## **UNSUNG**

An Architectural Allegory on the Government Hill Wireless Station

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An Architectural Allegory on the Government Hill Wireless Station

by Connor William Scher

Thesis document submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Architecture

at

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# PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE COLLEGE OF THE ARTS

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Fig. a. FACING PAGE:
Portrait of Connor Scher.
Emmalea Chan. March 2016.

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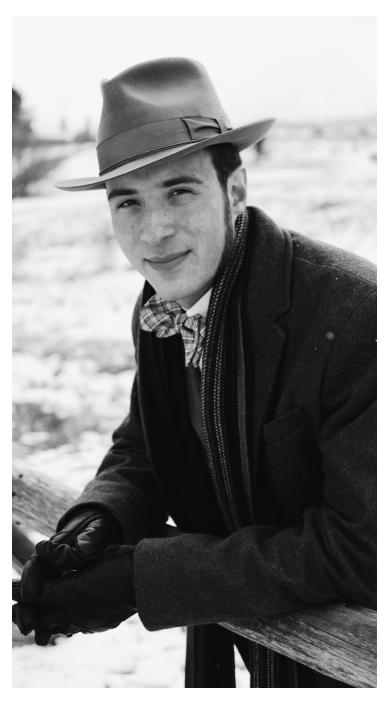
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To the residents of Anchorage, to whom I dedicate this Thesis, I hope you may enjoy the history I uncovered. Thank you for letting me tell your story, and the story of your ancestors. I hope future generations may learn from our experiences, laugh at our mistakes, and remember our heritage.

#### **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.

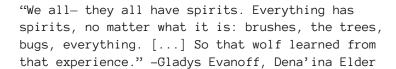
The Government Hill Wireless Station in Anchorage serves as the case study for these explorations. The building is on the Historic Register, and is one of the oldest buildings in Southcentral Alaska. Its history very much parallels modern development and settlement of the State, and so retains the stories 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 do not own this land, so much as the land owns us" -The Haisla Nation

Shi k'a chida'eshjuq da shqenaga nihdi qadak'dihnesh, 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. "The economy is a wholly owned subsidiary of the environment"  $-\mathrm{Sen}$ . Gaylord Nelson

"Nature bats last" -Anonymous

Quht'ana nch'uk'a qit'ayidine elnen gini t'ehtunil ch. Elnen gini biqutilghul! Quht'ana elnen elnen quq' eyduna nch'uk'a yitdusnil elnen gini ghu t'ehtunil ch'ghu. Elnen ghu shq'e ninkenteghudehi two feet through hqugh dendilkegh da. Yethdi t'ehtunil 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.

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