

Recorded in a Cabin in the Woods: Place, Publicity, and the Isolationist Narrative of Indie Music

MATTHEW DELCIAMPO

Abstract: This article addresses how isolationism is constructed within indie music publicity and how it indexes gender, race, and socioeconomic status. Using indie musicians Justin Vernon and Nick Zammuto as case studies, I analyze the phrases “the cabin in the woods” and “the middle of nowhere” to examine how the presentation of place within the genre reflects the identities of its musicians and audience. I conclude that the isolation narrative, in effect, inexorably exemplifies the genre itself: it enables musicians to reify their music’s originality, bolster its assumed authenticity, and thus solidify its purported “indie-ness.”

Résumé : Cet article porte sur la façon dont se construit l’isolement dans la publicité de la musique indépendante, et sur la façon dont il indexe les statuts socioéconomiques ainsi que de genre et de race. Prenant pour étude de cas les musiciens « indés » Justin Vernon et Nick Zammuto, j’analyse les expressions « cabane dans les bois » et « milieu de nulle part » pour examiner la façon dont la représentation du lieu au sein de ce genre reflète l’identité de ses musiciens et de leur public. J’en conclus que le narratif de l’isolement, en effet, est inexorablement exemplaire du genre lui-même : il permet aux musiciens de réifier l’originalité de leur musique, de renforcer son authenticité présumée et ainsi de consolider sa prétention à « l’indépendance ».

In the past decade, a number of musicians have found creative inspiration in wooded isolation. Writing on the current trend, Lucas Kavner describes how musicians retreat to rural areas of Washington, the Catskill mountains, and a cabin outside Raleigh, NC for artistic stimulation and quiet (Kavner 2012). For many such musicians, their seclusion becomes part of their self-promotion and publicity. Indie rock band FOXTRAX describes online how its members “holed themselves up in a cabin in the woods of North Carolina for six weeks ... [on a] “hiatus from the hustle and bustle of New York” (FOXTRAX 2017). Canadian country singer Corb Lund withdraws to his lodge in northern

Alberta to find refuge from everyday life stressors and develop new material (Atkinson 2012). In a similar manner to likeminded American folk-rockers of the 1970s (Hoskyns 2016; Ingram 2010), these musicians demonstrate the strong connection between isolationism and music, a trend that is particularly prominent within indie music. They represent the latest in American artistic attention to wooded seclusion, a trend so popular that Kavner concludes, “The Middle of Nowhere has become its own indie scene” (Kavner 2012).

Most visible among this self-sequestered cohort of musicians is Justin Vernon, whose group, Bon Iver, came to the attention of indie music news outlets after the release of its 2008 debut, *For Emma, Forever Ago*. As the album was publicized, so too was the story behind its recording: Vernon left where he was living in North Carolina and returned to his home state of Wisconsin to spend the winter at his family’s place in the woods. “I went straight up north to my dad’s cabin because I needed to be alone. I needed silence. It was a necessity more than a conscious decision,” he told *The A.V. Club* in 2008 (Hyden 2008). Vernon’s story was part of the album’s promotion, and while some criticized it as nothing more than a publicity stunt (*Vice* 2012), it worked mostly in his favour.

The promotion of *For Emma, Forever Ago* typifies what I refer to as the indie isolation narrative, a common phraseology used by both music publicists and journalists that ties place to musical production by using “the cabin in the woods” and “the middle of nowhere” to describe the writing and recording process. The indie isolation narrative is self-propagating. Once used, it appears in indie music journalism frequently thereafter. Additionally, its intimate ties to the perception of indie as separate from the mainstream music industry perpetuates its use. In the process, the narrative bolsters both the musicians’ cultural capital among indie fans and their financial capital gained through album, ticket, and merchandise sales.

The indie isolation narrative also recalls an American nature mythology fuelled by 19th-century Transcendentalists like Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson. In 1854, Thoreau published *Walden*, in which he described his time spent in the woods at Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts and his desire to live “deliberately” (1992 [1854]: 86). While the book was a moderate success for Thoreau after it was published, its popularity rose sharply among 20th-century readers, for whom Thoreau’s work glorified nature and prioritized solitude. The admiration of *Walden* established a tradition of Americans, who in this case are mostly white men of privilege, setting out into nature to reap its creative, psychological, and spiritual benefits. Mark Pedelty describes the legacy of the “Thoreauvian dynamic”: the interplay between the individual and “place, nature, and society” (Pedelty 2016: 216).

Thoreau's excursion into the woods, however, was not as idyllic or as isolated as it may have appeared to readers. As Pedelty and others describe, his writing romanticized both Walden Pond itself and his experience in it. The author was by no means a hermit; he regularly visited family and friends while living at Walden Pond. Additionally, Thoreau wrote much of *Walden* after his stay there. Nevertheless, the lasting legend of Thoreau's sojourn helped to forge a link between the experience of nature and artistic creation. The indie isolation narrative picks up this mantle and similarly idealizes the cabin in the woods and the middle of nowhere as places of escape and contemplation in which one receives divine inspiration.

The indie isolation narrative represents "place" in a distinct manner. It relies upon existing ideas about place within the minds of the indie audience yet has no definitive ties to a single geographic location. The cabin in the woods and the middle of nowhere are rather unspecific when analyzed as *places*. Where exactly is the middle of nowhere? Removed from a musical context, they describe ostensibly opposing locales: the cabin is definitely *somewhere*, although not named, while "nowhere" actively seeks no attachment to a specific locale. This contradiction recalls an existing dialogue surrounding how the concepts of place and space are related and defined. Yet despite their inexactness, the cabin in the woods and the middle of nowhere insinuate a connection to nature, which also signals the musician's naturalness and thus the musician's *supposed* genius (Goehr 2007 [1992]).

In this article, I suggest that the indie isolation narrative does not communicate a relationship to any specific place, but that musicians and trade publications use the phrases "the cabin in the woods" and "the middle of nowhere" to index gender, race, and socio-economic advantage. Living in urban areas often provides musicians a nearer proximity to audiences and easier access to resources, such as performance venues, recording studios, and media outlets. I emphasize here, however, that the indie isolation narrative presents the ability to toggle between rural and urban locations, an ability which characterizes the advantaged positions of those who benefit from the narrative. I begin by questioning whether the cabin in the woods, as it is formulated within this narrative, should be considered a place or whether it is best theorized through conceptions of detachment, space, and non-place (Augé 2009). I then unpack the term "indie," outline its use in this article, and consider how music journalists have written about place and isolationism. Building upon this context, I describe the indie isolation narrative and how publicists and journalists spread it. I analyze the ways purported isolationism links with the racial, socio-economic, and gender homogeneity of indie music. In contextualizing Vernon and the indie isolation narrative, I draw

upon ethnographic fieldwork with indie-electronic musician Nick Zammuto, whose home in the remote foothills of southern Vermont is a source of musical inspiration. I compare the isolationist narrative that characterized Vernon's and other indie musicians' recordings with Zammuto's own publicity — one that highlights his home's importance to his music and career. Zammuto offers an alternative perspective of the remote — not one that embraces isolationism but one that favours a connection to place, distanced from others as it may be. I contrast the middle of nowhere with what I describe as “the remote somewhere” of Nick Zammuto. Although I am critical of how the narrative surrounding Bon Iver constructs place, Vernon himself demonstrates his interest in local communities, particularly through his investment in his hometown of Eau Claire, Wisconsin. In this way, Vernon and Zammuto are similar, yet their publicities concerning place differ. Ultimately, this article makes the case that the presentation of place within the indie isolation narrative is reflective of the economically privileged, often male, and overwhelmingly white demographic that produces and listens to indie music.

Space, Place, and Non-Place

Several scholars have explored extensively the intellectual histories of space and place (see Tuan 1977; Bachelard 1994; Casey 1998; Cresswell 2015). Analyses of space and place are fluid; they depend upon subject position and perspective (Cresswell 2015). Defining a place often involves identifying a specific location, establishing its boundaries, and recognizing its history — whether forged through human experience (in towns, cities, etc.) or the acknowledgement of entities and processes that can exist independent of humanity (such as bioregions and ecosystems). Often place and space are connected in a complementary fashion: places are defined from spaces, or space is the absence of place (Cresswell 2015: 27-28). Geographer Tim Cresswell calls place “a meaningful location” and anthropologist Mark Pedelty similarly defines it as “space made meaningful” (Cresswell 2015: 12; Pedelty 2012: 20). For geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, space and place “require each other for definition” (1977: 6). Tuan argues that space involves a sense of movement, while place is defined by a pause — even if temporary. He notes, “The pause makes it possible for a locality to become a center of felt value” (138). Tuan makes the case that places distinguish themselves from spaces once humans assign them value, which is obtained through experience. In sum, spaces tend to be couched as nebulous, disconnected, yet-to-be-defined areas, while places are locales with which there is familiarity, history, and meaning.

The cabin in the woods and the middle of nowhere phrases each mix elements of space and place, and both require ambiguity in order to be effective within the indie isolation narrative. While the cabin in the woods evokes place more readily, it often requires additional context — a cabin in the woods near Eau Claire, Wisconsin for example. By contrast, even when musicians describe a retreat to the middle of nowhere, they inevitably travel to a defined location (i.e., a place) with which they have some level of investment and accumulated time spent there. To complicate matters further, the two phrases are sometimes conjoined within the narrative, “a cabin in the woods in the middle of nowhere,” which signals tepid relationships to both space and place. Neither provides the level of experiential involvement that Tuan, Cresswell, or Pedelty require of a place, yet they have more meaning than is typical of a space.

Anthropologist Marc Augé identifies a third category, the “non-place,” which is useful to describe liminal sites that are often positioned in — yet disconnected from — geographic locales (2009). Augé theorizes non-place through the impact of mobility in relation to place. He lists airports, bus stations, supermarkets, hotels, chain stores, and even “cable and wireless networks that mobilize extraterrestrial space for the purposes of a communication” as non-places (2009: 64). A non-place is often geographically situated within a place but bears little resemblance to that place and is devoid of its history. These are areas of “circulation, consumption and communication” (viii). In Augé’s work, people create “anthropological places” through involvement and strive to make them “places of identity, of relations, and of history” (43). The non-place lacks such characteristics. Important in Augé’s distinction between non-place and place (as well as space) is that non-places are inherently isolating: “As anthropological places create the organically social, so non-places create solitary contractuality” (76). For Augé and others (Relph 1976), mobilities have created a disjunction between human beings and places (see also Seamon and Sowers 2008). Considering the cabin in the woods and the middle of nowhere with reference to the non-place allows for an examination of how the two are framed within the indie music industry.

Although non-places are typically peopled whereas time spent in the cabin is characteristically solo, the key point of comparison is the resulting isolation. Despite the number of people who share a non-place, they have little relation to each other or to their shared locale. They rarely interact with one another for purposes other than what the non-place dictates. As an example, Augé cites the difference between a traveller and passenger — the latter being someone who is merely focused on the “*destination*” rather than a serious engagement with place (2009: 86; emphasis in original). Temporality is another key characteristic of the non-place. The non-place is not meant to be continuously inhabited but

visited and left. Shoppers, for example, spend little time in the supermarket relative to other places in their lives. They come and go as they please. The non-place exists for limited purposes, often for a single reason. Once that goal has been fulfilled, non-place occupants leave without any ties to each other or to their shared locale. The cabin in the woods is also marked by its fleetingness; it is a place that musicians can venture to and from at will.

When used within the indie isolation narrative, the cabin in the woods and the middle of nowhere disassociate from any specific location — as well as from that location's history and those who live there. The non-place characteristics of the cabin in the woods actually run counter to the strong associations that local indie and alternative music scenes have with places. Instead, the two phrases provide consumers with a tangible concept of seclusion, an area purposefully apart from place. They exist for a specific purpose, are both geographically and socially isolating, and are characterized by their temporality. In this way, the cabin in the woods and the middle of nowhere exhibit traits of non-place, rather than place or space.

Ruralness and Isolation in Popular Music

Spending time in nature is linked to several American artistic traditions. The MacDowell Colony has been providing a wooded retreat for artists for over a century, and similar institutions promote seclusion in nature as a way of fostering creativity. A certain attachment to ruralness is woven into the history of rock music in both the United States and the United Kingdom (Young 2010; Hoskyns 2016). In the 1960s, the Urban Folk Revival and an environmentally aware ethos engendered a desire for pastoral settings where musicians could hone their craft. Woodstock, New York and its surrounding area was home to an impressive list of American musicians who created a community there well beyond the town's namesake festival (Hoskyns 2016).

Rural settings also provide a sense of genuineness gained through imagined regional identification. David Ingram (2010) describes how Bob Dylan, the Grateful Dead, Linda Ronstadt, and other popular musicians of the era sought rural enclaves that were still adjacent to urban centres. A music publisher of the time, Dan Bourgeois, described one benefit of such locales: even though musicians were still in California or New York state, the isolated setting enabled them to pretend to be elsewhere, like "Kentucky or Tennessee or wherever you wanted to be" (Hoskyns 1996: 187; qtd. in Ingram 2010: 145). Ingram seems to imply that such musicians thus also benefited from the musical authenticity tied into these imagined southern environs. In an indie music context, the indie

isolation narrative takes on specific associations to place and emphasizes remote locations.

Beyond ruralness, the idea of place is inextricable from American popular music, and examples of its impact abound. Grunge music incubated in Seattle, Berry Gordy formed Motown Records in his hometown of Detroit, and the small town of Muscle Shoals, Alabama stands as a powerhouse of the country-soul music recording industry of the 1970s. Places define genres, localize music scenes, and bolster musicians' biographies through their connections to regional and homegrown styles. They are also interconnected with the language used to describe and categorize music. When a musician self-identifies as "country," for example, they draw upon historical meanings of what country sounds like, who performs it, and where such performers were born (Fox 2004). Record labels and other music media, like *American Idol*, promote not only the artists but also their homes, which signal the musicians' authenticity and "realness" (Meizel 2011: 149).

Isolationism presents a distinct challenge in relation to contemporary music and place. Recent popular music journalism has addressed isolation with varying degrees of critical engagement. In one article published on *Noisey*, the online music subsidiary of *Vice*, Emma Garland highlights how isolation can free musicians from distraction and inspire creativity. Garland lists both Radiohead's recording "in a 16th-century Tudor Mansion" and Gucci Mane's release of mixtapes from prison as examples of isolation but never addresses the social conditions or the (lack of) mobility that make these two places of musical production vastly different (2015). In a separate article, *NPR Music* contributor Ann Powers muses on how Sufjan Stevens's seclusion reflects his internal religious life (2015). She notes a different kind of solitude — namely alienation — in the music of Kendrick Lamar that emerged as the rapper introspected on racism in America and considered the ramifications of his newfound fame (2015). Powers provides a thought-provoking analysis of how musicians experience isolationism and what its effects are; however, her main concern is social isolation. By contrast, I offer that in this instance geographic isolation is intertwined with its social context. Indie musicians choose seclusion in places of leisure and respite that reflect their privileged social positions and promote their music.

Indie Music

"Indie" escapes a singular definition. Originally "independent," the shortened form has many uses. The term often describes geographic localities as sites of

music production — local indie scenes (Cohen 1991; Connell and Gibson 1997; Kruse 2010). Small record labels have long championed “indie” to distinguish themselves from the major labels and other music industry conglomerates, even though major and indie labels are often connected through subsidiary status or distribution deals. In the United Kingdom during the 1980s, “indie rock” surfaced as a term describing a distinction from the mainstream rock industry. In this context, indie had roots in the post-punk and DIY (do-it-yourself) scenes that emerged there and elsewhere a decade or more prior (Fonarow 2006). For British musicians, fans, and other participants in indie scenes, the term signals a variety of aesthetic, economic, and cultural characteristics. After a lengthy chapter exploring the meanings of indie, Wendy Fonarow concludes, “Indie is located ultimately in its discourse about its boundaries, in discussions about what it is and is not, because what it is constantly changes” (2006: 77).

Indie has a distinct history in the United States. In the early 1990s, musicians as diverse as Nirvana, the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Alanis Morissette, and Radiohead were classified as “alternative.” Despite the name, however, alternative musicians were among the most popular of that era: they toured extensively, performed in massive arenas, received considerable airplay, and gained popularity through music videos on MTV (Novara and Henry 2009). As a partial corrective for the conventionally leaning aspects of alternative music, “indie” thus came to describe musicians who could self-consciously disassociate from the influence of the mainstream (and thus alternative) music scene. In the late 1990s in the United States, the indie moniker indicated a purposeful detaching from other popular musics. Indie musicians in this era also benefited from a sense of creative freedom. As Vincent J. Novara and Stephen Henry assert, “The indie scenes evolved into places for experimentation and, ironically, as havens for musicians with straight-ahead pop sensibilities (as opposed to the ‘edgy,’ testosterone-driven sensibilities of post-*Nevermind* [hit album by Nirvana] alternative rockers)” (2009: 818). If indie was the new substitute for alternative during the 1990s, in many instances it soon suffered from the same dilemma as alternative once it became too big to be truly independent of the mainstream.

Around the turn of the century, a new crop of indie musicians from the United States and Canada made indie music publicly visible via frequent collisions with other varieties of popular culture. Zach Braff’s film *Garden State* (2004) brought indie music to the attention of many young people. The film’s soundtrack contained a variety of indie bands and, as Novara and Henry explain, the film’s lead characters used indie rock band The Shins to develop their romantic relationship and solidify a kind of cultural capital among listeners, “as if they were being let in on a secret” (2009: 830). What Novara and Henry

describe is a type of secret knowledge politics that characterizes some indie music fans who may appreciate a relatively unknown band for its obscurity, yet also desire to have other listeners share in their underground familiarity. Importantly, in 2011, indie band Arcade Fire won the Grammy Award for Album of the Year for its record *The Suburbs*. This win brought widespread attention to both Arcade Fire and indie music. It also sharpened the visibility of indie music within broader popular music spheres. For many music fans, the Grammy Awards indicate what is popular and therefore what they *should* be listening to.

Currently, indie expresses a variety of cultural and sub-cultural connotations for its listeners. Indie bands do not necessarily have one particular sound, meaning the term is routinely applied autonomously, apart from any genre-defining sonic characteristics. Ryan Hibbett writes, “The term, and others like it, positioned as they are at the intersection of various aesthetic, social, and commercial phenomena, occasion a unique glance into the complexities of cultural production” (2005: 55-56). Indie is a genre that is unified through shared cultural identifiers, rather than sound. As Taylor Martin Houston explains, “The autonomy constructed within the indie rock subculture provides a space for male rockers not only to defy mainstream music industry norms concerning sound and promotion, but also to challenge hegemonic constructions of masculinity” (2012: 160). The genre is thus unified through the sameness of its practitioners and audience, which begets specific behaviours within indie music spaces and aligns them through shared homosociality. I use the term “indie” because the musicians I discuss often employ it as a self-identifier. They call themselves indie and, importantly, so do their publicity apparatuses.

Turning back to the indie isolation narrative, one specific strength of the term “indie” in this article is that the cabin in the woods and the middle of nowhere represent voluntary seclusion from more populated places, which mimics the separation of indie music from the mainstream popular music industry. Ryan Hibbett notes the ability of indie music to be “independent of” the structures of the commercial popular music industry while using its supposed differences to define itself: “One can begin to see, then, that indie rock exists largely as an absence, a nebulous ‘other,’ or as a negative value that acquires meaning from what it opposes” (2005: 58). This nebulousness that Hibbett references could just as easily describe the amorphous place associated with “the cabin.” Indie musicians who identify with the isolation trope often speak of remoteness, seclusion, a communion with nature, and solitude or even loneliness. They gain social capital among listeners through the isolation narrative and they benefit from the tacit implication that their music has been bestowed upon them through nature and its spiritual power. Considering the

term from this perspective, it becomes clear that the narrative signals much beyond the sound of the music, especially among consumers.

The Effects of Indie Isolationism

Music publicists and journalists alike regularly incorporate information beyond the mere sound of the music to discuss an artist's work. They might source biographical details, liner notes, the musician's recent collaborations, accompanying media, interviews with the musicians, or stories about an album's origins in order to enrich the piece they are writing. In this article, I use the term "music publicist" to refer to anyone who is involved in the public representation or promotion of a particular musician and their work. These could be individuals working at a large publicity firm, indie label representatives who cold-call radio stations and media outlets to solicit interest, or even the musicians themselves — especially if they manage their own websites and social media. In the case of the indie isolation narrative, while it is often the publicist who first initiates the narrative, music journalists and fans frequently perpetuate it. The result is a self-sustaining account that becomes nearly obligatory when mentioning that musician in the future. As an anecdotal example, the isolation narrative has made its way into practically every interview with Vernon I have read, either posed to him directly in a question or referenced within an introductory paragraph. The continuation of the narrative immortalizes it within Vernon's promotion even today. After the release of Bon Iver's 2016 studio album, *22, A Million*, a childhood friend and collaborator of Vernon's, Trever Hagen, wrote a new bio for the group's website. It begins:

Ever since the door swung shut on that north woods cabin, we all felt like Justin entered a future we had imagined as kids. It was an obsessive, simple dream we shared as teenagers growing up in Wisconsin: just music, always. (Hagen 2016)

Later in the piece, Hagen refers to "Justin's recourse to isolation" when thinking retrospectively about Vernon's career in music (2016). Nearly a decade later, Vernon's isolationism continues to shape how his music is promoted.

The cabin in the woods — as it is formulated within indie music publicity — requires high socio-economic means; it is also almost exclusively white, and is, to a lesser extent, androcentric. While there is a rich tradition of women who compose about, among, and with the natural world (Von Glahn 2003, 2013; Feist 2016), the indie isolation narrative has become an almost exclusively

male space. Magazine and newspaper reviews often reference male lumberjack stereotypes — beards, flannel shirts, and a brawny physique (Frere-Jones 2009; Eells 2011; Pareles 2016). One *Rolling Stone* article describes Vernon as “six feet three and Norwegian-broad” and notes his “woodsman’s beard” (Eells 2011). While these are admittedly accurate descriptions of Vernon’s physical appearance, they also affirm an androcentric characterization of the woods and Vernon’s presence there. Even the use of the word “woodsman” automatically associates the wooded cabin with men.

Within the framework of the indie isolation narrative, time spent at a cabin in the woods requires at least moderate — if not substantial — economic means. The cabin is often a second home or is rented for leisure. This is a remoteness by choice, not by circumstance. The opposite transaction is commonplace within the history of American popular music. Narratives surrounding delta blues or country music, for example, feature stories of young, rural, and poor musicians who set out to “make it” in the big city — whether that be New York, Nashville, Chicago, or elsewhere. Such musicians succeed when they urbanize and escape their rural origins. The indie isolation narrative highlights the advantages of its associated musicians by emphasizing their literal and social mobilities. Indie musicians prosper artistically from their ability to retreat. The self-imposed disconnection from society can be undone at any time — another contrast to earlier rural musicians with limited mobility. Furthermore, the increased digital connectivity provided by the internet and other technologies enable one to be safely away from the world without total detachment. Musicians can be geographically isolated while still in contact with creative partners, fans, and the rest of the music industry. For musicians who choose isolation for a temporary amount of time, they do so with the knowledge that their seclusion has an end date.

Indie journalists have written recently about the genre’s homogeneity — particularly about its whiteness. In *Pitchfork* (itself arguably a purveyor of such uniformity), Sarah Sahim writes, “In indie rock, white is the norm” (2015). She lambastes indie for propagating an exclusionary culture while simultaneously drawing upon the work of musicians of colour. She connects this reality to the history of rock music in the United States: “White musicians seemingly can have it all: their almost impenetrable music scenes as well as their bastardization of most any other cultures. The root work by artists of color effectively disappears” (2015). Sahim questions which music becomes classified as indie and how that classification is enacted, using as an example an online petition to replace Kanye West with “a rock band” at the 2015 Glastonbury Festival. Sahim argues that in this instance “rock band” is code for white. In a response to Sahim’s essay, Noah Berlatsky echoes that among many indie fans, whiteness, rather than

sound, signals inclusion in the genre. He remarks that “genres like rock and indie are for many people defined by whiteness — that is, white skin becomes the genre marker, rather than the music itself” (2015). With few exceptions, musicians of colour are more likely to be excluded automatically from indie music, instead categorized under what Berlatsky calls “R&B with an asterisk” (2015). As Sahim and Berlatsky elucidate, in many instances, indie has become exclusionary, in blatant contradiction to its namesake.

Indie music’s racial homogeneity extends to its representation of place. White musicians are also the most frequently associated with the indie isolation narrative. I contend, however, that rather than a mere correspondence between the two, there is a more impactful connection that links indie isolation to the tradition of white American men setting out into the wilderness for inspiration. Sahim alludes to a similar connection: “While indie rock and the DIY underground, historically, have been proud to disassociate themselves from popular culture, there is no divorcing a predominantly white scene from systemic ideals ingrained in white Western culture” (2015). As Sahim makes clear, the linkage between isolation and “white Western culture” is indelible. As I describe later, Thoreau’s excursion to Walden Pond is similarly entrenched within the indie isolation narrative.

The indie isolation narrative indexes race, class, and gender around the experience of place and through its representation in music. It also parallels historical American conceptions of the “wilderness,” which Kevin DeLuca and Anne Demo contextualize in relation to the photography of Carleton Watkins and the writings of John Muir. DeLuca and Demo identify how whiteness and upper socio-economic positions relate to the wilderness and, later, to the environmental movement: “By linking wilderness to whiteness, the universality of the idea of wilderness as a natural fact comes under scrutiny and its cultural specificity and social and political history can be traced” (2001: 543). Summarizing the effects of Muir’s work, the authors state that Muir “is advocating a white wilderness that is a social construction with roots in culture, class, and race and which works to mark social distinctions and affirm hierarchies” (553). I suggest that the narrative of isolationism within indie music has a similar result. In the same way that Sahim and Berlatsky identify the self-perpetuating whiteness of indie music, so too has the socially constructed indie isolation narrative perpetuated the presumed naturalness of the solo excursion into nature by white men. In so doing, the indie isolation narrative reinforces existing social inequalities. Within indie music, the experience of nature thus remains exclusionary based upon social categorizations.

The cultural legacy of Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* took on a life of its own as it became a foundational example of an American sojourn into the

woods to seek respite and spiritual reconnection. Scholars have written on Thoreau, his representation of nature within *Walden*, his lasting impact on environmentalism, and his attention to sound (Buell 1995; Schneider 2000; Titon 2016). Lawrence Buell notes how “Thoreau’s canonicity has, in a way, exercised a restricting influence, reinforcing the notion of androcentric pastoral escape as the great tradition within American literary naturism” (1995: 25). Thoreau’s writings, particularly *Walden*, established a sanctified vision of nature within American popular culture for decades to come, yet his journey to Walden Pond became equivalently impactful. Buell writes of the “Thoreauvian pilgrimage” (311) to Walden Pond that cropped up after Thoreau’s death and also comments upon his legacy and its impact on the American environmental movement decades later:

He has been canonized as natural historian, pioneer ecologist and environmentalist, social activist, anarchistic political theorist, creative artist, and memorable personality combining some or all these roles. The result has been a more than ordinarily contested imaging process that presents itself to a striking extent both as a barometer of cultural history and as a means by which cultural values have been defined. (315)

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the enduring impact of Thoreau — along with other Transcendentalist authors, the landscape painters of the Hudson River School, and shifting cultural perspectives on nature — merged time spent outdoors with divine spirituality. When Thoreau withdrew to Walden Pond in the 1840s, however, ongoing chattel slavery and the systematic extermination of Native American indigenous groups made such a retreat unthinkable for most people of colour in the United States. Thoreau’s social and economic mobilities, as well as his literal freedom, enabled his sojourn. Access to, experience in, and perceptions of nature were not uniform in the 19th century and they remain inequitable today.

Thoreau’s writing contributed to a persistent and influential American environmental ethos. The first wave of environmental activists in the United States found inspiration in Thoreau’s pastoral vision from decades earlier. Bolstered by this legacy, Thoreau helped to establish the trope of the white American man who sets out into the secluded wilderness to seek creative inspiration, spiritual commune with nature, and divine transcendence. Lydia Goehr writes about how descriptions of artists in the early 18th century alluded to an “aura of naturalness” that conflated artistic ability and achievement with divine inspiration and nature (Goehr 2007 [1992]: 160). Goehr asserts, “By

transcending rules, artists were able to meet the demand that they create works that are experienced *as if* they were free from artificial making — as if they were natural” (161). Goehr continues, recognizing the paradox that “despite the force of the ideal of naturalness, artists were still to be conceived as genuine masters of their art” (162). The legacy of Thoreau’s visit to Walden Pond similarly engendered a type of excursion that hid the labour of artistic production in favour of transcendent inspiration. It is difficult to separate the notion of isolationism within American indie music from the impact of Thoreau. By publicizing isolationism, indie musicians reaffirm their indie-ness, purported authenticity, originality, and, by extension, their whiteness and androcentric social advantage. The indie isolation narrative also implies the indulgences of free time and freedom from distraction, as well as the luxury of disconnection and subsequent ability to focus solely on musical creativity.

Thoreau’s figurative shadow loomed over reviews of *For Emma, Forever Ago*, the debut album of Justin Vernon’s group, Bon Iver. *Pitchfork* noted how Vernon “sequestered himself in a remote cabin for four snowy months” and the author used Thoreauvian-signifying words like “natural,” “whittles,” and “isolation” to describe the music (Deusner 2007a). Later in 2007, *Pitchfork* described the “remote Wisconsin cabin” and “lonely winter” when it listed *For Emma, Forever Ago* as the 29th best album of that year (before the album’s wider release in 2008) (Deusner 2007b). The popularity of *For Emma, Forever Ago* brought Vernon and the indie isolation narrative squarely into focus.

For some, the isolation narrative was nothing more than slick publicity. One of the harshest criticisms of Bon Iver came from a *Vice* article published after the release of the group’s eponymous sophomore album. Using the satirical pseudonym Cinnabon Iver, an otherwise anonymous contributor suggested that Bon Iver is successful because of the wooded, bearded, isolation narrative. The author wrote:

A band like Bon Iver becomes super-duper popular because songs from their first album catch the attention of some publicist somewhere, who then pitches the record to popular indie music sites ... But the thing is, why them? There are a million bands, and the process of acquiring a publicist is often a nepotistic, cynical one that costs money that many musicians don’t have. The only thing separating Justin Vernon from Bobby Coffeeshop is he’d been in previous bands and got lucky enough to make an only-okay record under a set of circumstances that a publicist looked at and realized just screamed, “NARRATIVE!” (*Vice* 2012)

Here the author colourfully reiterates that the narrative behind *For Emma, Forever Ago* was an important piece of its publicity and that the narrative's consistent repetition in the media undoubtedly helped sell copies of the album. The trope has become so prominent — and maligned — that the online satirical newspaper, *The Onion*, published an article in 2011 titled, “Man Just Going to Grab Guitar and Old Four-Track, Go out to Cabin in Woods, Make Shittiest Album Anyone’s Ever Heard.” While there is nothing to indicate that contemporary musicians venture into nature purely for promotional purposes, it is important to note that doing so often endows them with a mystique that contributes to their publicity (Goehr 2007 [1992]).

Although the indie isolation narrative characterizes the cabin as an exclusive space, among Wisconsinites it is less frequently understood as such. In Wisconsin and other areas of the upper Midwest and Canada, a cabin in the woods is part of a broader culture of outdoor recreation among people from various socio-economic backgrounds. It is a place where people go to hunt, fish, and otherwise spend time in nature. These cabins may be hereditary or shared spaces inhabited for seasonal or short-term excursions. Within this cultural setting, the cabin is less frequently understood as a privileged vacation home and is, therefore, far less exclusive. Although it may be speculative to draw a link between Midwestern cabin culture and whiteness, the indie isolation narrative seems to take this supposition as fact. When the narrative reaches a national audience via indie music publicity this regionally specific understanding is replaced with one that is gendered, raced, and classed.

Regardless of the effects of the isolationist narrative, specific locales remain important to Vernon, and continue to shape his career and musical output. On Bon Iver's 2011 eponymous record, for which the group won the Grammy Award for Best Alternative Music Album, the majority of the tracks are titled after both real and imaginary places. Vernon's home of Eau Claire, Wisconsin figures prominently in his life (Gitner 2011). Vernon founded the Eaux Claires Music & Arts Festival along with Aaron Dessner of the indie band The National. The three-day festival features musicians from the local Eau Claire scene as well as nationally recognized groups. The festival organizers encourage headliners to arrive early, “spend time in the woods, work on music, experiment with new ideas,” and collaborate (Spitznagel 2017). In an interview with *The A.V. Club*, Vernon said, “Growing up, all I did was write about the fact that I'm from where I'm from. I was a big champion of where I was from and Wisconsin in general, and the Midwest. And I still am, to some degree” (Hyden 2008). He continued, citing the connection between the small-town feel of Eau Claire and the close proximity of a remote wooded area:

Just in general as a person, not necessarily as a songwriter, being in cities wasn't the right fit. I couldn't escape and be in the woods in [ten] minutes if I needed to. I like that in Eau Claire, I can walk to a bar or a coffee shop and there's city-ish things, but I can also drive and in eight minutes be at my parents' land outside of town. (Hyden 2008)

Regardless of Vernon's current feelings on the importance of place, he understands that the cabin was an easy detail to promote and for reviewers to pick out. He told *Pitchfork*: "It makes sense that that's part of the story and everything, but that's part of any story of any record ... I think people want to know where these events are made" (Mason-Campbell 2008). Vernon's ability to remain in Wisconsin and not move to an urban musical centre to expand his career is a sign of both his success and his privilege. Nevertheless, it is clear that Vernon values his connection to his home. My argument is not reflective of how important a place like Eau Claire is to Vernon personally, but is instead focused on how he and other musicians have touted seclusion and isolationism as being essential to their musical creation, and, importantly, how this narrative has been used to promote their records by other media outlets in both praise and criticism.

Nick Zammuto's Remote Somewhere

Indie-electronic musician Nick Zammuto composes and records at his home in rural Vermont, in a forested area similar to Vernon's cabin. Although Zammuto shares Vernon's same attraction to rural, wooded retreats, Zammuto's public attention to — and investment in — his home contrasts the isolationist narrative surrounding Vernon. I choose to highlight Zammuto here because of how his publicity showcases a tangible sense of working at his home in Vermont, contrasting the idea of non-place.

Zammuto writes of the importance of his home on his website:

All of our work takes place here at home in the mountains of Vermont. After living for years in various cities and towns, we wanted to move out to a place where there was more space to raise our boys, grow food and make music ... it's the best place I've ever had to work; Simple and focused. (Zammuto 2019)

Zammuto's statement highlights the geographic remoteness of his home and its contrast with urban areas. It also demonstrates the significance he and his wife,

Molly, see in where they have chosen to live. This is not temporary isolation but rather sustained rooting in place. My experience visiting Zammuto at his home reinforced the attention to place that he showcases on his website. Zammuto provides a counterweight to Vernon. I argue that Zammuto's place-making mirrors his music-making, particularly via the impact of recycling on both. I employ the phrase "the remote somewhere" to contrast "the middle of nowhere" and highlight this distinction between Zammuto's homestead and "the cabin in the woods."

In 2014, I went to visit Zammuto at his home. I arrived on a warm August afternoon and, as I approached his driveway, I was happy to be doing so in the summer. Zammuto's house sits on a hillside about two or three miles above the small town centre of Readsboro, Vermont, and I worried that my compact car would have been poorly suited to traverse the bucolic yet rugged terrain of the Green Mountains had I visited in winter. He and Molly have been investing in the property by making incremental improvements since they moved in. As their family grew and Molly gave birth to three boys, they transformed what they described online as a "semi-livable shack" into an impressive space, mostly using recycled materials purchased at a salvage yard. South-facing greenhouse windows create a space where 90-degree Fahrenheit temperatures are possible in the winter, which enables seed-starting and provides heat for the bedroom above on cold winter nights (Zammuto 2010). As I followed Zammuto through the doorway, he cautioned me to watch my head, assuring me that his house "was built for Hobbits" (See Fig. 1) (Zammuto 2014).

Zammuto first saw commercial success with his indie-electronic duo The Books, formed in 1999. He and his musical partner, Paul de Jong, created songs from obscure, often unique, audio samples which they found on records, home movies, answering machine tapes, and other media purchased from thrift stores. The resulting idiosyncratic tracks were ethereal, intellectually gripping, and intensely emotive but sometimes haunting or even confusing. Zammuto took discarded media and displayed its inherent "life force" (interview, August 3, 2014). By repurposing discarded home movies and audio tapes, which presumably meant something to the original owners at one point, The Books also found a new purpose for the emotions captured on those home movies and tapes.

I spent that day with Zammuto. We chatted in his studio, which was once a tractor barn. Molly joined us to drink homemade kombucha, and I later marvelled at the nearly fifteen-foot-tall working trebuchet Zammuto built at the back of his property. When I left Zammuto's home at the end of that day, I passed his storage shed and Molly's beehives where I paused for a moment at the large compost piles. For Zammuto and his family, recycling is an assumed part of everyday life. Molly explained to me that the compost fertilizes the family's



Fig. 1. Zammuto's Home. Photo by author.

substantial garden, where they grow most of their produce. Zammuto's interest in place and sustainability begets his focus on recycling, which has characterized both his homemaking and music-making.

Zammuto's outlook on place emanates from his suburban upbringing. By Zammuto's account, his parents were able to provide very well for him, yet he still yearned for something more. In his estimation, he is like many Americans: "I feel like I've met so many people who want something else in their lives — a feeling of connection" (interview, August 3, 2014). But Zammuto's ability to live like he does as an adult is a product of his substantial privilege. Zammuto acknowledges that his upbringing afforded him the opportunities and skills to forge a different path for the rest of his life. He attended Williams College and hiked the Appalachian Trail as a young adult in order to refocus the direction of his life. Ironically, Zammuto's identity and his position within upper-middle class suburbia is partially what enabled him to get an education and ultimately choose to leave suburban life behind. Nevertheless, Zammuto rejects the way he grew up largely due to its lack of connection to place.

Zammuto identified an emotional void in his life. He presumes that religion fills this role for some, although he was not raised religiously. He

described how his parents' last official act in the Catholic Church was to be married. After that, his family had no affiliation with Catholicism or any other religion:

I grew up completely secular, and that's what I was missing. I still feel like a ghost in this culture, like a homeless wanderer. I don't know where I fit in at all. Because all I grew up with was this highly consumerist, TV-watching, almost zombie-like, workaday world, and no spiritual framework to understand life within at all. All I could see was people trying to make money. And so, coming out of that, what I want for my kids now is for them to have a strong foundation, like a root to a place. And I look around at our culture and people crave that so badly, but they don't know how to get it because all that information is lost. (interview, August 3, 2014)

When I questioned Zammuto about what he meant by the phrase, the "root to a place," he nuanced his position. In his response, he expands upon his home — not simply as an isolated farm away from the treacheries of suburban living, but as a place that is connected to the natural world. He wants his sons to understand that they possess the tools to foster good relationships with their surroundings. He and Molly give their sons "a spiritual understanding of where they come from" (interview, August 3, 2014). Zammuto elaborated:

We're not offering them a religious understanding but a spiritual understanding nonetheless ... There is something sacred about where we are and where we come from. It's not something to be trashed, it's something to be taken care of: this is the land that's going to feed you — literally feed you, and so you have to take care of it. These are the creatures that you live with here. Get to know them. Go out and identify the birds, identify the insects.

There's something deeply engaging [in] educating our kids in that way and educating ourselves as well. Because we didn't know how to farm or build things; we were not taught that. We were taught how to hire other people to do that for you and they are called blue-collar workers. We have a strict no contractor policy: if we're going to do something, we're going to do it ourselves and otherwise we're not going to do it 'cause it's not sustainable. (interview, August 3, 2014)

Zammuto's suburban upbringing resulted in two concurrent, intertwined reactions: his desire to live more connected and rooted to a place (via his homemaking process), and his wish to find remnants of life within discarded consumerist media.

Zammuto's place-based promotional narrative has also produced financial benefits. In 2013, Zammuto launched an Indiegogo campaign that raised over \$35,000 to finance the recording of his second solo album. In his pitch to potential donors, he highlighted his place-based approach to music-making through a short documentary. He also included a description of his family and their way of living, ending it with, "Deep Thanks, Nick and Family." Contributors to the campaign noted how Zammuto's story resonated with them. One commenter lauded Zammuto's way of living as "truly inspirational." A separate donor wrote, "Can't wait for the album! When I visit Vermont, I'm buying you a beer" (Zammuto 2013). This comment is particularly enlightening because it illustrates that Zammuto telegraphed his sense of place through the Indiegogo site so effectively that this funder thinks Zammuto is approachable enough to meet socially.

Molly and Nick Zammuto seek a more meaningful and fulfilled life via place-based roots, which Nick promotes on his website and blog, through album art, and in promotional photos and videos. While Bon Iver's version of the indie isolation narrative (perhaps unfairly to Justin Vernon) communicates a distanced, aloof idea of place, Zammuto emphasizes investment in his home. Zammuto wants his life to be known. He told me:

I think as an artist [you're told] that you have to create a mystique, [but] in so many ways I want to do the opposite. I want the real thing to be better than anything I could come up with as sort of a stage persona. I don't act — I just can't — I'm not an actor. I can't put on a costume. (interview, August 3, 2014)

In contrast to the indie isolation narrative of Bon Iver, Zammuto takes full advantage of the Internet to represent himself the way he wants the world to see him — as remotely somewhere.

Concluding Thoughts

Elsewhere in American popular culture, wooded ruralness takes on ambiguous associations. Debra J. Rosenthal reminds us that African American authors paired nature with the horrific abuses of slavery and used pastoral places as metaphors

for freedom (2006). There is a litany of films that depict remote locales and their inhabitants as impending sources of terror (the *Evil Dead* and *Friday the 13th* series come to mind, as does *Deliverance*). Here, isolation exacerbates the protagonists' fear of their unknown and increasingly terrifying surroundings. In response, a growing number of satirical films examine the well-worn tropes of the former. *Tucker and Dale vs. Evil* (2010) critiques the stereotype of the murderous locals (pejoratively referred to as hillbillies) whereas *The Cabin in the Woods* (2012) is one of several films to take aim at the convention in which young people fight for their lives against various antagonists while in a secluded location. These examples reiterate that the indie narrative explored in this article represents just one of a variety of notions of the cabin. They also, however, underscore the androcentrism and connections to whiteness that accompany the indie isolation narrative.

The desire for time away from the rigours of day-to-day life is common. As Mark Pedelty notes:

Of course, it is not surprising that people seek spiritual escape from the noisy, alienating realities of modern existence and urban life, a world where one is constantly assaulted with loud noises and artificial images, a world where we are digitally connected to other people, systems, and machines at all moments. (2016: 220)

Isolationism is depicted as an antidote to the hustle and bustle of the quotidian world, and indie music is positioned similarly as a noble alternative to the commercialism of the music industry. But the indie isolation narrative also falsely establishes a situation in which musicians are somehow able to exist apart from the rest of the world through their seclusion. The narrative hides contemporary interrelationships in favour of a mythical, timeless commune with nature.

The indie isolationist narrative is largely a performative one. Zammuto, Vernon, and others are, on some level, seeking out seclusion in order to be seen by others. At the very least they benefit from the resulting public optics. This paradox is precisely the same as when Thoreau wrote *Walden*. Pedelty makes the same point in relation to Adrian Chalifour, whose work benefits from and emulates the “time-honored, Thoreauvian dynamic: the lone figure who strikes out into the woods to contemplate place, nature, and society” (Pedelty 2016: 216). But Thoreauvian isolationism requires it to be observed by its intended audience. Pedelty continues, “It is therefore a performative form of contemplation, more public than private despite the ostensible solitude at its center” (216). The narrative works as a publicity mechanism because it marks

Vernon and others in ways that highlight isolation as a desirable aesthetic of the indie music scene. Despite the musicians' publicized seclusion, they are still connected to the music industry and can choose to leave the cabin at any time. The celebration of the indie isolation narrative conceals the contradiction that the veil of solitude created around the recording process is lifted once the resulting album is released. Concerning this disconnect, Pedelty writes:

The individual seeks truth in solitary communion with nature yet then widely broadcasts that experience, transforming contemplative solitude into what could be read uncharitably as narcissistic spectacle. In other words, Thoreau was writing with the intention of being read. There was never anything purely solitary about it. (2016: 219)

Musicians create in isolation but intend for their work to be heard. The power of the indie isolation narrative rests paradoxically upon the need to be seen alone. Critically, this indie isolationism represents a *return* to nature. It is isolation for the purpose of making creative work. Such an excursion takes significant economic capital.

The language used in the indie isolationist narrative expresses a wide-ranging sense of isolation in reference to musical production. This middle of nowhere is isolated, lacks connectivity to a locale's history, and, in apparent contradiction, can exist anywhere. For the purposes of publicity, the actual geographic location is of little importance. While the narrative often describes an objective place — the cabin in the woods — the way the narrative fetishizes the isolation of the cabin lessens the significance of the actual place in which the cabin is situated (i.e., Wisconsin, North Carolina, or Washington). I have described Zammuto's "remote somewhere" to contrast the "middle of nowhere" trope in order to show how a specific place — Zammuto's home in Readsboro, Vermont — is a pronounced part of his music and career and contrasts the non-place of the cabin in the woods. Both the cabin in the woods and the middle of nowhere reflect not only geographic remoteness, but also a social disconnection and a separation from the mainstream music industry. The isolation narrative, in effect, inexorably exemplifies the genre itself: it enables musicians to reify their music's originality, bolster its assumed authenticity, and thus solidify its purported "indie-ness."

The persistence of the indie isolation narrative reinforces the existing inequalities of the genre and risks further exclusion of women and musicians of colour. Even though a wooded cabin may be a rather everyday place for Wisconsinites like Vernon, the aura of creative inspiration that is projected

through the isolation narrative is imbued with connections to Eurocentric views of nature and the wilderness, and thus to discourses of whiteness, socio-economic advantage, and often androcentrism. Both Zammuto and Vernon are benefactors of such privilege and their evocations of indie isolationism reveal their own complex relationships to place. The continued propagation of the narrative threatens to further entrench indie music's exclusivity. 🌲

References

- Atkinson, Brian T. 2012. Texas Legends, Cabin in the Woods Inspired Corb Lund's New Album. *Statesman*. December 28. <http://www.statesman.com/entertainment/music/texas-legends-cabin-the-woods-inspired-corb-lund-album/MEI5kFkH8MpPry4Jv2BSVJ/> (accessed June 23, 2017).
- Augé, Marc. 2009. *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*. Trans. John Howe. 2nd ed. New York: Verso.
- Bachelard, Gaston. 1994. *The Poetics of Space*. Trans. Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Berlatsky, Noah. 2015. Why "Indie" Music is So Unbearably White. *New Republic*. April 2. <https://newrepublic.com/article/121437/why-indie-music-so-unbearably-white> (accessed August 17, 2017).
- Buell, Lawrence. 1995. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- . 2005. *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Casey, Edward. 1998. *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Cohen, Sara. 1991. *Rock Culture in Liverpool: Popular Music in the Making*. Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press.
- Connell, John and Chris Gibson. 2003. *Sound Tracks: Popular Music, Identity, and Place*. New York: Routledge.
- Cresswell, Tim. 2015. *Place: An Introduction*. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
- DeLuca, Kevin and Anne Demo. 2001. Imagining Nature and Erasing Class and Race: Carleton Watkins, John Muir, and the Construction of Wilderness. *Environmental History* 6 (4): 541-560.
- Deusner, Stephen M. 2007a. Bon Iver: *For Emma, Forever Ago*. *Pitchfork*. October 4. <http://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/10709-for-emma-forever-ago/> (accessed August 8, 2017).
- . 2007b. The 50 Best Albums of 2007. December 18. <https://pitchfork.com/features/lists-and-guides/6753-top-50-albums-of-2007/?page=1> (accessed June 29, 2019).

- Eells, Josh. 2011. The Solitary Fame of Bon Iver's Justin Vernon. *Rolling Stone*. June 23. <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/the-solitary-fame-of-bon-ivers-justin-vernon-20110623> (accessed July 17, 2017).
- Feisst, Sabine. 2016. The American Southwest as Muse: Maggi Payne's Sonic Desert-scapes. *Contemporary Music Review* 35 (3): 318-335.
- Fonarow, Wendy. 2006. *Empire of Dirt: The Aesthetics and Rituals of British Indie Music*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
- Fox, Aaron A. 2004. *Real Country: Music and Language in Working Class Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- FOXTRAX. 2017. About. FOXTRAX. <http://www.foxtraxband.com/#about-section> (accessed June 23, 2017).
- Frere-Jones, Sasha. 2009. Into the Woods: The Bon Iver Sound. *The New Yorker*. January 12. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/01/12/into-the-woods-pop-music-sasha-frere-jones> (accessed August 8, 2017).
- Garland, Emma. 2015. What's It Like to Make Music in Complete Isolation, in a Cabin in the Woods? *Noisey*. July 21. https://noisey.vice.com/en_us/article/this-guy-went-straight-from-playing-warped-tour-to-spending-two-months-alone-in-the-woods (accessed June 23, 2017).
- Gitner, Jess. 2011. Bon Iver's Justin Vernon Talks About His Band's New Album. *NPR*. June 22. <http://www.npr.org/sections/allsongs/2011/06/23/137328981/bon-ivers-justin-vernon-talks-about-his-bands-new-album> (accessed August 17, 2017).
- Goehr, Lydia. 2007 [1992]. *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*. Rev. ed. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hagen, Trever. 2016. 22, A Million. *Bon Iver*. August 1. <https://boniver.org/bio> (accessed September 12, 2017).
- Hibbett, Ryan. 2005. What is Indie Rock? *Popular Music and Society* 28 (1): 55-77.
- Hoskyns, Barney. 1996. *Waiting for the Sun: The Story of the Los Angeles Music Scene*. London: Viking.
- . 2016. *Small Town Talk: Bob Dylan, The Band, Van Morrison, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix & Friends in the Wild Years of Woodstock*. Boston: Da Capo.
- Houston, Taylor Martin. 2012. The Homosocial Construction of Alternative Masculinities: Men in Indie Rock Bands. *The Journal of Men's Studies* 12 (2): 158-175.
- Hyden, Steve. 2008. Justin Vernon of Bon Iver. *The A.V. Club*. February 21. <http://www.avclub.com/article/justin-vernon-of-bon-iver-14201> (accessed July 15, 2017).
- Ingram, David. 2010. *The Jukebox in the Garden: Ecocriticism and American Popular Music Since 1960*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Kavner, Lucas. 2012. Indie Music and the Middle of Nowhere: The Hottest Scene is Where You Least Expect It. *Huffington Post*. May 31. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/31/indie-music-indie-bands_n_1556671.html (accessed July 20, 2017).
- Kruse, Holly. 2010. Local Identity and Independent Music Scenes, Online and Off. *Popular Music and Society* 33 (5): 625-639.

- Mason-Campbell, Nilina. 2008. Bon Iver. *Pitchfork*. May 27. <http://pitchfork.com/features/interview/7502-bon-iver/> (accessed August 8, 2017).
- Meizel, Katherine. 2011. *Idolized: Music, Media, and Identity in American Idol*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Novara, Vincent J. and Stephen Henry. 2009. A Guide to Essential American Indie Rock (1980-2005). *Notes* 65 (4): 816-833.
- Onion, The. 2011. Man Just Going to Grab Guitar and Old Four-Track, Go Out to Cabin in Woods, Make Shittiest Album Anyone's Ever Heard. June 11. <https://local.theonion.com/man-just-going-to-grab-guitar-and-old-four-track-gou-1819572725> (accessed June 29, 2019).
- Pareles, Jon. 2016. The Blessed, Cursed Life of Bon Iver. *The New York Times*. September 21. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/25/arts/music/bon-iver-justin-vernon-22-a-million-interview.html?mcubz=2> (accessed August 8, 2017).
- Pedely, Mark. 2012. *Ecomusicology: Rock, Folk, and the Environment*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- . 2016. *A Song to Save the Salish Sea*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press.
- Powers, Ann. 2015. How To Be Alone: Musicians Confront Solitude. *NPR*. April 1. <http://www.npr.org/sections/therecord/2015/04/01/396781687/how-to-be-alone-musicians-confront-solitude> (accessed July 17, 2017).
- Relph, Edward C. 1976. *Place and Placelessness*. London: Pion.
- Rosenthal, Debra J. 2006. 'Hoods and the Woods: Rap Music as Environmental Literature. *The Journal of Popular Culture* 39 (4): 661-676.
- Sahim, Sarah. 2015. The Unbearable Whiteness of Indie. *Pitchfork*. March 25. <http://pitchfork.com/thepitch/710-the-unbearable-whiteness-of-indie/> (accessed August 17, 2017).
- Schneider, Richard J., ed. 2000. *Thoreau's Sense of Place: Essays in American Environmental Writing*. Iowa City: Iowa University Press.
- Seamon, David and Jacob Sowers. 2008. Edward Relph "Place and Placelessness." In *Key Texts in Human Geography*, 43-51. Ed. Phil Hubbard, Rob Kitchin, and Gill Valentine. London: Sage.
- Spitznagel, Eric. 2017. Bon Iver's Justin Vernon and The National's Aaron Dessner on Their "Anti-Festival" Eaux Claires. *Billboard*. April 6. <http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/magazine-feature/7751657/bon-iver-justin-vernon-the-national-aaron-dessner-eaux-claires> (accessed August 8, 2017).
- Thoreau, Henry David. 1992 [1854]. *Walden and Other Writings of Henry David Thoreau*. Ed. Brooks Atkinson. New York: The Modern Library.
- Titon, Jeff Todd. 2016. Why Thoreau? In *Current Directions in Ecomusicology: Music, Culture, Nature*, 69-79. Ed. Aaron Allen and Kevin Dawe. New York: Routledge.
- Tuan, Yi-Fu. 1977. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Vice. 2012. Dear Bon Iver, Don't Let the Door Hit Your Ass on the Way Out. September 27. <https://www.vice.com/read/dear-bon-iver-dont-let-the-door-hit-your-ass-on-the-way-out> (accessed August 8, 2017).

- Von Glahn, Denise. 2003. *The Sounds of Place*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- . 2013. *Music and the Skillful Listener: American Women Compose the Natural World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Young, Rob. 2010. *Electric Eden: Unearthing Britain's Visionary Music*. New York: Faber and Faber.
- Zammuto, Nick. 2010. The Books' Nick Zammuto Builds a Home. *Impose Magazine*. August 26. <http://www.imposemagazine.com/features/the-books-nick-zammuto-builds-a-home> (accessed August 8, 2017).
- . 2013. Zammuto LP 2. *Indigogo* <https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/zammuto-lp-2#/> (accessed June 29, 2019).
- . 2019. Architecture. <https://zammutosound.com/our-house> (accessed June 29, 2019).

Interview

- Zammuto, Nick. 2014. Personal interview with author. Readsboro, VT. August 3.

Discography

- Bon Iver. 2008. *For Emma, Forever Ago*. Jagjaguwar JAG 115. Compact disc.

Videography

- Alvarez, Febe, dir. 2013. *Evil Dead*. 2013. Culver City, CA: TriStar Pictures.
- Boorman, John, dir. 1972. *Deliverance*. Burbank CA: Warner Bros and Elmer Productions.
- Braff, Zach, dir. 2004. *Garden State*. Century City, CA: Fox Searchlight.
- Craig, Eli, dir. 2010. *Tucker & Dale vs. Evil*. Hollywood, CA: Eden Rock Media.
- Cunningham, Sean S., dir. 1980. *Friday the 13th*. Hollywood, CA: Paramount Pictures.
- Goddard, Drew, dir. 2011. *The Cabin in the Woods*. Los Angeles, CA: Mutant Enemy Productions.