

UNSUNG

An Architectural Allegory on the Government Hill Wireless Station

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An Architectural Allegory on the Government
Hill Wireless Station

by
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ABSTRACT

In this Thesis, titled *Unsung, An Architectural Allegory on the Government Hill Wireless Station*, I explore issues of historic preservation through the medium of allegory. His research touches on many topics related to history, memory, and story, and views these all through the lens of sound. The Thesis explains how communication, and its development over time, relates to the importance of stories and sound, and that act is still one of connexion and transcendence.

The Government Hill Wireless Station in Anchorage serves as the case study for these explorations. The building is on the Historic Register, and is one of the oldest buildings in Southcentral Alaska. Its history very much parallels modern development and settlement of the State, and so retains the stories of those generations of people. Because it was the first permanent radio building for Anchorage, this Thesis uses the technology of radio to explain the more esoteric concepts it explores. Additionally, the Thesis reifies that the invention of wireless communication fostered the Modern Era, and forever changed how the world communicated and connected.

Providing further evidence for the theories it proposes, the Thesis explains and validates traditional Dena'ina beliefs. The Dena'ina people are the indigenous peoples who settled in Southcentral Alaska, and they maintained a traditional lifestyle into the Twentieth Century. Their appreciation for the power of a place, its holiness and significance, shaped their cultural practices.

They believe that all things, animals, plants, and people have spirits, and the interactions, or connexions, of those spirits imbue places and objects with certain metaphysical qualities. Significant sites have place spirits, that produce a milieu dependent on the nature of the events that transpired there. These place spirits, and their relationship to sounds, stories, and memories, preserve cultural sites.

Not subject to convention, this architectural Thesis engages the question of how sound can enhance current practices of Historic Preservation, and shape attitudes of significance and permanence. Although most architectural theses transparently criticize or wantonly neglect the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Historic Preservation, *Unsung* instead offers new interpretations of the existing statutes. It does not seek to change them or question them, but change preservationists' attitudes toward them. The Thesis offers more inclusive positions toward rehabilitation, preservation, restoration, and reconstruction, that can apply to locally significant and less-prominent historic resources.

With this allegory, I tell a story, about place, sound, and memory. The Thesis synthesizes evidence from the historic record, art, sound production, music, indigenous paganism, storytelling, and the Arctic way of living to offer a theory on how historic preservation can include sound as a medium, and not only rely on the material fabric of buildings.

“We all– they all have spirits. Everything has spirits, no matter what it is: brushes, the trees, bugs, everything. [...] So that wolf learned from that experience.” –Gladys Evanoff, Dena’ina Elder

“The economy is a wholly owned subsidiary of the environment” –Sen. Gaylord Nelson

“We do not own this land, so much as the land owns us” –The Haisla Nation

“Nature bats last” –Anonymous

Shi k’a chida’eshjuq da shqenaga nihdi qadak’dih-nesh, ch’u henda beghuda iti’ihjesh, shhenaga gini. Nu’uy jadeht biqutighu! –Shem Pete, Dena’ina Elder

When I too have died, you will hear my language and so forth, and possibly for this reason you will save yourself, by my words here.

Quht’ana nch’uk’a qit’ayidine eġnen gini t’ehtuniġ ch. Eġnen gini biqutilghuġ! Quht’ana eġnen eġnen quq’ eyduna nch’uk’a yitdusniġ eġnen gini ghu t’ehtuniġ ch’ghu. Eġnen ghu shq’e ninkenteghudehi two feet through hqugh dendilkegh da. Yethdi t’eh-tuniġ ch’ghu. –Shem Pete’s Uncle, Dena’ina Shaman

People do not realize what will become of this earth. Turn to this land! The people living on the earth do not realize what will happen on this land. On the ground over me there will be structures overgrown with vegetation as much as two feet thick. That is what will happen.

POLEMIC PARAGRAPH

The Government Hill Wireless Station in Anchorage died at 1700 on 10 July 2017 and the spirits and stories that it contained began dissipating into the ether. The structures themselves preserved a hundred years of history in their fabric. Whereas traditional and codified methods of preservation were insufficient to resuscitate the structures, *Unsung* elucidates through an architectural allegory the preservation of memories, stories, and place spirits without nostalgic subservience to historic constructs.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ENTRACT: INTRODUCTION	001	ECONOMIC ZONING MAP- 067	
AN ARCHITECTURAL ALLEGORY ON THE GOVERNMENT HILL WIRELESS STATION.	011	SENIOR MAP- 067	
ACT I: ON HISTORY	013	CONCLUSION- 069	
EARLY SETTLEMENT- 018		ACT III: ON COMMUNICATION	071
ALASKA ENGINEERING COMMISSION ARRIVAL- 019		POWER OF RADIO- 073	
A TOWN IS BORN- 021		SOUTH WELLFLEET STATION- 073	
A STATION IS BORN- 022		ALASKAN RADIO- 074	
WORLD WAR I- 026		BUCKMINSTER FULLER- 075	
WAMCATS- 027		TRANSCENDING SIGNALS- 075	
WORLD WAR II- 029		CONCLUSION- 076	
POST-WAR GROWTH AND CHANGE- 030		ACT IV: ON SOUNDS	079
WIRELESS STATION REUSE- 031		SOUND ARCHITECTURE- 081	
WIRELESS STATION ABANDONMENT- 032		ACOUSTICS- 082	
WIRELESS STATION PRESERVATION- 033		RESONANCE- 083	
WIRELESS STATION REHABILITATION- 034		REDRAWING SPACE THROUGH RESONANCE- 086	
ACT II: ON MAPPING.	039	INTERACTIONS WITH SOUND- 087	
LOCATING GOVERNMENT HILL- 042		PROGRAMMING SOUND SPACES- 089	
BUILT ENVIRONMENT OF GOVERNMENT HILL- 053		CONCLUSION- 090	
STRUCTURE AGE MAP- 056		ACT V: ON SPIRITS	093
OWNERSHIP AND TRANSFER MAP- 059		TRADITIONAL DENA'INA CULTURE AND COSMOLOGY- 095	
HOUSING PRICE MAP- 059		PLACE SPIRITS- 097	
CONTROLLED, CONTESTED, AND COMMON LAND MAP- 061		STORYTELLING- 097	
SEQUENCE OF DEVELOPMENT MAP- 064		TAK'AT- 097	

CHULYIN VEJEX SUKDU'A- 098
 RAVEN AND CARIBOU STORY- 098
 KIŁ CH'QINAGHIŁNIK'EN SUKDU'A- 099
 THE STUPID BOY STORY- 099
 WIRELESS STATION- 101
 SECTION HOUSE- 102
 CONCLUSION- 103

ACT VI: JOURNEY 105

ANCHORAGE TRAILMAKING- 107
 HISTORIC JOURNEY TO GOVERNMENT HILL- 112
 RESTORING THE JOURNEY- 115
 INITIAL DESIGN- 117
 FINAL DESIGN- 121
 JOURNEY TO TAK'AT- 122
 JOURNEY FROM THE EAST- 122
 JOURNEY TO THE HALL OF THE DESCENDANTS- 127
 STATION 1- 128
 STATION 2- 129
 STATION 3- 130
 STATION 4- 131
 STATION 5- 132
 STATION 6- 133
 STATION 7- 134

STATION 8- 135
 STATION 9- 136
 STATION 10- 137
 STATION 11- 138
 STATION 12- 139
 CONCLUSION- 140

ACT VII: RESUSCITATION. 143

QUESTIONS OF SIGNIFICANCE- 144
 LOCAL ZONING REGULATIONS- 146
 RITUAL ASSEMBLY SPACE- 147
 ELDERS AS OPERATORS- 150
 FINAL DESIGN- 150
 DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAM- 174
 HALL OF THE DESCENDANTS- 178
 AMBULATORY- 179
 ARCTIC ENTRY- 180
 COMMUTORY- 182
 STEREO RECITATORY- 184
 AUDITORY- 185
 OFFERATORY- 186
 TRANSMITORY- 187
 ANTERESONATORY- 188
 RESONATORY- 189

TRANSPORTORY-	190
HALL OF THE ANCESTORS-	191
ANIMATORY, ORATORY, AND PONTIFICATORY-	192
ASCENTORY-	194
MONO RECITATORY-	195
ADMINISTRATORY-	196
REFECTORY-	198
INSULATORY-	200
EXPERIENCIAL NARRATIVE-	202
CONCLUSION-	209
ACT VIII: RUINATION	211
WIRELESS STATION REMAINS-	216
EXPERIENCIAL NARRATIVE-	219
CONCLUSION-	222
ACT IX: RESURRECTION.	225
RETENTION OF MEMORY-	227
FINAL DESIGN-	228
DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAM-	235
INSULATORY-	236
ARCTIC ENTRY-	237
REFECTORY AND COMMUNITORY-	238
ADMINISTRATORY-	239
ARCTIC ENTRY-	239
EXPERIENCIAL NARRATIVE-	240

ACT X: REPRESENTATION	245
ENDING AND BEGINNING.	279
ENDNOTES.	AII
LIST OF FIGURES	AVI
BIBLIOGRAPHY.	AXVI



Origins and
Inspirations

