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Appalshop Genesis: Appalachians Speaking for Themselves in the 1970s and 80s

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APPALSHOP GENESIS:
APPALACHIANS SPEAKING FOR THEMSELVES IN THE 1970S AND 80S

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Kentucky

By
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Lexington, Kentucky

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

APPALSHOP GENESIS: APPALACHIANS SPEAKING FOR THEMSELVES IN THE 1970S AND 1980S

Appalshop, a multi-media and arts organization in Whitesburg, Kentucky emerged in 1969 at the crossroads of several different developments. It started as a War on Poverty program and its history exhibits the contradictory ideologies that fueled that effort and the political changes that forestalled it. The production company began in the midst of technological advances in media and is an early example of the democratization of technology and the potential of portable video equipment in affecting social change. Most importantly, its genesis is located within the context of a renewed interest in Appalachian history and culture and the related issues of negotiating regional cultural identity in the American national context. This one small organization in Eastern Kentucky provides a window to a wide slice of American history and culture in the midst of profound changes.

Throughout the twentieth century the Appalachian region has been repeatedly characterized in mainstream American culture in an overtly negative light. Appalshop played an integral role in countering these characterizations and the stereotypes they generated and reinforced. Technology became more accessible the second half of the twentieth century. As a result, Appalshop was able to challenge these negative perceptions of the region in the national mind by placing cameras, printing capabilities, drama, and visual art in the hands of Appalachians. This allowed them to speak for themselves—first to each other and eventually to the nation.

This dissertation focuses on the founding of the Community Film Workshop of Appalachia, the subsequent abandonment of the project by the federal government, the acquisition of control over its artistic output by artists and staff members, and its expansion between 1969 and 1984. It also addresses the significant role Appalshop played in the burgeoning Appalachian social movement context that emerged concurrently with its founding and its related role as a social change organization.

Keywords: TWENTIETH CENTURY US HISTORY, APPALACHIAN HISTORY,
APPALSHOP, MEDIA AND SOCIAL CHANGE, DOCUMENTARY HISTORY

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Chapter One

Introduction

“Appalachians Speaking for Themselves”—In the 1970s this goal inspired the founders and helped direct the development of one of the nation’s most important regional media, culture, and arts organizations. The simple idea underlying this slogan is pregnant with complexities about America in the second half of the twentieth century. The organization that became Appalshop emerged in 1969 at the crossroads of several different developments. Film production began in the midst of technological advances in filmmaking and Appalshop’s films were early examples of the potential of portable recording equipment. The new technologies available increased the utility and effectiveness of documentary film in social movements for justice, equality, and minority rights emerging from countercultures and minority groups that challenged the status quo in American society. Appalshop’s genesis was also an integral part of a renewed interest in Appalachian history, culture, and society—an Appalachian renaissance in the 1960s and 70s. This one small arts and media organization in Eastern Kentucky provides a window to a wide slice of American history, culture, and media in the midst of profound transformation.

Appalshop began as the Community Film Workshop of Appalachia (CFWA), which was one of many Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO)-sponsored job training programs for minorities across the United States. Rapidly improving recording technology was part of the inspiration for the film programs because it made the processes easier and the necessary equipment more portable. The students at the CFWA were immediately more interested in filmmaking than in job training—in part because they had little hope of securing employment in the target fields without relocating away from home. The program required

three minute practice films, but the first CFWA film was ten minutes in length and subsequent films were increasingly longer and more in-depth.

OEO program funding provided access to expensive equipment that made the workshop student artists' work possible. For the first time, amateurs could easily transport and use cameras capable of synchronous sound recording. When the program was discontinued in 1971, the director and some of the original students kept the equipment and continued to produce documentaries about communities in the Appalachian region under the new name of Appalshop.¹ Appalshop quickly became both an integral part of the Appalachian renaissance and a salient example of cutting-edge international trends in documentary filmmaking made possible by the newly available technological advancements.

Appalshop artists began screening their films almost immediately. They were generally well received and, in some cases, celebrated with glowing reviews and awards. In creating these films, the students at the CFWA were participating in an international trend in documentary filmmaking. Documentary film cannot be easily or rigidly defined. Broadly understood it includes films ranging from straightforward informational pieces to avant-garde visual experiments so complex they are impenetrable to the average viewer. The advent of portable digital technology, docudramas, "reality" television, and amateur recording popular in recent years has complicated the genre even further. However, to generally be considered a documentary a film must purport in some way to be non-fiction, authentic, real or true. Documentaries are important "reality-shaping communications"

¹ The one exception to the characterization of Appalshop's early films as documentaries is *In Ya Blood*, which is a fictionalized docudrama. *In Ya Blood*, directed by Herb E. Smith, (Whitesburg, KY: Community Film Workshop of Appalachia, 1971), VHS.

because by definition they assert that they contain truth or reality.² This definition is complex, because these films are not reality—they are portraits of reality.³ Documentaries also generally tell a story that the filmmaker believes is important for others to be familiar with, and even the process of selecting topics undermines objectivity. Therefore, despite assertions of truth, documentary film is subjective--defined and redefined over the course of time by makers and viewers.⁴

In order to understand Appalshop's artistic influences and contributions, it is important to explore, in brief, the history of documentary film. Documentary film dates back as early as the advent of film technology. The first footage captured by newly developed moving picture cameras in the late 1800s were in the broadest sense documentaries. The contemporary inventors of motion picture technologies, Thomas Edison in America and Auguste and Louis Lumière in France tested the equipment by capturing real events like the arrival of trains into a station and circus acts.⁵ Early developers of motion picture technology were more interested in capturing real life, as they saw it, than the soon-to-be more popular fiction format films which were rooted in literary and theater traditions.

Nanook of the North (1922) is widely regarded as the first feature-length documentary.⁶ Director Robert Flaherty used film technology to capture cultural traditions of an Inuit tribe with whom he had lived and brought it back for others to see. In addition to

² Pat Aufderheide, *Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction*, ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 5.

³Ibid 2.

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid. Edison's version was heavy—over 500 pounds—so he was limited to a stationary stage (called the Black Maria). Lumière invented a much lighter camera which allowed him to shoot in a wider variety of settings including what would later be understood as on-location.

⁶ *Nanook of the North*, directed by Robert Flaherty, (New York: Revillon Frères 1922), Various formats.

setting stylistic trends for subsequent documentary filmmaking, this early documentary raised important questions about authenticity, objectivity, and, ultimately, truth. Flaherty renamed his main character and portrayed him with a contrived nuclear family. He also staged many of the scenes in *Nanook* to make it appear more exotic to viewers. For example, the film portrays the protagonist and his family in a romantic light as if they had been untouched by white culture. In reality, Allakariallak (*Nanook*) was familiar with recent technology and other Inuit people actually repaired Flaherty's cameras. Several in the tribe were also engaged in the fur trade and regularly listened to weather updates via radio. Flaherty also included footage of cultural traditions that were no longer part of the day to day life of the tribe and documented these staged activities as part of the film's "truth."⁷

In recent decades, Postmodernism has resulted in mistrust of the documentary claim to be real—and with good reason.⁸ The goal in this early period was never to portray real people and events, but to stage realistic scenes in order to create authentic experiences for the viewers--realism not reality.⁹ It was clear even from this early example that documentaries are a set of choices—about subject matter, forms of expression, point of view, storyline, and target audiences.¹⁰

Flaherty was part of a trio regarded as pioneers of documentary film that also included Dziga Vertov, a Polish filmmaker, and, most importantly for this study, British

⁷ See descriptions of the filming of *Nanook of the North* in Aufderheide, *Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction* 27-31 and Erik Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of Non-Fiction Film*, ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 36-47.

⁸ Jack C. Ellis and Betsy A. McLane, *A New History of Documentary Film*, ed. (New York, NY: Continuum, 2005), 24-25.

⁹ Aufderheide, *Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction*, 28.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 127.

filmmaker John Grierson.¹¹ Grierson admired aspects of Flaherty's work, but also regarded it as primitive and remote.¹² He thought Flaherty's films painted romantic pictures of his subjects but fell short of their potential. Grierson saw the most potential for documentary film as a tool for social change. His work most directly influenced later uses of documentary film in American and international social and political movements of the 1960s and 1970s including social movements in Appalachia.

A wide spectrum of subgenres emerged from these early source points, ranging from state-sponsored government propaganda to artistic visual cityscapes aimed at tourists. Appalshop's early documentaries combined elements of several subgenres that were popular in the 1950s-80s including Public Affairs, Ethnographic, and Advocacy/ Activist films.

Public Affairs films were sober offerings about important social issues relevant to the American public. Their style was straightforward and often solemn and to viewers they appeared authoritative. Their expressed purpose was to inform. They were important in influencing what the public sees as "regular" documentary with narration and social-scientific proof. Public Affairs documentaries thrived in the medium of television in the 1950s--first in the form of broadcast news series and then in longer *Special Reports*. American families became familiar with the images of the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War primarily through Public Affairs documentaries.¹³ Public Affairs films also introduced America to Appalachian poverty in specials like CBS's *Christmas in*

¹¹ Ibid, 25.

¹² Barnouw, 85.

¹³ Ellis and McLane, 243-44.

Appalachia.¹⁴ In her short history of documentaries, film critic Patricia Aufderheide argued that Appalshop films were a direct reaction to this subgenre's interest in the region.¹⁵

Appalshop filmmakers were dedicated to reinterpret the region for America in part because of the negative stereotypes of the region that Public Affairs documentaries perpetuated on American television.

Ethnographic films that most influenced Appalshop artists included those aimed at capturing unique and/or fading cultural traditions and personal films about individuals that carry out these traditions from their points of view. Exoticism and ethnography were part of documentary from Flaherty's *Nanook*, and remained a mainstay of documentary films in subsequent decades. There is some contention among film historians and critics about ethnographic style films because they present their subjects as if the viewer is seeing them "as they are" but they are not generally held to the rigorous academic standards of trained Anthropologists. Nonetheless, this format remained popular, taking on a new life in the wake of social upheaval in the 1960s, and grew to include intensely personal films, many of which were about people left out of mainstream history. Documentary film became a tool to rally behind common causes and contributed to identity solidarity and civil rights politics for numerous minority and protest groups.¹⁶

Ethnographic films share some common traits with another subgenre important to Appalshop—advocacy or activist films. There are some examples of social issue documentaries in the early decades of the twentieth century. However, with new technology and in the contentious global political context of the 1960s, documentary film became a

¹⁴ *Christmas in Appalachia*, directed by Charles Kuralt, (New York: CBS News Special Report, 1965), 16 mm.

¹⁵ Aufderheide, *Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction*, 63-64.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 100-101; Ellis and McLane, 254.

very important and widely used tool available to movement participants. Documentary filmmakers in ethnographic and activist traditions engaged in creating visual representations that captured aspects of cultures that undermined the positive or illustrated the negative impact of capitalist hegemony. The genre allows for the filmmaker to present different sides of debates and to include powerful images to reinforce key points. For example, a description of environmental degradation can be borne out much more effectively with accompanying images. Activist/advocacy documentaries became a weapon for fighting social injustice and hastening social changes in the 1960s. Films in this vein are predecessors to Appalshop's early work.¹⁷

Historians agree that documentary film changed dramatically at the start of the 1960s due to technological advancements.¹⁸ The form evolved with technological possibilities. Public Affairs, Ethnographic, and Advocacy films all experienced revolutions in style due to the advent of new technology. The most important developments in technology in the late 1960s that facilitated this revolution were related to sound. During the silent era, documentaries and fiction films used some of the same techniques to compensate for the lack of a soundtrack including subtitles and music. When talkies became the norm in the late 1920s this changed. Patrons demanded films with sound, but the bulk of equipment required made it almost impossible to use in on-location filmmaking. Fiction moviemakers made films on elaborate sets in studio lots, but it was not feasible for documentarians to revert to the sound stage because the expense was often prohibitive and it undermined the

¹⁷ For further reading on ethnographic and activist films see John Corner Alan Rosenthal, *New Challenges for Documentary, Second Edition*, ed. (London: Manchester University Press, 2005); Brian Winston, *The Documentary Film Book*, ed. (London: British Film Institute, 2013); and Karl G. Heider, *Ethnographic Film: Revised Edition*, ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006).

¹⁸ Ellis and McLane, 167.

authenticity of their work. In order to compensate, many documentary filmmakers began using narration and voiceovers to frame on-location footage. This continued through the 1950s and thrived in the Public Affairs subgenre made popular by television.

Synchronized sound technology in portable cameras marked a fundamental change in documentary film format because it allowed the filmmaker to feasibly shoot on-location and to capture sound simultaneous with images. It allowed the filmmaker to conduct personal interviews in remote locations, and to use natural ambient noises that added texture and made the films more realistic and more effective.

These technological developments directly led to an explosion of a new type of documentary that could not have existed without portable sync sound. Practices set in motion by the legendary trio of documentary founders were profoundly shaken up in the 1960s revolution. Broadly understood, this new style of documentary film is referred to by many names including observational, fly-on-the-wall, living camera, realistic cinema, film inquiry, commonsense cinema, truth film, and candid-eye.¹⁹ The most common terms used to describe it are Cinema Verité and Direct Cinema.

Cinema Verité was rooted in French documentary tradition, and Direct Cinema is a version of it more popular in North America—especially the United States.²⁰ Historians, critics, filmmakers and commentators have drawn important specific distinctions between these two terms. Direct Cinema found its truth in events (newly) available to the camera. The artist played the role of an uninvolved bystander who simply turned the camera on real events and let truth unfold. The filmmaker(s) and processes were unobtrusive. Truth and

¹⁹ Ellis and McLane, 205.

²⁰ Ibid, 208.

reality could be expected to reveal themselves when the subject was left alone, deeply involved in some activity. Point the camera and let life reveal itself. In contrast, the practitioner of Cinema Verité acknowledged and accepted that the filmmaker cannot be objective and the camera cannot be unobtrusive and embraced the role of both in coercing truth to come out. In Cinema Verité the artist openly espoused the role of provocateur.²¹ He or she embraced the paradox that artificial circumstances (still in real life) could bring truth to the surface from its hidden recesses within people. The Direct Cinema Director was a passive observer; the Cinema Verité Director was an enthusiastic catalyst.²²

Though these distinctions were important philosophically to filmmakers and historians, to most viewers of documentary films outside the field, they were generally too subtle to discern. Both Cinema Verité and Direct Cinema sought to capture “real life” and “truth in people” through methods that were not possible prior to the 1960s.²³ Appalshop films in the 1970s had aspects of both of these types of documentaries. They were shot on-location with sync sound and often edited to make human subjects appear as if they were speaking spontaneously. Jean Rouch, a French anthropologist filmmaker and one of the founders of Cinema Verité believed that it was important to let the subject tell its own story.²⁴ This description is consistent with Appalshop’s aim to facilitate “Appalachians Speaking for Themselves.”

The technological revolution that spawned these important subgenres originated with television. Sync sound was originally designed to improve on 1950s Public Affairs style

²¹ Barnouw, 255.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ellis and McLane, 216.

²⁴ Barnouw, 254.

documentaries that television networks made popular. However, it actually undermined them as viewers began to demand more authentic documentaries. In the wake of the popularity of Direct Cinema and Cinema Verité the narration-style authoritative top-down Public Affairs documentaries started to seem contrived, and, to a generation of more politically radical young people, Public Affairs pieces appeared at best boring and at worst overtly deceitful.

Appalshop's impact as a creator of media in the Appalachian region in the 1970s must be understood within the context of documentary film history. The act of making a film is a subjective endeavor and the final products reveal a great deal about the filmmakers and the context in which they are working. Like *Nanook*, and thousands that followed, Appalshop's films were aimed to change the viewer's life experience and the way he or she related to others and to society as a whole. This point became even more salient as the video age ushered in by the introduction of portable sound-sync recordable equipment in the 1960s inspired many to again see documentary film as a tool within political and social movements.²⁵

By the time of the CFWA's founding in 1969, the politicization of documentary film was at its height. The technological breakthroughs that enabled the dawning of Direct Cinema and Cinema Verité, along with the grassroots testimonies and raw footage it allowed filmmakers to more easily capture, changed the capacity of documentary film to explore ethnographic subject matter. It also reinvigorated activist films referred to as free, participatory, radical, advocacy, or third cinema.²⁶ In the late 1960s and 70s projects were in

²⁵ Ellis and McLane, 254; Aufderheide, *Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction*, 82.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 77-78, 81-87.

development all over the world using film technology to raise awareness and affect social change.²⁷ More important for this study, such projects were underway in the small Appalachian community of Whitesburg, Kentucky.

Technological breakthroughs explain how Appalshop was able to create its style of films in the 1970s, but not the choice of content. Technology set the parameters of the possible, but the ways the filmmakers chose to pursue those possibilities depended on other factors. Their choices are best understood within the context of 1960s American countercultures and the rise in Appalachian awareness in the 1960s and 70s. Social changes in the 1960s influenced the way some Americans viewed social problems like racism and poverty. Mass Media and politics came under serious scrutiny as part of the cultural backlash to conformity and suburbanization in the late 1950s and 1960s that obscured these issues from the middle class. Some Americans became increasingly wary of government intrusion in daily lives justified by Cold War paranoia. Seeds of unrest bloomed to fruition in the context of the Civil Rights Movement, and, later, opposition to the War in Vietnam.

Members of the high-profile “hippie” counterculture expressed social rebellion through individual exploration and expression including illegal drug use, unorthodox sexual relationships, and radical fashion, music, and literature, but other groups sought more substantial economic, political, and social change in American communities. They started to question fundamental assumptions in American society including ideas about progress. Some resisted the burgeoning influence of consumerism and sought to return to simpler, pre-industrial and pre-capitalist modes of living through what is known as the back-to-the-land movement. Members of these countercultures focused on a renewed interest in traditional art and music, and in cultural trends that had become passé in urban areas.

²⁷ Ibid, 85.

Other, more politically active, counterculture members became extremely mistrustful of the expansive power of the federal government in the day to day lives of Americans. With the volatile events of 1968 and as the Vietnam War dragged on into the 1970s, this group grew more critical of traditional American values and became increasingly politically radical. In the wake of the African American Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 60s, many other social movements emerged, including movements in the Appalachian region.

Film functioned in several different ways in social movements in the late 1960s and 70s. Musician and social movement participant Guy Carawan noted that cultural traditions are a source of strength in movements.²⁸ Documenting, and, in some cases, preserving these traditions helped to create solidarity around common memories among members of movements. This is especially true in regard to identity politics, a phase of social movement development where emphasis is placed on defining the group and who does or does not

²⁸Guy and Candie Carawan, *Sowing in the Mountain*, ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 245.

identify as part of it.²⁹ Aufderheide noted that personal films in the advocacy/activist vein contributed of the development of cultural identity movements worldwide.³⁰

The use of film in social movements and for social change exploded with the new sound technology. The revolution in style (Cinema Verité and Direct Cinema) started during a time of mistrust of top-down information and of media in general. Distrust of mainstream media was embedded in social movements for justice, equality, political openness, and inclusion across the globe.³¹ By the 1970s, filmmakers believed documentary film could be used as a tool—even as a weapon—to bring about social change.³² Therefore controlling the means to create media became a revolutionary act.³³

The filmmakers at the Community Film Workshop of Appalachia (later Appalshop) were in a unique position because of the resources afforded by the film program to apply these ideas in the context in which they found themselves—the Appalachian social

²⁹ Cressida Heyes, "Identity Politics," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Spring 2012 Edition. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2012/entries/identity-politics> (accessed October 25, 2013). Identity politics "has come to signify a wide range of political activity and theorizing founded in the shared experiences of injustice of members of certain social groups. Rather than organizing solely around belief systems, programmatic manifestos, or party affiliation, identity political formations typically aim to secure the political freedom of a specific constituency marginalized within its larger context. Members of that constituency assert or reclaim ways of understanding their distinctiveness that challenge dominant oppressive characterizations, with the goal of greater self-determination... The second half of the twentieth century saw the emergence of large-scale political movements—second wave feminism, Black Civil Rights in the U.S., gay and lesbian liberation, and the American Indian movements, for example—based in claims about the injustices done to particular social groups. These social movements are undergirded by and foster a philosophical body of literature that takes up questions about the nature, origin and futures of the identities being defended. Identity politics as a mode of organizing is intimately connected to the idea that some social groups are oppressed; that is, that one's identity as a woman or as a Native American, for example, makes one peculiarly vulnerable to cultural imperialism (including stereotyping, erasure, or appropriation of one's group identity), violence, exploitation, marginalization, or powerlessness."

³⁰ Aufderheide, *Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction*, 101.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

³² Alan Rosenthal, *The Documentarary Conscience: A Casebook in Film Making*, ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), Introduction.

³³ Barnouw, 322.

movement context that emerged in the 1960s and 70s. During these decades there was a groundswell of activity in Appalachia rooted in bottom-up agency. Single-issue reform groups were forming to address a variety of social problems in the southern mountains including labor issues, inadequate access to healthcare, substandard educational systems, and environmental degradation. Artistic movements like the Soup Bean poets out of Antioch Appalachia College in Beckley, West Virginia and musicians like Jean Ritchie expressed the richness of Appalachian culture and questioned the social inequality that had become a part of so many Appalachian communities.³⁴ Numerous scholars conducted research projects aimed at creating a more accurate and in-depth understanding of the region's history and social problems. Radicals like Don West of the Southern Folk Life Center in Pipestem and Myles Horton of Highlander Folk School in New Market, Tennessee and, West Virginia fought for social change on a wide variety of issues ranging from the politics of cultural preservation to the devastating environmental effects of the coal industry to minority rights in the region.

The motivation for increased social awareness and political activism in Appalachia was related to national movements for equality and civil rights, folk culture revivalism, Vietnam War protest, environmentalism, and New Left intellectuals. However, its roots were also specifically in resistance to decades of cultural degradation of the Appalachian region over the course of the twentieth century—communicated to the nation in large part through various media outlets.

³⁴ Fairmont State University Folk Life Center, "Soup Bean Poets" www.fairmontstate.edu/folklife/west-virginia-literary-map/soupbean-poets (accessed October 16, 2013). The Soup Bean poets were "a group of avant-garde poets established in 1975 by Robert "Bob" Snyder and P. J. Laska, faculty members at Antioch College/Appalachian, Beckley, WV, and student members: Gail V. Amburgey, Bob Henry Baber, David Chaffins, and Pauletta Hansel (who named the group) along with selected associates: Joseph Barrett, Mary Joan Coleman, Bonni McKeown, and Jim Webb. These poets were an important part of a grassroots literary movement which networked to promote the region's literature and to voice regional concerns."

Appalachian scholars have demonstrated that a powerful “idea” of Appalachia emerged beginning in the latter decades of the 19th century with a plethora of “dialect tales and sketches describing little-known or forgotten aspects of American life” commonly referred to as Local Color writing.³⁵ The stories were printed in popular magazines like *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* and others that modeled their publications after it.³⁶ Authors of Local Color stories set in Appalachia typically had little or no actual experience with mountain people and culture. Stories highlighted the most sensationalistic aspects of an imagined Appalachia---including the implicit assumption that a visitor might expect to find the same type of people anywhere in the region. Stories about moonshine, feuding, kinship pathologies, and quirky individualistic characters appealed to readers’ sense of exoticism. Prevalent themes in these stories also reinforced the idea that Appalachia was a “strange land” frozen in time and inhabited by “peculiar people.”³⁷ As America experienced post-Civil War trends of industrialization and accompanying urbanization and immigration, authors imagined “Appalachia” as a place set apart by isolation and a lack of development and modernization. For those that believed modernization was synonymous with progress, the area lagged behind. Conversely, for those that feared rapid social and cultural change, this image of the region provided a comforting “other” where traditional American values still flourished and people were not swept up in the trappings of the Gilded Age.

Novels delved even deeper into similar portrayals of the region as out of step with mainstream American culture. John Fox, Jr.’s 1908 *Trail of the Lonesome Pine* was by far

³⁵ Henry D. Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness 1870-1920*, ed. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 7.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 6.

³⁷ *Ibid*, xi.

the most widely-read.³⁸ Fox's story reinforced common stereotypes such as moonshining, feuding, contempt for state authority, poverty, and coal mining. However, unlike the shorter travel works, these facets of Appalachian culture were woven into a developed plot with complex characters. Fox's literary contributions were certainly more substantial than most Local Color Writing, which is not generally understood to be worthy of in-depth study for its own merit.³⁹ Nonetheless, the literary merits of *Trail of the Lonesome Pine* and its precursor *The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come* were overshadowed by their unprecedented popularity.⁴⁰ These novels reached far wider audiences than the magazine pieces and remained on bookshelves in many American homes for decades. Fox was one of the first American authors to sell 1,000,000 copies of his books.⁴¹ *Trail of the Lonesome Pine* inspired four film adaptations including a 1912 offering from Director Cecil B. DeMille and another released in 1936 that had the distinction of garnering the first use of full three-strip Technicolor in making an outdoor picture.⁴² It also inspired three stage shows ranging from 1912 to a current outdoor drama that began in 1964 and still runs regularly in Big Stone Gap, Virginia.⁴³

³⁸ John Fox Jr., *Trail of the Lonesome Pine*, ed. (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1908).

³⁹ Shapiro, 7.

⁴⁰ John Fox Jr., *The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come*, ed. (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1903).

⁴¹ Aaron Davis, "John Fox, Jr" www.EncyclopediaVirginia.org/Fox_John_Jr_1862-1919 (accessed August 15, 2013).

⁴² International Movie Database, "Trail of the Lonesome Pine (1936)." www.imdb.com/title/tt0028401 (accessed August 22, 2012).

⁴³ "Trail of the Lonesome Pine Outdoor Drama", <http://www.trailofthelonesomepine.com/> (accessed August 22, 2012).

Like Fox's novel, the influence of media on national perceptions of an imagined Appalachian region grew along with technology from the printed page to the big screen. Beginning in the 1910s, motion pictures profoundly changed the style and scope of American media. Whatever interest cultural stories about cowboys, sambos, harlots, gangsters, or hillbillies held before the advent of films—this new media multiplied the reach of such stories exponentially. Many Americans found films fascinating and going to the movies was relatively affordable in the early twentieth century. Therefore, the stories they told, and the cultural assumptions those stories contained, were likely to be experienced by large audiences.⁴⁴ Movie theaters were most popular first in urban centers, along with other mass-oriented entertainment like sporting events such as baseball or boxing. However, rural themes were integral to many of the plots and characters that lit up the silver screen. Appalachian scholar J.W. Williamson combed hundreds of trade papers from the 1910s and 20s and found over 400 examples of silent films with rural themes.⁴⁵ Most of these reinforced ideas that Local Color Writers developed and were popular for the same reasons, though on a much larger scale. Though most of these themes were not particularly Appalachian, they were often portrayed in that light reinforcing the idea of a strange place and peculiar mountain people.

American fiction filmmakers' fascination with rural poverty and mountain life continued with the advent of talkies. In the wake of the American industrial revolution and then the Great Depression, movies in the late 1920s and 30s grappled with themes of urbanization, immigration, rapid industrialization, and economic disparities. Rural mountain

⁴⁴ David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements*, ed. (New York: Haper Collins Publishers, 1993), Chapters 14-16.

⁴⁵ J.W. Williamson, Interview with the Author, Digital Audio Recording, Boone, North Carolina, July 8, 2012.

people were often portrayed as buffoons who failed to change with the times or as sympathetic victims of desperate economic conditions. Such characterizations filled screens across the nation. Stories told through the new media of film reinvigorated the idea that poor whites were an economic “other” in emerging mainstream American culture.

Characterizations of rural--and especially mountain--people continued to be popular in the even more accessible medium of television. Comedic plot scenarios on shows like *Ma and Pa Kettle*, *Green Acres*, *Hee Haw* and *The Beverly Hillbillies* were built almost entirely around the theme of portraying how rural people lagged behind mainstream American society. Nearly every joke hinged on this premise. The rural characters repeatedly demonstrated ignorance of mainstream sensibilities in nearly every aspect of American life including economic institutions, fashion, government and law, personal relationships, and social graces.⁴⁶ Williamson noted, “The American Hillbilly fool is...usually lazy, or inept, or an outlaw on the fringes of the economy.”⁴⁷ By the 1960s, the character of the “hillbilly” was solidly interwoven in American cultural stories told through the increasing variety of available media outlets.⁴⁸ Though the themes of rapid change and economic struggle were common to many industrializing rural areas, the national focus shifted even more powerfully in the 1950s and 60s to Appalachia specifically.

As local color writing, novels, and films forwarded ideas about white mountain poverty in the mainstream they converged with the idea of a distinct Appalachia that was

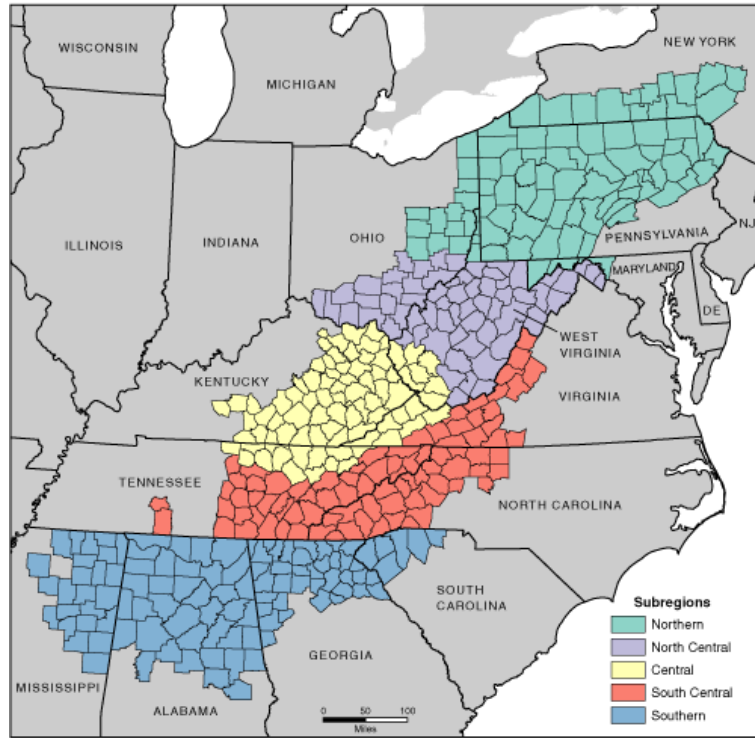
⁴⁶ J. W. Williamson, *Hillbillyland : What the Movies Did to the Mountains and What the Mountains Did to the Movies*, ed. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 28-32.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 27.

⁴⁸ Anthony Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon*, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), Chapters 5 and 6.

also becoming more popular. Berea College president, William G. Frost, first coined the term “Appalachia” in the 1890s as part of a fund raising campaign to draw attention and resources to the college. In the first half of the 20th century, there were many examples of its use ranging from vague definitions that appear in the work of song collector Cecil Sharp to place names such as Appalachian State University, in Boone, North Carolina or the town of Appalachia, Virginia. More significantly, missionaries and industrialists embraced the idea of Appalachia to justify dramatic and often devastating “progress” in the region with discourses of uplift and development.

Though use of the term continued to grow in popularity, its precise definition was difficult to discern. Its connotations were far more complex than just describing a mountain range. Most commonly it functioned as a concept that served the purposes of the people or groups using it, and therefore its meaning was subjective and, in most cases, self-serving. The federal government followed suit when, in 1965, the Appalachian Regional Commission delineated the most influential formal definition of the boundaries of the region (see Figure 1). However, even this “official” definition of the region was contentious and the result of political negotiation rather than any kind of discernible commonalities found throughout the designated region.



*Figure 1---Appalachian Regional Commission Official Map of Appalachian Region and Subregions*⁴⁹

By the 1960s, the idea of Appalachia was firmly established in American culture—and with it, all the stereotypes associated with rural backwardness and poverty. As a burgeoning national folk movement celebrated the region’s “traditional” crafts, scholars and social commentators published books that lent credibility to the popular stereotypes of prior decades as explanations for pervasive poverty in the midst of plenty.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Appalachian Regional Commission, "Subregions in Appalachia" www.arc.gov/research/MapsofAppalachia.asp?MAP_ID=31 (accessed September 15, 2013).

⁵⁰ Thomas Ford, *The Southern Appalachian Region: A Survey*, ed. (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky, 1962); Michael Harrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States*, ed. (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963); Harry M. Caudill, *Night Comes to the Cumberlands: A Biography of a Depressed Area*, ed. (Boston: Little, 1963). Examples: A committee based at Berea College conducted a study of the region and published the results as a collection of essays edited by sociologist Thomas Ford which highlighted cultural traits such as fatalism and kinship ties as inhibitors to homogenization into the American economic and cultural mainstream. See *The Other America*, by Michael Harrington used a version of Oscar Lewis’

Portrayals of the region that punctuated this view found a new voice in mainstream media news coverage. Throughout the 1960s journalists brought attention to the problem of Appalachian poverty that often coincided with high-profile visits from national politicians to starkly impoverished areas of the region. Television news reports and magazine articles flooded America with images of shacks, barefoot children, trash-filled front yards, and coal-covered miners as representatives of the entire Appalachian region.⁵¹ Though sometimes well-intentioned, press coverage further emphasized the idea that Appalachia lagged behind mainstream culture and that its economic struggles were largely the result of persistent cultural traits that prevented individuals and communities from prospering. Not only were many of the images troubling to residents of the region, but they also served to obscure structural inequalities that kept some Appalachians consistently poor as wealth poured out of the region.

Whether it was images of unsanitary living conditions, feuding, and in-breeding, or, conversely, romanticized images of rurality and simplicity--a place unspoiled by modern America--the conclusion was the same; Appalachia was somehow lagging behind the rest of the country. It is not surprising that poverty researchers and policymakers adopted theories that focused on cultural degradation, and a lack of modernization, to explain persistent poverty in the southern mountains.

Culture of Poverty model to account for pervasive poverty in the midst of affluence. He highlighted the twisted spirit that poverty created among the poor and extended economic deprivation to spiritual and moral deprivation. Even when explanations of poverty went beyond culture to look at some of the structural inequalities that contributed to it, as in Harry Caudill's *Night Comes to the Cumberlands*, they still served to reinvigorate the already prevalent understanding of Appalachia as a problem area in the national mind.

⁵¹ *Christmas in Appalachia*, directed by Kuralt. There are numerous examples of this type of coverage. One of the best is *Christmas in Appalachia*, This actually focused on Whitesburg, Kentucky. For an in-depth recent discussion of images of Appalachian poverty see Roger May, May 19 2012. "Perpetuating the Visual Myth of Appalachia Part I I I," *Walk Your Camera*, www.walkyourcamera.com (accessed September 15, 2012).

Like other social movements of this period, some of the movements in the Appalachian region have roots in identity politics. Regional identity in the 1960s was in large part a reaction to outside interpretations. This ranged from shame at being associated with a pathologically backward culture to defiance in asserting pride in embracing and redefining what it meant to be “Appalachian.” New film technology allowed filmmakers to go into remote areas and shoot footage of real Appalachians engaging in cultural activities and commenting on the region and its role in the nation. This was unprecedented. Documentary film historian Eric Barnouw argued that Cinema Verité and Direct Cinema films were, above all, destroyers of ‘stereotypes.’⁵² Another commentator, Rosenthal, argued that 1970s film in these styles served as a “de-mythologizing” force revealing more authentic versions of human experience than their predecessors.⁵³ Most specifically for Appalshop’s roots, documentary film historian Jack Ellis credited these styles with the rise of regional institutions within the United States including Appalshop.⁵⁴ Documentary film became a powerful political tool for defining identity and encouraging solidarity.

Appalshop was forged in the confluence of these trends. The popularity of film and the availability of new technology that allowed for easier on-location shooting with sync-sound made film programs possible and the pervasiveness of negative and inaccurate ideas about the region gave the filmmakers in the Appalachia program the motivation to interpret mountain culture from insiders’ perspectives—the opportunity and motivation to encourage Appalachians to speak for themselves. Though there was a great deal of diversity among the Appalshop filmmakers’ individual ideas about culture, politics, and art, they agreed on the

⁵² Barnouw, 247-253.

⁵³ Rosenthal, 5.

⁵⁴ Ellis and McLane, 248-250.

point that it was critical for their subjects to be encouraged to tell their own stories, to participate fully in recording their own cultural heritage, and to actively engage in current social issues affecting their communities on their own terms.

Today Appalshop is home to over twenty full time permanent staff members as well as numerous affiliated artists and board members. It facilitates a wide variety of art and media projects. Documentary film is still the most prolific part of the organization, but it now also includes audio recordings in the June Appal studio, Roadside Theater performances, and a local radio station that is accessible all over the world via internet. At different times and in varying degrees, Appalshop has served as a film school, a forum for aesthetic expression for numerous artists, a vault for cultural preservation in the face of encroaching modernity, and an agent of social change. In order to provide balance to overt characterizations of Appalachian people and culture from outsiders who were more comfortable with feuding, fatalistic, and culturally bankrupt hillbillies, Appalshop facilitated a transfer of resources and opportunities to create and experience a different kind of media to southern mountain residents. There are numerous Appalachian organizations dedicated to cultural preservation, to political and social change, to research and education, and to artistic expression, but none that combined these goals and efforts as powerfully as Appalshop.

The material culture Appalshop artists have contributed over the last forty years has served as touchstones for those inclined to analyze, romanticize, critique, recollect, compare, teach, and simply appreciate the region's culture and history. It is driven by individuals, integrated in the local community, active in the region, and connected nationally and internationally to other organizations. The filmmakers themselves were not fully aware of the impact of their work in the beginning. Their own ideas developed as they

matured and the influence of their work unfolded slowly in sometimes unpredictable ways—and it is in fact still in the process of unfolding--but the early years of its existence provided an important blueprint for this later development. Closer study of its genesis is an important part of American and Appalachian History in the latter twentieth century.

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Chapter Two

Seeking Avenues of Expression and Change:

From The Community Film Workshop of Appalachia to Appalshop

“It has been clearly demonstrated and documented that the poor, and the ethnically disadvantaged are seeking avenues [sic] of expression and change. That they are being listened to and not heard is an idea that is strongly entrenched in the hearts of many. The film workshop program of CFWC was created to fill this void.” ---CFWC promotional materials, 1970¹

“We’re waiting to see the form it’s going to take...I think if you know what it’s going to do before it starts out, you just do that, and there’s very little serendipity, very little surprise.” ---Bill Richardson, Original Director, CFWC of Appalachia, 1969²

The Community Film Workshop of Appalachia began in 1969 as a federally funded Career Training program to encourage minority participation in the film and television industries.³ By 1972, the program had become Appalshop, an artist-run media cooperative. To understand how, it is necessary to investigate the historical context that shaped the organization’s creation and the course of events that led to its transformation into Appalshop in three short years.

The Problem of Poverty

Poverty and related social problems are at the root of much of the stereotyping and misperceptions about the Appalachian region in the twentieth century. In the 1950s and early 1960s policymakers began to focus on poverty as the root of many of America’s problems and to approach its elimination systematically. In 1960 John F. Kennedy made

¹ Community Film Workshop Council, *Film Workshop Programs*, 1970. Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Box F4- Operational Records Unknown Dates, CFWC, Proposals, Correspondence, Misc., 6.

² David Hawpe, "Films: New Tools to Help Build Appalachia?," *Louisville Courier-Journal*, November 28, 1969, 1.

³ Community Film Workshop Council, *Film Workshop Programs*, 8.

poverty a key issue of his Presidential campaign.⁴ In 1964 Lyndon Johnson declared war on poverty and promised an arsenal of federal programs to attack it.⁵ Throughout the 1960s other leaders like Robert Kennedy, Sargent Shriver, and Martin Luther King, Jr. supported federal efforts to improve conditions for America's poor populations.

Federal interest in the problem of poverty was not new in the 1950s. Social scientific poverty research and accompanying journalistic exposés date back to at least the Progressive era.⁶ However, the idea that poverty existed in anomalous pockets that was most popular in the 1960s was related to American prosperity and optimistic liberalism in the wake of World War II.⁷ In the Cold War context, higher incomes, more spacious housing, lower unemployment, and especially access and opportunity to purchase consumer goods led to widespread faith in American capitalism as the best route to a higher quality of life.

Even as the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision struck down legal segregation in schools in 1954, extensive suburbanization (and accompanying "white flight") eroded the economic bases in America's once thriving urban centers as housing, schools, transportation, and shopping increasingly moved away from downtowns. New residential and commercial patterns reinforced the disfranchisement of the poor and helped to obscure the view of persistent poverty from America's expanding middle class.⁸ Suburbanization

⁴ John F. Kennedy, "Address to Southern Baptists Leaders," *reprinted in New York Times*, September 13, 1960, 22.

⁵ Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant : Lyndon Johnson and His Times 1961-1973*, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 61.

⁶ Alice O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth Century U.S. History*, (New Haven: Princeton University Press, 2001), Chapter One.

⁷ *Ibid*, 100-101.

⁸ For further reading on these topics see Lizbeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*, ed. (New York: Knopf, 2003).

reinforced the illusion that American prosperity was available to anyone and the expectation was a long-term--perhaps permanent--state of economic affairs.

Mainstream media played an important role in solidifying these ideas among Americans. Movies, television shows, popular music, and magazine articles during the 1950s and 60s, helped to define America as a prosperous society. Media offerings that were most popular and readily available reinforced the idea that “normal” meant middle-class, white, nuclear families with wage earning fathers and stay-at-home mothers, individual residences, and conservative moral codes. The increasingly important advertising industry reinforced this view of the average American and expanded it to include the ability to purchase consumer goods such as automobiles and appliances with commercials and ads that accompanied shows and publications.

In the midst of unprecedented prosperity and conformity, however, there were voices of dissent. Anxiety about racial integration, Communism, and nuclear war lurked just beyond the surface, and started to emerge in some media outlets. Beat poets questioned the consequences of conformity, documentary filmmakers took Americans into subcultures that were otherwise inaccessible, and even broadcast network news began to bring images of social unrest and economic disparity into American homes more frequently.

To those who cared to look beyond advertisements and sitcoms, it was clear that devastating poverty continued to plague the nation. Beginning in the late 1950s social commentators such as Michael Harrington argued publicly that the “Other America” found in urban ghettos and in rural areas such as the Appalachian region complicated the view of economic prosperity that characterized American society after World War II.⁹ The

⁹ Michael Harrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States*, ed. (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963).

ideological assumptions underlying the Cold War contributed to the urgency of eradicating poverty because, like institutionalized racism, evidence of poverty in the United States undermined the superiority of the free world and the free enterprise system. Images of poverty and stories of economic desperation caught the nation's attention and were a potential international embarrassment.¹⁰

The characterization of poverty as an anomaly became very popular after 1960. Social scientists, journalists, writers, and eventually policymakers struggled to find ways to explain and attempt to solve poverty-related problems. Liberal politicians and their supporters who had come of age in the New Deal era and were in the midst of the Civil Rights movement, were inclined to look to the federal government to ensure minority rights and to solve social problems—including the problem of poverty. A variety of theoretical interpretations of the problem and solutions forwarded by students of poverty including Development Economics, Modernization Theory, and the Culture of Poverty reached the highest levels of government. President Kennedy read an extensive review of *The Other America* and was convinced that the federal government needed to make alleviating poverty a priority.¹¹ After Kennedy's assassination, Johnson continued to support anti-poverty programs, culminating in the Great Society and the War on Poverty.¹²

¹⁰ See Michael Murphy, "The Valley of Poverty," *Life Magazine*, 54-65. 54-65. Photographs by John Dominis.

¹¹ Jill Lepore, "How a New Yorker Article Launched the First Shot in the War against Poverty," *Smithsonian Magazine*. www.smithsonianmag.com/history-archaeology/How-a-New-Yorker-Article-Launched-the-First-Shot-in-the-War-Against-Poverty-165589956.html (accessed March 18, 2013).

¹² For further reading on these theories and how they influenced federal policies see O'Connor, Michael Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare*, (New York: Random House, 1989) and Irwin Unger, *The Best of Intentions: The Triumph and Failure of the Great Society Under Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon*, (New York: Doubleday, 1996).

Harrington, Kennedy, Johnson, and others interested in the problems of poverty saw Appalachia as a salient microcosm of a larger American problem. The view of poverty as an anomaly against a backdrop of affluence fit well with long-held stereotypes about American minority groups, including the “hillbillies” of the southern mountains. Since at least the late 19th century pervasive imagery and commentary in a variety of media formats established the stereotypical Appalachian resident as a white “other” in contrast to mainstream American society.¹³ In fact, the traits that defined this “other” were largely exaggerated and to whatever degree they existed they were hardly unique to Appalachia. Nonetheless, through travel accounts, short stories, novels, radio, television, and film Appalachia came to represent a place of curiosity, fascination, and fear in American popular culture.

In the late 1960s, social and cultural trends also played an important role in influencing War on Poverty programs and Appalachia specifically. Native Kentucky author Gurney Norman embodied these trends as they manifested in the Appalachian context. His novel *Divine Rights Trip: A Novel of the Counterculture* is an exploration of 1960s counterculture from an Appalachian perspective.¹⁴ Norman’s protagonist left the mountains seeking authentic experiences, but returned to find those experiences were just as prevalent in his mountain home community as anywhere else in the nation.¹⁵ Norman found this to be true in his own personal experiences as he regularly traveled between San Francisco and

¹³ See Henry D. Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness 1870-1920*, ed. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1978).

¹⁴ Gurney Norman, *Divine Right's Trip: A Novel of the Counterculture*, ed. (Frankfort, KY: Gnomon Press, 1971).

¹⁵ Ibid.

Eastern Kentucky in the 1960s.¹⁶ He observed that many of the aspects of “authentic” culture that the counterculture sought to revive had never died in the mountains including arts and crafts, local music, respect for the land, and community-based values.¹⁷

The students artists trained at the Community Film Workshop of Appalachia were squarely at the crossroads of these larger national trends.

Community Film Workshops

The idea of training minorities in film and television production came from a private organization--the American Film Institute (AFI). Actors and film enthusiasts formed the AFI in 1967 for the primary purpose of training and film preservation.¹⁸ AFI leaders partnered with the Library of Congress to achieve this goal, which to that point employed only a very small staff dedicated to archiving films. Lyndon Johnson sent a personal letter commending the AFI for its “organizational approach” noting that he thought a non-government organization funded by private donations and the National Endowment of the Humanities (NEH) grants would give it the “essential freedom of action” this type of endeavor needed.¹⁹ In July 1968 the AFI provided a grant of \$50,000 for the Community Film Workshop project in response to a proposal spearheaded by the director, George

¹⁶ Gurney Norman, Interview with the Author, Digital Audio Recording, Lexington, Kentucky, June 6, 2012.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ American Film Institute, "History of Afi," <http://www.afi.com/about/history.aspx> (accessed October 30, 2013).

¹⁹ Anthony Slide, *Nitrate Won't Wait: A History of Film Preservation in the United States*, ed. (Jefferson, NC: Mcfarland and Sons, Inc, 1992), 75.

Stevens, Jr., and executive committee members actor-producer Sidney Poitier and Father John Culkin.²⁰

The impetus for the Community Film Workshops originated as a response to racial inequality in the film and television industries. AFI members were concerned with what they perceived as “gross inadequacies” in the economic opportunities afforded minority groups and the related misrepresentation of these groups in films and television programming.²¹ They believed that film and video offered tremendous potential to address these inequalities—especially with technological advancements that made cameras more affordable and easier to run and on-location shooting with sound feasible. AFI leaders viewed the workshops as an opportunity to train minorities in the technology necessary to create media and to prepare participants for careers in related fields.²² They believed that, in turn, with more minority personnel involved in the creative process of making films and television content, news media and artistic output would eventually reflect minority experiences more accurately.

The Community Film Workshop Council (CFWC) that oversaw the project established the first group of workshops in communities dominated by racial minorities—most commonly African Americans. The first round of Community Film Workshops included the *Studio Museum* in Harlem, *Project Able* in San Francisco, the *Mafundi Institute*

²⁰ Community Film Workshop Council, *Film Workshop Programs*, 5.

²¹ *Ibid*, 6.

²² Community Film Workshop Council, *Film Workshop Programs*, 6.

in Los Angeles, the *New Thing* in Washington DC, and the *Southern Media Workshop* in Jackson, Mississippi.²³

The focus of the AFI's Community Film Workshop programs expanded dramatically when it received a \$400,000 grant in 1969 from the office of Economic Opportunity for "newscameraman (sic) training programs" across the nation.²⁴ The CFWC used the funds to improve the current workshops and to set up eight new workshops in diverse locations including New York, New York, Vasalia, California, San Juan, Puerto Rico, Hartford, Connecticut, Chicago, Illinois, Atlanta, Georgia, Santa Fe, New Mexico, and Whitesburg, Kentucky.²⁵ The second wave of workshops, including the Community Film Workshop of Appalachia (CFWA), fell under the supervision of a regional CFWC office in New York City.

The new locations were in urban areas or in communities dominated by a wide variety of racial and ethnic minorities except for Whitesburg, Kentucky. The inclusion of a workshop in Appalachia reflected the inclination of War on Poverty policymakers to view the region as a disadvantaged area compared to the American mainstream and its inhabitants as a minority population. For the purposes of the OEO and the AFI, hillbillies were cultural and economic minorities. Deviation from a perceived mainstream, or "Otherness," can be defined in racial, ethnic, religious, gender, economic, or cultural terms. In all cases it is a negotiated/constructed reality. The classification of Appalachians as a minority was a direct result of the creation of the idea of Appalachia over the course of the twentieth century and

²³ Ibid, 10.

²⁴ Betty Murphy, "Creating a Community in the Mountains," *Opportunity*, 17-23. 17.

²⁵ Community Film Workshop Council, *Film Workshop Programs*, 10.

especially of more recent characterizations in television and film. CFWC general director Cliff Frazier made a salient comparison in an AFI promotional flyer from 1970 where he directly compared negative stereotypes perpetuated by mainstream media of ethnic minorities and racial groups including African Americans, Native Americans, and Appalachians.²⁶

Given the decades of cultural degradation that permeated portrayals of the southern mountains in various media outlets, adding a population of poor whites to the list of “racial” minorities that could benefit from the Community Film Workshops made sense for the AFI program. However, accepting federal funding from the OEO brought all of the assumptions and expectations of the War on Poverty to bear on the film workshops. The larger goal for the AFI was that eventually minority filmmakers would be in positions to bring the experiences of their communities to mainstream American film and television. In addition to broadening economic opportunities for minorities, the AFI wanted to bring about more equality in community cultural expressions to national audiences. For the OEO, however, the film programs were primarily job training initiatives aimed at alleviating the racial inequities in the increasingly significant job sectors of television and film production.²⁷

Community Film Workshop of Appalachia

The Community Film Workshop of Appalachia was especially complex in the contentious atmosphere of the War on Poverty in Appalachia in the late 1960s. Many

²⁶ Cliff Frazier, *Director's Statement*, Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Box F4, Operational Records Unknown Dates, CFWC, Proposals, Correspondence, Misc.

²⁷ Bob Geller, *Part III: Careers Training for Tv News Cameramen's Evaluation*, January 5, 1970. Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Box F4, Operational Records Unknown Dates, CFWC, Proposals, Correspondence, Misc., 1.

poverty warriors on the frontlines in Appalachia believed that community building and cultural expression were much more effective for breaking cycles of poverty than any simple job training program, but, again, there was a great deal of conflict over what these terms meant and how these ideals might specifically play out in the programs.²⁸ The CFW of Appalachia was unique in that it was the only film workshop established in a predominantly white community. Moreover, there were very few job opportunities in film or television anywhere near Whitesburg. Though there had been some success with job training programs in the region, for this particular program to succeed (using job placement as an evaluative tool) program students would likely have to relocate.²⁹ In the year before the OEO established the film workshop, a local Whitesburg newspaper reported that planners in the region found that most people had a strong desire to stay in or near their home communities.³⁰

In fact, based on these criteria, the workshop in Eastern Kentucky never met the expectations of the CFWC. However, there were things about the program that fit very well with Eastern Kentucky, and, in the end, the program became Appalshop which far surpassed any expectation anyone could have had when it first began. The program offered the opportunity to transfer new technology into the hands of Appalachians to give them the chance to create their own versions of their cultures. The fact that the idea of Appalachia as an anomaly to the American mainstream had concretized in American mainstream film, and

²⁸ For more information on the War on Poverty programs in Appalachia see Ronald D Eller, *Uneven Ground: Appalachia since 1945*, ed. (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2008).

²⁹ “70 Previously Unemployed Persons Get New Jobs After OEO Training,” *The Mountain Eagle*, 1 Feb 1968, 9; Bill Richardson, *Director’s Evaluation of Cfwc Appalachia-Past Three Months, March 1 – May 30, 1971*. Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Box S5- 71-78 Old Papers And Booklets.

³⁰ E.J. Safford remarks reprinted in “70 Previously Unemployed Persons Get New Jobs after Oeo Training,” *Mountain Eagle*, February 1, 1968, 9.

the possibilities afforded by new media technology opened the door for local filmmakers to offer alternative interpretations informed by their experiences.

This opportunity came at a time when Appalachians Speaking for Themselves had become very important to some people in the region, including the student artists at the CFWA. Control of media technology is an important function of power. Appalachian scholars have demonstrated a strong link between visual representations of the region and pervasive poverty and economic exploitation.³¹ However innocuous or entertaining media portrayals of the region in a comedic or exaggerated framing might have seemed to some viewers, they also contributed to the dehumanization of the labor force in Appalachia and created a sense of cultural inferiority that some people in the region found paralyzing.³²

Diffusion of portable video equipment in economically disadvantaged communities, like parts of Eastern Kentucky at this time, afforded the opportunity to produce more accurate interpretations of culture than national networks or Hollywood studios produced, and, therefore, resulted in democratization of technology. This is an important stepping stone to effective identity politics and social change. Film is a powerful tool. Until the 1960s, that tool was largely only available to the state and to corporations with enough capital to fund the expensive undertaking of making and distributing a film. The accessibility of this technology to a greater number of people without that kind of capital facilitated its use for social critique and change in the context of emerging social movements in Appalachia.

³¹ See Anthony Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon*, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); David Whisnant, *All That Is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region*, ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983); Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness 1870-1920*.

³² Henry Shapiro, *Economic Modernization*, ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978); *Strangers and Kin*, directed by Herb E. Smith, (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1984), VHS.

There were exceptions. Though it was not common, precedent existed for the use of film in the region as a tool of social change in the first half of the twentieth century. A brief consideration of two examples of these early Appalachian documentaries helps to frame the historical context of Appalshop's films in the 1970s. In 1937 Frontier Films, a group of documentary filmmakers concerned with economic inequality in America, released a film called *People of the Cumberland*.³³ It featured the social philosophy and work of Myles Horton and the Highlander Folk School and aimed to educate workers about the importance of unionization and how to operate a union. The film explored the influence of the coal industry and the resistance of some companies and individuals to establishing unions in eastern Tennessee. This resistance went so far in one case that a labor organizer was killed in the course of his work, and the film documented the events surrounding this tragedy.

The format of *People of the Cumberland* was typical of documentary films at this early date in that it used a blend of real footage and re-enactments for the visual content and music and voice over narration for the soundtrack. This early treatment of Appalachia is regarded by documentary historian Eric Barnouw as one of the most significant documentaries of the 1930s, and it foreshadowed themes that remained relevant in this genre to present.³⁴

Award-winning filmmaker and television producer Jack Willis picked up the theme of economic exploitation in Eastern Kentucky in 1960 with *Appalachia: Rich Land, Poor People*.³⁵ Willis was a young idealistic filmmaker. He grew up in Los Angeles, but worked

³³ *People of the Cumberland*, directed by Jay Leyda and Sidney Meyers, (Knoxville, Tennessee: Frontier Films, 1938), 35 mm.

³⁴ Erik Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of Non-Fiction Film*, ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 123.

³⁵ *Appalachia: Rich Land, Poor People*, directed by Jack Willis, (New York: NET, 1968), VHS.

primarily out of New York where he came in contact with important countercultural figures like Pete Seeger and Malcolm X.³⁶ He was familiar with Harrington's work and was drawn to Appalachia because of the economic injustice he saw in the coal industry. As the title suggests, the film's main focus was the disparity between the tremendous amount of wealth the coal industry generated and the desperate economic situation some of the miners and mining communities endured. The content is largely composed of interviews with the Collins family that lived in Eastern Kentucky. The primary breadwinner, Frank Collins, lost his job in the mines. He explained to viewers that he had little education and therefore little opportunity to find work. His wife was pregnant and ill, but they could not afford medical care. The community in which they lived lacked infrastructure to adequately address their problems. The Collins' were eligible for government assistance, but it was not nearly enough to sustain their family. Frank Collins asserted on camera that they lacked resources to get to a hospital, to submit the necessary paperwork for more assistance, or to migrate in the hopes of finding work.

Willis' portrayal of the region reinforced some of the stereotypes prevalent in mainstream media, mostly related to poverty and fatalism. The Collins' home clearly needed repairs and the human subjects seemed resigned and hopeless in some scenes. Nonetheless, it was still an early example of the potential of documentary film to show a more accurate view of Appalachian experiences than popular offerings like *Ma and Pa Kettle* or *The Beverly Hillbillies*. Where these shows trivialized poverty and portrayed mountain people as too unsophisticated to improve their economic situations, Willis' documentary illuminated the very real circumstances people faced and the limited options available for relief within

³⁶ William Swanson, "True Grit--Twin Cities Public Television President Jack Willis Interview," *Minneapolis-St. Paul Magazine* (accessed March 1, 2013).

the unsustainable system that the coal industry created. Documentaries like *People of the Cumberland* and *Rich Land, Poor People* were rare, and the format lacked the authentic texture of later Direct Cinema and Cinema Verité--inspired Appalshop documentaries, but they were forerunners of the use of film as a potentially powerful tool to raise awareness of social problems in Appalachian communities.

Because of his work in the region the CFWC hired Jack Willis as a consultant on the OEO project for the Appalachian workshop. Willis was an activist for social justice and through his work had developed personal and political connections to Tom and Pat Gish who ran a progressive community newspaper, the *Mountain Eagle*, in Whitesburg. The Gish's enthusiastically supported the idea of a film workshop and suggested a recent Yale graduate, Bill Richardson, to direct it.³⁷ Willis agreed and recommended Richardson to the CFWC. The CFWC followed up with an interview and review of Richardson's credentials and hired him to direct the Community Film Workshop of Appalachia.³⁸ The Gish's support and the comparatively large population and access to resources that Whitesburg offered made it an appealing choice to set up shop.³⁹

Bill Richardson was only marginally involved in the artistic output that came to define the organization in later years, but it would be difficult to overestimate his role in facilitating the workshop's survival and successes in these critical early years. Though the workshop students referred to him as the "old man," he was only twenty-six when he

³⁷ Bill Richardson, Interview with the Author, Tape Recording, Whitesburg, Kentucky, October 16, 2006; Rich Copley, "Appalshop's Beginnings," *Lexington Herald-Leader*, March 7, 2004, E8.

³⁸ Bill Richardson, Interview with the Author.

³⁹ Ibid and Helen Lewis, Interview with the Author, Digital Audio Recording, Abingdon, Virginia, June 24, 2012.

accepted the offer to head the CFWA with a first year budget of \$58,000.⁴⁰ Richardson was born in Jamestown, New York, and raised in Indianapolis, Indiana. He earned a Bachelor's degree from DePauw University in 1965 and pursued a graduate degree in architecture at Columbia University in New York City and then at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, in the late 1960s.

While at Yale he had the “dumb luck” to get his hands on one of the first non-commercial portable video cameras in the United States.⁴¹ Sony© sent early models to prestigious American universities so that faculty and students could experiment with the possibilities they offered. Richardson ended up with one of Yale's machines and used it, with no formal training, to complete his master's thesis on “the experimental uses of videotapes and television in community development.”⁴²

Although Richardson had limited practical experience in the region or in film production, his interest in Eastern Kentucky, his commitment to community-based artistic expression, and his connections to national institutions were all key components that defined the workshop in its nascent stages. Richardson and his bride of three weeks, Josephine, were regarded by most as “outsiders” to the region. A 1969 *Louisville-Times* article described them as appearing “out of place” in the mountain setting and that the only part of it that “seemed right” was the local students who were there working with them.⁴³ However, Richardson had connections to Eastern Kentucky rooted in friendships that stemmed from a

⁴⁰ Hawpe, "Films: New Tools to Help Build Appalachia?," B1; Murphy, "Creating a Community in the Mountains," 17.

⁴¹ Bill Richardson, Interview with the Author.

⁴² Murphy, "Creating a Community in the Mountains," 18.

⁴³ Hawpe, "Films: New Tools to Help Build Appalachia?," B1.

brief stint he spent working for the Eastern Kentucky Housing Development agency in the mid-1960s as part of his graduate studies. His primary field of study was Architecture and he and other students from Yale lived in Eastern Kentucky while designing low-cost housing that made sense in mountainous terrain.⁴⁴ The Richardson's rekindled these friendships when they moved to Eastern Kentucky in August 1969 and spent their honeymoon on the Gish's pull out couch.⁴⁵ They intended to stay just long enough to get the workshop started—maybe six months.⁴⁶ Josephine Richardson worked tirelessly with Bill to get the workshop up and running and to integrate it in a positive way into the Whitesburg community.

The first step was to find a specific location for the film workshop. The initial grant from the OEO provided basic equipment and rent. The first step for Richardson was to find somewhere to house administration, editing, and post-production. In the fall of 1969 he rented a space in downtown Whitesburg that became the workshop's first home (see fig. 2). It had a large window facing Main Street, so the entire town was privy to most of the day-to-day activity. The openness they embraced in relating to the community helped to stimulate interest and to alleviate suspicion about the “goings on” at the workshop.⁴⁷ One large room housed the equipment and a small administrative space and the dark room was a small closet-like space in the back.

⁴⁴ Bill Richardson, Interview with the Author.

⁴⁵ Josephine Richardson, Interview with the Author, Tape Recording, Whitesburg, Kentucky, October 14, 2006.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.



December, 1969. Josephine and Bill Richardson pose with their newly acquired equipment, in the front office of Appalshop, Inc. in Whitesburg.

*Figure 2- Appalachian Film Workshop's Humble First Home*⁴⁸

The next step was to recruit local residents to participate in the film workshop. Whitesburg young people congregated at the local movie theater, so the Richardsons started there.⁴⁹ They befriended projectionist Dave Adams who worked on a precursor to workshop films, *Mountain Motor Speedway*.⁵⁰ It featured footage that Adams shot when he and Richardson attended a local stock car race—the type of event that would have been nearly impossible to capture prior to the then recent advancements in recording technology. Adams soon became a regular at the workshop.

The Richardsons' second recruitment strategy focused on the local high school. An English teacher, Carl Banks, heard about the film workshop and approached Bill Richardson about coming to address one of his classes because he had a few exceptionally bright

⁴⁸ Photo reprinted from Copley, "Appalshop's Beginnings," E8.

⁴⁹ Bill Richardson, Interview with the Author. Josephine Richardson, Interview with the Author.

⁵⁰ *Mountain Motor Speedway*, directed by Dave Adams, (Whitesburg, KY: Community Film Workshop of Appalachia, 1969), 16 mm. Unreleased.

students who were bored and dissatisfied with the educational opportunities public high school afforded.⁵¹ Whitesburg young people in the early 1970s had very few options for staying in the region. Like other natural resources, Appalachia's youth poured out of the region to enrich other places. Banks thought that the film workshop might provide an outlet for these students' untapped talents and creativity and possibly widen their options.⁵² Herb E. Smith was a student in Banks' class and was among the first to show interest in the workshop.

The third recruitment strategy was to open the shop and wait for interested parties to inquire. Dropping in and hanging out generated the remaining participants including Marty Newell, another of Banks' students.⁵³ In the fall of 1969 eight participants began training at the Community Film Workshop of Appalachia. Smith and Newell started videotaping local high school basketball games. Portable video was rare in the late 1960s and operating the cameras and seeing people they knew on the television screen impressed the students.⁵⁴ In the context of the training program, they quickly advanced to other projects.⁵⁵

The early workshop training curriculum began with an introduction to the history of film and the 'No-Excuses world of the 'Professional.'"⁵⁶ Students were to proceed day by

⁵¹ Bill Richardson, Interview with the Author.

⁵² Ibid and Herb E. Smith, Interview with the Author, Tape Recording, Whitesburg, Kentucky, October 17, 2006.

⁵³ Marty Newell, Interview with the Author, Digital Audio Recording, Lexington, Kentucky, June 7, 2012.

⁵⁴ Nicole Paget-Clarke, "Appalachians Speaking for Themselves, an Interview with Herb E. Smith," *In Motion Magazine*. inmotionmagazine.com (accessed September 15, 2013), 2.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Community Film Workshop of Appalachia, *Tentative Workshop Curriculum*, 1970. Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Box F4, Operational Records Unknown Dates, CFWC, Proposals, Correspondence, Misc.--File Name CFWC.

day through equipment training, editing, lighting, sound synchronization, script writing, and other technical aspects of film production.⁵⁷ Richardson did not adhere strictly to the schedule. He believed that the best way to keep the students' interest was to allow them to shoot first and learn as they go. He focused on self-expression as the first step toward success for the workshop students. He thought that the degraded portrayal of Appalachian culture in mainstream media thwarted creativity and that this issue had to be addressed before they would be able to succeed at the technical training.⁵⁸ From the beginning, undermining the negative media portrayals of the region was part of his vision for the workshop.

In a 1972 interview, Richardson admitted that he had kept the students in the dark regarding the time and dedication required to complete films.⁵⁹ He encouraged them to go at their own pace and to take one step at a time. By the time the students had spent the numerous tedious hours required for editing and post-production they were sufficiently invested in their projects to stay the course and finish them.⁶⁰ A member of the first round of training classes described the process in OEO's *Opportunity Magazine* in 1972,

*"The first thing the Old Man had us do was go out and shoot some film. He didn't teach us the formal classroom way, just showed us how to work a camera. Then after we went out and took some pictures, he'd tell us what we did wrong."*⁶¹

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Bill Richardson, Interview with the Author.

⁵⁹ Murphy, "Creating a Community in the Mountains," 18.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Richardson's concepts conflicted with the CFWC. He believed he had a better understanding of the local community and regional culture than the head office in New York. Richardson saw the greatest hope for the project in its potential for artistic expression and cultural exploration by putting cameras in the hands of local Appalachians and letting them tell their own stories—not in job training.⁶²

Richardson and the first students at the Community Film Workshop of Appalachia were much more concerned with finished projects than the CFWC. The CFWC was interested in technical training. CFWC members thought it was quaint and interesting that minority filmmakers chose topics that reflected their cultures, but the subjects were not the focus of the project.⁶³ The CFWC of New York encouraged short practice films, but the Community Film Workshop of Appalachia released seven finished films in 1970-71 ranging from ten minutes to thirty minutes in length that were immediately screened in the local community and in the region.

Richardson's ideas about the potential for using artistic expression to build communities were the most important contribution he made to the CFWA. He openly defied the CFWC of New York, and this oppositional stance toward authority appealed to the students' counterculture sensibilities.⁶⁴ It went a long way in defining the organization that would become Appalshop.

⁶² Bill Richardson, Interview with the Author.. For more information on this conflict in perspectives in War on Poverty programs, see Ronald Eller, Chapter 4 "Confronting Development," in *Uneven Ground: Appalachia Since 1945*, (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press), 2008.

⁶³ Murphy, "Creating a Community in the Mountains," 18; Appalachia, *Tentative Workshop Curriculum*, 1-4.

⁶⁴ Norman, Interview with the Author.

News of the activities in Whitesburg soon spread as the workshop garnered press attention from nearby cities. The first significant newspaper articles about the Community Film Workshop of Appalachia appeared in Louisville papers. *The Courier-Journal* ran a full page story in November 1969—the first month of its existence.⁶⁵ The theme of the article was the “development possibilities” that film might offer to “help build Appalachia.”⁶⁶ The reporter, Eastern Kentuckian and career-long columnist and editor for the *Louisville Courier-Journal* David Hawpe, quoted Richardson brainstorming ideas about what the workshop might become.⁶⁷ Some of his ideas included making public service announcements for the Health Department and taking them into the hollows, producing programs of local interest to replace the national PBS programs shown on closed circuit television in schools, and working toward increasing influence and relevance throughout the region by expanding into West Virginia and Tennessee. The article mentioned several goals prevalent at this early date that remained important parts of Appalshop’s development as it expanded including community development and balancing the negative view presented by mainstream media.⁶⁸ It is clear from these ideas that Richardson viewed CFWA as a regional organization, that he understood the potential of new technology, and that he believed film could function in this context as a tool for social change.

⁶⁵ Hawpe, "Films: New Tools to Help Build Appalachia?," B1; R.G. Dunlop, "David Hawpe Retires as Courier-Journal Editorial Director," *ibid*(2009). www.courier-journal.com/article/20090728/NEWS01/907280332/David-Hawpe-retires-Courier-Journal-editorial-director (accessed October 18, 2013). David Hawpe began his career with the *Louisville Courier-Journal* in 1969 in Hazard, Kentucky. He remained with the paper in a variety of capacities for forty years. When he retired in 2009, the *Courier-Journal* ran an article that described him as an “unrepentant liberal that spent much of his professional life railing against what he considered to be the coal industry’s excesses and as an advocate for the underprivileged, especially in his beloved Appalachia.”

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Richardson was not focused on changing specific policies or even on political activism, but instead embraced personal artistic expression and control of cultural interpretation as a means to the larger end of undermining the cultural inferiority complex he identified in the region that was the result of decades of media degradation. This is the type of social change that he believed the workshop could achieve—beginning in the personal and artistic lives of the new filmmakers and spreading to the community and the region through the finished projects they shared.⁶⁹

A second article from *The Louisville Times* in 1971 revealed how much the organization had matured in two short years.⁷⁰ The organization had definitely taken shape and the participants interviewed demonstrated a great deal more confidence about the workshop's potential to bring about change. The one consistent theme was the idea of counteracting identities assigned Appalachians by outsiders, evident in the title: "The Real Picture: Appal Films are By, For and About Mountain People."⁷¹ Dianna Ott, an early student, told the reporter that she wanted to "help change the dismal image some Appalachians have of themselves and the area."⁷² She went on to comment, "We've seen and heard so many outside opinions of what we are, we've forgotten how special we really are."⁷³ Her argument for the value of Appalachian culture was built on the cultural traditions

⁶⁹ Ibid; Bill Richardson, Interview with the Author.

⁷⁰ Monica Kaufman, "The Real Picture: Appal Films Are by, for, and About Mountain Folks," *Louisville Times*, August 21, 1971, A7.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

that the early films captured.⁷⁴ Richardson echoed this sentiment with an assertion that the films do not present Appalachia in New York or California's image but present Appalachian life "as it really is—the good and the bad."⁷⁵ He asserted that he believed CFWA films could overcome the isolation people in the region felt from each other because of the mountains and create a bond. He believed this bond, strengthened by the presentation of Appalachian culture as it really was, could potentially boost Appalachia's economy and improve its image.⁷⁶

These statements illustrated the important role of identity politics in Appalshop's early years. The idealistic goals CFWA staff and students espoused and their confidence that their cinematic interpretations of Appalachian culture were comparatively authentic is evident. Echoing the language of both Cinema Verité/ Direct Cinema and American countercultures, it is clear from this very early period that CFWA and its artists saw the program as an opportunity to show a more authentic---more real—version of their culture than other familiar media portrayals. They also saw it as an opportunity to change how people and communities saw themselves.

In 1970-71, while the students were busy making films that defined Appalachian culture and identity on their own terms, and the Richardsons were building the workshop by establishing community contacts, recruiting more students, and generating additional funding, the larger context of the initial project, the War on Poverty, was crumbling. The

⁷⁴ *Woodrow Cornett: Letcher County Butcher, directed by* (Whitesburg, KY: Community Film Workshop of Appalachia, 1971), VHS.

⁷⁵ Kaufman, A7.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

Vietnam War ate up most of Lyndon Johnson's funding for domestic programs.⁷⁷ Even before his decision not to run for a second term in 1968, spending on domestic reform had slowed.⁷⁸ In 1968, Nixon announced his intention to dismantle the OEO, and his victory in the Presidential election that year brought most War on Poverty programs to a close over the next few years.

The CFWC fought for the film programs' survival with a strategic emphasis on outcomes for the job-training portion of the programs.⁷⁹ The New York office began to demand rigidly structured training programs and job placement statistics from the satellite workshops as evidence of their effectiveness and, thereby, their worth.⁸⁰ In the stricter context of job training, the best the Community Film Workshop of Appalachia could have offered would have been to train people for jobs outside the region, which was clearly not what Richardson or the students had in mind.

The divergent goals of the CFWA and the parent organization rapidly came to a head. The CFWC circulated glowing evaluations about many of the other workshops, but the Appalachian workshop lagged behind in job placement and financial support.⁸¹ Yet there was something of worth going on in Whitesburg that Richardson, Smith, Newell, Ott, and the other participants were unwilling to sacrifice without a fight. Richardson wrangled with

⁷⁷ Dallek, 399-405.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Paget-Clarke, 4-5.

⁸⁰ Office of Economic Opportunity Office of Program Development, *Evaluation of the Community Film Workshop Council Instructor and Staff Questionnaire*, 1971. Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Box F4-Operational Records Unknown Dates, CFWC, Proposals, Correspondence, Misc.. The content and organization of this evaluation form clearly indicate an emphasis on job training and placement percentages. Respondents were asked to rank objectives and effectiveness and the list of options were limited to issues related to job-training and profit.

⁸¹ Ibid.

the CFWC for as long as possible to keep the workshop funded. In the meantime, he helped workshop participants set up a separate non-profit entity called Appalachian Film Workshop, incorporated with its own board of directors independent from the Community Film Workshop of Appalachia.⁸² The Appalachian Film Workshop sought funding and contract jobs outside the umbrella of the CFWC, while still enjoying support from the original arrangement. The first external contract was with the Appalachian Adult Basic Education office to produce a one-minute public service announcement. The \$2,000 earned for this project floated the fledgling artists for several months.⁸³

As pressure intensified to make CFW of Appalachia comply with the New York home office objectives, Richardson tried to forge a mutually beneficial relationship between the two organizations operating separately in Whitesburg. From March to May 1971 Richardson avoided a loss of OEO funding by ostensibly agreeing to follow CFWC guidelines. On paper he agreed to shift...

*...from a locally controlled community film workshop in which the workshop evolved through the free and unprogrammed combined efforts of all the people who worked in the shop TO a training program written and directed from the central New York CFWC office.*⁸⁴

Richardson portrayed the shift as an attempt to come into compliance with CFWC goals and objectives. However, he continued to believe that he had a better understanding of how the workshop could best benefit the artists, the community, and the region and that it was not reflected in the job-training aspect of the workshop. The apparent shift of focus was a tactic

⁸² Bill Richardson, *Appeal for Membership on Board of Directors and Support*, April 19, 1971. Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Unlabeled box, 1.

⁸³ Calder Smoot, "Appalshop: Mountain Media Center," *Youth Magazine*, , 93; Murphy, "Creating a Community in the Mountains," 20.

⁸⁴ Richardson, *Director's Evaluation of Cfwc Appalachia-Past Three Months, March 1 – May 30*, 1-3.

to keep funds flowing and to prove a point to the New York office about their misperception of the situation in Whitesburg.⁸⁵

Richardson submitted a report on the new format in June 1971.⁸⁶ Not surprisingly, the report included two curt positive points and several pages of well-developed negative aspects of the shift in focus. Richardson argued that the workshop's success in 1970 was the result of allowing young people to express themselves in whatever way they deemed best.⁸⁷ He argued that "fear of failure is a paralyzing Appalachian syndrome," and that the rigid expectations of the CFWC program were intimidating and unnecessary for successful filmmaking.⁸⁸

The report also raised the issue of CFWC funding. The funding was based on the volume of participants and employment placement statistics. Because CFW of Appalachia was in a sparsely populated area compared to most of the other workshops, there was no way the project could meet the criteria for the number of participants and job placements. Opportunities for careers in media in the region were practically nonexistent. The students at the Appalachian workshop operated without the stipends that CFW workshop participants received in more densely populated urban areas.⁸⁹

Instead of job placement, Richardson wanted the CFWC to consider community counseling and placement in colleges, vocational schools, cable television, and other entities

⁸⁵ Bill Richardson, Interview with the Author.

⁸⁶ Richardson, *Director's Evaluation of Cfwc Appalachia-Past Three Months, March 1 – May 30*, 1-2.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 3.

that would benefit the local community. He also balked at the outside control the CFWC home office exerted, insisting that what worked in New York did not work in Appalachia.⁹⁰ Letters from participants supported his official report. Herb Smith's response, which Richardson included with the report, revealed that from a student's perspective Richardson was more in tune with the local residents and filmmakers than CFWC New York could ever hope to be:

*"i was really disappointed to hear about your training program. In fact, i think it sux: I walked into the workshop for the first time in March 1970—I knew nothin' about film...one year later—there's now a film (in ya blood) that i wrote, directed, acted in, edited, and shot a few cutaways. Also, i've helped in several other films. i think this is certainly a credit to the appalachian film workshop and director: bill richardson. If there would have been classes, one day with a light meter, one day on the history of film, etc. i would have never done it. i was tired of classes, and bullshit lectures, then I got a chance to do somethin' i.e. make films. i think it worked. When I see my friends doin films and think how much we knew before, i know it worked. i'm shore. SO, you want to fuck the whole thing up, you should start havin classes---initiate a trainin program—create a factory. i hope ya can see what i'm-a-getting at. herb e."*⁹¹

Richardson's report and the supporting commentary from Smith revealed prevalent ideological assumptions at this critical juncture in Appalshop's history. Richardson and CFWA's students wanted to minimize the rigidity of the training program and focus on the process of creating films. They wanted local participants to have the opportunity to follow their own interests and to find satisfaction in the authenticity of the finished products. The student artists were also much more interested in artistic expression and the empowerment

⁹⁰ Richardson's view demonstrates a community organizing approach rather than a skill development approach. Dr. Ronald Eller explored these concepts extensively in *Uneven Ground*. See this for a more detailed explanation of this theme.

⁹¹ Richardson, *Director's Evaluation of Cfwc Appalachia-Past Three Months, March 1 – May 30*, Appendix A.

that accompanied it than they were in securing jobs in television or film production—especially if it meant leaving their hometowns.

Richardson followed up his report with a notification to CFWC that all activities of the CFWA were suspended because of lack of adequate funding.⁹² CFWC withdrew funding from the Community Film Workshop of Appalachia in December 1971. Richardson’s report confirmed that the Appalachian workshop was not compatible with the CFWC’s goals. The separation was as amicable as could be expected. The CFWC viewed the funding cut as the expected end of a short-term program. The program paid expense reports through the end of the year and agreed to a grant for rent and telephone service through February 1972.⁹³

The more important issue was the fate of the equipment from the original grant. The access to this cutting-edge technology was a key aspect of the organization. The artists would have had a very difficult time replacing the expensive Arriflex cameras that were so integral to their films. At first, the CFWC demanded the CFWA return the hardware. Richardson and the artists resisted stringently. Conflict reached a peak when an “OEO bureaucrat” approached Richardson armed with a gun and fired in the general direction of his home.⁹⁴ Fortunately, the conflict was resolved peacefully and the Appalachian Film Workshop was permitted to keep the equipment on the condition that they kept some kind of training program as part of their organization.

⁹² Bill Richardson, *Correspondence to Community Film Workshop Council*, June 8, 1971. Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Box S5, 71-78 Old Papers And Booklets, 1.

⁹³ Appalshop Board of Directors, *Proposal to Campaign for Human Development*, 1972. Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Box F5, Operational Records 1970-77, Correspondence and Proposals and Projects 1971, 6.

⁹⁴ Bill Richardson, Interview with the Author.

Conclusion

In July 1971 the Office of Economic Opportunity published a “comprehensive account” of the film workshops, but the report focused on the urban areas where the job placement goals were more easily met.⁹⁵ However, the following year the same publication ran a largely celebratory story specifically about the Appalachian Film Workshop that complemented the earlier article.⁹⁶ That article contained the following statement, “The OEO Community Film Workshop grant, their financial backbone, expired in November. Richardson and the filmmakers knew this was coming and also knew that the time for just training, which was what the grant was for, was past.”⁹⁷

Nonetheless, the loss of funding was devastating—at least for a little while. As one participant put it, “The people of the workshop were always aware of the impending OEO cut off, yet the reality of no money was a shock.”⁹⁸ The loss of funding created an atmosphere of crisis and opportunity for the newly-formed Appalachian Film Workshop.⁹⁹ Staff members described the break as a chance to, “re-examine our goals, to restructure our organization, and, hence, to expand.”¹⁰⁰ The staff reconceptualized the organization’s film program and expanded to include a variety of media departments.

⁹⁵ Murphy, "Creating a Community in the Mountains," 17.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 21.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Bill Richardson, *Letter to Conrad Pressman*, December 6, 1971. Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Box F5, Operational Records 1970-77, Correspondence and Proposals and Projects. File Name--Correspondence, 1.

¹⁰⁰ Marty Newell, *Proposal for Funding the Appal Shop to George Brosi*, January 3, 1972. Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Box F5, Operational Records 1970-77, Correspondence and Proposals and Projects, 1.

They also shortened the name from Appalachian Film Workshop to Appalshop. The Appalshop became the core administrative support for several media endeavors.

Diversification was a financial survival strategy, but it also opened up new artistic opportunities. In late December 1971, the scattered staff gathered to re-evaluate their goals and to plan for their uncertain future. Staff members engaged in a flurry of activity. They hurriedly completed films in production, took road trips and wrote grants to try to secure funding, and held a marathon board meeting that lasted from December 27, 1971 – January 2, 1972.¹⁰¹

In addition to the staff's commitment to artistic and cultural goals, there was an economic focus as well. The students and staff members were also dedicated to creating jobs for artists that would allow them to stay in the region.¹⁰² Providing an alternative to coal and the scant other jobs available in Whitesburg and surrounding areas was in itself an important part of what Appalshoppers wanted to bring to the community.¹⁰³

The organizational structure changed dramatically in the wake of the break with the OEO. In its first two years the organization functioned primarily as a training and film production center. After the OEO suspended financial support Appalshop became a nonprofit media and arts organization---self-supported and artist-administrated. In a very short span of time the organization transitioned from a top-down funder administrated program to an artist- run cooperative.

¹⁰¹ Appalshop, *December Report*, 1972. Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Box F4- Operational Records Unknown Dates, CFWC, Proposals, Correspondence, Misc., 3.

¹⁰² Paget-Clarke, 5.

¹⁰³ Smith, Interview with the Author.

The Richardsons and the students were part of a growing regional movement seeking cultural reinvigoration and social equality, and a national countercultural movement that questioned top-down authority. The focus on job training and the politically charged resistance to this approach was part of a broad groundswell of activity in the Appalachian region that exploded in the 1970s. The larger issues played out in small-scale in Whitesburg and access to the new technology that inspired Direct Cinema and Cinema Verité style documentaries afforded the student artists a unique opportunity to be an integral part of burgeoning movements for cultural expression and pride, and social equality and justice. The potential easier on-location shooting offered, Richardson's experience and direction, and the students' artistic talent and passion about Appalachian culture and resistance to economic and environmental degradation in the region led them to create an organization that wound up at the core of social change in Appalachia.

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Chapter Three

A Strong Appalachian Consciousness Emerges: Appalachians Speaking for Themselves in Appalshop's Early Films

*The Community Film Workshop Council of Appalachia is a group of Appalachian young people expressing themselves through the media of film, videotape, and still photography...Throughout its history, the film industry has been controlled by people with a narrow range of lifestyles. For the first time, the Appalachian people have the opportunity to show their world as they see it. As they capture the uniqueness of the area, a strong Appalachian consciousness emerges.*¹

The most important legacy of the Community Film Workshop Program in Appalachia was the facilitation of the transfer of newly available technology into the hands of Appalachian young people. Throughout the twentieth century media technology was an important part of social movements. The control of media means power--both overtly, in the form of propaganda and more subtly in the establishment of social and cultural norms, i.e. whose version of history and culture prevails.

Since at least the late 19th century, the control of media that defined Appalachia in American mainstream culture lay largely in the hands of people outside the region. From Local Color Writing in magazines to the four hundred plus silent films of the 1920s to popular television shows in the 1960s, Appalachian people were often portrayed in degrading ways by mainstream media.

The students that trained at the CFWA were motivated to counter the negative view of the region that was prevalent in mainstream media, and they perceived the film workshop as an opportunity to reach that goal. They believed that this was critically important—

¹Appalshop, *Appalbrochure 1972*, ed. (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1972), 2.

though the full impact of their work and the role the organization they created would play in the coming years eluded them at this early date. Nonetheless, the early films they made exhibited critical ideas and assumptions the filmmakers held about what they perceived as their Appalachian heritage. The guiding idea behind all of these films was “Appalachians Speaking for Themselves.” This was the closest the filmmakers or the organization they created came to a collective ideology. It set a precedent for Appalshop’s documentary film style and laid the groundwork for their efforts toward social change in Appalachian communities.

Although the CFWA fell short of the CFWC’s expectations for job placement, it far exceeded them in artistic output. The young filmmakers finished and released seven films in 1970 and 1971. The organizational turmoil and sparse funding that characterized Appalshop’s first two years did not impede the student artists’ creativity. Though the films were brief and in some cases technically unpolished, audiences lauded them as cultural treasures. The subject matter and style of these early films reflected Cinema Verité and Direct Cinema—international trends in documentary film production--and set patterns that helped to define Appalshop for decades to come. Moreover the funding and critical acclaim these films generated allowed the organization to expand into a wide variety of media by the mid-1970s including a recording studio, a photography program, a theater group, and a literary magazine, as well as a dedicated distribution department. Their artistic successes, and the topics they chose to document, invigorated other Appalachian social movement groups that were gaining momentum in the region.

The student artists that made these early films identified the degradation of Appalachian culture in mainstream media as debilitating for the region and saw the

resources offered by the CFWC as a potential antidote. Like other rural areas in America, traditional Appalachian cultural values had been undermined over the course of the twentieth century by changes resulting from rapid industrialization. Migration rooted primarily in economic necessity undermined family solidarity, consolidation and bureaucratization of some Christian denominations challenged the independence of religious traditions, and environmental degradation threatened the very land—the mountains—that formed the framework for so much of the day to day life of the region’s inhabitants. Appalshop filmmakers valued some aspects of the culture they perceived to be fading and saw their work as an opportunity to capture and celebrate their culture while it was still possible and in a new way afforded by technological advances in filmmaking.

The students chose documentary film subjects that represented a wide range of local culture and values, which reflected a broader trend toward renewed interest in Appalachian regional culture and history. In the 1970s policymakers, artists, journalists, academics, and commentators were struggling to understand the region, and it spilled over into the personal lives of the Appalachian young people operating the cameras. Some of the films focused on dying traditions in the day to day lives of Appalachians, while others examined ideas about modernization and progress in the context of contemporary national social issues and the related consequences for the region. A discussion of the early films reveals how this process unfolded.

Community Film Workshop of Appalachia Films

The first film that the CFW of Appalachia released was a ten-minute piece featuring an “old style” hog butchering titled *Woodrow Cornett, Letcher County Butcher* in 1971.²

² *Woodrow Cornett: Letcher County Butcher*, directed by Frank Majority, (Whitesburg, KY: Community Film Workshop of Appalachia, 1971), VHS.

Frank Majority was the primary creative force behind this film. As with many of the early films, the subject was related to the filmmaker—Cornett was Majority’s father-in-law. The film straightforwardly documented the process of hog butchering, beginning with Cornett shooting and shaving the hog and ending with a pile of discarded body parts and pieces of meat. The text in the film was minimal. It was limited to a personal interview with Cornett who discussed his ties to the land in Eastern Kentucky. He enjoyed hunting, fishing, and anything to do with wild game.³ One goal for Majority and the other CFWA filmmakers was to capture and preserve fading traditions in an increasingly modern world. Though it was not uniquely Appalachian, and the process was still an active part of mountain life in the early 1970s, the “old-style” process of livestock becoming food was becoming an anomaly that the filmmakers identified as part of their disappearing culture.⁴ The film contained little context, which set a precedent for the CFWA filmmakers showing things “as they saw them” and facilitated Cornett as an Appalachian speaking for himself.⁵

The same year nearly all the CFWA students collaborated on a group project titled *Whitesburg Epic*.⁶ Descriptions of the film referred to it as a film “about themselves.”⁷ The content consisted of impromptu man on the street style interviews popular in Direct Cinema and Cinema Verité documentaries with Whitesburg residents about contemporary national topics such as the draft, the counterculture, and the progress and goals of the Vietnam War.⁸

³ Ibid.

⁴ Betty Murphy, "Creating a Community in the Mountains," *Opportunity*, 17-23., 20.

⁵ Marty Newell quoted in Ibid, 20.

⁶ *Whitesburg Epic*, directed by (Whitesburg, KY: Community Film Workshop of Appalachia, 1971), VHS.

⁷ Appalachian Film Workshop, *Appalbrochure 1971*, ed. (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1971), 4.

⁸ *Whitesburg Epic*, directed by Richardson.

Whitesburg Epic juxtaposed the opinions of Appalachians against the backdrop of key national political issues. It showed “Appalachians Speaking for Themselves” about political activism and demonstrated knowledgeable participation in national debates, which undermined the notion that the region was isolated from or lagging behind the rest of the country.

The next CFWA film, *Judge Wooten and Coon-on-a-Log (1971)*, was a conversation with a local Whitesburg resident set against a community picnic and a contest that pitted dogs against raccoons on a floating log.⁹ It was the first film directed by Herb E. Smith¹⁰. The film portrayed the event as a slice of local culture, but it also included important dialogue about what Wooten thought it meant to be Appalachian. Again, it was a blueprint for future films that focused on regional community gatherings and festivals such as *Ramsey Trade Fair* and *Morgan Sorghum*.¹¹ The interviewer and filmmakers were off camera, but still present as they conversed with the film’s main human subject. Later films would take this technique to a new level by minimizing the filmmaker/interviewer to a level that was almost undetectable to the audience. This style is a signature feature of many of Appalshop’s films.¹²

Wooten conversed with the filmmaker about why he thought people preferred to live in the mountains and about their “unique” perspectives on work, money, and leisure in

⁹ *Judge Wooten and Coon-on-a-Log*, directed by Herb Smith, (Whitesburg, Kentucky: Community Film Workshop of Appalachia, 1971), VHS.

¹⁰ Smith was one of the first students the Richardsons recruited for the film workshop in 1969 and he has remained an integral part of Appalshop to present.

¹¹ *The Ramsey Trade Fair*, directed by (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1973), VHS. *Morgan Sorghum*, directed by (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1974), VHS.

¹² Rich Copley, "Appalshop's Beginnings," *Lexington Herald-Leader*, March 7, 2004, E8.

comparison with the rest of the country.¹³ He embraced Appalachian culture as an anomaly in modern America and idealized it as a better way to live. These two films demonstrated the complexity of regional cultural identity. “Appalachians Speaking for Themselves” implied diversity. Different filmmakers and subjects approached their identities as Appalachians from very different vantage points and the films illustrated both regional identification among Appalachians and diverse ideas about what that meant.

At first glance, *Whitesburg Epic*, *Woodrow Cornett: Letcher County Butcher*, and *Judge Wooten: Coon-on-a-Log* offered divergent styles and unrelated subjects. However, a more in-depth assessment of these earliest films reveals the relationship between them to be complimentary rather than conflicting. Appalshop filmmakers reflected the diversity in their communities through their own backgrounds, their artistic visions, and their subject choices in the style of Direct Cinema and Cinema Verité. From the earliest days, CFWA/ Appalshop filmmakers had a great deal of creative control over their projects. They came up with the ideas for films and were largely responsible, with help from Appalshop’s administrative umbrella--Appal Core--to secure funding. This meant that film subjects were as diverse as the student filmmakers themselves.

Nevertheless, there are also threads that run through all of Appalshop’s artistic output, and they are present even in these earliest films. All three of these films were archetypes of Appalshop offerings in later years. *Woodrow Cornett: Letcher County Butcher* focused on a specific aspect of daily life. The aim was to document a way of doing something that was becoming increasingly less prevalent, along with the perspective of an individual that had been engaged in the process nearly his entire life. The filmmakers

¹³ *Judge Wooten and Coon-on-a-Log*, directed by Smith.

encouraged Cornett to not only demonstrate his skill, but to tell his story. It highlighted the individual and the process and largely left the interpretation and contextualization up to the viewers. *Whitesburg Epic* (1971) was broader and offered more commentary to interpret its themes for viewers. It demonstrated the diversity of the region, that national issues were of interest to Appalachia, and that many “Appalachian” issues were thoroughly American. *Judge Wooten: Coon-on-a-Log* combined both of the approaches by capturing the contest and picnic—common community activities—with the economic and social commentary from a community leader that was clearly conscious of his Appalachian identity, but was also connected to issues of local and national political significance.

The remaining CFWA films were related to various aspects of the coal industry. Though coal is not found in every part of the region it is the dominant economic force in Eastern Kentucky where Appalshop is located and more broadly is an inextricable part of the popular perception of Appalachia. No images are more recognizable as thoroughly Appalachian than the dusty faces of coal miners with hard hats and head lamps. Since the early twentieth century the coal industry provided the majority of wage employment in many (though certainly not all) central Appalachian communities. Coal is an extractive industry and is prone to boom and bust cycles that create a great deal of ambivalence among workers and coal communities.

By the 1970s the impact of strip mining on the land and people were obvious to anyone. Political unrest, legendarily violent labor conflicts, and corruption in the form of inconsistent enforcement of legal requirements for safety regulations were also major factors in the history and culture of Appalachian coal communities. It is no surprise that Appalshop

films would build on documentaries like *The People of the Cumberland* (1937) and *Appalachia: Rich Land, Poor People* by addressing this important theme.

Coal Miner: Frank Johnson (1971) focused on an individual career coal miner.¹⁴ In response to off-screen interview questions from the Director, Ben Zickafoose, Johnson compared his mining experiences in his early years to the more mechanized processes of his later years. He recalled the legendary violence in Harlan County in the 1930s (bloody Harlan) and expressed concern about mine safety.¹⁵ He spoke favorably of the United Mine Workers Union as a protector of miners and disparagingly of coal operators he charged with only being concerned with short-term profits.¹⁶

In addition to his commentary, the film featured images of the mines, miners, and equipment juxtaposed against a song written by labor activist and renowned balladeer Jean Ritchie. In keeping with Appalshop stylistic trends, there was little narration or context for Johnson's opinions and shared experiences. In speaking for himself, his point of view illustrated the complex and contentious issues relating to coal mining in the region.¹⁷

¹⁴*Coal Miner: Frank Johnson, directed by* (Whitesburg, KY: Appalachian Film Workshop, 1971), VHS.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Helen Lewis, Interview with the Author, Digital Audio Recording, Abingdon, Virginia, June 24, 2012. In addition to its significance for developing Appalshop styles and subjects, *Coal Miner: Frank Johnson* was also important because it reinforced an early relationship between the organization and Dr. Helen Lewis, a professor at Clinch Valley College in Wise, Virginia. Zickafoose, a West Virginia native, was a student in Lewis' seminar in Appalachian Studies—one of the first of its kind. Lewis' class format allowed wide latitude for students to design their own projects. Zickafoose was interested in film and Lewis advised him to go to Appalshop. He submitted *Coal Miner: Frank Johnson* as a project for class credit. Zickafoose's work with Appalshop for Lewis' seminar began a long and fruitful relationship. In the coming years the relationship grew to be one of the strongest connections between Appalshop and the burgeoning Appalachian Studies movement in its nascent stages at regional colleges and universities.

A second film about the cultural impact of the coal industry represented a significant departure for Appalshop. *In Ya Blood*, Herb E. Smith's second film, was a loosely autobiographical dramatic film--not a documentary.¹⁸ It was the only one that the organization produced in this period and one of only two overall. The protagonist, Randy (played by Smith), faced a situation the film portrayed as typical for area young people. After high school graduation, circumstances forced Randy to choose between taking a job in the coal industry and leaving the area to attend college. He had an opportunity to purchase an automobile but could not afford it without a job in the mines. The company was looking for a long-term employee. His girlfriend encouraged him to acquire a car, which he could do only if he accepted the job. After an extended walk through the mountain woods illustrating intense self-reflection and inner conflict, he decided to take the job—presumably his only option for economic viability if he desired to stay near where he grew up and meet his girlfriend's expectations.¹⁹

Though it was fictionalized (a docudrama), *In Ya Blood* revealed realistic assumptions that young people in some parts of the region held. Setting his important reflective walk in the mountain woods highlighted the region's natural beauty and a way of life that was materially better than anywhere Randy might have chosen to relocate. It also dramatized the importance of place and home and the difficulty of the decision to stay or go. This phenomenon was prevalent in writings by and about Appalachians, and its

¹⁸ *In Ya Blood*, directed by Herb E. Smith, (Whitesburg, KY: Community Film Workshop of Appalachia, 1971), VHS.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* Smith defied these narrow options in his own life by attending Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee and returned to Whitesburg to a long and successful career at Appalshop.

implications were evident in the migration patterns in which people from the region engaged over the course of the twentieth century.

Some Appalachians—much like other groups facing displacement-- have been strongly resistant to leaving their homes. When economic factors forced migration, many returned weekly to the mountains via the celebrated “Hillbilly Highways” leading to urban centers in Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, and other neighboring states.²⁰ The priority placed on staying connected to the mountains even after relocating, and the experiences of living in “Appalachian” areas of cities outside the region reinforced Appalachian identity. The theme of the limited choices of the mines or the highway resurfaced in many later mainstream feature films set in the region such as *Coal Miner’s Daughter* and *October Sky*.²¹ The difficult choice portrayed in *In Ya Blood* was also a theme of Herb Smith’s real life story. In a 1986 interview he observed that one of Appalshop’s greatest accomplishments was that it kept several local young people, including him, at home and out of the mines.²²

The third CFWA film to focus on themes related to the coal industry was broader in scope and much more overtly political than the other two because it directly attacked an elected Union official. *UMWA 1970: A House Divided*, the second film from Ben Zickafoose, documented a United Mine Workers of America rally where Tony Boyle, president of the national organization since 1963, was the featured speaker.²³ Zickafoose

²⁰ *Long Journey Home*, directed by Elizabeth Barret, (Whitesburg, Kentucky: Appalshop, 1987), VHS.

²¹ *Coal Miner's Daughter*, directed by Michael Apted, (Universal City, CA: MCA Records Nashville, 1980), DVD.; *October Sky*, directed by Joe Johnston, (Hollywood, California: Universal Studios, 1999), DVD.

²² Nicole Paget-Clarke, "Appalachians Speaking for Themselves, an Interview with Herb E. Smith," *In Motion Magazine*. inmotionmagazine.com (accessed September 15, 2013), 5.

²³ *Umwa: A House Divided*, directed by Dan Mohn and Benjamin Zickafoose, (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1970), VHS.

interspersed images and commentary from people in the crowd who generally expressed mistrust and criticism of Boyle's corrupt administration with clips of his speech. Like *Whitesburg Epic*, this film demonstrated that the Appalachian region was deeply intertwined with national political issues and that some national political issues—especially relating to energy and labor—were deeply Appalachian.

This film became increasingly poignant over the next several years in the context of Boyle's demise. At the time of the rally featured in the film, he was already under suspicion for financial irregularities, fraudulent acts in connection with his election, and the murder of Joseph Yablonski (who had opposed Boyle in an election the prior year) and his wife and daughter. Boyle was eventually convicted of embezzlement and first degree murder and lived out the rest of his life in federal prison. The Appalshop film captured this riveting story in its early stages and the "Appalachians Speaking for Themselves" that it featured were politically astute observers and critics of the economic and social inequality this kind of political corruption bred in the region.

The budgets, production values, and artistic expertise in the CFWA films were not as developed as they would become later. However, they provide an important look into Appalshop's historical roots and foreshadow future films in regard to both subject matter and style. The subject matter in the CFWA films represented the most pressing themes that the students chose to incorporate into what they saw as a unique opportunity for Appalachians to speak for themselves. They were also topics that Appalshop filmmakers revisited again and again in the coming decades. These films documented activities carried out by local people that contrasted modern ways of doing things, such as "old-time" hog butchering and local festivals like the Coon-on-a-log contest. But they also documented the

important ways Appalachia reflected modernism with focus on the ramifications of cutting edge industrial technology, national labor crises, and a general critique of bureaucracy and political corruption at the highest levels.

These themes provided the context for Appalshop's development and the films established several stylistic trends in these early films that went a long way toward defining Appalshop's artistic output over the course of the 1970s and beyond. First, with the one exception of *In Ya Blood*, the films were documentaries. They also utilized traditional mountain music for the soundtracks and featured on-location outdoor natural imagery, which was possible because of the new technology of portable cameras that originally inspired the film workshops.²⁴ The films' styles also reflected the goal to let the subject tell the story. The filmmaker was only present as a decreasingly discernible off-screen voice carrying on a conversation with people in the film who were local residents and were closely related in some way to the filmmakers. The style reflected the expanding possibilities of the new technology and explored aspects of Direct Cinema and Cinema Verité that were popular in social movements across the globe. These stylistic trends remained signature features of Appalshop films.

Press Coverage and Promotional Materials

Richardson encouraged the student filmmakers to immediately begin exhibiting their films, and screenings generated press coverage that raised the organization's profile. Herb Smith attended Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee while still working on films at Appalshop. Vanderbilt's *Hustler* ran a few articles about Smith's efforts as an example of

²⁴ Appalshop's understanding of traditional Appalachian music changed over the course of the 1970s—especially with the advent of June Appal Records. However, at this time, it was largely defined by acoustic music typically played on harmonica or string instruments much in the style of English ballads.

the opportunities that new technology afforded and the potential role of universities in the exciting new creative endeavors.²⁵ Smith screened *In Ya Blood* at Vanderbilt and earned great praise from the *Hustler* critic. Richardson arranged a screening at Yale that sparked a more in-depth article from the *New Haven Register*.²⁶ The reporter described his view of Appalshop's role in redefining the region:

*Filmmaking in this area of Kentucky has brought its members together, giving them a new sense of validity and an Appalachian consciousness, perhaps even a positive self-consciousness, that permits many to take some pride in their customs and folkways, making them proud of the things they possess...Both the positives and negatives of Whitesburg, Kentucky are writ large and given the mythical dimensions that only the movies can create. The films by the Community Film Workshop of Appalachia to be shown this week provides a rare opportunity to see something interesting about this seemingly remote region as well as understand how filmmaking can define salient aspects of a community, creating in a different way the important histories of people and places that define us—telling us who we are and from whence we've come.*²⁷

Another article from 1972 reinforced this perspective. Pat Aufderheide, film critic and reporter for the *Minnesota Daily* reported that Appalshop films were of “national interest” because of their success at making good films away from urban centers and that they could take simple subjects and “render them watchable.”²⁸ Her exuberance is clear –

²⁵ Herb E. Smith, "Student from Appalachia Praises Film Workshop," *The Vanderbilt Hustler*, January 29, 1971, 9.; Walt Potter, "Herb E's Flick and the Frosh Arts," *ibid*, February 12, 1971, 9.

²⁶ James Childs, "Filmmaking in Appalachia," *The New Haven Register*, March 12, 1D.

²⁷ *Ibid*.

²⁸ Pat Aufderheide, "Appalachian Film Workshop Show, No Hoedown," *Minnesota Daily*, November 30 1972, 10.

“Oh, it’s invigorating, the whole thing. What a wonderful statement for people’s art, that it need not be inept or uninteresting...the people can take back their technology.”²⁹

These early films revealed the common goals of Appalshop’s founders and first filmmakers to focus on capturing, preserving, and expressing aspects of culture on their own terms and the adulation they enjoyed from screenings illustrated that they were communicating successfully with their audiences. A commitment to let the subject tell the story was clear in both their promotional literature and the choice of subject matter, which the students directed themselves, and viewers and critics appreciated what they were trying to do. A film scholar writing in *Film Quarterly* described the subject matter in the early films as follows:

*...the Appalshop documentaries are not neutral or scientifically objective. On the contrary the choice of subjects is an editorial comment that the Appalachian way of life has for centuries contained its own folk culture and wisdom, which are now threatened with extinction.*³⁰

The style and subject matter demonstrated bottom-up agency in defining what it meant to be Appalachian. The text in the films, the promotional materials from this era, and the reviews also revealed some very poignant aspects of regional identity as it functioned in the early 1970s. First and foremost was the point that though the subjects of the CFWA films were proximate to the organization’s headquarters in Whitesburg, the artists, promoters, and critics commonly generalized that the films were about “Appalachia” in general. The descriptions in early promotional materials and reviews reinforced assumptions the filmmakers and critics held about Appalachian identity. They referred to “the

²⁹ Ibid, 13.

³⁰ Andrew Horton, "Film from Appalshop: Documentary Film-Makers in the Appalachians," *Film Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (Summer 1980): 12.

Appalachian people” defined in contrast to the “narrow range of lifestyles” of those in power in the mainstream American film industry.³¹ And Appalshop’s newsletter asserted the subject matter represents the “uniqueness” of the area and from it an “Appalachian consciousness” emerges. One catalog writer described Woodrow Cornett as one of the last people in the area who performed the type of butchering featured in the film, which reinforced the notion of a passing Appalachian culture captured on film. The 1971 promotional catalog published by the CFWA described it as follows,

*“three real mountain men fit together for the first Appal Shop classic film: a hog killin’. Instead of the hogs goin’ to the butcher, in the mountain hills, the butcher usually comes to the hogs. Woodrow Cornett beautifully performs this old art as Ashland Fouts plays some of the old Appalachian songs in the true mountain style...”*³²

Note the references to “real” and “true” mountain people and culture in contrast to the purportedly less authentic portrayals they were reacting against. This language continued in the description of *Whitesburg Epic*. It begins, “there are a lot of films about Appalachia by outsiders, but the members of the Appal Shop are doin’ films about themselves. Because they are from the area, the Appal Core knows the people, and can get their honest opinions on controversial questions.”³³ The 1971 Appalbrochure description of *Judge Wooten and Coon-on-a-Log* went one step further by drawing an overt distinction between the values of the film’s subject, a Leslie County, Kentucky resident and “middle class America’s values.”³⁴

³¹ See Appalshop, *Appalshop Notes: News and Program Schedules from Appalshop*, ed. (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1971), 2.

³² Appalachian Film Workshop, *Appalbrochure 1971*, 2.

³³ *Ibid*, 4.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 5.

This is the language of identity politics. While the subject matter was not unique to Appalachia or representative of the entire region in any general sense, for the filmmakers and audiences that viewed and discussed the films over the years, the authentic portrayals of subjects presented as Appalachian encouraged solidarity and illustrated a more positive perspective of Appalachian cultural heritage than what existed before it. This view of the region so strongly held by Richardson and the students defied the construction of the idea of Appalachia over several decades and represented instead the experiences they lived and saw in their communities. It is a statement about the times—about identity politics and social consciousness in the region and in the nation.

Reinforcing that they were unique in this context did not reinforce tired stereotypes or essentialistic generalizations of the region, but rather highlighted the subjects as examples of cultural values that still remain part of vibrant Appalachian communities with something worthwhile and valuable to contribute. It was also a testimony to the student artists' belief in the power of reality and truth captured on film in the context of the popular new style of documentary filmmaking and exhibited for audiences that related closely to what they were seeing. It was best understood as a contrast to the degraded caricature of the region prevalent in mainstream media than as any kind of assertion that Appalachian culture was somehow distinct from any other American subculture in any definable way.

Striving for authenticity, as they defined it, was the foundation of the artists' visions. The films reflected both the influence of the American counterculture of the 1960s and 70s and a reaction to negative portrayals of the region in other media outlets. Appalshop filmmakers in the early 1970s believed that they were doing something very important in presenting the real Appalachia to a nation that had a very skewed and ignorant perspective

on the region. Herb Smith wrote a promotional article for a film screening at Vanderbilt University where he challenged readers that if they “want to know Appalachia is really like not just the way some filmmaker newsman, etc. wanted to show it because the public wanted to see, I urge you to see the Appal Shop Show.”³⁵ In “The Real Picture: Appal Films are By, For and About Mountain People,” one student filmmaker iterated: “We take it for granted until we see it on film. Then we’re aware that we do have things that make us unique. Things we can be proud of.”³⁶ The reporter went on to conclude from the interview that “that’s another goal of Appal Shop, developing Appalachian consciousness among the people who are often isolated from one another by mountains...the films present Appalachian life as it really is.”³⁷ This method of encouraging consciousness through positive media portrayal (possible only through control of the means of production) was a very significant strategy for empowering Appalachian people and communities toward the end of social change. Change requires challenging dominant social paradigms and this is impossible if people and communities are hampered with a shameful view of their cultural heritage. In this way, from the earliest films, Appalshop was an integral part of the Appalachian social movement context.

With more time and exposure, Appalshop began to get press coverage from widespread and diverse publications, but the understanding of the organization’s role as a regional institution remained consistent. In an article about a film screening at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, Aufderheide asserted that “There’s no doubt in these films that

³⁵ Smith, "Student from Appalachia Praises Film Workshop," 9.

³⁶ Kaufman, A7.

³⁷ Ibid.

Appalachia is another world.”³⁸ The *New Haven Register* reported, “The films are strange and interesting, presenting motion pictures of a region of this country that few Easterners think seriously about except in terms of moonshiners and revenoors or coal mine disasters...the six films in the program I saw...go a long way toward informing one more fully about this unknown pocket of rural America.”³⁹

These comments were embedded in overwhelmingly positive articles and reviews about the early Appalshop films. It was clear that the idea of a unique Appalachian culture influenced the framework in which the films were presented and appealed to audiences. Even in the earliest films, the filmmakers were able to strike a balance between undermining stereotypes and reinforcing Appalachian consciousness as a multi-faceted identity. As the artists matured they became much more conscious of this dichotomy. In fact, Herb Smith brought it to the forefront in the early 1980s, with a film, *Strangers and Kin*, which directly addressed the role of media imagery in creating and defining Appalachian culture.⁴⁰

In the late 1960s and 1970s when some African American Civil Rights activists embraced Black Power, and other groups such as women, Native Americans, and homosexuals engaged in separate minority rights movements, the idea of power became directly related to a unique cultural consciousness. Appalshop films effectively exhibited aspects of Appalachian culture as beautiful and valuable, and reinforced the presence of agency among Appalachians in their determination to live as they saw fit. This contributed to empowerment among Appalachians--especially young people—and encouraged them to begin to challenge dominant social paradigms in new and exciting ways both in their

³⁸ Aufderheide, "Appalachian Film Workshop Show, No Hoedown," 10.

³⁹ Childs, "Filmmaking in Appalachia," 1D.

⁴⁰ *Strangers and Kin*, directed by Herb E. Smith, (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1984), VHS.

personal lives and their communities. In this sense The CFWA's early films and the exposure they garnered helped lay the groundwork for coalescing Appalachian social movements in the 1970s and the accompanying social changes that they brought about. It did not stop here—with identity politics—but it was an important part of the early years.

The Appalshop

CFWA staff members saw the end of OEO funding in 1971 as an opportunity to further place control of the organization in the hands of local people and to have an even freer hand in guiding the activities as a regional organization. An early Appalshop brochure contained the following statement of the goals of the newly formed group:

*The Appal Shop provides mountain people with an opportunity to work in media and increases the information available about the region. The better informed a person is, the more readily he can accept social change. Communications is involved with changing the way people think and thereby influencing the way they act. We believe we are an agent of such change in Appalachia.*⁴¹

This statement of Appalshop's commitment to social change at this important juncture was extremely significant. It marked the young artists' departure from not only the funding, but from the CFWC's foundational assumptions about the goals of the projects. Cultural preservation and identity reconstruction were not part of the CFWC's original goals for the program, but they were important organizational goals by the time Appalshop became an independent cooperative. These goals were stepping stones to Appalachian consciousness, identity, and eventually social change that included a shift of power and agency that went well beyond the original scope of the training program. The filmmakers believed that this new technology had the potential to empower people in their local

⁴¹ Appalshop, *Appalbrochure* 1972, 1.

communities and the region to not only tell their stories, but to change the outcomes. This commitment to change at the community level through technology and art was certainly not part of the vision of the Community Film Workshops, and more than anything it set Appalshop apart from the CFWA.

Also at this juncture, Appalachian identity functioned as an important fundraising strategy. By necessity, the loss of OEO funding resulted in an intensification of the importance of fundraising in the organization's day-to-day operations. Board meeting minutes from this period contained discussions about financial problems and concern for financial viability.⁴² Appalshop staff members highlighted the importance of "Appalachians Speaking for Themselves" directly in fundraising and volunteer appeals. For example:

*"For the first time, it's a chance for the mountain people to make films for and about themselves, their needs, and their cultures. This is better for the area than the typical NBC, CBS, or ABC one or two day "tours" that are typical of outside newspeople (sic). With a few exceptions, filmmakers not from the area have produced distant, exploitative and destructive films about the area."*⁴³

In grant proposals, descriptions of each staff member in promotional materials included a hometown in the region.⁴⁴ This indicated an inclination to portray the staff members as regional insiders. Funding organizations such as the Ford Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) responded favorably to portrayals of the group as "uniquely Appalachian" and to proposals that included goals of capturing, preserving, and

⁴² Appalachian Film Workshop, *Appalachian Film Workshop Board Meeting Minutes*, July 13, 1971. Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Box G1 Board Meeting Minutes, File Name 1971, 1.

⁴³ Bill Richardson, *Appeal for Membership on Board of Directors and Support*, April 19, 1971. Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Unlabeled box, 1.

⁴⁴ This is even true for Mimi Pickering who is listed from Charleston, West Virginia, when she spent most of her childhood in California and attended college in Ohio.

expressing aspects of Appalachian culture. For example, one proposal included the following:

Mountain people have no control and virtually (sic) no voice about the decisions that control their lives....In that sense all mountain people are poor because they (sic) come from the place they were born....

Because of the isolation of the mountains, there is a desperate need to communicate with the outside world...The Appalshop grant would allow a group of young mountain people to continue documenting their heritage. Because their culture is rapidly disappearing, it urgently needs to be recorded. This heritage is a rich and unique part of America. Many aspects of our two hundred year history can be found living unchanged in Appalachia today.⁴⁵

This dynamic reinforced the group's identity as a local and regional institution and influenced the choice of subject matter for subsequent films.

In 1972 Appalshop's budget included income from the Episcopal Church Youth Fund, State of Kentucky Centralized Employment Program, National Education Television, a few sales and rentals of finished films, reimbursement pay from CFWC, and unemployment compensation to individuals.⁴⁶ It also listed outstanding proposals to TV stations, foundations, and a variety of state and federal grants. By 1973 the list of Appalshop supporters had grown to include Kentucky Adult Basic Education, Kentucky Rural Child Care, the Council of the Southern Mountains, and three small grants from Kentucky public television.⁴⁷ The contract jobs ranged from short films on pre-determined topics, to cable television shows, to public service announcements.

⁴⁵ Appalshop Board of Directors, *Proposal to Campaign for Human Development*, 1972. Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Box F5, Operational Records 1970-77, Correspondence and Proposals and Projects," 1-2.

⁴⁶ Murphy, "Creating a Community in the Mountains," 20.

⁴⁷ *Appalbrochure 1973*, ed. (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1973), 4.

All Appalshoppers engaged in fundraising efforts at this time. It became the primary goal for survival for several months. Even as the urgency for funding abated, it became part of Appalshop's organizational culture for the artists to engage in seeking funding for their own projects. As the organization matured and found surer footing there were more resources available to make this easier and some division of labor for grant writing and proposals, but fundraising never became completely separate from filmmaking.

Appalshop managed to stay afloat with this wide variety of funding opportunities, but also by limiting expenses, accepting federal transfer payments such as unemployment and welfare, and generally being, as Herb Smith phrased it, "hustlers."⁴⁸ The reliance on grants from so many diverse sources required the group to bend to meet different kinds of funding agendas. However, the staff managed to do this without abandoning the goals they pursued—especially letting Appalachians speak for themselves. The fact that the organization survived the funding cut off, and that most of the artists remained with the group, is a testimony to the commitment they had to their work and to finding a way to stay in Eastern Kentucky and out of the mines, as well as their willingness to sacrifice personal comforts and security for their larger goals.

The most significant of the early grants was from the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC).⁴⁹ The ARC was the most significant program to emerge from increased interest in the Appalachian region as an American economic problem area in the 1960s. It survived the demise of the War on Poverty and the slashing of federal programs in the Reagan years and is still active at present. Like most organizations that attempted to address

⁴⁸ Paget-Clarke, 3.

⁴⁹ Grammy Foundation, "Www.Grammy.Com/Nominees/Search?Artist=&Title=&Year=1973&Genre=All" (accessed September 20, 2011).

the problems of Appalachia it both undermined and reinforced stereotypes about the region. Though its goals were largely economic, one of its most significant unintended consequences was that it strongly reinforced Appalachian regional identity.⁵⁰

The Appalachian Regional Commission was also the most influential organization to ever attempt to draw finite boundaries around the region. It freely used the term “Appalachian” to refer to anyone within those boundaries. It is problematic to draw a direct line between a federal agency and local self-identification and it is not within the scope of this study to explore this connection with the depth it requires. However, it is worth noting that some figures in the Appalachian studies movement, who were on the front lines with students locate the beginning of any kind of discernible Appalachian self-identification among students with federal reinforcement of the idea of a distinct Appalachian region that culminated with the establishment of the ARC in 1965.⁵¹ The reinvigoration of the term just before the creation of the CFWA is part of the origination of the slogan Appalachians Speaking for Themselves.

Appalshop’s first direct interactions with the ARC came in 1972 when the agency paid \$25,000 for a documentary conceived as a celebration of the effectiveness of ARC educational programs in the region.⁵² Appalshop used the money to purchase additional equipment that was independent of CFWC obligations, and made the first “professional” film the workshop released titled *Appalachian Genesis*.⁵³ The film was the first to be produced in

⁵⁰ Lewis, Interview with the Author.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid and Bill Richardson, Interview with the Author, Tape Recording, Whitesburg, Kentucky, October 16, 2006.

⁵³ *Appalachian Genesis*, directed by Ben Zickafoose William Richardson, and Dave Adams, (Whitesburg, KY: Community Film Workshop of Appalachia, 1971), VHS.

color and, at 29 minutes, was the longest film at that point. The subject matter was a “young people’s report.”⁵⁴ Like *Whitesburg Epic* it featured interviews with local students, but it focused more closely on local issues such as education and employment opportunities, coal mine safety, and inadequate health care. The filmmakers interspersed on-the-spot style interviews similar to *Whitesburg Epic* and common in Cinema Verité films with footage of a visibly detached public official in stark contrast to the very vibrant young people shown in mostly outdoor settings. In contrast to the ARC’s concept of showcasing improvements in education, the students were very critical of their educational opportunities.⁵⁵

According to Bill Richardson, the ARC was furious with the result and refused to grant any additional funding for projects like this to the Appalachian Film Workshop for fifteen years.⁵⁶ However, the organization floated for several months on the ARC grant and, with it and other minor contract jobs, the Appalshop began to establish stability independent from the CFWC. In these early years, the course of its development was influenced significantly by available funding.

The other individual grants in 1972-73 funded several overtly political activist films that reflected the artistic vision and passion for social justice of new arrival Amelia “Mimi” Pickering. Pickering grew up in California. Her parents were political radicals who instilled ideas about social responsibility and economic justice in her from a very young age.⁵⁷ After high school she attended Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. Antioch was a non-traditional educational institution with a very strong commitment to social consciousness

⁵⁴ Ibid, Opening Credits.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Bill Richardson, Interview with the Author.

⁵⁷ Mimi Pickering, Interview with the Author, Tape Recording, Whitesburg, Kentucky, October 13, 2006 .

and public political activism.⁵⁸ The college took a serious interest in Appalachian social justice and established over forty satellite programs throughout the region, including one in Beckley, West Virginia in 1971 called Antioch Appalachia.⁵⁹ Through this program Pickering made contacts that led her to become involved in one of the most important single issue movements in the region--the Black Lung movement in West Virginia.⁶⁰ Connections through her involvement with Black Lung organizations led her to Appalshop. At Appalshop she began to explore her passion for filmmaking in earnest.

Pickering was much less concerned than other Appalshop filmmakers with exploring or preserving Appalachian culture and history.⁶¹ She was interested primarily in making films on issues of economic inequality, injustice, and social change.⁶² Being a self-identifying outsider, she had no undiscovered Appalachian heritage to uncover or to preserve on film.⁶³ Within Appalshop's wide range of subject matter her films were among the most politically charged. Her brand of activism was more influenced by methods common in the Civil Rights and Labor movements such as public protest and aggressively seeking policy

⁵⁸ For a fuller description of Antioch's history and mission see "Mission and History." http://antiochcollege.org/about/mission_and_history.html (accessed September 2, 2012).

⁵⁹ Antioch's Beckley program drew a group of writers and political activists at this time that were very influential in Appalachian studies. This group included the Soup Bean poets and Don West. West was the co-founder of the Highlander Folk School and later went on to establish the Appalachian South Folk Life Center at Pipestem, West Virginia.

⁶⁰ Pickering, Interview with the Author.

⁶¹ *Lee Banks: Mountain Farmer*, directed by Mimi Pickering and Shelby Adams, (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1974), VHS. The exception to this generalization is a nine minute film she collaborated with Shelby Adams to make called *Lee Banks: Mountain Farmer*.

⁶² Pickering, Interview with the Author.

⁶³ Ibid.

changes. Her social consciousness was evident in her early films, *Millstone Sewing Center*, *The Struggle for Coon Branch Mountain*, and *Buffalo Creek Flood: An Act of Man*.⁶⁴

Millstone Sewing Center was a thirteen minute film about a War on Poverty funded organization that made clothes for poor people in Letcher and Knott counties in Eastern Kentucky.⁶⁵ Like the film workshop, the Sewing Center faced funding cuts that threatened to shut it down. The subject matter was largely composed of descriptions of the work at the center by its staff. It was clear that the Sewing Center provided an important service for the community with very little in the way of resources. Though Pickering focused on political changes at the national level that threatened the viability of such an institution, the themes of regional identity, diversity among Appalachian communities, and bottom-up agency were also themes in the film.

The film also exhibited class conflict within the region related to the hot-button issue of school consolidation. In the film, the mostly retired older women that worked at the Sewing Center described the anxiety that children from their community felt when they moved on to attend high school in a nearby but comparatively urban county seat community. The seamstresses strove to make clothes that mimicked urban fashion trends to help the students fit in in their new environments.

The concern the students experienced and the attempts by community workers to ameliorate their anxiety demonstrated the diversity and even tension between rural and urban areas within the region. Speech patterns, clothing, music, and other cultural factors

⁶⁴ *The Millstone Sewing Center*, directed by (Whitesburg, KY: Appalachian Film Workshop, 1972), VHS; *The Struggle of Coon Branch Mountain*, directed by (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1972), VHS.; *The Buffalo Creek Flood: An Act of Man*, directed by Mimi Pickering, (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1975), VHS.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

created distinctions not just between Appalachia and the rest of America but also within the region between comparatively rural and urban areas. Pickering chose to highlight a government program that attempted to address this tension that was in peril of losing funding. It is clear from the film that she believed the program addressed important issues regarding social inequality in education. If students were forced to deal with social pressure and anxiety because their families could not afford or did not have access to consumer goods, then their educations would likely be affected. This scenario revealed a deep class conflict within the region. Pickering saw the Sewing Center as a means to alleviate some of this class conflict and its pending demise as a failure on the part of the government.

This tension between urban and rural cultural norms was by no means uniquely Appalachian. In fact, like many themes relating to the region, it illustrated that Appalachia was no different than other areas that experienced similar patterns of comparative geographic isolation and rapid growth and industrialization. Nonetheless, it was an important part of how people in the region viewed themselves and each other at this time in Appalshop's evolution.

In *The Struggle for Coon Branch Mountain*, Pickering's subjects told the story of their mountain community's fight for better access to education for its children. Local demands for a road and a school bus culminated with a march on the Capitol building in Charleston, West Virginia. Again Pickering's film focused on social problems in the region and political activism aimed at solving them. While scholars were engaged in seriously questioning stereotypes like fatalism in the course of their studies and classes, Appalshoppers were creating films that exhibited Appalachian activism on film.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Helen Lewis, "Fatalism or the Coal Industry? Contrasting Views of Appalachian Problems," *Mountain Life and Work* 46, (December 1970).

In the mid-seventies Pickering's passion to address political and social injustice culminated in *Buffalo Creek Flood: An Act of Man*, which held a coal company responsible for one of the most devastating coal disasters in Appalachian history.⁶⁷ Though Pittston Coal Company had reason to suspect that a dam it built over a hollow might not hold the company chose to ignore the information. On February 26, 1972 under pressure from heavy rains, the dam broke and flooded the community of Buffalo Creek, West Virginia with walls of water rushing through the hollow. The flood left 4,000 people homeless, injured 1,100, and killed 125 people. It was one of the most destructive environmental disasters to occur to that point as a result of coal mining. The company protected its interest and denied culpability by claiming the flood was "An Act of God."

The victims were incensed by the company's unwillingness to accept responsibility. In keeping with the dominant Direct Cinema and Cinema Verité stylistic trends, Pickering used testimonials and photos from local residents to give the victims the opportunity to describe the flood from their perspectives. Her portrayal of the events in the film made it clear that she agreed with the victims that the company was at fault and she used the evidence uncovered in making the film to support this perspective.

The second section of the film documented the legal struggle that ensued after the flood. The victims formed a community action group and sued the company. Their grievances included poor construction of the dam, unwillingness to acknowledge the dangerous conditions it created, and inconsistent enforcement of safety regulations by state inspectors. The politically charged subject matter made filming very difficult. Pickering faced opposition from the company and from some community residents. Despite these

⁶⁷ *The Buffalo Creek Flood: An Act of Man*, directed by Pickering.

obstacles, Pickering's subjects demonstrated political and legal savvy and a willingness to engage in activism to improve conditions in their coal community. Rather than approaching social change through preserving and celebrating remnants of a fading culture like many of the other early films, Pickering's films dealt with urgent current problems that the processes of modernization--as carried out largely by coal companies--created and with possible solutions the region's inhabitants pursued.

Appalachian Educational Media Project

For the next few years, most Appalshop filmmakers operated within the context of a very important NEH grant, secured in the spring of 1972, for a long-term project called the Appalachia Educational Media Project. It proved to be a "saving grace."⁶⁸ AEMP was designed to continue the training portion of the original CFWC workshop, but under the direct control of the Appalshop staff members. The AEMP grant allowed the organization to survive the break with CFWC. It sustained the organization's film enterprises for several years, which in turn provided a stable base for the later development of music, drama, and still photography programs. Though the pattern of slim financial resources was prevalent throughout the 1970s, the AEMP grant offered opportunities for several staffers to earn more regular income while they continued to make films. It also allowed new filmmakers to train at Appalshop.

⁶⁸ Herb E. Smith, Interview with the Author, Tape Recording, Whitesburg, Kentucky, October 17, 2006.

Eleven of the fourteen Appalshop films released between 1973 and 1975 were AEMP films.⁶⁹ AEMP designers conceived and proposed it as an extension of the CFWC training goals, but the structure of the training was markedly different than the early OEO-funded training sessions. The goals were:

- 1) To involve students in the production of films about Appalachia
- 2) To learn media technology through hands-on use
- 3) To become more “aware and proud of their heritage,” and
- 4) To distribute completed films throughout and beyond the Appalachian region.⁷⁰

The program required a six-month commitment from each participant, which gave students the opportunity to go through the entire process of making a film--from choosing their own subjects to final production and release. As part of the self-directed training program under AEMP, budding directors and producers gave progress reports at regular meetings and received advice and assistance from more established filmmakers.⁷¹ Some of the AEMP students worked at Appalshop before the grant, but the project also brought in many new students. Over the course of the project there were over twenty students, mostly from the Appalachian region, who went through training and seventeen that completed films.⁷²

⁶⁹ Appalshop, *Final Narrative Report Appalachian Educational Media Project*, Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Box F4- Operational Records Unknown Dates; CFWC Proposals, Correspondence, Misc., Appendix B. File name: AEMP.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 1.

⁷¹ Ibid, 2.

⁷² Ibid, 4.

The students chose specific subjects for AEMP films, but the project's goals and the parameters of the grant from the NEH directed choices to some degree. AEMP films focused on traditional crafts, exceptional individuals, and vanishing mountain traditions and institutions. These films continued the ideal of allowing the subject to tell the story—"Appalachians Speaking for Themselves"--and reinforced the patterns in subject matter and Direct Cinema/Cinema Verité stylistic trends of the earlier CFWA films.

One of the first films produced by Appalshop filmmakers with the Appalachian Educational Media Project grant was about a pervasive Appalachian stereotype—moonshining. In *Tradition* AEMP student filmmaker Anthony Sloan juxtaposed interviews with law enforcement officials about their tactics in trying to stop illegal alcohol production with commentary from repeat offender moonshiners justifying the choice to continue producing it.⁷³ Though the filmmaker was barely heard asking questions, it was clear that the film was sympathetic to the moonshiners and that the fact that the activity was illegal did not make it a black and white issue. In one segment, the "revenuer" explained that he believed people went back to illegal alcohol production after serving time in jail because they either preferred it to legitimate work or a lack of education prevented them from finding gainful employment. The film then immediately cut to a moonshiner saying that he chose to make moonshine because it was a noble alternative to welfare in an economy where jobs just were not available. He believed that in producing and selling alcohol he at least earned his income. His perspective was a salient example of the sometimes subtle differences between the way that a federal law enforcement official saw what had been repeatedly set forth as an Appalachian activity or stereotype and how an Appalachian

⁷³ *Tradition*, directed by Bill Hatton and Anthony Slone, (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1973), VHS.

speaking for himself interpreted it. This film overtly reinforced the filmmaker's belief in bottom-up agency and the importance of facilitating the exposition of insider perspectives.

Other AEMP films also focused on institutions or practices that were becoming increasingly rare in modern culture. The filmmakers involved in these projects shared a goal to capture these cultural artifacts before they disappeared entirely. The political perspective on these subjects ranged from neutral to very sympathetic and in many instances the filmmakers and the people who appeared on camera were making overt comparisons between modern or national culture and Appalachian ways of life. Therefore, like most Appalshop films in the 1970s, these films exhibited how the region was a part of a wider national dialogue, while at the same time reinforcing Appalachian identity as a multi-faceted tool for social critique.

Herb Smith, one of Appalshop's most seasoned filmmakers at this time, made one of the most widely acclaimed of these films on Regular Baptist Church rituals called *In the Good Old Fashioned Way*.⁷⁴ The film depicted Old Regular Baptists carrying out a river baptism, a foot washing ceremony, and a funeral. These traditional religious rituals were set to a backdrop of shape note and call and response singing popular in some traditional Appalachian religious services. The underlying theme was that the film subjects resented the new, more modern way church organization and worship were being carried out in the mid-1970s. They highlighted the decentralized, community-oriented nature of their churches and the intimate and personal relationships that formed the core of their interactions. In keeping with Appalshop's commitment to allow the subjects to tell their own stories, Smith and the other students who worked on the project were largely absent from the final product,

⁷⁴ *In the Good Old-Fashioned Way*, directed by Herb E. Smith, (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop Films, 1995), VHS.

but the editing and intimate subject matter exhibited their respect and commitment to preserve the dying traditions they were documenting.

Another seasoned Appalshopper, Ben Zickafoose, contributed to the AEMP offerings with his film *Feathered Warrior*.⁷⁵ It was similar to *Tradition* in that it documented an illegal rural tradition-- the illegal sport of cock-fighting in the region. It was notable in Appalshop's catalog because of some departures in style. The filmmaker was more present than in most of the other films—the viewer could hear his questions more clearly and the interview with the primary human subject of the film was more obviously directed than other early films. It also contained experimentation with the editing and the music. Much of the film was shot through a red lens filter that gave it an eerie feel that highlighted the bloody violence of the sport. At the same time, there was nothing directly critical of cock fighting and Zickafoose portrayed the human subject in a favorable light as a guardian of a time honored tradition in the mountains holding out against a different set of values about animals and sport imposed by outsiders.

Diana Ott revisited the topic of education in *The Kingdom Come School*.⁷⁶ However, it presented a much different perspective on the topic than Pickering's *Struggle for Coon Branch Mountain*. Rather than focusing on the political struggle to gain access to larger and better equipped schools, *Kingdom Come School* documented the fading tradition of one room schoolhouses. It followed the day to day operations of this education model with extensive interviews with the teacher that would be displaced when the school was closed and the students sent to a larger public school divided by grades in another community.

⁷⁵ *Feathered Warrior*, directed by Ben Zickafoose, (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1973), VHS.

⁷⁶ *The Kingdom Come School*, directed by Diana Ott, (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1973), VHS.

Kingdom Come School was both a preservation piece about a fading cultural tradition and a social critique of school consolidation.

Ramsey Trade Fair, the first film by AEMP student Scott Faulkner, was similar in that it documented a way of life that was perceived to be quickly fading away and challenged the assumption that progress of the modern consumer culture and expanding markets were unquestionably better.⁷⁷ It was filmed at a local fair where sellers and buyers exchanged goods, socialized, ate, and listened to gospel music. The subjects in the film talked about their unique products and about the nature of the commerce that transpired at the fair. It was personal and small-scale—attributes that most of the fair-goers found preferable to the fast-paced world of the national consumer culture. As a group they indicated that something would be lost if alternatives to catalog shopping or corporate consumption was eliminated.

The Appalachian Educational Media Program (AEMP) was generally successful in achieving its stated goals. Students experienced hands-on use of portable recording technology and most saw their projects through to completed films. The subject matter reinforced Appalshop's goals for the program. The NEH was satisfied and Appalshop received continued funding for a second phase of the program in 1973. AEMP II represented more of an "accounting change than a programmatic one" and the goals and finished products were similar to the original project.⁷⁸ Several students who completed training under AEMP I became instructors for AEMP II, which provided continuity in the

⁷⁷ *The Ramsey Trade Fair*, directed by Faulkner.

⁷⁸ Appalshop, *Final Narrative Report Appalachian Educational Media Project*, 1.

staff and the projects. AEMP II students completed and released six more films between 1974 and 1977.

One of the most important films of the AEMP II project was Elizabeth Barret's directorial debut *Nature's Way*.⁷⁹ Barret joined AEMP in 1974. She grew up in Hazard, Kentucky—just over the mountain from Whitesburg but in a comparatively urban environment. She first encountered Appalshop at a film screening at the University of Kentucky where she attended college.⁸⁰ The early films made an impression on her and shortly after graduation she gravitated toward Appalshop.⁸¹ Even though Barret grew up near Whitesburg the subject matter in the early films was still foreign to her own experiences growing up in a town with comparatively high population density and economic stability in the region.⁸² In her own early films she explored aspects of Appalachian culture that she considered part of her newly re-discovered heritage and that were disappearing fast.⁸³ *Fixin' to Tell about Jack* focused on the nearly lost art of storytelling.⁸⁴ In *Nature's Way* she explored the role of midwives, which though once a critical part of Appalachian health care, had become almost completely eclipsed by the professionalization of medicine in the region in the first half of the twentieth century.⁸⁵ By generation and by class, she was

⁷⁹ *Nature's Way*, directed by Elizabeth Barret, (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1974), VHS.

⁸⁰ Elizabeth Barret, Interview with the Author, Tape Recording, Whitesburg, Kentucky, October 17, 2006.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ *Fixin' to Tell About Jack*, directed by Elizabeth Barret, (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1975), VHS.

⁸⁵ *Nature's Way*, directed by Barret.

an outsider to the subjects of her films, but her self-identification as an Appalachian drew her to explore these topics.⁸⁶

NEH awarded the AEMP grant in part on the basis of the films expressing and preserving “Appalachian” culture. In turn, the filmmakers were very conscious of the idea of “Appalachians Speaking for Themselves” in their choices of subject matter for these films. Individually, each film was the product of the filmmakers’ own interests and interpretations of the various aspects of Appalachian culture as they saw them. In this way they met expectations and requirements while also building on Appalachian identity politics and encouraging social change through cultural awareness and preservation. In the process of capturing fading cultural traditions, the films also questioned assumptions about assimilation into mainstream American culture and competing definitions of progress. Each of these films provided the opportunity to open a dialogue about particular issues that were important to some Appalachians, while at the same time using the newly available technology to go on-location and capture fading traditions for future generations.

Conclusion

“Appalachians Speaking for Themselves” had been part of the original concept of the CFWA and was reinforced after the break by the staff’s own ideas about what the organization should be. It was also an important part of the fundraising – numerous grant proposals were structured around the “Appalachian-ness” of the organization and the staff. However, as the staff grew more diverse, the idea of Appalachians speaking for themselves became more complex. Staff members brought different ideas of what it meant to be

⁸⁶ Barret, Interview with the Author.

Appalachian to their projects. Diverse subjects with a wide array of ideas about culture and society made for richer, but less easily defined pictures of the region's culture.

By the time the AEMP ended in 1977, Appalshop had expanded into several new media formats including Roadside Theatre, June Appal Records, and a literary magazine called *Mountain Review*. Appalshop's output provided examples of its potential, and it subsequently became easier to secure funding. Films in the late 1970s and early 1980s followed the formulas established earlier in the decade in subject and style, but typically operated with higher budgets because of the comparatively stable financial situation at Appalshop. Prevalent themes from earlier films such as cultural preservation and expression, aesthetic beauty, authenticity, and economic and environmental justice were still present. However, additional funding from a variety of sources resulted in longer and more developed documentaries.⁸⁷ This allowed the filmmakers to explore subject matter more fully.⁸⁸

The end of the AEMP in 1977 marked a change of direction for the film program at Appalshop. In its wake, Appalshop did not receive any additional funds specifically earmarked for training programs. Funds from the Kentucky Labor Department provided stipends for students, but the program was geared toward apprenticeship. Students worked

⁸⁷ Appalshop, *Appalshop Promotional Catalog*, ed. (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1981). Promotional literature lists a wide range of general categories for Appalshop films: Aging, American studies, anthropology, Appalachian studies, art/arts and crafts, changing society, cultural geography, education, energy-environment, English, folklore/folklife, health, folk medicine, history, labor studies, music, political science/government, psychology, religion, social issues, social studies, sociology, values, women's studies, and work.

⁸⁸ *Hand Carved*, directed by Herb E. Smith, (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1981), VHS. For example, newlyweds Herb Smith and Elizabeth Barret worked together for almost two years on an extended project that became the film *Hand Carved* (1981), which followed a craftsman through the process of creating handmade furniture. It was nearly ninety minutes in length—much longer than any Appalshop film to that point.

closely with more experienced filmmakers trained at Appalshop, but did not choose their own subjects or oversee projects on their own. Though the motivation for changing direction was the type of funding that was more readily available, most of the staff supported it.⁸⁹ Appalshop artists had reached a new level of expertise.

Collectively, the films of the early to mid-1970s were an impressive collection of ethnographic offerings that explored and preserved aspects of local culture and exposed exploitation and political corruption. These films represented a more accurate and authentic portrayal of regional culture than any other film collection to that point. The commitment to *Appalachians Speaking for Themselves* began a process of cultural redefinition that, together with other groups and individuals in a social movement context in the region that encouraged empowerment and regional activism that laid the groundwork for social change. The final report on the AEMP confirmed that, like in the earlier years, the training aspect was secondary. “The value of their new job skills is important,” claimed the report, “but what is perhaps more important is the new or rekindled pride in their culture and people.”⁹⁰ The early films quickly became part of a larger dialogue about the region. The addition of drama, music, photography, and literature expanded the scope of Appalshop’s role in defining Appalachian identity and the opportunities for its artists to encourage awareness and bring about social change.

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⁸⁹ Appalshop, *Final Narrative Report Appalachian Educational Media Project*, 5.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Chapter Four

“The Great Leap Forward:”

Appalshop’s Expansion Programs

“...Appalshop’s history is defined by bursts of energy... Soon other artists—most from the Appalachian region—were drawn to Appalshop where they started Roadside Theater, June Appal Recordings and the Mountain Review Magazine. It was a period that... [the] executive producer of Appalshop Film and Video, characterizes as ‘the great leap forward.’”¹

The revenue stream and critical acclaim the film program generated in the early 1970s resulted in expanded opportunities between 1973 and 1978. Appalshop added a recording studio called June Appal Recordings, a Roadside Theater group, a literary magazine titled *Mountain Review*, a photography program that produced several traveling exhibits and published collections, and a video and cable TV department. Appalshop’s decisions to expand into new media reflected a commitment to encouraging Appalachians to speak for themselves in as many ways as the organization could sustain. Appalshop’s artists and administrators did not pursue a cohesive plan, but rather expanded into a variety of media when the opportunity and resources allowed. Each program was unique, but they all reflected Appalshop’s larger goals. Though these goals were originally rooted in new film technology, they transferred seamlessly to other endeavors.

The new media outlets attracted a wide variety of students and artists. The diversity in the backgrounds and methods of the new staff members that led the new departments dramatically changed Appalshop’s artistic output. Their experiences enriched Appalshop’s

¹ Appalshop, "Appalshop Celebrates 25th Year," *Appalshop Notes*, 8.

role in creating and promoting Appalachian identities through artistic expression, and expanded the scale of opportunities within Appalshop's reach for social change in the region through empowerment and activism.

The new programs offered opportunities for artists to use different media. Through those new lenses the perspectives Appalshop artists presented were more complex and diverse than what any one program—even the dynamic film program—could offer. Appalshop's early successes with the films drew leaders for the expansion programs from larger urban areas across America to Whitesburg. These artists were typically formally educated in their fields and were cognizant of national trends in media and social change. The exciting changes in the scope of programing in the mid-1970s contributed to Appalshop's influence in the region and laid the groundwork for its eventual explosion into a national multi-media arts organization.

As with the film program, it was the loss of OEO/CFWC funding that opened the organization up to the possibilities of expansion. During the funding crisis and subsequent marathon board meeting in the winter of 1971 the staff generated a "December Report" that included an important record of the current staff and their positions in the newly organized Appalshop. The new organizational structure included separate departments for new media and also provided a way to increase Appalshop's influence through a dedicated Distribution department.

Under the new organizational structure several workshops, each with a coordinator, worked together under the leadership of a few core administrative leaders.² The Appalshop Administrative core included staff members that had been with the organization since the beginning including Marty Newell, Herb Smith, and Dave Adams. However

² Ibid, 4.

because these early students were splitting their time between the Appalshop and other pursuits including attending college, the staff expanded significantly. The coordinators for each department corresponded with the Central staff which included a Director and a Board that oversaw the various divisions (figure 2).

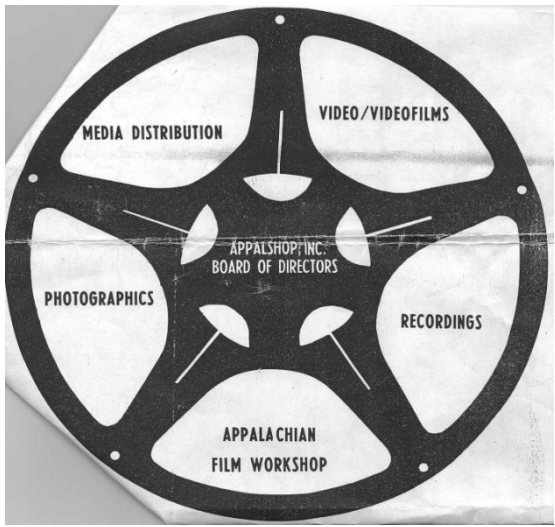
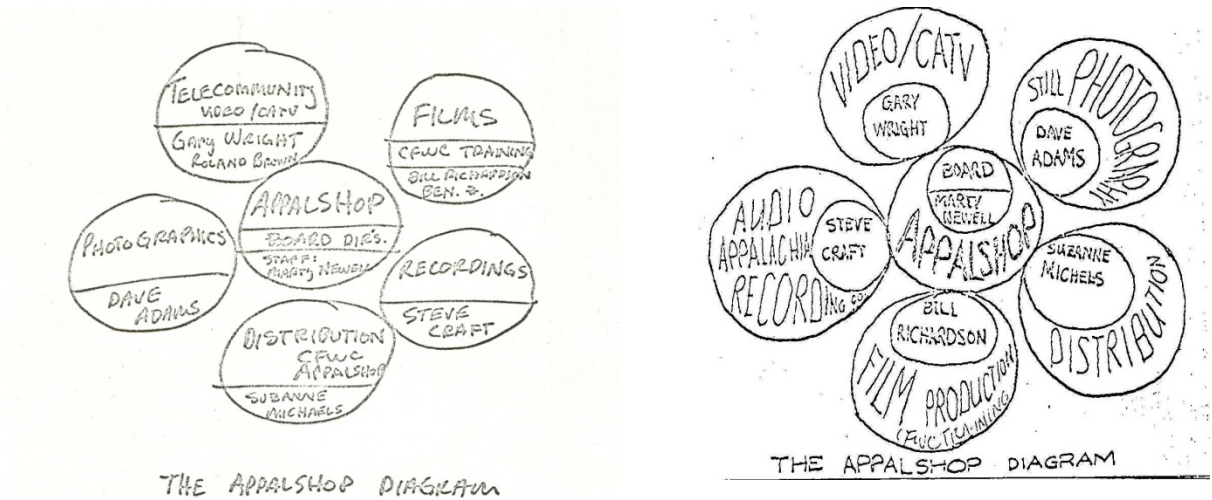


Figure 3- Versions of Organizational Diagrams³

³Appalshop, *December Report*, 1972. Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Box F4- Operational Records Unknown Dates, CFWC, Proposals, Correspondence, Misc., 5. Marty Newell, *Proposal for Funding the Appal Shop to George Brosi*, January 3, 1972. Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Box F5, Operational Records 1970-77, Correspondence and Proposals and Projects, 3; *Appalachian Film Workshop, Appalbrochure 1971*, 2.

Decentralized structure became an important part of Appalshop's organizational culture after becoming independent of the CFWC. The staff members reacted against the negative repercussions of bureaucratic structure they had experienced under the CFWC and the OEO. The board of directors functioned as an umbrella administrative organization for a variety of artistic endeavors and media services. Each department was responsible for securing funding for its projects. Departments shared administrative expenses and some marketing, but it was up to the individual artists to secure funding and survival was largely on a project by project basis. Although many Appalshop staff members had long relationships with the organization—including some founders still currently associated with the organization—no staff member was ensured a long term job in the 1970s.

It took a few years for the programs envisioned in the 1972 reorganization to become independent and viable, but by 1974-75 the expansion was fully operative and by the end of the decade Appalshop supported twenty-five full time employees and operated with a \$600,000 budget.⁴ The Appalshop transformed from an OEO job training project for film and television to a core that supported a much wider variety of media opportunities. A brief account of the histories of the expansion programs is integral to Appalshop's story and its role in the Appalachian social movement context of the 1970s.

June Appal Recordings

Within months of establishing independence from the CFWC, Appalshop set up a recording studio called June Appal Recordings. Music was an integral part of Appalshop's artistic output from the very beginning. Because they embraced stylistic trends that eschewed narration and voiceover, music was the most powerful way the filmmakers

⁴ Owen Hardy, "Appalshop," *Louisville Courier-Journal*, July 22 1979, 7.

framed the content of the films. The music in the early films helped to set tone and reinforce the subject matter. For example, *Millstone Sewing Center* featured local Primitive Baptist choir singers; *Coal Miner: Frank Johnson* featured a labor song written by Jean Ritchie; and *Struggle for Coon Branch Mountain* featured a folk song written specifically about the events and places relevant to the subject of the film. In 1973, Appalshop released *Tomorrow's People* (1973)—“a sight and sound experience of mountain culture.”⁵ Titling the film *Tomorrow's People* was a direct rebuttal to these premises in Jack Weller's book, *Yesterday's People* that highlighted cultural traits as the explanation for pervasive poverty in the region. The soundtrack was even more central to its subject matter than in other early films because it contained no dialogue or verbal content at all—just music and images.

The opportunity for local musicians to have an outlet for their work independent of the film program soon became a priority at Appalshop. The music program became more focused in 1973 when the Appalshop's Administrative Staff (the Appal Core) purchased an undeveloped loft space to use as a recording studio. Appalshop hired “filmmaker, musician, writer, scholar, activist, veteran, and Appalachian cultural worker” Jack Wright to develop the music program.⁶

Wright spent most of his childhood in Wise County, Virginia—just across the state line from Whitesburg, Kentucky. After serving in the Vietnam War, he enrolled at Clinch Valley College to finish his four year degree. Wright studied with Helen Lewis—one of the

⁵ *Tomorrow's People, directed by* (Whitesburg, Kentucky: Appalshop, 1973), VHS. The title refers to the fact that the film was offered as a rebuttal to the widely-read and suspiciously regarded *Yesterday's People* by Jack Weller. Weller's work was based on Culture of Poverty theory, which was sometimes interpreted as blaming the victims of poverty for their economic struggles and perceived backwardness of their cultural coping mechanisms.

⁶ Biographical information about Jack Wright is summarized from Maryanne Worthington, "Interview: Jack Wright," *Still: A Journal* 1, no. 1 (2009). <http://www.stilljournal.net/jack-wright-interview.php> (accessed August 12, 2011).

pioneers of the part of the Appalachian Studies movement that worked within the college and university system in the region. Her research and vibrant classes encouraged Wright to consider pursuing a career focused on Appalachian regional culture. Through Lewis' Appalachian seminar Wright was exposed to guests like social commentator Harry Caudill, activist Don West, and musician Earl Gilmore. He became acquainted with folk and protest musicians such as Guy and Candy Carawan at the Highlander Folk School.⁷ Wright began a long and fruitful relationship with Appalshop that would come to be one of the most important in the organization's early history and development—especially for June Appal Recordings. After graduation from Clinch Valley College Wright engaged in graduate work in International Relations at Oxford University and traveled extensively in the United Kingdom. When he returned he secured a Ford Foundation Youth Leadership Development Fellowship to study Appalachian culture.⁸

Jack Wright's decision to join Appalshop was a culmination of his interest in Appalachia, his dedication to grassroots social change, and his lifelong love of music. Appalshop hired Wright to develop his ideas and in 1973 his ideas revolved around the importance of music and storytelling to Appalachian identity, cultural empowerment, and social change. He secured grants from the NEH and the Lily Endowment and used the funds to start June Appal Records and Roadside Theater. By summer of 1974 Appalshop owned an 8-track recorder and Wright was overseeing album production, release, and distribution.

⁷ Guy and Candie Carawan were very influential activist folk musicians who worked for many years with the Highlander Folk School. For more information see The Southern Folklife Collection- Guy and Candie Carawan Collection-1955-2010, http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/c/Carawan,Guy_and_Candie.html (accessed September 12, 2012).

⁸ Ibid.

The recording studio quickly became a promising source of revenue. In 1976 it grossed \$12, 837.⁹

One of the earliest recordings by Nimrod Workman was a great example of how the music program reinforced Appalshop's dual goals of cultural preservation and social change through "Appalachians Speaking for Themselves." Workman performed an old style of ballad singing. He was also a black lung organizer and a strong Union supporter in the midst of highly contentious labor struggles in Appalachian coal fields. His style reflected one type of traditional mountain music, but many of his lyrics were socially relevant to the 1960s and 70s and were politically radical.

A Study Guide written to accompany a documentary on Workman published several years after the release of the album described him and his music as follows:

Long before the people of the mountains of Appalachia were exploited for the vast coal resources found there, folk music was a rich and constant source of cultural strength in the region...In the isolation of the mountains, English and Scottish songs have flourished, and consequently the region is best known for both its coal and its traditional music. Nimrod Workman is a fine contemporary example of a traditional folksinger, and the songs he sings reflect not only the older Anglo influence, but also the influences of regional and national crises, of modern commercial country music, and of fundamental Christian religion belief and music.¹⁰

Some of the songs were a nostalgic homage to past ways of life that sought to preserve music styles and describe vanishing Appalachian cultural traditions. However, there was also a strong current of social justice and political activism in Workman and other June Appal artists' recordings. Themes from tracks off the early albums include unionism,

⁹ Appalshop, *Appalshop Background Information*, 1978. Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Unlabeled box, 1.

¹⁰ Richard Tallman, *Nimrod Workman: To Fit My Own Category, Study Guide*, ed. (Viper, KY: Graphic Arts Press for Appalshop, 1979), 2.

mine safety, economic and racial inequality, and the ravages of war. Artists cited influences ranging from family members that preserved traditional songs to national artists such as Pete Seeger and the Carter Family. Under Wright's leadership June Appal became an increasingly significant resource for regional artists throughout the 1970s, but the label also connected the region to larger issues that grassroots activists were fighting for across the nation. The overlap between regional identity and connections with outsiders defined June Appal and the other expansion programs in their formative years.

Roadside Theater

Jack Wright's interest in storytelling inspired him to pursue a program for artistic expression in theater format that became *Roadside Theater* in 1974. Roadside's first official Director, Don Baker, was the creative force that shaped Roadside Theater's early goals and development. Baker repeatedly asserted that he began his work at Roadside by thinking about what kind of theater made sense in Eastern Kentucky.¹¹

Like Wright, Baker had grown up in southwestern Virginia, but he had influences derived from diverse education and work experiences. Immediately before coming to Whitesburg to work with theater at Appalshop he was working as an Arts Counselor in Washington, DC. He was interested in grassroots theater—a tradition in America that had roots in the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s and was reinvigorated by social movements of the 1950s and 60s.¹²

¹¹ Sharon Hatfield, "Tales of Appalachia: Roadside Theatre," *The Drama Review* 27, no. 2 (Summer 1983): 45; Anne Michelle Ellis, "Theatre and Community Formation: Two Models of Self Representation" (Doctoral Dissertation, Cornell University, 1995), 93.

¹² Lynda Burnham, "Reaching for the Valley of the Sun: The American Festival Project's Untold Stories," *The Drama Review* 44, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 76-77.

Prior to the establishment of Roadside Theater, the only existing local theater group in the area was the Appalachian Actors workshop which performed well-known plays. In the very beginning, Roadside founders worked with that existing organization. However, it did not take long for it to depart significantly from the group's format and subject matter. Wright and Baker founded Roadside Theater in 1973-74.¹³ The name reflected the style of performances they wanted to promote—the kind that Wright and Baker believed made sense in Appalshop's community and artistic context.

Roadside Theater has been described by Appalshoppers and by critics and commentators as folk, indigenous, community-based and most commonly grassroots theater. However it was described, all agreed that it was markedly different from traditional theater. The actors used virtually no sets or props, and the scripts generally served only as a loose guide to the performance. The minimalist approach to theater reflected two important goals of the program—to encourage people to use what resources were available to express themselves and to demonstrate that it does not take elaborate or expensive props and sets to connect in a meaningful way with the audience.¹⁴ In the pursuit of these goals, the theater program mirrored the Direct Cinema/ Cinema Verité style prevalent in the film program. Like June Appal, Roadside Theater was a new way for Appalachians to speak for themselves.

Throughout the 1970s Roadside operated without a permanent performance space. The success of Roadside's performances relied on personal connections with the audience and vocalizations in storytelling style. The earliest statement of its goal in Appalshop materials

¹³ Appalshop, *Appalshop Background Information*, 1.

¹⁴ Hatfield, "Tales of Appalachia: Roadside Theatre," 44.

was “the perpetuation of cultural heritage, and collaboration with the community to create a contemporary cultural identity linked to progressive social change.”¹⁵ Roadside sought to achieve this with a unique style of staging performances that were combinations of church services, oral history, storytelling, and Appalachian musicals.¹⁶

Roadside’s first show reflected the crossover from traditional theater. It was a staging of *Peter Pan* in March 1974 for Whitesburg fourth graders. By September of the same year Roadside writers and actors were working exclusively with what they saw as Appalachian themes and material. Keeping with Wright’s original ideas, the first performance of regional material was a collection of stories. They included Jack tales, local family legends, ghost stories, and other folk tales. Productions evolved and the actors used different stories based on the audience, venue, and perceived effectiveness of the material. Collectively they performed different combinations of stories under several titles including *Grandfather’s Tales* and *Mountain Tales*.¹⁷

Red Fox’s Second Hangin’ was the first original full-length piece that Roadside artists wrote and performed. It also marked the program’s foray into the more politically charged aspects of Appalshop’s artistic output. The central event in the play is an 1893 lynching of a local doctor named M.B “Doc” Taylor. The Roadside actors and writers began by extensively researching the events surrounding Taylor’s death. In the course of researching the historical events, they discovered previously unknown documents, including the original transcript of the trial, which convinced them that leaders in the coal industry framed Taylor

¹⁵ Lynda Burnham, "Reaching for the Valley of the Sun: The American Festival Project's Untold Stories," *ibid*44, no. 3 (Fall 2000), 77-78.

¹⁶ Appalshop, *Roadside Theater*, Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Unlabeled box, 1.

¹⁷ *Mountain Tales (Roadside Theater)*, directed by Roadside Theater, (Whitesburg, KY: June Appal Recordings, 1980), Sound Recording.

and facilitated his unjust execution.¹⁸ This was not the version of the story with which most people were familiar. Fox Jr.'s *Trail of the Lonesome Pine* incorporated a fictionalized version that was more sympathetic to the coal industry. Because of the novel's popularity, this was the version that had prevailed to this point.



*Figure 4- Red Fox's Second Hangin',*¹⁹

Roadside used images, music, language, and accents that reinforced the idea of Appalachian cultural preservation and identity. The goal in presenting these elements of culture in a positive light and to people that had limited access to theater was to encourage the audience to embrace a more positive outlook on their culture and themselves. Baker said,

*I know how embarrassed I was once to be a hillbilly. We do this to say to mountain people, Look you've got a tradition—not only people and stories and history to be proud of, but a style that's special.*²⁰

¹⁸ Hatfield, "Tales of Appalachia: Roadside Theatre," 47.

¹⁹ Photo reprinted from Hatfield, 46.

²⁰ Don Baker, quoted in Ben A. Franklin, "An Appalachian Drama Captures Washington Audience," *New York Times*, May 12 1977, 17.

In an essay on Community-based theater Cocke went a step further in describing his experiences with early Roadside performances:

*To no longer be dependent upon other people's versions of the truth about you and your people, to begin the search for the truth about yourself, was nothing short of revolutionary for these young people who had inherited 200 years of being unfavorably stereotyped in the popular culture.*²¹

Because of the face-to-face contact Roadside demanded, it had the potential to have a demonstrable influence on the way individual Appalachians saw their culture, their history, and themselves. The early leaders in the program experienced what they saw as a profound impact on their audiences, made numerous connections, and received many expressions of gratitude from the communities where they performed. In this way they attempted to use theater to undermine cultural shame which is a crippling barrier to social change.

The original concept for Roadside Theater included limiting performances to locations in the region. Baker and Cocke saw local performances as an important aspect of Roadside's operations early on because "conventional theater rarely reaches the back hollows."²² In the region they performed in schools, libraries, churches, coal camps, and in tents or open air at fairs, festivals, community picnics, and numerous other venues and events.²³ However, in 1976-77 financial concerns and interest and acclaim from outside the region encouraged Appalshop to expand Roadside Theater to reach much wider audiences including off-Broadway theaters and Lincoln Center in New York, Atlanta, Georgia, Cincinnati and Dayton, Ohio, Knoxville, Tennessee, Chicago, Illinois, Washington, District

²¹ Dudley Cocke quoted in Ellis, "Theatre and Community Formation: Two Models of Self Representation," 94.

²² Dudley Cocke quoted in Hatfield, "Tales of Appalachia: Roadside Theatre," 45.

²³ Appalshop, *Roadside Theater*, 1.

of Columbia, and numerous other locations reaching to the west coast.²⁴ Within its first three years of existence Roadside Theater gave over 300 performances before a total of 750,000 people.²⁵ In the years immediately prior to the construction of a home theater in 1982, Roadside performers were consistently performing 200 shows a year on the road.²⁶

Though Roadside drew material from rural experiences, the performances enjoyed a positive reception in urban areas as well.²⁷ As with the films that received such warm receptions in cities, this indicated that “Appalachian” themes had broad appeal to national audiences.

At its inception in 1974, Roadside Theater was one of a handful of theaters in the United States with the goal of “...the perpetuation of cultural heritage, and collaboration with the community to create a contemporary cultural identity linked to progressive social change.”²⁸ Since the early 1970s, it has been the topic of several studies of the potential for grassroots theater to transform communities and repair damaged cultural identities.²⁹ One example of the role Roadside played in this larger national movement is a conference called the *Arts Idea Exchange* in 1978 that focused on neighborhood arts groups. One of Appalshop’s founders, Dee Davis, represented Appalshop at the Washington, DC meeting and, along with two other leaders from MACE from the Deep South and a Puerto Rican

²⁴ Ibid and Franklin, 17.

²⁵ Appalshop, *Appalshop Background Information*, 1.

²⁶ Hatfield, "Tales of Appalachia: Roadside Theatre," 47-48.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Burnham, "Reaching for the Valley of the Sun: The American Festival Project's Untold Stories," 78.

²⁹ See Ellis, "Theatre and Community Formation: Two Models of Self Representation,"; Burnham, "Reaching for the Valley of the Sun: The American Festival Project's Untold Stories,"; Sharon Hatfield, "Tales of Appalachia: Roadside Theatre," *ibid*, 27, no. 2 (Summer 1983).

community from New York City, shared ideas and led discussions with 250 participants about the struggles and effectiveness of using dramatic artistic expression to heal communities.³⁰

Like the film program, Roadside allowed the organization to serve as a regional institution that offered Appalachians the opportunity to speak for themselves both in their communities and across the nation. This was an important part of Appalshop's overall goals to change the negative view of the region in national culture and to afford regional residents the chance to tell their own stories.

Photography

The idea of "Appalachians Speaking for Themselves" went well beyond words. Offering a more authentic version of the images that defined Appalachia was always a significant part of Appalshop's goals. Images of the region generated by outsiders appeared to some in the region to be rooted in cultural degradation and they were a constant reminder of the importance of who controlled the perception of Appalachia in America. The films, album covers, publications, television, and theater productions all had visual elements that made up part of their effectiveness and their impact. However, still photography for its own sake and in its own right did not really become an independent part of the organization until Appalshop invited Wendy Ewald to spearhead a new program in 1976.

Of the several staff members that joined Appalshop to run the expansion programs in the mid-1970s, Wendy Ewald's personal ties to Appalachian regional identity and culture were the most tenuous. She was born in Michigan—outside of even the most generous

³⁰"Arts Idea Exchange," *Washington Post* (1978). <http://infoweb.newsbank.com> (accessed March 6, 2012), 1.

definitions of the region. She attended Antioch College in Ohio (at the same time as Mimi Pickering) and went on to study photography in New England at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The only time of length that she spent in Appalachia were her years working with Appalshop's photography program.

Her personal distance from the subject matter and her training and experience with a variety of disfranchised communities influenced her work at Appalshop. Ewald dedicated her photography career to empowering the powerless by giving them the opportunity to document the images of their daily lives—especially groups that traditionally had limited social power such as women and children. Whitesburg was one of several international locations where she worked.

While in Kentucky the photography program under her direction produced three projects funded by the National Endowment of the Arts that included travelling exhibitions and published photograph collections.³¹ The project that received the most acclaim featured photographs by school children. She began by teaching a "Photography in the Schools" program at three Letcher County Schools. She compiled photographs taken by children ranging from fifth to eighth grade into an exhibit that toured throughout Kentucky and was eventually shown in New York City and at the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, DC, called *Portraits and Dreams: Children's Photographs of Appalachia*.³² The photographs ranged from mundane images of day-to-day life to haunting images of devastating poverty

³¹ Wendy Ewald, *Appalachian Women: Three Generations*, ed. (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1981); Loyal Jones Wendy Ewald, and Lyn Adams, *Appalachia: A Self-Portrait*, ed. (Frankfort, KY: Gnomon Press for Appalshop, 1979); Wendy Ewald, *Portraits and Dreams: Photographs and Stories by Children of the Appalachians*, ed. (New York: Writers and Readers Publishers, Inc., 1985).

³²Hardy, "Appalshop," 7.

and violent imaginations.³³ She resisted the idea that photographers had to be trained professionals to be effective artists. Ewald worked with the children to allow them to tell their own stories and the results exhibited her belief that the subtext of photos is as important as the images.³⁴ Her teaching methods focusing on bottom-up personal expression among students fit well with Appalshop's goals to promote "Appalachians Speaking for Themselves." Ewald's program broadened Appalshop's reach by allowing women and children with little education or experience the opportunity to include their views of their communities in the sea of images that defined the region.

There is little evidence that these exhibits were shown very often in smaller Appalachian communities. This type of artistic output was most commonly consumed in museums or at universities. In this way the Photography program more than any of Appalshop's other departments, appealed to formally educated urban audiences. Appalshop was one stop for Ewald on the way to a diverse and successful career using photography to explore identity and culture in many contexts. The Appalachian exhibits were a few among many of her projects that illustrated the complexity of daily life by juxtaposing larger themes of social inequality and personal introspection.

Wendy Ewald embodied the complex dynamics at work at Appalshop during "the great leap forward." She was a categorical outsider. In her study of Roadside Theater's role in Appalachian identity Anne Michelle Ellis asserts, "Throughout Appalshop, the vast majority of staff are of the region, with the few exceptions being recruited for their specific talents and abilities."³⁵ Wendy Ewald is a salient example. She went on in her career to do

³³ Ewald, *Portraits and Dreams: Photographs and Stories by Children of the Appalachians*.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Ellis, "Theatre and Community Formation: Two Models of Self Representation," 11.

similar projects in locations around the world and is widely respected as an innovative and talented artist. She has worked most commonly with women and children in poor communities striving to provide an outlet and encouragement for people whose perspectives she believed were often disregarded. Ewald brought her larger ideas about media and society into the Appalachian context with the Photography program in the 1970s. Like Roadside, the Photography program was not focused on generating revenue. Its focus was on community healing, identity exploration, and empowerment through artistic expression.

Mountain Review Magazine

As with all the expansion programs, *Mountain Review Magazine* had roots in Appalshop's earliest years. The student artists began publishing *Appal Seed* and *Appalbrochure* in 1971.³⁶ These were pamphlet style newsletters that informed readers of releases, screenings, grants, and awards associated with the early films, and reprinted articles about the program. They also included schedules of community events for other organizations and articles about Appalachian issues like local politics and the coal industry.

Mountain Review built on these early publications. In 1974 Appalshop began a journal and writing workshop. Staff members conceived *Mountain Review* as an outlet to publish works generated by the artists in the workshop. It was not an independent department like June Appal or Roadside Theater--the initial commitment was only for four quarterly magazines beginning in September 1974. However, it was more popular than expected and it outlasted the writing workshops. Publication continued into the early 1980s.

³⁶ Community Film Workshop of Appalachia, *Appal Seed*, ed. (Whitesburg, KY: Community Film Workshop of Appalachia, 1971); Community Film Appalachian Film Workshop, *Appalbrochure 1971*, ed. (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1971).

Mountain Review's format was a delightfully inconsistent cornucopia of information. It included news about Appalshop and schedules of events like its predecessors. It also included submissions from Appalshop students that gave exposure to budding regional talent. As an Appalachian regional literary magazine it contained amateur and professional folk tales, new fiction, and poetry. However, that was only the beginning; it also contained non-fiction essays, historical recollections, cutting edge social commentary about regional politics and labor issues, photographs, religious articles, financial information, and book and music reviews.³⁷ The contributors included community organizations, activists, religious leaders, social commentators, academics, poets, and students.

Content in *Mountain Review* was specifically geared toward “native readers” and people with Appalachian roots that had relocated outside of the region.³⁸ The circulation was modest—2,000 readers by 1978.³⁹ However, the wide variety of articles and information revealed a great deal about Appalshop's role in shaping Appalachian identity and empowerment. In their introduction to the first edition, editors Lyn Adams and Susan Chesnut acknowledged the problems of publishing a magazine that attempted to represent an entire region.⁴⁰ In trying to define the parameters of the magazine and its readers, Adams and Chesnut found that “any preconceptions which were held have again and again been confounded.”⁴¹

³⁷ Lyn Adams and Susan Chesnut, ed. *Mountain Review*, Quarterly vols., vol. 1-4 (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, September 1974).

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Appalshop, *Appalshop Background Information*, 1.

⁴⁰ Lyn Adams and Susan Chesnut, ed. *Mountain Review.*, Volume 1, 1.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

This poignant observation was just as true for all of Appalshop's programs as it was for *Mountain Review*. The proliferation of art and media Appalshop generated in the 1970s undermined the idea of a cohesive single Appalachian culture while at the same time reinforcing empowerment through complex and diverse Appalachian identities. The idea of Appalachian culture is a political construct and Appalshop's artists were skilled at wresting some of the power that came from regional stereotypes away from outside interests and toward a greater understanding of both tradition and diversity in the region.

Films During the "Great Leap Forward"

As the other programs were starting out and gaining momentum in the 1970s, the film program remained the backbone of Appalshop's financial support and organizational framework. Projects generated for the second phase of AEMP and other films continued in the Direct Cinema/ Cinema Verité traditions which continued to grow more popular over the course of the 1970s. They also built on the subject matter and styles of the early films. For example Gene DuBey's *Sourwood Mountain Dulcimers* chronicled an artisan demonstrating how to craft the traditionally Appalachian instruments.⁴² Anthony Sloan continued the theme of personal biopic films with *Oaksie*, and in 1979 Frances Morton and Gene Dubey released the most in-depth study of the ravages of the coal industry Appalshop had produced to that point with the 50- minute film *Strip Mining: Energy, Environment, and Economics*.⁴³

One of the most interesting films of the late 1970s was a cultural preservation piece

⁴² *Sourwood Mountain Dulcimers, directed by* (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1977), VHS.

⁴³ *Strip Mining Energy, Environment, and Economics, directed by* (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1979), VHS. and *Oaksie, directed by* Anthony Sloan, (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1979), VHS.

directed by Frances Morton called *Waterground*.⁴⁴ *Waterground* documented an old style water-powered mill that had been active since 1840 and still functioned in its original capacity. It was located in Western North Carolina, which represents an expansion of Appalshop's range into non-coal areas of Appalachia.

Waterground was, on its surface, a historical record of a process quickly fading from modern American daily life in the vein of *Woodrow Cornett: Letcher County Butcher*.⁴⁵ However, in addition to beautifully capturing the process and the machinery, the filmmakers also elicited commentary from the miller about the way Americans consumed food products. He refused to add anything to the grain, including bleach or yeast to make it self-rising. He was suspicious of mass production of food and purchasing flour or meal in a situation where the consumer was unsure of its origins. This attitude demonstrated agency on the part of an individual that is not resistant to "progress" because of backward culture or fatalism but was an informed critique of a particular aspect of that progress deeply rooted in experience and knowledge.⁴⁶

Overall, the films in this period continued to demonstrate Appalshop's goals of cultural preservation, identity (re)construction, and social change through artistic expression. With more solid financial resources and more artists, films were typically longer, more developed, and more diverse than the collection of earlier offerings, but the style and substance demonstrated remarkable continuity.

⁴⁴ *Waterground*, directed by Frances Morton, (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1977), VHS.

⁴⁵ *Woodrow Cornett: Letcher County Butcher*, directed by Frank Majority, (Whitesburg, KY: Community Film Workshop of Appalachia, 1971), VHS.

⁴⁶ Patricia Beaver, Interview with the Author, Digital Audio Recording, Boone, NC, July 17, 2012. This film is also interesting because of its practical uses decades later. After the miller passed away, the mill was in danger of being torn down. *Waterground* was shown at an early meeting of the Weinberger Mill Preservation Society as an informative tool and a rallying point.

One of the most significant changes in the film program of the late 1970s was the evolving role of Bill Richardson. Richardson remained on the Board of Directors and was involved with Appalshop's various departments-- especially with fundraising--throughout "the great leap forward." However, much of his time and creative energy were taken up with a project that never came to fruition. Appalshop retained the rights to produce a second dramatic film. It was a film version of Appalachian author Gurney Norman's *Divine Right's Trip: A Novel of the Counterculture*.⁴⁷ The novel was lauded by critics in publications ranging from *Rolling Stone* to the *Guardian*. A *New York Times* reviewer that wrote, "[Divine Right's Trip] stands a good chance of being the book for a generation" and compared it to Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* and J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*.⁴⁸

Richardson and Norman believed that *Divine Right's Trip* reflected the important relationship between Appalachian young people and the national culture (and countercultures) of the 1960s and 70s.⁴⁹ They also thought Appalshop was the perfect choice to make the film version. However, practical limitations of making a large budget feature film impeded their vision. They made it as far as hiring writers to develop two different scripts, but in the end Appalshop never made the film.⁵⁰

When production of *Divine Rights Trip* fell through, Richardson began to remove himself from Appalshop's day-to-day operations and pursued his original passion for architecture. He secured his license and took on contracts for local community centers and

⁴⁷ Gurney Norman, *Divine Right's Trip: A Novel of the Counterculture*, ed. (Frankfort, KY: Gnomon Press, 1971).

⁴⁸ *New York Times* reviewer quoted in "Novel Written by Former Hazard Herald Editor Read Nation-Wide," *The Hazard Herald*, August 11, 1972, photocopied, page unclear. Appalshop Archive.

⁴⁹ Gurney Norman, Interview with the Author, Digital Audio Recording, Lexington, Kentucky, June 6, 2012; Bill Richardson, Interview with the Author, Tape Recording, Whitesburg, Kentucky, October 16, 2006.

⁵⁰ Bill Richardson, Interview with the Author.

schools. He was still part of the Appalshop Board of Directors until, in 1978, he chose to accept the offer to design a new building for the organization. Completion of the building ended Richardson's official affiliation with Appalshop, though he and his wife Josephine remained in the community and supportive of the organization.

Video and Cable Television

The first format Appalshop filmmakers worked with was 16mm film. This was the format of choice for most documentary filmmakers at the time. However, film was expensive and could only be used once, which made it an impediment to longer projects. The Appalshop filmmakers quickly started to move toward video, which had several benefits for the kind of films its students and artists created. The video format was less expensive, it could be reused (taped over), and it allowed easy and immediate review for training and more efficient editing.

The shift to video for some projects opened the door to the use of video technology for other purposes—including cable television. “The great leap forward” included establishment of a department dedicated to cable television programming. Shows produced for the Cable department mirrored subjects in Appalshop films. In fact, some of the earlier films were shown on cable television as part of the program. The cable TV program was less a departure from previous Appalshop artistic output and more a new outlet for Appalshop's finished products. It was an attractive option for making Appalshop productions more accessible—especially locally and in the region.

The Cable TV department was one of the earliest expansion programs the core developed, but it took several years to come to fruition as a financially viable endeavor. The

first paid contracts in the CATV department were for filming and editing segments for other organizations and a few short public service and promotional spots. These early jobs paid very little. As it grew, CATV offered more opportunity as an outlet for Appalshop artists' creative output than as a revenue stream. The first breakthrough for the program was an invitation in 1973 to put on a weekly show for the local NBC affiliate in Hazard. In a budget proposal one staff member designated the offer as "no money—good exposure."⁵¹

Increased exposure meant a greater scope of influence for the Appalshop goal of facilitating Appalachians Speaking for Themselves. The opportunity to produce television shows gave Appalshop the chance to reach audiences that had been previously unreachable. For the average person to view an Appalshop film before the expansion into cable television and distribution, he or she either had to attend a showing or be part of an organization that used the films in a program setting. The mechanism for personal rentals was limited and there were no television broadcasts of Appalshop films until after the expansion.

One reason television was so appealing to Appalshoppers was that it had become one of the most pervasive and effective conveyors of stereotypes about rural and mountain people in in the 1950s and 60s. Staff awareness of and consternation with this trend that often portrayed rural people as buffoons on television were clear in an early 1970s grant proposal. It quoted a scathing critique of mainstream television from Jim Branscome's *Annihilating the Hillbilly: The Appalachians' Struggle with American Institutions*:

In September, CBS began its new television season with the theme "Let's All Get Together." If you watch television on Tuesday nights, you know that who got together, back-to-back, were the stars of three of America's most popular TV programs: The Beverly Hillbillies," "Green Acres," and "Hee-Haw." Each week millions of Americans gather around their sets to watch this combination, which has to be the

⁵¹ Appalshop, *Budget Proposal*, Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Unlabeled box, 2.

*most intensive effort ever exerted by a nation to belittle, demean, and otherwise destroy a minority people within its boundaries...all only a short while after Eric Sevareid has completed his nightly lecture to the American public on decency, integrity, dignity, and the other great American virtues.*⁵²

By the 1970s television was a pervasive influence in American culture and some perceived the images these particular shows portrayed as damaging representations of rural life.

Appalshop filmmakers saw access to television as another opportunity to broadcast more accurate versions of Appalachian culture and identity to broader and more diverse audiences. Moreover, controlling media broadcast in this format was an important part of the democratization of technology many Appalshop artists considered to be at the heart of their work.

The program began with the Hazard affiliate which reached local audiences in and near Appalshop's home community in Whitesburg in unprecedented numbers. Appalshop valued the expansion of distribution to local audiences. The organization was also committed to its relationship with local people because the artists believed they would benefit from the comparatively authentic portrayals of their communities and neighbors. The subject matter was largely drawn from these communities and therefore the artists wanted them to be as readily available as possible to people that might likely identify with the subjects and benefit from the artists' work. Though Appalshop's reach eventually expanded well beyond these local communities, many of the artists saw the greatest need for more accurate media portrayals and potential for cultural empowerment in the communities closest to them geographically with which they shared common interests and concerns. With

⁵²Quoted in Appalshop Board of Directors, *Proposal to Campaign for Human Development*, 1972. Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Box F5, Operational Records 1970-77, Correspondence and Proposals and Projects

the addition of a Cable TV department, the local audience for Appalshop's artistic output grew exponentially from the handful of people that had seen an Appalshop production prior to the expansion.

In 1977 Appalshop began to produce a regular series for Kentucky Educational Television called *Headwaters*.⁵³ That same year PBS carried a 90 minute conglomeration of several of Appalshop's early films called "The Appalshop Show" in national markets. It was significant because it was the first national mass exhibition of Appalshop's work via television. Museum exhibits and film festival screenings offered the opportunity for some exposure—especially to art communities and critics. However, cable television reached people at home in their living rooms both in and outside the region.

The CATV program was in some ways less directly artistically driven and slower to bloom than the other expansion programs. However, it eventually opened up opportunities to showcase output from all of Appalshop's various departments for comparatively large and diverse audiences. By the end of the decade, this program overlapped significantly with the film program and was a large part of Appalshop's growth from a local and regional institution to a nationally recognized and lauded multi-media and arts organization.

Distribution

Along with the other expansion programs, Appalshop sought a wider audience by establishing a dedicated Distribution department. Distribution was a two-pronged effort. One goal was to generate revenue and the other one was to encourage consumption of

⁵³ Appalshop, *Headwaters*, Specific Date Unknown--Early 1980s. Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Unlabeled box, 1.

Appalshop's output and therefore increase the scope of its influence—especially within surrounding communities and the Appalachian region.

As early as 1971, Appalachian Film Workshop staff members considered marketing to regional and national networks.⁵⁴ The board of directors included distribution as its own department in the reorganization that occurred in the wake of the cut off from the OEO and CFWC. By 1973, distribution had become a significant part of Appalshop's strategic planning. The goal was for the film program to be largely self-supporting from rentals and sales. It started slowly, but by the end of the decade it was a significant revenue-generating part of the organization. In 1977 distribution grossed \$38,000, and by 1978 had logged 469 film sales and 1,921 rentals in forty states and seven foreign countries.⁵⁵ It was also one of the most important avenues through which Appalshop art and the ideas about Appalachian identity, culture, and social change that it contained spread.

Though the scope of the Distribution program grew over time to encompass every state in the union and many foreign countries, national exposure was incidental to Appalshop's primary goals early on.⁵⁶ The filmmakers and other artists completed projects first for personal expression, second for the local community of Whitesburg, and finally for the Appalachian region.⁵⁷ Regional distribution of the films was an ongoing concern for the

⁵⁴ Appalachian Film Workshop, *Appalachian Film Workshop Board Meeting Minutes*, July 13, 1971. Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Box G1 Board Meeting Minutes, File Name 1971.

⁵⁵ Appalshop, *Appalshop Background Information*, 1.

⁵⁶ Richardson, Interview with the Author. Herb E. Smith, Interview with the Author, Tape Recording, Whitesburg, Kentucky, October 17, 2006.

⁵⁷ Smith, Interview with the Author.

core of leaders at Appalshop.⁵⁸ In the midst of growing into a nationally recognized arts and media organization, Appalshop staffers wanted to make sure that local and regional people had as much opportunity as possible to access their artistic output.⁵⁹ The staff wanted to ensure that their successes and expansion did not detract from their original goal, and they dedicated a great deal of time and energy trying to come up with creative ways to make the films accessible in the region. Inspired by Roadside Theater, one staff member proposed a van with mobile viewing equipment that could travel into the more remote areas of Appalachia.⁶⁰

Van viewing never materialized, but Appalshop staff members had more success with a plan to target regional schools for film distribution.⁶¹ Records of rentals and sales indicated increased use in classrooms over the course of the 1970s.⁶² Filmmakers generally agreed that public schools in Appalachia were among the most important venues to show films. Children and teenagers were particularly susceptible to the degrading perspective of the region prevalent in mainstream media. They were also the least likely to be exposed to the fading aspects of Appalachian culture that many of the films tried to preserve. School

⁵⁸ Appalshop, *Distribution*, 1972. Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Box F5, Operational Records 1970-7; Appalshop, *Appalshop Films: Educational Materials from Appalshop*, ed. (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1985).

⁵⁹ *Appalshop Board Meeting Minutes*, June 1973. Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Box G1 Board Meeting Minutes , 1.

⁶⁰ Appalshop, *Proposal to Lklp*, Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Box F5, Operational Records 1970-77 Correspondence and Proposals and Projects.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Appalshop, *Appendix B- Aemp Film Distribution Table*, July 1978. Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Box F4- Operational Records Unknown Dates; CFWC Proposals, Correspondence, Misc., Appendix B. File name: AEMP.

children were, therefore, among the most important recipients of the cultural reinterpretation Appalshop offered.

Appalshop's goal to reach school-aged children led to a project that reflected both the scope of its influence and the increasing self-awareness of its role in not just preserving but interpreting Appalachian culture. In 1976 a Ford Foundation grant allowed Appalshop to commission Film Transcript and Study Guides to accompany film purchases and rentals for classroom use.⁶³ These documents contextualized film topics and included discussion questions, suggested readings, and assignments to complement each film.

Targeting school-age students throughout the region was an important marketing strategy, but it also demonstrated Appalshop's growing role as a regional institution. Though the film subjects were local, and the artists remained committed to their local communities, it is clear from the efforts at distribution that the artists also believed they were relevant to people in the region outside their immediate communities. This was part of an overall shift in scope that occurred during the 1970s and that came to fruition as Appalshop partnered with other groups, especially the Appalachian Studies movement, in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Film Screenings and Live Performances

The expansion programs also encouraged an increase in live performances. It was in the context of film screenings, theater performances, concerts, and exhibitions that Appalshop gained the exposure, critical acclaim, and (indirectly) the funding that fueled its other efforts. Bill Richardson encouraged film screenings from the earliest days of the Appalachian Film workshop. Although this was not what the New York office had in mind

⁶³ *Appalshop Films*, ed. (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1981), 1.

for the training programs, he believed that the films Appalshop was making were good enough to show anywhere and that doing so would benefit both the audiences and the student filmmakers.⁶⁴ CFWA, Appalachian Film Workshop, and Appalshop showed the films locally for civic organizations and in community venues such as schools, churches, town halls, and civic clubs.⁶⁵ Typically, a screening included a few films and a discussion led by the filmmakers and other staff members.⁶⁶ The filmmakers encouraged audiences to engage in dialogue after viewing films. The public screenings became forums for discussions of film content and the ideas it conveyed.

Filmmakers also screened the early films at festivals around the region with generally positive results including earning several awards. Student and amateur film festivals were popular in the early 1970s. They provided early outlets for showing Appalshop's finished products in public. Herb Smith was a freshmen at Vanderbilt University in 1971 and he exhibited *In Ya Blood* at a Freshmen Arts Festival.⁶⁷ A student film reviewer noted that "it comes across real"—reflecting the influence of Direct Cinema and Cinema Verité on these types of festivals at the time.⁶⁸ He also wrote that if the rest of the entries "live up to this ...it will be well worth upper-class as well as freshmen attention."⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Bill Richardson, Interview with the Author.

⁶⁵ Kaufman, A7.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Walt Potter, "Herb E's Flick and the Frosh Arts," *The Vanderbilt Hustler*, February 12, 1971, 9.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Appalshoppers showed *Whitesburg Epic* at Morehead State University in the first Appalachian Film Festival in 1972.⁷⁰ They often screened at other Kentucky locations including several showings at the University of Kentucky. One of the earliest awards the Community Film Workshop of Appalachia received was at the D.W. Griffith Film Festival at the University of Louisville.⁷¹ They also held screenings and fundraisers in public venues such as The *Kentucky* and the *Vogue* Theaters.⁷²

Early successes and acclaim at regional festivals led to opportunities in more urban venues. An award winning screening at a University of Tennessee festival, satirically name the "Cans" Film Festival because the entry fee was a can of food, led to an invitation from judge and *Village Voice* film critic John Mekas to screen *Appalachian Genesis*, *Judge Wooten and the Coon-on-a-Log*, *Woodrow Cornett: Letcher County Butcher*, and *In Ya Blood* in New York City.⁷³ In 1972, when funds were severely limited, Appalshop artists screened films and led discussions in New Hampshire at the New England College Film Festival, in Connecticut at The Yale Law School Film Society Special Event, at the University of Illinois' Illini Union, the Walker Arts Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and the Temple University Film Forum, and the Museum of Modern Art in New York City.⁷⁴ By 1974 screenings had reached the nation's capital with showings at the Janus Theater in

⁷⁰ Appalshop, *Appalbrochure 1972*, ed. (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1972), 18.

⁷¹ Community Film Workshop, *Appalbrochure 1971*, 3.

⁷² Carol Marie Cooper, "Film Documents Difficulties Facing "Coalmining Women"," *Louisville Courier-Journal*, March 6 1983, B 1-2.; John Furcolow, ""Big Lever" Follows Election in Leslie County," *Lexington Herald*, 1982, 1., reprinted in Appalshop Promotional Poster, 1982, 1.

⁷³ "Film Workshop Takes Four Awards," *Mountain Eagle*. Reprinted in *Appalbrochure 1973*, 17, February 24, 1972, Page unknown; Jonas Mekas, *Village Voice*--Reprinted in *Appalbrochure 1972*, May 11, 1972, Accessed in Appalshop Archives. Photocopied. Page unknown.

⁷⁴ *Appalbrochure 1972*, 18. Pat Aufderheide, "Appalachian Film Workshop Show, No Hoedown," *Minnesota Daily*, November 30 1972, 10.

Washington, DC and travelled as far west as California for a screening at the University of California at Berkeley.⁷⁵ By the early 1980s Appalshop films were shown all over the United States and in a few European countries and broadcasted on local and national Public Broadcasting Networks regularly.

University and theater screenings were generally held in small auditoriums with capacities of 200-300, but there are not adequate records available to establish accurate numbers of people who attended these screenings. The venue sizes varied widely. The feedback the screenings generated was more important than the number of attendees. Each of these screenings evoked press coverage, presented opportunities to network with other groups that found Appalshop of interest for a variety of reasons, and raised Appalshop's regional and national profile.⁷⁶

As a result of these experiences, the artists matured both in their ability to make effective films and in their understanding of the role the organization might have as a regional institution explaining the real Appalachia to the rest of the country. Balancing the negative representations of the region in mainstream culture was part of Appalshop's motivation since its founding. Film screenings were the first events that began to help these young artists see what they were up against in terms of the pervasiveness of Appalachian

⁷⁵ Carol Polsgrove, "Appalachia Discovers Itself on Film," *Washington Star-News*, January 27, 1974, 3-5.. William Bates, "Appalachians Films at Archive Tonight," *The Daily Californian*, October 14 1974, Accessed in Appalshop Archives. Photocopied. Page unknown.

⁷⁶ Rena Niles, "Appalshop," *Bluegrass Woman*, 34-35. ; Nancy Legge, "Video/ Film," *The Villager*, November 22 1979, 1; Leslie Bennetts, "The Hillbillies' Story, Told in Films at Modern," *The New York Times*, December 1 1984, 11.; Cooper, "Film Documents Difficulties Facing "Coalmining Women"; Gary Arnold, "Film Workshop Is Great 'Fluke'," *Washington Post reprinted in Las Vegas Review Journal*, February 8, 2; Donia Mills, "Kentucky Documentaries-Films from Appal," *Washington Star-News*, January 30, 1974, E5.; J. Hoberman, "Appalshop: Films from Appalachia," *The Voice*, November 26, 1979, 45.; "Off-the-Beaten-Path Guide to Moviegoing," *The New York Times*, 1979, 7.; Janet Maslin, "Film: Five Short Films from Appalachia," *New York Times*, November 22, 1979, 17.; Gary Arnold, "Tribute to an Appalachian Mr. Chips," *The Washington Post*, March 24 1981, B9.; "Tv Listings Friday, January 28," *New York Times*, January 28, 1977, Accessed in Appalshop Archives. Pages unknown.

stereotypes and negative media portrayals in mainstream culture. In this context, through audience responses, press coverage, and reviews, they learned how their representations looked to outsiders.

The expansion programs--Roadside Theater, June Appal Records, and the Photography Program--set different patterns for exhibition of artistic output based on the type of media that each used to disseminate products and the ideas about the region they contained. In the context of live performances, Roadside Theater was the most distinct because it never aimed to generate a finished product in the way that films or albums were finished products. Roadside writers and performers used scripts and had a basic framework for the shows they were performing. However, because throughout the 1970s they were working without a permanent facility, the performers regularly improvised and adapted to a wide variety of performance spaces and audiences.⁷⁷

Roadside Theater's founders and early leaders had little interest in expanding outside of the region.⁷⁸ They focused on intimate theater experiences. Their early performances were largely in "more than 500 small communities, town, back hollows, and coal camps, in tents, at schools, fairs, churches, libraries, community center, picnics, club house, and festivals."⁷⁹ Roadside performances were also aimed at counteracting a broad critique of national mass media, but not as much as they were trying to connect with individuals and communities. They embellished some of the stereotypes—because of the medium of theater especially language and accent—specifically to help relieve anxiety Appalachian people (often children) felt about the way they spoke. By trekking through hollows and targeting

⁷⁷ Hatfield, "Tales of Appalachia: Roadside Theatre," 48.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Appalshop, *Roadside Theater*, 1.

schools Roadside actors regularly reached audiences at a more intimate level than a film screening or an album could ever hope.

Roadside Theater performed in ad hoc spaces before small audiences, but increased their impact in the region by touring often. The range covered every Appalachian state.⁸⁰ From there the geographical scope of Roadside performances grew even larger. In this way Roadside's pattern mirrored the film program. Local and regional successes led to invitations to wider audiences. By the late 1970s Roadside actors had also staged performances in Washington, DC, at a Folklife Festival and at off-Broadway venues in New York City.⁸¹ However, even in the late 1970s Roadside promotional material continued to highlight that its performers "all grew up in Central Appalachia."⁸² The emphasis on the actors' origins reflects a strong dedication to preserve the authentic Appalachian identity Roadside leaders believed was a key component of their work. If one child saw a Roadside play and began to view his or her culture and identity in a more positive light, then Roadside achieved its goal. This was a more personal method of social change that was aimed less at public policy and more at the way Appalachians viewed themselves.

June Appal's contribution in the early years to Appalshop's influence was largely embodied in the artists the staff members chose to record, but apart from Jack Wright, these artists were not Appalshop staff members like the members of Roadside. Like Roadside, June Appal did not have a dedicated performance space—a stage to facilitate concerts. In its early years June Appal's impact early on was more through distribution than live performance.

⁸⁰ Appalshop, *Appalshop Background Information*, 1.

⁸¹ Appalshop, *Roadside Theater*, 1.

⁸² *Ibid.*

This changed dramatically over time. Wright became interested in the idea of large outdoor festivals with several performers. Festival format concerts had taken hold at the national level among the counterculture with high-profile gatherings like the Monterey Pop Festival and Woodstock. Wright adapted this idea to Appalachia. He put on some of the first shows of this type in the region. In the 1980s this grew into an annual music festival called *Seedtime in the Cumberland*, which remains one of Appalshop's most popular events.

Conclusion

Appalshop filmmakers continued making documentary films throughout the 1970s. As the expansion programs became more stable, collaboration between the departments increased. There were several examples of this collaboration in the late 1970s.

Jack Wright's dual roles in founding June Appal and Roadside Theater meant close collaboration between those programs. Even after Don Baker took over Roadside, Wright continued to tour with the group as a storyteller and was involved with Roadside until his departure from Appalshop in 1985.

Filmmakers Scott Faulkner and Anthony Sloan followed up June Appal's first album release with a critically acclaimed documentary about Nimrod Workman.⁸³ This was the first of over a dozen Appalshop films about musicians ranging from regional artists such as Sarah Ogan Gunning to national acts such as the Carter Family and Ralph Stanley. In 1982, Herb E. Smith directed a three minute music video (in the early days of that medium) for a song recorded at June Appal by Lee Sexton, an Eastern Kentucky banjo player, and

⁸³*Passing through the Garden*, directed by Nimrod Workman and Phyllis Bowles, (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1975), Sound Recording.; *Nimrod Workman: To Fit My Own Category*, directed by (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1975), VHS.

submitted it to the national country music video station, which, to his surprise, played “the hell out of it” for several months alongside Top 40 Country hits for national audiences.⁸⁴

In 1982 Appalshop released a video recording of *Three Mountain Tales*, which was a sampling of some of Roadside’s storytelling and in 1983 Don Baker, in conjunction with the film program, directed a film of Roadside’s first full length original play, *Red Fox’s Second Hanging*.⁸⁵ The film team also put together a striking piece on Wendy Ewald’s *Portraits and Dreams*, and June Appal recorded and released a folktale written and read by Gurney Norman called *Ancient Creek* in 1975.⁸⁶

Though the departments operated under different coordinators, the collaboration between film, music, and theater was indicative of the connections among Appalshop’s artists. Though Appalshop had a decentralized organizational structure, the subject matter reflected a common vision of “Appalachians Speaking for Themselves.” Artists shared the stage for various events including a fundraiser for a National Endowment of Humanities matching grant in August 1978 that included film screenings, a Roadside Theater performance, and a concert by Appalshop musicians.

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⁸⁴ Smith, Interview with the Author. *Whoa Mule*, directed by Herb E. Smith, (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1982), VHS.

⁸⁵ *Three Mountain Tales*, directed by (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1982), VHS.; *Red Fox’s Second Hanging*, directed by (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1983), VHS.

⁸⁶ Ewald, *Portraits and Dreams: Photographs and Stories by Children of the Appalachians*.; Gurney Norman, *Ancient Creek*, ed. (Whitesburg, KY: June Appal Recordings, 1975), Sound Recording.

Chapter Five

Participants and Creators:

Appalshop and Appalachian Social Movements

*We've also witnessed in the past three decades a cultural flowering in Appalachia - not only a renewed interest in traditional forms, but a powerful evolution of contemporary mountain culture as people have begun to develop a consciousness in and pride in being Appalachian. The work of people such as ... the folks at Appalshop is at the heart of this renaissance. – Stephen Fisher, 1999.*¹

*As they have documented Appalachian history and culture through film, video, music recordings, theater, photography, and radio, they have been an important part of the cultural revitalization movement in the Appalachian region in the 1970s and 1980s. They have been participants and creators as well as documenting and preserving regional culture. Appalshop has been part of a cultural revival in the mountains and...has helped to rediscover and reinterpret Appalachia for its generation. ---Helen Lewis, 1990.*²

The artistic style of the early Appalshop films, plays, audio recordings, and other output was deeply rooted in documentary film trends brought on by technological change that emphasized raw authenticity and self-directed subject matter. However, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the organizational culture at Appalshop and the content of its products were also increasingly shaped by interactions with a groundswell of social movements in Appalachia. Appalshop's expansion over the course of the 1970s brought its artists and promoters in contact with other reformers, artists, activists, and scholars in the region that were all part of an Appalachian renaissance that coalesced contemporary with

¹ Stephen Fisher, "Anger and Hope in Nearly Equal Measure: An Interview with Stephen Fischer," *Appalachian Journal* 26, no. 2 (Winter 1999): 185.

² Helen M. Lewis, *Appalshop: Preserving, Participating in, and Creating Southern Mountain Culture*, ed. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1990) 84.

Appalshop's founding and with which it grew and matured.³ Along with the artists' personal experiences, these relationships and the understanding of Appalachian issues prevalent during the renaissance significantly influenced the choice of subject matter in nearly all of Appalshop's artistic output. Relationships with other Appalachian social movement groups and participants helped to frame the content in the output Appalshop artists used to express themselves, to raise awareness, to reinforce identity, and to actively seek social justice in the region. Consequently, Appalshop achieved its greatest successes toward its goal of social change in the region in this context.

Appalachian Social Movements—Antecedents and Influences

It is essential to understand Appalshop growth and maturation in the context of a simultaneously unfolding movement of Appalachian social movements that focused on the promotion of positive Appalachian regional identity and struggles for social, economic, and environmental justice. Such movements had distant but discernible roots in earlier efforts at regional social uplift at the end of the nineteenth century and early decades of the twentieth century that coincided with the rapid industrialization of the southern mountains.

In this period, numerous individuals, organizations, groups, institutions, and agencies tried to solve Appalachia's problems and to encourage progress by "developing" the region along a pre-determined trajectory of modernization.⁴ Fueled by the exoticism of local color writing, religiously-based uplift impulses in the Northeast, and the potential for profit natural resources offered, outsiders intent on fixing Appalachia's problems poured into the region. Unfortunately, at this time, the parameters of social improvement were set

³ The term Appalachian Renaissance is used by noted activist, author, and political science professor Steven Fisher in Fisher, "Anger and Hope in Nearly Equal Measure: An Interview with Stephen Fischer," 185.

⁴ David Whisnant, *Modernizing the Mountaineer*, ed. (New York: Burt Franklin and Company, 1980), xv.

based on the elements of Appalachian society that industrialists and reformers deemed to be impediments to industrialization.

Efforts at social improvement in the region in the first half of the twentieth century faced debilitating obstacles. Appalachian scholar Stephen Fisher argued, in his essay on grass roots protest organizations in Appalachia, that social change in this period was characterized by obstacles that ultimately led to quiescence including

*single industry economies, the control of land and resources by large absentee companies, high levels of poverty and unemployment, the frequent use of red-baiting, intimidation and physical force to squelch dissent, political corruption, a highly stratified and oppressive class system....cultural traditions that stressed individualism, the strength of capitalist ideology, racism and sexism, lack of strong local organizations, high illiteracy rates, and poor transportation and communication systems.*⁵

Faced with these formidable obstacles, it is not surprising that many efforts to improve communities in the region were ineffective. By the time the Appalachian region was “rediscovered” in the late 1950s and early 1960s, conditions in some areas of the region were significantly worse than they had been before industrialization and efforts at social uplift—before “development” and “progress” became priorities.

Despite the failure of many social change agents in the first half of the twentieth century to significantly improve communities in the region, there were some exceptions. A few organizations founded during this earlier period persisted into the next iteration of concentrated social improvement efforts in the 1960s and 1970s.

One example of an important older organization that was part of the groundswell of social movement groups focused on Appalachia in the 1960s was the Highlander Folk School (later Highlander Center). Myles Horton and Don West founded Highlander in

⁵ Stephen L. Fisher, *The Grass Roots Speak Back*, ed. (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 203.

Monteagle, Tennessee in 1932.⁶ In the 1930s and 40s, Highlander trained labor organizers on the logistics of building and running unions and in the 1950s and 60s it was an important Civil Rights organization.⁷ By the mid-1960s Horton was convinced the Civil Rights movement was in the hands of skilled black leaders and that Highlander should turn its focus to the Appalachian region.⁸ This gave Highlander staff the time and opportunity to concentrate on social and economic problems and cultural revitalization of their own region and their work drew Highlander into fruitful interactions with other groups focused specifically on Appalachia.

Highlander and other institutions and organizations such as Berea College, the Council of the Southern Mountains, and regional settlement and folk schools like Pine Mountain and Hindman in Kentucky and John C. Campbell folk school in North Carolina bridged the gap between the earlier generation of industrialization-era reformers and the groups that formed in the 1960s and 70s. Though these older institutions engaged with many of the Appalachian movement participants and groups in the 1960s and 1970s, including Appalshop, they were organizationally and philosophically distinct from most of them.

Most of the social change organizations working in Appalachia at this time were small, single-issue groups, made up of individuals with a wide spectrum of motivations. The Appalachian renaissance of the 1960s and 70s is best understood as a loosely connected,

⁶ Frank Adams, "Highlander Folk School: Getting Information, Going Back and Teaching It," *Harvard Educational Review* 42, no. 4 (November 1972), 500-502. Horton was a socialist and a student of Reinhold Niebuhr. He spent time as a social worker with the YMCA and traveled in Europe to study social reform. West was a more radical socialist that sought fundamental change in the class/caste system he saw emerging in the industrializing south. They conceived Highlander as an American version of the Danish folk schools aimed at adult education and social reform both had visited.

⁷ Ibid, 509, 515.

⁸ Ibid, 515-16.

multi-faceted, “movement of movements” that included activists, artists, politicians, students, academics, journalists and community leaders and organizers.⁹ It encompassed a wide array of perspectives and strategies for social and cultural reinvigoration ranging from nostalgic community celebrations such as Appalachian cultural festivals to experimental living cooperatives that reflected the 1960s counterculture.

Renewed interest in the region at the national level that began in the late 1950s, and the federal resources it afforded Appalachian communities, formed another important part of the context for social movements in the 1960s and 1970s. The Appalachian Regional Commission and the War on Poverty programs were primarily focused on improving economic conditions in the region. Policymakers strove to discern to what degree “Appalachia” was mired in abject poverty in the midst of plenty in the nation and how the federal government might go about fixing it. Some movement-based groups, like Appalshop, enjoyed the benefit of federal funding in their early years, and some federally sponsored poverty workers joined social change organizations. As this process unfolded, participants in various social movements raised important questions about energy, resources, labor and human costs, cultural degradation, and community viability. At their most radical, movement participants also advanced scathing critiques of narrowly defined “progress” and the ramifications of capitalism.¹⁰

⁹ Laurence Cox and Alf G. Nilsen, "Social Movements Research and the 'Movements of Movements': Studying Resistance to Neoliberal Globalisation," *Sociology Compass* 1, no. 2 (November 2007) The concept of a “movement of movements” originally applied to resistance to neo-globalization, refers to the interdependency of various specific social movements and social movement organizations that have shared concerns--such as economic and environmental justice--and thus influence, support, and sometimes even interpenetrate one another. The concept is thus applicable to the various social movements in Appalachia that, together with academic and artistic expressions, contributed to what many describe as an "Appalachian Renaissance" in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.

¹⁰ For further reading on the role of the federal government in Appalachia see Ronald D Eller, *Uneven Ground: Appalachia since 1945*, ed. (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), Whisnant,

The groundswell of social change groups in Appalachia that coalesced in the 1960s and 70s into a social movement context also included elements of the counterculture including back-to-the-landers, craftsmen and artisans, environmental activists, practitioners of natural medicine, New Left academics, and labor justice advocates. It included people interested in preserving fading cultures and other people who were suspicious of authority and engaged in oppositional politics. Protest against the war in Vietnam, suspicion of conformity and consumerism, indignation at inequality based on ethnicity, race, sex, and sexual preference, and general critiques of “progress” as it had been defined in the first half of the twentieth century were appealing to Appalachian reformers that experienced devastating consequences of these social problems firsthand.

The legacy of earlier efforts at social change in Appalachia, renewed federal/national interest in the region’s economic struggles, and popular countercultural impulses thriving in the 1960s combined to form a context for an Appalachian movement of social movements immediately before Appalshop’s founding that persisted at least through the mid-1980s. The specific histories of the hundreds of individual groups that comprised this social movement context are not as important to this study as are the broad issues they sought to address and the strategies they employed to bring about social change because these are the factors that most influenced Appalshop’s evolution in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Appalshop and Appalachian Social Movements

The social movements that flourished in Appalachia in the 1960s and 70s were as diverse as the region itself. They crossed race, gender, class, geographical, and political boundaries. Appalshop interacted with social movement participants and groups in a wide

Modernizing the Mountaineer, and Jerry Bruce Thomas, *An Appalachian Reawakening: West Virginia and the Perils of the Machine Age, 1945-1972*, ed. (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2010)

variety of ways. This was part of Richardson's goals for the organization—before the first film was ever made he expressed a desire to work with other groups in Appalachia.¹¹ From the moment they began to incorporate as their own entity, Appalshop staff members looked for other like-minded groups to partner with as a survival strategy.¹² Appalshop's artists' divergent interests and the wide range of subject matter they chose to explore forged connections with a broad spectrum of reformers, artists, activists, and academics in the late 1970s and 80s. An examination of these connections reveals a great deal about Appalshop's evolution and maturation in this period.

The four areas of social movements that most influenced Appalshop's history in the late 1970s and early 1980s were minority rights/identity movements, artistic and cultural movements, protest movements concerned with labor, economics, politics, and the environment, and the academically based Appalachian Studies movement. Though individuals or groups rarely fit cleanly into any one of these categories, in the context of Appalshop's history, it is useful to look at motivations, ideals, and strategies in this light.

Minority Rights and Identity Movements

In the wake of the successes of the African-American Civil Rights Movement, other groups sought justice and equality based on its model. In the 1960s and 70s Native Americans, women, homosexuals, and Latino migrant workers all forwarded significant social movements rooted in group identity politics.¹³ A shift in American liberalism, codified in the Civil Rights Movement, toward equality through minority rights influenced

¹¹ David Hawpe, "Films: New Tools to Help Build Appalachia?," *Louisville Courier-Journal*, November 28, 1969, 1.

¹² Marty Newell, Interview with the Author, Digital Audio Recording, Lexington, Kentucky, June 7, 2012.

¹³ See Cressida Heyes, "Identity Politics," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Spring 2012 Edition. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2012/entries/identity-politics> (accessed October 25, 2013)."

some of the Appalachian social movements at this time. “Appalachian” identity (sometimes “Hillbilly” identity) became a moniker that delineated and valorized a status not unlike a separate ethnicity—a minority group within the United States.

In the first half of the twentieth century outsiders largely defined Appalachian identity for those outside the region. Appalachia was a political construct that served divergent agendas ranging from Local Color writers selling stories and novels to industrialists gaining access to natural resources, to missionaries raising money for their denomination’s reform efforts. Like other minority rights movements, some Appalachian groups in the 1960s and 70s attempted to wrest control of Appalachian identity and used it to empower what they saw as an unjustly denigrated population.

Appalshop regularly invoked terms like “authentic” and “true” Appalachians and embraced the idea that it was very important for “real” Appalachians to tell their own stories rather than acquiescing to others who continued to forward negative interpretations of Appalachian people and culture. This is the political thrust of “Appalachians Speaking for Themselves.” The focus on identity in the early years of Appalshop’s history is evinced by the outrage expressed by Appalshop artists, staff members, and supporters toward mainstream media—specifically television and films—and the priority Appalshoppers placed on mountain people being intricately involved in creating their own relatively unpackaged interpretations of their culture in styles heavily influenced by Direct Cinema and Cinema Verité.

The role of Appalachian identity in regional efforts at social justice and cultural invigoration is a complex topic and it remains a point of debate among Appalachian scholars

and activists.¹⁴ The heart of the current debate lies in the usefulness of Appalachian identity as a source of strength and power in a framework of oppositional politics vs. the detrimental influence of ideas about cultural homogeneity, essentialism, and insider/outsider tensions that identity politics can encourage.¹⁵ Identity politics in an Appalachian context raises difficult questions like:

- Who exactly is an Appalachian?
- What encourages self-identification as an Appalachian?
- Does designation as an Appalachian-American have any demonstrable correlation to tangible problems like poverty levels, health issues, or to particular cultural traits or values?

Although these questions are still much in debate, the fact remains that identity politics played an important part in some of the region's social movements in the 1960s and 70s, including influencing Appalshop's role in this context.

In addition to numerous references to Appalachian identity in promotional materials, correspondence, and commentary about Appalshop in the press, several Appalshop films directly reflected the influence of minority rights and identity politics. The subject matter in almost all of the films in the 1970s and 80s reflected local community culture and the filmmakers and staff members definitely considered Whitesburg an Appalachian community. However, some films delved into this issue more directly than others. For example, *Whitesburg Epic* and *Appalachian Genesis* in the early years and later

¹⁴ Stephen Fisher Barbara Ellen Smith, Philip Obermiller, David Whisnant, Emily Satterwhite and Rodger Cunningham, "Appalachian Identity: A Roundtable Discussion," *Appalachian Journal* 38, no. 1 (Fall 2010): 56.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Strangers and Kin, specifically explored identity issues and what it means to be Appalachian in personal, local, regional, and national contexts.¹⁶

Appalshop was not only influenced by a revitalization of Appalachian identity and cultural pride but also by other minority rights groups' struggles for equality rooted in race and gender identities. Several Appalshop films in the later 1970s and early 1980s demonstrated this influence.

Elizabeth Barret focused on women's issues at the outset of her Appalshop career. In the mid-1970s, in the midst of second wave feminism, she directed *Nature's Way* and *Quilting Women*, both of which specifically addressed women's experiences in the region.¹⁷ She continued this focus with her 1982 release, *Coalmining Women*.¹⁸ This film documented the experiences of a small number of female coal miners in a historically male-dominated industry. It documented the intersection of the subjects' identities as women and as Appalachians, offered an alternative look at the coal industry, and explored complex questions of economic motivation and gender roles in this context. Barret's film gave a voice to an otherwise largely overlooked population in Appalachia's economy and culture. It was a good example of providing an outlet for specific groups of Appalachians that

¹⁶ *Whitesburg Epic*, directed by Bill Richardson, (Whitesburg, KY: Community Film Workshop of Appalachia, 1971), VHS.; *Appalachian Genesis*, directed by Ben Zickafoose William Richardson, and Dave Adams, (Whitesburg, KY: Community Film Workshop of Appalachia, 1971), VHS. and *Strangers and Kin*, directed by Herb E. Smith, (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1984), VHS.

¹⁷ *Nature's Way*, directed by Elizabeth Barret, (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1974), VHS.; *Quilting Women*, directed by Elizabeth Barret, (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1976), VHS.

¹⁸ *Coal Mining Women*, directed by Elizabeth Barret, (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1983), VHS.

previously had little opportunity to speak for themselves in a format like documentary film.¹⁹

Two Appalshop films from this period addressed the also often overlooked issues of race and ethnicity in Appalachian history: Sue Baker's 1982 release *Clinchco: Story of a Mining Town* and the 1985 biopic *Mabel Parker Hardison Smith*, directed by Anne Lewis.²⁰ *Clinchco: Story of a Mining Town* documented the creation, heyday, and ultimate decline of a coal town in southwestern Virginia that recruited workers from the Deep South—many of whom were African American.²¹ Baker used photos collected from the town's residents to reconstruct the town's history for viewers. The subject matter was not specifically about the experience of black coalminers, but rather focused on a wide variety of dynamics within this multi-racial company town in Appalachia. By using photos and interviews from residents, the filmmakers allowed these Appalachians to speak for themselves about their rare integrated community in ways that complicated and enriched understanding of both African American and Appalachian identities by exhibiting their stories as fruitful and significant parts of regional history.

Mabel Parker Hardison Smith was similar in that its subject was an African American woman who grew up, worked, and raised her own family in a coal town. In the film Smith discussed her motivations for migrating to the region, described her career as a school teacher in a coal town, and analyzed how social changes related to race impacted her

¹⁹ *Coalmining Women* was a tremendous success for both Barret and Appalshop. It was screened in a variety of contexts ranging from numerous local showings in small community venues to national audiences such as the National Conference of Christians and Jews (where it received a merit award) to international festivals in locations as far flung as Athens, London, and Mexico City.

²⁰ *Clinchco: Story of a Mining Town*, directed by Sue Baker, (Whitesburg, Kentucky: Appalshop, 1982), VHS.; *Mabel Parker Hardison Smith*, directed by Anne Lewis, (Whitesburg, Kentucky: Appalshop, 1985), VHS.

²¹ Ibid.

life in the southern mountains. These films undermined the stereotype of racial homogeneity in Appalachia and illustrated the important role African Americans had played in the region's history.

Coalmining Women, *Clinchco: Story of a Mining Town*, and *Mabel Parker Hardison Smith* are important examples of how Appalshop's work in the region was related to a variety of social movements—in this case related to gender, race, labor, and region--and how in the late 1970s and early 1980s, its artistic output became part of national and international conversations about social change. They can also be understood as part of an attempt on the part of some movement participants to reconstruct Appalachian identity in more inclusive ways.

Art and Culture Movements

A second important component of Appalachian social movements of the 1960s and 70s with which Appalshop regularly interacted was individuals, groups, and organizations focused on revitalization of objective material culture such as literature, arts and crafts, photographs, and music. In this period Appalachian artists significantly contributed to the Appalachian renaissance and, in some cases, were recognized by commercial successes in a national context.

Fiction writers like Gurney Norman, Wilma Dykeman, and James Still and poets like the Soup Bean group out of Antioch Appalachia in Beckley, West Virginia contributed to a rich literary tradition with more “authentic” offerings than popular, but skewed, earlier interpretations from Local Color writers or John Fox, Jr. Appalachian arts and crafts and folk music flourished in the context of a national revival of these art forms that opened new

doors for well-known performers like Nimrod Workman, Jean Ritchie, and Ralph Stanley as well as local artisans like Dewey Thompson who made furniture by hand from start to finish or self-taught artist Sarah Bailey who designed and made her own corn husk dolls and flowers.

Regional artists appreciated the creative outlet that Appalshop provided and they embraced the comparative authenticity of its output. Weary of outside interpretations, Appalachian artists in the 1970s were reaching out to each other and to the region in a struggle to wrest control of defining their own culture from others. In this context, Appalshop offered opportunities to produce and promote Appalachian art.²² The artists that took over after the CFWC stopped funding the program conceived Appalshop first and foremost as an outlet for Appalachian art and media.

One of the most important institutions that embodied this component of Appalachian social movements was the Appalachian Folk Life Center in Pipestem, West Virginia established by Highlander founder Don West. This organization and others like it including Appalshop sought to preserve aspects of Appalachian culture, while at the same time mobilizing cultural politics to bring about social change. Preservation was not only about remembering the past; it was a way to re-establish the legitimacy of cultural traits that had been portrayed by outsiders as at least “old-fashioned” and at most shameful. It was part of a strategy to reinvent Appalachian identity as a tool to promote solidarity, cultural pride, and social improvement through the arts. Appalshop also employed this strategy in many of its films.

²² There are many examples of this. It is an integral part of Appalshop’s mission. For a broad view of different ways Appalshop promoted art see Lyn Adams and Susan Chesnut, ed. *Mountain Review*, Quarterly vols., vol. 1-4 (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, September 1974).

Several Appalshop films focused on subject matter that offered the opportunity to exhibit Appalachian art. Wendy Ewald's work with Appalachian children and women in conjunction with Appalshop's Photography program was the subject of a documentary, directed by Ewald and Andrew Garrison, also entitled *Portraits and Dreams*.²³ The film was a short, but insightful look at her philosophy and process in carrying out community photography projects.²⁴ Though Ewald was not a regional native, the artists in her program were 150 children between six and fourteen who lived in the mountains of Kentucky. In the film Ewald described dual purposes of the project: 1) To contribute to the historical record of Appalachian communities with photos that would end up in family albums for generations and 2) To exhibit a unique way of looking at these communities—in her words, “a new way of seeing” Appalachia through the children's eyes.²⁵ Her work resulted in three traveling, widely viewed, and well received exhibitions of Appalachian photographs, including a showing at the Smithsonian in Washington, DC.

Sunny Side of Life, directed by Anthony Slone, Scott Faulkner, and Jack Wright, focused on the music of the Carter family in Appalachian Virginia.²⁶ The Carter family became a national act as “hillbilly” music became “country” music during Nashville's meteoric rise to prominence in the 1920s- 40s.²⁷ This film documented the family's Appalachian roots and the important role that “old-time” music still played in an

²³ *Portraits and Dreams*, directed by Andrew Garrison with Wendy Ewald, (Whitesburg, Kentucky: Appalshop, 1984), VHS.

²⁴ See the earlier discussion of the Photography program in Chapter 3.

²⁵ Andrew Garrison with Wendy Ewald, *Portraits and Dreams*.

²⁶ *Sunny Side of Life*, directed by Anthony Slone Scott Faulkner, and Jack Wright, (Whitesburg, Kentucky: Appalshop, 1985), VHS.

²⁷ Anthony Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon*, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), Chapter 3.

Appalachian community. It was a celebration of one type of traditional Appalachian music similar to earlier Appalshop films about musicians, but the increased length and depth of the film illustrated Appalshop's maturation into analysis of broader issues of the music industry and cultural adaptation and transplantation.

Sarah Bailey is an excellent example of an Appalshop film about traditional arts and crafts in the region.²⁸ It was a biopic directed by Anne Lewis that aired on Headwaters Cable Television program in 1984. In the film, Bailey demonstrated several arts and crafts processes including carding and spinning wool and designing and making corn husk dolls and flowers. Not only did the documentary preserve Bailey's methods and skills, it also delved into her life story and the role her art played in sustaining her family. Bailey was an artist, but also an entrepreneur. As a child she quickly learned how to spin and sew in order to sell garments and she taught herself to make dolls and flowers based on a single viewing of one other handmade corn husk rug. She demonstrated agency in overcoming her lack of formal education and fashioning her own way of making a living. In the context of her work she explained her life philosophies including an openness to teach other her skills and a belief that God rewards those that help others. In the film she is shown instructing a tour group visiting from outside the region who was seeking to learn about Appalachian culture. The film is indicative of the renewed interest across the nation in traditional arts and crafts and Appalshop's role in that movement.

Finally, Appalshop's films about art and artists in the early 1980s included a conceptual experimental piece called *Ourselves and That promise*, directed by Joe Gray,

²⁸ *Sarah Bailey*, directed by Anne Lewis, (Whitesburg, Kentucky: Appalshop, 1984), VHS.

Gene Dubey, and Scott Faulkner, that was unlike any other Appalshop film to that point.²⁹ This film featured four Kentucky artists—three authors and a photographer—sharing their work in a variety of settings. Its primary theme was the interplay of art and the environments, both natural and manmade, in which art is created and shared. The subjects included mountain aerial photographer Billy Davis, novelist and farmer James Still, Pulitzer Prize winning author and poet Robert Penn Warren, and commercially struggling and existential angst-ridden poet Ronnie Chiswell who talks openly about his experiences with the counterculture and his substance abuse. The film showcased these diverse artists, whose only connection was that they were contemporary Kentuckians, and juxtaposed their work against a visual regional context. Not only did it give the artists an outlet for their work but it went beyond a one dimensional exhibition of that work and emphasized the importance of context—of place—in creating and appreciating art. *Ourselves and that promise* moved Appalshop decidedly out of the realm of cultural preservation and into contemporary, experimental, cutting-edge artistic expression in the region.

Collectively these films about various aspects of regional art and material culture illustrated how Appalshop provided opportunities for the region's artists to express themselves on their own terms—to speak for themselves. They also evinced notable growth and maturity that a decade of experience afforded the artists and the organization in both the choice of subject matter and the content. Finally, they indicated how deeply Appalshop was integrated into a variety of artistic endeavors in the region and illustrated that its artists sought to appreciate and understand, as well as significantly contribute, to this component of Appalachian social movements.

²⁹ *Ourselves and That Promise*, directed by Scott Faulkner Joe Gray with Gene DuBey, (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1977), VHS.

Activist/ Protest Movements

A third aspect of the “movement of movements” in Appalachia that flourished in this era and influenced Appalshop’s history was linked to a complex discussion about labor, economics, and politics in the region that tied in closely with an increasingly active environmental movement. In the context of burgeoning national movements concerned with these issues, Appalachian activists focused on the particular problems prevalent in the region.

The subject matter of some of Appalshop’s films aggressively attacked local institutions and power brokers like large corporations, public schools, and political leaders. The course of making these films, and the critical political viewpoints that they espoused, drew Appalshop into relationships with a variety of likeminded local and regional political activists. This is especially true of films about the coal industry and the environmental degradation it brought along with it. Issues surrounding coal mining were pervasive for many social activists in Appalachia. In the 1970s the coal industry was heavily engaged in strip mining--a particularly environmentally degrading way to mine coal in comparison with deep mining.³⁰ Mechanization had already made the industry less attractive as a viable source of community jobs and economic stability than in previous generations. The very evident environmental trauma that surface mining brought with it made it an obvious choice and an easy target for protest groups.

³⁰ For a description of the devastating effects of strip mining see Chad Montrie, *To Save the Land and People: A History of Opposition to Surface Coal Mining in Appalachia*, ed. (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2003) and Harry M. Caudill, *Night Comes to the Cumberlands: A Biography of a Depressed Area*, ed. (Boston: Little, 1963).

In addition to the immediate effects of the mining process, the long term effects of several decades of industrialization were also coming to a head, and groups formed to address associated problems. These issues included environmental and health problems like water and air pollution, black lung disease, deforestation and ecological changes in plant and animal life, and flooding, as well as also economic issues related to labor conflict, structural inequalities, poverty, and the pursuit of strategies for sustainable economic growth in Appalachian communities in contrast to the devastating boom and bust cycles associated with the coal industry.³¹ Appalshop's first print publication included a list of other publications and groups they thought would be of interest to their readers. It mentioned *Mountain Life and Work*, *Miners Voice*, *Coal Patrol*, *Coal Age*, *Hawkeye*, *Designs for Rural Action*, the Council of the Southern Mountains, and various Black Lung Associations.³²

Appalshoppers interacted with the activists in Appalachian movements in different ways. Some of the artists were participants and actively involved as frontline protesters. They also sometimes engaged more subtly in protests that took place close to headquarters in Whitesburg or in areas they were filming. For example, staff members occasionally showed up at picket lines with empty cameras.³³ They found that the presence of a camera made people less likely to behave in ways they did not want others to see—another example of the role of media in social protest on a very basic level as a way of minimizing violence toward demonstrators.³⁴

³¹ See Stephen Fisher, *Fighting Back in Appalachia: Traditions of Resistance and Change*, ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1993).

³² CFWA, *Appal Seed*, 1971.

³³ Newell, Interview with the Author.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

Research and preparation for films also encouraged a variety of interactions with protest groups. Films on related topics drew Appalshop artists and staff members into more in-depth relationships with environmental and labor activists. For example, in a grant proposal for a film on coalmining, staff members asserted that Appalshop was in contact with many activist groups including several anti-strip-mining groups.³⁵ The film was to be aimed at “people in those parts of the region where strip-mining takes place...[and] more generally the entire country in terms of social awareness, the need for change, and the ecology movement overall.”³⁶ The proposal also attested that Appalshop had established “numerous contacts with community groups throughout the region, scientific authorities and journalists, as well as congressional staff members familiar with the topics we will encounter.”³⁷ In this process, some of the filmmakers became advocates and used film as a political tool.

Several 1970s and early 1980s Appalshop films focused directly on the social activism associated with the coal industry and resulting environmental degradation. In addition to *Coalmining Women*, there were two other films in this period that focused directly on coal: *Buffalo Creek Revisited*, directed by Mimi Pickering and *Stripmining: Energy, Environment, and Economics*, directed by Frances Morton and Gene DuBey.³⁸

³⁵ Appalshop, *Stripmining Film Project*, Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Box F5, Operational Records 1970-77, Correspondence and Proposals and Projects, 1.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Appalshop, *Untitled Promotional Materials*, Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Unlabeled box, 1.

³⁸ *Strip Mining Energy, Environment, and Economics*, directed by Frances Morton and Gene DuBey, (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1979), VHS.

Buffalo Creek Revisited was a follow up, ten years after the flood, to Pickering's earlier film *Buffalo Creek Flood: An Act of Man*.³⁹ It documented the continuing struggle of community residents to recover from the flood and the resistance they were up against from corporations and local government. The content was similar to the original film in that it used photographs, video footage, and testimonials from local residents. However, it delved deeper into broader issues of community and the "psychology of disaster."⁴⁰ It was a scathing critique of the coal industry and the exploitative institutions that allowed the industry to devastate the community of Buffalo Creek including public policies and corrupt political processes.

Stripmining: Energy, Environment, and Economics was similar in that it was an expansion on an earlier film Dubey directed called *Stripmining in Appalachia*.⁴¹ The earlier film detailed the processes involved stripmining and used aerial footage to illustrate the destruction it caused. *Stripmining: Energy, Environment, and Economics*, released six years later, included a history and description of the process, but it continued on to explore other related topics including documenting a citizens' movement to stop it and the fight for federal regulation that resulted in the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977.⁴²

Both of these films are excellent examples of how later Appalshop films were more in-depth due to increased funding and the experiences and maturity of Appalshop's artists,

³⁹ *The Buffalo Creek Flood: An Act of Man*, directed by Mimi Pickering, (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1975), VHS. *Buffalo Creek Revisited*, directed by Mimi Pickering, (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1984), VHS.

⁴⁰ Appalshop, "Www.Appalshop.Org/Store" (accessed September 15, 2011).

⁴¹ *Strip Mining Energy, Environment, and Economics*, directed by DuBey. Ibid.

⁴² Appalshop, "Www.Appalshop.Org/Store."

yet still exhibited continuity in style, content, and goals—especially the goal of allowing Appalachians to speak for themselves. They are also examples of projects that brought Appalshop staff members and artists more closely in contact with activist movements for economic and environmental justice in the region.

Not all environmental issues in the region were related to coal. *Yellow Creek, Kentucky*, directed by Anne Lewis, followed the story of a citizens' group that organized in a small Appalachian community with the specific goal of cleaning up a water source they shared that was seriously polluted by a commercial tannery.⁴³ The citizen's group the film documented was a great example of participatory government and multi-partisan cooperation. It took a dual approach with both a lawsuit and a grassroots political campaign to gain seats on Middlesboro, Kentucky's City Council. The citizens' organization ran Republican, Democrat, and Independent candidates. The film documented several steps in the election process through which they won seven city council seats. Larry Wilson, the president of the citizens' council, later joined Highlander Research and Education Center as Environmental Programs Director, illustrating the important connections between a grassroots single-issue organization like the Yellow Creek Citizens Council, Appalshop artists that documented their struggle, and an older, more established institution like Highlander.⁴⁴

The most elaborate and celebrated political film from this period was France Morton's *The Big Lever: Party Politics in Leslie County*.⁴⁵ Morton was not a part of the

⁴³ *Yellow Creek, Kentucky*, directed by Anne Lewis, (Whitesburg, Kentucky: Appalshop, 1984), VHS.

⁴⁴ Rob Wells, "Yellow Creek: Grassroots Environmentalism at Work," *Hendersonville Times-News*, October 5, 1990, 14.

⁴⁵ *The Big Lever: Party Politics in Leslie County*, directed by Frances Morton, (Whitesburg, Kentucky: Appalshop, 1982), VHS.

original OEO training classes, but was one of the most important additions to join Appalshop in the mid-1970s. Like Pickering, she focused on overtly politically charged subjects. She collaborated on *Strip-mining: Energy, Environment, and Economics* and then followed it with *The Big Lever* in 1982.⁴⁶ The latter is one of Appalshop's best productions—evinced by its popularity in screenings and continued use in college level classrooms.⁴⁷ The film began as a documentary covering Richard M. Nixon's 1978 visit to Leslie County, Kentucky.⁴⁸ Leslie County had been a Republican stronghold since the Civil War, and the visit was Nixon's first political public appearance since resigning from office five years earlier.⁴⁹ Originally the film was supposed to be a newsreel for PBS, but it grew into much more.⁵⁰ The local election focused on by the film was a race between George Wooten and Allen Muncy for County Judge Executive. Morton took it further with a focus on aspects of local politics in the county including patronage, family pressure, near blind party loyalty, and other patterns often found in a "close-knit community."⁵¹

The film took a fascinating turn when Muncy was convicted of conspiracy to commit mail fraud in the midst of his term in 1980—a charge linked to his 1978 victory which largely rested on 1,665 suspicious absentee ballots.⁵² Astonishingly, while his case

⁴⁶ *Strip Mining Energy, Environment, and Economics*, directed by DuBey. and Ibid.

⁴⁷ Helen Lewis, Interview with the Author, Digital Audio Recording, Abingdon, Virginia, June 24, 2012. Stephen Fisher, Interview with the Author, Digital Audio Recording, Abingdon, VA, June 15, 2012.

⁴⁸ Paul Blanchard and Frances Morton, *Big Lever: Party Politics in Leslie County Study Guide*, ed. (Norton, Virginia: The Norton Press, 1983).

⁴⁹ Furcolow, reprinted in Appalshop Promotional Poster, 1.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Morton, *Big Lever: Party Politics in Leslie County Study Guide*, 3.

was in appeal, he still won a primary by riding the momentum of “the Big Lever”—straight ticket Republican voting-- even though a jail sentence was pending. In the film, Muncy invoked the Nixon visit as an explanation for why federal prosecutors singled him out and persecuted him, underscoring the film’s theme about political party patronage and loyalties that reached all levels of government.⁵³ *The Big Lever: Party Politics in Leslie County* presented this one Appalachian community as a microcosm that exhibited how local politics sometimes worked. It served as a tremendous resource for anyone interested in political themes in Appalachia.

Activist films about the environment, the coal industry, and politics illustrated Appalshop’s evolution in the late 1970s to early 80s. The wide variety of topics and the depth of analysis in these films make it clear that the Appalshop artists had matured. Their films had become more complex, more analytical, and more technically proficient. The content in the films also clearly demonstrated that the organization had grown through its interactions with other Appalachian social movement groups, but its commitment to “Appalachian Speaking for Themselves” remained an integral part of its evolution. Every film still reflected this ideal. In fact, in these years the opportunity to forward this fundamental organizational and artistic goal expanded with the variety of Appalshop programs available and increased funding that allowed for more and longer films and its relationships with activist and protest groups.

Appalachian Studies Movement

⁵³ Furcolow, reprinted in Appalshop Promotional Poster, 1.

The fourth group of Appalachian social change agents that significantly influenced Appalshop's growth and development in the late 1970s and early 1980s was the Appalachian Studies movement, comprised of scholar/activists that were generally tied to a network of universities and colleges across the region. The Appalachian Studies movement began in the 1960s. By the mid-1970s it had coalesced into a conference where scholars, activists, and other social movement participants gathered to present new research, brainstorm about the region's problems, and celebrate and preserve Appalachian culture. By the late 1970s, the conference had become an annual event named the Appalachian Studies Conference (ASC). After nearly a decade, the Appalachian Studies Movement organized more formally across different parts of the region in an umbrella organization called the Appalachian Studies Association (ASA), founded in 1985. Despite the organizational and name changes, the movement has a common history. However, that is not to say that the Appalachian Studies movement participants were in any way a homogenous group. The scholars, researchers, teachers, and academics in this movement were diverse in their fields of study, their understanding of the region and its successes and problems, and in their strategies to bring about social change.

It is important to understand the relationship between Appalshop and the Appalachian Studies movement not only because they matured together, but also because academics contributed to Appalshop projects, and became important consumers of Appalshop products. Although they were typically not members of the Appalshop formal organization, academics nonetheless contributed to the production, distribution, and consumption of Appalshop-produced media.

Much of the early work in which Appalachian Studies researchers engaged was about providing more accurate interpretations of the region than popular stereotypes offered and engaging in thorough and balanced research less influenced by negative views of the region to support their arguments. One of the earliest studies that can rightly be considered part of the Appalachian Studies movement was a sociological survey Thomas Ford carried out at the University of Kentucky, published in 1962.⁵⁴ Though this study was later criticized for essentializing the region and relying too much on stereotypes, it did represent a new way of analyzing the economy and culture of some parts of Appalachia.

By the 1970s the Appalachian Studies movement had gained momentum. Participants engaged in a wide variety of research projects relating to a spectrum of regional topics. It is impossible in the scope of this study to consider these projects individually, but a few examples help to illustrate the nature of the work being carried out at this important time in Appalachian scholarship. Helen Lewis is a particularly important example because she was a significant figure in both the Appalachian Studies movement and in Appalshop's history. A brief review of her early work is relevant to both. In 1970 she published an article in *Mountain Life and Work* that directly addressed the stereotype of fatalism, which had been a primary component of Jack Weller's writings.⁵⁵ It posed a dichotomy to readers—were Appalachian problems the result of fatalism or the coal industry? This article is a foundational consideration that presented a new construct for analyzing economic distress in the region. Lewis and other like-minded researchers moved the conversation away from

⁵⁴ Thomas Ford, *The Southern Appalachian Region: A Survey*, ed. (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky, 1962).

⁵⁵ Helen Lewis, "Fatalism or the Coal Industry? Contrasting Views of Appalachian Problems," *Mountain Life and Work* 46, (December 1970).

cultural traits, which was riddled with pitfalls regarding stereotypes, and redirected analysis toward structural problems.

Over the course of the 1970s, Lewis traveled to Wales with Appalachian scholar John Gaventa multiple times to gather evidence for a comparative study on coal mining communities. She also assisted him, along with sixty activists, citizens, and academics, in conducting a groundbreaking land use study at Highlander that demonstrated root causes of many of Appalachia's economic struggles.⁵⁶ In 1978 she published an article that expanded on the gripping idea forwarded by Harry Caudill and others that Appalachia functioned as an internal colony in the United States.⁵⁷ This provided an important theoretical framework for scholars to analyze the economic situation in the region. Her general approach and her specific work were all indicative of trends that would come to define the emerging field of Appalachian Studies.

Lewis' work is a salient example of the emerging Appalachian Studies movement, but it is only one example among hundreds. Her contemporaries and intellectual descendants included a large group of scholars from different colleges and universities working in a wide range of disciplines that together began a tradition of research that is going strong into the present. These scholars shared inspiration and motivation with other social movements that sought to undermine stereotypes, resist exploitation, and create more accurate understandings of the region.

⁵⁶ Shaunna Scott, "The Appalachian Land Study Revisited," 35, no. 3 (Spring 2008): 236.

⁵⁷ Dwight Billings Alan Banks, and Karen Tice, *Appalachian Studies, Resistance, and Postmodernism*, ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993); Linda Johnson Helen Matthews Lewis, and Donald Askins, *Colonialism in Modern America: The Appalachian Case*, ed. (Boone, North Carolina: The Appalachian Consortium Press, 1978), 284.

Appalachian Studies scholars were not only integrated in the Appalachian renaissance as researchers, but also in their roles as teachers in colleges and universities across the region. Appalachian Studies classes quickly became an important outlet for new research and an important forum for discussing Appalachian identity issues among students. Several universities, including the University of Kentucky and West Virginia University, offered Appalachian History and Sociology courses in the 1960s. Lewis offered a seminar for undergraduates at Clinch Valley College in 1970 that was one of the first multi-disciplinary Appalachian studies courses. Others soon followed with undergraduate and then graduate seminars modeled on the multi-disciplinary approach.⁵⁸

Appalachian Studies classes reflected collaboration between universities and movement groups outside universities. The classes were typically cross-disciplinary and included contributions from artists, activists, and community members. One of Lewis' early classes provides a good example. The class met early in the week, then on Wednesday nights students attended performances by Appalachian musicians—both professional recording artists and family and community members. These performances were videotaped, and some were even made accessible to the community by broadcast on local radio. As Appalachian studies classes became more popular, educators drew on the resources of their particular communities. Courses also typically included talks by environmental activists, researchers from a variety of disciplines, folk culture enthusiasts, local politicians, writers, and others who were deeply engaged in the Appalachian social life.⁵⁹ They also almost

⁵⁸ Patricia Beaver, Interview with the Author, Digital Audio Recording, Boone, NC, July 17, 2012; Fisher, Interview with the Author.

⁵⁹ Lewis, Interview with the Author.

always included Appalshop films accompanied by discussions with the filmmakers whenever possible.

The Appalachian Studies movement began to take more definite shape in April of 1976 with an interdisciplinary meeting at Appalachian State University, *An Appalachian Symposium in honor of Cratis D. Williams*.⁶⁰

The panels at the Symposium exhibited the current state of Appalachian Studies by reflecting scholars' interests in a wide variety of topics relating to the region. The opening session included topics like new directions in regional research for oral history, the attempt to be a sensitive observer in Appalachia, and prevailing assumptions about Appalachian personality in folk tales.⁶¹ Other panels included presentations on religion, isolation, industrialization and violence, dulcimer making, and the southern mountain vocabulary.⁶² Participants included core members of Appalachian studies including Wilma Dykeman, Henry Shapiro, Ronald Eller, Loyal Jones, Gordon McKinney, and Stephen Fisher. In addition to scholarly papers, the conference included a performance by folk singer Jean

⁶⁰ "An Appalachian Symposium in Honor of Cratis D. Williams," *Appalachian Journal* 3, no. 3 (Spring 1976). Edelma Huntley, "The Graduate School" <http://www.graduate.appstate.edu/> (accessed October 5, 2012). Patricia D. Beaver, "Cratis Williams Memorial Fellowship in Appalachian Studies Presented Annually in Memory of Cratis D. Williams (1911-1985)." www.appstudies.appstate.edu/sites/appstudies.appstate.edu/files/pdfs/WilliamsScholarship.pdf (accessed May 4, 2013). "An Appalachian Symposium in Honor of Cratis D. Williams," *Appalachian Journal* (Spring 1976): 285-86. The Symposium honored a "pioneer of Appalachian studies," Cratis D. Williams, the outgoing head of the Graduate School at Appalachian State. Williams dedicated his career to Appalachian scholarship in the generation preceding the coalescence of the Appalachian Studies movement. His Eastern Kentucky roots and unprecedented range of scholarship on the region at this early date earned him colorful nicknames like "Mister Appalachia" and "the Complete Mountaineer." It is fitting that the Symposium in his honor served as the venue for the early formal interactions of Appalachian Studies movement participants.

⁶¹ Beaver, "Cratis Williams Memorial Fellowship in Appalachian Studies Presented annually in memory of Cratis D. Williams (1911-1985)." 1.

⁶² "An Appalachian Symposium in Honor of Cratis D. Williams," 285-86.

Ritchie, poetry readings, and, most significant to this study, a screening of the *Appalshop Show*.⁶³

Participants in the *Cratis D. Williams Symposium* represented over a dozen colleges and universities—most of them in or near the Appalachian region. Over the next few years these and other schools continued to add Appalachian Studies courses. Eventually some adopted interdisciplinary minors in Appalachian Studies, and founded Appalachian Centers dedicated to a wide range of activities including research, activism, artistic expression, and cultural preservation.⁶⁴

Scholarly journals also promoted Appalachian regional studies by providing an outlet for publication and peer review. Appalachian State University started one of the first such publications, *The Appalachian Journal* in 1971-72.⁶⁵ Its roots were in a prior effort called “Faculty Publications” edited by the Teachers College. That publication failed, but the release of the first Foxfire books in 1969 reinvigorated the idea of a scholarly publication out of Appalachian State, and this time, because Appalachian Studies was becoming increasingly popular, it was conceived with a regional focus.⁶⁶ Appalachian State faculty member J.W. Williamson spearheaded the effort. The Cratis Williams Symposium provided a forum for Williamson to interact with emerging young scholars and led to the publication in 1977 of the “Guide to Appalachian Studies.”⁶⁷ This further solidified the growing Appalachian Studies movement. In 1980, the participants in the then annual

⁶³ *The Appalshop Show*, directed by Various, (Whitesburg, Kentucky: Appalshop, 1977), VHS.

⁶⁴ Banks, Billings, and Tice, 286.

⁶⁵ "Appalachian Journal Volume 1," (Fall 1972).

⁶⁶ J.W. Williamson, Email, Email, October 17, 2012..

⁶⁷ Stephen Fisher, "Guide to Appalachian Studies," *Appalachian Journal* 5, no. 1 (Fall 1977).

conference published a collection of papers presented there titled “Proceedings of the Appalachian Studies Association.”⁶⁸ And, after the formal establishment of the Appalachian Studies Association (ASA) in 1985, this grew into a regular journal titled the *Journal of the Appalachian Studies Association* which began in 1989.⁶⁹ Both journals are still in publication.

The historical development of the ASA as a professional organization is not an isolated story. It had roots in the resources afforded by regional institutions of higher education, but was not conceived as an exclusive organization constrained by university walls. The goals of the Appalachian Studies movement and its professional organizations—the ASC and ASA—always included partnering with community members and activists outside of the ivory tower.⁷⁰

Academics and social commentators demonstrated concerns about the pitfalls of “experts” and isolating formal studies. In an early meeting, journalist Jim Branscome “lambasted all the academics in the audience for failing to connect their research on important community issues and struggles.”⁷¹ Nonetheless, many leaders in the Appalachian Studies movement sought interaction with activists and community members as part of their mission. John Gaventa expressed this in his remarks at the Appalachian studies conference in 1978, repeated in a later article discussing this aspect of Appalachian Studies. He said:

⁶⁸ Appalachian Studies Association, "Asa Timeline" www.appalachianstudies.org/content/resources/timeline2.html (accessed October 15, 2012).

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Banks, Billings, Tice, 284.

⁷¹ Fisher, "Anger and Hope in Nearly Equal Measure: An Interview with Stephen Fischer," 185.

*The most informative writing about the inequalities of the Appalachian region during the last decade has not come from the circle of academe. Rather, it has come primarily from those outside the academic world—committed journalists, investigative researchers, regional activists, and those who have organized their own citizen groups.*⁷²

Gaventa set a cautionary tone for the group that would later form the Appalachian Studies Association that reinforced a commitment to community activists and non-academics that remained part of their goals. In 1985, when the ASA was formally founded, it was described as an interdisciplinary organization with the primary goal of using scholarship to address problems in Appalachia.⁷³ The founders intended it to serve as a “forum for an ongoing conversation between activists and academics.”⁷⁴ This was a very important aspect of the Appalachian Studies movement identity because the participants wanted to improve on earlier research by including a broader understanding of the region than was possible before. They also wanted to avoid the pitfalls of earlier researchers who were not as willing to collaborate among disciplines or with non-academic partners.

The ASA pursued policies such as alternating locations between college campuses and public parks and projects that combined traditional scholarship and community researchers and activists.⁷⁵ Individual activist scholars demonstrated the significant crossover and defied categorization in this respect. For example, Herb Smith noted in a later interview that the exchange with a scholar like Helen Lewis was particularly enriching for

⁷² Reprinted in Alan Banks, "Appalachian Studies, Resistance, and Postmodernism," 283.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Fisher, "Anger and Hope in Nearly Equal Measure: An Interview with Stephen Fischer," 186.

⁷⁵ Appalachian Studies Association, "Asa Timeline".and Banks, Billings, and Rice, 285-86.

Appalshop artists because, “she has a foot in both worlds.”⁷⁶ She was deeply involved in Appalachian Studies, but she was also involved in other grassroots life in the region. Again, Lewis is only one example of many Appalachian scholars that were also activists.

Over the course of the 1970s and early 1980s Appalshop became deeply integrated into the culture of the Appalachian Studies movement and the more formal contexts of universities and professional scholars. Part of Appalshop’s evolution in the late 1970s and early 1980s this involved acting as a meeting place for the many and varied Appalachian social movements and facilitating cooperation between them. The participation and acceptance of Appalachian Studies movement members was an integral part of this process.

The Distribution program, part of Appalshop’s expansion in the mid-1970s, brought Appalshop into direct contact with educational institutions including colleges and universities. Appalshop promotional materials illustrated this clearly. One of the earliest catalogs was titled *The Films of Appalshop: An Introduction to Thirty Documentary Films and Their Use in the Classroom*.⁷⁷ In the late 1970s outreach to educational institutions was punctuated with the inclusion of formal Study Guides with institutional rentals. This initiative was originally aimed at public Elementary, Middle, and High Schools, but expanded to include Colleges and Universities as early as 1975.⁷⁸

Over the next ten years, ties to colleges and universities grew stronger. Appalshop published another elaborate catalog in 1985 dedicated to classroom use and this time it

⁷⁶ J. W. Williamson, *The Appalshop Filmmakers*, ed. (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 399.

⁷⁷ Appalshop, *The Films of Appalshop: An Introduction to Thirty Documentary Films and Their Use in the Classroom*, ed. (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1975).

⁷⁸ Ibid.

overtly marketed to colleges and universities.⁷⁹ In one flyer, Thomas Plaut, a Sociology professor at Mars Hill College, was quoted giving testimony to the usefulness of Appalshop films for college audiences.⁸⁰ Another promotional flyer contained the following quote from historian and author Wilma Dykeman:

Appalshop films can be used to enrich and add vitality to courses and programs in a variety of settings. To help you select the films and filmstrips that best serve your interests, we have arranged our collection under a number of topics. These subject areas are only suggestions, as all of the possible uses and programming combinations are too numerous to list. Study Guides and Transcripts are available for most of the titles and materials integrating Appalshop resources with syllabi and courses are being developed. If you would like us to help you work up a course, workshop or program using Appalshop films, give us a call.⁸¹

Appalshop screened films in university settings from the very beginning when it was still the Community Film Workshop of Appalachia, and the artists were still students, but in the late 1970s and early 1980s the relationship with academics and marketing for classroom use expanded in scope and scale. As Appalachian Studies classes became increasingly popular, numerous syllabi included Appalshop films as part of the curriculum.⁸² The Subject Index Dykeman referred to is an important connection that reflected Appalshop's belief that its films were relevant in university settings (see figure 1). It was a matrix of films and subjects broken down by content areas for particular classroom needs. It included several college level disciplines including American Studies, Anthropology, Education, Cultural

⁷⁹ Appalshop, *Appalshop Films: Educational Materials from Appalshop*, ed. (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1985).

⁸⁰ Appalshop, *Appalshop Announces*, ed. (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1985).

⁸¹ Appalshop, *Untitled*, Specific Date Unknown--Late 1970s. Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Unlabeled box, 1.

⁸² Lewis, Interview with the Author. Fisher, Interview with the Author.

Geography, Political science, Women’s studies, Sociology, Social Issues.⁸³ It also included a separate category for Appalachian Studies, and nearly every film fell into this category.

Subject Index to Appalshop Films

We welcome evaluations of the films and discussion guides and appreciate suggestions for utilization and programming.

With a Ford Foundation grant, the Appalshop Education Project has developed supplemental materials to accompany our films and increase their effectiveness in classrooms and study groups. TRANSCRIPTS and DISCUSSION GUIDES are shipped with all films.

	AGING	AMERICAN STUDIES	APPALSHOP STUDIES	ARTS AND CRAFTS	EDUCATION	CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY	ENVIRONMENT	ENGLISH	FOLKLORE/FOLK LIFE	HISTORY	LABOR STUDIES	POLITICAL SCIENCE/GOVERNMENT	PSYCHOLOGY	SOCIAL ISSUES	SPORT	VALUES	WOMEN'S STUDIES	WORK
Appalachian Genesis	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
The Big Lever: Partisan Politics in Leslie County	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
The Buffalo Creek Flood: An Act Of Man	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Callfish: Man Of The Woods	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Chairmaker	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Coal Miner: Frank Jackson	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Coal Mining Women	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
The Feathered Warrior	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Fixin' To Tell About Jack	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Hand Carved	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
In The Good Old Fashioned Way	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
In 'Ya Blood	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Judge Woolen And Coon-On-A-Log	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
The Kingdom Come School	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
The Millstone Sewing Center	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Mountain Farmer	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Nature's Way	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Nimrod Workman: To Fit My Own Category	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Obit	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Ourelves And That Promise	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Quilting Women	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Ramsey Trade Fair	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Scourwood Mountain Duncmers	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Strip Mining: Energy, Environment and Economics	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Strip Mining In Appalachia	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
The Struggle Of Coon Branch Mountain	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Tomorrow's People	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Tradition	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
UMWA 1970: A House Divided	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Waterground	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Woodrow Cornett: Letcher County Butcher	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Figure 5- Subject Index⁸⁴

As the Appalachian Studies movement grew and became more institutionalized over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, Appalshop staff members interacted with Appalachian Studies participants in capacities that went well beyond the use of films in the classroom. Bill Richardson attended the Cratis Williams Symposium in conjunction with the *The Appalshop Show* screening.⁸⁵ This opened the door for personal interactions and laid the groundwork for collaboration. Many of the early Appalachian Studies scholars first became familiar with Appalshop staffers and their work at this Symposium.⁸⁶ After this, connections grew much stronger. Helen Lewis left Clinch Valley College in 1977. This opened up many

⁸³ Appalshop, *Appalshop Promotional Catalog*, ed. (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1981).

⁸⁴ Appalshop, *Appalshop Films*, ed. (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1981), 2.

⁸⁵ Appalshop *The Appalshop Show*, directed by Various.

⁸⁶ Fisher, Interview with the Author; J.W. Williamson, Interview with the Author, Digital Audio Recording, Boone, North Carolina, July 8, 2012. Gordon McKinney, Interview with the Author, Digital Audio Recording, Asheville, NC, July 16, 2013.

opportunities for her, including serving as acting director of the Highlander Center. In 1979-80 she taught at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina in an Appalachian studies program. In that same year Appalshop conceived and secured partial funding for its Human History Project, which Lewis was hired to direct, that brought these strands together and solidified a lasting relationship with several key academics.

Human History Project

The Human History of Appalachia was a defining project in both Appalshop's relationship with Appalachian Studies and its role as a regional institution. Staff members began preliminary work on the project, which included several films, in September, 1976.⁸⁷ The NEH grant that funded the project specifically required collaboration with people with academic credentials in Humanities fields. The filmmakers began by identifying the leading Appalachian Humanities scholars, many of whom were participants at the Cratis Williams Symposium, and bringing them together at Appalshop for a series of brainstorming meetings.

The first thing this group determined was that no comprehensive history of Appalachia existed and that, as a result, Appalachian Studies scholars and their precursors worked within "conflicted notions, models, myths, and misunderstandings. The work of researchers, media people, and humanists alike has approached Appalachia through many different perspectives of greater or lesser limitations."⁸⁸ They arrived at the conclusion that the Human History Project did not need to encourage new research, but rather should aim to

⁸⁷ Wayne Coombs, *The Human History of Appalachia--Grant Proposal*, Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Unlabeled box

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 12.

correlate the research that was already available by creating common terms and symbols—to synthesize what was already known and make it possible to portray it on film to increase accessibility.⁸⁹

The joint committee of Appalshop artists and Humanities scholars conceived The Human History of Appalachia as real, authentic, and accurate portrayals of Appalachian history that reflected the diversity of “people and thought” in the mountains.⁹⁰ It was an opportunity to forward different interpretations of the region’s history than previously existed—one that was in line with Appalshop’s original goal of allowing Appalachians to speak for themselves. The scholars and advisors were Appalachians who had dedicated their careers to research and understanding of the region’s history and current social development and problems. At this point in the evolution of both, Appalshop’s goals and organizational culture fit well with the Appalachian Studies goals of deconstructing stereotypes and replacing them with more accurate interpretations of Appalachian history, culture, and identity.

The committee designed the subject matter and styles of the Human History Project films to be distinct from prior Appalshop films. They were conceived as more analytical, more dependent on narration and context, and broader in scope in comparison with portraits of individuals or singular institutions. The project lent itself to partnerships with academics across the region. A budget proposal compiled for a grant in 1977 included funds for several meetings a year for a team of academic consultants.⁹¹ Appalshop did not gain approval for

⁸⁹ Paraphrased from *ibid*, 13.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 7.

⁹¹ Coombs, *The Human History of Appalachia--Grant Proposal*, 38.

this particular grant proposal, but it was eventually granted the money for the first phase of the project—two years of planning and research—by the National Endowment for the Humanities, with the academic advisors still included as part of the process. By the time the grant came through Helen Lewis had been hired to direct the project. This solidified the link with academics and began a long and fruitful relationship between Appalshop and Appalachian Studies.

Preparation for the project brought different elements of Appalachian movements into contact with each other at unprecedented levels. In one of the most interesting episodes in Appalshop's history, Lewis began her role as Director by taking the filmmakers on a road trip to visit several universities in the region to meet with scholars working on Appalachian Studies topics. The Appalshop personnel on the trip included Herb Smith, Mimi Pickering, Elizabeth Barret, Marty Newell, and other filmmakers. Newell recalled that in preparation for the trip they were told, "Helen's going to take us to visit the best thinkers in Appalachian Studies."⁹² This group toured the region with visits to large regional universities like West Virginia University, as well as to smaller colleges such as Union College and Mars Hill. They met with writers, professors, and students, and forged important contacts with scholars like Wilma Dykeman, Judy Jennings, Alan Banks, and Ronald Eller that would prove to be important ongoing relationships for all parties.

Once the initial connections were forged and solidified, the next step was to use this group's knowledge and artistic talents to frame the project's content. The original plan for the Human History Project was to produce seven films about the History of Appalachia organized chronologically. However, the committee soon agreed that topical films would be

⁹² Newell, Interview with the Author.

more effective.⁹³ In keeping with Appalshop's style, each of the filmmakers chose their own subjects. Topics included diverse themes like Migration, Resistance Movements, Rivers and Streams, Religion, and Stereotypes.

In order to encourage interaction and to thresh out content for the films, Appalshop held a conference in August 1979 titled *History on Film* at Hindman Settlement School.⁹⁴ The program included discussions of the logistics involved in presenting historical subject matter on film including historical reenactment and dramatization, the role of the walk-on narrator, the use of photographs and archival material, and how to portray history through particular events.⁹⁵ These topics represented elements of film that diverged from the Direct Cinema and Cinema Verité stylistic trends that had influenced Appalshop's earlier film styles. The discussions were directly aimed at learning new methods suited specifically to the Human History Project films. The final session was an open discussion among participants about the possibilities for a series of films on Appalachian history.⁹⁶

The conference Program listed the Principal Project Consultants who at that time included Wilma Dykeman, Ron Eller, Archie Green, Helen Lewis, James Sill, David Walls, Cratis Williams, John A. Williams, and Peter Wood.⁹⁷ The conference mailing list included representatives from the University of Kentucky, University of Cincinnati, West Virginia University, Alice Lloyd College, East Tennessee State University, and Duke University. It

⁹³ Lewis, Interview with the Author.

⁹⁴ Appalshop, *Schedule for the History on Film Conference at Hindman Settlement School*, ed. (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1979).

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

also listed representatives from other organizations including Folklore Centers, Urban Leagues, the Kentucky Humanities Council, the Kentucky Arts Commission, and Highlander Center.⁹⁸ The wide range of participants illustrated the collaborative efforts among Appalachia's social movements and regional institutions that the project encouraged.

The next step in carrying out the Human History Project was to develop scripts. Most Appalshop films to this point had not been pre-scripted. A filmmaker would certainly have plans for the film's themes and content, but interview films that had made up most of the prior Appalshop projects did not include scripts for the subjects. Because of the subject matter and proposed style of the Human History Project films, the new venture, however, required formal scripts which were also a requirement of the grant. The writers were drawn from the artistic side of the project advisors. The main writers were Roadside personnel-- Don Baker and Maxine Kinney.⁹⁹ Later, collaborators like filmmaker Lucy Phoenix and novelist Gurney Norman advised on scripts as well.¹⁰⁰

The writers participated in various aspects of the research for different films. Filmmakers researched the specific subject matter on which they were working. Lewis worked hands-on with filmmakers and writers researching any historical accounts, photos, novels, cartoons, stories, and films they could find with Appalachian themes. They compiled numerous books of context information, images, and text that were designed to serve as sources for all the films. By the end of the two year grant for preparation the process of research and writing resulted in seven scripts.

⁹⁸ Appalshop, *Schedule for the History on Film Conference at Hindman Settlement School*.

⁹⁹ Coombs, *The Human History of Appalachia--Grant Proposal*,37; Lewis, Interview with the Author.

¹⁰⁰ Lewis, Interview with the Author.

The collaboration between academics and artists on this project went beyond advising. Under Lewis' leadership it became a much more integrative process than the grant even required. The best example of this is the learning exchange that resulted from humanities scholars—conditioned to write in prose text—engaging in a project that relied on presenting research and narrative in the largely visual medium of film.¹⁰¹ This task challenged academics on the committee because it was outside the realm of their common experiences. Conversely, the artists learned from the academics as well, since this project required a great deal more scholarly research and analysis than prior Appalshop films. The exchange of information and ideas represented the best of what the Human History Project was designed to foster, and represented a watershed in the relationship between Appalshop and Appalachian Studies. This relationship was a two way street—each learned from the other. The act of carrying out this project strengthened and concretized this relationship into a lasting partnership that continued to influence both groups from that point forward.

During the research phase of the project, one filmmaker, Herb Smith, insisted that his project had to be first. He was interested in Shapiro's work on the "Idea of Appalachia" and other commentators that pointed to stereotypes as a causative force in some aspects of Appalachian History and a defining factor in regional research and development. He felt strongly that this must be addressed before the other topics could be presented effectively.¹⁰² Initially the committee was resistant to this idea.¹⁰³ They generally agreed that the topic was especially important, but logistically it was a difficult choice for the first film.¹⁰⁴ It would

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Lewis, Interview with the Author.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

require more sensitivity and nuance to translate the subject matter to film format than the other topics. However, eventually enough of them agreed that they went forward with this film, *Strangers and Kin*, as the first Human History Project finished film.¹⁰⁵ It was released in 1984.

Strangers and Kin directly confronted important issues related to Appalachian identity including the legacy of negative interpretations of Appalachian culture in mainstream American culture, the necessity of undermining cultural shame before trying to encourage activism and social change, and the importance of “Appalachian Speaking for Themselves” in the process of defining their own ideas about their heritages. These themes had been underlying topics in much of Appalshop’s previous artistic output, but no project had taken them on as directly as did *Strangers and Kin*. It was arguably the most important and influential film Appalshop had produced to that point. The choice of this subject matter, and the masterful way the film dealt with it, was indicative of both Smith’s maturity as an artist and the organization’s growth through partnering with other Appalachian social movements.

The committee resolved the anticipated problems of translating the material to film by using re-enactments by Roadside Theater performers. This strategy was initially planned to be part of all the Human History Project films, but it was especially useful for *Strangers and Kin*. The film contained period-costumed actors reading historically significant quotes alongside video clips and photos discovered in the research phase of the project that illustrated different perspectives on the region. This material was interspersed with personal

¹⁰⁵ *Strangers and Kin*, directed by Smith.

narrative commentary from the Roadside actors themselves and others about how this material had influenced Appalachian history and their own experiences.

The text was powerful. It revealed a plethora of negative stereotypes and the unchecked acceptance of them as fact by people in positions of power to influence development in the region. The film made it very clear that this phenomenon had a defining impact on regional history both through institutions influenced by this view of the region and the personal pain experienced by people in the region including the films' subjects. Its conclusions are still stunning.

Strangers and Kin remained one of Appalshop's most significant and popular films. Smith credited the collaboration with humanities scholars and the interactive viewing and editing process, in part, for the film's success.¹⁰⁶ Over 150 people saw the film at different phases before it was completed. Their input became part of the process.¹⁰⁷ The final product defied concerns about translating this more complex subject matter to film. The script utilized numerous historical sources with academic integrity in a way that was visually stimulating and artistically interesting. In keeping with the original goals for the Human History Project, it represented collaboration between academic research, artistic expression, and cultural agency rooted in reconstructing Appalachian identity. Its primary contribution was not new facts or conclusions, but rather a synthesis of knowledge in an innovative, fascinating, and accessible new format. Appalshop screened it often to generally positive reviews from both viewers and critics. It was an unqualified success for the organization.

¹⁰⁶ Williamson, "The Appalshop Filmmakers," 398.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

Strangers and Kin also provided a material connection between Appalshop and the Appalachian Studies movement. The new bonds the project forged were evident at the Appalachian Studies Association conference in 1984 at the Blue Ridge Conference Center YMCA, near Asheville, North Carolina. Appalshop staff members rented a house next to the conference site and maintained an ongoing Open House to show films--particularly *Strangers and Kin*--and facilitate communication with anyone that was interested in talking to them. From this point forward, Appalshop films were regularly shown at conferences and a wider swath of scholars became more familiar with the work being carried out in Whitesburg.¹⁰⁸

Despite *Strangers and Kin's* successes, most of the Human History Project scripts never made it to finished projects. The NEH grant, in fact, only covered part of the production costs for *Strangers and Kin*.¹⁰⁹ Smith continued to work on it for six months after the funding dried up.¹¹⁰ The NEH rejected grant proposals for the rest of the films originally planned under the Human History Project. Different people associated with the project have different interpretations of the loss of funding, but all agreed that it was a political rather than an artistic decision. With the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, leadership at the NEH changed. Under the leadership of Bill Bennett and Lyn Cheney, Appalshop's Human History Project was de-prioritized. In interviews, Dee Davis and Marty Newell also asserted that discontinuation of funding for the project was related to energy interests—that the new leaders had vested interests in not offending “Big Coal” and that led

¹⁰⁸Lewis, Interview with the Author.

¹⁰⁹ Williamson, "The Appalshop Filmmakers," 400.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

them to discontinue the projects.¹¹¹ Helen Lewis had a slightly different view. She attributed the loss of funding to the change of leadership as well, but also because the new NEH wanted more formal projects—the Appalshop films were too “provincial.” She recalled that Bennett wanted something “on the Constitution” rather than mountain religion or rivers and trails of Appalachia.¹¹² The second film of the seven originally conceived as part of the project, Elizabeth Barret’s *Long Journey Home* about Appalachian migration, was eventually released (with different funding) several years later in 1987, but the other films associated with the Human History Project were never completed because of the decision by the NEH to discontinue funding.¹¹³

It is unfortunate that the other films conceived by this groundbreaking idea and talented staff were never produced. However, the lasting relationships forged between Appalachian Studies and Appalshop that resulted from the project are an unintended lasting legacy that is very significant to both groups. University academics have relied heavily on Appalshop’s artistic output to teach new generations of students about the region. In turn, Appalshop has received promotion, adulation, and support from the academic community that helped to propel it to its status as a significant regional organization. More importantly, both groups learned from each other and enriched each other’s perspectives on the region-- sometimes contentious, sometimes cooperative, but always toward the end of a better understanding of the region.

¹¹¹ Newell, Interview with the Author. Dee Davis, Interview with the Author, Digital Audio Recording, Whitesburg, KY, June 7, 2012.

¹¹² Lewis, Interview with the Author.

¹¹³ *Long Journey Home*, directed by Elizabeth Barret, (Whitesburg, Kentucky: Appalshop, 1987), VHS. Other unfinished Human History Projects included film on Appalachian religion, natural environments, protest, and historical events such as the Civil War.

The tight relationships with Appalachian scholars led to increased exposure on campuses including students that represented future generations of Appalachian researchers. These relationships fueled the flames of exposure to Appalshop's output within and outside the region. By the early 1990s, promotional materials indicated that Appalshop staff members had embraced collaboration with scholars and emphasized the importance of institutions of higher education to the scope of their influence. One pamphlet read, "Most of our distribution is within the Appalachian region, and surrounding areas. We are fairly connected to colleges and universities around the region. After 25 years almost 26 years now—people get to know you."¹¹⁴ Another read, "Appalshop artists have made it a policy to work closely with scholars and educators to produce representations of the region that nourish positive identities and broaden political awareness."¹¹⁵ Herb Smith summed up his interpretation of the interactions between Appalshop and Academics with this:

A lot of what the scholars have brought to us, the exchanges we've had, has been like a little class...a series of tutors who are helping us understand how these images are working together and what the history those images of mountain people has been. And to some degree—I don't want to overstate this—we have educated the scholars as well about what the medium can hold. I think to some degree it's been a real positive experience for all of us in that exchange.¹¹⁶

In an important watershed in the relationship with the Appalachian Movement and with Appalachian Studies specifically, the ASA awarded Appalshop filmmakers Mimi Pickering and Anne Lewis the prestigious *Cratis Williams/ James S. Brown Service Award* in 2011.

¹¹⁴Nicole Paget-Clarke, "Appalachians Speaking for Themselves, an Interview with Herb E. Smith," *In Motion Magazine*. inmotionmagazine.com (accessed September 15, 2013), 12.

¹¹⁵ Banks, Billings, Tice, 286.

¹¹⁶ Williamson, "The Appalshop Filmmakers," 399.

This honor unequivocally acknowledged Appalshop's important connection with and contribution to Appalachian Studies.¹¹⁷

Institutional Changes and a New Building

Appalshop had ceased to function as a unified organization in many ways by the late 1970s; however, the artists still operated under a common administrative umbrella. Appalshop's decentralized organizational structure was part of its effectiveness and its charm, but Appalshop's development is not a story without contention. Hearty debates and divergent perspectives were always part of its operations. The interaction of many creative and individualistic people operating within a decentralized organizational structure was a formula for institutional friction. Early board meeting minutes included disagreements.¹¹⁸ Points of contention included finances, project development, and personnel decisions.¹¹⁹ In the early years, the board required a unanimous vote to make any decision. As the organization grew in size and scope, this became impossible, indicating that expansion led to increased conflict. Growth opened up new opportunities, but also made Appalshop more difficult to manage, as might be expected.

In the late 1970s Appalshop's internal struggle to organize itself more efficiently, along with its external goal to demonstrate legitimacy and stability to meet requirements of funding agencies, resulted in decisions at different times to hire outside consultants to evaluate and suggest changes.¹²⁰ A close look at one of these reports by consultant Karl

¹¹⁷ Beaver, Interview with the Author.

¹¹⁸ Appalshop, *Appalshop Board Meeting Minutes*, June 1973. Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Box G1 Board Meeting Minutes .

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Davis, Interview with the Author.

Mathiesen titled “Report on the Structure and Organization of Appalshop” written in 1980, revealed much about the organizational culture at Appalshop as seen by an outsider.¹²¹ The report pointed out that the cooperative aspect of Appalshop’s participatory management style was created in a situation where staff members were unwilling to openly criticize each other; therefore, important issues were not being addressed.¹²² The report suggested organizational restructuring (beyond the hand drawn circles of earlier years) and a more rigid process of accountability to ameliorate conflict related to management relations and finances.¹²³ This was only one of many reports by consultants, and its specific impact on particular changes is unclear.¹²⁴ Other reports were not available for comparison, and one staff member, Dee Davis, indicated in an interview that these consultants were generally tolerated as part of meeting expectations for funding agencies and their conclusions were not widely embraced by Appalshop staff members.¹²⁵ However, Appalshop did undergo significant organizational restructuring in the early 1980s, based in part on the stability that regular funding, critical acclaim, and increased scope afforded it.

In conjunction with reorganization and increased output and activity, Appalshop’s leaders began to feel that the organization had outgrown its physical space. They started to look toward renovating the building that housed the June Appal recording studio into the primary space for all Appalshop’s programs. The administrative staff focused on the

¹²¹ Karl Mathiesen III, *Report on Structure and Organization of Appalshop*, February 8, 1980. Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Unlabeled box Box F4, *Operational Records Unknown Dates; CFWC Proposals, Correspondence, Misc.*

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Davis, Interview with the Author.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

renovation for several years in the late 1970s and early 1980s. They worked on it piecemeal at first, and then, eventually, were able to secure a few substantial grants to finish the project.¹²⁶

Bill Richardson had gradually phased out of Appalshop's daily operations during the mid-seventies. When production of *Divine Rights Trip* fell through, he began to pursue his original passion for architecture. He secured his license and took on contracts for local community centers and schools. He was still part of the Appalshop Board of Directors until, in 1978, he chose to accept the offer to design the new building, and resign from the board, because acting in both capacities would have been a conflict of interest.

The space that would become Appalshop's permanent headquarters had previously served as a warehouse for consumer goods, a pizza restaurant, and a Laundromat.¹²⁷ It was a monumental task to transform it into the kind of space that could house the arts and media institution that Appalshop had transitioned into over the course of the 1970s and early 1980s. Richardson spearheaded the warehouse's re-purposing which included an "extensive participatory design process" involving the staff in a cooperative effort.¹²⁸ This approach was in keeping with Appalshop's overall philosophy of participatory decision making. The internal space was designed to encourage openness and expression and the design of the external face included cedar siding covering the original brick that gave the building a rustic look. (See figure 3). This combination reinforced Appalshop's commitment to open artistic expression and to the aesthetic beauty of traditional rurality. The renovation cost was nearly

¹²⁶ Gregg Swem, "Appalshop's New Home Will Be Dedicated Saturday in Whitesburg," *Louisville Courier-Journal*, Photocopied, Day and Month unclear, 1982, 1.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Matthews Architecture, "Portfolio - Appalshop Center." www.matthewsarchitecture.com/portfol/appal/index (accessed June 16, 2013).

\$900,000. Three-fourths of the funding came from grants from the United States Economic Development Administration, the Appalachian Regional Commission, the Kresge Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. The remaining quarter was Appalshop's contribution.¹²⁹

The wide variety of contributors to the project illustrated the scope of influence and acclaim Appalshop enjoyed only a little over a decade after its founding. It was functioning as a local employer, a lightning rod for various components of Appalachian social movements, and a nationally recognized artist-run media cooperative.

The new building opened with a *Grand Opening Celebration* in September 1982 and remains Appalshop's home. The program for the grand opening included the following "Invitation and Thank You" to the people in the region:

Appalshop has moved into a new home, a renovated warehouse in downtown Whitesburg, Kentucky; With its completion the people of the region will have access to a wide assortment of facilities. A 150 seat theater, gallery and lobby space, meeting rooms, a screening room, and darkroom. We encourage you to use this space, to make our new home yours, and to participate in the ongoing activities of the Appalshop.

Since 1969, Appalshop has been able to get through lean times and prosper in good times because people who worked here have given a lot, people throughout the mountains have openly shared their experiences and their time, and people from all over have been willing to take risks with their resources, betting that this experiment would work. Those of us who have been entrusted with this building want to acknowledge these many gifts and set ourselves about doing work which is befitting of such a trust.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Appalshop, *Appalshop Grand Opening. September 24, 25, 26, 1982*, ed. (Whitesburg, Kentucky: Appalshop, 1982).

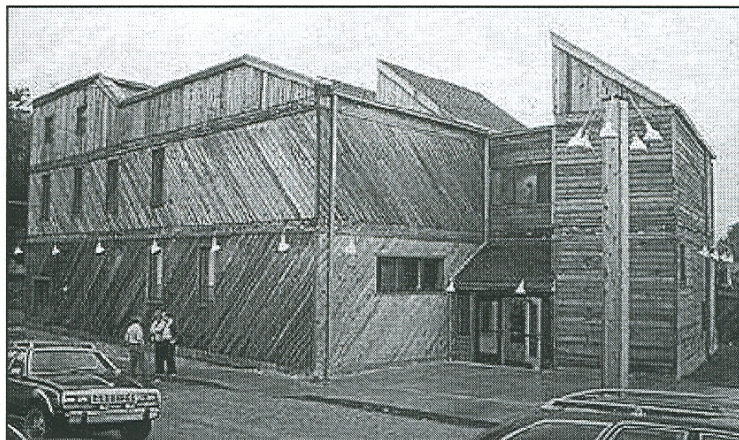


Figure 6- Appalshop 1982-present

By the mid-1980s Appalshop was firmly established and well-housed. It was running on a million dollar plus budget annually, was a leading community employer, and all of its expansion programs were on solid footing. The renovation of space in the late 1970s and early 1980s is a powerful metaphor for the expansion of the scope of the organization. By the time the building was completed, Appalshop had become a local mainstay, a regional gathering spot, and a national cultural treasure.

Conclusion

Appalshop's interaction with various Appalachian social movements and the organizations and individuals that comprised them was the most important factor influencing its history in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The foundation laid in the first few years with films that were so honest, poignant, widely screened, and well received, coupled with the expansion programs in the mid-1970s, propelled the organization to a well-deserved position of prominence in the region. The seemingly boundless energy and

dedication of the staff members and artists brought them into contact with a wide array of minority rights crusaders, artists, protesters and activists, and academics who contributed to the rich fabric of the social movements propelling an Appalachian renaissance forward. Appalshop was in a unique position to act as a conduit for new and exciting ideas and strategies from individuals and organizations striving to improve the region. The films and other creative output from this period reflected both the influence that interactions with creative, dedicated, and inspirational people had on Appalshop's institutional history, and the important role it played as a catalyst to propel the movements into greater successes.

Appalshop's growth and development as a regional institution was not at the expense of its role in the local community. In the late 1970s and early 1980s the organization continued to focus on integrating into its Whitesburg, Kentucky home. Herb Smith summed up how these different roles overlapped: "Appalshop is a small portion of a larger process throughout the Appalachians—and I find it in thousands of communities that we visit"¹³¹ The most important of those communities for Appalshop was still Whitesburg. In addition to the already prevalent performances, screenings, and community involvement, Appalshop reached out further in the mid-1980s by offering educational courses on many topics including photography, basket weaving, piano, clogging, and guitar. Sixty-five students enrolled in these courses in the first year. Later the program expanded to include cake decorating, darkroom, square dancing, banjo, sewing, calligraphy, drawing, and painting.¹³² Through these programs Appalshop stayed connected to the people of Whitesburg, even as the organization expanded into a regional and national institution.

¹³¹ Paget-Clarke, 9.

¹³² Appalshop, "Community Classes Begin," *Appalshop Notes*, Fall 1985, 5.

Appalshop's increasingly important role as a national arts organization encouraged artists to realize and embrace self-awareness of their role in preserving and reconstructing Appalachian identity in these years. In 1985, Appalshop hosted a national conference sponsored by the National Alliance of Media Arts on *Media and Democracy: Shaping the American Cultural Image*.¹³³ Unlike the earlier conference on *History On Film* that utilized Hindman Settlement School's resources, at this point Appalshop was in a position to hold the meetings at its own new facility. The choice to host *The Media and Democracy Conference* in Whitesburg was part of national recognition of fifteen years of Appalshop. It kicked off a multi-faceted anniversary celebration by highlighting fifteen films including both classics and premieres.¹³⁴ The conference made use of the new facilities for meetings, receptions, and numerous film screenings. The purpose of the conference was "to examine how the media arts field, through creating new organizational alliances, can create new audiences locally and nationally for independent media arts—film, video, audio—in America."¹³⁵ The celebration continued as the American Film Institute, the organization that sponsored the original Community Film Workshops, recognized Appalshop's 15th Anniversary with extended tribute shows in New York and Washington, DC.¹³⁶

By 1984, Appalshop operated on a large, steady budget that supported thirty-four full time and several part-time employees.¹³⁷ *Appal Notes* in early 1985 reported statistics

¹³³ Appalshop and National Alliance Media Arts Centers, *Media and Democracy: Shaping the American Cultural Image*, ed. (Whitesburg, Kentucky: Appalshop, 1985), 1-2.

¹³⁴ Barbara Rehm, "American Film Institute Show Recognizes Films of Appalshop," *The Coalfield Progress*, Nov 20 and 22, 1984, 1.

¹³⁵ Appalshop and National Alliance Media Arts Centers, 1-2.

¹³⁶ Rehm, "American Film Institute Show Recognizes Films of Appalshop," 2.

¹³⁷ Desson Howe, "Appalshop: Linking Art and Life," *Washington Post*, November 14, 1984, 15.

for the previous year that quantified the growth Appalshop had experienced over the past decade. In 1984, 87 tour groups visited the new facility and an estimated 7,800 people attended music and theater performances by Appalshop artists there in that year.¹³⁸ Roadside performed 146 shows to an estimated audience of nearly 40,000. June Appal released 5 albums and sold 24, 984 copies of recordings. The estimated number of people that saw Appalshop films in 1984 was nearly 100,000 and the potential audience for *Headwaters* was three million.¹³⁹

Clearly by this point Appalshop was a well-established organization in the local community, in the Appalachian region, and on the national stage. The important connections secured in the 1970s and 80s with Appalachian reformers, artists, activists, and scholars reinforced these roles and Appalshop's stability in general. From here the organization went on to engage in numerous experimental and creative endeavors that would have been impossible in the earlier, less stable earlier years including an annual music festival called *Seedtime on the Cumberland*, the Appalachia Media Initiative that trains Appalachian young people in filmmaking and sponsors international filmmaker exchange programs, and WMMT radio that is accessible across the globe via internet.¹⁴⁰

Broadly understood, the Appalachian movements of the 1970s and early 1980s included a wide variety of people and organizations from different walks of life with a broad array of goals and divergent ideas about how to bring about social change in the region.

¹³⁸ Appalshop, "1984 Statistics," *Appalshop Notes*, 3.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Appalshop, "Seed Time on the Cumberland" <http://seedtimefestival.org/> (accessed October 30, 2013). and "Appalachia Media Initiative" <http://www.appalshop.org/ami/> (accessed October 30, 2013). Appalshop-WMMT, "Wmmt's History" www.wmmt.org/about-2/history (accessed November 16, 2012).

While the connections to these movements grew directly out of Appalshop's local community in Whitesburg, its path would have been very different if local connections were not embedded in a region that was itself experiencing a "movement of movements." Immersion in the local community would likely have been a component of any endeavor like Appalshop wherever it took root. However, Appalshop took on another identity as an Appalachian organization within a larger social movement context. It is both a product of, and a defining element in, this array of organizations and grassroots struggles.

The timing of Appalshop's founding made it a contemporary of the Appalachian renaissance and an integral part of shaping it. It shared vision and characteristics with many social movement groups and individuals, but was also unique. There was nowhere like Appalshop. Helen Lewis wrote that the artists were neither objective observers nor crusaders.¹⁴¹ Appalshoppers did not pretend to be unbiased about the issues that they saw as most important in the region, but they were also open to many ways of looking at them. Appalshop's decentralized organizational structure made it pliable enough to accommodate various groups.

It appealed to artists in a direct way as an outlet for creativity and expression, to communities through performances and screenings, to activists through progressive political leanings of its numerous coal-related, political, and environmental films, and to scholars through projects built on research and promoting more accurate versions of the region's history and social development. Appalshop was thus in a position to facilitate cooperation among many voices in Appalachia. In return the artists and staff members benefitted from the work others in the region were doing and, in part because of the knowledge and

¹⁴¹ Lewis, "Appalshop: Preserving, Participating in, and Creating Southern Mountain Culture," "Appalshop: Preserving, Participating in, and Creating Southern Mountain Culture," 81, 84.

experience it afforded them, were able to propel the organization into a regional institution that would continue to generate important artistic output and would remain on the frontlines in the region's most important battles for social change in the future.

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Chapter Six

Conclusion:

Hope for the Future-- Documentary, Identity, and Social Change

New technologies such as 16mm have been trumpeted as a way out of the quandary of “truth” but really just opened up new ways to explore it. – Pat Aufderheide, Documentary Film Historian¹

It’s a sense of self-identity and a notion of who we are as a people—the idea that we could say to ourselves and the region, and to our kinfolks who had moved away that there are valuable things here in the mountains. To me it comes down to a sense of hope for the future. – Herb E. Smith²

Appalshop’s early history, rooted in the commitment to “Appalachians Speaking for Themselves,” reveals a great deal about the important role of media technology in identity politics and social change in the latter half of the twentieth century. Appalshop staff members and the organization they built were operating on several levels in this period. Appalshop served as a vehicle for Appalachian artists, activists, and academics to express themselves. Its artists documented subjects from the local Whitesburg community and the organization served that community as an employer and as a cultural resource. Over the first fifteen years of its existence, it grew to be an important regional and to a lesser degree national organization that explored what it means to be Appalachian in the midst of a “movement of movements” for social change in the region.

¹ Pat Aufderheide, *Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction*, ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 127. Pat Aufderheide, *Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 127.

² Roger Fristoe, "Appalshop: Arts Center Celebration Honors 20 Enriching Years," *Louisville Courier-Journal*, September 24, 1989, 11.

Appalshop's organizational structure, staff, funding, and subjects changed significantly between its founding in 1969 and the early 1980s. The organization grew larger, the revenue stream became more stable and expansive, the technical proficiency of the films improved with experience, and the subjects Appalshop filmmakers tackled became broader and more diverse. However, from its founding as a War on Poverty program and subsequent struggle to establish independence, through the expansion of the mid-1970s to its establishment as a regional institution in the early 1980s, many of Appalshop's goals and ideas, including the fundamental dedication to "Appalachian Speaking for Themselves" remained consistent.³

Appalshop's earliest artists framed the organization based on closely held ideas and goals that reflected the value they saw in Appalachian culture and the passion they had for social justice. They understood the significance of the idea of cultural other-ness in America at this time. They believed that control of media was too tightly in the grip of people whose ignorance and prejudices informed their portrayal of cultural outsiders (minorities)—including the hillbillies of Appalachia—to the point that they were generally inaccurate and offensive.

Appalshop fought for the democratization of technology as a strategy to counteract negative repercussions of cultural degradation. The artists repeatedly asserted their conviction that there was something of value in Appalachian culture and history and dedicated themselves to capturing and disseminating material culture that demonstrated that value. Appalshop's commitment to these core beliefs is evident in promotional materials it generated, in press coverage it received from journalists and commentators all over America, and in every process and product the artists created. In part, this study of

³ Micheal W. Perri, "Appalshop," *Art Papers*, 12-16.

Appalshop's early history and evolution is important because it documents the specific challenges and triumphs the artists and staff members experienced in remaining committed to these goals and values.

Appalshop's story, though, is also relevant beyond just the institutional history or analysis of the content of specific output. It was an example of a successful organization using technology newly available to a wider spectrum of people of varied socioeconomic classes toward the end of cultural reinvigoration and social change. It was also a significant contributor in defining Appalachian identity in a social movement context where cultural politics and minority movements rooted in identity were at the forefront of American progressivism.

The first broader theme in American history to which Appalshop's early history is relevant is the importance of technological advancement, and the undeniable implications of the democratization of new technologies. This topic has become even more salient in recent decades with the proliferation of affordable high-quality handheld cameras and the marketing potential of the internet. In today's context of amateur video and outlets like youtube.com, it is hard to imagine a world where the power to create and distribute a film or an album of music was almost exclusively in the hands of the state or large corporations. Appalshop was part of the dynamic reinvention of how Americans produced and marketed media and its early artists and promoters were uniquely poised to use changing trends in media to forward their goals.

Appalshop was founded in the midst of increasingly widespread use of documentary as a tool for social change. Social documentary is a way of grappling with the systems of

knowledge, production, and power that alienate modern individuals.⁴ Appalshop's use of documentary in this way is an example of national and international revolution in media—especially documentary—in the context of social movements. Even the decision that a topic is important enough to deserve a film and the actual process of making that film are parts of movement culture. It was an exciting time and people were exploring creative ways to use documentary to encourage agency and improve society. One example is a project sponsored by the Canadian Film Board—a leading entity in Cinema Verité and Direct Cinema style documentary film rooted in John Grierson's tradition of social consciousness. The project used film technology to provide citizens access to the means to express their concerns and needs and to create a dialogue with agencies of government responsible for social programs.⁵ Its goal was to go beyond using Cinema Verité and Direct Cinema films as mirrors and to give “regular people” the opportunity to use them as a ‘hammer’—a force for social change by going beyond communicating to or for the people to communicating WITH the people and allowing them to control the means to create their own media. Grierson believed this project succeeded in “decentralizing the power of propaganda.”⁶

Appalshop mirrored aspects of this strategy in an Appalachian regional context. It provided an opportunity for “Appalachians Speaking for Themselves” to be heard. Film technology in the hands of minorities (in the various ways that is defined in American culture) has come to be one of the most important tools to raise awareness and affect social change. Appalshop was on the ground floor of this revolution in media and its history is a

⁴ Jonathan Kahana, *Intelligence Work: The Politics of American Documentary*, ed. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2008), 2.

⁵ Ellis and Jack C. Ellis and Betsy A. McLane, *A New History of Documentary Film*, ed. (New York, NY: Continuum, 2005), 245-46.

⁶ Ellis and McLane, 246.

salient example of one important way documentary film functioned as a vehicle to attempt to balance the scales of justice.

Secondly, Appalshop's history is relevant to the history of identity politics and minority rights movements in America in the second half of the twentieth century. Through effective use of technology, Appalshop and other organizations like it in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s redefined Appalachian identity. Following a pattern set by the African American Civil Rights movement, the Appalachian "movement of movements" became one of many movements rooted in identity politics that delineated platforms that encouraged solidarity, cultural reinvigoration, and social justice. Collectively, these movements changed the way mainstream American culture viewed minorities and made real differences in institutions and public policies that had previously codified injustices rooted in prejudice and exploitation.

The most important thing the changing character of the documentary films Appalshop produced over this fifteen year period affirms is that having a hand in defining their own cultural identities encourages people to fight more effectively for social justice. Cultural degradation is a powerful deterrent to social activism. The student artists at the Appalachian Film workshop saw it as a debilitating obstacle directly affecting their lives and their communities. In this sense, the goal to use newly available media to allow Appalachians to speak for themselves and the act of portraying Appalachian identity in a more positive and accurate light was an extremely important contribution in a social movement context.

In the beginning, Appalshop's role as a regional organization and its contributions to ideas about Appalachia was less conscious than in later years. However, the seeds of

identity politics and the desire to redefine what it meant to be Appalachian were evident from the very beginning. Appalshop filmmakers considered the films to be authentic portrayals of local mountain culture and they considered the local mountains around them to be “Appalachian.” In this sense they were always an “Appalachian” organization. Appalshop artists and staff members reinforced this with generous use of the term throughout the seventies to describe themselves and their artistic output in promotional materials, interviews, and grant proposals. Commentators writing about Appalshop in newspapers and reviews also readily used the term “Appalachian” to describe the organization and, in fact, even its name is a shortened version of Appalachian Film Workshop. However, Appalshop filmmakers stopped short of directly asserting that any particular film represented the culture of the entire region or that there is anything essentially “Appalachian” about the film subjects and content.

Rather than simply refuting negative portrayals of the region and its inhabitants, Appalshop filmmakers offered versions of Appalachian culture that were much richer and more nuanced than the material culture that local color writers, novelists, or television show creators, and filmmakers that preceded them produced. As the organization and the artists matured, the Appalachia that Appalshop artists presented became more diverse and complex. They effectively walked a fine line by undermining stereotypes, while simultaneously reinforcing identity. The subjects of films, musicians, actors, photographers, writers, and other Appalachians they gave the opportunity to speak for themselves told of a regional identity and culture that was conflicted and at times victimized and exploited, but that was also authentic, diverse, and valuable.

Over the course of the years covered in this study, Appalshop artists became increasingly aware of their own roles as not just preservers, but creators of Appalachian culture. *Strangers and Kin* is an excellent example of the artists' increasing awareness of this role.⁷ Where the earlier films portrayed Appalachians Speaking for Themselves through specific cultural practices, political discussions of relevant topics, or efforts to make communities better, *Strangers and Kin* illuminated a more complex analysis of the larger reasons these films needed to be made in the first place. It explored the impact of decades of cultural degradation and economic exploitation that left some Appalachians feeling powerless to fight back. This film showed the insight gained from over a decade of working in the region and clearly exhibited that Appalshop was dedicated to being an active part of re-making Appalachian identity. Though it is directly in line with Appalshop's early goals, it could not have come to fruition without the benefit of experiences and relationships over the course of the 1970s and early 1980s.

There is also evidence of the importance of connections forged at the national level with groups carrying out similar endeavors in other areas of the country.⁸ In this context, Appalshop began to influence not only the way Appalachians saw themselves, but the way the nation saw them as well.⁹ Artistic output that highlighted material arts and crafts resulted in interest and collaboration from members of the national folk movement, live screenings and shows drew attention from audiences and the press, and federal grants reinforced its role as an important part of not just Appalachian, but American culture, art,

⁷ *Strangers and Kin*, directed by Herb E. Smith, (Whitesburg, KY: Appalshop, 1984), VHS.

⁸ "Arts Idea Exchange," *Washington Post* (1978). <http://infoweb.newsbank.com> (accessed March 6, 2012).

⁹ Lynda Roscoe Hartigan, "Going Urban: Americal Folk Art and the Great Migration," *American Art* 14, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 28.

and politics. In addition to positive reviews of screenings in national press outlets, the artists received letters of interest and encouragement from folk enthusiasts as well as a wide range of powerful high-profile individuals from professional actors to politicians.¹⁰

Most importantly, the study of Appalshop's evolution is a testimony that it is possible in America for people with limited resources and no formal training to make a difference. Appalshop generated artistic output that provided an important alternative to mainstream media. Its story is an example of the effectiveness of bottom-up agency. It is a testimony that activism, artistic expression, and scholarly research in the hands of "regular people" committed to improving their lives and communities matter.

Appalshop combined the democratization of new technology with a burgeoning movement context in the region to give Appalachians the opportunity to participate in defining their own identities and to use this as a platform to seek social justice. Appalshop and the many Appalachian social movements it has been such an integral part of have made significant leaps toward positive social change in the region since the groundswell of activity in the 1970s. As part of a larger social movement context it had both direct and

¹⁰ Wendell H. Ford, *Letter to Josephine Richardson*, June 11, 1976. Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Box F5, Operational Records 1970-77, Correspondence and Proposals and Projects. File Name--Correspondence; Paul N. McCloskey, *Letter to Ms. Amelia Pickering*, June 11, 1976. Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Box F5, Operational Records 1970-77, Correspondence and Proposals and Projects. File Name--Correspondence; Alan Lomax, *Letter to William Richardson*, February 12, 1974. Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Box F5, Operational Records 1970-77, Correspondence and Proposals and Projects. File Name- Correspondence; Howard Klein, *Letter to Carl D. Perkins*, March 26, 1974. Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Box F5, Operational Records 1970-77, Correspondence and Proposals and Projects. File Name--Correspondence; Carl D. Perkins, *Letter to Mr. Bill Richardson*, April 5, 1974. Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Box F5, Operational Records 1970-77, Correspondence and Proposals and Projects. File Name--Correspondence; Marty Doty of Walt Disney Telecommunications and Non-Theatrical Company, *Letter to Mr. Garrison*, July 27, 1984. Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Box F5, Operational Records 1970-77, Correspondence and Proposals and Projects. File Name--Correspondence; Appalshop, *Mailing List*, Specific Date Unknown-Mid-1970s. Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Box F5, Operational Records 1970-77, Correspondence and Proposals and Projects; Bill Richardson, *Letter to Conrad Pressman*, December 6, 1971. Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Box F5, Operational Records 1970-77, Correspondence and Proposals and Projects. File Name--Correspondence; Bill Pratt, *Correspondence to A.F.W.*, May 21, 1970. Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Box F5, Operational Records 1970-77, Correspondence and Proposals and Project; William R. Weinberg, *Letter to Hon. Julian Carroll, Governor Cc: Dee Davis*, 1979. Accessed in Appalshop Archives, Box F5, Operational Records 1970-77, Correspondence and Proposals and Projects.

indirect influence in raising cultural awareness, exposing corruption, calling for justice in the coalfields in places like Buffalo Creek, and demanding accountability for environmental degradation like the poisoning of Yellow Creek. Numerous groups aimed at specific issues have grown more stable and larger groups like Kentuckians for the Commonwealth have been established to address a wide variety of related issues and have a voice for democracy in political discourse that just did not exist before. Appalshop was an integral part of this kind of social change in the region.

Appalshop and other social movement groups also contributed to the understanding of the region. For anyone that cares to learn about the region, there are a plethora of artistic and academic sources readily available. So many of Appalachia's artists, activists, and scholars have benefitted from and contributed to the impressive cultural resource Appalshop has become. Nonetheless, there is still much to be done. Mountain Top Removal has taken the environmental issues related to coalmining to a whole new level, and many communities are still struggling to find sustainable economic patterns that will alleviate persistent poverty. Every year brings more attempts—in formats ranging from news shows like *20/20* to reality shows like *Buckwild*, to “documentaries” like the *Wild Wonderful Whites of West Virginia*--to portray the region and its inhabitants as backward, exotic, fatalistic, and economically desperate. The work of organizations like Appalshop has never been more important.

In many ways, Appalshop, and other movement groups in the region have moved beyond the original thrust to challenge and balance stereotypes—not because it is not important, but because to whatever degree it can be done, it's been done! Stereotyping will never be eliminated, but there is now a base of scholarship and opposition that no longer

allows negative portrayals to go unanswered. On the cutting edge of national trends like multiculturalism and diversity, these individuals, groups, and institutions have demonstrated that the nation, regions, states, and individual communities derive strength from both their shared traditions and the many ways they are different. Appalshop's early commitment to "Appalachians Speaking for Themselves" opened doors to worlds those young people could never have imagined, and as a result people have found support, encouragement, opportunity, expression, and community at Appalshop.

Though Appalshop staff members grew beyond their week to week existence and their contempt for authority, they never lost their rebellious spirits, lack of pretension, commitment to authenticity, and passion for social justice that grew from their early roots in the 1960s counterculture. Their ideas about Appalachian identity grew over time with their lives and artistic experience, but they never lost their hearts for the communities that make up the region. And in process, their pool of talent and creativity only grew stronger. Their ongoing work over the last 40 years demonstrates this.

The Appalachia that Appalshop exhibited through the newly available technology it acquired in the early 1970s is a complex world of diversity and multiple truths as unique as the people and landscapes in the region that Appalshop has been so dedicated to representing, analyzing, and defending. The kind of change this organization and those it has partnered with over forty years of hard dedicated work is not the kind that comes at the point of a gun, in a picket line, or even from a ballot box, though it has supported and documented some of those means to social justice as well. This aspect of Appalshop's work is the kind of change that happens in individuals—in their perceptions of their home, their families, their cultures, and their possibilities. It is slow, but constant, difficult, but

rewarding, frustrating, but real--with depth and staying power that makes a difference in hard fought inches. This lays the groundwork for social change that is more evident such as public policy and democratic representation, but in itself it is still a revolutionary goal. Appalshop artists gave Appalachians the opportunity to speak for themselves, and what they spoke about was a vibrant, real, diverse, active, valuable, and hopeful place worth fighting for and that people can be proud to call home.

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Teaching Assistant, History		2005-2012
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Project Assistant, Development of APP 101 Online Tutorial		2006-2008
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