between the researcher and community (Iseke & Moore, 2011). Taking the time to establish or follow community protocols, in addition to institutional protocols (such as written consent), demonstrates respect and value for the community’s culture and stories.

In both the IRB waiver and conversation with participants (i.e., in writing and verbally), I informed participants that they were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. Consent forms detailed what the study entailed and what was expected of the participant, including potential risks (which were minimal, but noting their interviews may be made public, so there is potential social risks). Additionally, participants had the option to use a pseudonym, or other markers such as a preferred name or initials, but I made sure to clarify that this does not guarantee anonymity, given the nature of the study, specificity of the story, and size of the community. In the spirit of Newkirk’s (1996) guidelines for ethical rendering, I communicated my “willingness to
bring up issues, problems, or questions” (p. 13) and asked that my participants do the same. I returned to these are conversations in the second round of interviews to make sure that participants were comfortable, expectations were clear, and that any problems or questions had the chance to be addressed.

As previously mentioned, participants had an opportunity to review how they were quoted and the associated analysis in the dissertation. Each participant was sent relevant passages with summaries that contextualized them within the chapter and study; I brought participants’ attention to anything that deemed “bad news” or problematic (Newkirk, 1996). For example, one participant’s answers were often framed as contrast to other narratives, so I made sure that it was clear that they knew how their ideas and perspectives were framed. Participants were encouraged to contact me if they had concerns about factual accuracy or misrepresentation and I offered to talk through any conflicts in interpretation or analysis. This review and opportunity to respond served as a means to not only aim for accuracy, but also a means to make sure participants had and continue to have control of their own narratives (Brittenham et al., 2018). Additionally, as a researcher, to minimize potential for harm (for both the community and individual participants), I felt that these exchanges with community members was a means toward doing the best to accurately portray community members' stories—it not only was a means of maintaining our relationship, but a reminder to me to be mindful of analysis and potential bias. When crafting and editing writing and research “editing can transform how voices are heard and how stories are understood” (Iseke & Moore, 2011, p. 29). And while I initially had the impulse to review every stage of the transcription and analysis process with community members, I also had to be aware of the distribution of labor and
respect that not all community partners may be interested in reviewing transcripts or analysis and would rather have highlights or be walked through major changes (Iseke & Moore, 2011).

In response to any conflicts in perspective and interpretation between myself and community members that remained unchanged after discussion were included in the final document, with both a reflection and explanation of why I chose to maintain my interpretation and analysis.

All data and participant information were kept on a password protected computer and encrypted external hard drive. This information was held through the duration of the dissertation; I will renew and update my IRB for additional work as the larger project continues. In addition to making sure participant information is secure in storage, I avoided discussing details of participant information with others within the study and within the related community.

**Potential Bias**

In acknowledging my role as a recreator, as Portelli (2019) terms it, throughout this project, I have aimed to be attentive to how I respond and react during interviews. This research studied and addressed differing (and sometimes conflicting) narratives and details, and thus my identity and biases potentially shaped how I approached this study. Since I cannot erase my own subjectivity, I have reflected on how it may influence the power dynamics of the interviews and my interpretation of the subsequent data.

As a relatively recent transplant to Louisville,¹ I lack insider knowledge and history of the city, community, and people, which can only be created through lived

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¹ Nearly five years at the time of writing.
experience. Difference, as previously stated, can be meaningful to the interview process (Portelli, 2018), and it potentially helped me to avoid blind spots or biases I may have had as someone who had lived in Louisville all or most of their life; however, it also meant that there were gaps I needed to fill\(^2\). I needed the participants to fill in the blanks for me, and I asked clarifying questions to make sure I understood their perspectives and that I was not projecting.

Where I lack local knowledge, I do have knowledge and experience in record stores as a record collector. This insider knowledge and experience created common ground with participants as we were able to share interests and they felt understood when I was able to respond in kind when they talked about specific bands, albums, or record store culture. This insider knowledge helped me to put some information in context with the larger vinyl culture and record industry. However, since this is a definitive bias, I also had to make sure that I was not filling in blanks where it would skew information, nor that I was aligning myself with those who shared my perspectives and interests. Additionally, as a cis woman, I recognize that this has influenced my experience in record stores, which are sometimes considered male-centered spaces; in some cases, this position was useful in discussing perspectives and experiences.

Finally, as a White researcher researching a site that is in a historically White neighborhood in a heavily segregated city, I attempted to be deliberate in my participant sampling. The goal was to have a diverse base that would not only help me fill in the gaps as an outsider, but to reveal different perspectives and narratives while also potentially highlighting inequities and biases within the local music community. I discuss

\(^2\) For example, I occasionally would get turned around/confused when participants were trying to describe side streets to me.
this more in the “Limitations” as well as later chapters, since this goal could not be fulfilled as I would have liked.

In order to be attentive to my position, as part of my journaling practice after each interview, I self-assessed what went well in the interview process and what may have gone better, referring back to best practices in oral history and qualitative interviewing. This helped me modify my approach with subsequent interviews as needed, while also keeping me honest.

**Limitations**

The COVID-19 pandemic, as will be further discussed in Chapter 5, limited the ways in which I may have engaged with the community. The need for social distancing was both a limitation and ethical concern. It may have also influenced the conditions for relationship building. Within community engagement research, part of establishing trust and familiarizing oneself with the research site and community is actually going out into the community—being in the place and interacting with people. Additionally, face-to-face and in-person communication can create a more personable experience, building trust and relationships between the researcher and community members (Alvarez, 2018). From a theoretical standpoint, this would be to embrace the embodied experience of body in a place as described by Boyle and Rice (2018). While ear X-tacy as a business is now closed, most of the buildings still stand.

A remote option may have reduced harm, not just from infection, but unnecessarily painful experiences. Two participants explicitly noted in their interviews that they had not returned to the research site, partially due to the pain associated with the closing of the store and fondness for what it had been. The shift in approach to
accommodate the pandemic ultimately helped to avoid possible conflict or unnecessary discomfort for community members.

While remote interviewing allowed participants and me (as a disabled researcher) to work from a safe location, this may have deterred potential participants from engaging for a number of reasons: Some may not have been comfortable with the technology or may have been experiencing “Zoom fatigue” with so many meetings, communications, and events being hosted online. Under pandemic conditions, others may not have had the mental or emotional energy to engage and/or may not have been able balance the commitment with caretaking and/or work responsibilities. The stress, collective trauma, and general insecurity of a global pandemic may have made it difficult for potential participants to forge trust—even with the advancement of background blur technology, video calls can be intrusive as they often provide a look into the participants’ living space (or background noise through the microphone).

The pandemic and lockdown also made it difficult to open up conversations regarding reciprocity since some approaches were not possible. I offered a meal to the two participants who met in person. Since this is the start of a larger project, I intend to revisit reciprocity, especially since I will be seeking to engage with additional community members.

The second largest limitation of this study is limited racial diversity. While I made multiple attempts to recruit participants of color, particularly Black participants, most of these attempts went without a response. This limits the people who are being heard and potentially limits the collective narrative that has been shared here and consequently it may reproduce some dominate narratives. I discuss this further in Chapter 5.
Finally, as with most dissertations, time and funding is finite. This limits the amount of work that can be done, truncating some practices that would be expected with longer projects.

**Conclusion**

No study is perfect, nor can it account for hiccups or possible barriers and changes in material realities, both in our and community members’ lives; the best we can do as researchers in the field and our analysis is to be tactical (and tactful) and open, maintain open communication, and pivot when necessary, being mindful of everyone’s best interests (including my own as a researcher). Taking care of myself, as the researcher, often benefitted my participants, and vice versa.

These methodological frameworks taught me to be flexible, to allow human research to be messy, and to face the challenges of unanticipated answers/outcomes with joy and grace. As such, they allowed for me to maintain a critical eye while following the narratives where they went; this approach taught me to sit with the data, to re-search, search again and again. However, it also revealed the selectivity of research and narrative, not just in participant answers, but in shaping the chapters that follow, which cover only a fraction of what the interviews entailed. Research, by its very nature, will always be selective, and this project revealed the ways in which the research itself is also a rhetorical construction; that being said, as stated elsewhere throughout this project, it’s through the selectivity and specificity (and recognition of the limitations, including biases) that meaning making happens and opens doors to further analysis.

The following chapters will apply these methods and theoretical frameworks in the analysis through the rhetorical lenses presented in Chapter 1.
CHAPTER III

RHETORICS OF NOSTALGIA AS RHETORICAL PLACEMAKING—THE TENSIONS OF PAST AND FUTURE IN DESIRE AND SPECULATION

Every Friday during the first semester of my MFA, I would take the train from Northern Philadelphia to the record store Main Street Music, one stop past my townhome in the suburbs. By the time I got there, my husband would already be drinking with the other regulars and the owner. After greeting everyone, I would walk past the counter into the back office where would grab a green pony bottle of Rolling Rock from the fridge. This was a privilege earned by showing up, spending money, and being able to talk music.

New to the city, Main Street Music became a focal point for socialization. We attended in-store events — concerts held in the record stores — and volunteered at the merch tables. Two of the employees lived in our neighborhood. We had meals together and watched each other’s pets during vacation. Eventually, this would be the record store we would get married in, but it’s also a place where we occasionally felt tensions and obligations to financially support. In short, I have a range and wealth of memories and emotions attached to this store.

While Main Street Music is still open, it reminds me of ear X-tacy because of the way both became focal points for the music community, their location on popular stretches of road, and their longevity (ear X-tacy closed after 26 years while Main Street
Music boasts 25+ years of service). Main Street Music describes itself as “an independent record store that doubles as a gathering place for music lovers” (“About Us,” n.d., para 1), and founder John Timmons has described ear X-tacy as a place “where anyone could shop” (Shuffitt, 2012). Community is partly what draws me to record stores in the first place.

Since moving to Louisville in 2016, I’ve only had the chance to return once to Main Street Music. As such, this store, as a place, currently exists in memory for me. The memories of Main Street Music shift and change as I visit and immerse myself in other record stores that are attached to my own values involving community and music but also the values I’ve seen in action within these places.

As covered in Chapter 1, both rhetorical placemaking and nostalgia are acts of the present. Because these are acts of the present, we perhaps consider place in terms of the present, such as the store I frequented in Philadelphia. Even without me being there, I know this store still exists, and my present rhetorical placemaking is influenced not only by my memories, but by their social media and the occasional conversation with the employees. I have the opportunity to go back to this place, to make new memories. But what happens with placemaking when the place no longer exists? When there is no longer a spatial location that bears that place’s identity?

This chapter proposes that rhetorical placemaking can be entered through rhetorics of nostalgia. In other words, rhetorical placemaking of a past place is influenced by our desires and interests of what we wanted a place to be, which is influenced not only by our past and present desires, but what we desire and speculate a place can mean
moving forward, both for ourselves and others. We reconstruct and shape our narratives around place to reflect our values and interests.

To explore this argument, this chapter will start with the use of speculation and desire (influenced by critical design) as a means for rhetorical placemaking. Then, to test how speculation and desire can be used in placemaking potential pasts, we will explore rhetorical placemaking of the region in Appalachia before finally turning to this project’s research site ear X-tacy. Drawing from participant oral history interviews, I’ve identified three values to examine and consider how this influences participants’ rhetorical placemaking of ear X-tacy.

**The Literature: Critical Design, Speculation, Desire in Rhetorical Placemaking**

Critical design emerged out of critical theory. For Dunne and Raby (2013), who coined the term, critical design “is a means of speculating about how things could be--to imagine possible futures” (para. 1). And while these speculations are not a guarantee, Dunne and Raby are less interested in being correct about any one future and more invested in the “‘what if’ questions that are intended to open debate and discussion about the kind of future people want (and do not want)” (para. 1). Artists, including Dunne and Raby, have used critical design to challenge social, cultural, and ethical norms in topics such as humans’ current and future reliance on technology.

Meanwhile, rhetorician Megan Gianfanga (2018) has used critical design as a means of exploring rhetorics of place. For Gianfanga, critical design allows her to consider open-ended means of representing and discussing place. She argues that critical design, in being able to imagine possible futures, a city can prepare its population to embrace and navigate future values and behavior expectations through critical and
rhetorical interventions. Through collaboration and dialogue, people can rhetorically and critically intervene in the direction and development of a place and these changes reinscribe new meaning in placemaking. “Change,” Gianfanga argues, “constitutes places as much as their material elements or maps do” (p. 30), and critical design allows the placemaking process to be visible. In other words, critical design allows her to highlight and trace the rhetorical interventions that influence placemaking and change.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I am personally invested in critical design’s speculative, imaginative nature. Through speculation, there is the potential to not only examine possible futures, but possible pasts. By considering “the kind of future people want (and do not want)” (Dunne & Raby, 2013, para. 1) regarding a place, the conversation shifts from what a place was during a point and time to how people desired that place to be. In other words, the “what if” is shaped by nostalgia, and nostalgia shapes not only what they lost, but what they imagine and wish could happen moving forward, creating a tension between the past and future.

In looking forward, even if we don’t always realize it, we are also looking into the past. How things could be is based on how things could have been. The shape of our memories and how we have rhetorically constructed them for ourselves informs our expectations of future—the pasts and futures we’re willing to speculate about, at least. Similarly, drawing upon Lynch, Gianfanga (2018) states: “Places are always imagined, in a sense. Kevin Lynch writes that ‘our images of past and future are present images, continuously re-created’ (65)” (p. 31). As stated in Chapter 1, neither place nor memory are static—placemaking may be an act of the present, but we cannot act in the present

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3 The multiplicity of these pasts include various interpretations, revisions, and reconstructions, as well as what people wish the past could have been like.
without past experiences. We consider what we would like a place to be (or not be) based on how we remember a place (or similar places).

For example, my expectations of going into a record store are going to be based on all my previous experiences visiting other record stores, and as such I’m going to weigh the experience against all those previous experiences. Positive experiences in favorite stores will influence what I want the new place to be; equally, bad experiences will inform what I hope doesn’t happen. Additionally, my imagined sense of what a record store could be and should be is re-invented with the accumulation of experiences. In short, if places “are never fully present, never quite cohesive or reliable or still” (Gianfanga, 2018, p. 31), then memory as reconstructions of a place will never be fully present or cohesive either.

In the following section, I consider how speculation about the tension between the past and future influence rhetorical placemaking of Appalachia using Kurlinkus and Kurlinkus’s 2018 article “‘Coal Keeps the Lights On’: Rhetorics of Nostalgia for an in Appalachia.” I’ve picked this article for a few reasons: (1) I want to explore the ways in which speculation is enacted in rhetorics of nostalgia; (2) I want to consider what it looks like to rhetorically placemake while looking to the past of a place that still exists before adding the complication of a potential past for a place that no longer exists; (3) Appalachia is a region ripe with both reconstructions and fictional imaginings that have shaped local and national rhetorical placemaking⁴; and, (4) Kurlinkus and Kurlinkus

⁴ While Louisville is on the periphery of Appalachia, their proximity in this project is coincidental; however, there is room for future research to consider the role region plays in the placemaking of ear X-tacy and other record stores.
(2018) are heavily focused on the rhetorical nostalgia for a region, which will further illustrate the inherent connection between rhetorics of place and rhetorics of nostalgia.

**Appalachia and Rhetorics of Nostalgia’s Role in Rhetorical Placemaking**

Kurlinkus and Kurlinkus (2018) interrogate rhetorics of nostalgia surrounding Appalachia as a region and how these rhetorics are and have been used by different actors—the coal mining industry, politicians, and the Appalachian community members. Rhetorics of nostalgia, by their very nature, are a longing for the past. As discussed in Chapter 1’s literature review, rhetorics of nostalgia are culturally learned and an act of the present; additionally, “nostalgia is an inescapable part of all identity formation and memory, and rhetoric studies seems well suited to understand, critique, and aid in the democratic movements that might stem from it” (Kurlinkus & Kurlinkus, 2018, p. 105). What does this mean for rhetorical placemaking?

Historically, nostalgia is a longing for home, a place. Longing and loss of a place, as well as the desire for a place to be different (either as it is now or has been), causes us to imagine and create ideas of place. We rhetorically craft an idea to frame the place as we desire it to be (whether positively or negatively). While Kurlinkus and Kurlinkus provide examples of placemaking Appalachia that trace back to Reconstruction Era, for the sake of this exercise, I focus primarily on recent examples, such as Trump’s 2016 presidential campaign and the coal industry. Both project ideas onto Appalachia to reshape its past to take advantage of the present and future.

Through nostalgia, Trump's 2016 presidential campaign aims to rhetorically placemake—on a national and regional level. The slogan "Make America Great Again" (MAGA), using the word "make," implies that place can be made, shaped, and imagined.
MAGA's rhetorical design of the future is a return to the past. However, to return to the past, the past must also be designed to align with these goals. "Make America Great Again" encompasses both the future and the past—in order for the future to be great, it must be like the past, which also must be great.

"Greatness" is an interpretation of history and place, and one not without its criticisms. For example, the nostalgic longing in MAGA rhetoric is typically interpreted and deployed for a White-only America, which has never actually existed. This reconstruction of the past is further fostered by values of white supremacy and capitalism—this reconstruction of potential pasts and projection into possible futures encourages a certain type of behavior and embracing of values. If someone wants America to return to its former greatness, then they must also imagine the possibility of such a past where these values were encouraged. This creation of the past is a collaborative effort among the political campaign, voters, and industry tycoons that would benefit from the material consequences of this mindset.

Within Appalachia, this effort to reconstruct the past is entangled with the coal industry, and then passed to locals, especially those whose families have worked in the mines. Place and identity are closely linked, thus the narratives constructed about the people are imposed upon the land and vice versa. Throughout history, there has been a tension between the regional caricatures of the ignorant hillbillies and hardworking people of Appalachia—the conflicting ideas of these terms are deliberate and malleable based on the longing and desire of those wielding the terms. Within Trump’s 2016 campaign, Trump uses the latter to welcome people into a “community of nostalgia,” which Kurlinkus and Kurlinkus (2018) describe as: “a diverse constituency united by
pride in region and industry, longing to recover a golden age of jobs, and loss caused by years of ‘abusive’ regulation and globalization” (p. 88). The campaign argued that it represented the “silent majority,” who, Trump claimed, were what made this country “great.” This “golden age” has been labeled, by Kurlinkus and Kurlinkus as well as the press, as an “inauthentic memory,” but “denying longing as inauthentic doesn’t relieve us of its influences” (p. 88). Especially when the liberal alternative has framed Appalachia as “all that is wrong with poor, white, irrational America” (pp. 96-97). In other words, an idea about a place does not have to be authentic for anyone, including the people who live there, to long for that idea. This may also be part of what draws in some people of Appalachia, even in the face of hardship.

The coal industry has utilized nostalgia and the need for self-continuity by creating “the myth of self-sacrifice,” which weaves the narrative that when hard work is for the larger well-being, hardship, lack of pay, and poor compensation are acceptable (Evans cited in Kurlinkus & Kurlinkus, 2018, p. 98). In combination with the human need for self-continuity, the myth of self-sacrifice is aided by the “fading affect bias,” which “ensures memories of extreme/painful emotions fade more quickly than positives ones” (p. 98). Because positive stories create stronger identities, it’s easier to circulate and embrace communal narratives that coal mining represents honorable self-sacrifice (Kurlinkus & Kurlinkus, 2018). Thus, when Friends of Coal, a political action group, uses the slogan “Coal Keeps the Lights On” or passes out workbooks in Appalachian schools that describe the importance of the coal industry for jobs and American independence (Kurlinkus & Kurlinkus, 2018), they create not only a fondness for coal,
but to encourage future generations to imagine Appalachia as a place that has and will embrace the coal industry.

These narratives erase the other parts of Appalachian history, such as unions and oppression, and the countless deaths in the face of capitalism. Instead, these narratives of self-sacrifice and make no new calls to action within this narrative—“[the miners] chose to give their lives and are heroes for doing so” (Kurlinkus & Kurlinkus, 2018, p. 99). This builds an expectation to continue to sacrifice in the name of coal and Appalachia. To do otherwise would be betrayal to the way of life and greater good. Thus, Appalachian people find control through defining themselves through coal: “Mining isn’t just a job; it’s a ritual act of familial identity preservation” (p. 100). The coal industry’s efforts to rhetorically shape Appalachian passes through the generations because there are no other alternatives for those who continue to lose. Embracing the values presented and shaping them into strength creates a concept of Appalachia that they can be proud.

Perhaps most interestingly, despite the rhetoric of embracing and bettering Appalachia, a sense of togetherness, these creations of potential pasts begin outside Appalachia or from corporate individuals. These entities, who do not share the working class’s experiences, shape narratives around Appalachia to serve their own needs while rhetorically placing themselves alongside the working class, with shared goals and aspirations. However, Kurlinkus and Kurlinkus (2018) do provide examples of nostalgia shaped by people within Appalachia—through queer and feminist lenses, movements within Appalachia pose a “what if” of their own. These “what if”’s consider how things may be different in the present and moving forward if the past had been different and what this would mean for them. For example, what if industry had entered Appalachia
differently (Kurlinkus & Kurlinkus, 2018)? In daring to consider how things could have been different, these questions prompt a recreation of the past and an alternative understanding of Appalachia, some more dramatically than others. In other words, counter nostalgias prompt re-examination of narratives such as those presented by the coal mining industry.

These examples demonstrate the role rhetorics of nostalgia play in rhetorical placemaking. While it could be seen as a matter of needing to know what a place has been in order to know where a place can go, nostalgia is not just about remembering the past—it is about what we long for and to what end, and using that longing to shape what we want to imagine the past being in order to frame how we want to move forward into the future. Appalachia has the continued potential for change as a place that continues to exist; however, there is a complication in the fact that this study’s research site has no future as a place that exists in geographical space.

The Rhetorical Placemaking of Ear X-tacy

Unlike the Appalachia narratives created by MAGA or the coal industry, the placemaking of ear X-tacy is perhaps closer to those mentioned at the end of the previous section—a collaboration of those who live within the community and/or engaged with ear X-tacy when it was open. However, like Appalachia, the placemaking surrounding ear X-tacy evokes the past—an imagining and interpretation of what ear X-tacy had been, or what people desired it to be.

As previously mentioned, our present and future expectations and desires are shaped by past experiences, and our desires are often influenced by our values and interests. As such, it would make sense then that our experiences with rhetorical
placemaking in the past would also influence the present act of placemaking. For example, fast food restaurants rhetorically construct a sense of place through slogans, commercials, and building design. The consistency and similarity of the rhetorical construction at different locations build the expectation for future experiences to align.

While ear X-tacy was not a franchise and only briefly had two locations\(^5\), I do suspect that the rhetorical placemaking and construction of the store itself influenced participants’ rhetorical reconstructions of the store.

During my research on the history of ear X-tacy, and during participant interviews, two goals and values ear X-tacy promoted emerged, one officially and the other less so. The first is the official slogan, “a premier alternative record store,” which inherently linked the record store to the rise college rock in the 1980s, followed by alternative music in the early 1990s. The second was unofficial, but no less influential. Timmons stated in the 2012 documentary *Brick and Mortar and Love* (Shuffitt, 2012) and during our conversations that as the store grew, he wanted to expand so that it could be a place “where anyone could shop.” These two goals and aspirations for ear X-tacy rhetorically shaped the store until its closing, and likely to continue to influence the ways in which people choose to remember ear X-tacy. In the interviews, it was common to hear associations between alternative rock and ear X-tacy, and multiple people talked about the openness and welcoming space (though not everyone agreed with the extent of this).

\(^5\) In addition to the main Bardstown Road location, there was a brief, second location in the Louisville suburb Middletown. While it’s not entirely clear why it closed, from what I was able to gather during my interview with Scott Ritcher, it closed due to overall lack of traction in comparison to the main store on Bardstown Road. Further interviews would be needed to confirm this.
However, it’s important to remember (no pun intended) that both memory and placemaking are acts of the present. In other words, because place and memory are not static, what happened in the past and understandings of place are not remembered verbatim and change over time (Giafanga, 2018; Fernygough, 2014). Participants’ experiences of place during ear X-tacy’s existence shaped and influenced the way that they remember the store a decade after its closing, but that is not the only influence. Now, when reconstructing memories of ear X-tacy, there is an accumulation of both their experiences in the store and all the times that they have remembered ear X-tacy since its closing. Any rhetorical placemaking during ear X-tacy’s existence may have influenced employee and customer values and behaviors, which allowed them to imagine what a future could look like for the store, but the reconstruction of memory is an accumulation of previous reconstructions of the store, which are shaped by experiences and desires that have developed since the store’s closing.

During participant interviews and while reviewing the transcripts, I noticed narrative patterns—repeated words and concepts that reflected both the values and goals of ear X-tacy (see above) and values of the participants. While some narratives were more strongly influenced by nostalgia and fondness than others, these narratives all came back to desire of what they wanted place to be (and not be). These overlaps likely result in an accumulation of shared experiences, especially those who have lived in Louisville for some time (multiple participants knew each other at least in passing).

In this chapter, I am following the interconnected narrative threads and values of discovery, passion for music, and community. These three threads serve as both a contemporary interpretation of ear X-tacy (both what it set out to be and rhetorical
reconstruction) and a reflection of current desires and sense of place (both of ear X-tacy and the surrounding area). In other words, these narratives reflect how participants are rhetorically placemaking ear X-tacy, but also reflect how participants currently make sense of a “premier alternative record store” or "a place where anyone could shop." While one claim about ear X-tacy came before the other, as noted above, the two claims, ultimately, have different aims—one is connected to the type of music that was available while the other shifts focus to the community. Contemporary placemaking of ear X-tacy works in collaboration with the past, and depending on when participants visited ear X-tacy, they may privilege one of these ideas over the other in their narratives reconstructions.

In the following sections, I will consider the three identified narratives and how these values play out in participants’ understanding of place. While these are separated for ease of reading and close examination, it’s important to also recognize that these narratives and values overlap, as seen in the Venn diagram (Figure 1), which provides examples of how each influences the other and how they manifest.

**Figure 1**

*Intersecting Values within Ear X-tacy (As Communicated by Participants)*
Community

At its height, approximately 1993-2010\(^6\), Scott Ritcher, a former employee, described ear X-tacy as a “Louisville institution,” but regardless of when participants visited or worked at ear X-tacy, they referred to the store as a gathering place or a community hub—a place where people would meet up and/or hang out. The store’s location(s) on Bardstown Road, a main thoroughfare, and proximity to other businesses, in combination with the variety of music that it had to offer, made it a convenient stop, attracted people to the store, and made it easy to return. Participants described ear X-tacy as a community, and part of the Louisville music community, both on a large and small scale, serving different populations, depending on when they frequented the store, and at what location.

\(^6\) These dates are drawn from the Burnette’s 2021 oral history in *Louisville Magazine*. These dates are when the store was in its largest location.
Ear X-tacy began as a store focused on music that was difficult to find (see Discovery), and later grew into “the place where anyone could shop” as described by Timmons. Michael Jones, a former customer who frequented the Highland Coffee location in the early 1990s, described ear X-tacy as a “clubhouse” where he and his friends would gather on a regular basis. He appreciated the fact that, when he first started going, it was small and personable.

Jones: I mean, I've had friends that worked there. It was close by. So it was just like our hangout. Yeah. [laughs] And it was like a landmark, “Like meet me at ear X-tacy,” or you know, we'll go do this.

As the store grew, ear X-tacy became less of a neighborhood destination and more so a city destination, and then a destination for touring musicians and record collectors. The community grew with the store, and for some, that changed the perception and narrative of the store. While some enjoyed the expansiveness of the store’s largest space, those who were more familiar with its previous iterations, like Jones and Fox, felt as though the store had moved toward a more commercial route, almost like a mall store, despite it having been the alternative to the mall. This made it feel less personable to some who had visited previous, smaller locations.

Regardless the iteration of the store, Ear X-tacy was a place that was acceptable for teenagers to frequent. Natalie Wicke described ear X-tacy as important to her teenage years because, “It gave me a place to go.” Meanwhile, Jill Wegenast mentioned that two of her daughters would walk to ear X-tacy after school, and she felt safe with them hanging out there, as she had frequented one of its locations on Bardstown Road when she, too, was their age. Former Tower Records executive Russell Solomon noted that young people are an important demographic to record stores—his business was built had
been built around the fact that young people deeply cared about music, and music was a way for them to express themselves (Hanks, 2015).

But participants did not just remember ear X-tacy for supporting the Louisville community and its youth, it was a place where musicians could find work and support for their music. Musicians could sell their music on consignment. They could rely on the employees to display their merchandise or play their music. In-store events provided a space for musicians to play their music live, which further prompted the gathering of young people. Multiple participants made note that ear X-tacy had a designated bin for local music and that local music was available for preview at the listening stations. Ritcher mentioned that if someone, including him, was trying to produce an album, they could count on Timmons to preorder enough copies to ensure they had enough money to press the record. It wasn’t just about the store succeeding, but the music community. For example, when discussing ear X-tacy’s reputation, Wicke recognized that while ear X-tacy, by the time she was working there, was not an underdog, it was mindful of those who did not have the same resources:

Wicke: You know, [ear X-tacy] would have a whole section for local artists they would put them on the listening stations, they would play their music in the stores. They would, you know, put up posters, and, you know, they put their money where they’re values were, like, oh, it wasn’t just lip service like, “oh yeah, we support local music.” Well, you know, anyone can say that to kind of get brownie points or whatever but their genuinely did it. [laughs] And I think that was a huge, you know, boost to the community in that regard.

Wicke makes a distinction between actions and language—for her, community, is not just about the gathering of people, but offering support when resources were available to do so. But also, her memory of ear X-tacy as a community member aligns with her understanding of what “support local music” means and entails. These types of
statements can be broad and open-ended, meaning multiple things to multiple people. For some, it may be attending and showing up for local artists; for others, it may mean using their purchasing power at local businesses. For ear X-tacy, it meant utilizing the store’s standing within the music community and its financial privileges.

As ear X-tacy grew and its music selection widened, the more possibilities there were for "anyone" to be able to shop, though the term “anyone” is up to interpretation. Given that this is within the context of a record store, the first and more likely interpretation is in reference to genre. While ear X-tacy began as a shop primarily for punk and alternative music, things Timmons liked, he eventually realized that was not sufficient:

**Timmons:** I kind of took the best parts of other stores that I worked in or shopped. [ACW: Mhm.] Just tried to make it—I just wanted it to be a place where I would [laughs]—it was very selfish. I wanted it to be a store that I would want to shop it, you know? And it started off very, very narrow mindedly with basically just selling things that were my musical taste, if you will, or lack thereof. And I don't know how long it was after I opened the store that I realized: Okay, this has gotta be—it can't just be for me. It's got to be… I wasn't thinking everybody, but I was thinking it's got to be for more than just my musical taste.

Timmons’ goals to expand beyond his interests were certainly reflected in the participants’ responses. They were interested in a range of genres, and part of what appealed to them about ear X-tacy was finding new ones (e.g., the following two sections). Ritcher, as an employee, was aware of the customers’ range of interests as well:

**Ritcher:** I think the store is sort of known for its indie alternative punk angle or because it was sort of an epicenter for that sort of stuff, but there was, there were so many country and blues and jazz classical fans shopping there that were--and those are really, really good selection of those types of music.

Although “anyone” is primarily related to genre, when I asked participants about the demographics, they identified customers and employees anywhere from their teens to
their thirties (but not limited to this range). Notably, out of the eight participants, four of them mentioned the racial dynamics of the store. And out of the four, only 3 of them referenced it explicitly.

**Jones:** I would say it wasn't very racially diverse. I think that there was only, especially in within the, you know, the indie rock crowd, I was probably one of a handful of Black people, there’re few Asians, but it's mostly White people and a lot of them trying to be different, but being the same [laughs], like wearing black leather jackets. [...] You know. And so, I was attracted to the artistic nature of it [Bardstown Road] back then. All the--had all the mom and pop stores. And so ear X-tacy, it was a space that was accepting of minorities, but it was really, in a lot of ways, but it was really a White-dominated space, [laughs] you know.

**Harris:** You wouldn't see a lot of Black people in there either, not, not that is was exclusive or excluded-- trying to exclude anybody, I don't think, but just because of the racial issues we have in the segregation that we experience every day, that was just a, you know, another outcome of it there.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, most of the participants for this study are white, which means there are some narratives that are underrepresented here. Because ear X-tacy was located in the Highlands neighborhood, a historically White neighborhood, Whiteness may have been assumed or the default for some participants. I further discuss the potential implications of this in Chapter 4, but as noted in Chapter 5, this portion of the narrative deserves more attention in future research.

Heather Fox, who felt as though the store did not attend to race, noted that she wasn't sure if it was a record store's responsibility to attend to diversity. In reflecting on her memory of the place and what she think a place should be, she found herself wrestling with the tensions between the two. While talking through her thoughts, she speculated about the role of genres such as the world music section. This section not only appealed to her but offered a different look into the diversity within a record store. In most record stores, a world music section is smaller than other sections. More often than
not, I find it buried in a corner or tucked away in spare space; however, given that Fox generally did not do much browsing in the store itself, the presence and breadth of this section in ear X-tacy stood out to her. While this shifts the conversation from “everyone” by moving from genre presence of consumers to the stock within the store, music by different people across the world can also create representation (not unlike books by diverse authors in a bookstore).

While the store was a place where anyone could shop, as a place within the community and as a community, participants demonstrated interest and investment in ear X-tacy being more than a record store; however, that does not mean music was and is not important to ear X-tacy as a place.

The store’s reputation was based on its accommodations of the music community, along with its capacity to be “cool,” a word that multiple participants came back to—the people were cool, the store was cool, the vibe and decorations were all cool. There was a social status equated with ear X-tacy. Even if not everyone agreed that all these things were cool, they at least identified one or two things about the place that qualified as such. Equally, the store itself seemed to offer certain affordances for someone to be recognized as cool.

The capacity to be cool and identified as cool within music circles and microcosms such as ear X-tacy (and perhaps record stores more broadly) is closely linked cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) surrounding musical taste. Taste is socially constructed, and association with ear X-tacy, whether an employee or regular customer, reflected certain kinds of tastes—tastes that demonstrate a “cool” status. To be a part of the community within ear X-tacy was to demonstrate a capability or appreciation for certain
kinds of art. In earlier iterations of the store, before its largest location, this community was considerably smaller, and the tastes that reflected “cool” status were far more selective. As will be discussed in the next section, this status comes with a hierarchy, and that selectivity of who is considered “cool” and who isn’t means that it’s not just about who can shop at the store, but who can demonstrate their appreciation and passion for music. In Chapter 4, this “cool” factor reflects the “authentic” experience of ear X-tacy.

**Passion for Music**

This narrative thread may seem obvious—it’s difficult to talk about a record store without discussing music because running and visiting a record store generally requires some sort of investment in music. In the previous section, music is often what brought people together. As aforementioned, Ear X-tacy was a place where people could discover and find music that they often could not find anywhere else. For example, one participant mentioned the awe of being able to find a Dr. Dre album before rap and hip hop was widely available in Louisville. However, it’s the way in which participants described the level of passion and investment that makes it worth noting. This ranged from supporting local musicians to learning about music to identify what makes a good record store business in the face of capitalism.

While ear X-tacy undoubtedly attracted casual music listeners, participants remembered those who were dedicated:

**Jones:** Ear X-tacy was for people that were serious about music. Like you cared a lot about music.

**Ritcher:** I mean, I think they were, as a general rule, I think the customers were pretty smart, pretty knowledgeable about music and, you know, really music, musically interested people.
Wicke: You know, you have people wearing like t-shirts and jeans, like the employees in the customers looked really similar and sometimes you could--and like, they all knew about music. So you could probably go up to a customer and be like, “Hey, man, is this a good, you know, record?” and they’d be like, “Oh yeah! You know, and blah blah blah.” And it's like, “Do you work here?” “No man, you need to go up there!” [laughs]

This identification of passionate music fans could be a reflection of those who agreed to this study—those who cared enough about music and ear X-tacy to want to talk about it for roughly two hours. For others, the investment and interest in music is a reflection of Timmons’ intentions for ear X-tacy:

Harris: Like, I don't think John Timmons ever wanted to become Amazon. You know, that wasn't his goal. I mean, maybe he would have liked that, [ACW: laughs] but, I mean, yeah, he was doing it because he believed in the music, he loved music, and he believed in music, and he knew that music was important and, I guess like I was saying, he wanted to share it with people.

For participants like Harris, the value is not just in of music itself but being in the music business for, as Harris put it, the “right reasons,” which includes separating financial success from the importance of sharing music. When Harris spoke of feeling sad or the loss of ear X-tacy, it was in the context of what the store did in service of music.

The employees could help customers find music and make recommendations based on the customers’ interests and previous purchases, which further emphasized the welcoming, community aspect of the store. In the interviews, participants equated the passion for music with a knowledge of music, which was another layer of being “serious” about music. The staff's knowledge was appealing, either because customers could get help or because the employees shared a level of investment.

Harris: I always felt like I was welcome there, you know, and that I could get competent help if I did--and that's one of the things, too. I mean, I always felt like there was a level of knowledge about the music there that was sufficient, you
know, because some places they aren’t, they're not. [Undecipherable] can go into a music store and they don't really know much about the music, which is, I wouldn’t say it's annoying, but it was refreshing to be a place where they did know about, [ACW laughs] you know, I gave them high marks for that.

Wicke: I remember Matt Anthony was like, really--he had the best funky recommendations. I know he has, like, a radio show now. That dude is cool. So, you know, when I started work there I would be like, “Matt what's good? Like what I need to listen to?” and he'd be like, “Well,” you know, like he had this really like soothing voice and [laughs] he would just give you his recommendation, and you’d like take it as gospel because it like came from Matt.

The passion and knowledge of music, while agreed upon, was interpreted differently by different participants. Harris, who has a lifetime of experience working in the music industry, identified the employees’ knowledge base as good customer service; Wicke remembered the level of expertise as “gospel”—something that wasn’t to be questioned. For others, this level of knowledge or the way that it was expressed, could be intimidating. Wegenast said that she sometimes felt anxious when she took a record up to the counter, worried that she would be judged for her selection—that it was too mainstream or not hip enough. In other words, she worried that her music tastes were not refined enough for the employees’ expectations. Fox also mentioned that when she was younger, she felt intimidated, especially when the store was largely populated by men, and she only remembered some women working there in the later years. Even now, as an archivist, Fox says that the ways knowledge and passion are expressed by some record collectors feels more like a hoarding of knowledge—more about power and demonstrating one’s expertise rather than sharing and being helpful. In other words, one’s status is determined by one's knowledge and capacity to demonstrate that knowledge in ways deemed socially acceptable within the confines of the store or other sites where
record collectors gather (Bourdieu, 1986). These socially acceptable ways do not always come across as the most inviting, especially to those who are not regulars in those spaces.

Fox’s perception of record collectors and record store employees is a familiar trope, which has been immortalized in pop culture through the film *High Fidelity* (Frears, 2000). The film features multiple scenes of record store employees criticizing one another for their perspectives on music—debating and ranking albums and artists by convoluted standards. This knowledge and value of music is sometimes used against customers. In one particular scene, Jack Black’s character refuses to sell an album to a customer, only to turn around later and sell it to someone he deems worthy of it. In another scene, the employees chase out a customer who is looking for a pop album for his daughter’s birthday. These scenes, while seemingly hyperbolic, are models of the exclusivity and distinctions cultural capital create. The customer “allowed” to buy the album is deemed worthy because of they have reached a status level of coolness that the previous customer hasn’t—he was too cool to care or exhibit excitement or desperation for the album. The customer who is chased out of the store is marked as an outsider—their interests and tastes deemed shallow in comparison to the employees. As hinted in the previous paragraph, it’s not just a matter of the knowledge itself, but how that knowledge is communicated and performed (Bourdieu, 1986).

The trope and cultural microcosms represented in *High Fidelity* were present, on some level, during the interviews, and those who had worked in the store considered how they may appear on the customer side:

*Ritcher:* But usually, we were having a good time when we were working, and I think there was also a thread of sarcasm, and, you know, like any records store, was just like the people working there are just cooler than everybody else. And we know everything and we hear about everything and “yeah, I know, I know, I've
heard it, yeah.” So, there was that thread, but otherwise, it might be up to the customers because I don't know if that how much that came across.

As the store moved into new, larger spaces, there were opportunities to expand and carry a wider variety of music. Not just the initial punk and alternative stock or mainstream pop, but obscure genres. Timmons said that he relied on the knowledge of his employees—if they had an area of expertise, he relied on them to stock and expand different sections area. For example, he had an employee who said that they should have a blues section, and while Timmons originally did not think it would be popular, they expanded that section and it did sell.

The variety meant more than just the expansion of merchandise—the music’s presence and display also mattered to some participants:

**Harris:** And I think just the way it was all laid out and, you know, the fact that genres had their own territories, you know? And so it's almost like you're sort of giving value to that thing because it has its own space. It's not just stuck in with everything else. It's like, you know, Cajun music has its own slot, so that means we believe Cajun music is worthy of that.

Harris, Ritcher, and Jones all mentioned specific sections and records that weren't about making money—classical orchestra, noise bands, etc. It was more about creating the opportunity for someone to discover and learn about these genres and bands. This value earned the music not only a place in the stacks, but its own marker:

**Harris:** I mean, how many Art Ensemble of Chicago records are you gonna sell, you know? I mean really, but I have no doubt there were Art Ensemble of Chicago recordings there. And so that's probably the biggest things that he stocks stuff because it was noteworthy. You know, it was important for some reason, even though he probably knew that he was gonna sell all much of that.
Jones: And he had to carry some of the more commercial stuff [laughs] just to make living, you know, because like to get obscure. Japanese noise band isn’t gonna pay the rent, you know? [laughs] But I think he was all about educating.

The value of having this type of music in stock resonates with Harris’s comments about being in the record business for the “right reasons.” The business model, despite being a business, in this perspective, is as much about being a service as it is making money.

The fact that the business also, ultimately, failed results in not just loss, but perhaps admiration for ear X-tacy sticking to its values even if also mourning the loss.

Furthermore, Jones, Harris, and Ritcher (among others), exhibit an invested interest in the arts, making them close to the subject matter. Kreuter (2018) notes that “within the literature of rhetoric, proximity has been theoretically linked to empathy” (p. 55). This empathy, which can provide coherence in arguments (Lynch, as cited in Kreuter, 2018), creates a connection between these participants’ interests (music) and ear X-tacy (the business, the place, and Timmons’ goals).

On some level, as a culture, and especially in music culture, we romanticize things that ultimately fail — (from the self-destructive history of musicians to punk’s rebellion against society, we admire those that dared to push the limits for the sake of art. Perhaps, in these moments, people dare to imagine a future where business and art are not dependent on capitalistic success. In the arts, there is a tension between making/supporting art for the love of it and financial survival to keep making/supporting art. And while ear X-tacy didn’t survive, the fact that it could exist as a place at all perhaps affirms the fact that our desires are not always limited by dollar signs.

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7 Businesses, of course, have the goal of making money and use their image to make money. Even the participants that worked there, however, did not focus on this within their narrative reconstructions.
Discovery

Like “community,” “discover” was a word that appeared in the interviews without my prompting. Discovery serves as a connecting point or a throughline for all three narrative threads because of the understandings of discovery engage both the values of community and music. For example:

**Harris:** And so [genre sections and labeling] to me conveyed that these people know what they're doing, they care about the music, they want me to discover things that I might not know about. And so that's what those are all really positive things for my perspective.

**Wicke:** I'd say the reputation [of ear X-tacy] would be like, you're always going to discover something new.

**Jones:** That was part of the fun, just killing time, not really wanting to buy anything in particular, but just looking through the CDs and finding something like “wow!” you know, this is, you know, like Massive Attack, that for me was a band that to this day is one of my favorite bands. And that's--I remember discovering *Blue Lines* at ear X-tacy just like, what's this? [laughs]

Because ear X-tacy was a place where people would go to find what they couldn’t find elsewhere, it was reliably a place where customers could go to explore and browse through the record bins. Meanwhile, because ear X-tacy was a community hub before the advent of social media, people would go to ear X-tacy to find people with similar interests or to discover what was happening in town. Customers could reliably go to ear X-tacy to see flyers on the windows and on the bulletin board. It was a place of community as much as it was a place of possibility—there was dependably something new to be found, which created an incentive for some to return again and again. This was in part due to the way the store was set up, not just what was included. The new music
bins, the listening stations, the music dividers that were hand-illustrated by the employees were all arranged and designed to help customers discover new music.

Finding one’s way to the store itself, could be a matter of discovery, and reasons for going varied. Ashley Taylor said that before the internet and without social media, finding people with similar interests and music outside of the mainstream was difficult: “… it was like, where am I gonna go to discover this kind of stuff?” Living on the outskirts of Louisville, Bardstown Road wasn’t as readily accessible for Taylor, but the shops in the suburbs didn’t stock what they were looking for. Ultimately, they relied on classmates in punk and ska bands to find their way to ear X-tacy. Meanwhile, Jones started coming to ear X-tacy because he was in search of music that a coworker, whom he had a crush on, introduced him to—he wanted to find more of that music to impress her. For both Taylor and Jones, ear X-tacy met a specific demand for a particular need not being met by other places in Louisville.

While discovery was frequently music related — discovering genres, bands, people who played in bands — in some cases, ear X-tacy was also a matter of discovery of the self. Gianfanga (2018) argues that places “are rich material from which people construct for themselves a reality, coextensive with a mythology, that puts them in actionable and meaningful relation to its elements” (p. 31). In other words, making sense of a place or in the act of placemaking, participants are saying just as much about themselves as they are the place—they are making sense of their own identity in relationship to the site in question.
In particular, Jones, Wicke, and Ritcher all made reference to how ear X-tacy had an influence on who they are today. Jones and Ritcher both credited ear X-tacy for experiences that led to their current careers.

**Jones:** Well, I think it was raw education for me. I like, never really, when I was younger, I never really thought, hey, I'm gonna write about music when I grow up, you know?

During our second interview, Jones made repeated references to the education he received at ear X-tacy and how his connections through ear X-tacy led to opportunities in music journalism. For Ritcher, it was also about the flexibility working at ear X-tacy provided him:

**Ritcher:** … I wouldn't be here in Sweden now without ear X-tacy because of the connections that I made through music and how that afforded me the opportunity to travel playing music and to, and that brought me to Sweden for the first time in the 90s. And without all that, I wouldn't be who I am. [laughs] Not to put it to too boldly, but I wouldn't be here, I wouldn't have taken these paths. And I certainly wouldn't have a lot of the appreciation of and values and musical taste or lack thereof that I have.

Meanwhile, Wicke noted that being an ear X-tacy employee in her teenage years made her feel special and, and in mourning the close, she expressed, “…it gave me a lot…” The opportunity to work with adults who were “cool” gave her role models outside of her parents and family—people who would let her explore and be independent but would also introduce her to new music and intervene when older male customers bothered her. This socialization during the years when she began to gain some independence undoubtedly shaped her worldview.
Taylor, who shopped at ear X-tacy as a teenager, mentioned that ear X-tacy’s merchandise was a means of self-expression: “So, but it would be pins like anti-punk or something like that or you know. So that’s where you would find like the ‘fuck the police’ or, you know, like socialism type stuff, you know, like, that's where that would be. And so it was an entryway and into alternative culture and that kind of way and in expression, I think, oh yeah.” The community along with the purchasing power made available through ear X-tacy during those teenage years provided a space and place to explore and discovery both one’s identity and how to present it visually and materially to the world.

These anecdotes suggest discovery of music and merchandise at ear X-tacy also served as a discovery of the self through community and consumerism. The values participants associate with ear X-tacy are values in which the participants are invested currently (the present), and values they see as part of their own identity. For example, Fox’s investment in community influenced the way that she remembered ear X-tacy, even the critiques. Meanwhile, Harris’s emphasis in the passion for music is reflected in his experience in the music industry as a program director. As busy adults in the age of the internet there are not as many opportunities to spend time with friends or find something new in the world. Most of the participants have moved away from where they lived at the time (multiple participants lived within walking distance of ear X-tacy).

However, that does not mean there is not still the desire and interest in those places and experiences. If anything, it means the narratives and shaping of what ear X-tacy as a place was, and wasn’t, encapsulates the place’s importance. Although “nostalgia ruins our sense of a place” (Boyle, 2018, p. 61), this is usually when comparing it with the present—any changes or moves away from what we imagine a place was (as I’ll
cover more in Chapter 4) will always be held up against nostalgia iterations of that place. But the only remaining discovery surrounding ear X-tacy is within the past, within nostalgia, within memories of what it had been.

**Discussion: The Future of Rhetorical Reconstruction of the Past – A Collaboration**

While navigating the loss, those who remember ear X-tacy, do, perhaps, engage in the “what if.” A “speculative act” is “one that dreams of new ways forward and seeks to change the existing framework rather than simply hoping to survive within it (9)” (Gianfanga, 2018, p. 30). But what is in it for the participants? What if ear X-tacy had survived? What would ear X-tacy be like today? The values that that participants bring to the reconstruction of ear X-tacy reflect what they hope the store would be like in the present, in the future ear X-tacy never achieved.

In the face of loss, nostalgia is a means of self-continuity. The myth of self-sacrifice, as seen in Appalachia, is only one version of self-continuity. As Appalachia continues to be exploited and miners face inequity and dangerous conditions, self-continuity helps some make sense of their ongoing situation and how it connects to the past and future—Appalachia has, does, and will continue to work hard and sacrifice for the greater good of the country. Ear X-tacy, however, no longer exists and its absence creates a different type of disruption—there is a clear separation between the past and present. Thus utilizing nostalgia and rhetorical placemaking, those who frequented ear X-tacy mitigate this disruption and assure stronger coherence within their memories.

While there is romanticization around failed businesses, failed bands, failed projects, there is also the risk of feeling that all the time, money, and effort we invested into them was a waste. Nostalgia, perhaps, allows us to feel positive about the choices we
made, the time we invested in something, even if it did not work out in the end. In the face of loss, we can see how we have grown from that point, our experiences within a place. Our concept of a place, especially when the place no longer exists, then, is further influenced by our identity and values. Self-continuity also becomes a means of continuity of place. In other words, as part of some participants’ efforts toward self-continuity, they rhetorically construct ear X-tacy as a place that represented specific values that helps align with the progression they have made as people, both in their lived experience and values.

By imagining what a place was and what participants desire it to have been/be, participants also have the chance to imagine who and how they were in the past, their status within that place, and how they came to be who they are. In doing so, they realign their values and tastes (both past and present) to further adhere to self-continuity. The “what ifs” of the past speak to the understanding of the self—one can imagine themself in the past, in a place they did or did not connect with, and imagine how that informs their path moving forward. They can see how they came to appreciate music and how they articulate what they know. For example, those, who visited ear X-tacy in their formative years, as some participants did, may look back and argue that because of their time at ear X-tacy, they now see the world or understand the arts in particular way, which then influences the way they share memories about the place. A positive understanding of place reflects a positive understanding of themselves, and their status within that setting, which can apply to more than ear X-tacy, but other record stores, bookstores, and other niche businesses and community hubs of the past.
This chapter has primarily explored at the ways participants and their current values create paths to rhetorical placemaking and possible pasts. The ones who are doing the rhetorical placemaking and recreating the pasts are one and the same; however, I do want to offer a possible alternative perspective. Oral history practitioners such as Portelli (2018) argue that the interviewer is a collaborator. While the participants are answering questions I provided and sharing their experiences, both the participants and I are engaging in imagination (as Gianfanga emphasizes), or speculation of how things could have been.

Perhaps the question is not only how might participants’ desires and imagination reconstruct the past, but how is my imagination engaged by others’ rhetorical placemaking? Moving beyond self-continuity and what these reconstructions may mean for participants and long-time Louisville locals—those who have experienced ear X-tacy—I must also consider what these narratives mean for external forces, including myself, the researcher. While creating potential pasts, perhaps the interview participants are interested not only in the retelling and their own futures, but influencing how I, moving forward, understand and reconstruct ear X-tacy. The potential futures here are not so much about the place itself, but how the rhetorical placemaking I may be doing while imagining what ear X-tacy was like and how I write about it. In other words, perhaps participants are rhetorically crafting future understandings of the past.

Perhaps participants are considering how they want me to understand what it means to rhetorically reconstruct ear X-tacy. Gianfanga (2018) argues that an aspect of critical design’s speculative nature is “to anticipate the needs of a future state of being” (p. 30). On the surface, this would be a matter of considering the needs of the past, but
given the tension between past and future, those needs are wrapped up in the future reconstructions of the past. Perhaps, then, participants are rhetorically anticipating my needs to reconstruct ear X-tacy, both in this project and within my own imagination.

Memory and nostalgia, after all, are selective: Who gets to remember what and why? In writing this chapter, I, too, am rhetorically placemaking—shaping a narrative of what ear X-tacy was. The ways in which I construct my understanding of participants’ placemaking will influence future readers’ understanding of ear X-tacy and the ways in which they imagine this place. This is not an objective process—it’s shaped by my own desires, imagination, and what I know of record stores based on my own experiences (visiting other record stores) and consumption of media (e.g., documentaries, movies, articles, etc.). Imagination is not the same as memory or remembering (Fernyhough, 2014), but I am prone to fill in gaps and set the scene, based on what the participants share and how it interacts with my own experiences.

As aforementioned, rhetorics of nostalgia argue that nostalgia is something that is socially learned (Kurlinkus & Kurlinkus, 2018). By listening to the participants, I am, in my own way, learning the social protocols for being nostalgic for this place, and to engage in rhetorical placemaking practices that adhere to the narratives presented by the participants. In other words, these rhetorics of nostalgia are perhaps preparing me for future rhetorical placemaking.

If the participants are attempting to influence how I engage in rhetorics of nostalgia and rhetorical placemaking, it’s not out of any act of deception. From a psychological perspective, conversation helps to integrate events into memory. Developmentally, we organize and integrate early memories as we have conversations
with family members, such as older siblings, aunts, and parents. This does not necessarily mean these memories are reliable (as others’ input can have a strong influence):

High-quality memories like these, well integrated with other sources of information, are easier to recall. But, paradoxically, they also have a greater potential to become disconnected from what actually happened. As memory leaves the world of fragments and unintegrated emotions, it also becomes more prone to distortions. The more memory becomes organized, the more slippery it becomes. (Fernyhough, 2014, p. 99)

While some participants didn’t have strong feelings about the store itself, multiple participants expressed a sense of loss or sadness in the absence of ear X-tacy and a joy in revisiting it through their memories. A couple participants said they had fun in talking about the store, and in round two said they had been looking forward to our second conversation. The conversations helped them to think of things they had not thought about in some time, but the decade since the closing has influenced the narrative’s shape, which is not necessarily about the individual facts, but what ear X-tacy stood for, what it represented, and what its absence has meant for each of the participants. This, in turn, influences my own rhetorical shaping of narrative of the place moving forward, and so on. I entered this project asking how people remember ear X-tacy the way they do, not what was ear X-tacy? These conversations reflect participants’ relationships not just to the events that transpired during ear X-tacy’s existence, but their relationship to the place. The narrative spaces that opened up in the interviews (as per Portelli, 2018) create new opportunities for rhetorical intervention, not unlike the collaborative activities cited by Giafanga (2018).

**Conclusion**

A reconstruction of the past influences imagined futures—which that be how the place in question will take shape in the future, or how the place will be rhetorically
constructed moving forward. The difference lies within the state of the place’s existence. Without a present or future, all that is left is the rhetorical construction of the past moving forward. A person retelling or rhetorically placemaking may turn to rhetorics of nostalgia as a product of their own longing and self-continuity, but also as a means to influence how someone else later chooses to create their own potential pasts.

Tracing the rhetorical placemaking of ear X-tacy to current rhetorical reconstructions and back, we can see that place, even when the place no longer exists, is in a recursive state of invention. People who are invested in a place’s memory will continue to rhetorically reconstruct that place, using both memory and their current perspectives. The combination of these are means to look toward future understandings of that place. The tension between the past and the future is productive—it is a way of saying, “This is how we want this place to be remembered.” This does not mean that people will always remember a place in a positive light or argue that the place was perfect. While most agreed that ear X-tacy was a community space, not everyone felt equally welcome or comfortable in all iterations of the store. Some female participants mentioned feeling intimidated by the primarily male-staff, but Natalie, who worked in a later iteration of the store, not only felt comfortable, but protected by those she worked with. Their positions within the store and time are different, creating different narratives and attitudes.

Some participants explicitly stated they were not nostalgic. Thus, a new question arises: Can a person utilize rhetorics of nostalgia without the person themselves experiencing nostalgia? Given the examples presented in the coal industry and politics, I suspect the answer is yes. Marketing also leans on nostalgia to sell products, and the
vinyl record industry is no exception. It is also worth considering whether a person always recognizes themselves as nostalgic. Some who said they were not nostalgic still expressed loss and sadness, components of nostalgia. However, as touched on in this chapter, loss is also connected to desire.

This chapter has further established the connection between rhetorical placemaking and rhetorics of nostalgia. In particular, it has looked at the ways in which narratives of nostalgia contribute to rhetorical placemaking. As mentioned in Chapter 1, there have been events and efforts to recapture the magic of ear X-tacy, especially around the 10-year anniversary of its closing. While these are public facing, they primarily target a local, Louisville audience, revealing other ways in which the community is engaging in collective rhetorical placemaking. In Chapter 4, I will delve further into these rhetorical reconstructions and how they serve as rhetorical appeals to authenticity. As such, the next chapter will shift from placemaking to consider what could have been to consider what could be— authenticating narratives of place to encourage specific future reconstructions.
CHAPTER IV
THE ROLE OF APPEALS TO AUTHENTICITY—MAINTAINING NARRATIVES AND BELONGING

At the beginning of Chapter 1, I shared my experience at Main Street Music as a community hub. This place gave us a place to meet others who shared common interests. Beyond the company and the music selection, the other appeal was the convenience of Main Street Music’s location. Not only was it a five-minute train ride or quick drive from our townhouse, but the street hosted other businesses that we grew to love. As someone who grew up in a small rural town, Philadelphia was the largest city I had ever lived in and this neighborhood met many of my expectations and imaginings of what city life would be like, especially for creatives. I had access to experiences and connections that had, for the most part, been unavailable to me up until then.

The ritual of our weekly record store visits typically went like this: Visit, drink, buy some records, then go across the street to the bar Lucky’s Last Chance for $5 happy hour Dark ‘N’ Stormys (there was a lot of drinking during my MFA). Sometimes we’d then go back and buy a few more records. Then, as we grew more familiar with the street, our radius expanded. We subscribed to a CSA from the local co-op. We ate sushi at the opposite end of the street. Once the ice cream shop opened, the record store owner would give me cash and say, “You fly, I buy,” and I would walk down the street to bring him back a scoop of strawberry ice cream. This main drag of the neighborhood also had a movie theater, a post office, an emergency vet, and multiple niche shops. When we got
married in the record store, we invited our friends from across the country because we wanted them to experience our life, this community, and what we thought reflected a genuine Philadelphia experience.

To some degree, this reflects what I briefly touched on in Chapter 3—ear X-tacy’s location on Bardstown Road influenced its capacity to become a place for community. The street has served, and still serves, as a gathering place and hub for restaurants, bars, stores, and businesses, including record stores, bookstores, and art galleries. During the interviews, there were mixed feelings about Bardstown Road. Some participants felt that Bardstown Road has declined or become too commercial, whereas some are still convinced that this is where new and hip things appear first in town. Either way, the street is one of the main roads within the city. Personally, I find myself on Bardstown Road at least once a week, due to the convenience and proximity to my home, and this influences my behavior and choices. For example, if I know I’m going to be on Bardstown Road to go to the local bookstore, I will likely choose to go to the local grocery store across the street, rather than drive to another neighborhood.

In these moments, I love the feeling of being immersed in the city. Like my experience in Philadelphia, occupying these local spaces feels authentic in comparison to shopping in the big box stores in the suburbs. Or, perhaps another way of putting it: I feel as though I’m gaining a real experience, even though some may argue that there is nothing authentic about Bardstown Road\(^8\) in comparison to what it used to be. And just

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\(^8\) Some participants argued their reasons for disliking the current state of Bardstown Road were deeply intertwined with the fact some of their favorite places were now closed. So often, because of nostalgia, things we loved when we were younger, such as pop culture, were better than what we encounter today; we reconstruct them in our memory as the ideal or standard, which makes it difficult for anything else to measure up. In the case of Bardstown Road, it’s difficult to imagine
like my description of Philadelphia, this excludes parts of the city (both spatially and temporally). The Philadelphia experience my husband and I wanted to share did not include things such as going to Liberty Bell or the historic district in downtown proper (though some guests did that); it wasn’t going to the Reading Terminal Market, which is literally in the heart of the city, only blocks from city hall. While we appreciated these things, these weren’t what made Philadelphia real to us.

During interviews, participants often described ear X-tacy locations as the “first” or “real” ear X-tacy—locations that were significant to them personally. These designations often hinted at appeals to authenticity. Alternatively, there were also indications of potentially inauthentic or less authentic record store experiences, with mentions of the store becoming “mall like” as it grew bigger. Now, over a decade since the store’s closing, there have been a series of events and artifacts that connect back to ear X-tacy, such as museum exhibits, artwork, and concert staging. These rhetorical reconstructions and placemaking, which often utilize nostalgia, create a series of narratives of ear X-tacy. Consequently, the efforts often stake claim to certain eras or versions of ear X-tacy.

In Chapter 3, I suggested that narratives and placemaking that stem from rhetorics of nostalgia are an act of self-continuity. The reconstructions of a place help to affirm ideas about a person’s selfhood and their experiences. In the previous chapter I also claimed that “an idea about a place does not have to be authentic for anyone, including the people who live there, to long for that idea.” Within this context, I was referring to the trueness or actuality of the situation versus perception; however, as the literature below it without certain businesses or locations (or conversely, with certain commercial chains in place of local businesses).
suggests, that trueness or essential essence of a place is only possible in fragments and partial perceptions. Following these threads, I would like to like to further explore the following questions: What do locals or those that were here when ear X-tacy was open tell one another about place? What does collective retelling look like through appeals to authenticity, and what role do these artifacts and events play?

The rhetorical construction of ear X-tacy’s differing narratives that are presented in this project are, at the end of the day, made up of largely similar parts, arranged in different assemblages or constellations (Deleuze & Guttari, 1987), with different elements taking the forefront and perhaps one or two major differences, often temporal or spatial. These constellations and arrangements, like place and memory, are not static—they are the product of reconstructions, which will change over time and may change from moment to moment. As people interact with and negotiate different narratives, both public and private/personal, they may reconfigure their sense of place in response. After some temporal distance, narratives may shift yet again, reverting back to a narrative, or creating a constellation that consolidates previous and new narratives that reflect how longing, loss, and desire have changed or rekindled when exposed to other narratives.

Temporal distance from experiences can alter our sense of place, and we may not always feel an active longing until we are met with something that prompts us to do so, such as the artifacts and events presented in this chapter. Thus, constellations of ear X-tacy reflect the parameters of one’s imagination, memory, and desire for place, which are not unlike attempting to define the parameters of geographical space, and time.

Creating, reconstructing, and engaging in narratives surrounding ear X-tacy is an attempt to preserve the memory and narrative of the place, and this preservation stems
from longing and nostalgia; however, different constellations and approaches preserve different iterations of the store and the experience of having been there. For some, this is about the physical space and the interactions that were had, for others, this may be more about the temporal period that they associate with the place, or a combination of time and space. In preserving a sense of the place and attitude of a time, it is also an effort to preserve a feeling of belonging.

In this chapter, I will unpack how artifacts and events are used as attempts to preserve ear X-tacy’s memory and the narratives that are constructed around them. I consider how these artifacts and events are used not only as a collective retelling of ear X-tacy, but a rhetorical appeal to authenticity. This chapter begins with unpacking how rhetorical appeals of authenticity and how it influences placemaking and what this may mean for placemaking sites such as record stores. I will then analyze artifacts and events, especially those made or revisited in ear X-tacy’s absence, and the potential implications and consequences of appeals to authenticity.

**Rhetorical Appeals to Authenticity and Place**

In “Denton and the Rhetorical Appeal of Authenticity,” Jordan Frith (2018) argues that rhetorical appeals to authenticity—attempts to claim and identify the trueness or essence of a place—are selective/exclusionary in their efforts of preservation. Consequently, he notes, there can never be a holistic perception of place and authenticity cannot be confused for accuracy. This distinction reflects my question of how people remember ear X-tacy. The rhetorical construction of place, as noted in the previous chapter, is closely linked to desire, so it stands to reason that an appeal to authenticity is
not necessarily what *is* true, but what those making the appeal identify as true or real about a place.

Using his own town of Denton (described as “little Austin”), Frith (2018) explores the ways in which people argue the authenticity of a place as means to illustrates the fragmented nature of placemaking, which not only prevents a holistic perception of place, but also the people within it that place. Denton’s downtown and town square, frequently featured in blogs and tour advertisements as the real or authentic Denton, are frequented by people such as hipsters, academics, and liberal, financially stable white people. And while the downtown may be authentic to those people, Frith points out that this does not account for the rest of the town, both geographically and population-wise. For example, Frith acknowledges that this area of the city does not represent the historically Mexican-American or Black neighborhoods, nor does it include the majority of the city’s population that votes conservatively. Thus, appeals to authenticity, as previously mentioned, are exclusionary. In order for one place (such as part of a city) to be authentic, another part (the rest of the city) must be inauthentic; as time moves forward, this extends to points in time (e.g., the claim that the 1950s were the best time and truest version of America). This line of argument excludes other populations’ narratives and perceptions of place and time (and their authentic versions) from the conversation, which can also create a bubble effect. And while the exclusion can be problematic, the appeals to authenticity and the desire to preserve the perception of a place are not inherently good or bad, but rather, depend on the context (Frith, 2018).

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9 One example Frith (2018) gives is an effort to preserve Indigenous lands from tourism and industry—appeals to authenticity can be used to avoid cultural erasure.
Regardless whether appeals are authenticity are accurate or not, we want to feel as though we are getting an authentic experience of a place, whether it be a city, a region, a restaurant, or a store. This is perhaps especially true when we’ve built cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) as described in the last chapter. When we perceive those experiences or those versions of a place to be threatened, we move to preserve it—to capture what we believe that trueness is, both in space and time, so that it’s not completely lost to history—and our status.

Frith’s discussion of appeals of authenticity as an act of preservation are primarily about place in the present—attempts to avoid change or deviation rather than preserving something that has already passed, but this is still deeply rooted in the past and past experiences. According to Kreuter (2018), we legitimize our experiences of a place through arguments of proximity, which are rooted in our experiences of a place during a particular timeframe:

In declaring oneself proximate, we undertake a special witnessing, as well as playing a rhetorical trump card among our interlocutors. In declaring our own proximity, we dare others to match the legitimizing forces of our own proximity. Either they can respond, “Yeah, well, I was there when . . .” and declare an even closer proximity to essential events (and that proximity may be in time, space, or both), or they can cede, to a degree, the point. They cannot match our proximity. (p. 54)

This proximity (spatially and temporally) can be a form of an appeal to authenticity—when bloggers in Frith’s town writes or talks about the “real Denton,” they are talking about the downtown, and descriptions of their proximity in relation to space and time bolsters their appeals to authenticity. Without past experiences or preconceived notions of a place (such as cultural perspectives of Appalachia and its history as described in the previous chapter), one cannot protest change in the name of authenticity. In some cases,
there may be historic significance to a place, but that historic-ness can also be personal and individualized, which further leads to selectivity and exclusion—the appeal to authenticity is shaped around *when* the place was experienced. However, as we know, place is not static (Frith, 2018; Gianfanga, 2018), and thus we can never fully protect a place from changing, which only escalates the threat of a place we love becoming something we no longer recognize.

Appeals to authenticity in relation to what one desires out of a place is further complicated by the argument that rhetorics of nostalgia can be culturally and socially learned (Kurlinkus & Kurlinkus, 2018; Kurlinkus, 2018). This means a person can be nostalgic for somewhere or some time they’ve never been or never experienced, but culturally and socially they’ve been taught that they should be. These places and times may be presented in media, in museums, or through family/community narratives as idyllic—the place may framed as better back then, which correlates with nostalgia as a critique of the present (Portelli, 2018; Helgren, 2015; Shircliffe, 2001). This means a critique of the present may also be an appeal to authenticity of the past. It may mean that current configurations of a place do not align with the rhetorical framing presented by any person, group, or media.

So, what does any of this mean for the place that no longer exists? Preservation stems from desire and longing. When combined with loss, this is a catalyst for nostalgia. As such, preservation of the place that no longer exists hinges upon rhetorical reconstruction and nostalgic placemaking. In other words, when the place no longer exists, in order to preserve an idea of the place, a person or group must recursively invent and rhetorically placemake through reconstruction. When the geographical space or
building is unable to be preserved, it becomes a matter of “preserving” memory, or “preserving” the idea of what a place should be. These attempts to “preserve” memory help us to maintain a sense of connection to what has been lost.

I say “preserve” as I’m skeptical that memories can be preserved. Fernygough (2014) argues that memory isn’t something that one “has” and is not static, therefore it’s difficult to prevent change over time. Preservation, in the context of memory, then, may be a matter of maintaining narratives (such as the ones presented in Chapter 3) that serve as a catalyst for nostalgia, which, in turn, create opportunities for rhetorical placemaking. While both nostalgia and the placemaking will change over time based on future influences, the rhetorical appeals and arguments will still cycle back to structures such as “I was there when” and “x was an authentic experience because...”, which is potentially limiting given the changes over time. This conservative bent will always return to “better times,” because, regardless whether they actually were, that’s what we imagine those times to be.

Perhaps the question then becomes: If proximity serves a means of appeals to authenticity, what are other ways people create proximity in place of temporal and spatial proximity? How do people create appeals to authenticity based on rhetorical structures such as “I was there when...” and “x was an authentic experience”? In the case of ear X-tacy, how are artifacts and events maintaining particular narratives and creating appeals to authenticity?

Before unpacking appeals to authenticity connected individual artifacts and events, I first want to consider what appeals to authenticity mean in the context of record stores as a type of place. These appeals influence the ways in which people conceptualize
record stores as places and how people relate connect with artifacts within these places (e.g., physical music medium). This exercise will not only provides context of how rhetorical placemaking of ear X-tacy compares to other stores, but help consider the ways in which appeals to authenticity within record stores utilize rhetorics of nostalgia.

**Authenticity and Record Stores**

Within record stores, appeals to authenticity play a role in location, design, and rhetorical placemaking, all of which can make or break financial success. In the previous chapter, among several perspectives, I highlighted the movie *High Fidelity*, which plays into the trope that record store workers are music snobs, which draws a connection between place and the people who occupy it. Record store documentaries, meanwhile, often describe record stores in ways that also overlap with the narratives in Chapter 3. In particular, *Other Music* (Basu & Hatch-Miller, 2019) and *Walls of Sound* (Gracon, 2012) highlight the value of record store employees and their capacity to connect with customers—unlike an algorithm, they take the time to get to know a person and make recommendations based on their purchases and past conversations.

Authenticity of the record store experience is dependent upon nostalgia. When designing a record store, some owners look back to what they think a store used to be as the ideal (Sonnichsen, 2016). In other words, their design hinges upon the idealized portrayal of stores from 1960s-1980s, which they use in attempts to create a temporal proximity: “… rather than tap into the modern world, young people who go into business in the 21st century often base their vision on tales from their parents and older relatives about what made record stores great in the [past]” (Calamar & Gallo, 2010, p. 7 cited in Sonnichsen, 2016, p. 193). In a similar vein, local and independent bookstores are held
up as the authentic ideal in comparison to chains such as Barnes and Noble, Books-a-Million, and Half-Priced Books. In the documentary *Other Music* (Basu & Hatch-Miller, 2019), musician Regina Spector argues for the return to these models: “More than ever, people being together is very important. For me, theaters, bookstores and music stores, record stores, were a type of temple. And they would have a community.” And these sacred spaces, while facing hardship through every economic downturn, are simultaneously expected to struggle to survive since they operate through perceived goodwill and labors of love (i.e., not there to make money). Pop culture representations and tropes about small businesses falling on hard times, including *UHF* (1989) and *Empire Records* (1995), trigger anticipatory nostalgia and teach us to feel the continued threat of losing these places.

Contemporary attempts to recreate record stores and other niche shops as they were before reflect the longing for a time previous. In particular, participants cited an age before the internet, or more specifically, an age before social media and streaming.\(^{10}\) As discussed in chapter 3, discovery is read as a major value of ear X-tacy; our means of discovery have changed over time with advances in technology, which has shifted our sense of proximity to place, as I’ll further discuss in the next section.

In a case study of three record stores in a Los Angeles neighborhood, emotional geographies scholar Sonnichsen (2016) argues that proximity is also important to record stores when it comes to choosing a location and their interior design. When record stores are in business districts and neighborhoods with other arts-oriented stores (including

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\(^{10}\) This reference to technology advancement can be seen in previous eras—enough that we get songs like “Video killed the Radio Star” (1979)—and further reflects the idea that appeals to authenticity are both spatial and temporal (and vary from person to person.)
other record stores), or a “cultural cluster” (p. 194), they are more likely to attract the
type of customers that will support their store. The neighborhood in Philadelphia had a
bookstore, jewelry and visual arts stores, and restaurants featuring food from around the
world. Meanwhile, as already mentioned, multiple record stores including most of the
iterations of ear X-tacy, used to be located on Bardstown Road. The potential customers
who frequent these neighborhoods already have a culturally learned sense of what to
expect—they are already looking for these experiences (Sonnichsen, 2016). Their appeals
to authenticity likely align with what the neighborhoods are providing.

Meanwhile, the design of a store not only sets the tone and aligns with the type of
music that they sell, but it invites particular types of customers. For example, in
Sonnichsen’s case study (2016) the Los Angeles store Wombleton Records, which draws
inspiration from “a British style salon” (p. 196), embraces the styles of London and Paris,
which Sonnichsen describes as “the most instrumental places in the construction of
quintessential Europe and the public memory” (p. 197). It uses the theme to communicate
and reinforce the idea that their stock is highly curated and includes pressings from
around the world. Their appeals to high class reflect the “high levels of social and cultural
capital” one must have to appreciate and find those types of records (Hracs et al., 2013,
1157 cited in Sonnichsen, 2016, p. 198). In comparison, dissertation participants
described ear X-tacy, which emerged from punk and relate genres, as a bit grungy, citing
the red cement floors and smell of incense. Photos I’ve seen of inside the Panera location
featured Christmas lights strung up the staircase. Meanwhile, participants described
handwritten record label bins, which reflects the do-it-yourself (DIY) attitude of punk
and an “alternative record store.”
So when participants discuss ear X-tacy, the rhetorical appeals to authenticity harken back to not only the store itself, but the neighborhood it was located in (i.e., the Highlands, and along Bardstown Road), and the music it carried. As hinted above, the appeals to authenticity within record stores are yoked to the past, both within the place and the merchandise. Vinyl, in its revival, has been part of the wider commercialization of nostalgia, but physical music mediums more general have the capacity to prompt a longing for the past.

**Authenticity and Physical Music Mediums**

In the last decade, my record collection has grown exponentially. I sometimes forget what I do and don’t own; however, when I pull a record off the shelf, there’s a strong chance that I remember where and when I bought it. For example, when I look at my copy of White Stripes’ *Icky Thump*, I distinctly remember buying it at Tracks in Bloomington, Indiana, during a weekend trip to see a show at the Comedy Attic. The weather was sunny and warm, and we walked up and down the street looking for a suitable coffee shop to sit and read. In other words, the album’s music may connect to one set of memories, whereas the physical artifact itself connects to another. Holding and looking at a record or CD, taking in the artwork, and possibly the wear and tear from years of moving, all hold significance.

Similarly, when I asked participants how they felt about physical media, multiple participants described them as time capsules—CDs, cassettes, vinyl, etc. all had associations with different periods of time and points in their lives. For example, for Fox, cassettes embodied the Louisville indie music scene of the 90s and reminded her of when she was first learning guitar. Her teacher would make mixtapes for her to study.
Meanwhile, Harris said that when he thinks of 8-track tapes, he remembers taking a road trip to Florida with his brother. These memories and associations reflect a connection not just between artifact and memory, but the potential for connecting to the past and the places associated with it.

Dedicated vinyl collectors are prone to seeking out specific pressings—pressings from specific countries, specific time periods, or specific labels—and this is a product of not only seeking a certain sound, but a certain experience. Sonnichsen (2016) argues that vinyl collectors have an emotional attachment to records as tactile things, which provides something that digital music cannot. And while part of this emotional attachment may be an effort push against “conventional society” (Leyshon et al., 2005, p. 182 cited in Sonnichsen, 2016, p. 192), vinyl records create a connection to history, often times and places that the collector cannot access but feels a connection to through the artifact itself, particular first pressings (Sonnichsen, 2016). Particular “fantasies about time and place” (p. 193) influence a collectors’ preferences and interests. First pressings and rare vinyl bear a high level of authenticity because of they were the first, and there is no closer proximity than being original. Music artifacts and mediums, then, are another tool for rhetorical reconstruction of memory and place.

This understanding of physical music mediums positions record stores to not only be a community hub or a place for connection with other people—record stores market and sell artifacts that people seek to connect with other times and places. A sale is not just a sale of the artifact or the music it contains but longing to discover and/or a longing to connect to something new. The function of a record store as a place and its appeals to authenticity, then, is also connected to putting collectors in closer proximity to the
artifacts they seek, that “point of origin” (Sonnichsen, 2016, p. 193), which then puts them into a desired proximity to their concepts of time and place.

A record store’s appeal to authenticity and identity can also be informed by the type of music they stock. For example, Plaid Room in Loveland, Ohio, is perhaps best known for its soul and blues music due to its connection to the Ohio-soul focused record label Colemine Records. Ear X-tacy, meanwhile, could claim that it was an “alternative record store” because it stocked music that people could not find in mainstream stores, which, of course, carried primarily mainstream music. Drawing further parallels between bookstores and music stores, bookstores that advertise to focus on a particular genre may be expected to carry specific titles and authors. These places create a space for discovery and exploration—they are not just dealing in the artifact, but the experience of the hunt for the artifact.

The advent of the internet, however, changed our proximity to music, which also changed our behaviors and understanding of space and place. Companies like Amazon have made ordering physical music easier and cheaper, but the internet also produced digital music. Regardless of whether they were prompted or not, nearly all the participants mentioned that they now stream music online. Even if they still buy physical media, or are interested in owning a record player, participants cited the convenience of digital music—the ability to listen on a mobile device and instantly queue a song or artist. For Jones, this makes research easier. For Fox, this represents different kinds of opportunities for discovery that were helpful when she hosted a radio show. However, not everyone who streamed music found it to be as pleasurable as physical media.
When thinking about vinyl, Wicke described the process of putting on a record and listening to it as ritualistic—something that demands attentiveness:

I really don't listen to vinyl that much, especially now because [my record player is] broken, but one of the things that kind of draws me to that medium, I guess, just how like you have to be involved with it, if that makes sense. Like, you know, you can set a Spotify playlist, draft a music playlist, and just clean whole house, like go on a drive, do whatever. You don't have think about, like, oh, it's, you know, it's time to change directions here. And like, I've, for example, Big Star #1 Record is one of my favorites and it's one of the first ones—I think I got it from ear X-tacy, if I remember right, and there's a shift in the mood of that album when you flip it over, you know. So I thought that was really a clever way for the artist to kind of create like, this word is pretentious, I apologize, but like a soundscape, you know, like a mood, vibe, whatever for the first part of the album and like they know that you're going to have to get up and change it and do something else, so the next part of the album, you know, they kind of can make that choice of like, we’re gonna shift gears. It's going to be a little bit more, you know, down tempo, or hey, we're going to pick it up now, you know, like I don't know. You don't really get that with a CD. Like you don't notice when that intermission, so to speak, happens. It's always kind of liked vinyl—This sounds weird, don't judge me, but there's something like precious about it. Like, it puts you in the moment more, because you really have to listen and know when it's going to be time to switch, but not in an anxious way, just in a more present way.

In a similar vein, Harris said that he felt a mixtape took more time than a playlist, and that the giving someone the physical mixtape (or mixed CD) itself felt like an act of care. The ritual of playing and caring for vinyl or the labor that goes into a mixtape perhaps create certain types of memories that differ from the disembodied nature of digital music, which can be taken and played anywhere. In other words, the relationship and proximity to music changes when moving from physical to digital mediums.

With the internet, we do not have to seek out a place like a record store because music is now available through our phones and streaming apps. Equally, social media has made it easier to connect to others with similar interests and find concerts and events.
With digital music, one may lose the “authenticity” of a first pressing, a physical origin, but that does not mean there are not gains. As mentioned, Fox found streaming made discover easier; using the app Radiooooo, Fox has been able to discover music that is not readily available on physical mediums and therefore unlikely to be available at a record store. This app allows the user to select a decade and a location, and it will provide a sampling of music from that era and place. Even in this digital space, place plays a key role. Being able to identify the music’s origin appeals to the authenticity of it (e.g., this is real Zamrock because it was produced in Zambia).

In addition to streaming, most participants no longer visited record stores on a regular basis, at least, not as frequently as they used to, even though there are currently multiple record stores in Louisville. If they do, it may be to visit someone or to look for a particular pressing, but retellings of ear X-tacy regularly regulate record stores to an age before the internet. While record stores are no longer the only way to encounter music, they still serve a multitude of functions, including the narratives identified in Chapter 3, and physical music mediums as artifacts still have the capacity to appeal to people.

As hinted at in the beginning of this chapter, participants had different perspectives of what the “real” or “original” ear X-tacy is, and the investment in these “real” or “original” versions of ear X-tacy are not unlike a vinyl collector’s investment and interests in a first pressing. Shifting gears, the second half of this chapter will look at the ways in which other artifacts and events are used to create appeals of authenticity and create a sense of proximity to these iterations of ear X-tacy as a place.
Ear X-tacy Bumper Stickers: The Original Artifact

Although ear X-tacy is gone, the logo bumper stickers remain a common and recognizable sight in Louisville. The bumper stickers feature ear X-tacy’s heavily xeroxed typewriter font. Some versions have the logo embedded either in an oval or as part of a URL. Regardless, the most common colors are a black background with white text, which Timmons described as setting “slightly off kilter.” Other colors would eventually be added into rotation, which will be addressed below.

Unique to the artifacts in this chapter, these stickers were around when ear X-tacy was open; they have even outlived some of the buildings ear X-tacy once occupied. The stickers have endured and older ones have the advantage of temporal proximity—they were part of the store and were made in that time period. So, on the surface, their appeal is not to any particular narrative or version of ear X-tacy—they seem to resonate across generations and demographics invested in the store—but their continued existence and people’s interactions with them, during, and after ear X-tacy’s lifespan, create different narratives of place, belonging, and identity. Although the stickers have re-emerged and are currently for sale at the Frazier History Museum since 2019, most participants were unaware of the stickers’ availability.11

When I first asked about Timmons about the stickers, he admitted he never wanted nor liked bumper stickers. In fact, he only got them because they were the cheapest item available from someone who kept trying to sell him promotional items. He

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11 The only two that expressed awareness/were not surprised when I mentioned the news stickers were John Timmons and Michael Jones. Even with this awareness, most participant responses were in reference to the stickers from when the store was open and their absence since the closing of the store in 2011 until the exhibit in 2019. Questions in the interviews were also geared toward how participants interacted with or remembered the stickers either when the store was open or how they see/engage with them in daily life.
set them out and didn’t think much else about them. But he eventually noticed that stickers began to rapidly disappear, and finally noticed that people were cutting and rearranging the letters:

We went to the black and white ones, and we were giving those away and then people started coming in and, you know, grabbing a handful. Then started seeing them cut up and… they didn’t say ear X-tacy anymore, so it pissed me off. You know. I think the first one that came to mind was “ax yer cat.” [ACW laughs] Cut it up letter-wise and put it like… [mumbles] I’m gonna have to start charging for these if people going to start doing this. [laughs] Little did I realize, I just gave a bumper sticker another life and kind of put it in another bumper sticker orbit, if you will.

Eventually, he began limiting the stickers one per purchase. That did not mean that people did not stop buying, collecting, and reworking the logo.

When ear X-tacy was still open and the bumper stickers were in ready supply, people used the stickers for scrapbooking and collaging. They would also cut apart the letters to spell out new words. More traditionally, people also put the stickers on their cars and bikes:

Jones: … I remember like it just captured the era, like everyone would have like “ax yer cat.” Like, you know, it didn't actually advertise ear X-tacy because people would cut’em up and they spell out different words.

Wegenast admitted that she knew about the bumper stickers before she knew about the store itself. As a teenager, she saw the stickers had been cut up and rearranged, and she wanted to know where she could get them to participate as well. The cut-ups and

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12 The ways participants described cutting up and collaging with stickers reminded me of remixing as described by Carter and Dunbar-Odom (2018). In their research, teen participants remixed media to disrupt or destabilized dominant concepts/narratives to create media which reflected their realities, identities, and knowledge-making practices. In the case of the bumper stickers, this was not in conjunction with school programming, but something that happened within the community. This site holds potential for future research through this lens.
rearranging of the letters reflected the punk and DIY scene in Louisville at the time. In obscurring the store’s identity and place, the appeal was the potential to construct and reconstruct not just a sense of place, but one’s identity and reality—the stickers, access to and participation in the creating something new with them all symbolized being part of something exciting and potentially exclusive. Even though it no longer advertised ear X-tacy, ear X-tacy was the place where these things could happen, the store provided the opportunity to participate. Recognizing the obscured place was part of the cultural capital. The search for these would be part of what eventually led her to the store.

Eventually, the stickers appeared in various colors, including a full rainbow, which Timmons said is the rarest of them all. Even he doesn’t have any of them left. Wegenast, however, is very proud to still have one on the family truck. Today, these older stickers can be found on bumpers, wrapped around light poles, and even slapped on the occasional city trash can.

Now, when some participants see an ear X-tacy sticker on a car or out and about, they feel a range of emotions, many of which circle back to a kinship or like they know the person who owns the vehicle:

**Wicke:** Okay, my first honest thought is that person is cool. [laughs] I feel like, I mean, they’re limited edition, right? Like they were always—I think they were free, if I remember right? We had a bunch of different colors, and I remember, like, I would stock up on them and I had a weird thought that, like, “Okay, these are—maybe these will be worth something someday.” [laughs] But, you know, when I see them out in the world on like cars and things… I don't know. I just feel like, “Oh, that person, like, they know. They know.” [laughs] Because you can kind of try to describe what it was, and, you know, just what it meant to you. But, you know, to… I don't know. It's kind of like, when you're like a coffee addict and you see like a Starbucks or a Heine Brothers’ logo, and you're like, “ah!” Something like lights up in your brain. That's like, oh, I recognize this. I like this. These are my people. [laughs] That might sound weird, but… I don't know, there's just something cool, and, again, grungy—I mean the fonts and everything, like
it's... I don't know. That's such a good question. I feel like I'm part of an in group, [laughs] you know, and like, I've recognized like a brother or sister.

Wegenast: I think that's probably somebody I know driving that car. [laughs] Like, you know the kind of people that went there, you knew who they were, they knew who you were. It was a community of sorts, you know?

Taylor: It was part of a regular purchase. You know, they were always available. So now it's like this thing of some—when I see one or somebody has one it's like this sudden I—it's a mutual thing of like, “Wow, that's a recognition to something I really love,” and then also like, “oh my god do they really know? Do they really know [laughs] what it was like to walk in there and have those conversations and to discover things?” You know, what does it mean to that person? So usually questions come to mind is like, what does that mean to that person?

Timmons, meanwhile, is still shocked people want to put the stickers on their cars and feels an overwhelming sense of gratitude:

I really didn't like bumpers; I thought it was a stupid idea. See? What do I know? [ACW laughs] I still see them around and I'm really… It still affects me the same way. It's just like, I want to stop and put a note on the—if it's a park car, I want to put a note on their windshield and say, “Thanks so much!”

Thus, after ear X-tacy’s closing, the bumper stickers serve not only as a reminder of the store, but a means of connecting and identifying people with like interests and potentially like experiences. Just as ear X-tacy, as a place, served as a community hub and a place people could go to find objects to express themselves, the bumper stickers continue to be a means of self-identification and connection. Although people have moved, changed careers, and are in different stages of their lives, sighting an ear X-tacy sticker reminds them not only the place, but that they belong to a group of people who experienced this and the cultural capital they held in relation to that place. Who wouldn’t want to preserve that feeling of belonging and kinship?
As mentioned at the beginning of the section, most participants either did not express awareness or interest in the bumper stickers that were now available at the Frazier History Museum. The lack of interest from those that did know or were made aware the new stickers may suggest the value associated with getting a sticker from ear X-tacy. Wicke’s comment about them being “limited edition” demonstrates the shift in the original stickers’ nature as a commodity. On occasion, I’ve spotted ear X-tacy bumper stickers, and even memorabilia like a plastic shopping bags, listed on eBay. At one point the stickers were abundant and free/low cost; it was easy to stockpile them for scrapbooking, remixing, and other projects. Seeing these stickers out in the world may have been a common occurrence for some. Even when they were in high demand, ear X-tacy’s presence assured they would be produced, and ear X-tacy’s presence also assured continued interest as people would be interested in continued brand loyalty. Once the store closed and the production of stickers ceased, those who had stickers may not have been as interested in parting with them. Those who moved on no longer felt obligated to associate themselves with the store through the stickers. In short, now that the store is closed, there is no supply to meet the demand, so the sticker’s rarity has increased, making them more valuable and their sightings out in the world even more significant.

Questioning whether the person driving knows or has experienced ear X-tacy, there is a yearning for authenticity through proximity. While the sticker alone signals experience with the store, the signal perhaps carries a stronger meaning if that person was able to buy the sticker in the store—if they were able to say that they were there when ear X-tacy was open. Recently, I saw a yellow and red ear X-tacy sticker on a parked car and I found myself asking similar questions. The sticker itself looked so new, but I am still
unaware any replicas that had been made using this original design and color scheme, so my first thought was that this must have been someone who had been an early fan of ear X-tacy. Although I never set foot in the store, based on the narratives I had been told, my impulse was to recognize the sticker as authentic. From the perspective of nostalgia as something that can be socially and culturally taught, the stickers have been a teacher for me as an outsider—their presence reminds me of ear X-tacy’s absence and makes me long for the opportunity to have seen the store for myself.

As further described in the next section, since 2019, the Frazier History Museum sells a version of the bumper stickers in their gift shop; however, this is still not widely known, nor are they necessarily the same as claiming to have an “original.” As suggested in the previous paragraph, to have one form a past trip to the store claims a particular kind of proximity that can’t be claimed by replicas.

Even then, these new offerings are primarily targeted toward those who have nostalgia for ear X-tacy. For Jones, the incredible part of Frazier’s music history exhibit was getting the original ear X-tacy sign, but he said that for a lot of people, the stickers were the exciting part:

Everybody remembered the bumper stickers. It was like that, that's the thing, because I thought was amazing we got the sign in there, but like to this day, I think the Frazier is selling those bumper stickers, and I have one of my car and people are always good excited about it.

While both the sign and stickers share the ear X-tacy logo, the sign is static. The stickers, as artifacts, were/are mobile and something that people interacted with more intimately—

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13 The store’s colors were yellow and red, following in the tradition of Tower Records as well as a number of fast food chains. However, later Timmons stated he’s “more of a black and white kind of guy.”
they were something that could be held, applied, and manipulated. The stickers served as a tool for the individual manipulation and definition of ear X-tacy as a place—the role the store played, what it could become, and how one could communicate that with the rest of the world:

**Timmons:** And just, I cannot believe it’s popular as it got. I mean… And it kind of became a thing. People would spot them around the country [ACW: “Oh wow.”] and take pictures of bumper stickers in different states. Or they would take a sticker, you know, and put it up—there's—somebody sent me a picture of one of our stickers on the wall in CBGB’s.\(^\text{14}\)

The bumper stickers call back to a time when ear X-tacy was growing and popular, rather than a thing of the past, but for people like Fox, it calls back to 1990s grunge. These bumper stickers serve as a time capsule, harkening back to the attitude of a time as much as they do the place they advertise. For Jones, the stickers are a reflection of DIY punk culture, and perhaps this is why the stickers are more desired and remembered than other common artifacts that reflect identity alignment and brand allegiance (e.g., T-shirts)—the stickers were malleable and opened to new possibilities. The reconfiguration of the letters reflect the ways in which narratives of ear X-tacy are configurations of different artifacts and memory reconstructions.

The visual recognition of the bumper stickers lives on not just in reproductions and sightings around town but in the Louisville Independent Business Alliance’s “Keep Louisville Weird” stickers, which now also include “Make Louisville Weirder.” As one of the founders of the alliance, Timmons used the ear X-tacy colors and typewriter font for the stickers. At a glance, it can be easy to mistake one for the other (and I have). One of the first statements on Louisville Independent Business Alliance’s website is: “Locally-

\(^{14}\) CBGB (1973-2006) was a famous New York City club known for hosting punk and new wave music acts.
owned businesses are one-of-a-kind enterprises that are vital to the unique character of the Louisville Metro community” (Louisville Independent Business Alliance, n.d.). Rhetorically, it is not only a continuation of ear X-tacy (and a nod to “Keep Austin Weird”), but an argument that authenticity resides in local and small businesses, emphasizing the importance of community, which I discussed in Chapter 3. The declaration of “Keep Louisville Weird” is also an act of preservation—to maintain a place where locally-owned businesses are supported and allowed to thrive. But it’s also possibly a rewriting of history—a longing for a time where a store like ear X-tacy would have survived.

**Frazier History Museum’s “Celebrating the Sounds of Kentucky” Exhibit**

In the fall of 2019, shortly after I had first started noticing the bumper stickers around town, the Frazier History Museum, a museum in downtown Louisville, launched an exhibit titled “Celebrating the Sounds of Kentucky.” From Bluegrass to punk rock, from Loretta Lynn to Squirrel Bait, this exhibit, curated by Michael Jones, unpacked the musical history of Kentucky.

The exhibit was cramped, partially due to the corners and winding nature of the space, partly due to the glass cases full of outfits and instruments. The end of the exhibit, when one turned the corner, featured the original ear X-tacy sign mounted over the exit and opened to an installation—a pseudo recreation of being in ear X-tacy. Several bins of CDs featuring local music and hand-decorated section labels invited participants to browse. An unhinged door was propped against the wall and covered in stickers, including several cut-ups of the ear X-tacy bumper sticker. A milk crate was filled with
old zines. The wall above the bins had several framed photographs, including one of the very first ear X-tacy location on Poplar Level Road in the Audubon neighborhood.

While there were a few wall panels after this display, highlighting venues and contemporary bands, for all intents and purposes, the exhibit ended with ear X-tacy. When I first toured the exhibit, I was struck by this ending and the way that, nearly ten years after closing, ear X-tacy played such a large role. I was still learning about ear X-tacy, and most of what I knew was word of mouth through other record collectors and the bumper stickers around town. This display, organization, and finale of the exhibit, on the surface, argued that a major highlight of Kentucky music history is ear X-tacy. Or that ear X-tacy was a defining part of Kentucky’s music history. The space the installation took up within the exhibit allowed viewers to stay and linger. In that sense, the ear X-tacy portion was an experience.

Museums are narrative spaces (Weiser, 2017). And although museums are typically framed as historical and/or educational, they often participate in some level of memorializing, making it “difficult to separate [historical and commemorative] in practice” (White, 1997, p. 22). In this sense, installations like the ear X-tacy one become just as much a of shrine as it is a place for education and memory reconstruction. Music exhibits and museums embrace some level of immersiveness, which allows attendees to not only learn about the subject but have an embodied experience. For example, music-based museums like Stax Museum of American Soul and the Sun Studios in Memphis, Tennessee have several rooms where attendees can touch instruments and recording counsels or stand in spaces where their favorite artists recorded music that they love. Sun Studios has a microphone planted in the middle of their iconic recording space, with a
photo of Elvis nearby for reference so that people can pose like him in photographs. The experience can just as much be about paying respect to these artists and those involved in making the music. In the Stax Museum, there are multiple sections dedicated to those who pioneered and fought for soul music, narratives that often intertwined with the civil rights movement. The advantage of the example museums, however, is that they have access to the original buildings and geographic space—recreating the past, in some ways, is literally a matter of preserving the artifacts that were once there. For the Frazier Museum exhibit, Jones had to bring in the artifacts to create just enough likeness to spark the imagination.

A museum exhibit has an appeal to authenticity by being in a museum—there is a sense of reliability. Another way of saying this is that a museum represents some level of authority, and through that authority, they craft narratives and present ideas about history (or science, or art, etc.) that people understand as authentic. Although critics may debate it, most museum goers like don’t question what does and doesn’t go into an exhibit. If it’s included, it must be important—about history, about who we are, or about a place. For “Celebrating the Sounds of Kentucky,” the museum organized a panel on opening night to discuss the exhibit. Among the panelists were John Timmons and curator Michael Jones, along with several others who had worked in the music industry. Their presence and discussion of the exhibit certified it as viable, as trustworthy. Additionally, Jones’ experience as a music journalist and historian provided him with the credentials.

In creating the exhibit, Jones had the chance to connect all his interests, ranging from local rock to jug band music. He wanted to demonstrate how Kentucky served as a crossroads for American popular music during the westward expansion, and how there
was a blending of cultural influences beyond bluegrass music. At the same time, there
was a personal expression:

I wanted to show the variety of music. I wanted to put it into historical context,
but also a lot of it had to do with my personal kind of musical interest and
evolution. …. So, a lot of the exhibits in the—or the different artifacts and things
in the exhibits actually had something to do with my career and my life, too. So, it
was also kind of like my personal musical journey there.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, Jones’ experience at ear X-tacy was educational and primed
him for music journalism, which makes it an important part of Jones’ music journey. As
such, it makes sense that ear X-tacy would play such a large role in the making of the
exhibit:

**Jones:** Well, I just thought, to me, ear X-tacy was important to Louisville music,
and I—Well, actually, when I had sat down and I sketched all the different eras of
music, like how we wanted to present it and ear X-tacy was the one—something
that was there from the beginning, you know—because I feel like it kind of
molded the way I think about music having that space, you know, to talk to
different people and get different—get to listen to different genres of music and
things like that. It was like my YouTube, [laughs] you know? And I would hear
stuff that like probably I would never seek out on my own, and so I felt like it was
important to have there. And I wanted to kind of capture that in that section and a
lot of people told me that was their favorite part of the exhibit.

Exhibits, like archives, memory, and nostalgia will always be up to interpretation, but
also selective in their creation based on who created it. The creator gets to decide what is
important and what ideas viewers will encounter. In other words, Jones’ understanding of
place, from Kentucky as a state to Louisville as a city, and then individual places such as
ear X-tacy, shaped the exhibit, which, in turn shapes the narrative about ear X-tacy’s role
in Kentucky’s music history.

When it came time to gather work for the exhibit, Jones said that one of the first
people he called was John Timmons:
I was able just to pull out my rolodex and call all my friends and get artifacts from them. And one of them, of course, was John Timmons from ear X-tacy because a lot of my friends who were musicians work there, too, and he had also put out some of their records at one time.

For the ear X-tacy portion of the exhibit, he knew that he wanted to display local acts with a CD display, and fan zines like Bert the Cat, and show fliers—things that reflected the elements of ear X-tacy that stuck with him.

With this exhibit, the Frazier Museum began selling T-shirts and ear X-tacy bumper stickers. The renewed and ongoing availability of these items, Jones said, means a lot to people, as previously mentioned, “You know, when we did the Frazier exhibit that the ear X-tacy section got the biggest response, and people were freaking out that they could get those bumper stickers again.” When we first spoke, the exhibit had come down months ago, but he also said that, “People are still going on [laughs] about ear X-tacy’s memorabilia, which just shows you the power that it had for a certain generation of people.”

But, of course, as much as museums are often trusted authorities, they, too are selective and have a slant of their own. Much like the questions we ask about nostalgia—who gets to remember what and why?—we have to ask of museums—What counts as worthy of inclusion and who gets to decide? What gets excluded?

Jones admitted that there are insider things, and those things were for people who visited ear X-tacy the same time that he was. For example, “You would know who The Uglies were.” But overall, he contributed the immersive nature of the ear X-tacy portion of the exhibit to the fact that he “remembered it so well” and he got “[his friends involved in helping [him] recreate it.” These collaborations reflect a microcosm of the ways in which museums can embody collective identities (Weiser, 2017).
Selectivity is not always based on importance or bias, but also availability. In the case of the exhibit fliers, all the fliers primarily came from one individual because an exhibit from another local museum had donated their fliers to the Louisville Music Underground Archive (LUMA) and the university would have charged Jones to use or copy them for his exhibit. Like other parts of the exhibit, he turned to his friends and used what was provided, so while the fliers as a general artifact reflect what ear X-tacy would have included, the types of shows and music were limited out of necessity.

**Bri Bowers’ Artwork**

Bri Bowers, an Ohio artist who relocated to Louisville after college, got started illustrating Louisville landmarks when she participated in the *Wander Louisville* city guidebook (Duvall, 2021). Afterward, she began illustrating the neighborhoods she spent time in, then began talking with customers at a local gallery: “While previously working as the gallery curator for Revelry in NuLu, Bowers was able to get feedback directly from customers. They'd share their favorite spots with her and the stories behind them, like having a first date there” (Duvall, 2021, para. 19). Since then, she’s created an extensive series of watercolor illustrations that highlight Louisville neighborhoods, and iconic—iconic to those who live in the city—locations, ranging from bars to bakeries to music venues to bygone video rental shops. Among these is the Panera location ear X-tacy. These illustrations have been reprinted on tea towels, collages, magnets, and even wooden Christmas ornaments.

While it’s unclear whether or not Bri Bowers actually experienced ear X-tacy\(^\text{15}\), her illustrations of Louisville, both in city projects and in her work, resonates with

\(^{15}\) I was not able to interview Bowers for this project, but plan to reach out in the continuation of this project.
people. She has demonstrated her capacity to capture the key details of a place, those key material details that spark memory reconstruction. As local businesses and restaurants grow and become popular, it's a status symbol or stamp of success when they’ve been illustrated by Bowers. It’s not uncommon to see a business celebrate on social media and announce that their storefront has been captured in watercolor. In other words, Bowers preserves an idea of place through illustration. In doing so, she captures place within a particular point in time. While places are not static, watercolors do not change over time. The meaning and significance of this illustration may change over time, but the image itself won’t, even when a business closes or changes its name with new ownership.

Watercolors, by their nature are water soluble; the diluting of colors creates a dream-like scene. As someone who was not in Louisville when ear X-tacy was open, the Bowers rendition informs how I imagine ear X-tacy. Although I’ve seen photos and driven by the buildings, I find myself turning to the wooden ornament that attempts to capture the entrance of the Panera location, with the large logo sign hung above the doorway and the red OPEN neon sign directly beneath it. But as informative as it is, this illustration is also limiting for me as someone with minimal experience with the place—it does not give me a sense of the inside of the store, or the expansiveness of the store; I cannot see the CDs, vinyl, and other merchandise inside. With my limited knowledge and information based on photographs and interview participants’ descriptions, my configuration and sense of the inside of this place is undoubtedly a combination of multiple ear X-tacy locations, with my imagination filling in what I think a record store should be, which is further based on what I’ve been told of ear X-tacy in combination with my previous experience in other stores. Meanwhile, for those that visited this
location (or even other locations), the storefront is a springboard, a suggestion that they
can fulfill through memory reconstruction and imagination. Watercolors, in this sense, are
forgiving—the dreaminess allows viewers to engage and participate in multiple ways, to
fill in the gaps, both within shades of color and beyond the bleeding edges.

Bowers’ illustrations rose to a new level with Jack Harlow’s Louisville-only tour.

**Jack Harlow’s No Place Like Home Tour**

In November 2020, Jack Harlow, a hip-hop artist who grew up in Louisville,
posted on Twitter:

> I vividly remember 10 years ago today...I was in 7th grade... and as soon as school
let out we ran up to the legendary record store, ear-x-tacy....and I I bought a copy
of My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy on the day of its release

Harlow’s tweet about the Kanye West album somewhat reflects the sentiments of the
research participants—the album reminds him of a particular time and place. And while
the subject of the tweet is technically the record, the majority of the post is actually
dedicated to the “legendary record store” and the experience of going to the store. The
description of “vivid” and running to the store elicit nostalgia—the memory of youth and
the thrill of being able to visit the store after school, which may also be associated with
simpler times (especially given Kanye’s recent media presence). Citing this tweet,
Seventeen lists ear X-tacy as one of Harlow’s favorite home town spots, describing the
store as, “the iconic record store where Jack bought some of his favorite childhood
records until it closed in 2011” (Olson & Twerksy, 2022, n.p.). In this list, ear X-tacy is
an authentic insight into a celebrity’s life—ear X-tacy becomes embedded and
contextualized within Harlow’s ever-growing current narrative.
At the end of 2021, Harlow performed a Louisville-only tour called *No Place Like Home*. Each stop of the tour was in a different Louisville music venue. While this tour was a means of celebrating Louisville, Harlow’s home, the stage highlighted several local businesses, including ear X-tacy. In the local arts publication the *LEO*, Wilson (2021) called the stage depictions “meticulous recreations” (para. 6). These “recreations” are based on reconstructions, and what seemed to be the most important parts of the storefronts to recreate.

From the photos, even in a dark concert venue, the glow of ear X-tacy’s logo is bright, hanging over the grey structure shaped like the Panera location’s entrance. The glass door is backlit, making it easier to see the fliers taped to the windows. The tour title “No Place Like Home” is about Louisville, but it’s also about the venues, such as the Louisville Palace, and the stores recreated on stage. These individual places within a larger place, are each “home.”

Harlow’s reminiscing and highlighting of ear X-tacy appeals to fans because, like the *Seventeen* article, they feel closer to who he is as a person. Younger fans may have not had the chance to experience ear X-tacy, but his narrative will appeal to them because of that chance to feel closer. Meanwhile, those that do remember may feel as though their memories and experiences are validated or legitimized. In other words, in a false appeal to authority, Harlow’s celebrity status endorses particular narratives of ear X-tacy.

Meanwhile, as part of the tour merchandise, Harlow collaborated with Bri Bowers to make shirts and hoodies. One version features the ear X-tacy logo on the front, while the back has the text “No Place Like Home” with Bowers’ illustration of ear X-tacy beneath it. At the bottom, in smaller font, “Five Hometown Shows Five Iconic Venues.”
The first time I saw one of these shirts in the wild, I did a doubletake. For all intents and purposes, the front of the shirt, especially the black edition, looks like an ear X-tacy shirt. It’s not about the tour at all. Those who buy and wear the shirt are signaling not only their investment in Harlow and the tour, but their fondness for the place that was ear X-tacy. In this sense, the shirt creates a similar signaling as the bumper stickers: I knew this place, and I loved it.

The rhetoric of Harlow’s tour in combination with Bri Bowers’ art paints a specific version of ear X-tacy. In addition to ear X-tacy as a place equating to the comfort of home, ear X-tacy exists as one specific location: the Panera location.

**Timmons’ Radio Show**

When I asked participants what in current Louisville reminded them of ear X-tacy, at least one mentioned hearing ear X-tacy founder John Timmons on the public radio station 91.9 WFPK Music. Because some participants so closely associate Timmons with the store itself, hearing his voice on the radio sparks recognition and association with ear X-tacy. He currently hosts a three-hour mid-morning slot, during which he dedicates one song to the ear X-tacy era:

Um. I don't talk about it that much on my own, but I do, every day, I do a—it's not really a feature, it's just part of my show. I play a song from that era, I call it, you know, “Today's ear X-tacy, a track from the alternative era,” which who knows what that means. But we were billed, you know, we called it an alternative record store when I started, just because it was literally different from anything else in town.

Looking the playlists from previous shows, recent examples of “Today’s ear X-tacy” have included: “Our Lips Are Sealed” by Fun Boy Three (1983), “Spanish Bombs” by The Clash (1979), and “World Shut Your Mouth” by Julian Cope (1987) (“John
These punk and new wave bands all pushed against expectations during their time, not unlike ear X-tacy standing out from other stores in town when it was open. Considering ear X-tacy began as Timmons selling punk albums out of his apartment, it’s easy to imagine these tracks representing music that would have been found within the store.

Timmons himself said that he has to remember that listeners, especially in syndication, may not know what ear X-tacy was, so he takes a moment to describe the store:

I have to remember that there are people listening all around the country, and some places around the world that have no idea what ear X-tacy is. So I have to— I’ll explain every once in a while, “It was a record store here in Louisville.” I don't say that I owned it, but it's just like it was a record store and… I don't really talk about it on my own.

By positioning the store separate from himself, Timmons’ selections and the store and framed within a specific time period, not unlike participants’ reactions to physical music mediums at the beginning of the chapter. This association, and rhetorical framing, encourage a particular type of memory reconstruction. Additionally, it allows Timmons to step away from the pain he experienced after the store closed, and shape a new relationship with ear X-tacy in its absence.

For some, part of the store’s authenticity was connected to the people—those who shopped there, worked there, as well as the man who owned the store. The people themselves were “authentic.” When talking about the type of people who frequented ear X-tacy, Wicke described them as people that could be taken at face value: “Yeah, I think values of, you know, authenticity. You know, the people that went there were just, they’re just real people, you know.” In Chapter 3, when discussing ear X-tacy, multiple people
would mention Timmons’ directly—Timmons’ values, intentions, and interests. The perception of what made ear X-tacy a “good” store (i.e., not in it for the money) is closely linked to Timmons’ own values. This, too, is an appeal to authenticity—a sense of “realness” that is not just about the core essence of a thing or an idea, but that core is visible and stripped away of certain ideas/ideologies/frameworks such as capitalism. In describing what she meant by “real people,” Wicke alluded to most regulars at the store as not being wealthy. This push against wealth and money reflect not only the DIY attitude of punk and gritty nature of grunge, but cultural narratives that money corrupts people, places, and ideas.

Discussion

While some of these artifacts, events, and the narratives they produce may seem unrelated outside of their love of ear X-tacy, ultimately, as concluded in Chapter 3, participants and members of the Louisville community seem to be engaging in self-continuity. However, I would argue that these objects and activities are not only about continuing the self, but an unwillingness to imagine a reality where ear X-tacy, as a place, does not play a role in their lives, and narratives about Louisville (albeit selective narratives).

Rather than defining ear X-tacy for others, for those who may not be within Louisville, these efforts feel primarily for those within Louisville or had been in the city—an affirmation that this place happened. When reflecting on the closing of ear X-tacy, and how she felt now, Wicke found it difficult to process:

It just felt like, hmm, felt like home. and now I think it feels like… I'm struggling, because it sometimes it's like, oh man, that, was that place real? [laughs] Like did we really have access to that kind of space? You know, there's just we don't have anything like that anymore and it's sad.
These retellings are a chance for those in and from Louisville to establish their own narratives of ear X-tacy. With multiple locations and periods, there is deliberation over what was the “real” or “first” ear X-tacy, and these moments allow people to stake claim to the narrative they want to pursue. They define the sense of place, both geographically, socioculturally, and psychologically. They get to articulate their version of the “real” ear X-tacy and forward particular narratives and perceptions of the store.

Jack Harlow’s stage set up and Bri Bowers’ artwork both highlight a particular building (i.e., Panera Ex-tacy), whereas Jones’ exhibit was more about the intimate experience of being in earlier iterations. Timmons’ nod to ear X-tacy on his radio program is just about that temporal period as it is about the store—the celebration and sharing of music as participants spoke about in Chapter 3.

In fact, the narratives examined in Chapter 3 all play some role here. Harlow’s No Place Like Home tour emphasizes community, both within ear X-tacy and Louisville. Additionally, the tour brought everyone together at the concerts, which are communal experiences. Bowers’ artwork also embraces community—her individual illustrations can also be found as collages, representing the Louisville neighborhoods. Jones’ exhibit features a passion for music, by the exhibit’s theme alone, but it also encourages discovery—the wall placards, the interactive installations, and the expansiveness all encourage the viewers to discover something new about Kentucky’s musical history. Even the bumper stickers create a sense of community—an instant recognition when spotted out in the wild.

In defining these versions of ear X-tacy, they are articulating the ways in which they wish to see what Louisville was and is. Another way of putting it: Each of these
retellings highlight what these groups and individuals identify as their “authentic” Louisville experience, which will always be selective. Aside from the fact that one person (or even a group) cannot experience the wholeness of a place, ear X-tacy existed within the ecosystem of Bardstown Road and the Highlands neighborhood, an area that not everyone in Louisville experiences the same way or identifies as a central point of Louisville. The rhetorical positioning privileges white, middle-class neighborhoods where young white people would gather. Frith (2018) argues:

Many cities, including Austin, are socially segregated. I mention the specific type of whiteness of ‘authentic’ Denton here to make a similar point: no representation of a place, no genuine local culture, will ever capture what a place means to everyone. Place is always, to some degree, subjectively constructed. (p. 123)

The representations of Louisville within the context of ear X-tacy also do not fully capture what Bardstown Road or the Highlands may mean to everyone within the community or within those areas. They do not address the narratives of the historically Black West end of Louisville. They even exclude the south end of Bardstown Road itself, which runs past the Highlands and into historically immigrant neighborhoods.

As stated earlier in this chapter, the selectivity of authenticity can be argued as an act of preservation. This act of identifying both a spatial and temporal moment when a place was its most “authentic” self, closely relates to restorative nostalgia—an attempt to return to or rebuild what someone imagines a place to have been (Boym, 2007, 2018). As touched upon in Chapter 1, restorative nostalgia, unlike reflective nostalgia, does not have the flexibility to consider the fallibility of memory or accept the loss. Although memory changes over time, restorative nostalgia will continue to try and rekindle and reconstruct the experience exactly as it was.
Consequently, through the lens of restorative nostalgia, appeals to authenticity are not only selective, but have the potential to be form of gatekeeping. For example, I have an elderly friend who has spent most of her life in the South, but because she is from the Midwest and was not in the South during a particular time period, there are some in her town that still do not consider her to be “truly” Southern. The authenticity of her identity is withheld, because it does not align with an appeal to the authenticity of the place. In other words, just as social capital within a place can help someone to feel as though they can thrive in a place, the lack thereof or certain kinds of capital are unavailable due to its impermeability/location in time. Thus an appeal to authenticity that emphasizes restorative nostalgia—we must preserve this place, we must do as much to go back to how things used to be—means that some will not be able to participate or be accepted in a place because the social and cultural capital required is unattainable; they can never achieve the temporal proximity. However, not all nostalgia aims to recreate a one-to-one experience or sense of place.

In maintaining and negotiating differing narratives of ear X-tacy, people are likely drawn to where they feel they belong. The capacity for nostalgia to be culturally learned (Kurlinkus & Kurlinkus, 2018) suggests that it may not just be those who were there (and thus have temporal proximity) when ear X-tacy was open who are drawn to these narratives. In other words, those who were not there may also be drawn to narratives where they feel that they potentially could have belonged. This may also be why the Panera location is so popular and continues to be iconic. Aside from the building’s architectural aesthetic16, the breadth of music it carried presents the most possibilities for

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16 According to Timmons, the building was originally for storing trolleys. He also described the building as having a “soul.”
one to find what they are looking for and something to identify with, whether it be by
genre or group of people. Bowers’ dreamy water colors, for all the potential limitations,
also open up to endless possibilities of what could have been for anyone to imagine and
desire.

So, if nostalgia, as oral historians suggest, is a critique of the present (Portelli
2018; Helgren, 2015; Shircliffe, 2001), what critiques do these artifacts, events, and
constellations make of contemporary Louisville? What stories does they tell, or retell?
The absence of ear X-tacy is a loss, which fuels the creation of continuing or new
narratives of the store, but also what the store represents or serves as a shorthand for,
such as the larger narratives from Chapter 3. Psychological studies argue that we are
prone to retain positive memories longer than those that are mixed feelings (Newman, et
al., 2020), and feelings of community and belonging are understandably things someone
would want to maintain and/or return to; as we get older and move through different
stages of life, our social circles shift and change. With growing obligations and
responsibilities, it typically becomes more difficult to make friends outside of work,
connections through obligations such as children, and so there is a potential loss of
community, which can put the present under scrutiny.

Van Tilburg et al. (2019) suggest that nostalgia is connected to “momentous”
occasions, and for multiple participants, the closing of ear X-tacy felt significant.
Although there are multiple record stores in Louisville, such as Surface Noise and
Guestroom Records, which are smaller and niche-oriented, there is nothing like ear X-
tacy, and it’s questionable whether a store of that size is still financially sustainable in
Louisville, or anywhere\textsuperscript{17}—in the process of doing this dissertation, another large regional record store chain in Wisconsin closed the majority of its stores, including its flagship location. So in addition to current and future local record stores potentially living in ear X-tacy’s shadow—possibly influencing their own claims to authenticity—there is the potential for critique of the economic health of the city and neighborhoods with rising prices of storefronts in popular neighborhoods.

As suggested throughout this chapter, authenticity is not just about geographical space, but also time. In our interviews, Heather Fox frequently returned to the 1990s—the aesthetic and the music scene within Louisville, especially the punk scene. This was a formative time for Fox; she was learning to play her guitar with her friends, forming a band, and overall learning to be more confident as a girl, then woman. Ear X-tacy didn’t play a direct role in that, per se, but when she sees the logo, she thinks of grunge. However, Fox is also still in her band and still performs and attends shows with her friends. Interestingly, Fox is one of the participants that did not express close ties with ear X-tacy, though she acknowledged it was an extension of the music community. Her feelings and responses to ear X-tacy’s absence are more about the passage of time and reflecting on an era that was about change and growth, which studies have also identified as a source for nostalgia (van Tilburg et al., 2019).

While Frith acknowledges that authenticity typically is about white narratives and spaces, what he doesn’t fully articulate is that appeals to authenticity are also, in their own way, about authority—who has the authority or right to claim a narrative, an idea, or

\textsuperscript{17}Interestingly, in the process of writing this dissertation, Better Days Records, a contemporary to ear X-tacy, moved its eastside location off Bardstown Road into a large building on Baxter Ave, which runs parallel to Bardstown. Its stock has grown considerably since. The owner did not respond to my interview request.
recreation of a place is authentic? In other words, authority, like authenticity, is selective, and those with authority often are the ones who get to determine what counts as an authentic narrative. Both wield some power in their selectivity.

When I say that authority has power in appeals to authenticity, I don’t mean this strictly in the negative sense, though it may sound like it (because it often does). For example, Jones, the curator of the exhibit, not only spent time at ear X-tacy, but is a music journalist and historian. Given his background and expertise, he may have some authority to make appeals to authenticity. In fact, as a Black music historian, he was able to shape the narratives around the music history of Kentucky, highlighting Black artists and movements that might have otherwise been underrepresented or ignored all together. His authority provides him the opportunity to make appeals to authority that change our understanding of Kentucky’s history for the better. Kentucky, as a place for music, became richer and more nuanced.18

However, I would argue that while authority and authenticity are both selective, the key difference is that not everyone has authority, but everyone can make appeals to authenticity. If they didn’t, then some may argue that some of my interviews were not valid and that I should have only focused on certain individuals. Similarly, several participants (and several people who declined) weren’t sure why I wanted to interview them because they did not feel qualified to speak about ear X-tacy, either because of their feelings for the place or their limited interaction with it. In other words, because of their limited or differing proximity, they did not feel as though they could authentically speak

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18 It is worth noting that this is just in reference to the work in the museum exhibit. Overall, there is considerably more work to be done in Louisville and the state of Kentucky. This work cannot fall on the backs of Black people and must be in collaboration across all demographics.
to ear X-tacy. But that does not mean they could not authentically speak to their own experience.

As such, while there may be more “official” identifiers and narratives of place than others, there will always be those who dissent, who have another version of a place. There will always be the glossy tourist pamphlet and then there will be a local that says something like, “If you want a real [city] experience…” Because no matter how much we want to wrap our arms around the authentic, true, or platonic essence of a place, the truth is that we can never fully capture the entirety of a place—“it can never exist as some objective entity waiting to be experienced” (Frith, 2018, p. 125).

We will make appeals to authenticity again and again, and those appeals will change over time with our concepts of place and acts placemaking.

For this research site, the artifacts and events serve as stand-ins for the place’s absence. These artifacts, these events, and daily rituals help keep ear X-tacy alive. In this sense, these objects serve a similar role to memorials, but whereas memorials are stationary, within a specific place, these objects have the capacity to move throughout the city and beyond, physically and digitally. This moves beyond the scope of this project and into theory of public memory, but there is room for future research, as I’ll discuss in the following chapter.

Although I argue these artifacts and events are primarily for those who were there, who have some sort of proximity to the research site, I can’t ignore the effect these things potentially have on those who were not in Louisville or are transplants.

I was not present for when ear X-tacy was open, but as a record collector, being able to engage in some of these activities and with these artifacts do make me feel closer
to ear X-tacy in some way. In that way, they also invite others in—come, enjoy this thing with us, be part of it, let us tell you about this amazing thing that used to be in Louisville. Meanwhile, when I first began to explore this project, as mentioned in Chapter 1, a fellow transplant had mentioned that they did not realize ear X-tacy was closed because they saw it “everywhere”—the bumper stickers, the parody shirts, the artwork, and so on. These objects, these touchstones, rhetorically constructed a presence that felt real and, well, present.

When Timmons announced the closing of ear X-tacy on the store’s Facebook page, he declared:

ear X-tacy is no more
Long live ear X-tacy! (ear X-tacy, 2011)

The declaration is an acknowledgment of ear X-tacy’s passing and making way for the next generation of record stores, not unlike the passing of the throne from one monarch to the next. However, the contradictory nature of this statement also lives on in the reconstructions and narratives included in this project. Although the store itself closed, the impact it had on the community is clear when looking at the ways in which ear X-tacy is still a part of the cultural conversation. Not only is it a part of the conversation, but some parts of the Louisville community take opportunities to will it back into conversation. I do emphasize “some,” given not everyone in the study expressed nostalgia for the place, but as hinted above, this study does not give a holistic look at the Louisville community, or even the Louisville music community.

The contradictory nature of Timmons’ statement also reflects the tensions in retelling and reconstructing our sense of place. We desire to preserve the memory of a place even in the face of those things are ever-changing. We know place from our
perspectives, but not the whole of it. Even so, that does not mean we love or loved a place, it does not mean we cannot appreciate the way it has shaped us and who we’ve become. If it did, then these stories would not continue to emerge.

**Conclusion**

Attempts to preserve and maintain narratives about a place will never truly succeed in preserving the place itself, because both memory and place change over time. However, these attempts do often keep narratives circulating within certain public spaces and social circles, which means they do succeed in continuity of both individual selves and the place that no longer exists. Collective memory of a place like ear X-tacy is further complicated by the fact that ear X-tacy existed in multiple geographical spaces overtime, and there are a range of memories to navigate and negotiate when rhetorically placemaking. What about the place one is nostalgic for likely influences how they craft and share their narratives. This chapter entered these narratives through artifacts and events that were created in ear X-tacy’s absence.

While the narratives in Chapter 3 alluded to values surrounding place, the artifacts and events described in this chapter often connected back to specific periods in time, and navigating and negotiating narratives over time will often further influence our understandings of the authenticity of a place. Appeals to authenticity, in their selectivity, potentially connect to one’s feelings of belonging, either the loss and desire for it or the potential, which is connected to one’s social or cultural capital within a place. This raises questions about how we frame narratives and rhetorically construct place to not only potentially exclude, but include, which will be covered in the next and final chapter, along with other implications of this dissertation research.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS AND LOOKING FORWARD

While the bulk of this dissertation was written at my desk or at coffee shops (in cliché grad school fashion), there are also notes and passages that were constructed at social events, sparked by conversations, on the road, at concerts, and even on Record Store Day while waiting outside a record store. I carried this research with me to different places, which made me consider the way each of those places was constructed and how I would later rhetorically shape them in my own memory reconstruction. Those moments, along with the enthusiasm and excitement of community members, regularly kept me going when I lost momentum. I mention this, partly to illustrate the ways I connected with this research from conception to completion, but also to connect it back to another interest of mine: The movement and occupation of bodies in spatial locations—the way our embodied experiences shape the work we do, but also our understanding of place and what we long for in those places. As I’ve mentioned throughout this dissertation, closer proximity does not guarantee accuracy (Boyle & Rice, 2018); however, this research is not necessarily about accuracy or identifying what “really happened.” Rather, it is about the subjectivity of our rhetorical construction of the past, of place, of places in the past—the how and why these narrative constructions come to be, which are influenced by many of the things I’ve addressed in this dissertation, but also material realities of bodies, which are political.
I began this project because I was interested in the bumper stickers that I was seeing around town. They were not just on cars and public spaces—they were part of the Louisville landscape. I wanted to know what gave them their staying power. The more I investigated the store behind the logo and ear X-tacy itself, the more I began to think about place, and the absence of places. The absence of ear X-tacy made me even more curious about the narratives that simultaneously survived it and attempted to keep the store’s spirit alive.

This all being said, this is not my first attempt to write about record stores. In my MFA, I proposed a mixed media project that would have been an interrogation of my experiences in record stores, the community I had found in Philadelphia, juxtaposed with my experiences as a child crate digging in disaster zones of stores with my father. All the while, I would have been considering why he had never introduced me to certain artists, and what it may have meant to have heard them at such a young age. It’s only after completing this dissertation that I see the threads that have continued from that rejected project to this dissertation—the roles niche places like record stores and bookstores play in our lives and how we perceive them as places. Although I’m certain my father never introduced me to Bowie and Prince, I question my memory, constantly trying to reconcile the memories I reconstruct and what feels like a conflict in logic. I imagine what could have been, what I could have been nostalgic for, and the longing for what never was. At the same, there is the undeniable influence record stores have had on me over the last ten years, the way my world has expanded through them.

In other words, this dissertation considers not just community nostalgia (or lack thereof), but also how that nostalgia has affected me, as the researcher and someone who
straddles both insider and outsider status—an insider in record store culture, but an outsider in terms of Louisville history, and as someone who is a transplant who has lived in a post-ear X-tacy Louisville but only for a relatively short time (5 years). This, in and of itself, a bias, but I have attempted to mitigate this bias through reflection and privilege participant voices where I can. As with any research, it could be better, and given this is the start of a larger project, I intend to take what I’ve learned in this dissertation to continue this research—both to improve the theoretical aspects and community-facing project while being mindful of the community.

From a more theoretical perspective, this dissertation has utilized a blend of oral history and qualitative interviewing to investigate the intersections of rhetorics of nostalgia and rhetorics of place—to analyze how people rhetorically construct, discuss, and understand places that no longer exist. I started by unpacking the relationship between rhetorics of nostalgia and rhetorics of place, using speculation as a throughline to consider how desire and our past and current values influence narratives about both the past and hopes for the future. This paved the way for investigating the role of appeals to authenticity in rhetorical placemaking, which is influenced by our nostalgia of what we want a place to have been; this allowed me to reflect on how we maintain narratives of past places. Ultimately, each of these steps have led me to self-continuity—not just in connecting one’s past self to the present but setting the stage for future self-continuity. This dissertation has returned again and again on the relationship between narrative, identity, and place. Each of these three facets are recursive unto themselves, and as each changes and shifts over time, so does the relationship between the three.
The early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic created and fostered additional challenges for this project. Now that we are in a later stage of the pandemic, I look forward to continuing my research and pursuing topics that could not be covered and/or arose during my initial research. In this chapter, I will consider not only the implications of this research, but avenues for moving forward, both for this study as well as the discipline continues to research rhetorics of place and rhetorics of nostalgia.

This Study in Conversation with the Literature

Rhetorics of nostalgia provided me the framework to consider what my participants longed for and why; furthermore, it prompted me to ask how participants made sense of the loss of the store ear X-tacy, and how this influenced participants and others taking action in both the present and future in order to stabilize their sense of place and sense of selves. While neither place nor identity is static, one takes action in order to create continuity — a clear construction of narrative.

Self-continuity, which is a recurring theme within the literature (across disciplines), is not only about meaning making in one’s life (van Tilburg et al., 2019), but identity formation. As one is able to connect who they were to who whe’ve become, they have a more cohesive (or stabilized) sense of self, which then informs how their sense of place and how they reconstruct memories. In reflecting upon their experiences and the store ear X-tacy as a place, participants considered who they were when they were at ear X-tacy, who they currently are, and how they got to this point, especially when the participants had more experiences at ear X-tacy and/or encountered ear X-tacy in their younger years. As shown in Chapter 3, some participants made direct connection between ear X-tacy and who they had become; others reflected more broadly, considering what it
meant to be a teenager or young adult at the time and how they had progressed. In these narratives, participants sought to identify a clear progression, a continuity of who they had been and who they are becoming in the store’s absence. These findings support research that draws a connection between identity and our understanding of place, but also suggest that places more strongly associated with identity former will prompt future nostalgic placemaking. As I discuss more below, these findings encourage further exploration and unpacking of this connection within the context of rhetorics of place.

Meanwhile, in alignment with human geographies and rhetorics of place, those who did not have as strong of an emotional connection to X-tacy spoke of the place more distantly, its significance more broadly and less personal. Those with strong emotional connection spoke of the place as personally significant, with more detail about the place itself in addition to their own sense of self. In turn, this reflects the participants’ sense of communities—communities they felt a sense of belonging in, communities they participated in, or perhaps wish that they had been a part of. If appeals to authenticity are connected to belonging, then this suggests that rhetorical placemaking narratives construct not only the sense of place and one within it, but, as Tuan (1979) suggests, a sense within a societal structure. This, then, potentially opens further study within rhetorics of place as to how individuals map out their communities and the businesses within them, the appeals of authenticity across multiple places (as opposed to one individual place/area).

All participants, some prompted, some not, spoke about X-tacy in proximity to other businesses and places. Physical and temporal proximity, as Krueter (2018) argues, can be a way of rhetorically arguing one’s closeness to a place or experience.
Participants mapped their experiences around ear X-tacy in relation to other places they would visit and/or were significant to them. While these places were often in physical proximity to ear X-tacy, I was surprised to see how participants went out of their way to make associative connections with places they felt had a similar vibe or set of values as ear X-tacy. This was more common than comparing ear X-tacy to other record stores, which I thought would have been a more prominent conversation point, but it only came up when I directly asked about other record stores. One example that came up across multiple interviews is Twice Told Books, a bookstore that was within walking distance (i.e., physical proximity) to ear X-tacy; it also employed musicians and was a place people would go for specific kinds of books and to gather with like minds. When creating association between places, proximity was far more common than temporal proximity, which seemed more reserved for participant experiences within different iterations of ear X-tacy (e.g., visiting during a particular time period was a more authentic experience).

This complicates the relationship between time and place when considering the role of nostalgia within rhetorical placemaking, which often demands juggling the two. However, proximity also manifested, as mentioned, in terms of perceived values, which somewhat deviated from the literature. Participants negotiated ear X-tacy, as a place, within a larger place—an identity within identities.

While identity was such a strong theme in the literature, for me, the role it played in this study and analysis is perhaps the most unexpected outcome. Going into the research I had considered the role of emotions in nostalgia and place, but I focused more on community, despite interviewing participants separately. There is no place without people, just as there is no community without people, making this research just as much
about the people as the place itself, hence the presence of nostalgia within rhetorical placemaking. Boyle and Rice (2018)’s collection recognizes this—a body in place and embodied knowledge are both shaped by people and their identities. There is more research to be done within rhetoric of place about individual identities and place.

This study and the essays in Boyle and Rice’s collection hint at the ways in which rhetorical placemaking shapes identity and vice versa, but the ways in which places shape identity beyond self-continuity deserves more attention. For example, Kreuter (2018) argues that, “Proximity is a function of memory and emotion” (p. 54). Consequently, he suggests that connections he makes between his past and his sense of any particular place, which is related to past experiences only because he is reassessing and reconstructing those memories while in that place, are uniquely his own—others will not make those same linkages as “proximity sutures disparate experiences” (p. 55). These unique and disparate linkages and association influence rhetorical construction of memory and place, and shape nostalgia. This challenges research that focuses on collective memory. It also leaves room for further exploration of the type of associations and linkages individuals within a place, especially given the prominent of identity that I noted above\(^\text{19}\). Additionally, this may be further means of extending conversations surrounding self-continuity and speculation—considering the ways in which seemingly disparate connections are rhetorically made, and how this may further influence how places are rhetorically constructed in their absence.

\(^{19}\) Alternatively, future studies that are more invested in collective memory and/or the social aspects of rhetorical placemaking, should potentially consider engaging with research participants both in a collective and individual setting to study the ways in which social engagement influences both collective and individual memory and placemaking.
The role of identity, then, makes the prevalence of narrative construction no surprise. Even when not been prompted\(^{20}\), some participants turned to anecdotes to reinforce what they were trying to say. Narrative was also a way for people to insert themselves and their position within place. These narratives were also launching off points for people to reflect on their identities and engage in self-continuity. In a similar fashion, this study also uses vignettes and narrative as means of sense-making, partly inspired by Giafanga’s (2018) modeling of vignettes to support critical design within rhetoric.

Psychological studies have expressed concerns that studies about nostalgia may prompt nostalgia and positive responses due to the nature of the study and the setting that the nostalgia is triggered (Newman et al., 2020). This is a possibility for this project, especially given most participants were excited to discuss the subject matter. They also expressed a fondness for the conversation. However, some also expressed a sadness in thinking about the store, especially the longer they talked and the more deeply they thought about it. The conflicting and mixed feelings that emerged in these cases align with the psychological studies that suggest nostalgia triggered in daily life may have more negative associations or stem from negative moments (Newman et al., 2020)—a longing to return to better times. One of the ways I attempted to mitigate positive-only responses was to ask for reflection of how their feelings have changed over time, or how they felt when encountering signs of ear X-tacy in their daily lives. In the continuation of this study, I plan to recruit more participants that have different opinions or experiences and consider further strategies for avoiding leading questions.

\(^{20}\) Or directly prompted, considering both oral history and qualitative interviewing aim to gather data that is rich in details, which often means encouraging narrative responses.
The following sections consider, given this study and the above correlations, where there is potential for future research. I also consider the next steps for this project and how I want to move forward, addressing the limitations of this project and other themes and topics that emerged within the interviews.

**Room for Future Research within the Discipline**

The following sections address areas for future study as related to the discipline, which often intersect with the dissertation project, but deviate from its primary focus and/or research site.

**COVID, Lockdown, and Implications on Nostalgia and Place**

The COVID-19 pandemic altered the state of the world, and influenced what and how we research. Lockdown provided a specific set of challenges, and for many during this time face-to-face interactions were limited. People were advised to mask, avoid crowds, and only go to places that were essential (e.g., grocery stores, hospitals, etc.). Concerts were canceled, stores reconfigured their hours and limited the amount of people who could be in the space at any given time. Hand sanitation stations were installed in entrances, sometimes accompanied by a box of masks.

The way we moved through space and engaged with place dramatically changed.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, this project had to be reshaped and reconsidered to be mindful of safety and comfort. I interviewed participants during the summer and fall of 2021, at which people were in various stages of sheltering in place and moving back out into the world. With limited access and visits to certain kinds of places, I found myself wondering how this loss (albeit temporary) either fueled or shifted nostalgia for those places, and what this may mean for nostalgia for places and times before the pandemic.
(even if those places no longer exist). How does it shift our perceptions of place and potentially heighten the sense of “things used to be better”?

Rhetorics of nostalgia is a potent lens to analyze people’s perceptions of before and after the pandemic. This potentially skewed some responses in the research, and it will be interesting to see how future participants respond to the same questions now that most no longer shelter in place. While the differences may be difficult to assess for this project, or may not result in anything, it does raise questions for the larger field of study. What do people feel they have lost? What do they long for? What critiques of the present exist in the face of a global pandemic and now that the state of emergency has ended?

Meanwhile, there is potential for rhetorics of place to study the rhetoric surrounding place during and after lockdown. While some places were labeled and categorized as “essential” or “necessary,” others were “non-essential.” Additionally, some places were specifically deemed high risk (e.g., bars and restaurants) and to be avoided. How did these labels influence the rhetoric around those places? What did it mean for the people who occupied those spaces, both in their understanding of place and how they were addressed by society (e.g., nurses as “heroes”)? How do people talk about those places now that safety protocols have been lowered? Furthermore, how have people who did not participate in lockdown defended these places? Or how did those who did not have the privilege of sheltering conceptualize place while working under high risk conditions?

As safety protocols are lowered and more people resume pre-pandemic behavior, will rhetoric surrounding places revert or shift to something new, and how much of it will directly include language from lockdown? What will be the new expectations of place?
How will this shape who does and does not have access to public places? For example, disabled, chronically ill, and immunocompromised people have historically had difficulty accessing public places and the pandemic has made it increasingly difficult to participate in public life. In a similar vein, what is the aftermath of the resurgence of Asian hate on Asian businesses and neighborhoods as a sense of place?

Meanwhile, as a nation, we are still unpacking the loss of the businesses (often small, independent, and local) that did not survive—that were forced to close because a lack of business, a lack of employees, and/or a lack of funding. Because rhetorics of place frame place as a rhetorical construction that is recursively invented, this would make it a suitable lens to analyze these changes over time, through multiple sources (e.g., qualitative interviews, social media text, news, etc.). In other words, this dissertation study can serve as a steppingstone toward future research to study the ways in which these businesses are constructed in hindsight, both the individual and collective losses.

Finally, within interviews, participants frequently mentioned the age before social media. Given that social media, along with Zoom, was one of the primary means of communication during lockdown, there may have been a sense of loss of face-to-face interaction. There is room for future research to consider how people talk about their feelings about social media (and technology) post-lockdown and whether or not they express nostalgia for before COVID, or even how they talk about post-lockdown in comparison to before COVID and the ways they engage with people in different places.

**Brand Identity and Franchises**

While ear X-tacy’s multiple locations were frequently mentioned, this study only briefly touched on the fact that ear X-tacy once had two simultaneous locations. While
these separate geographical spaces were distinct in their identities, both were ear X-tacy, which raises questions about how identity of a place identity stretches over multiple spatial locations. There is room for rhetorics of place to further research multiplicity of place, especially in combination with brand identity, which is dependent on narrative.

Research about franchise restaurants typically addresses the comfort and consistency of each place looking and feeling the same (along with consistency in the food served), which intersects with nostalgia (e.g., how it made us feel when we were children); there is also room to consider what this means through the lens of rhetorics of place—what rhetorical construction takes place to assure this, even when there are unavoidable differences. How does one rhetorically negotiate the nuances between a specific location and the brand identity? What can and can’t be different from geographical space to geographical space and still maintain the same brand identity and sense of place? Additionally, ear X-tacy’s multiple moves into different buildings raises questions as to how a place maintains its identity as a place while moving from one geographical space to another, when the sensory experience of a spatial location is part of the development of sense of place.

**Future Research within This Study**

Engaging in oral history has felt rewarding and grounding. I am, historically, a maker of things as much as I am a scholar, so I am leery of research about and involving communities that ultimately becomes an intellectual exercise. I do, however, wish there had been more time and opportunities to engage with my participants throughout the process. Initially, I had hoped to pause at each stage—transcription, initial analysis, and then drafts—to discuss with participants and move toward “writing with,” but it was not
feasible within the dissertation timeframe, and I wanted to be mindful of the labor I was asking of participants, as mentioned in Chapter 2. As I move into the next stage of the project, I am hoping for enough space to take the time to pause and check in more regularly with participants and have follow-up conversations as different subjects and themes arise. While more dialogue can complicate the process, it may help fill in gaps and create further nuance.

The following sections address areas I intend to expand upon after the completion of this dissertation, as part of the ongoing, larger project.

**Race, Place, and Belonging**

As mentioned in Chapter 2, aside from COVID-19, the biggest limitation of this study was the lack of racial diversity. As I continue this project, I will once again attempt to recruit people of color through snowball sampling, social media, and identifying community members through other projects, such as the *Louisville Magazine* oral history. A more diverse participant group would allow for me to further analyze the community surrounding ear X-tacy without tokenizing any one participant. If I am still unable to recruit more participants of color, then I will be sure to further investigate what this may mean about ear X-tacy as a place within a White neighborhood. Because this is an oral history project, I want to forward participant narratives first, but there is also something to be said and analyzed about the voices willing/not willing to participate.

In addition to recruiting more participants, I want to have more direct conversations with current and future participants about race. While I asked about the demographics of those who frequented ear X-tacy, I did not ask about race directly. This was a deliberate move—I wanted to see what answers participants would give
unprompted. In future research, especially since I’ve developed and continue to maintain relationships with current participants, I would like to ask them to reflect more about race in relationship to ear X-tacy—the employees, the customers, and the neighborhood more broadly. This relationship building and maintaining will make it easier to discuss topics such as this, which may make some participants uncomfortable, especially if asked in the first round by someone they don’t know well.

As part of this ongoing research, both for this project and rhetorics of place and nostalgia more generally, there is ample room to consider how racial demographics and interactions influence the making of place, as well as creating a sense of welcoming and belonging. I intend to draw not only the history of record stores and the different communities and racial demographics they serviced, but also work such as bell hooks’ *Belonging: A Culture of Place* (1990), which reflects on the concept of home, but also the history of Black land ownership in the South and how this affects understandings and relationship to place.

Further this research may help to further investigate the role Whiteness plays in our cultural nostalgia, whether it be the dominance of White narratives or how cultural appropriation influences memory reconstruction and rhetorical placemaking.

**Rhetorical Organization of Space and Behavior**

During the interviews, I asked participants to describe a typical visit to ear X-tacy and sensory details of the store. In a recent oral history article, Werner-Thomas (2022) argues that asking about and discussing sensory and concrete details within an interview can reveal how a participant understands and interacts with the world around them; this sense-making, as Werner-Thomas notes, is not just about sense of place, but sense of self.
Not only do questions involving sensory details create first-based accounts that capture a range of sensory experience, but researchers “gain insight into identity and intersubjective identity formation and the personal and societal values that underpin them” (Werner-Thomas, 2022, p. 111). Further exploring and asking about these details with additional participants could reinforce the claims made throughout this dissertation about the connections between self-continuity and placemaking.

In continuing this project, I am also interested in how spatial organization reflects not only the rhetorical construction of space, but how these rhetorical moves influence the behavior of people as they move and interact with said space. Further questioning of sensory details would reveal more about how participants moved through the spaces and/or what resonated the most with them. Classical Grecian rhetorical traditions consider memory to be spatial (Dickinson, 1997). This spatial approach was more about the mental organization and quick retrieval of ideas, but this could also be informative in considering the development of place, especially in relation to sensory details. Spatial recall as an attempt to stabilize the idea of a place that is no longer present could also be telling.

**Public Memory, Memorials, and Absence of Place**

This dissertation acknowledges public memory and draws from limited research regarding memorials and museums. Museum rhetorics and public memory can also shed further light on the formation of collective identity within the context of ear X-tacy. Additionally, there is further work to be done to consider the ways in which some of the events and artifacts created in ear X-tacy’s absence may operate similarly to memorials,
as hinted at in Chapter 4. This research would be complemented by New Materialist research such as Gries’s work in *Still Life with Rhetoric* (2015).

**Ear X-tacy and the Closing Record Store Narrative (and the Vinyl Revival)**

In some ways, the story of ear X-tacy is part of a niche genre—the narrative of a closing and bygone record store. Documentaries such as *Other Music* and *All Things Must Pass* have set the tone for how we culturally say farewell to the previous generation of record stores; for some, the documentaries are the first time they’re introduced to the store, where they are learning about the store and how to say goodbye to it in the same breath. Ear X-tacy has its own documentary, *Brick and Mortar and Love*, which was filmed during the store’s final days. Within this little genre, there’s room to explore and expand the landscape—to reflect on the absence of these places, and any shifts in the perception that’s happened in the time that has lapsed. As already hinted, there’s so much to unpack in terms of loss itself, which may also be aided by public memory studies. Meanwhile, this study might consider how community and behaviors adapt to the absence of a place, whether this means opening other record stores or returning to others that remain.

As such, I intend to consider how ear X-tacy and its absence are in conversation with other record stores within Louisville. In the absence or loss of one place, how do people feel about another? Or, how does the shadow of ear X-tacy influence how people perceive current record stores? Participants drew parallels between ear X-tacy and *Surface Noise*, which is owned by a poet and former member of Louisville bands such as Malignant Growth. However, there was not as much conversation about stores that were direct competitors and have outlived ear X-tacy, such as Better Days (which may
coincide with conversations surrounding race). What narratives about vinyl and record stores are being disrupted in the latest vinyl revival? Which are recurring? How does this affect how we understand current and former record stores?

**Final Thoughts**

In 2023, we are currently in a vinyl boom. In fact, 2022 was the first year since 1987 that vinyl record outsold CDs (Millman, 2023, para. 1). Major labels and independent artists alike are pressing albums on vinyl despite worldwide shortages and delays due to the pandemic and the closing of multiple vinyl pressing plants. Vinyl design is expanding beyond creative splatters to picture discs, experimenting with liquid and sand filled records. St. Paul and the Broken Bones released a limited edition of their album *Angels in Science Fiction* (2023), which includes a leaf pressed within the record; each leaf is taken from the front man’s property (“Angels in Science”, n.d.). Despite the continued proliferation and expansion of streaming and online shopping, people are looking for physical connections to music.

In response, record stores are still emerging, often smaller, niche, and neighborhood oriented. There is still greed in the industry with rising prices, not unlike what we saw in the CD boom, but record stores are finding ways to navigate and survive this new terrain—they are communicating with one another and connecting with their surrounding communities. For example, during the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests in Louisville, Guest Room Records opened its space to marchers, providing them a safe place to rest and rehydrate. Since then, they have donated holiday sale proceeds to community non-profits. Meanwhile, Surface Noise hosts poetry readings and art shows in addition to its regular in-stores.
As I write this, I am planning on moving to a new place over 600 miles away.

This new place also has a record store. Each time I have visited it, my sense of place has shifted—I’ve grown more familiar and some of my assumptions have either been confirmed or denied. The rhetorical construction of this new space is still murky, especially when I am so far away from it. When I finally get there, I know my time in Louisville record stores will be reinvented, especially as I take the next steps of this project. All the while I will be trying to find my sense of place, both where I have been and where I will be.
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APPENDIX A

SUBJECT INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

“Long live ear X-tacy!”: An Oral History Study of Rhetorics of Nostalgia and Place

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Site(s) where study is to be conducted: Interviews will be conducted online, or pandemic conditions willing, in-person at participants’ home or an agreed upon location.

Phone number for subjects to call for questions: (502)852-2173 (Bronwyn William’s office phone number) or (217)972-8001 (Aubrie Cox’s cell number)

Introduction and Background Information

You are invited to participate in this research study. The study is under the direction of Dr. Bronwyn Williams, Director of the University Writing Center, and conducted by co-investigator Aubrie Cox. The study is sponsored by the Department of English at the University of Louisville and will take place through online interviews. Participation is an entirely voluntary process.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to better understand how nostalgia fuels how we conceptualize and articulate place when a place no longer exists. Through the lens of rhetorics of nostalgia and rhetorics of place, this research study hopes to contribute to emerging conversations within rhetoric studies. This study investigates this purpose through research site ear X-tacy.
If you choose to take part in this study and to be displayed in the final findings, your participation will include:

**Procedures**

1. 1 (60 minute) recorded oral history interview. This interview will take place over the phone or online software. Any video recordings will be converted to audio only. Video will not be displayed in final findings.
2. 1 (60 minute) follow-up recorded oral history interview. This interview will take place over the phone or online software. Any video recordings will be converted to audio only. Video will not be displayed in final findings.

After the interviews have been transcribed, and I have made my selections of what to include, I will offer to share these portions of the transcripts with my initial thoughts and observations. Additionally, I will offer drafts of the research where your transcripts, as a participant, are included, along with context for the rest of the chapter. Or, if you prefer, I can provide a summary of the content. As a participant, you are not obligated to do or say anything in response to these documents. However, at any point, you also have the right to ask that content from your interviews be omitted, and are welcome to provide your interpretations that I can include with mine in analysis and discussion.

Later, the interviews conducted in this study may be published in a public oral history archive.

At any point during this study, you are free to drop out without consequence. Your information will be removed from the transcriptions and interpretation and analysis of the data.

**Potential Risks**

One potential risk is self-consciousness due to being recorded. Some participants may also experience discomfort in the discussion of social issues.

Social risks with participation in this study include the possibility that your statements or ideas may be recognized by someone you know. As a participant, you will have the option of whether or not to take a pseudonym. Every attempt will be made to uphold confidentiality, but it is not guaranteed due to the specificity of the research.

All information will be stored on a password protected, encrypted personal computer and external hard drive.

As a participant, you will be informed at the beginning and reminded throughout that your participation is voluntary and that you may excuse yourself at any time.
Benefits

This research will likely not benefit you directly. Beneficiaries of this research include the field of rhetoric and composition and oral history studies.

Compensation

You will not be financially compensated for your time, inconvenience, or expenses while you are in this study.

Alternatives

Instead of participating in this research, you can decline and not take part in the study.

Confidentiality

Total privacy is not guaranteed. Your privacy will be protected to the extent of the law.

Once your information leaves our institution, we cannot promise that others will keep it private. While unlikely, the following may look at the study records and your information may be shared with the following:

- The University of Louisville Institutional Review Board, Human Subjects Protection Program Office, Privacy Office, others involved in research administration and compliance at the University, and others contracted by the University for ensuring human subjects’ safety or research compliance
- Government agencies, such as the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP)

All data will be kept on a password-protected, encrypted computer and external hard drive.

Voluntary Participation

Taking part in this study is voluntary, and you may choose to not take part. You will be told about any changes that may affect your decision to continue in the study. If you decide to be in this study, you are allowed stop taking part at any time. If you withdraw from the study, none of your information will be included in the final findings.

Contact Persons
If you have any concerns or complaints about the study you may contact Dr. Bronwyn Williams, at (502)-852-2173 or via email bronwyn.williams@louisville.edu.

You may also contact Aubrie Cox, at (217) 972-8001 (cell) or via e-mail aubrie.cox@louisville.edu.

Research Subject’s Rights

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a research subject, you may call the Human Subjects Protection Program Office (HSPPO) at (502) 852-5188. You may discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject, in private, with a member of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) or the HSPPO staff. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members from the University community, staff of the institutions, as well as lay members from the community not connected with these institutions. The IRB has approved the participation of human subjects in this research study.

Concerns and Complaints

If you have concerns or complaints about the research or research staff and you do not wish to give your name, you may call the toll-free number 1-877-852-1167. This is a 24-hour hot line answered by people who do not work at the University of Louisville.

Acknowledgement and Signatures

This informed consent document is not a contract. This document tells you what will happen during the study if you choose to participate. Your signature indicates that this study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered and that you agree to take part in the study. You are not giving up any legal rights to which you are entitled by signing this informed consent document. You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

If you would like to participate, please sign below. As a reminder, participation is voluntary and you are able to withdraw at any time.

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<tr>
<td>Bronwyn Williams, PhD</td>
<td>(502)-852-2173</td>
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<td>Aubrie Cox, MA, MFA</td>
<td>(217)-972-8001</td>
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APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Note: Some questions were modified or reframed for owner John Timmons and former employees to better reflect their experiences.

Round 1

1. What parts of the Louisville music and vinyl scene do you or have you participated in? In what capacity?
2. Can you please tell me a story about ear X-tacy? Or What story first story comes to mind when you think about ear X-tacy?
   a. What are some positive memories you have about ear X-tacy?
   b. Are there any less positive memories you have about ear X-tacy?
   c. What images or sensory things come to mind when you think about ear X-tacy?
3. What do you think of when you see the ear X-tacy logo, such as on a bumper sticker?
4. Do you ever think about or talk with others about ear X-tacy? What is usually the focus of the conversation?
   a. Do you ever hear others talk about ear X-tacy? If so, what is generally the focus?
5. What comes to mind when you pass the old ear X-tacy locations on Bardstown Road?
6. What role do you think ear X-tacy played in the music scene?
7. To you, what has changed since ear X-tacy closed?

Round 2

1. Is there anything you’ve thought about since our last conversation or anything that’s come up that you want to share?
2. What do you feel or what comes to mind when you hold a CD or vinyl record?
   a. Does this feel different to you than digital music? Why?
   b. What does it mean to you to share music?
3. How would you describe the vibe or attitude of ear X-tacy? What do you think they were going for?
   a. What kind of values do you think ear X-tacy held or what kind of values might they have tried to pass on to their customers/those who frequented the store?
   b. How do you feel like they did any of that?
4. What kind of experience did you feel you were getting by going to ear X-tacy?
5. How would you describe the people (customers and employees) at ear X-tacy?
   a. What person do you think of first when you think of ear X-tacy?
6. Walk me through, in order/step-by-step, what a “typical” visit to ear X-tacy would be like?
   a. For employees: Walk me through a typical workday.
7. Where were you living/how close were you to any of the ear X-tacy store fronts? How frequently did you visit? (try to confirm dates, years, age, etc)
8. How did you feel about ear X-tacy when it was open? How do you feel about it now (10 years after it’s closed)?
9. What in current Louisville reminds you of ear X-tacy?
10. What do you remember of the closing of ear X-tacy? (optional)
11. How has the pandemic made you think about places? (optional)
12. What was the reputation of ear X-tacy? (optional)
APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT BIOGRAPHY SKETCHES

The following are brief descriptors of the research participants. The information was drawn from the interviews and information that was publicly available.

Heather Fox (she/her): Fox is co-founder of the garage rock music collective Juanita. She currently serves as the director of the Oral History Center and as a manuscript archivist for the University of Louisville, where she was one of the leading project managers for the Louisville Underground Music Archive.

John Harris (he/him): Harris the former Executive Director for the Clifton Cultural Center, which hosted live concerts and promoted world music. This position brought him to Louisville in 2010. He currently works as a guitar instructor for School of Rock.

Michael Jones (he/him): Jones is a former customer of ear X-tacy a is a music journalist and historian. He was the curator of the Frazier History Museum’s 2019 exhibit “Celebrating the Sounds of Kentucky.” He is currently an economic development reporter for Louisville Business First.

Scott Ritcher (he/him): Ritcher is a former employee at ear X-tacy and the owner of the label Slamdek Record Company (1986-1995). He was also one of the employees responsible for opening and maintaining the Middletown ear X-tacy location. Originally from Louisville, Ritcher now lives in Sweden, where he works for a company that helps independent artists prepare their material for streaming services such as Spotify and Apple Music.

Ashley Taylor (they/them): Taylor is a former customer of ear X-tacy and is a poet, educator, and activist.

John Timmons (he/him): Timmons is the founder and former owner of ear X-tacy. Before ear X-tacy, he worked for multiple record stores and for a period sold records out of his apartment. He is currently a host and producer for Louisville Public Radio on WFPK.

Jill Wegenast (she/her): Wegenast is a former customer of ear X-tacy. She currently works for the University of Louisville College of Business as a graphic designer.
Natatlie Wicke (she/her): Wicke is a former employee of ear X-tacy, which was her first job at 16. She now works in an office. Her record player is currently broken.
APPENDIX D

Ear X-tacy Locations and Nicknames

The following list documents the locations of each ear X-tacy storefront. Additionally, each has been dubbed/given a nickname. These names/terms are reflective of the language participants used to describe each location. I opted for these within the text to best reflect the narratives as they were presented; however, as noted within Chapter 4, multiple locations were called “the original” ear X-tacy.

This list draws from the *Louisville Magazine* oral history (Burnette, 2021) as well as several news articles for address, dates, and other information (“ear X-tacy,” n.d.; Gibson, 2020; Vogt, 2021)

Locations by Date

“First location,” 4264 Poplar Level (1985 for six months): This location was the first storefront, which most participants were not aware of.

“Great Escape location,” 2433 Bardstown Road (1986-1990): This storefront shared a space with what is still the comic store The Great Escape.

“Highland Coffee location,” 1140 Bardstown Road (1990-1993): This location became Highland Coffee after ear X-tacy moved. This was the second-most remembered location. Highland Coffee closed during the COVID-19 pandemic (Vogt, 2021).

“Middletown location,” Eastgate Shopping Center 12501 Shelbyville Rd (1992-1998): This was the only point in which ear X-tacy had two locations simultaneously. Middletown is an eastern suburb of Louisville. Interestingly, this location is left out of the *Louisville Magazine* oral history.

“Panera location” / “Panera X-tacy,” 1534 Bardstown Rd (1993-2010): This was the location that most participants remembered. While it was a Pier 1 before it became ear X-tacy, more people referenced the fact it became a Panera Bread after, which also closed during the pandemic (WLKY News, 2020). It is now an I Heart Tacos.
“Final location,” 2226 Bardstown Rd (2010-2011): This was the final location before closing. The building was shared with a Fedex before torn down. A CVS, which was built after, is currently located at this location.
CURRICULUM VITA

Aubrie Cox

EDUCATION

Ph.D.  Rhetoric and Composition, University of Louisville, expected August 2023
  Dissertation: “‘Long live ear X-tacy!’: An Oral History Study in Rhetorics of
  Nostalgia and Place”
  Committee: Bronwyn T. Williams (Chair), Mary P. Sheridan, Kristi Maxwell,
  Christine Ehrick

M.F.A.  Creative Writing, Temple University, 2018
  Thesis: “Every Time It Rains, I Melt: Scrap Essays”
  Advisor: Brian Teare

M.A.  English, Creative Writing, Ball State University, 2013
  Advisor: Mark Neely

B.A.  English, Millikin University, 2011
  Honors Project: “Monkey’s Mask: Haigo and the Haiku Novel”
  Advisor: Randy Brooks

PUBLICATIONS

Peer-Reviewed Essays

  English, Edwards, Jessica Newman, Aubrie Cox Warner, and Bronwyn
  Williams. “Embodiment, Place, and Stance: A Collaborative Exploration
  of Graduate Research and Mentoring.” International Studies in Sociology
  https://doi.org/10.1080/09620214.2021.1882870

  Warner, Aubrie Cox. “Reparative Leanings of Haiku Aesthetics: Ways of
  Knowing and Reading in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s A Dialogue on Love.”
  Juxtapositions: A Journal of Haiku Research and Scholarship, vol. 5,
  2019, from https://thehaikufoundation.org/wp-
  content/uploads/juxtapositions.pdf
Poetry Chapbooks


Select Poetry Published in Journals and Magazines

*Full list available upon request.*


“Small Craft Advisory II.” *District Lit,* The Disability, Medicine, and Illness Issue, 2017.


Select Poetry Published in Anthologies

*Full list available upon request.*


Fiction Published in Journals and Magazines


Other Publications


**PRESENTATIONS**

Conferences

“Unexpected Benefits in Pandemic-Influenced Methodologies.” Researching in/through and around the pandemic: Challenges, Opportunities and New Understandings of Being a Researcher. University of Bristol [virtual], May 17, 2022. **Presenter.**

“Making Knowledge for/about/with Communities: The Expectations and Realities of Collaborative Writing.” Blue Ridge Corridors, virtual, September 19, 2020. **Panel presenter.**

"Encountering Tensions in Listening: Critiques and Endorsements of Krista Ratcliffe and Mary Rose O’Reilley." NCTE Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning, 2020. **Workshop presenter.** [cancelled due to COVID]

“The Sound of Nostalgia: Oral History and the Tensions of Memory and Place.” Sound Studies, Rhetoric, and Writing, Detroit, MI, 2021. **Presenter.** [cancelled due to COVID]


Workshops & Festival Presentations


Guest Lectures

“Writing and Publishing as a Haiku Poet.” ENG 308: Poetry Writing at Ball State University, Muncie, IN. November 6, 2015.

“Haiku Workshop.” Introduction to Creative Writing at Benedictine University, Springfield, IL. November 18, 2014.

“Haiku History.” Zen Poetry Honors Course at Ball State University, Muncie, IN. February 08, 2013.
AWARDS & HONORS

Professional

Writing Awards & Honors
- Semi-Finalist in Rose Metal Press Chapbook Competition, 2016
- Grand Prize in Wyvern Lit Flash Fiction Contest, 2015
- Third Place in Turtle Light Press Haiku Chapbook Competition 2014, 2014
- Editor’s Choice for Ershik: Journal of Senryu and Kyoka, 2013
- The Haiku Foundation Touchstone Award for Individual Poem in 2012, 2013
- The Distinctive Scribblings Award for outstanding poem in Eucalypt, 2012
- Museum of Haiku Literature Award for best poem in Frogpond 35.1, 2012
- Featured Artist in Haigaonline 12.2, December 2011
- Honorable Mention in Accents Publishing 2010 Poetry Chapbook Contest

University

University of Louisville
- Creative Writing Award for Graduate Poetry, 2019

Ball State University
- Penscape Poetry Award, 2012
- Merit Fellowship, 2011-2012 & 2012-2013

Millikin University
- C.W. Barnes Memorial Award for grade point average, 2010
- Scovill Prize Award for overall excellence, 2010
- Conant Society Achievement Award for outstanding English major, 2010
- Dr. Grace Patten Conant Writing Award for literary creation, Millikin University, 2010
- Honorable Mention for Dr. Grace Patten Conant Writing Award for literary interpretation, 2010
- The JoAnne Trow Award for outstanding sophomore member of Alpha Lambda Delta, 2009
- Honors Scholar and James Millikin Scholar, Millikin University, 2007-2011

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Instructor of Record, University of Louisville, 2018-present)
- BUS 301: Business Communications [1 Distance Education] (2 sections)
- ENGL 202: Introduction to Creative Writing [Distance Education] (1 section)
- ENGL 101: Introduction to College Writing [Distance Education] (1 section)
Instructor of Record, Temple University, 2016-2018
ENGL 2003: Introduction to Poetry (1 section)
ENGL 802: Analytical Reading and Writing (3 sections)

Adjunct Instructor, Pellissippi Community College, 2015-2016
ENGL 1020: Composition II: Writing About Literature (1 section)
ENGL 1010: Composition I (3 sections)
Writing Tutor in Tutoring Center

Adjunct Instructor, Millikin University, 2013-2014
IN 203: Advanced Studies in Poetry: Global Haiku Traditions [co-taught] (1 section)
IN 151: Critical Writing Reading & Research II (1 section)
IN 150: Critical Writing Reading & Research I (2 section)
IN 140: University Seminar [service-learning component] (3 sections)

Adjunct Instructor, Richland Community College (2013-2014)
ENGL 102: Composition II (1 section)
ENGL 101: Composition I (1 section)

Instructor of Record, Ball State University (2011-2013)
ENGL 104: Composing Research (4 sections)
ENGL 103: Rhetoric and Composition (2 sections)
Writing Center Tutor (1 semester)

ADMINISTRATION EXPERIENCE

Assistant Director of BizComm Writing Lab, College of Business, University of Louisville, 2021 – 2023
• Tutored students in-person and virtually
• Maintained Setmore online scheduler
• Revised tutoring guidebook, class presentations, and onboarding procedure
• Created promotional materials such flyers and videos for distance ed courses
• Conducted research on business writing centers
• Edited faculty documents upon request

Assistant Director of Creative Writing Program, College of Arts & Sciences, University of Louisville, 2020 – 2021
• Transitioned reading series and workshops to an online format during COVID lockdown
• Maintained program’s social media (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram)
• Created templates for branded promotional materials for program and reading series

Assistant Director of Virtual Writing Center, University Writing Center, University of Louisville, 2018 – 2020
• Tutored online, synchronous and asynchronously
• Mentored new M.A. students in asynchronous tutoring
• Tutored PhD candidates during Dissertation Writing Retreat (2019, 2020)
• Presented at annual campus programming for online teaching

EDITORIAL EXPERIENCE

Executive Producer, *Citizen Lit*, literary podcast, 2015 — 2017
• Coordinated and conducted interviews
• Researched guests, software, and funding opportunities
• Managed social media accounts and website
• Designed promotional materials

Editor, *Frogpond*, print poetry journal, 2016
• Member of Haiku Society of America’s Executive Committee
• Oversaw production of 3 print issues a year
• Selected content and laid out issues in Adobe InDesign
• Delegated tasks to assistant editor and reviewers

• Member of the Exploratory Committee
• Member of Editorial Board
• Co-creator of scholarly bibliography

Genre Editor, *A Hundred Gourds*, international online poetry journal, 2012 — 2015
• Responsible for selecting, organizing, and managing submissions for the haiga section.
• Member of the Management Team, voting on decisions about content and operations.
• Responsible for writing one feature per year and book reviews as needed.

Assistant Editor, *The Broken Plate*, Ball State University student-run literary journal, 2012
• Oversaw and advised design team on issue and new website.
• Researched online pay systems to increase sales options.

Senior Editor, Bronze Man Books, Millikin University student-run publishing company, 2009 – 2011
• Edited, reviewed, and wrote press releases, promotional materials, and manuscripts
• Communicated with authors, submitters, and customers
• Represented company at public events, readings, and book sales
• Managed and delegated tasks to editorial team
• Recruited, interviewed, and taught junior members about the editorial process.
**Editor-in-Chief**, *Collage*, Millikin University student-run literary and fine arts magazine, 2008 – 2011
- Oversaw production of two print editions per academic year
- Selected and edited submissions as member of the literary editorial team
- Delegated tasks to editors and designers
- Promoted and presented the magazine on campus and at conferences.
- Recruited and interviewed prospective editors and designers

**SERVICE**

Professional & Community
- **Volunteer tutor**, Cotter Cup K-12 Poetry Contest, 2022
- **Board Member**, Sarabande Books Young Professionals Board, 2019-2020
- **Grant Writing Intern**, Sunday Breakfast Mission, 2017-2018
- **Team Chaperone**, Breaking Grounds Poets at Brave New Voices, Atlanta, GA, 2015

University
- **Arts & Sciences Disciplinary Committee Member**, University of Louisville, 2022
- **Assessor**, General Education Assessment, University of Louisville, Spring 2021
- **Group Facilitator**, University Writing Center Creative Writing Group, University of Louisville, 2019-2021

Department
- **Graduate Student Representative** Hiring Committee, TT Assistant Professor in Literature and Creative Writing, University of Louisville, Spring 2021
- **Faculty Liaison**, English Graduate Organization, University of Louisville, 2019-2020

Contest Judging & Reader
- **First Round Judge**, for Interfaith Youth Essay Contest, 2021
- **First Round Judge**, Interfaith Poetry of the Sacred Contest, 2020 & 2021
- **Panel Judge**, 2016 Luminaire Award for Best Poetry, Alternating Currents, 2015
- **Fiction Reader**, Best of the Net 2015, 2015
- **Co-judge**, Nick Virgilio Contest, Haiku Society of America, 2015
Co-judge, Conant Award for Literary Creation, Millikin University English Department, 2014

Nominating Committee, 2014 Board Elections, Haiku Society of America, 2013

SELECTED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Adobe Faculty Learning Community, University of Louisville Digital Media Suite, 2022

Adobe Creator Badge I, Adobe, 2022

Training in Anti-Racist Pedagogy, University of Louisville Composition Program, 2021

 AAC&U VALUE Institute Certified Scorer, Written Communication Rubric, University of Louisville, 2020

Certificate in Online Writing Instruction, University of Louisville Composition Program, 2021

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP)

Oral History Association (OHA)

RELEVANT COURSE WORK

University of Louisville (Ph.D.)
- Writing Center Pedagogy taught by Dr. Bronwyn Williams
- New Media taught by Dr. Bronwyn Williams
- Rhetoric and Poetics taught by Dr. Joe Turner
- Theories that Matter (Watson Seminar) by Dr. Mary P. Sheridan
- Research Methodologies by Dr. Mary P. Sheridan
- 18th Century Literature: Brontës taught by Dr. Deborah Lutz

Temple University (M.F.A.)
- Teaching Practicum taught by Dr. Shannon Walters
- Literature of the Sublime taught by Dr. Allen Singer
- Queer Theory taught by Dr. Brian Teare
- Poetics of Resistance taught by Dr. Brian Teare
- Poetry in the Expanded Field taught by Dr. Jena Osman
- Creative Nonfiction taught by Prof. Joan Mellen
• Grant Writing taught by Dr. Eli Goldblatt

Ball State University (M.A.)
• Teaching Practicum taught by Dr. Jacklyn Grutsch McKinney
• Composition Research Seminar taught by Dr. Jennifer Grouling Snider
• Writing Across the Genres taught by Prof. Jill Christman
• Flash Fiction Writing taught by Prof. Sean Lovelace
• Story Cycles Fiction Writing taught by Prof. Cathy Day
• Contemporary American Literature taught by Deborah Mix
• Slave Narratives in the 18th C Ottoman Empire taught Dr. Adam Beach