Music, Communications, Place: Udo Kasemets and Experimentalism in 1960s Toronto

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Department of Music
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2015

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the connections between experimentalism, space, and place as they materialized through the work of Estonian-born composer Udo Kasemets (1919-2014) in 1960s Toronto. Arriving in 1951 as a stateless refugee, Kasemets became an integral part of postwar Canada’s musical climate. Kasemets offered a mordant view on the pervasive conservatism that characterized art music performance in Toronto as a critic for The Toronto Daily Star, and frequently wrote of the need for more support for Canada’s modernist composers. After reading John Cage’s Silence in 1961, Kasemets became an ardent proponent of experimental and mixed media performance, and undertook several initiatives to introduce radically new forms of performance situations in Toronto. Targeted by his (former) fellow critics as a charlatan, Kasemets polarized reviewers with his writing, music, and concert organizing.

Organized into two sections, this thesis argues that experimentalism acts as a catalyzing force in configuring place in 1960s Toronto. Like many avant-garde practitioners during this time, Kasemets was influenced by the larger cultural
implications that Marshall McLuhan’s spatial theory of communication proposed; namely, that post-print media technologies offered the possibility of sensory and social transformation. In the first part of this dissertation, I evaluate experimental music as communication through a reading of McLuhan’s use of sound and orality. I also address methodological challenges of doing historical ethnography, reconciling the dissonances between memory and archival materials as the primary site of fieldwork. Third, I propose that examining the tensions between experimentalism and conservatism that became manifest in music criticism in 1960s Toronto allows us to account for a listening culture—the attitudes, assumptions, and expectations that informed how audiences interacted with music that helped define the contours of place.

The second half of this dissertation is organized into three case studies of Udo Kasemets’ activities in Toronto: Men, Minds, and Music, the first “all avant-garde” concert series held in Toronto, in 1963; The Isaacs Gallery Mixed Media Concerts of 1965-67; and the Canavangard series of graphic scores curated by Kasemets and published by BMI Canada. In sum, I conclude that the efficacy of experimental practices lies in how notions of place can be articulated, reinforced, and made vivid in the face of postwar placelessness.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project has been long in the making. In June of 2005 while I was finishing my undergraduate degree and looking for a way to pay rent, I took a job at the Canadian Music Centre’s National Office in Toronto. My title was “Library Assistant.” Two weeks after I started working, the Librarian (my boss) left the CMC to pursue other another opportunity, effectively giving me free rein over the library during the quiet summer months. Amongst the thousands of spiral-bound works on the shelves by CMC Associate Composers, I began to take notice of distinctive beige and brown covered scores, with the name of the composer and its title affixed by gold labels. The covers featured an eye-catching pattern of text, an arrangement of the word “Canavangard” geometrized in a diamond shape. The series editor was Udo Kasemets. That summer, with ample time on my hands, I began to search out as much as I could about Kasemets, whose name had only been vaguely familiar to me. My first exposure to Udo’s music came in my Intro to Composition class in the first year of my Bachelor’s degree, in 1998—we listened to Udo’s Time Trip to Big Bang and Back, and, as I recall it, our course instructor explained we were listening to what was probably the most experimental composition of recent years by any Canadian composer.

It is safe to say that Udo has been in and out of my thoughts for the last fifteen years, in one way or another. While this is in many ways a project about him, and is a project because of him, it is not one dedicated to him. He wouldn’t have wanted that, and I am not certain he would have agreed with some of what I have written. But I would
hope that the curiosity he fostered in me would make him feel that his work throughout much of the second half of the twentieth century in Canada has had real meaning. It has.

I am deeply grateful to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for funding this project with a Joseph A. Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship, and to the American Musicological Society for supporting my work with an Alvin H. Johnson AMS 50 Fellowship. As well, I am truly honoured that the Canadian University Music Society recognized an early version of Chapter 7, one of the central parts of my thesis, with the SOCAN/George Proctor Prize.

There is a common belief that finishing a PhD thesis is a solitary pursuit, where one withdraws into the rarefied interior space of writing and thinking. While I did end up doing both of those things every so often, I simply could not have completed this work without the help and support of so many people that it is daunting to think of them (and thank them) all now.

First and foremost, I owe my advisor, Dr. Robin Elliott, a debt of gratitude that I can’t imagine will ever be fully repaid. As a scholar, Robin has redefined how Canadian music can and ought to be studied, and I can only hope that my work one day will come within striking distance of the bar he has set. Robin’s support and mentorship throughout the past six years have been unfailing, inexhaustible, and indispensable. I wish to thank my committee members Drs. Sherry Lee and Josh Pilzer, for providing me with feedback throughout the course of my study—not only during the writing of this thesis, but throughout my studies at U of T. Both Sherry and Josh are brilliant thinkers who’ve made me consider how to write better and more critically about music and ideas. My external
examiner, Dr. Jonathan Sterne, provided invaluable critiques in his report, and I thank him for giving me the kind of perspectives I never would have seen on what next needs to be done with this study. I must also thank Dr. Mary Ann Parker, who was part of my defense committee, for helping me think more deeply about who the readership of a project like this might be, and why that matters.

I would like to also especially thank Drs. Jeff Packman and Ken McLeod at the Faculty of Music, U of T, for the many words of advice they’ve given me as the scope and purpose of this dissertation took shape. Jeff and Ken helped me often and in myriad ways when they probably didn’t realize they were doing it. I cannot adequately express how completely reliant this study is on Kathleen McMorrow’s stewardship of the Udo Kasemets archival collection at the Music Library at U of T: thanks to her, my understanding of 1960s Toronto and Udo’s work during those years was made vivid by the materials in Archives Collection 11.

It would be unforgivable for me not to acknowledge Dr. David Cecchetto at York University: colleague, friend, and a model scholar. Although he wasn’t part of my committee in any formal way, David became an essential figure of support and inspiration, and continues to do so.

My thanks also go to fellow U of T students and alumni in musicology and ethnomusicology, who helped foster a real sense of collegiality through the years in the department, especially: Patrick Nickleson, Deanna Yerichuk, Erin Scheffer, Dr. Mark Laver, Dr. Andy Hillhouse, Dr. Colleen Renihan, and Dr. Alexa Woloshyn.
To Udo’s collaborators, students, and colleagues present and (in some cases, very) past who took the time to talk with me about experimentalism, and about the questions Udo continued to ask almost until the very end of his life, I am humbled by your generosity and your kindness. My work is merely an echo of yours. My deep gratitude goes out to John Beckwith, Linda Catlin Smith, Donald J. Gillies, Michael Snow, Avrom Isaacs, Gordon Mumma, Gordon Monahan, Tina Pearson, Bertram Turetzky, Ronald R. Napier, Lowell Cross, Mani Mazinani, John Kamevaar, Gayle Young, Ann Bourne, Hart Broudy, Drew Yallop, Rick Kitaeff, Pierre Coupey, and those who shared their experiences working with and remembering Udo.

Finally, this work is dedicated to Naomi, who I love endlessly and effortlessly, and to our Genevieve, who came into the world just before Udo left it. All that I do is for you, for us.
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INTRODUCTION

“All questions are meaningful. Not all answers are meaningful.”

His apartment is modest, a one bedroom unit at the end of the hall on the first floor of an eleven storey building just north of St. Clair Avenue, east of Avenue Road in Toronto. The neighbourhood, Forest Hill, is old money, with tony mansions lining Dunvegan Avenue just to the west, and even further, the slightly incongruous spires of Casa Loma casting shadows down the hill in their unintentional Gothic Revival kitsch. The stretch of St. Clair between Avenue and Yonge has a conspicuous abundance of art-deco walkups—the kind you see in midtown Manhattan, with thin Futura-fonted names inscribed above awninged entrances—interrupted by newer high-rise mixed-use condos with street-level commercial. But Udo’s place seems somehow removed from the pace and time of not-quite-uptown Toronto. Walking into his apartment in the mid morning, as I did several times during the spring and summer of 2010, I felt as though I was entering a quieter space, where things bore longer contemplation. The stillness of Udo’s apartment belied the rushed affluence around him, and as I would come to learn, the busy-ness of a mind not yet ready to acquiesce to the vagaries of very old age.

Toronto’s next major lateral artery north of St. Clair is Eglinton Avenue, which stretches far beyond the city’s borders, past Mississauga to the west and out to Scarborough in the east. Fifty years ago, at number 1310 on the south side, where the southern terminus of the once contentious Spadina Expressway spills traffic out on Eglinton West, saxophonist Paul Brodie and his wife Rima ran the Brodie School of
Music and Dance. In 1963, Brodie let Udo use the upper-floor studio to host a series of monthly concerts between January and April. Packaged together as Men, Minds, and Music, they have come to be known as Toronto’s first all avant-garde concert series. In a preview piece, *The Globe and Mail*’s arch conservative music critic, John Kraglund—who will appear many times yet in this study—called the task of acquainting Toronto audiences with the avant-garde “Herculean.” No Lehar, or Beethoven, and no Mahler. No Strauss to balance out whatever insalubrious noise respectable Toronto concert-goers might have been assaulted by, thanks to some rogue piece of modernism (Schoenberg was still something of a rarity) hanging off the program like a leprous appendage.

Instead, audiences—small audiences, made of “Canada’s most important musicians,” according to Brodie¹—heard Ives, Cage, Roger Reynolds, even some “Canadian”—Joachim, Aitken, and Kasemets. Gordon Mumma and Robert Ashley, who were erstwhile members of the ONCE Collective, busy prefiguring Ann Arbor Michigan’s magnetism as a nexus of radical counterculture a few years later, performed their own compositions for two pianos. Critic Ezra Schabas would chastise them the next day in *The Globe and Mail* for behaving like a couple of children.² Ralph Thomas wrote in *The Toronto Daily Star* that eighty people sat in “open-mouthed wonderment,” but at least “no one hissed,”³ as Udo played John Cage’s *Suite for Toy Piano*. Men, Minds, and Music ran a deficit of over a thousand dollars—over eight thousand adjusted to today’s inflation—for four

concerts that averaged only a few dozen spectators. Herculean indeed. In his autobiography, Brodie called the series “a great success.”

But in Udo’s apartment, a half-century later, the memory of those concerts is barely graspable. We sit, for hours usually, at his table in the living room. Like most furniture in his place, it is palpably of the 1960s. The chair I sit in feels every inch its age, and the green and faded yellow cushion matches the placemats on the table. As always, Udo is a consummate host, even at 91 years old. Strong, fresh coffee is made in advance, and assortments of muffins and other morning snacks are laid out. I tell him once, “I’m happy to bring food the next time,” having long ago noticed the difficulty with which he moves around his home. I would learn later from talking to old friends of his that not one but two serious falls are responsible for the cane he uses, even to walk from the table to the kitchen to retrieve the carafe of coffee. I grimace as his slow journey down to the Mac’s Milk in preparation for our interviews plays out in my head.

As we talked that spring and summer, Udo sat always on the same side of the table, directly in front of two tall bookshelves. The more I got to know him, and the more he and I talked, the more I began to daydream that those shelves were in some way avatars. I scanned the titles and authors, arranged, as he told me, in importance from top left to bottom: Cage, McLuhan, Fuller; histories and ethnographies of the Maya; poetry collections by Octavio Paz, Louis Zukofsky, Jackson Mac Low, e.e. cummings. Volumes on flowers and plants. It would not be until long after our summer of interviews that I would start to understand just how much of Udo’s library was being filtered through his

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slow, halting and labyrinthine ways of talking, where long, anticipatory silences would separate phrases of a few words often by dozens of seconds.

**UDO DIED** on January 19, 2014 at the age of 94. The composer John Beckwith, who had known Udo for more than six decades, emailed me late in the afternoon the day he passed away, assuming I’d heard. I hadn’t—it had been over three years since I had last spoken with Udo. After the spring and summer of 2010, when I interviewed Udo for nearly 13 hours over several meetings, Udo stopped responding to my messages. I would later learn, through my conversations with his colleagues and friends, that this wasn’t an especially unusual thing to have had happen. In the intervening three and a half years between my interviews with Udo and his passing, I felt as though I had become intimately close to someone I’d only met on a half dozen occasions—someone who was nearing the end of a long, complicated, and mercurial life on the margins of Canadian music. I had been in contact with people who had known and worked with Udo during the 1960s through to the 2000s. I had spent long afternoons in the Harvey Olnick Rare Book Room at the Faculty of Music library examining Udo’s correspondence, sketches, and draft writings. In unexpected places and at unexpected times, Udo’s name appeared in conversation: “Oh yeah, Udo wrote a piece for me in I think it was ’84 or ’85”; “I performed one of his pieces a few years ago. Not much happened in it.”; “Udo wrote me a piece for solo clarinet that was about three or four hours long.”

Udo seemed to exist nowhere and everywhere at the same time. When I asked him about the past, his answers always found their way back to the present: the phrase
“At the present moment,” which Udo delivered in a continental European accent many times throughout our conversations, has become imprinted on my mind’s ear as an aural artefact of consummate placelessness. Composer Linda Catlin Smith, colleagues with Udo since the early 1980s, reminded me once that English was his fourth language, after Estonian, German, and Russian. He once described himself to me as an outsider wherever he went, which I found puzzling for someone who’d lived in one city for over 60 years.

Udo was born on November 4, 1919 in Tallinn to Anton Kasemets and Adele Leontine Kasemets. Anton was a well-known composer and choral conductor in Tallinn, and, perhaps to Udo’s dismay, a musicologist who published a number of books on Estonian music during his life. Udo began studying composition in Tallinn to become not a composer, but a conductor of choral music, as he told me. During Udo’s studies in Estonia, he was inspired by the newness of the atmosphere during the interwar years. Until 1918, when Estonia issued its declaration of independence, the Baltic state had been under the colonial rule of Russia. In an interview with Warren Davis on CBC radio—an episode of *Two New Hours* dedicated to marking Udo’s 60th birthday in 1980—he recalled that the culture of Estonia was “very young—everything was new in this environment.” Udo described his exposure to modern music during the 1930s and 40s, of hearing Brahms for the first time as a twenty-year-old conservatory student. Under the tutelage of Heino Eller, Udo became enamoured with new sounds: he says that Eller gave
him the desire to look for something “that was not commonplace, that was new, that was exciting.”

In 1944, along with some 80,000 other Estonians, the Kasemets family fled the Baltic region after the fall of the German army nearing the end of the Second World War. Although Estonia had been under Soviet occupation since 1940, the situation deteriorated as Russian forces reconquered the territory. As did some 25,000 others, the family arrived in Germany, and settled in a displaced persons camp for the next six years outside Stuttgart in the small town of Geislingen-an-der-Steige. During Udo’s time there, he attended the summer course for new music in Kranichstein-Darmstadt in 1950. Udo recounted his experiences there to many people, myself included: working intimately with the leading figures of European modernist composition, including Krenek and Varèse, opened his mind to a world of new possibilities for sound. One particular memory that Udo recalled to me enthusiastically was hearing Hermann Scherchen conduct Varèse’s *Ionisation*—one of the first Western orchestral compositions for percussion instruments only. After the performance, a number of audience members expressed their displeasure with what they’d heard by storming out loudly as they left. According to Udo, Scherchen turned to the audience, declared that some people hadn’t understood the work properly, and performed it right there a second time.

In 1950, Anton and Adeline’s American visas came through, and they settled in Detroit. Udo’s papers came through the next year, and he arrived on the shores of Halifax

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on a sunny day in February. He recalled to Warren Davis on the CBC, “It looked like such a promising land; it still is. We can do all kinds of dumb things in this land, but this is the only place in the world where we can do all these dumb things. And hopefully, also do some other things that are not as dumb as we do very often.”

Udo’s host family was in Hamilton, and it didn’t take long for him for tap into what was happening musically. He met Reginald Godden, the conductor and pianist who was at the time in charge of the Hamilton Conservatory. Through Godden, Udo became aware of the goings on of a group of young composers in Toronto who were trying to establish composition as a legitimate profession in Canada: Harry Somers, John Weinzweig, John Beckwith.

Although it may seem unlikely now, Udo and Harry Somers became fast friends in the early 1950s, and Udo held Somers in high regard until the end of his life. As he spoke of it,

Well, if I remember—at that time, I was always a loner in a certain way. Well, what you at one time mentioned me as an outcast, or whatever the word was. Even when I came to Canada, you see, my last real impression in Europe was, before I came over, was my attendance at Darmstadt. And at that time, of course, as you know, I was very keen about twelve tone music and all this attitude that came with it. And it was very difficult to learn anything about it, and so I came to Canada with that baggage and I didn’t find—or found very few people who were involved in that particular aspect of music making. So I plowed away, in my own way. I lived at that time in Hamilton and so I was not—yes, I was friends with Harry Somers very much at that time, and because he was the person who was not necessarily, at that time, looking at twelve tone music, but he was a person who was curious about what is music in a certain way. That means that he was really searching for his own way of dealing with that whole question. And he was the closest person that I came to appreciate at that time, and, mind you, I became part of the Composer’s League and started to work with these people but mostly, I was just doing my own thing in my own way.
THIS DISSERTATION aims to accomplish more than telling the story of Udo Kasemets’ work as someone just doing his things in his own way in 1960s Toronto. Divided into two sections, my goal with this project is to situate the activities, writing, and composing of Udo Kasemets within a broader current of experimental practices that took shape and travelled across North America. In the first four chapters, I offer contextual and theoretical perspectives on: art music in Canada during the postwar years, with a focus on how the material and symbolic landscape of Canadian space was shaped under the weight of communications infrastructure to articulate a cultural geography of centres and margins; the trajectories and often contradictory narratives of the avant-garde and experimental practices in twentieth century music and art, and the intersections between media theorist Marshall McLuhan’s spatial understanding of communication and experimentalism; temporality, memory, and the methodological challenges associated with undertaking research that is part archival excavation and part historical ethnography; finally, what I am calling listening culture in 1960s Toronto—or the circulation of attitudes and assumptions, biases and challenges that helped define how audiences were expected to understand and experience music in the city.

The second half of this dissertation concerns itself with three case studies, and by way of a conclusion-coda, a fourth, that brings this study’s first half into dialogue with Udo Kasemets’ activities as a critic, composer, concert organizer, and writer. These chapters detail: 1963’s Men, Minds, and Music series, suggesting that a long-term curatorial vision was at work in the programming of the concerts to narrate a history of
experimentalism in alternative performance environments; 1965-67’s Isaacs Gallery Mixed Media Concerts organized by Kasemets in art impresario Avrom Isaacs’ spacious Yonge Street gallery, which I argue must be read within McLuhan’s media dialectic as “anti-environments” fundamentally altering the cultural topography of Toronto’s musical landscape; and finally, Canavangard, the publication series of graphic scores spearheaded by Kasemets in the final years of the decade—a series that, at its conceptual root, views alternative notational methods as a vital method of re-connecting performers, audiences, and composers in a matrix of participation.

In my conclusion, I look briefly at SightSoundSystems, the week-long festival of art and technology organized by Kasemets in March of 1968 which has become mostly known for its opening performance—John Cage’s Reunion, the five-plus hour chess match played by Cage and Marcel Duchamp in Ryerson Theatre. This is a performance that scholars have written about in considerable volume, but the festival, and moreso, Kasemets himself have been largely absent from those accounts. Although Reunion was the one event during the decade that brought Toronto into the purview of experimentalism’s cultural geography, my aim in this dissertation is to consider how the sum total of the work undertaken by Kasemets throughout the 1960s was critical in the configuring of place—how Toronto was not merely host to an abundance of aberrant and critically-derided performances of experimental art and music. On the contrary, as a growing metropolitan centre of culture in postwar Canada, I argue in Music, Communications, Place: Udo Kasemets and Experimentalism in 1960s Toronto that the
impact made by such activity has become part of the fabric of Toronto’s cultural and social history.
CHAPTER 1.
ART MUSIC IN POSTWAR CANADA

“Art is a communication.”
—Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters, and Sciences\(^1\)

Introduction: “We Are Sort of an Avant-Garde”

On August 20, 1948, a brief news report appeared on page four of the Toronto daily newspaper *The Globe and Mail*. The headline ran “First Immigrants Arrive from the Baltic,” and the 112-word story reported the arrival of sixteen people to Toronto’s Union Station from the Baltic region of Europe, which had fallen once again to Soviet reoccupation after the defeat of German forces at the end of World War Two. All sixteen refugees were sent to Canada under the auspices of the Lutheran World Relief plan, spoke English fluently, and were set to begin farm work to pay off the two hundred and fifty-five dollar debt incurred from their passage across the Atlantic. “There are 50,000 more of us in Latvia and Estonia wanting to come to Canada,” Mrs. Gerhard Svalbe of Riga was reported to have said, “but the Lutheran organization has sent us first so you can look us over and see if you want any more of us.”\(^2\)

Mrs. Svalbe made a passing comment to the reporter taking her statement that the newspaper chose to print which would prove to be extraordinary in its prescience for both

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musical life in Canada, and especially Toronto: “We are sort of an avant-garde.”

Between 1944 and 1955, some 16,000 Estonians alone emigrated to Canada as part of the region’s mass exodus to Sweden, Germany, and North America. Among those was the thirty-two year old composer and conductor Udo Kasemets, from the Estonian capital of Tallinn. Throughout the course of this dissertation, I will position Kasemets as a central figure in the emergence of experimentalist practices in the postwar milieu of Toronto, whose work as a critic, composer, and concert organizer of avant-garde music was emblematic of broader cultural tensions that pressured notions of civic identity. Yet Kasemets was only one constituent element of the complex mosaic of forces that together shaped the politics of Canadian culture in the postwar era.

These politics were shaped, in part, by the relative stability, economic prosperity, and newly inherited sense of nationhood which came with the country’s formidable displays of militarism and diplomacy as part of the Allied effort overseas. Philip Massolin observes that the “twenty-five year period after the war was indeed one of re-examination, of both the nature of Canadian culture and how that culture reflected a larger national identity.” The development of art music in particular in Canada in the decades of the 1950s and 60s ties directly into larger trends associated with postwar cultural and population growth, and in particular, with the blooming of institutional regimes of cultural stewardship. This is also the time when the first wave of postwar

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3 Ibid.
5 Canada’s population increased from 12.1 million people in 1945 to 22.1 million in 1975. See Magda Fahrni and Robert Rutherford, eds., *Creating Postwar Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008), 1-20.
Canadian composers—many of whom, such as Kasemets, Otto Joachim, Oskar Morawetz, Istvan Anhalt, Talivaldis Kenins to name only a few, arrived here as part of a westward migration of European intellectuals during and after the war years—also reach a kind of critical mass. Former CBC executive Karen Kieser notes that in the 1950s composers (led largely by John Beckwith and John Weinzweig) began to actively advocate for more opportunities to make their music heard to concertgoers, that “something was in the air.”

In this first chapter, I contextualize the advocacy of Udo Kasemets for an experimental approach to music and culture in 1960s Toronto within the larger sociopolitical climate of postwar Canada. I introduce one of this dissertation’s main thematic positions, namely that music, as a communications medium, acts as a critical agent in articulating space. I follow three lines of inquiry in pursuing this notion, by first addressing the central importance of the 1951 *Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters, and Sciences*. The document that resulted is known commonly as the Massey Report (named after its chief Commissioner, the diplomat and statesman Vincent Massey). No other document so formally legitimized the priority of developing Canada’s cultural institutions during the postwar period of stability and prosperity; paradoxically, the report became, as Ryan Edwardson observes, almost an invisible hand in Canadian life guiding developments in both arts and communications.

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Second I examine those ensuing changes to music infrastructure in Canada, and especially Toronto: the emergence of funding structures and granting agencies, arts councils, and music resource centres recommended by the Massey Report precipitated the creation of a network of support for Canadian composers that facilitated a cultural imaginary which unfolded along national lines. This foment of awareness in Canadian music of the 1950s and 60s has been lauded by historians as an “heroic” era, in which a cadre of young and determined composers advocated passionately atop a wave of nationalist momentum, and sought to legitimize the social role of the composer as a viable professional vocation. Finally, this chapter positions all of this activity within a larger purview of Canada’s cultural geography, one whose characteristics were shaped by the growth of communications technologies in the postwar period. I argue in this chapter and throughout this dissertation that the spatial bias of music, to paraphrase the political economist Harold A. Innis, enabled these configurations of identity to materialize across strata of national and civic awareness.

The Massey Report, Communication, and Cultural Geography

During the postwar years in Canada, a predominating sentiment that played out in the musical as well as the larger cultural milieu was one of cultural protectionism. This

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7 Ryan Edwardson, *Canadian Content: Culture and the Quest for Nationhood* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 78. Edwardson writes, “For many Canadians, particularly by the late 1950s, the Massey Commission’s cultural ideology was as little a part of daily life as the likelihood of encountering Massey himself.”

feeling had cohered, by the late 1940s, against a threat of American imperial incursion on concert stages, radio and television airwaves. It was a discourse that began to crystallize in Canada long before the postwar era, as Roger Frank Swanson has shown; federal policy documents dating as far back as 1931 evidence an early awareness of the United States’ colonization of Canadian cultural spaces.\(^9\) By the late 1940s, the extent to which this fear manifested itself in a national collective consciousness was considerable, and the federal government appointed Vincent Massey, former ambassador to England and a high profile figure in Canadian public life, to chair a Commission tasked with producing a report on the state of Canadian culture.

The *Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters, and Sciences*, referred to often as the Massey Report (or Massey-Levesque Report),\(^{10}\) was produced in 1951 after Commissioners spent two years canvassing the nation about all matters related to arts, culture, and communication. At over 500 pages, it synthesizes the results of over a thousand interviews conducted with individuals, community organizations, advocacy groups, and four hundred and sixty-two formal briefs submitted to the Commission’s task force. Edwardson notes that the Commission, supported federally and backed by taxpayer money, was the result of years of lobbying by “culturists” (his term) who had rallied behind the influential figure of Massey, and that

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\(^{10}\) After Massey’s French Canadian counterpart, Commissioner Henri-Georges Levesque.
postwar reconstruction and federal planning had made it more feasible than ever.\textsuperscript{11} He writes that the Commission afforded

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a monumental opportunity for the social elites, artists, cultural critics, and moral watchdogs to consolidate and protect a cultured vision of nationhood against the spectre of all things mass, while incorporating both the arts and the mass media as tools for defining what did and what did not constitute Canadian content and identity.\textsuperscript{12}
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The opening pages of the Massey Report contain language encapsulating the climate in which the massive study was undertaken by Massey’s team of researchers, positioning Canada on a tenuous cultural precipice. The Commissioners write:

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It cannot be denied … that a vast and disproportionate amount of material coming from a single alien source may stifle rather than stimulate our own creative effort; and, passively accepted without any standard of comparison, this may weaken critical faculties.\textsuperscript{13}
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The Report’s first two chapters offer expositions broadly defining and contextualizing mass media, broadcasting, and the state of libraries and universities in Canada, otherwise considered as traditional repositories of knowledge and culture, as being controlled by American benefactors and corporate influence. The chapter on music in the section “The Artist and the Writer” is framed in the Report’s larger concerns of protecting broadcasting space, and hints at the imbalance of “high” and “low” culture being made available to Canadian listeners on public and commercial radio. It opens with statements regarding the prevalence of light or popular music in recordings and on radio, but that there is also as much “good” and “serious” music “readily available” to any

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\textsuperscript{11} Edwardson, \textit{Canadian Content}, 53.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{13} Government of Canada, \textit{Royal Commission}, 18.
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Canadian as she has time to listen to. Moreover, it assured its readers that the Canadian public was on the course of “acquiring a discriminating taste in music and has come to know the delight of great music worthily performed.” In the short opening paragraph, several elemental points embedded in the Report’s deceptively straightforward and seemingly neutral language become clear, which unfold at a macrothematic level over the course of the document at large. First, there is an a priori conception of what constitutes good culture and its supposed obverse, popular culture. The rigid bifurcation between mass and non-mass as it applies to the enterprise of cultural production in Canada remains constant throughout the Report. Further, a narrative of civilizing Canadian cultural consumers is operative, and the Report’s authors are writing from a position of presumed moral superiority. Lastly, the Report suggests that Canada currently has a surplus rather than a deficit of good and serious music, waiting to be deployed to satisfy the ascendant tastes of a population coming to terms with its own upwardly-mobile cultural habits of consumption.

The section on music goes on, in subsequent paragraphs, to identify the “handicaps,” “disabilities” and “hazards” facing composers writing music of “experimental and non-derivative character” in spite of an increased “vigour and variety” of musical life in the country. It lists among these problems the general unawareness of the Canadian public towards Canadian composers, the lack of promotional resources, the lack of a publishing infrastructure, the lack of a permanent secretary or office for the

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14 Ibid., 184.  
15 Ibid., 194.  
16 Ibid., 183-184.
Canadian Music Council (which I will discuss below), and critically, the lack of a music library of circulating scores of Canadian works. In sum, the Report’s findings on music outline, for the composer at least, a state of overall malaise and distemper in contrast to an otherwise healthy consumer climate for music.

In his analysis of how the Commission treated and defined “culture,” Massolin suggests that the Commissioners believed so-called high culture would prove to be a “vital remedy for the modern crisis of values:”

High culture also fostered the critical abilities that would help to expose mass movements as false. Most important, it enabled an appreciation of moral and aesthetic values and the capacity for individual cultural improvement.17

The Massey Commission has been subject to an abundance of criticism, by a chorus of commentators (just a few mentioned above), as articulating the voice only of the cultural elite. Yet the impact of the Commission on Canadian culture has been extraordinary, in setting a policy framework for support mechanisms to sustain the growth of arts production. Literary critic George Woodcock reflected, in a 1977 editorial in *Canadian Literature*, on the status of art and culture in Canada before the Commission produced its set of recommendations, and the changes that resulted from its report. Returning to Canada in 1949 from a trip to England, he described the Canadian cultural “scene” as being as “bleak as a Winnipeg winter. … Art galleries and theatres barely survived in the largest towns, and the touring companies that visited Canada were almost always of the lower grade.”18 The Commission set about creating “an entirely new situation for the arts

18 George Woodcock, “Massey’s Harvest,” *Canadian Literature* 73 (Summer 1977), 2.
in Canada, and to change, in ways not entirely anticipated and not in every way good, the
general attitude towards the artist as creator and performer.”19 In Woodcock’s 1985 book
Strange Bedfellows: the State and the Arts in Canada (one of the seminal monograph-
length studies of Canadian cultural policy), he notes that the word culture appeared
nowhere in the Commission’s terms of reference, and that few predicted the proportions
that the Commissioners’ activities would assume.20

However, Gerald Friesen, in a defense of the Commissioners’ work, writes that
the Report eclipsed its own rhetorical ensconcing in the language of high culture (of
which, he notes, the Commissioners themselves were well aware) by drawing attention
inward to Canadian communities as the source of a national cultural reservoir. The
Commission was actually less concerned with elite art as it was with good art, wherever
and however it existed in Canada, reflecting “the moral and spiritual qualities of the
community as community.”21 One of the overarching tensions identified by the
Commissioners lay in how to protect the integrity and identity of Canadian regionalisms
within a broader nationalist envelope. They write:

Along with attachment to the whole of the country with its receding distances
goes the sturdy self-reliance of local communities. These are separated by both
geography and history. In all our travels we were impressed by differences of
tradition and atmosphere in regions such as the Atlantic Provinces, the Prairies
and British Columbia. The very existence of these differences contributes vastly
to “the variety and richness of Canadian life” and promises a healthy resistance to
the standardization which is so great a peril of modern civilization. There is
nothing in this antagonistic to a Canadian spirit. On the contrary, it has been as

19 Ibid., 4.
20 George Woodcock, Strange Bedfellows: the State and the Arts in Canada (Toronto: Douglas and
McIntyre, 1985), 46.
21 Gerald Friesen, Citizens and Nation: an Essay on History, Communication, and Canada (Toronto:
University of Toronto Press, 2000), 197.
essential in the inspiration of artist and poet as has been the massive Canadian
landscape. Canadian civilization is all the stronger for its sincere and unaffected
regionalism.\textsuperscript{22}

The Commissioners’ work, then, was at a basic level informed by the need to connect the
disparate centres of culture, which in their envisioning were articulated as local sites of
community-based arts making in towns and cities across the country:

Even in acknowledging what the artist has done to create a Canadian spirit, we are
reminded that he must be able to reach his community, and that he must have
some intercourse with colleagues and critics if he is to do good work. Moreover,
he must have the material support which as a rule only a concentrated community
can give.\textsuperscript{23}

Beyond the Report’s remarks about musical culture in Canada, it is worth addressing here
how important mass media was in how the Commissioners framed the problems overall.
Part I, Section II of the Report details in brief the social and cultural history of
communications in Canada, and the impact that developing media technologies had on
Canadian life in the first half of the twentieth century. The introductory remarks depict
Canada before mass communication as a place that was community-oriented, with local
music flourishing in small towns and cities. The report states that “most Canadians now
in their thirties or older will recall that the church organist and the church choir provided
much of the music of their earlier years.”\textsuperscript{24} Learned, refined, and cultured, the “scholarly
musicians” of yesteryear brought with them a “tradition of fine music” from the old
country. The tone that the Report would take in positioning Canada’s cultural heritage as
chiefly English in nature is set in these opening paragraphs, depicting the emergence of

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\textsuperscript{22} Government of Canada, \textit{Royal Commission}, 11-12.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 19.
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commercial radio and television as potential harbingers of cultural annexation. It is worth noting one significant and contentious point that informs the Massey Commission’s understanding of culture—it is one founded on the ideological basis that Canada’s cultural forebears were of British and French provenance only. The Commission ignores, in its purview, the importance of Aboriginal peoples as a founding part of Canada, and their role in how Canada defined its national identity would become a part of a much larger conversation in the 1960s and 70s.

The Massey Report’s views of mass media were, as Zoë Druick suggests, ultimately ambivalent, evidencing a “double cultural logic.” She notes that the report calls at once for increased mediation of culture, as well as its erasure.\(^{25}\) Mass communication & technology, in the context of international postwar initiatives in reconstruction were seen as ameliorative agents in educating and enculturating populations. The Massey Commission then embodies these tensions, calling for the development of such infrastructures in Canada and steady guidance by the state to implement a positive balance that works with communities to improve social life through art. Creating a nationalist feeling, if perhaps not explicitly an identity among the diversity of the local, was a clear aim of the Commissioners, and hints at the number of tensions that become apparent in the report. Druick notes the report is marked by a series of contradictions—its blend of casting mass media as a dangerous force as Canada enters into its new postwar maturation as well as a positive one capable of providing model

content for national development; as well as contradictory reception by critics at the time, who simultaneously credited the report’s importance as well as its irrelevance in contemporary Canada. In the final section of this chapter, I explore in greater detail how communication has become critical in configuring Canada’s cultural spaces in the twentieth century.

**Infrastructural Changes in Canadian Music**

In *Making Culture: English-Canadian Institutions and the Arts before the Massey Commission*, historian Maria Tippett argues that the Massey Commission’s most significant impact on arts-making in Canada was delineating a separation between amateur and professional designations—yet another crucial tension that would come to bear on the rise of avant-garde activity in the 1960s. Tippet writes, “Amateurs, to be sure, lost their once important role [after the Massey Commission]: central figures earlier in the country’s cultural life, they now found themselves occupying a distinctly indifferent position, transformed by a new emphasis on professionalism and the increasingly easy access to galleries, concerts, and plays into consumers, rather than producers, of culture.”26 This notion of professionalism and the drive for recognition as a legitimate texture of Canadian cultural fabric in the post-Massey era became a chief objective for Canadian composers, and resulted in a number of significant developments during the 1950s that acted in defining a centre-margin/professional-amateur split in how arts and culture were supported and conceived of in Canada’s postwar years. This particular

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separation would crucially impact how the activities of experimentalism in Toronto were received by critics, many of whom looked at the activities undertaken by Kasemets in the 1960s as examples of artistic dilletantism. These particular tensions are explored in more detail over the course of this dissertation, but they warrant mention here in light of the ensuing developments which unfolded in the 1950s as composers made inroads towards establishing the idea that contemporary musical expression was a worthy pursuit, meriting the attention of audiences, critics, and importantly, funding.

Historian Clifford Ford writes that “no single Royal Commission report has had such far-reaching influence on socio-musical life in Canada.”27 Louis Applebaum, in the forward to The Modern Composer and His World, noted: “As recently as twenty-five years ago, the composer was an uncommon creature in Canada’s society, well hidden and rarely audible. The genus could count few members and their total effect on the community was not significant.”28 The tangible impact of the Massey Commission on arts in Canada came with the establishment of a number of institutional support mechanisms, granting bodies, and centres to house and archive the cultural products of Canadian artists: the Canada Council for the Arts, the CBC’s elaborated and invigorated mandate, the creation of the National Film Board, National Library, National Archives, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and many others.

28 John Beckwith and Udo Kasemets, eds. The Modern Composer and His World (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), v.
A quick survey of the list of 462 briefs submitted for the Report\textsuperscript{29} reveals a good number submitted by musical agencies and advocates in Canada, among them the Canadian Music Council. It is here that we might be able to draw a direct connection between the Massey Report’s political agenda and the capillary movement of composer-activists working to legitimize and create a sustainable infrastructure in Canada. The Canadian Music Council was assembled, rather hastily as Helmut Kallmann suggests, initially as a music committee in 1944 to speak on behalf of musicians in Canada “from all walks of life”\textsuperscript{30} to the House of Commons Committee on Postwar Reconstruction. In 1945, it adopted its name formally, and received federal a charter in 1949—the same year Massey’s team initiated its research. Chaired by composer and Toronto Symphony Orchestra conductor Sir Ernest MacMillan, the Council remained a loose umbrella group of lobbyists, nomadic until 1976 when it established a permanent secretariat in Ottawa. We may almost certainly attribute the orientation of the Massey Report’s findings on music to the Canadian Music Council’s submission, as it mirrors larger desires articulated by composers in other forums. For example, in her valuable account of the early years of the Canadian Music Centre, Karen Kieser notes that the Canadian Music Council’s core objectives included more access for composers to audiences and performers, more

\textsuperscript{29} See Government of Canada, Royal Commission, Appendix A: 425-433.

resources for Canadian composers, and crucially, a score library and information centre,\textsuperscript{31} precisely the same recommendations outlined in the Report.

Accounts of the changes in Canadian music during the 1950s and early 1960s are abundant, and have been dealt with at length, and I will refrain from rehearsing aspects of those histories in detail that have been covered elsewhere;\textsuperscript{32} yet a very brief overview of some events is necessary to understand the broader context in which Udo Kasemets’ activities in 1960s Toronto unfolded.

In 1951, a handful of Toronto composers, spearheaded by John Weinzweig, aspired principally to establish a standard of professional activity and collectively resist the antipathy towards home-grown composers, and formed the Canadian League of Composers, acquiring a charter in 1952. Elaine Keillor notes that the League’s central mandate was to facilitate performances of Canadian composers, and that aesthetic outlook remained a subsidiary concern for the members of the League.\textsuperscript{33} During the 1950s, the League was primarily responsible for organizing concerts of works by Canadian composers, initially in Toronto and Montreal, and its membership steadily grew from an initial consortium of twenty composers. Eight years later in 1959, after a concentrated period of lobbying, research and organizing, primarily by Weinzweig and

\textsuperscript{31} Kieser, “The Early Years,” 8-9.
\textsuperscript{33}Elaine Keillor, \textit{Music in Canada: Capturing Landscape and Diversity} (Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006), 252, 254. However, in one of the only scholarly articles dedicated to this early period of the CLC, Benita Wolters-Fredlund argues that there existed a substantial bias against older, and presumably more ‘traditional’ composers, epitomized in the figure of Healey Willan. See Benita Wolters-Fredlund, “A ‘League Against Willan’? The Early Years of the Canadian League of Composers, 1951–1960,” \textit{Journal of the Society for American Music} 5.4 (November 2011), 445-80.
fellow composer John Beckwith, the dream of having a music library dedicated to the circulation and dissemination of Canadian scores was realized with the incorporation of the Canadian Music Centre, in Toronto, again under a federal charter. Within a span of just little more than a decade, the postwar mobilization of Canadian music occurred in leaps and bounds, with the incorporation of three principal bodies—the Canadian Music Council, the Canadian League of Composers, and the Canadian Music Centre—all under federal charter, all mandated to achieve precisely what the Massey Report recommended in its quasi-diagnostic synthesis of the status of the postwar composer in Canada.

Udo Kasemets, whose year of arrival in Canada is coincident with the publication of the Massey Report, quickly made himself a part of the crusade to legitimize the profession of composition in a time of cultural and social transition in Canada. During the 1950s, he forged professional alliances with composer-activists like Beckwith, Weinzweig, and other major figures in the Toronto scene. He became deeply involved in the Canadian League of Composers and the Canadian Music Centre, institutions which are intimately tied to the Massey Report’s conceptual aims. But as my dissertation will show, beyond about 1960, Kasemets began to remove himself from the various projects of cultural nation-building, and engaged with a different vein of experimental activity that largely resisted the anti-Americanist rhetoric contained in the Report. In the following chapters of this study, I will explore precisely how Kasemets’ work in the 1960s was oblique to the conceptual purview of the Massey Report, and rejected the high modernism of the postwar serialist avant-garde which permeated composition in Canada in favor of establishing cross-border networks of collaboration.
A significant (and now largely forgotten) example of Kasemets’ investment in positioning Canadian musical activity in a larger internationalist framework occurred in the form of a week-long meeting of composers held in Stratford Ontario in August, 1960. Along with John Beckwith, Kasemets acted as co-secretary for the International Conference of Composers, which brought some fifty-five composer delegates from nearly twenty countries to the small southwest Ontario community. The genesis of the conference came with a visit to the USSR made in 1958 by Louis Applebaum, then the director of the Stratford Festival of Music, to explore the possibilities of bringing Russian ensembles to Canada for inclusion in festival programming. Like Glenn Gould’s solo tour of the Soviet Union the year previous, and the tours made by famous American jazz musicians to the Eastern Block throughout the 1950s, Applebaum’s trip was an exercise of soft diplomacy common in the era of Cold War politics. As he writes in the foreword to Kasemets’ and Beckwith’s edited proceedings from the conference (*The Modern Composer and His World*), the spark of the meeting happened there.

It is remarkable to note on the list of attendees that travelled to Canada the geographical spread they represented. Aside from more well-known figures of postwar music like Krenek, Dutilleux, Varèse, Karl-Birger Blomdahl and George Rochberg, delegates from communist states participated as well: from Cuba, Aurelio de Vega; Czechoslovakia, Václav Dobiás; the USSR, Otar Taktakishvilli. Events included formal papers, roundtables, discussions, and concerts of new works, and languages spoken at the conference—English, Russian, German, French, and Czech—were simultaneously translated via shortwave radio. The CBC broadcast events across the country—John
Beckwith recalls his excitement at interviewing Varèse on national radio\textsuperscript{34}—and the newly formed Canada Council aided the organizers with a $10,000 grant, with the stipulation that the conference tailor its scope towards international themes, with “no geographical bias or political overtones.”\textsuperscript{35}

Rochberg reviewed the conference in \textit{The Musical Quarterly} in January 1961, and emphasized its uniqueness as an unprecedented example of Canadian composers working together to position themselves within a broader global community. He wrote that the conference was “borne out of a profound need for Canadian musicians to establish direct contact with the main currents and ideas of contemporary musical life.” Employing a spatial metaphor which I deal with in the following section of this chapter, Rochberg approvingly and perhaps over-enthusiastically noted that “they have moved from a provincial periphery to the centre of international musical activity—no small feat.”\textsuperscript{36}

In Quebec, Pierre Mercure organized a similar event the next year—John Beckwith recalled to me in conversation that the Stratford Conference was, unintentionally, a politically heated affair in the sense that it excluded many of Quebec’s leading figures of modernist composition. Mercure’s International Week of Today’s Music (Semaine internationale de musique actuelle) happened the following August in Montreal, and its impact in Canada has arguably been more deeply felt as an important early congregation of experimentalist composers of international caliber. John Cage

\textsuperscript{35} Louis Applebaum, “Foreword,” in \textit{The Modern Composer and His World}, viii.
attended, and was commissioned to write a piece by the Montreal Festival Society, *Atlas Eclipticalis*, his first orchestral work.\(^37\) (*Atlas Eclipticalis* would prove to be the source of one of Cage’s greatest professional embarrassments, when the New York Philharmonic performed it—or didn’t, depending on which member of the orchestra you spoke to—in 1964.)\(^38\)

At a local level, several developments in the 1960s were evidence of the dedication by composers and musicians to actualize the idealistic spirit of cultivation in the arts that circulated so visibly in the post-Massey Commission period. Canadian classical music had developed throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries what Elaine Keillor identifies as its own “conservative tradition,” built upon foundations established by France and England, its two major colonizers and cultural influences.\(^39\) Harry Somers, the leading light of postwar musical modernism in Toronto, observed: “You see, to composers Toronto’s musical life is like an enormous restaurant that only serves fish and chips, which is fine if you like fish and chips but even then, you can get sick of the same dish day after day, year after year.”\(^40\) Somers was one of the founding members of Ten Centuries Concerts, a maverick organization formed by a handful of Toronto composers who harbored a sense of acute dissatisfaction with the city’s


\(^{38}\) Benjamin Piekut has recently written on this scandal, in *Experimentalism Otherwise: The New York Avant-Garde and Its Limits* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011). His chapter “When Orchestras Attack!: John Cage Meets the New York Philharmonic” (pp. 20-64) deals with how badly the musicians treated Cage’s score, disregarding the meticulous performance instructions.


unadventurous concert music programming. Its first president was R. Murray Schafer, who recalled that after returning to Toronto in the early 1960s after time spent abroad, he found “musical life had changed very little. The same porcine entrepreneurs were offering the public the same honeyballs.” Ten Centuries Concerts was formed as way of enlivening Toronto’s “slovenly concert scene” with programming that ignored the rigid categories of period or era in favour of juxtaposing little-heard and adventurous works on the same program: the resulting concerts were collage-like in their crisscrossing of time-period and genre. Although Ten Centuries Concerts made a significant impact on new music’s viability and worth within Toronto’s music scene, Kasemets himself had attempted something similar with the short-lived Musica Viva series, which lasted for only one season (1959).

Despite a proliferation of groups in Toronto invested in presenting new works during the 1960s, Canadian music scholars often refer to the tenor of that city’s musical climate—and the country’s at large—as one marked by conservatism during the 1950s and 60s. This is a conservatism propagated as much by composers who looked suspiciously on new developments in composition as well as by the audiences and critics who were acclimatized to concert programs of standard German repertoire.

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42 Ibid, 35.
43 See John Beckwith, *Music Papers* (Ottawa: Golden Dog, 1997), 72-90, for an overview of the growth of specialist music groups dedicated to presenting avant-garde programs to subscription-based audiences in Toronto during the 1960s. Beckwith, in passing, mentions Kasemets’ work: “…small groups—in Montreal with composers like [Serge] Garant and [Gilles] Tremblay, and in Toronto with Udo Kasemets—started devoting workshop-like presentations to music that was seldom heard in live conventional concerts at that time—music by composers such as Webern, Ives, Varèse, John Cage” (74-75).
suggests that the lack of exposure to the Second Viennese school (Schoenberg, Webern, Berg) and serialism by composers born before 1934, as well as overwhelming predilection towards “traditional” (presumably tonal or neo-romantic) music by audiences, factors heavily into what she bluntly calls the “conservative tradition” in Canadian music.\(^{45}\) Equally, George Proctor admonishes the slow embrace of experimentalism by composers in the 1960s as being attributed to “an inborn conservatism and a national inferiority complex which causes us to frown” on deviating from status quo.\(^{46}\) Writing about Toronto in particular, Carl Morey traces the gradual encroachment of modernism during the 1940s and 50s, noting that before the war, composers Healey Willan and Sir Ernest MacMillan—figures hardly associated with the avant-garde—passed as “modern.”\(^{47}\) Morey argues further that the creation of the Canadian League of Composers in 1951 “filled out” the framework of the past thirty-five years of irregular experience with twentieth-century composers in Toronto.\(^{48}\)

**Cultural Spaces of Postwar Canada—Centres and Margins**

As Jody Berland writes, Canadian cultural policy as exemplified in the Massey Commission and its predecessors—1929’s Aird Commission on public broadcasting and the 1936 Canadian Broadcasting Act—has been defined largely within a vision of nationalism that favours state intervention in protecting and maintaining unity through culture. Moreover, this sphere of culture itself constitutes a fragile space “in which an


\(^{47}\) Carl Morey, “The Beginnings of Modernism in Toronto,” in Ridout and Kenins, 84.

\(^{48}\) Ibid.
entity already self-defined as Other—defined negatively, without known quantities—could speak.”  

The Massey Commission succeeded in defining postwar Canada as a dynamic configuration of thriving regional and local cultures in spite of the double threat offered by both commercial media (which the Commissioners envisioned as the embodiment of American influence) and the unbridgeable geographies isolating the pockets of culture across the nation. In essence, the chief effect of the Massey Commission was to present Canada as a nation in progress, with the keys to national unity residing in cultural sovereignty. Berland suggests that cultural policy in Canada has been “founded on the assumption that building national, publicly owned cultural and media infrastructures dedicated to presenting alternatives to American mass media would guarantee an expansion of a creative, commercially unimpeded cultural space and public sphere.”

What remains important to consider is that postwar Canadian culture was formulated principally within a paradigm of space, where the vectors of centre and margin become materialized as both rhetorical and physical quantities. Indeed, Berland has commented extensively and authoritatively on the spaces of Canadian culture that communications technologies have created, taking up the ideas presented by the political economist Harold A. Innis. Innis is perhaps the most well-known figure (aside from Marshall McLuhan) associated with the Toronto School of Communication, a group of scholars working in the 1940s and 50s at the University of Toronto who developed an

49 Jody Berland, “Marginal Notes on Cultural Studies in Canada,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 64, no. 4 (Fall 1995), 516.
50 Ibid., 517.
influential theory of communication based largely on models drawn from literary studies. In brief, the Toronto school argued, radically at the time, that the major systems of communications technology present in any given society were responsible for conditioning sensory and social behaviours, and proposed a dichotomous framework of communication that located literacy and orality as oppositional poles along a continuum of perception.

Innis was a political economist by training, and authored two of the key texts that became foundational to the Toronto school’s theoretical position, *Empire and Communication* (1950) and *The Bias of Communication* (1951). He argued, through a broad historical survey of ancient civilizations, that the rise and fall of empires could be assessed according to the conditions set by their communications networks. Yet relevant to the present study, Innis was among the earliest thinkers to draw correlations between culture and communication, and to illustrate how media presume biases towards either time, or space, or a combination of both. Crucially, Innis and the Toronto school in general were responsible for elaborating the ways in which media could be conceptualized, as material objects and processes that are chiefly employed as extensions of human perception. As Innis shows in *Empire and Communication*, media such as clay, architecture, and papyrus were all temporally biased, in that they emphasized aspects of time over space in their inability to travel great distances, and to endure through centuries. Print typography and radio are biased spatially, and are able to articulate dominance over vast distances. Thus the media of architecture and sculpture express a temporal bias in their permanence relative to the ephemeral qualities of newspapers or
radio, which tend to bias spatial control in their dissemination of culture across untenably large territories.

In *The Bias of Communication*, Innis writes:

The capacity to concentrate on intense cultural activity during a short period of time and to mobilize intellectual resources over a vast territory assumes to an important extent the development of armed force to a high state of efficiency. Cultural activity … becomes an index of power.\(^{51}\)

Canada’s fortification and expansion of its communications and infrastructural networks in the postwar period accelerated flows of cultural capital from urban metropolitan centres outward to more remote places within the nation: radio and television towers accompanied the mining and development projects northward and westward. In an early essay, Innis outlines his “staples thesis” of economic nationalism, suggesting that the dominance of territorial space which newspapers and radio exercise is the natural extension of primary industries such as pulp and paper. He notes that “Improved communication such as the press and the radio, improved transportation, and the development of modern architecture, for example, the skyscraper, tend to stress similarities of language and ideas,”\(^{52}\) foreshadowing Benedict Anderson’s now ubiquitous notion of “imagined community” by nearly fifty years.

Berland’s work on space in communications and cultural theory is indebted to Innis, but also remains valuable for contemporizing the outlook and methodological shortcomings of Innis, who belonged to a past generation of thinkers. Berland writes that


by the time the wave of the “spatial turn” in the humanities had crested—an important analytical shift that utilized (among others) work by Henri Lefebvre, Edward Said, Lash and Urry, Benedict Anderson, and Doreen Massey to account for the flows of culture in an increasingly globalized, postmodern, and postcolonial world—Innis remained an absent figure. In an essay from 1997 (and subsequently reprinted in her 2009 collection *North of Empire: Essays on the Cultural Technologies of Space*) Berland suggests that the notion of “margin” in postmodern scholarship had become a “metaphorical rather than spatial term.”

Innis’ contributions to cultural theory in this regard are the ways in which he anticipated cultural and postmodern theory through a materialist reading of postcolonial spaces. She writes:

[Innis] describes a materially and ontologically based relationship between space and time which requires a fundamental reconceptualization of space itself. He conceives topographical space as produced space, and shows that the production of space and the production of social life form one process. Space is neither an inhabited frontier nor a backdrop for history, but the very subject and matter of historical change. Communications technologies mediate the social relations of a particular society by setting the limits and boundaries within which power and knowledge operate.

Canadian cultural space following the Second World War was transformed by substantial infrastructural developments that helped create a complex geography of centres and margins. For Innis, the notion of marginal space was at the heart of Canadian identity in both its topographical and rhetorical connotations. Where the Massey Report overwhelmingly emphasized Canada’s marginality in relationship to the centres of

54 Ibid., 69.
power, commerce, and influence emanating northward from the United States, Innis also imagined Canada in its early history as a peripheral dominion space within Britain’s imperial purview. Yet within the nation itself, we can map onto Canada’s territoriality the consolidation of centres and their margins in the postwar as both physical and metaphorical, and the acceleration of cultural activity within those centres reflected the imbalance of power embedded within those relations.

**Geography and the “Spatial Bias” in Canadian Art Music**

Art music in Canada, not unlike painting and poetry, has historically demonstrated a long-standing fascination with Canada’s physical geography, and allows us to glean insight into how the material networks of postwar infrastructures facilitated the flows of cultural capital from margin to centre. The loci of Canada’s major compositional activity and places where new music received public performances in the 1940s and 50s were, unsurprisingly, Toronto and Montreal. As the two most populous cities in the nation, they became, as illustrated above, places where an intense concentration of new work was commissioned and performed, and in many cases, the result of work that embodied the geographic tensions felt by Canadians as a new imaginary of the nation came into view during the 1940s, 50s, and 60s. The overwhelming preoccupation that midcentury composers in Canada shared in depicting landscape and first peoples to inhabit those territories amounts to an attempt to conquer, or at least, account for, an irresolute vastness of space that had become emblematic of the nation’s identity complex.
While it is beyond the limits of this study to explore this work in great detail, a few examples illustrate this point effectively—Harry Somers’ stark and confrontational depiction of Ontario’s north woodlands in the masterpiece of his early period, *North Country* (1948) exemplifies the uneasy gaze of the colonizing eye on the incalculable expanse of unknown geographies; it is maybe the first “great” postwar Canadian composition to reflect the cultural geography of Canada in such a muscular and galvanizing sound. The myriad exscriptions of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit song, legend, and cultural texts—even place names—by Euro-Canadian composers betrayed a desire to assemble a narrative of originary connection to the land and its ancestral cultures, as they were enfolded into a modernist vision of nationhood via modernist musical vernaculars.

One of the most striking dissonances in this respect comes with composer Otto Joachim’s ultra-modern *Katimavik*, a four-channel electronic composition commissioned for the Canadian centennial at Expo 67 in Montreal. As the sound installation to the “Canadian Pavilion,” (notable for its remarkable nine-storey-high inverted pyramid given the same name as the composition), *Katimavik*—meaning “gathering place” in Inuktitut—furnished the space with sonic objects generated entirely from Joachim’s self-built electronic studio. Kasemets himself called *Katimavik* “muscular,” and noted that the work was not meant to be performed as a stand-alone composition, but was conceived as

Brian Cherney, in his biography of Somers, describes the work’s “lean, highly strung melodic lines; thin, transparent textures … the tight thematic control… and the tension-producing appearance of tonal elements within an atonal context” that construct Ontario’s northern environment as an unnatural, irresolute space. Somers’ predilection with the so-called “long line” can be heard in the dramatic opening theme. See Brian Cherney, *Harry Somers* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), 35-41.
an integral part of the pyramid’s architectural space: “Few people could have done better justice to this acoustical setting,” which fit the environment “like a glove.”56 In *Katimavik* many of the topoi that defined postwar Canada’s cultural moment were expressed in sound: the jarring disjuncture of modernity and the past that came with fitting an abstract electronic composition with an indigenous title performs the function of conflating Inuit culture into a vision of futurity promised in the work’s sonic material. But the “gathering space” implied in the word *Katimavik* also changes meaning, for it is not one of neutrality nor brotherhood, but a space of imbalance—where marginal latitudes become enfolded into the rhetorical centre of postwar narratives of Canadian culture.

In sum, art music composition following the Second World War, read in the context of Canada’s changing cultural infrastructure, reflects the dynamic tensions resident in the centre-margin dichotomy that Innis described. Composers were working in a climate where new support mechanisms enlivened the creative field and afforded new opportunities for professional growth in the years following the Massey Commission, and the pressing issue of national identity factored critically into this activity. Thanks in large part to increased and sustained administrative presence in Canada’s north, the elaboration of radio and telecommunications networks, and an intensified interest in constructing myth-narratives about historical connection to the land itself, the Euro-Canadian image of a cultural identity assumed a fantastical shape that reflected a new spatial understanding of the nation and its peoples. Art music in Canada became a new venue for these

negotiations of power to materialize, implicating composers and their subjects in a structurational dynamic—to employ Anthony Giddens’ concept\textsuperscript{57}—that not merely reflected social, cultural, institutional codes, but actively participated in mobilizing those discursive practices. Yet, as we will see throughout this dissertation the construct of space offers a model for examining how experimentalism, as a localized phenomenon, has the potential to alter the nature of those relationships produced by space.

CHAPTER 2.
CONFIGURING SPATIALITIES: EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC AS COMMUNICATIONS MEDIA

“What I envision all the time is an environment.”
Udo Kasemets, 1980

Introduction

In a 1967 article published in *artscanada*, media guru Marshall McLuhan made the following deduction: “If the planet itself has thus become the content of a new space created by its satellites, and its electronic extensions, if the planet has become the content and not the environment, then we can confidently expect to see the next few decades devoted to turning the planet into an art form.” By the late 1960s, McLuhan had crested the wave of his celebrity as a public intellectual, and the influence of his spatial theory of media, communications, and technology had begun to take hold in experimental art and music practice. In particular, McLuhan’s focus on the relationship between environment and art—or more precisely, as this chapter will investigate, the conflation of environment as art—resonated deeply with conceptualist practitioners whose works sought to destabilize the various boundaries separating art from non-art. McLuhan’s article in *artscanada* was one of many of his pieces written during the 1960s aimed at explicating the nexus of art and environment facilitated by not only technology, but also the intermingling of different media in aesthetic forums. John Cage, in an essay written in

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1967 (at the behest of Toronto Daily Star critic Ralph Thomas), expressed his indebtedness to McLuhan in this regard:

Art and now music in this century serve to open people’s eyes and ears to the enjoyment of their daily environment. We are now, McLuhan tells us, no longer separate from this environment. New art and music do not communicate an individual’s conceptions in ordered structures, but they implement processes which are, in our daily lives, opportunities for perception.³

McLuhan and Cage were, by the mid-1960s, the two pillars of inspiration that supported the philosophical and intellectual undergirding informing much of Udo Kasemets’ activity as a composer, concert promoter, and writer. In the same way that Kasemets would polemicize about experimental modes of performance having the capacity to unmoor Canadian musical culture from the conventions and attitudes of the nineteenth century, McLuhan himself positioned the onset of electronic culture in the 1960s as a sloughing off of the binds of literocentrism keeping Western culture entrenched in the vestigial heritage of its typographic past. “New media have created a new society with new tastes, new sensitivities, new modes of communication,” Kasemets writes in Source Magazine in 1968, echoing McLuhan. “New artists illuminate our media-controlled environment, stimulate our perceptive faculties, evoke new responses to life around and within us. New media call for immediate involvement. New arts demand practical participation.”⁴ By casting the experiential dimensions of music, sound, and performance as medial phenomena—that they engender a new relationality between

participants in these processes—Kasemets embarked on a cultural project throughout the 1960s to deploy experimental music as a transformational communications medium.

This chapter undertakes a reading of experimentalism in music, and more specifically, mixed media arts, as a form of communication by examining the theoretical connections between McLuhan’s spatial theory of media and its manifestation in 1960s experimentalism. Throughout this dissertation, archival sources refer to the music of Kasemets, Cage, and others, as “avant-garde”: In fact, much of what has been cast under the umbrella of the avant-garde by critics commenting on progressive music in 1960s Toronto can equally be thought of as conceptualist, or following Michael Nyman’s (1999 [1974]) influential early study, “experimental” music. I thus begin this chapter with an excursion into the terminological problems associated with “the avant-garde”: the differing approaches to taxonomizing avant-gardes reveal multiple and shifting orientations of what constitutes marginal and resistant art actions. This chapter, in keeping true to the overarching thematic of spatiality, highlights the avant-garde as a “discursively mapped space”\(^5\) that generates its territoriality of centres and margins according to complex economies of cultural and social capital.

I then consider the connections between sound and music in McLuhan’s writing, and discuss, at a somewhat cursory depth, the role that James Joyce and his 1939 book *Finnegans Wake* play in tying McLuhan’s spatial theory of media within the domain of art. Draft and published writings by Kasemets, detailed more faithfully in Chapters 5 through 7, reveal McLuhan’s critical influence as the composer explored music’s medial

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properties: in the same way that McLuhan argues media has the capacity to transform sensory and social configurations, Kasemets believed standard musical communications media—notation, concert halls, recitals—remain artefacts of a nineteenth-century, parochial culture, and warrant revision to reflect a rapidly modernizing technocultural landscape.

The sonic biases in perception McLuhan saw in pre-modern and non-literate cultures opened up broad rhetorical vistas for considering how space and time conform to different logics depending on modes of communication. Conspicuous binaries emerged in McLuhan’s writing, of linear versus cyclical orientations of time and space; verbal versus written linguistic systems; individual versus collective social organizations; perspectival (or Euclidean) versus non-perspectival (or acoustic) space; sequential-visual-interiorized-alphabetic language versus overlapping-oral-exteriorized-phonated language. I would like to consider McLuhan’s impact on music—specifically experimental and avant-garde music of the 1960s—with a focus on both the spatial and the textual, and how the various polarities that spiral out of the dichotomous aural and visual tensions in McLuhan’s media theory get materialized in creative sonic practices. However, I also want to illustrate some of the ways McLuhan’s interdisciplinarity might have missed the mark, by drawing connections between the art music community and postwar relations between Canada and its first peoples that McLuhan may have facilitated. Through tracing a line from the avant-garde to conceptualism under the larger framework of experimentalism, my purpose is to highlight spatiality as the link that connects the various nomenclatures

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attached to 1960s mixed-media practices associated with Cage, Kasemets, and others, thus providing a theoretical grounding for the proliferation of its seemingly capricious and uncritical use by commentators during the 1960s.

The Avant-Garde’s “Rhetorical Geography”

As Hubert F. van den Berg notes, the discursive history of the avant-garde continues to unfold throughout and between disciplinary fields despite the presence of a glaring, persistent, and theoretically fatal paradox: namely, that the avant-garde, as a domain of scholarly inquiry, exists as historical unity despite the total lack of consensus about who, what, where, or when the avant-garde was or is. He writes that since the 1970s, the term “has served … as a common designation—a more or less fixed name—for a set of divergent, heterogeneous phenomena that together form some sort of a single entity, a historical ensemble or configuration.”7 By the 1940s, as he notes, the term had become a fashionable label for innovation and experimentation in arts—what we might now more appropriately designate under the nomenclature of modernism in art. Indeed, as much of the archival sources used in the dissertation reveal, “avant-garde” serves as an umbrella term, whose meaning is always shrouded behind a certain opacity; yet the implications for this term were laden with implicit valuation. Even Udo Kasemets, whose

work was cast squarely within the frame of avant-garde practice, bristled at the word: “Avant-garde? I don’t like the word. Every definition tries to put people in boxes.”

Renato Poggioli, in his seminal *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1968 [1962]) likewise observes that “it is extraordinary how often [the term] has recurred, not only in literature and journalism but also in public polemic and cultivated conversation.” He also suggests that we are “naturally” inclined to consider the “so-designated phenomenon as a permanent, or at least recurrent, factor in the history of art and letters;” and, more tellingly, that the avant-garde has often been the cause for uncritical divisiveness. “Never mind that the foes of avant-garde art do nothing more than sigh nostalgically for the good old days when art was traditional, academic, and classical.”

Poggioli’s early analysis is known chiefly for his four-fold typology of the avant-garde’s historical moments, or the chapters that together trace a life cycle of any one avant-garde practice or movement: *activism, antagonism, nihilism,* and *agonism.* The first moment, activism, is one which Poggioli suggests is the least important or characteristic feature of the avant-garde. Activism connotes in its various political and militaristic configurations a blindness, the cult of the act rather than action, and a tendency to “function without any method.” The activist stage of the avant-garde calls to mind “a marching toward, a reconnoitering or exploring of, that difficult and unknown territory

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10 Ibid., 13.
called no-man’s land.”11 Activism signals nothing of much substance in and of itself. The second moment, antagonism, performs a dual function of both isolating and conjoining individuals together in solidarity as avant-gardists, and moves an avant-garde more towards an aesthetic specificity, beyond the general domain of “act.” The antagonistic aspect of the avant-garde is embodied for Poggioli both by a railing against tradition as much as a rebelling against the public. He writes that the “innumerable expressions of this antagonism can be reduced, almost without exception, to the lowest common denominator of non-conformism. If the avant-garde has an etiquette, it consists of perverting and wholly subverting conventional deportment.”12 Nihilism, Poggioli’s third moment, is a quality that “no avant-garde movement fails to display, at least to some degree,” and is demonstrated most clearly in early avant-gardes of Dadaism and Futurism,13 movements whose primarily aesthetic prerogatives were rooted in the denigration and dissolution of art objects. The nihilist tendency illustrates that in avant-garde movements “ideology and psychology are quite as important as poetics and aesthetics,”14 that nihilism is “predominantly … social in nature, though in terms of cultural problems.”15 The nihilist impulse for Poggioli points towards a conclusion that the goal of art process being an artwork, or a “social relation” becomes “hypostatized.” Finally, the moment of “unlimited importance” in an avant-garde movement, agonism,

11 Ibid., 27-28.
12 Ibid., 31.
13 Ibid., 62.
14 Ibid., 63.
15 Ibid., 64.
signifies a tension that seeks to “transform the catastrophe into a miracle.”\textsuperscript{16} The avant-garde’s agonistic moment remains its most vital turn, where activism, antagonism, and nihilism culminate in a selfless metamorphosis for the avant-gardist—what he describes as an “enlargening and deepening of the historical vision of the world,” idealized, for Poggioli, in the goals of Futurism.\textsuperscript{17}

Poggioli’s theory of the avant-garde, while useful in its attempt at taxonomizing the criteria for what might constitute an avant-garde action, has also been subject to serious critique by subsequent scholars. Jochen Schulte-Sasse, writing in the Foreword to Peter Bürger’s \textit{Theory of the Avant-Garde} (2011 [1974]) notes its “vulnerability,” and inability to distinguish between the avant-garde, romanticism, and modernism.\textsuperscript{18} Yet its utility for the present study of experimentalism in 1960s Toronto is not insignificant: the following chapters in this dissertation, comprised of case studies of Kasemets’s activities in mobilizing experimentalism, reveal that Poggioli’s four-part model remains an appropriate mechanism for gauging the various stages of an avant-gardist approach to art.

Bürger’s influential study posits a formulation of the avant-garde that is inseparable from class, buttressed largely by critical and literary theory, and queries the existence of autonomous art that Poggioli’s romanticized vision suggests. Bürger’s aim is to parse out the dimensions of “avant-gardiste” art by examining how art both recedes into and withdraws from the safeguards of institutional legitimacy, but also to

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 66. \\
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 67. \\
\end{flushright}
demonstrate the historical contingency and socially conditioned nature of that art.

Poggioli makes no such inquiry in his study. For Bürger, whose analysis draws from Adorno, Lukacs, and Althusser, the avant-garde represents the highest accomplishment of the middle class; its disavowal from the social itself is socially conditioned. In writing about the “untruth of art’s autonomy,” he writes

the category “autonomy” does not permit the understanding of its referent as one that is developed historically. The relative dissociation of the work of art from the praxis of life in bourgeois society thus becomes transformed into the (erroneous) idea that the work of art is totally independent of society.\(^\text{19}\)

By the mid 1960s, a particular vein of the avant-garde—especially the musical avant-garde—had calved off into such a presumed sanctuary of rarification. Exemplified by the totalism of Darmstadt, and later IRCAM in Paris, this strain of institutionally protected avant-garde practice became what Georgina Born terms “autarchic,”\(^\text{20}\) encased in a tautological prism that Susan McClary describes as its “terminal prestige.”\(^\text{21}\) Born (with David Hesmondhalgh) writes of postwar music in Western art culture having a drive for “self enclosure,” through the “negation or denial of reference to other musics and cultures, that is historically aberrant,” what they call “the fantasy that one could invent a new musical language without references to other musics … through a process of pure conceptual invention.”\(^\text{22}\) McClary writes that “only with the twentieth-century

\[^{19}\text{Ibid., 46.}\]
\[^{21}\text{Susan McClary, “Terminal Prestige: the Case of Avant-Garde Music Composition,” \textit{Cultural Critique} no. 12 (Spring 1989), 57-81.}\]
\[^{22}\text{Born and Hesmondhalgh, “Introduction,” 16-17.}\]
avant-garde … has there been music that has sought to secure prestige by claiming to renounce all possible social functions and values.”

Following Bürger’s correlation of avant-garde art and class, she notes that the breakdown of patronage and the aristocracy in Western culture forced musicians to rely “reluctantly … on the bourgeois audience;”

and by quoting Pierre Boulez, McClary outlines the double economies of a pluralistic, commercial market for music, and one where capital is driven by prestige: “The economy is there to remind us, in case we get lost in this bland utopia: there are musics which bring in money and exist for commercial profit; there are musics that cost something whose very concept has nothing to do with profit.”

This division, in socio-economic terms, that has separated art “for art’s sake” from the vagaries of popular art and mass consumption has been a line of delineation for many commentators on aesthetic production in a post-industrial age. For Clement Greenberg, the avant-garde represents an idealized expression of art’s ability to slough off the external pressures of market economies—to withdraw into their medial possibilities as pure forms. Greenberg’s classic early essay “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” published first in 1939, remains a definitive exposition of this view of art’s autonomy. He writes (presaging McClary’s comments) of the necessary “emigration” of the avant-garde from bourgeois society to bohemia in the late nineteenth century, and away from the “markets of capitalism, upon which artists and writers had been thrown by the falling

23 McClary, “Terminal Prestige,” 60.
24 Ibid.
25 Quoted in McClary, 60-61.
away of aristocratic patronage." Thus, the very foundation of the avant-garde, for Greenberg, is predicated upon a removal, or a disavowal into a kind of hermetic (autarchic) praxis that focuses inward on disciplinary and aesthetic prerogatives.

In this way Greenberg’s view is that true avant-garde artists look inside their medium, not outside, and that the content of an artwork dissolves into form. By way of example he cites James Joyce’s *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, experiments unparalleled in their influence on twentieth-century literary modernism. As we will later see, Joyce’s work became a triangulating factor—one of several—that connected McLuhan, Cage, and Kasemets together in their creative approaches to sound as media. Greenberg writes that in Joyce’s writing we witness “the reduction of experience to expression for the sake of expression, the expression mattering more than what is being expressed.”

Greenberg and Bürger are both supportive of the avant-garde’s schismosis from domains of commercial art production, and both hold that the avant-garde is entwined in a paradoxical relationship with the social, class, and culture. Both also point to a spatiality implied by this relationship, wherein the avant-garde carves out a chimerical vision of society to come. For Greenberg, it is the preservation of “living culture,” and for Bürger, the necessary sublation (and return) to autonomy to create a “free space within which alternatives to what exists become possible.” Both Greenberg’s and Bürger’s analyses are also critiques that seek to conceive of this space as one which is

27 Ibid., 532.
28 Ibid., 540.
socioeconomic, rather than discursive. Paul Mann’s provocative and (relatively obscure) book *The Theory-Death of the Avant-Garde* (1991) proposes that throughout its various histories, the avant-garde has been responsible, more than for heralding new social and aesthetic visions of futures to come, for mapping out its own discursive space again and again; and, further, that the economies sustaining the panoplies of twentieth-century avant-gardes are in fact largely cultural, entirely dialectical, and rely on the successive dissolutions of avant-gardes to maintain the power inherent in this dialectic. In the avant-garde,

> art manifests itself entirely as discourse, with nothing residual, nothing left over. Or rather: no visible residuum, for even as one must insist that the avant-garde is fully discursive—even as one discovers that the reflection of this discursivity was the theory-life and theory-death of the avant-garde—in the end one will also find that something is always missing from discourse, always omitted, denied, concealed, lost, skipped over, ignored.\(^30\)

Mann’s study is largely concerned with these dialectical relations rather than the taxonomic definitions of the avant-garde, and insists that any avant-garde consistently defines itself both in terms of and against the definitions imposed upon it.\(^31\) For an avant-garde to sustain itself ideologically, practically, and economically, it relies on the persistence of the traditional forms of art that it promises to obliterate: the “avant-garde is instrument of an attack on tradition, but an attack mandated by tradition itself. … [T]he avant-garde sustains what it opposes precisely by opposing it.”\(^32\)


\(^{31}\) Ibid., 9.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., 11.
For Mann, the avant-garde has been successful in defining its own rhetorical geography of centres, margins, insides, and outsides, and it is this particular way of envisioning the avant-garde as a spatial phenomenon that makes itself most useful to the present study. It also helps us do away with getting waylaid by trying to parse out a definition of what separates the avant-garde from better nomenclatures. He writes that the term avant-garde is “cause and product of confusion of ambiguities and contradictions, which sustain avant-garde discourse.”

The avant-garde is, then, better thought of as a discursively mapped space, one that defines itself again and again chiefly as a “limit,” which is always moving and staking a claim to redefining those centres and margins that delineate its existence as border. It has “served, in most cases unwittingly, as an instrument for the incorporation of its own marginality. The avant-garde is the outside of the inside, the leading edge of the mainstream, and thus marginal in both senses: excluded and salient.”

Mann’s concluding sentiment about the discursive conflict inherent in the shifting centres and margins that serve as the avant-garde’s cycles of renewal and dissolution bears quoting, at its considerable length:

So after crossing this overdeveloped, overtravelled, mapped and meta-mapped terrain we seem to arrive at nothing more interesting or inevitable than a logical conclusion, at one and the same time egregiously silly and perfectly serious, a non-event and an actual catastrophe. What changed between the heroic age of the avant-garde and today is the history of the avant-garde itself. We have witnessed too many frontiers that turned out to have been cultural centres from the outset, too many negations that were already nods of assent: hence no more faith in the anti’s ability to stay anti, in its power to rise above the exchange of equations of cultural economics. Avant-garde discourse is the vanguard of this lost faith, this consciousness of the apparently unlimited capacity of recuperation. In this sense

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33 Ibid., 45.
34 Ibid., 12.
the avant-garde turns out to be *en avant* of an unprecedented epoch, a development unforeseen in the manifestos of its earlier age: the contraction, the collapse, the theory-death of the very dialectical device by which the modern era … has always sustained itself.³⁵

What Mann emphasizes, perhaps more than other observers of the historical avant-gardes, is the very expendability of these movements that exists as a central feature of their spatiality. Indeed, the military origins of the term denote an “elite and expendable shock troop” sent to attack enemy lines, which obliterates itself with its own intensity.³⁶ Similarly, Jürgen Habermas offers a conceptualization of the avant-garde that equally suggests it is more than anything, a “spatial metaphor.” The avant-garde explores hitherto unknown territory, exposes itself to the risk of sudden and shocking encounters, conquers an as yet undetermined future, and must therefore find a path for itself in previously uncharted domains. But this forward orientation, this anticipation of an indefinite and contingent future, the cult of the New which accompanies it, all this actually signifies a glorification of a contemporaneousness that repeatedly gives birth to new and subjectively defined pasts.”³⁷

Habermas’ notion, which complements the rhetorical geography mapped by the avant-garde, is also noteworthy in that it emphasizes yet another cyclical process set in motion by the avant-garde: the cult of the New. The avant-garde’s insistence on the “glorification of a contemporaneousness” yields a perpetual and at times uncritical prioritization of the present—the same “cult of the act” which Poggioli’s typology encompasses. If Udo Kasemets’ work in 1960s Toronto is to be classified as avant-garde, as it repeatedly and mockingly was, this particular dimension of the term is salient: as we

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³⁵ Ibid., 114.
³⁶ Ibid., 45.
will see, McLuhan’s spatial cosmography of media emphasizes a simultaneity of perceptual, relational, and cognitive processes that post-typographic communication systems facilitate. The typographic predisposition towards unitary and linear unfolding of content through its medium (reading, writing, perspectival vision) becomes conflated—or to use a phrase from McLuhan’s lexicon, imploded—into a holistic perceptual field of multi- and inter-sensory experience. More than simply a convenient analogue, McLuhan’s “audile-tactile” environment of new media became, for Kasemets, a powerful rhetorical model that furnished new modes of performance with a sociocultural context.

The cult of newness remained pervasive in Kasemets’ writing, and one could argue that “newness” has been the one constant aspect binding all of his work as a composer, rhetorician, and concert promoter together. Newness has held a special place in twentieth-century avant-gardism that highlights a fundamentally modernist imperative: indeed, the modernist cri de guerre sounded by Ezra Pound in his infamous poetic injunction—“Make it New!”—implies a reconfiguration of aesthetic and technical

38 An illustrative and lengthy quote from Kasemets, excerpted from a 1980 interview with CBC’s Warren Davis on Two New Hours, summarizes this particular infatuation with newness. Kasemets is recounting his experience at the Kranichstein Institut, and his impression of meeting Edgard Varèse, who was teaching there during Kasemets’ time there in the late 1940s: “Varèse was a most magnificent human being: a poet of a man standing there and talking, talking about things that we have to do something new. There were students who brought things which at that time, particularly in Germany of course, were shockingly new because everybody had been writing just string quartets or piano trios or whatever the traditional forms were. And Varèse asked for something new. One guy said, ‘Well, I have written something which involves a saxophone.’ Varèse said, ‘Yes, ok, but will you bring something new now?’ He listened to what people brought, and he was not content. I couldn’t understand. ‘An Evening with Udo Kasemets,” Two New Hours, Warren Davis, host (Toronto, ON: CBC Radio, February 17, 1980).

39 The origins of this slogan, colloquially attributed to Pound, and also the title of a 1934 collection of his essays (Make it New: Essays, Faber and Faber), have predictably been called into question. Michael North’s convincing feature article from 2013 in Guernica: a magazine of art and politics explores Pound’s own “historical recycling” in expropriating this phrase as the leading battle cry for modernist poets in the 1930s and 40s. See Michael North, “The Making of ’Make it New!,’” Guernica: a magazine of art and
parameters defining any given creative practice. For Pound, e.e. cummings, James Joyce, and others, this manifested in radical experimentation with language, typography, syntax, and larger structural forms. As previously mentioned, Joyce’s dismantling of the conventions in writing in the first half of the twentieth century yielded two masterpieces of modernism—*Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. In both, Joyce dispenses with notions of temporality, exteriority and interiority, and traditional narrative structure in favour of dense intertextual (and inter-linguistic) writing. *Finnegans Wake* especially was instructive for Cage and McLuhan as a precedent-setting experiment, in that it proposed a mosaic, multi-directional text as a viable means of communication, but also in that it re-sites the audiality of language from the confines of its visual mode in typography. Since McLuhan’s *Gutenberg Galaxy* (discussed below) relies almost entirely on the canon of Western literature as its primary site of critique, *Finnegans Wake* offered an instructive example of intermediality in writing, where the sounds of words means the same, if not more, than their visual iteration as text.

To summarize then, the purpose of the foregoing discussion is not to pin down one catch-all definition of the avant-garde, nor is it to either prove or disprove its utility as a way of categorizing the activities of Udo Kasemets in 1960s Toronto. Rather, my purpose is to parse together a working rubric where avant-garde can indeed remain an applicable lens for evaluating the kinds of marginal, antagonistic, activist, and rhetorical actions of Kasemets and his collaborators—especially since this term will appear over

and again throughout this study. Yet it does not completely account for these activities, and in fact lingers as a problematic description of the mixed- and inter-media practice that comprised Kasemets’ aesthetic. Indeed, if we hold, following Greenberg, that a key feature of the avant-garde is a wilful sublimation into an art’s medial world—sound, paint, concrete, whatever—then it only goes so far in its work. In fact, it is the intermediality of Joyce’s writing that proved so instructive to McLuhan, Cage, and Kasemets, which would become a critical component of 1960s conceptualist and experimentalist practices.

**Tracing the Intermedial/Intersensory: from Joyce to McLuhan**

Klemens Gruber (2006) observes that writing and, specifically, letters are an especially resonant site for understanding the dynamics of intermediality. Mentioning early experiments in lettrism (or the jarring juxtaposition of typography in visual art), he notes that the expropriation of technologies for creative purposes resulted in intermediality in the avant-garde. Technology in the early twentieth century opened the possibility for intermedial arts by the various attempts at sensory isolation: phonography, typography, telephony, and telegraphy all endeavoured to mediate single sense perception through technological enhancement. Gruber cites Cubism’s attraction to the visual qualities of letters for their inherent aesthetic as objects meant for ocular consumption, and refers to Rosalind Krauss’s notion of “semantic positivism” in which letters themselves became detached from larger linguistic systems. He writes, “Shaken loose

from their verbal context, the words and letters in Cubist paintings burst forth into multiple meanings, and in the variety of their typography, they took on a visual character in their own right.”

The growth of advertising and its ubiquity in the cultural sphere in Europe accounted for the widespread use of letters in avant-garde art—readily available in newspaper ads, photographs, and so on, letters became for avant-garde artists raw tools for exploration in painting, theatre and other arts: “As advertising spread throughout the public sphere, so the invention of the typewriter domesticated the printing press, mechanized handwriting, making it anonymous, as it liberated single letters from their context. Words dissected into letters were freed from their meaning; one thought with one’s fingers.”

Avant-garde artists “sought the liberation of writing from narration, the free existence of the alphabet, and the intensification of the lettristic impact.”

Here we encounter a somewhat McLuhanesque interpretation of typography’s misuse in the hands of the avant-garde, and how repurposing elements of the wider medial environment highlights the possibilities of intersensoriality. Lettrism set a precedent for the “semantic positivism” that marks Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* as an experiment in the intermediality of words and writing. Where *Ulysses* traces an arc through one day in the life of protagonist Leopold Bloom, told in the so-called “stream of consciousness” idiom that blurred interior monologue with exterior events, and wove literary allusions and a number of devices into a dense 250,000 word text, *Finnegans

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42 Ibid., 184.

43 Ibid., 182.
Wake departs wholly from the linearity and monosensoriality of print media altogether. Its opening passage hints at a cyclical conflation of space and time, and the notion of directionality in writing that McLuhan’s spatial theory of post-print media would challenge:

riverrun, past Eve and Adam’s, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs.

Sir Tristram, violer d’amores, fr’over the short sea, had passencore rearrierv from North Armorica on this side the scraggy isthmus of Europe Minor to wielderfight his penisolate war: nor had topsawyer’s rocks by the stream Oconee exaggerated themselfe to Laurens County’s gorgios while they went doublin their mumper all the time: nor avoice from afire bellowsed mishe mishe to tauftauf thuartpeartick: not yet, though venissoon after, had a kidscad buttended a bland old isaac: not yet, though all’s fair in vanessy, were sosie sesthears wroth with twone nathandjoe. Rot a peck of pa’s malt had Jhem or Shen brewed by arclight and rory end to the regginbrow was to be seen ringsome on the aquaface.44

Redolant with local colloquialisms, anachronisms, borrowed phrases from other languages, wordplay, allusions, and so on, the text of Finnegans Wake is notoriously inscrutable on a casual read, and demands a different reading strategy to unpack the kaleidoscopic range of language Joyce incorporates. Finnegans Wake attempts to describe the tactile sensory experience of a dream world, or, opposite Ulysses, a cycle of night into day, told in the myriad stories of hundreds of characters (many of whom are palimpsestic iterations of the same handful of main figures) spanning what effectively amounts to a parable of the entirety of human civilization. The title itself, although drawn from a nineteenth century Irish-American ballad “Finnegan’s Wake,” is also play on

words, and points to the cyclical renewal of life and death associated with light and dark, day and night: *Finnegans Wake*, or “Finn again’s awake.” In the ballad, the day labourer and hod carrier Tim Finnegan arrives to work one morning drunk, falls from a ladder and dies. As is customary to Irish funereal tradition, friends and family are gathered for a wake to mourn the dead with drink and merriment; during the celebration, a jug of whiskey gets spilled on Finnegan, who rises from the dead.

As evidenced by the opening paragraph, Joyce intended the work from its outset to eschew any notion of beginning and ending, with the word “riverrun” (not capitalized) implying that *Finnegans Wake* “begins” mid-sentence, in flux, and, cyclical, as the closing words of the book imply a connectedness to its opening:

First. We pass through grass behush the bush

Margot Norris identifies how the ‘riverrun’ opening of *Finnegans Wake* is itself an invitation to a different kind of spatial configuration, interpellating readers right from the beginning into a kind of playful participation:

The sinuous sentence, the swerving phrase, continues a journey: by water, by bodily fluid, by verbal fluency. If we, the readers, are encompassed in the ambiguous ‘brings us,’ then we can begin to understand why the voice of that opening sounds so like the narration of a tour guide. For we have no way of knowing where we, as readers, are situated in the opening. Are we on a boat in the river Liffey in Dublin, or are we inside a human body; are we at the beginning of time, or the eternal present of every human utterance?

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45 Ibid., 628.
The image of the river, introduced in the first word and ultimately embodied in the character Anna Livia Plurabellum, dominates the work, signifying the inevitable dissolution of all things into an ocean of infinity as much as it instantiates the localness of Dublin’s cultural geography. The multitude and conflation of the timeless and mythic with the present and mundane would draw McLuhan obsessively to *Finnegans Wake* as a breakthrough in the literary arts.

In the following paragraph, at the opening of the work, we encounter the first of the “Ten Thunderclaps” that Joyce places throughout the text. These thunderclaps proved inspirational to John Cage, and found their way into his music from the 60s: the thunderclaps, ten words, each one hundred letters long⁴⁷ that open up symbolic lexical and semantic roadblocks, appear throughout the book as a way of marking primitivity, and the numinous power of thunder in tribal societies. The first Thunderclap appears thus:

The fall
(bababadalgharaghtakamminarronnkonnbronntonnronntuonnthunntrovarrhounawwnskawntoohoohoodenhurruhnk!) of a once wallstrait oldparr is retaled early in bed and later on life down through all christian mistrelslly. The great fall of the offwall entailed at such short notice the pftschute of Finnegan, erse solid man, that the huntyhillhead of humself sends an unquiring one well to the west in quest of his tumptytumtoes: and their upturnpikepointandplace is at the knock out in the

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⁴⁷ Except for the very last one, which is 101, making the total length of the thunderclaps 1001. Cage abandoned a piece composed around the thunderclaps: *Atlas Borealis and the Ten Thunderclaps.* As a kind of follow-up to Cage’s *Atlas Eclipticalis* (1961), which was premiered in Montreal at the Semaine internationale de musique actuelle organized by Pierre Mercure (a festival that itself was a response to the 1960 conference organized in Stratford by Kasemets, John Beckwith, Louis Appelbaum, and others), this work also reaffirms Cage’s strong connection to Canada in the 1960s. See particularly Crystal Chan’s illuminating article, “John Cage’s Canada” in *Maisonneuve: a Quarterly of Arts, Opinions, and Ideas* (October 2009) for a journalistic expoloration of Cage’s fascination with Canada and its landscapes. [http://maisonneuve.org/article/2012/10/9/john-cages-canada/](http://maisonneuve.org/article/2012/10/9/john-cages-canada/), accessed September 23, 2014.
park where oranges have been laid to rust upon the green since devlinsfirst loved livy. 48

According to McLuhan, each thunderclap “is a cryptogram or codified explanation of the thundering and reverberating consequences of the major technological changes in all human history. When a tribal man hears thunder, he says, ‘What did he say that time?’, as automatically as we say ‘Gesundheit.’” 49 Eric McLuhan (Marshall’s son and co-author of Laws of Media) has undertaken the lengthiest study of the role that these thunderclaps play in the Wake, and argues that far from being a “random collage of sounds” the thunderclaps are the most conspicuous and unusual feature of the “conscious verbal landscape” 50 of the book. Free of any syntactic logos, the thunderclaps emphasize not only the impact of technological change as cultural change, but also the immersive orality of Joyce’s auditory writing—its musicality. Writing to his daughter, Joyce himself said of the work, “Heavens knows what my prose means. … But it’s pleasing to the ear;” and responding to another question as to whether the Wake was a mixture of literature and music, that, “No, it’s pure music … just meant to make you laugh.” 51

48 Joyce, Finnegans Wake, 3.
50 Eric McLuhan, The Role of Thunder in Finnegans Wake (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), x.
51 Quoted in Richard Ellmann, James Joyce (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 715-16. In conversation with Kasemets, Joyce’s thunderclaps appeared again when we were speaking about the 1983 event Counterbomb Renga, a massive work Kasemets coordinated with Toronto experimental performers to protest the proliferation of nuclear arms. At the time, as with many of Udo’s responses to my queries, I missed the reference that informed the content of his reply. Below is an extended excerpt of our discussion.

JS: Do you know the anthropologist John Blacking?

UK: No, I don’t know.
Literary (and some music) scholars have dealt at length with music in the work of Joyce, and especially with his crucial position in the Cagean orbit. Some of Cage’s most well known pieces were inspired directly by the *Wake: The Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs* (1942), *Roaratorio* (1979), *Nowth Upon Nacht* (1984), and Cage devoted a number of mesostic compositions to Joyce’s name. Kasemets himself became absorbed in Joyce’s orbit likely via Cage’s influence, and participated in a 1964 concert organized by Toronto’s James Joyce society, called *A Choice of Joyce*. The Society was founded that year by Harry J. Pollock, a teacher, playwright, and enduring figure in Toronto’s...

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JS: Actually, he was an ethnomusicologist who wrote a very influential, very small book in the ‘60s called *How Musical is Man*? And he worked with—his research area was the Venda people in Central Africa. He studied Venda children’s songs. He was a very— the chapters of book are—he’s basically getting at the question of what is music, and he’s very virtuosic with words and catchy titles. And so one of his chapters is “Humanly Organized Sound” as one definition; another one is “Soundly Organized Humans” or something like that. I always thought it was a really interesting way of putting it. That to me seems like, when we talk about what is music, and what is the difference between music and sound and music and noise, is the fact that it has to be organized in some way by somebody. So there’s some kind of human agency involved in it. And it seems to me that there’s a lot of—I don’t know if you agree with that or if you disagree with that, because it seems to cut against some of the central ideas of John Cage’s ideas about music and sound; and intent and organization, and creating something that is defined by its form. Whereas, something like this for example [pointing to the Musicworks edition of Counterbomb Renga] there’s a large amount of change, and not formlessness, that’s not what I’m trying to say, but certainly the sum of it can’t really be only considered as being something that has a definite form to it that you’ve organized. Because it seems that there’s so much more there.

UK: Well, if I remember correctly, the whole idea grew out from the Renga principle, and of course from the Haiku principle. And the responses were—some were very rigidly organized. Either sound things or verbal things; and others were completely free. There were some responses that were just prose in its simplest way. And, well, you accepted every approach to that whole question because that whole question really was talking about your response to that whole question, which was, yes, it was that bomb, but—the bomb is only a word. And there is much more to it than just the word. That’s one of our problems that I’ve found recently, quite acute, is that: yes, we use words to try to explain anything, and really words are very superficial in trying to explain. What is music? Ok, I mean, you try to explain it as organized sound, but who organizes it? The listener really organizes it, and the one who creates some sounds organizes it too. I mean, if you play your guitar or piano or whatever, or sing, you try to organize that sound into some statement. Or, even if you speak—I mean there is really only music that humans created from the beginning on where just sounds that they tried to create to express something that they were able to observe. So they called it thunder. The other people called it donner. Or whatever.


53 Several other of Cage’s works feature Joyce- and *Finnegans Wake*-derived texts: *Fifteen Domestic Minutes* (1982), *Child of Tree* (1939), *In the Name of the Holocaust* (1942).
literary community. At the concert, held in late November in the Poor Alex Theatre in the city’s Annex neighbourhood, a version of Kasemets’ composition *Trigon* was performed, titled *Triv and Quad*; I examine *Trigon* in detail in Chapter 7, but it merits a brief note here that this work was, by far, Kasemets’ most well-known piece during the decade, and received more performances than any other work from his 1960s oeuvre. *The Toronto Daily Star*’s Ann Marshall reported that at the beginning of the concert, Kasemets warned the audience, “You might find that you’re not understanding the music. Just close your eyes for a while; then you might find that snatches of it are getting through.” ⁵⁴ The program featured works by Cage (*The Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs*), Luciano Berio (who set many of Joyce’s text to music⁵⁵), Bruno Maderna, and George Cacioppo.

Although a detailed analysis of the *Wake*’s encyclopedic intertextuality is far beyond the purview of this project, it is worth noting that language for Joyce was a way of articulating human collectivity, and that the connection to the Tower of Babel—the structure from Book of Genesis symbolizing the unity of humankind across generations and languages—is a significant part of the work’s thematic motives. As the story tells, God destroys the tower and scatters the people who had convened at Shinar to build a structure that was meant to reach to the heavens, as a warning to humanity against challenging the omnipotence of God by technology: “The Lord said, ‘If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not

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⁵⁵ See Murphy (1999) for a detailed analysis of Berio’s Joyce-inspired post-serial compositions.
understand each other.” So the “fall” that Joyce signals with the first thunderclap is not only the fall of the Tower of Babel, but also Tim Finnegan—himself an archetype of Irish lore (Fionn Mac Cumhaill)—as well as Adam’s fall from the Garden of Eden. As Joyce scholar Derek Attridge argues, “Finnegans Wake is [Joyce’s] anti-Babel, designed and built to counter the destructive act of the jealous god who drove the nations apart.” If, as Attridge suggests, we cannot parse meaning or coherence in The Wake, it is because “we are still locked in our monoglot cultural prisons, lacking the energy and enterprise to follow Joyce in his multilingual architectural feat of total unification.”

The multiplicitous language that Joyce employs to create the verbal worlds of Finnegans Wake has been scrutinized by a generation of scholars attempting to penetrate the linguistic and semantic architecture of the work. But relevant to this study, it is the spatialization of sound and meaning and connectivity that makes the Wake such an important part of McLuhan’s epistemological framework. As Donald F. Theall and Joan Theall note, the working title for both of Marshall McLuhan’s major works outlining his media theory in the 1960s—The Gutenberg Galaxy and Understanding Media—was, at one, point, “The Road to Finnegans Wake”, and they observe that McLuhan himself said that his work could not fully be understood without an understanding of Joyce. For McLuhan, Joyce’s work represented a prime example of how artists create “new grammars and new rhetorics to cope with the changing socio-political and technological

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and perhaps more importantly, recuperate the sense of the numinous and communion in the everyday that typographic media had attenuated in modernity.

*Finnegans Wake*, as Theall and Theall write, features an interplay of languages that highlighted the rapid transnationality of the modern world, where the concept of nation and state was becoming increasingly obsolesced with the advancement of media and communication technologies. The mosaic approach to writing so consummately mastered by Joyce in both *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* operated on a level going beyond a modernist experimentation with literary form; it represented a new semiotic system of post-print communication where symbols and their signifiers became disentangled from the hegemonic narrative form of typographic writing.

Joyce’s influence permeates *The Gutenberg Galaxy: the Making of Typographic Man* (1962), McLuhan’s first major work outlining his communication theory. *The Gutenberg Galaxy* surveys the canon of Western literary works as a way of accounting for the impact of communications technology on societies in the modern world, and configuring the human sensorium, or our sense ratio, to a visual bias. In McLuhan’s jargon, the four and a half centuries following Johannes Gutenberg’s invention of the printing press have produced the “typographic man,” whose subjectivity has been shaped, ordered, and maintained by a uniform and sequential presentation of knowledge through print media. For McLuhan, both Joyce and the Symbolist poets—Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Baudelaire, Verlaine—offered a viable exit from the linear logics associated with typographic visuality by presenting their work in a total and diversified “field.” He notes

59 Ibid., 51.
in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, in referencing medieval and Gothic grotesquery as a pre-
typographic means of semiotic disjuncture in visual art, that Joyce and the Symbolists
“accepted the grotesque as a mode of broken or syncopated manipulation to permit
inclusive or simultaneous perception of a total and diversified field. Such, indeed, is
Symbolism by definition—a collocation, a *parataxis* of components … without a point of
view or lineal connection or sequential order.”60

McLuhan’s use of the term parataxis in this passage is noteworthy: as a literary
technique, parataxis implies the disjunct pairing of two disparate elements in short, non-
hierarchical or logical relations. Paratactic writing was a key feature of Joyce’s work, and
became one of McLuhan’s own rhetorical tools to resist traditional narrative and linear
structures in his writing. Yet as I discuss below, parataxis also became central to mixed
media and experimental practice in the 1960s, where gestural and aural elements
comprising a work are coexistent, overlapping, and missing any obvious hierarchical
structure. For McLuhan, parataxis represented a method of achieving a kind of “semantic
positivism” in writing—a collocation as he calls it, whereby relations between words,
images, and their associative meanings become reconfigured. This reconfiguration
achieves an effect that is critical to understanding McLuhan’s larger media theory;
namely, that the narrative disruption imposed by paratactic writing engenders a newer
sensory engagement with words, and their sonic and visual properties. According to
McLuhan, this results in a much more immersive process between reader and text, one

60 Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: the Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of
that is inherently participatory and communal in nature. In reference to a particular
passage in *Ulysses* he continues in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, “The figures of classical
rhetoric are archetypes or postures of individual minds. Joyce by means of the modern
press translates them into archetypes or postures of collective unconscious.”

Much of McLuhan’s media theory resides along a critical axis suggesting that
print typography has produced what Walter Ong called a “tyrannically” visual logic of
perception, sensation, and spatialization. With typography, language—and therefore
consciousness—are heavily patterned and have produced several key traits of Western
society. Individualism, alienation, and the rise of nationalism are all identified by
McLuhan as the spoils of the typographic universe. Pre-typographic societies, in
McLuhan’s often-problematic rendering, fall on a continuum ranging from tribal-oral to
scribal-medieval cultures. McLuhan argues that in the “ancient” tribal or scribal world,
all reading was done aloud, and with print, “the eye speeded up and the voice quieted
down.” Interestingly McLuhan also considered the production of medieval manuscripts
as “almost entirely a do-it-yourself culture” (emphasis mine): “Not only was the assembly
of the parts of the book often a collective scribal affair, but librarians and users of books
took a large hand in composition since small books which only took a few pages could
never be transmitted except in volumes of miscellaneous content.”

One of McLuhan’s claims in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* is that print resulted in a haptic split, a silencing and

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61 Ibid.
63 McLuhan, *Gutenberg Galaxy*, 43.
64 Ibid., 131-133.
interiorization of language as a visual and individuated mode of communication, which “translates man from the magical world of the ear to the neutral visual world.”\textsuperscript{65} For McLuhan, the typographic era precipitated the decline of orality, the tactility of language and communal experience.

It should be noted that McLuhan’s legacy as theorist of culture and media hasn’t exactly fared well in the eyes of many commentators. Especially for those ensnared by the binarization of orality and literacy that appears to dominate all aspects of his thinking, McLuhan’s insistence on assigning to every artefact of human culture a visual or auditory designation can be reductive. Leadened by the oratorical figurations of paranomasia, litotes, hyperbole, irony, and simile—the very “postures of the mind”\textsuperscript{66} pulverized into abjection with the alphabetization of language—McLuhan’s dizzying and “ideogrammatic” surveys of typographic culture yield a deceptively crude spatial dialectic of communication: the visual and the “audile-tactile.”\textsuperscript{67} Ruth Finnegan, in her compelling challenge to McLuhan, Walter Ong, and the cadre of literary scholars advancing the oral/literate divide, writes that “the detailed findings of historians, anthropologists, sociologists and others suggest that human development is more

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 18.
\item \textsuperscript{66} “The figures of rhetoric are postures of the mind, as hyperbole, or irony, or litotes, or simile, or paranomasia. Picture writing of all kinds is a ballet of such postures which delights our modern bias towards synaesthesia and audile-tactile richness of experience, far more than does the bare, abstract alphabetic form.” McLuhan, \textit{The Gutenberg}, 47.
\item \textsuperscript{67} Throughout this chapter I refer, somewhat casually, to the dialectical method in bringing to the fore McLuhan’s uses of sound. More rigorous examinations of dialectics in McLuhan have been conducted that critically contextualize him with earlier dialectical (Adorno) and “ideogrammatic” approaches to culture and history (Benjamin). See Pamela McCallum (1989), Judith Stamps (1995), and Paul Grosswiler (1996).
\end{itemize}
complex than can be subsumed under the one simple key of the form of communication.”

Indeed this is true; but a closer reading of McLuhan reveals a far subtler parsing of the sensory complex as configured under the influence of communications media. And, littered throughout McLuhan’s oeuvre as a way of illustrating these changes to the human sensorium lies music. Resident within the acoustic-auditory spatial complex are several aporias masked by McLuhan’s rhetorical spirals, especially in what I see as an undisciplined use of sound throughout his writing. McLuhan relies on the properties of sound that are separate from its cultural semiosis—its physicality as a relational sensory thing—but also, and less systematically, on puzzling glosses of sound as it becomes manifest as music. These two regions tend to generate counter-meanings in McLuhan’s often-epigrammatic invocations of sound and music that become deployed rhetorically throughout his writing.

Music and McLuhan—Acoustic Space

It is worth discussing how McLuhan betrays a blunt understanding of music, through the imprecise correlations he draws between media, perception, and musical processes. Early in The Gutenberg Galaxy, McLuhan spends time using the analogy of melody, describing technology’s ability to extend senses into the social world as being

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69 Bruce E. Gronbeck, “McLuhan as Rhetorical Theorist,” Journal of Communication 31, no. 3 (September 1981), 119. As Gronbeck notes, this lets us tackle the encyclopedic scope and “conceptual quagmires” that too literal a reading of McLuhan produces. Casting McLuhan’s writing “in the form of a rhetorically inspired communication theory should allow one to assess its bases, its thrust, and its strengths and weaknesses.”
“comparable to what happens when a new note is added to a melody.”70 We must consider “melody” and its new note in terms of similar dialectical pairings that appear in McLuhan’s media theory such as figure and ground, and, especially pertinent to this study, “environment” and “anti-environment.” Melody here assumes a systemic identity that has become engrained so deeply into a broader social consciousness that it appears invisible, or as McLuhan would say, environmental. Its alteration—the new note—signals disjuncture and antithesis, transforming it to anti-environment (discussed in detail below). Yet just a few pages on, melody operates in a seemingly opposite way, tied into an opaque use of cyclicality to describe literate societies. In repetition, which for McLuhan is a fundamental hallmark of typographic culture, lineality and cyclicality collide as means of articulating the homogenous iteration of objects in space, extending infinitely outward (to what McLuhan would elsewhere call the “vanishing point”).71 He writes, “Melodies of literate societies are repeatable cycles. But the music of non-literate people has no such repetitive cyclic and abstract form such as melody.”72 Here we encounter an unorthodox notion of melody as total abstraction, and melody in its iterativity and “reiterativity” as synecdoche for broader patterns of behaviour in mechanized, repetitive cultures.

70 McLuhan, The Gutenberg Galaxy, 41.
71 Pictorial space for McLuhan is either perspectival or mosaiced, resulting in either a subjective detachment from space (as one gazes, three dimensionally, into a “vanishing point”) or a multi-directional immersiveness in environment, which he categorizes as “two-dimensional.” See Marshall McLuhan and Harley Parker, Through the Vanishing Point: Space in Poetry and Painting (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 1-31.
72 McLuhan, The Gutenberg Galaxy, 44.
Yet even a few more pages on, another use: describing ancient Greek and Roman forms of oral rhetoric, he observes that “Such equations or figures have no content but are structures like an individual melody which evoke their own world.” Melody thus embodies “contentlessness,” a quality of media implied in McLuhan’s famous aphorism “the medium is the message.” But like rhetorical figurations (the litotes, paranomasia, and so on), McLuhan intimates that melody is a mosaiced form of sound, or one that “involves,” rather than separates. Within a half dozen pages, McLuhan constructs a polymorphic and vexatious semiotic of melody, as a medium that seemingly fulfills contradictory roles thanks to its capricious rhetorical deployment.

Music for McLuhan is an index through which the effects of technological change in society can be read as manifest. By the seventeenth century, mechanical culture resulted in the rending of words from sound, the rise of a “specialist autonomy of musical instruments,” and the acceleration of language’s apprehension as a visual rather than aural medium. A quote from Understanding Media illustrates this point:

> With the first printing of musical scores in the sixteenth century, words and music drifted apart. The separate virtuosity of voice and instruments became the basis of the great musical developments of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The same kind of fragmentation and specialism in the arts and sciences made possible mammoth results in industry and in military enterprise, and in the massive cooperative enterprises such as the newspaper and the symphony orchestra.

In the Gutenberg Galaxy, McLuhan writes, “Song is the slowing down of speech in order to savour nuance,” before positioning polyphony and monophony in a false binary:

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73 Ibid., 46-47.
74 Ibid., 200.
“Polyphony was to have effects in music comparable to moveable types and mechanical writing in language and literature.”76 McLuhan thought of the medieval world as fundamentally oral (“The medieval monk’s reading carrel was indeed a singing booth”77), communal, and haptic; medieval music was equally redolent with a “tactile sensuousness.”78 So there appears to arise yet another dichotomy that music indexes—the sensuous and the mechanical—which is linked problematically to oral and literate societies. Other spurious hypotheses spring up from this, such as jazz’s inherently tribal and audile-tactile nature,79 being a response to the “highbrow richness and orchestral subtlety of the Debussy-Delius period”,80 and the waltz as an aural avatar of the mechanical and the militaristic.81

To return to McLuhan’s idealized rendering of so-called “tribal man” as a rhetorical construction of a person from any non-literate (or more accurately, pre-typographic) society: two concepts emerged which resonated beyond academic circles in the 1960s and formed the basis of the media theory outlined in the Gutenberg Galaxy—the global village and acoustic space. The global village was McLuhan’s appellation for an utopic post-typographic world, wherein immediacy, a return to a new orality—what McLuhan idyllically calls a “garden ... of haptic harmony”82—and total connectivity would result from the recession of print and the rise of electronic media. McLuhan had

77 Ibid., 92.
78 Ibid., 201.
79 Ibid., 53.
80 McLuhan, Understanding Media, 278.
81 Ibid., 280.
82 Ibid., 17.
been developing his ideas of such a “historical return” since the 1950s in his famous “Communications and Culture” seminars at the University of Toronto, as well as in the journal *Explorations*, which he edited along with anthropologist Edmund “Ted” Carpenter. ⁸³ He had noted that the extraordinary proliferation of electronic communication technologies in the postwar era introduced into daily life was enabling us to “observe ourselves and other cultures as never before.” ⁸⁴ McLuhan’s global village was a world of instantaneous interconnectivity, a “new time-space paradigm” as Richard Cavell describes in *McLuhan in Space: A Cultural Geography*, “constantly in flux, and inherently dialogical.” ⁸⁵

In McLuhan’s global village, the spatiotemporal arrangement of linearity and distance becomes replaced by *acoustic space*. In contrast to visual space, which is prescribed, predictable, and grounded in the geometries of Euclidian perspective, the fundamental non-linearity of acoustic space is characterized as a centre-without-margins, “a perfect sphere whose centre is everywhere and whose margins are nowhere.” ⁸⁶ Immersive, holistic, multidirectional—a “sphere without fixed boundaries, space made by the thing itself, not space containing the thing” ⁸⁷—McLuhan’s acoustic space seems aimed at obviating everything associated with the Gutenberg era’s overwhelmingly visual

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⁸³ The trajectory of how McLuhan arrived at the idea of acoustic space has been extensively traced. See especially Richard Cavell (1999), (2002), and (2011). Briefly, the notion took shape during McLuhan’s famous “Communication and Culture seminars” at the University of Toronto during the 1950s, and, as Phillip Marchand notes in his widely-cited critical biography of McLuhan, it was Carleton Williams who first presented a paper there suggesting that unenclosed space might be thought of as “auditory.” Philip Marchand, *Marshall McLuhan: The Medium and the Messenger* (Toronto: Vintage, 1990), 123-124.
⁸⁶ Quoted in Marchessault, p. 91.
bias. Thanks largely to his close association with the anthropologist Carpenter, who studied the Aivilik Inuit in Canada’s Arctic, McLuhan formalized a notion that all oral cultures adhered to non-narrative orientations of reality, due to the absence of standardized systems of writing. The gradual ascendance of electronic media, slowly phasing out the typographic era of human history, would in turn reorder the human sensorium to accommodate a new, audile-tactile dimension of communication, wherein perspectival and subjective distances are elided into an organic wholeness. Acoustic space is therefore not necessarily a mode of perception defined by sound, but by the immersive qualities of auditory experience, and McLuhan relied heavily and consistently on this metaphorical construction as a way of describing how subjectivity in the new time-space of post-print communication was being crucially repositioned. According to McLuhan and Carpenter, “Auditory space has no point of favoured focus…. It is not pictorial space, boxed in, but dynamic, always in flux, creating its own dimensions moment by moment. It has no fixed boundaries; it is indifferent to background.” In contrast to visual space—or as they write, “pictorial” space, which is misleading since McLuhan would later explore how spatial “acousticity” is manifest in photographs and paintings—auditory space is marked by its insistence of perceptual organicism, an

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88 And additionally, Carpenter’s association with anthropologist Dorothy Lee, who studied Trobriander island culture in the 1940s. Lee was instrumental in articulating cyclical and non-lineal organizations of daily life as being related oral cultures. Her essay, “Codifications of Reality: Lineal and Non-Lineal,” appeared in Explorations, and was subsequently reprinted in Dorothy Lee, Freedom and Culture (Engelwood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1959).
90 Cubism, for example, was to McLuhan acoustic space represented visually (see Understanding Media, 13).
interplay of senses that resists the focused, acute, and localized apprehension of objects in the visual field.

In his famous and lengthy *Playboy* interview from March 1969, McLuhan tells us that acoustic space

has no center and no margin, unlike strictly visual space, which is an extension and intensification of the eye. Acoustic space is organic and integral, perceived through the simultaneous interplay of all the senses; whereas “rational” or pictorial space is uniform, sequential and continuous and creates a closed world with none of the rich resonance of the tribal echoland.⁹¹

As a relational medium, McLuhan and Carpenter argue that “the essential feature of sound … is not its location, but that it be, that it fills space.”⁹² Thus the material properties of sound that account for its *indiscrete* nature as an aural phenomena become, for McLuhan, part of an attractive representational matrix: “We hear equally well from left to right, front to back, above or below. … We can shut out the visual field by simply closing our eyes, but we are always triggered to respond to sound.”⁹³ Referring to the all-seeing figure of Greek myth, they suggest that “We are not Argus-eyed, but we are Argus-eared.”⁹⁴

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⁹³ Ibid., 67.
⁹⁴ Ibid., 68. This phrase also appears in Marshall and Eric McLuhan, *Laws of Media: the New Science* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 69. Kasemets reiterated the importance of this particular aspect of sound to me in an interview from 2010. I had been asking him about how he felt as an “outsider” in Canadian music, and Kasemets’ reply drifted to the spatial properties of sound. At the time, I did not recognize how much McLuhan and Carpenter’s spatial (and rhetorical) formulation of sound informed his particular digression: “Because we have learnt over centuries, actually since the beginning of human activity, that fantastic thing, that sounds are the part of music and sounds were the very first human experience, along with sight of course, and sight has taken over. But really our listening is always there. Our ear and our brain are always aware of sounds. It doesn't matter in which direction they originate and come to us, we are responding to them. While during the night, we can close the eyes and go to sleep, at the
And in McLuhan’s spatial cosmography, sound is indeed part of the newly emergent mythic environment articulated by electric media’s supersession over the mechanical technoscape. It is tied to ritual, a “tribal echoland.” As a way of mitigating the intensification of reason associated with detached visuality, McLuhan frequently describes aural modes of communication as magical. With Carpenter, he writes, “Auditory communication makes present the absent thing; writing annulled this magic because it was a rival magical means of making present the absent sound.”

Carpenter’s work among the Aivilik Inuit (along with Dorothy Lee’s analyses of Trobriander and Wintu culture) helped shape McLuhan’s spatial theory by suggesting that “non-literate” northern people (and by extension all tribal cultures) experience things primarily as auditory:

To the Eskimo, truth is given through oral tradition, mysticism, intuition, all cognition, not simply by observation and measurement of physical phenomena. To them, the ocularly visible apparition is not nearly as common as the purely auditory one; hearer would be a better term than seer for their holy men.”

Later, in Playboy he explains:

Audile-tactile tribal man partook of the collective unconscious, lived in a magical integral world patterned by myth and ritual, its values divine and unchallenged, whereas literate or visual man creates an environment that is strongly fragmented, individualistic, explicit, logical, specialized and detached.

same time our hearing system is always an alert system, because you hear, and you respond only to some shocking sounds and wake up suddenly because you heard a sound. Sound is a fundamental human experience that in a sense … I mean you hear, all the time sound is present. Because your physical systems respond to sound all the time.” Interview with the author, March 14, 2010.

Ibid.

See, for example, Dorothy Lee, “Being and Value in a Primitive Culture,” The Journal of Philosophy 46 no. 13 (July 1949), 401-415. Lee emphasized non-lineal codifications of experience among Trobriand, and an atemporal worldview due to a lack of linguistic means of expressing such.

McLuhan and Carpenter, “Acoustic Space,” 68.

McLuhan, Playboy Interview, 59. McLuhan’s repeated invocations of “tribal man” are deeply—and if read literally, fatally—problematic. As Janine Marchessault reminds us, they have been rightly critiqued for
To McLuhan, orality is merely the auditory bias of a complex intersensorial web—the interplay he often describes—rather than a rigidly dichotomous opposition to visuality, or a wholly non- or illiterate communication system. His overreliance on “tribal” culture unfortunately mitigates the strength of the argument advanced precisely against print culture: namely, that it distorts the sense ratio to an anaesthetic or “hypnotic” extreme. This is McLuhan’s whole point in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*—to show how the schizophrenia of literacy results from an overemphasis on the cultivation of visual culture. It is not that orality and auditory space exclude other senses; in fact, it is quite the opposite—they metonymically signal a “balanced interplay of senses,”[^99] what we might think of as a synaesthetic “coolness.”[^100] McLuhan illustrates this separation of visuality from the balanced sensory web at the hands of technological revolution through an elegant reading of verse by W.B. Yeats:

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Locke sank into a swoon
The garden died
God took the spinning jenny
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their inaccurate and essentializing rendering of non-Western cultures as Orientalized others. But as she also notes, for McLuhan (and Harold Innis, who earlier theorized oral culture and communication as “time-biased,” and whose influence McLuhan often acknowledged), oral tradition was a path “to community and a just society.” Further, she observes that among the myriad dialectical formations comprising McLuhan’s media theory, the pairing of an historical and mythological consciousness is achieved through an emphasis on orality. Read with a culturally relativist eye, the various nomenclatures that signify the auditory bias in perception throughout McLuhan’s writing (especially post-*Gutenberg Galaxy*) as tribal, “oriental,” and in perhaps the phrase that is most striking in its crudeness, “the Africa within,” (taken from Joseph Conrad) obscure their broader function—which is to attenuate the historically-situated and material processes of communication by inflecting them with the language of historical and cultural disjuncture. See Janine Marchessault, *Marshall McLuhan*, xix, 104, 216-217. For a fairly convincing charge of ethnocentrism levied against McLuhan for his treatment of Asian culture as principally “tribal” in spite of major technological inventions associated with Gutenbergian individualism, see Lydia Liu, “iSpace: Printed English after Joyce, Shannon, and Derrida,” *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. 3 (Spring 2006), 547 n. 71.

[^100]: I explore McLuhan’s problematic dialectic of “hot” and “cool” in greater detail in Chapter 7.
Out of his side.\textsuperscript{101}

Here we observe Yeats’ typically sinister treatment of technology, personified in the spinning jenny, in a version of a “mock-Mechanical creation.”\textsuperscript{102} This is a theme McLuhan explores at length in The Gutenberg Galaxy’s expository opening section, by demonstrating in numerous literary examples the cultural trauma associated with massive technological transitions. He writes that the “Lockean swoon” is the hypnosis of a single sense saturation—visuality—as it fills the field of experience: “At such a moment, the garden dies.” The garden, reads McLuhan, indicates “the interplay of all the senses in haptic harmony.”\textsuperscript{103}

As a probe to point at the synaesthetic relationality characteristic of acoustic space, McLuhan frequently employs the notion of interval: acoustic space is a “moving vibrant interval.”\textsuperscript{104} He writes, “Tactile space is an interval. Hence, beat and rhythm. … [It] is the interval whether in music or mosaic or in poetry that compels involvement until we become part of the situation.”\textsuperscript{105} The ambiguous use of “beat and rhythm” hints at a (tribal) pulsation of intervals spaced out across time. But like much of what populates McLuhan’s terminological lexicography, rhythm’s particular use can be traced back to the ideas generated in the Communications and Culture Seminars. In Lawrence K. Frank’s essay “Tactile Communication,” published in Explorations, pre-verbal tactility is

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\textsuperscript{103} McLuhan, The Gutenberg Galaxy, 17.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 34.
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dressed in a language suggesting musical structures latent within the repetitious
movements, touchings, and gropings at things that help babies shape and understand their
worlds, both intra- and extra-uterine:

The fetus … continuously receives the rhythmic impacts of the maternal
heartbeat, impinging on the skin of his whole body and magnified by the fluid.
His own heart beat will later synchronize or be out of tune with the maternal heart
beat; in either case he experiences a series of impacts upon his skin to which he
develops a continuous response, as a psychological resonance. Thus, even before
birth he adjusts to a rhythmically pulsating environment.106

McLuhan’s faith in the tactile aspect of an intersensory balance can likewise be
correlated to Frank’s suggestion that touch is at the base of all communicative action—it
“is never wholly superseded; it is merely elaborated by the symbolic process.”107 Touch
and rhythm are the genesis of symbolic meaning, the physical actions on top of which the
semiotic strata of existence begin to take shape. As Frank explains, “the potency of music
and poetry, with their rhythmical patterning and varying intensities of sound, depends in
large measure on the provision of an auditory surrogate for primary tactile experience.”108

But interval also implies simultaneity and co-inci dence, which, in McLuhan’s use,
offers an exit from the uniform sequences that materialize in typographic communication
and mechanical technology, and an opening to the productive potential of discontinuity.
An apparent contradiction arises precisely from a rhetorical use of sound that is perhaps
too loose (like describing, for example, the isomorphism of the heartbeat between mother

106 Lawrence K. Frank, “Tactile Communication,” in Explorations, eds. Edmund Carpenter and Marshall
107 Ibid., 4.
108 Ibid., 8.
and fetus as “in tune”). McLuhan employs interval in a short prefatory essay\(^{109}\) to call to our attention a “strange apposition,” a resonant or *fecund* interval, which qualifies the interval as a generative site and a place from which “new content” can emerge, again, as a dialectal formation of antithetical structures.\(^{110}\) So in addition to the discrete rhythmic repetitions or pulses that originate in an incipient tactility—“beat, rhythm”—and which appear to want to articulate *time* as a conflation of space, interval also describes a possibly “harmonic” identity in relations. To use a directionally biased descriptor, McLuhan’s interval is vertical, and always in some way fruitfully dissonant. Even in this case, it is the *gap* more than the strangely apposite poles forming its frame that interests McLuhan: “Tactility is the space of the interval; acoustic space is spherical and resonant.”\(^{111}\)

Sphericality and resonance, while organic and immersive, are equally and importantly marked by discontinuity. This marks yet another paradoxical use of sound: “The ear favors no particular ‘point of view.’ We are enveloped by sound. It forms a seamless web around us. We say, ‘Music shall fill the air.’ We never say, ‘Music shall fill a particular segment of air.’”\(^{112}\) Discontinuity for McLuhan then is not necessarily incoherence, but rather an interruptive desequentionalization that brings into relief the relations between two things. It is in this way, as McLuhan is trying to tell us, auditory

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\(^{110}\) Ibid.


perception is intervallic at the same time seamlessly immersive—both disjunct and confluent—which exposes yet another example of the emergent oxymora that McLuhan creates in using sonic images.

**Environments, Anti-Environments, and the Spatial Topography of Experimentalism**

The most well known connections between McLuhan and music come with the influence he exerted on John Cage in the 1960s, and as I discuss below, so many of McLuhan’s awkward ruminations on music and sound become crystallized as core tenets of conceptualist strains of experimentalism. In a short article from 1967, Cage writes, “not a moment passes without my being influenced by him and grateful to him,”¹¹³ citing McLuhan’s observations about art and environment’s inseparability from one another and the externalization of the central nervous system into international communications networks. “The world we now live in is a global mind,” he says, sounding every inch a McLuhanist.¹¹⁴ Richard Cavell writes, in a paper given in 2011 at the Institute for Sonology in Den Haag, that McLuhan’s media theories can be described as “an ontology where the self and the world are not discrete but relational. Indeed, McLuhan argued that electronic mediation, in extending our bodies and consciousness itself, constituted a vast extended body which had become our new environment.”¹¹⁵

Cavell analyses Cage’s iconic 4’33” by keeping in mind the questions of boundary and subjectivity that McLuhan’s acoustic space addresses. McLuhan preferred to think of the spatial relationships electronic media configured as immersive and

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¹¹⁴ Ibid., 170.
¹¹⁵ Richard Cavell, “McLuhan and Acoustic Space.”
holistic, and used auditory metaphors for describing their characteristics. Cavell notes that for Cage, art is primarily about subjectivity, but also corporeality and embodiment: art comes from within the self, generated within the bodily systems of sensation, perception, and understanding. In 4′33″ the listener’s sensory complex generates the compositional structure of the piece—ambient, environmental sounds “being themselves” as Cage would say—enveloping, penetrating and vibrating the psychophysical auditory systems of the listener. Indeed, the resonances between Cagean poetics of music and McLuhan’s poetics of space are strong, and to again paraphrase Cavell, have much to do with the breaching of boundaries.

In his artscanada article, McLuhan reciprocates the debt of influence expressed by Cage, and also positions Cage along the axis of influence that Joyce occupied for McLuhan. He writes:

John Cage … very early in the book [Silence], he explains that silence consists of all the unintended noises of the environment. All the things that are going on all the time in any environment, but things that were never programmed or intended—that is silence. The unheeded world is silence. That is what James Joyce calls thunder in [Finnegans Wake].

Sound’s very materiality constitutes a relational reaction in the listener, a crossing of physical boundaries into the body. But boundaries of performer and auditor also become troubled, suggesting, however superficially, a fetishized tribal communality that McLuhan’s “secondary orality” implies: everyone becomes the performer, and to a lesser extent, the “composer” in a social/sensory space geometrized without a central auditory point of focus.

ALL OF THE ABOVE DISCUSSION concerning Joyce’s auditory writing and McLuhan’s (often imprecise) use of music and sound in his media theory accounts, in part, for their influence on Kasemets in the 1960s—but also experimentalism broadly imagined. But it is through McLuhan’s dialectic of environment and anti-environment that sound and spatiality cohere with specific regard to 1960s experimentalism, as evidenced by the developments of inter-media and performance art, and especially, Cagean notions of theatre, which I discuss below. As Richard Cavell argues in *McLuhan in Space*, McLuhan’s contribution to communications and media theory must be read within the context of a broader “spatial turn” in cultural theory. Cavell writes that space “is the single most important conceptual category within McLuhan’s highly eclectic body of work,” and that in his ongoing attempt to answer the basic question of media’s impact on our senses, McLuhan returned again and again to the notion that it is the changing perception of space afforded by technology that has yielded massive socio-cultural transformations across civilizations.

By the mid 1960s, McLuhan had begun to emphasize the impact of art in society as an environmental transformation, one afforded by the increasing power of communication technologies to encompass and observe the totality of human activity. An environment, in McLuhan’s use, represents a total field of perception where no single-sense modality predominates over any other. In the same way acoustic space stands as a way of describing holism and involvement, environment embodies a “cool” spatial

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quality; that is to say one that implores an immersive sensory participation. In his 1966 essay “The Relation of Environment to Anti-Environment,” he writes:

An environment is naturally of low intensity or low definition. That is why it escapes observation. Anything that raises the environment to high intensity, whether it be a storm in nature or violent change resulting from a new technology, such high intensity turns the environment into an object of attention. When an environment becomes an object of attention it assumes the character of an anti-environment or an art object.\(^{118}\)

McLuhan’s use of certain terms—\textit{intensity} and \textit{definition}—refer to a lexicology of classifications describing sensory engagement that different media demand. For example, in print typography, the intensification of one sense—vision—reconfigures the sense ratio to lessen the user’s reliance on hearing or touch, or the audile-tactile. It is important to parse out another embedded allusion in this passage that again reinforces the centrality of Joyce to McLuhan’s thinking: the notion that violent technological change (recall Yeats’s spinning jenny), or “a storm in nature,” can alter the level of perceptual intensity of an environment implicitly refers back to the ten thunderclaps in \textit{Finnegans Wake}.

In his 1967 \textit{artscanada} article “Technology and the Environment” McLuhan makes the case that the emerging forms of experimentalism in the 1960s are associated with technological changes in the Western world. McLuhan writes, perhaps a bit generously (if not opaquely), that “abstract art … is very much a result of the electric age going around the mechanical one.”\(^{119}\) The ability to transmit and consume the cultural artefacts, behaviours, and relations between people afforded by post-print media


ecologies effected the ability to process the environment itself as “an artform.”\footnote{Ibid.}

McLuhan relates this to earlier media ecologies, and writes that “the Middle Ages were the late show of the Renaissance,” which is to say that the content of Renaissance typography was by and large the tales and stories of the receding medieval world, in a similar way that late night television in the 1960s showed old movies. “The content of the print technology of the Renaissance was medieval writing,” McLuhan notes; “What got printed in main, for two centuries and more after the printing press, was the medieval tale, medieval books of hours, medieval liturgies and medieval philosophy.”\footnote{Ibid.} This idea would get expressed more fully in McLuhan’s tetradic laws of media (see \textit{Laws of Media}, 1988), as well as his rhetorical notion of the “rearview mirror.” In McLuhan’s tetrad, media possess four characteristic properties that work in consort with each other—they embody the potential to reverse, obsolesce, retrieve, and enhance the abilities of older media.\footnote{A ready example, as expressed by (among others) David Cecchetto comes with the medium of email. Email both obsoletes letter mail, and enhances its ability to communicate with individual people on a far greater scale. Email also retrieves the nostalgic qualities of letter mail—making handwritten letters a principally aesthetic practice (think also of how vinyl records become art objects in their juxtaposition with newer forms of CDs and digital media). The reversal potential of email is manifest in spam, junk mail, and email’s unmanageably overwhelming presence in the daily routines of modern life: “reversal” signals the point in which a medium no longer fulfills its function anymore.} So if, following this thinking, experimental art acts as a “rearview mirror” to any social or medial environment, that environment, its characteristics, and the events occurring therein ostensibly become the “content” of experimentalist practice, or a new environment. “Environments are not just containers, but are new processes that change
the content totally,” he writes: “New media are new environments. This is why media are the message.”

McLuhan’s dialectic of environment and anti-environment traces back to a broader theoretical formulation comprising part of his media theory, that electronic technologies possess a capacity for limitless inclusion. The very notion of acoustic space reflects this basic premise, albeit expressed in an abstracted and rhetorically malleable iteration. In his 1962 essay “The Electronic Age—the Age of Implosion,” McLuhan writes that “electricity has wrapped the planet in a single cohesive field or membrane that is organic rather than mechanical in nature. The population of the world has imploded, as have the models of perception and learning.” McLuhan suggests that the reversal potential of typographic media (although, again, this terminology would not be collected and formalized in any systemic way until the publication of *Laws of Media* in 1988) had been reached and proven manifest through electronic communications networks re-integrating the erstwhile separation of the sensorium. Implosion for McLuhan forms one half of yet another dialectic pairing related to media’s impact on the sensorium—the other half being *explosion*—as a way of mapping the geographies of perception in spatial terms. In the same way an environment is integral (characterized by perceptual integration rather than separateness), the quality of implosion suggests a connectivity between participants in any given spatial relationship: “Implosion means the end of the

teacher as expounder and of the lecture as briefing session.”¹²⁵ In such medial spaces, the reconfiguration and redistribution of authority alters the conditions in which information or content moves through spaces of perception. For McLuhan, the avant-garde was as much a sensibility, a loosely defined attitude and approach to action in all pursuits (this particular essay, “The Age of Implosion” focuses on business models—a successful businessman should “dig the latest art”¹²⁶ to be successful) as it was any specific historical movement. But in the main, McLuhan’s view of contemporary art drew from a more literal, militaristic definition of avant-garde—it was a kind of reconnaissance mission hinting at changes to come.

Like many of the dyadic formations in McLuhan’s dialectic theory, the relation of environment and anti-environment is, as McLuhan himself writes, fraught with “great confusion.”¹²⁷ What constitutes an environmental mode of perception, if the anti-environmental agent intensifies the formerly benign qualities into an integral aesthetic field? Does this not then make the old environment part of its dialectic apposite? It simultaneously situates artists as catalytic agents in fomenting perceptual change at the same time as it mitigates their detached individualist position of authority. He recognizes this particularly in discussing Glenn Gould’s famous withdrawal from the concert-hall—at one time an anti-environment, according to McLuhan, where the ritualistic gathering of the elite gathered in a collective communion with sound—into the realm of recorded or “electric music.” While the dissemination of recordings is an environmental

¹²⁵ Ibid., 187.
¹²⁶ Ibid., 186.
¹²⁷ Ibid., 14.
transformation McLuhan concedes that it “becomes more and more the concern of the private individual.” For McLuhan, the larger point is that the capacity of electronic media to disseminate information from former, older environments amounted to a renewed sense of awareness of that information as an aesthetic object.

**Conceptualism, Happenings, and Cagean Theatre**

It is not therefore especially difficult to see why McLuhan’s influence reached young minds in the 1960s, and especially helped experimental and mixed-media practices to be placed more meaningfully within a social context. By the late 1960s, experimentalism in art and music had emerged in North America as a phenomenon localized in communities of practice: Ann Arbor, New York City, San Francisco, Detroit, and other cities were host to networks and micro-infrastructures that supported non-institutionalized currents of experimentalism. Animated largely by young composers, performers, and thinkers working in marginal spaces, countercultural and avant-garde scenes took form in artist-run galleries, loft spaces, and on university campuses. The overarching dominance of postwar serialism as the *lingua franca* of modernism was yielding to a conceptualist strain of the avant-garde that manifested itself alongside the 1960s zeitgeist of exploration and possibility. Fluxus, West-coast minimalism, experimental dance, theatre, and what would later be formalized as performance art were proliferating as new modes of creative expression that pushed against the “autarchy” of postwar institutionalized avant-garde. This distinction is one that has continued to be

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muddied throughout the course of the ensuing fifty years of practice, and the opening section of this chapter attempts to at least address those discursive problems in passing detail.

Conceptualist developments in performance arts—“Happenings,” “Events,” mixed and inter-media concerts\textsuperscript{129}—had increasingly become a prevailing influence during the 1960s in North America, and works by John Cage, Allan Kaprow, Jim Dine, Claes Oldenberg, Fluxus, ONCE, Dick Higgins and numerous other artists and ensembles had re-envisioned parameters of performance and expression in the plastic and visual arts. By the end of the decade, \textit{theatre} had become the principal medium where vectors of sight, sound, sculpture, movement, and language were reconfigured into discrete relations, which Michael Kirby, in his influential 1969 collection \textit{The Art of Time: Essays on the Avant-Garde}, calls \textit{alogical}.\textsuperscript{130} Hans Thies Lehmann uses the terminology \textit{parataxis} (recall McLuhan’s use earlier in this chapter describing Joyce’s writing) to account for “the non-hierarchical use of signs that aims at a synesthetic perception and contradicts the established hierarchy,”\textsuperscript{131} a slight modification of the term’s linguistic and oratorical origins—and musical experimentalism had found an accommodating new venue outside the concert hall in small, non-traditional theatre spaces. “Old” or classic theatre—mimetic, narrative, lineal, representational, where the “activities … assume the


shape of a continuous flow”¹³²—had been supplanted by what Kirby called “The New Theatre.”¹³³ As he notes the “backbone” of this contemporary praxis was Cage: as Cage considered all sounds musical, all gestures and persons part of a musical event, the possibilities for the theatricalization of performance were vastly expanded.¹³⁴ Theatre—according to Cage’s famous definition as “something which engages both the eye and the ear”¹³⁵—had indeed by the end of the decade become a way of describing musical performances as much as anything else.

Drama critic (and director) Richard Schechner coined the term environmental theatre as a way of denoting the strain for conceptualist practice that sought to imbricate and aestheticize all aspects of the performance space. In “6 Axioms for Environmental Theatre,” published in TDR in 1968, Schechner outlined a definitional scheme for an experimental model of performance that had been taking shape during the 1960s: 1) theatre is a set of related transactions; 2) all space is used for performer and audience; 3) the theatrical event can take place in a totally transformed or “found” space; 4) focus is flexible or variable; 5) all production elements “speak in their own language”; and 6) the text need be neither the starting point nor the goal of a production; and “there may be no text at all.” Environmental theatre, in effect, is fundamentally spatial in its purview,

¹³³ Kirby, The Art of Time, 75.
¹³⁴ Ibid., 77-78.
¹³⁵ Michael Kirby and Richard Schechner, “Interview with John Cage,” Tulane Drama Review 10 vol. 2 (Winter 1965), 50. Cage says: “I try to make definitions that won't exclude. I would simply say that theatre is something which engages both the eye and the ear. The two public senses are seeing and hearing; the senses of taste, touch, and odor are more proper to intimate, non-public, situations. The reason I want to make my definition of theatre that simple is so one could view everyday life itself as theatre.”
making use of the theatrical setting—whatever that may be—as an “expressive
dimension.”

Perhaps, then, what binds McLuhan’s spatial theory of media to the kinds of experimentalism that foregrounded non-matrixed and intermedial approaches to performance is the premise that the work of art as taken up by conceptualist practice—that is to say, the work being done by and as art—must be construed within a wider, environmental scope. As Kirby observes, “Art, in a perceptual sense, is no different from non-art things and objects. It does not require a different perceptual state. It does not need to be looked at with a mental attitude or set unlike that involved in everyday life. It is not hermetic.” Benjamin D. Buchloh’s influential essay from *October* in 1990 stresses that the key feature of conceptualism, which I would suggest represents the most accurate way of describing the vein of experimentalism practiced by Kasemets during the 1960s in Toronto, in fact is the proposition that the author and spectator (or composer and listener) exist in space as equally contributing members of any aesthetic activity. Conceptualism reflects

upon the construction and the role (or the death) of the author just as much as they redefined the conditions of receivership and the role of the spectator. Thus they performed the postwar period’s most rigorous investigation of the conventions of pictorial and sculptural representation and a critique of the traditional paradigms of visuality.

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137 Ibid., 38.
Buchloh’s argument positions conceptualism squarely within the discursive tensions I have outlined in this chapter—namely, the deeply fraught rending of visuality, literocentrism’s cardinal sense, from its location of power in the arts during the first half of the twentieth century. “Just as the modernist critique (and ultimate prohibition) of figurative representation had become the increasingly dogmatic law for pictorial production in the first decade of the twentieth century,” writes Buchloh, “so conceptual art now instated the prohibition of any and all visuality as the inescapable aesthetic rule for the end of the twentieth century.”

The proliferation of conceptualism in the 1960s took shape in myriad forms discussed here in general terms. John Cage’s 1952 event at Black Mountain College, widely considered to be the first “happening,” featured an environmental presentation of non-matrixed mixed media elements and activities, and effectively set a performative precedent for the kinds of actions that gave conceptualism its materialized and localized manifestations. Yet, returning back to this chapter’s opening, conceptualism’s pedigree is inexorably entrenched within even the first iterations of classic early twentieth-century avant-gardism. Duchampian readymades—most famously, the 1917 Fountain, signed “R. Mutt”—ostensibly set an institutional precedent for conceptualism as a means of remapping the geography of aesthetic perception. As the most notoriously aggressive (and obvious) intervention into the parameters of what constitutes an artwork, Duchamp’s Fountain accomplished the basic task, some forty-five years early, that Cagean

139 Ibid., 119.
experimentalism would seek to take up—to presume an aesthetics that bind art and life into one environmental network of experience.

**Conclusion: The Relation of the Conceptual to the Perceptual**

This chapter has traced a somewhat circuitous route in examining the role of Marshall McLuhan as an important theoretical voice in Udo Kasemets’ world, but also in the realm of experimentalism writ large. Guided by *space* as a kind of discursive pole star, I have argued that sound and environment form a rhetorical, if at times troublesome and paradoxical lynchpin that connects McLuhan to the expansion of mixed media art that made incursions into the wider cultural landscape of North America. Yet I’ve done so in a way that avoids a detailed ethnographic or historical methodology in favour of generating a more accommodating theoretical context. In the ensuing chapters of this dissertation, I look far more closely at Kasemets’ work and writing as Toronto’s most antagonistic proponent of experimentalism, his work as a critic, concert organizer, composer, and polemicist; indeed, at times it will become clear that Kasemets’ interpolation of McLuhan borders on the appropriative, and sometimes the conspicuously zealous. As one example, an obscure event score by Kasemets from the mid 1960s, *McLuhan Reading Piece*, which is consistently omitted from every published works list, instructs audience members to read at various times aloud, silently, to an individual, or group of people, text from an accompanying page. The pages included are simply torn from McLuhan and Quentin Fiore’s 1966 *The Medium is the Massage*. 
As an action piece in the now-canonized conceptual tradition of Fluxus, or early minimalist word scores, Kasemets' *McLuhan Reading Piece* evidences an excitement to deploy into performance context the hip ideas McLuhan was publishing in chapbooks and non-traditional publishing formats; it is however, remarkably faddish in its attempt to emulate the work being done George Maciunas, Cage, La Monte Yonge, and others.

In 1968, Kasemets published "Eight Edicts on Education," which probably would have been his most-widely read article, in the influential American magazine *Source: Music of the Avant-Garde*. Stylized as a series of discrete meditations on the problems of
contemporary music education, Kasemets echoes the sometimes pedantic bombast of McLuhan’s oratorical writing. I quote a passage here in full:

The issue is communication. Linear presentation of ideas may work when both parties, the writer/teacher/lecturer and the reader/student/listener, are tuned in on the same wavelength. Since that can be rarely the case, most of the author/teacher’s energy is spent on trying to force the reader/student’s thinking pattern into a set groove and hold it there. In fact, good linear writing is a form of brainwashing in that the reader’s whole thinking process is manipulated by the author. Author not only an authority, but an authoritarian [sic]. Modern writers and thinkers have abandoned autocratic linearity in favour of a more democratic relationship with the reader. James Joyce started it all. He doesn’t lead the reader by hand through the pages of finnegans wake [sic]: the reader himself has to work his way through the book, do his own thinking. What Marshall McLuhan does when he offers a mosaic of observations, or Buckminster Fuller when he “thinks out loud,” or John Cage when he sets an avalanche of multidimensional information into motion, is in essence the same thing. Each of their utterances represents a conclusive moment during their incessant thinking activity. The reader/listener has to use the potential and energy of his own mind to arrange them into patterns of understanding. On account of more active recipient information, non-linear communication methods are considerably higher intensity than their linear counterparts. Electronic age favours non-linearity.140

Kasemets neatly hits the pillars of mutual influence spearheading the late 1960s intellectual zeitgeist: Cage, McLuhan, and Joyce. But above all, this passage summarizes what I have been arguing for throughout this chapter: that the experimentalist project begun in the 1960s sought to decentralize the communicative potential for any aesthetic practice from an art object to one of perception. Brian Eno, in the Foreword to the twenty-fifth anniversary publication of Michael Nyman’s Experimental Music, offers a concise definition of experimentalism that is as incomplete as it is definitive: it is a process of apprehending. Music is something “your mind does”; for Eno,

140 Kasemets, “Eight Edicts on Education,” 42.
experimentalism moves the activity of music from “out there to in here.”\textsuperscript{141} This is the crucial premise that couples together the seemingly oppositional forces of the conceptual with the perceptual.

McLuhan has been associated, along with Walter Ong, (and earlier figures like Milman Perry, Albert Lord, Claude Levi Strauss, Jack Goody, and Erick Havelock) with a school of thinking that positions literacy and orality against each other as a metric for indexing, respectively, cultural modernity versus cultural ancientness. Although this “Great Divide Theory” (as it is often referred to) has been roundly criticized as monolithic, technologically determinist, and unable to stand up to the scrutiny of ethnographic data (Howes 1991, Finnegan 1988, Smith 2007), Veit Erlmann has recently made the suggestion that it is indeed “alive and well,”\textsuperscript{142} that the battles between the visual and aural continue to play out in critical theory, philosophy, and the recent surge in the study of audio and aural cultures. But the role of sound in McLuhan’s spatial theory articulates precisely the agentive role of environment in generating ratios, in creating what McLuhan would ultimately refer to as the \textit{sensus communis}—“common sense,” the coming together of perceptual systems in a “garden of haptic harmony.” Yet in his unrelenting castigation of modernity’s overwhelmingly visual bias, McLuhan’s intersensory approach to sound becomes subordinated by the dualistic artifice of orality versus literacy, a binarism that recent works in sound studies have convincingly challenged.


For example, Jonathan Sterne engages directly with McLuhan, Ong, and the Toronto School’s deeply troubled mishandling of the sonic as a methodological means of setting up modern Western histories along a trajectory to literacy from orality. He provocatively opens with the suggestion that the history of communication has been written in “the shadow of an aging fable”—oral, literate, and post-literate eras of communication—and that denying the “coevalness” of written and oral cultures effectively perpetrates larger hegemonic and discriminatory narratives that have skewed Western epistemologies.143 Scholars like McLuhan, and moreso Harold A. Innis and Edmund Carpenter “asked the right questions for their moment, but our moment is not theirs,” as he writes.144 Sterne’s critique of the Toronto School’s understanding of the ancient world emphasizes the shortcomings that other, and later generations of scholars have observed; but, importantly, it puts a challenge for us to deeply reconsider the way that communication theory has been narrated along such precarious axes of orality and literacy, and to recognize them as conclusions which must be reexamined.

In McLuhan’s auditory landscape, the enigmatic nature of sound plays out especially in the rhetorical sonification of medial and communicative processes, but also in acoustic space. McLuhan’s assertion that media extend our consciousness in an “outering” of our central nervous system—an externalization of the vibrating corporeality that comprises the networked sites of all sensate experience—thus points towards the sound’s affective capacities while remained cloaked in a grammar that is circuitous,

144 Ibid., 222.
always turning back on itself. But acoustic space, as more than a polemic formalization, intimates an approach to space and subjectivity that exposes the nexus of body and environment, of perception and vibration, an awakening from the swoon.
CHAPTER 3.
CONFIGURING TEMPORALITIES: METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES OF DOING HISTORICAL ETHNOGRAPHY

Introduction: “I Have to Research My Own Memory”

I am calling this research project, in part, an “historical ethnography” of the activities that constituted an experimental music and mixed media practice in Toronto in the 1960s. More specifically, I am examining those activities that centred around the magnetizing figure of Udo Kasemets, who as we will see in the following chapters, made himself a visible and vilified polemicist for the avant-garde in Toronto. The site with which this dissertation concerns itself, as a geography of people, places, and sounds, exists today in a fragmentary and displaced agglomeration of things—things which narrate a story in uneven and often evanescent tableaus of images and moments. These images and moments live as both material objects—the letters, photographs, telegrams, papers, digitized sound files of reel-to-reel tapes, and so on, that remain housed in archival collections—as well as immaterial non-objects, impressions themselves archived in contours of memory of the people who operated within the marginal landscape of experimental music in the 1960s. As such, there exists a tension, which as I show in this chapter, can be both limiting as well as productive, between the presumably fixed documentary evidence of objects that instantiate a history of praxis, and the unstable architecture of memory.

During one of my conversations with Udo in the summer of 2010, I arrived at his apartment, as usual, in the late morning, and surprised him by asking him first a question
about his 1983 mixed media piece *Counterbomb Renga*. *Counterbomb Renga* came up the week previous in my interview with composer Linda Catlin Smith, who has known and worked closely with Udo since they first met on this particular project, now thirty years ago.¹ She urged me to talk with Udo about this piece, which was more of an event than a musical work: a massive artistic response to the threat of nuclear proliferation that hung heavy during the early 1980s, involving nearly one hundred musicians and poets from around the world, performed live in Toronto and broadcast on CBC Radio 2.² Udo, ever the accommodating host, agreed to let me query him about the work. But perhaps thirty minutes after our conversation had begun, Udo betrayed a slight discomfort in being asked about *Counterbomb Renga*, without having been given any advance notice that I would be pressing him for details on the specifics of the entire event:

> When you ask about things fifty years ago, or something like that, they are very vague in my memory, because I’m still very busy trying to figure out the now of today and that’s occupying my mind most of the times. Not the past—the past is gone.³

I had anticipated that the topic of *Counterbomb Renga* would be a welcome respite from the battery of questions about the 1960s to which I had been subjecting Udo since our morning conversations began in the spring. My strategy had backfired: Udo conflated *Counterbomb Renga* with all of the other “ancient history” I had been pressing him about, as he called it, from decades earlier—“things fifty years ago.” Towards the end of

¹ Indeed, it was Linda Catlin Smith who was largely responsible for stewarding Udo’s deposition of his personal papers in the Harvey Olnick Rare Book Room at the University of Toronto’s Music Library. This dissertation relies critically on that archive, as well as others, discussed in this chapter, in reconstructing the events and performances in Toronto during the 1960s.
³ Interview with author, July 20th, 2010.
our long interview, the silences between our words grew, and hung in the air alongside
the motes of dust suspended in sunlight:

    If you want to talk more about this next time—I was very glad to be able to talk
    with you about it today. I think it’s an extraordinary thing. Hmm. I have so many
    notes. We’ve talked about an awful lot of things.⁴

Well. My answers are not always very coherent but, at the same time, don’t be
shy to ask anything that you want to ask. I mean, yes, you ask something and I
can’t remember any more.

“I can’t remember anymore.” It is a statement that bears two possible modes of syntactic
interpretation: I cannot continue remembering; or, there are no more things I can
remember. Earlier in the interview, Udo said something equally revealing about the
processes of accessing his own internal record of past experiences that highlights not only
the plasticity and evanescence of remembering, but also how the immaterial constitutes
an archive that beckons activation. In recalling how the musical and poetic fragments that
comprised Counterbomb Renga were woven together in a chain of artistic statements
lasting more than two hours, Udo told me, “I would like to elaborate more about these
Renga ideas, but I have to research my own memory and information because that is not
the only thing that has manifested in my musical activity.”⁵

This chapter considers the challenges of working with memory in tracing
connections between the present and past, and articulating an ethnographic site whose
dimensions of place are constituted in both material and embodied histories. In this sense,
I am working in what media anthropologist John Postill has recently theorized as an

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⁴ Throughout, italics are used to indicate the transcriptions of comments made by the author in interviews.
⁵ Emphasis mine.
ethnographic field that is diachronic, or “multi-timed.” In a correlative way to how field sites in globalized cultures have forced ethnographers to work in what George E. Marcus terms “multi-sited” conditions—sites that, thanks to the postmodern “world system,” force research to move “out from the single sites and local situations of conventional ethnographic research designs to examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space”—Postill’s proposal for exploring multi-timed ethnographic fields seeks to engender a dialogic relationship between past and present, to assess the “finite, clock-and-calendar logic of actual social changes” as they have transpired between the continuous ethnographic present and its past. But the ethnographic site of experimentalism in 1960s Toronto is both multi-timed and multi-sited: its material history resides in both memory and archive, but its social history stretches into the present—alive, resonant, and populous today in praxis sustained by local musicians and audiences.

I begin with an overview of this dissertation’s methodological purview and goals, and outline activities undertaken between 2010 and early 2013 that comprise the bulk of my primary research. I then bring the present study in proximity to scholarship in Western art musics that takes ethno- and sociomusicological standpoints: paradigm-shaping works by Shelemay (2001), Bohlman (1991), Monson (1996), and Born (1995) that provide foundational evidence for examining art and “classically”-derived musical practices as expressive cultural pursuits. Following this I consider the critical subfield of

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8 Ibid., 96.
9 Postill, “Media and Social Changing,” 2.
historical ethnography, which has etched out a place within the umbrella of anthropological, ethnomusicological and social scientific research of the last quarter century. Here I address the main concerns identified by researchers working to reconstruct the everyday structures of past places and cultural groups, which revolve centrally around reconciling oral narrative and documentary evidence. This section of this chapter deals respectively, with what Ann Stoler calls the “archival pulse” (2009), and the interactive and processual nature of memory. I conclude by suggesting that these two dimensions of the material and immaterial produce a “fecund interval,” borrowing a key term from Marshall McLuhan’s analytic model of media dialectics to describe the productive dissonance that emerges from antithetical and seemingly separate domains.

**Primary Research Methodology: “Men, Minds, and Archives”**

Primary research for this dissertation was conducted periodically over two and a half years, in the form of interviews conducted in person and via telephone, informal and incidental correspondence carried out through email, Facebook, and in some cases, “snail mail”; and, archival research undertaken at a number of locations—the Donald J. Gillies fonds at the Ryerson University Archives and Special Collections, which contains valuable accounts of, primarily, the SightSoundSystems festival of March 1968. The archive also holds bound volumes of the then-Polytechnical Institute’s student newspaper, *The Ryersonian*, that reported on SightSoundSystems and also Electromediasensoranagrams, the one-day mixed arts festival which preceded it in November of 1967; The Clara Thomas Archives at York University housing the Avrom Isaacs fonds (containing details about the Isaacs Gallery Mixed Media Concerts of 1965-67); the Canadian Music Centre’s National Office in Toronto, whose invaluable vertical
file collection of ephemera stores program notes, works lists, publicity clippings and concert notices of its Associate Composers, including Udo, before he unofficially severed ties with the organization; and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s audio-visual archive, which allowed me to listen to early air checks of Udo’s music (including his elegant *Violin Concerto* written in the pre-Cagean days of the 1950s). This archive also included a broadcast of the program *The Arts This Week* produced by the young critic Wendy Michener, which aired on January 30, 1966 and featured interviews with Toronto’s civic and cultural leaders in a discussion on the changing state of the arts and music in the city during the decade: the media theorist (and media savvy) Marshall McLuhan, Mayor Philip Givens, arts critic Robert Fulford, author and Master of Massey College Robertson Davies, theatre impresario Ed Mirvish, and—Udo Kasemets. In a stunning sonic snapshot of a bygone time that would seem impossible to conjure today, given the current climate of conservatism in municipal affairs, Mayor Givens waxes eloquently: “Art gives a meaningfulness to life. We have to develop the things of the soul and the mind and the spirit.”

Archival collections of *The Toronto Daily Star*, *The Globe and Mail*, and *The Telegram* were invaluable in stitching together a narrative of critical discourse surrounding Udo’s activities, and how he pressured boundaries of conservatism in the arts during the 1960s. Udo’s own contribution as music and concert critic for *The Toronto Daily Star* from 1959 to 1963 produced a portfolio of reporting that offers a

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10 The work (its premiere) was broadcast on CBC’s *Music Thursdays* on April 13, 1967, performed by violinist Hyman Bress with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. John Avison conducted.

11 Michener (1935-69) was a dynamo, and a highly respected critic. A writer, radio producer, and filmmaker who contributed, during the 1960s to several national outlets (*MacLean’s, The Daily Star, CBC Radio*, etc.), Michener, daughter of Governor General Roland Michener (in office from 1967-1974), died at the age of 34.
mordant counterpoint to his contemporary (and counterpart) at The Globe, John Kraglund, the bastion of conservatism in Toronto’s musical culture. I discuss Udo’s music criticism more closely in Chapter 4, but in brief, his 140-plus columns touch on a variety of aspects of musical life in Toronto: sometimes-scathing reviews of famous musicians (including Glenn Gould, at the very height of the pianist’s fame) and often encouraging write-ups of community-based choirs and amateur orchestras are balanced by reports of national arts festivals, opinion pieces on modern music, and frequently, the tenuous relationship between critics and musicians. By late 1962, Udo was given a bi-weekly column in the Saturday arts section of the Star, simply called “Udo Kasemets on Music,” which opened a space for him to editorialize on music in Toronto, respond to readers’ letters, and ultimately develop a voice as a dispassionate critic and observer of cultural life.
As Chapters 5 and 6 also show, the passion and detail devoted to covering Udo’s presentations of experimental music remain evident in the dozens of columns by critics like Kraglund, Kenneth Winters, William Littler, Barrie Hale, Jackson House, Ralph Thomas, Patrick Scott, Paul Ennis, Ralph Hicklin, Ezra Schabas, and others. Their reporting on Men, Minds, and Music of 1963, The Isaacs Gallery Mixed Media Concert Series of 1965-67, and the SightSoundSystems festival of 1968 not only assists in reconstructing the textures of these events—textual accounts of their otherwise undocumented sonic and experiential profiles, as they weren’t otherwise recorded—but it also offered me, along with bits of correspondence, flyers, and other incidental artefacts, a path to chronicling Udo’s legacy as a concert promoter. John Kraglund’s itinerancy in keeping watch of Udo’s presence in the 1960s was matched only by the legendary and remarkably consistent skepticism levied by him against all things experimental; as such he becomes an unlikely amanuensis in the historical narrative of postwar avant-garde activity in Toronto.

![Figure 3.2. John Kraglund mentions the SightSoundSystems festival in The Globe’s Friday preview of the weekend’s arts events. The Globe and Mail, March 8, 1968, 11.](image)

Above all, the Harvey Olnick Rare Book Room at the University of Toronto Music Library was indispensable in furnishing this dissertation with the archival
materials necessary to make connections between the disparate shards of history contained in all these artefactual objects. A large collection of Udo’s personal papers, correspondences, compositional sketches, program notes, mimeographs and photocopies of concert reviews, posters, ledgers, and so on—“Archives Collection 11” as I have come to know it—spans some four decades, from the late 1950s until the mid-1990s, contained and catalogued in 26 boxes. I spent many hours scouring this archive, uncovering a history of experimental practice that emerged somewhat haphazardly in a milieu of postwar nationalism and countercultural disaffection. Authored by the genteel and disarmingly avuncular rhetorician Udo Kasemets, draft writings, press releases, reports and articles for publication reveal a compelling narrative of radicality that triangulates Cagean musical poetics, a McLuhanist techno-utopianism, and a European expatriate’s cold and unremitting gaze on Canada’s groping attempts at identity in the wake of the Massey Report. Sketches of the manifesto later appearing in the 1967 catalogue *Canavangard: Music of the 1960s and After* (which largely comprises the subject of Chapter 7) reside in the archive, handwritten in red ink on brown manuscript:

Music of the Western world became a rigid discipline; with strict rules governing its creative and recreative aspects. These regulations weren’t any longer imposed by popes or potentates who had set the tone of Medieval & Renaissance music: it was the new king, industrialization, and its offshoot the printing/publishing industry that dictated the possibilities & limitations of the content & form of music of the past 300 years.

It is well understood that our century represents a rapid transformation from the industrial era into one of electronic technology. The consequences of this changeover are felt in every way of life, including arts in all their manifestations. New concepts, methods, practices have been developed by artists, centuries-old conventions abandoned, fresh approaches taken to all phases of artistic activity.

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12 My debt of gratitude to Kathleen McMorrow, outgoing Head Librarian at the Faculty of Music Library at the University of Toronto, will remain forever outstanding. Her encouragement and support for this research were supplanted only by the care which she attended to Udo’s papers.
Old relationships have given way to new ones. Composers often do not need a middleman/performer: they compose directly on magnetic tape. Or they engage performers directly to participate in the creative act. Or they enlist performers who aren’t musicians but rather engineers, technologists, video-experts, etc. Or, even if they provide instructions for performers, they frequently use methods which have little or nothing in common with traditional music notation. In many cases their music is so uniquely personal that its presentation by other performers is impossible...\textsuperscript{13}

Also populating the archival collections are the tactile and material residua of that time: letters from Cage, Gordon Mumma, Alvin Lucier, Barney Childs, Pauline Oliveros, and other catalyzing figures of the 1960s American avant-garde; but there are, perhaps more importantly, documents that might escape the attracting glow of marquee archival materials (such as notes from Morton Feldman and Ernst Krenek):\textsuperscript{14} the minutiae associated with organizing events, comprised of box office numbers, equipment rental fee receipts, publicity lists (Kraglund was sent free tickets to everything; and both the young Bob Rae and Michael Ignatieff, then editors of student newspapers \textit{The Varsity} and \textit{The Gargoyle} at the University of Toronto in the late 1960s, were also earmarked to get publicity materials), ticket ledgers, and telegrams sent to Udo by artists wanting to negotiate their performance fees.

The impact of these collections on this study will become evident, for Chapters 5, 6, and 7 (case studies on Men, Minds, and Music, The Isaacs Gallery concerts, and Canavangard, respectively) draw deeply from the archival material in assessing the tensions and anxieties surrounding avant-garde performance in 1960s Toronto. Indeed, as Ann Stoler notes, archives themselves have a \textit{pulse}, and articulate a discrete ethnographic

\textsuperscript{13} Udo Kasemets Papers, Archives Collection 11 : E.1.2.
\textsuperscript{14} Udo Kasemets Papers, Archives Collection 11 : E.5.27.
space. This pulse is constituted of “unquiet movements in a field of force”:\textsuperscript{15} in considering state archives (her particular research area is colonial Dutch Indonesia) as more than simply neutral repositories of historical and ethnographic data, Stoler tells us that archives index power relations, “realignments and readjustments of people,”\textsuperscript{16} and above all, afford a space “where truth claims compete, impervious or fragile, crushed by the weight of convention or resilience in the immediate threat of the everyday.”\textsuperscript{17} The archival collections consulted in this study differ in that the breadth of personal and institutional documents accumulated within are not official histories, nor are they oriented towards a particular historiographic \textit{grain}, as Stoler terms it. But, they are in likeness to her colonial archives in that they reveal the processes by which an experimental ethos and discursivity crystallize in the everyday movements of people: movements between nations, cities, and institutions, but also movements through ideas and relational spaces.

For example, the personal exchanges between Udo and intellectual luminaries that contributed to the elucidation of his particular creative vision point toward the immersion of the ontological within the epistemic. Along with a telegram indicating one particularly unfruitful attempt by Marshall McLuhan at telephoning Kasemets, a single cryptic note intimates a possibly deeper connection between the two, but also grounds Udo’s theoretical movements within the tactile geography of the city, its musical life, and the networks of exchange flourishing between Toronto’s various creative circles:

\begin{flushright}
\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 33.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 24.
\end{flushright}
Dear Mr. Kasemets:

Many thanks for prompting me to go to your concert last night. It was a great treat.

I intend to do some meditating on the problem of form in these matters. What is happening is that instead of using our environment as a wrap-around, we have begun to use it as an art form to be probed. This is a reversal quite closely related to the space capsules of our time.

Best Wishes,

Marshall McLuhan.

In this letter, delivered the day following the Mixed Media Ensemble’s premiere performance of *Trigon* in the fall of 1965, McLuhan scholars will recognize several keywords here constellating nodes within the media theorist’s cosmography—*environment, wrap-around, probe, and reversal*. As I discuss further in Chapter 7, *Trigon* would become the signature piece of Kasemets’ 1960s oeuvre—both polemical and musical—and this brief note from McLuhan, likely telegraphed during a daily administrative routine of correspondence, highlights precisely the kinds of local interaction animating the fields of discourse about experimental music and communications.

From the archive such lambent pulses radiate, weak and mercurial on their own. Yet when activated into wider networks of inquiry, which is a main goal of this dissertation, they become nodal highlights. The presumptuous artistic ambit of *Trigon*, to model a possibility of social change through mixed media, and to make vivid a newer mode of awareness, stretches out not so much into untenable obliquity—as Kraglund

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would write in *The Globe and Mail*, “Trigon Stands for the Arts Gone Haywire”—but
into the heart of McLuhan’s developing communications framework.

![Figure 3.3. John Kraglund, “Trigon Stands for the Arts Gone Haywire,” *The Globe and Mail*, October 4, 1965, 16.](image)

As Jacques Derrida writes in his seminal text *Archive Fever: a Freudian Impression* (1995), the archival process is one of “domicilization,” which entails an “institutional passage from private to public.”

Derrida’s deconstructivist exposition on the nature and meaning of archives is an injunction into how we must treat archives not as neutral spaces or collections, but rather as exterior and prosthetic mechanisms for the housing of memory and experience that conform to “topo-nomological” principles derived from the “archontic” process. Derrida’s opening remarks in *Archive Fever* are concerned with the linguistic threads embodied in the word “archive”—which he notes traces to the ancient greek archons, legislators and stewards of written laws housed in privileged places. The archontic principle, Derrida stresses, is one driven by the need to unify, classify, and identify archivable content through means of “consignation,” or the putting together of signs. Archives require—indeed are predicated upon—“*a certain*

“exteriority” as he writes: “no archive without outside.” The transition to this exterior site, from the “topographic” or originary place of memory, implies that the archivable contents become subject to an institutionalization, or a set of laws or regulations (the “nomological”).

The “fever” that besets us to archive, Derrida writes, comes from the ever-present threat of Thanatos, or the Freudian “death-drive,” which promises to efface memory. Archives counter that threat with the counter-promise of “radical finitude,” yet within the archival technique itself the death-drive exists—the archive, as a form of repetition and repeatability in their prosthesis of memory and event, “always works, a priori, against itself.” But the archive does not only contain a trace, or “impression” as Derrida uses, of the past; it is not simply an accounting of historical events, however subjected to and transformed by the laws and authority that determine the consignation of the archival objects. The archive is equally oriented towards the future—an anticipatory quality that Derrida calls “spectral messianicity.” Archives are spectral in the sense that that which they contain is neither present nor absent, and as would a phantasmic entity, they beckon our return to them—or their return to us to attend to unfinished business. This is important, the futurity of the archive: as Derrida tells us, our engagement with the archive becomes an ethical and political one in how we use it.

But another kind of archive emerged in the generation of this dissertation’s primary research: audio recordings, transcripts, and interview notes that comprise the

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20 Ibid., 11, emphasis in original.
21 Ibid., 12.
22 Ibid., 36.
documentation of personal interviews conducted throughout the course of the past two and half years. As George E. Marcus suggests, the material accumulation of ethnographic work—field notes, unpublished work, drafts, diaries, and tapes—“constitutes an archive in its most literal and subversive senses,” subversive in its relationship to sanctioned archives of “cumulative published ethnography.” The ethnographer’s personal archive is messy, a raw and unassembled account of the personal immersion within a field that yields a heterotopic record of encounters between researcher and subject, not yet molded into the narrative framework of interpretation. “The fieldwork exercise is an anticipatory one,” writes Marilyn Strathern, which asks the ethnographer to be “open to what is to come later.” Such an exercise results in a “‘field’ of information to which it is possible to return, intellectually speaking, in order to ask questions about subsequent developments whose trajectory was not yet evident at the outset.” This archive—or field of information—in which I found myself immersed consisted of personal correspondences and interviews with people connected to Udo over the span of five decades. The bulk of it exists in my meetings with Udo himself in the spring and summer of 2010, but also with colleagues, former students, musicians, composers, and others whose creative practices intersected with Udo’s between the 1960s and now.

In-person interviews occurred mostly in Toronto, and were recorded with consent from the participants. Aside from Udo Kasemets, whom I interviewed six times, I had conversations with the following people about experimental music and art in 1960s

\[\text{References}\]

25 Ibid., 9.
Toronto: **John Beckwith**—composer, founding member of both the Canadian Music Centre and Canadian League of composers, and, especially pertinent to this study, one of the organizers of Ten Centuries Concerts (10CC) in the 1960s, which was one of the most vital organizations presenting new music in Toronto. As I mentioned, Udo’s piece *Trigon* was premiered on the program of 10CC’s 1965 season opening concert, and Beckwith’s astonishing capacity to recall dates, facts, and details from decades ago helped piece together chronological threads about Udo’s early movements as an émigré composer in Toronto; **Avrom Isaacs**—founder of the Isaacs Gallery in 1955, whose enterprising spirit in postwar Toronto facilitated the growth of an experimental arts community that clustered around his gallery in the 1960s, and who gave Udo the opportunity to curate and present mixed media concerts between 1965-67. Av was a host, and as he put it to me, made no claims to being privy to the esoteric musical happenings transpiring in his gallery:

> Udo knew where he was going and what he wanted. I was an amateur, and I went along for the holiday so to speak. So we put on certain things. …I was the space for it, so I don’t think I got very involved in any heavy discussions with any of these people. It was all so damn new to me, that I was glad to be there to see it happen.\(^{26}\)

**Gordon Mumma**—performer, composer, and leading figure of the 1960s American avant-garde, who collaborated closely with Cage, and who founded the ONCE Festival in Ann Arbor, Michigan during the early 1960s. Mumma was Udo’s most direct and long-standing connection to Cage and American experimentalism, and Udo’s archival papers are rich with their correspondence. As he wrote to me in 2010,

> [Udo’s] important work has been badly neglected, both as a composer, performer and an organizer of contemporary arts activities. During the 1960s he was an

\(^{26}\) Interview with the author, May 3, 2012.
energizing figure for the ONCE Festival era activities, and brought many other performers back and forth across the Great Lakes between Canada and the U.S.A.\textsuperscript{27}

**Michael Snow**—artist, filmmaker, sculptor, and musician, who has since the mid-1950s been working in experimental fields of visual and aural media. In the 1960s Snow was, aside from being Canada’s most famous artistic export, part of the Artists’ Jazz Band, an improvisational ensemble made up of other visual artists (Nobuo Kubota, Robert Markle, Graham Coughtry, and Gordon Rayner) who performed at the Isaacs Gallery Concert series. In ruminating on Udo’s perennial outsider status, Snow recalls:

> He was a kind of connection with avant-garde thinking elsewhere. As far as the art world was concerned, he came from outside the art world. Maybe it was the connection with Cage that separated him from the rest of the music scene, because he is and continues to be controversial, I guess you could say. It’s hard to account for.\textsuperscript{28}

**Donald J. Gillies**—Professor Emeritus of Ryerson and York University, and esteemed communications scholar. Gillies was in the late 1960s a young lecturer in advertising and marketing at Ryerson Polytechnical Institute, and his role as institutional liaison in making SightSoundSystems happen was essential. Following the festival, Gillies cultivated an association with Cage, collaborating on the Toronto premiere of *HPSCHD*, and also worked with McLuhan in the 1970s. His recollections were critical in reconstructing and contextualizing the festival as an anomalous event illuminating the mutual influence exerted by art and technology on one another. But Gillies also remembers that the festival’s impact was mitigated by organizational flaws, and a general unreadiness for this type of event, especially the opening night’s *Reunion* concert pitting John Cage against Marcel Duchamp in a game of amplified chess:

\textsuperscript{27} Personal communication, November 18, 2010.
\textsuperscript{28} Interview with the author, March 11, 2011.
The potential of SightSoundSystems was massive. [That there was] the willingness to take a chance, or to take chances on what might come about as a result of this. But I didn’t know enough about it to say, “this could be the future.” I don’t know if anyone else in the group at Ryerson—there was quite a number that was involved, including some students—I didn’t know that they were intellectually or aesthetically aware of the significance of Cage’s work.29

Others interviewed include John Kamevaar, sound artist, member of the CCMC30 along with Michael Snow, and former student of Udo’s at the Ontario College of Art in the early 1980s; Bertram Turetzky, American experimental contrabassist and original dedicatee of Trigon; Ronald Napier, the head of BMI Canada’s publishing division in the 1960s, who oversaw the approval and publication of the Canavangard series; Hart Broudy and Drew Yallop, student exhibitors at SightSoundSystems whose installations, “The Room” and “Tactile Urban Environment” (respectively) were part of a series of student contributions; Pierre Coupey and Rick Kitaeff, who, along with the fire-breathing performance artist Marcel Horne, created the psychedelia-drenched revue “The Electric Shaman” that also ran throughout the festival; Lowell Cross, the engineer of the electric chessboard on which Cage and Duchamp played, and a graduate student at the University of Toronto in composition in the late 1960s; David Jaeger, Linda Catlin Smith, Tina Pearson, Ann Bourne, and Gayle Young, and Gordon Monahan, who worked closely with Udo in the 1980s on various projects, and whose impact on this research comes in providing contextual insights into how Udo’s ideas evolved over time, but also how the core tenets that were formalized with the discovery of Cage in 1961 remained steadfast. And of course, there is Udo Kasemets himself, whose account of 1960s experimentalism

29 Interview with the author, January 27, 2012.
30 The Canadian Contemporary Music Collective, formed by Snow, John Oswald, and Al Hansen in 1976 is a free improvising ensemble that succeeded what the Artists’ Jazz Band began in the 1960s. It continues today to perform intermittently with Snow, Oswald, and sound singer Paul Dutton.
in Toronto was evasive as it was illuminating, and whose ideas and provocations then—and now—form the thrust of this dissertation.

I interviewed Udo six times in person in the spring and summer of 2010, all at his apartment in Toronto in the St. Clair and Yonge area. These interviews occurred in March, June, and July. The range of topics we covered was expansive, and recalling Marilyn Strathern, it was an exercise in entirely anticipatory fieldwork. Udo had a habit of taking very direct questions—about dates, people, concerts, review, and so on—and answering them in circuitous, indirect routes: stretching them out over paragraph-long detours until the specifics of the question became threadbare strands, through which deeper topoi could be perceived. Often, Udo’s points would take shape slowly, and my queries about generic issues as, for example, the ascendance of serialism in Canadian musical institutions in the postwar period, were turned into pedagogic exchanges illustrating basic ideas about sound and music:

_I’m curious about that too, what your thoughts are, sort of, how that kind of happened. How that process of the institutionalization of serialism became so pervasive. Why do you think that happened?_

I think—I don’t know, I haven’t spent much thought about this particular question but it was in a sense possible for the academics to plug into it and—you see unfortunately this continent doesn’t have its own fundamentals or traditions and they are all artificial or all brought in. I mean different folk song movements that have developed, they all come naturally with a people—

You see people need music—that is the fascinating part of all humanity wherever they are, and one really fundamental thing that troubles me immensely is the fact that we hear, all the time, even during the night: our hearing system is working. Therefore, for instance, when there is some thunderclap or whatever or somebody is knocking on a door and so on, you wake up. Because you hear it. The hearing system is present day and night. And we are so plugged into the visual understanding of the world—that is very secondary because—we don’t, I mean our eyes work in a very funny way anyway. They see things upside down and all that, so you correct it. And we get into this correction situation from the beginning on. And then we come and figure, “this is a table.” OK, it is a table yes, but it
really is all kinds of things that have been brought together to create this kind of a situation where it looks like a table. And we have a word for it. We start using symbols for real things, and confusing even the real things because we invent language. Which is sound. Pure sound. And so, our real world is the sonic world.\footnote{Interview with the author, June 16, 2010.}

At the time, I missed the most of the relevance of a passage like this, where key points illustrating Udo’s intellectual history became clear to me months later—for instance, the Joycean \textit{thunderclap}. This passage from Udo triangulates him within a frame of intellectual pursuit inhabited by both McLuhan and Cage, as Joyce’s influence was crucial as a modernist literary antecedent to the intermediality of language, voice, and especially, text.

Marilyn Strathern might call this an example of an \textit{ethnographic moment}, “a relation in the same way as a linguistic sign can be thought of as a relation (joining signifier and signified).” Ethnographic moments highlight the instance where the understood becomes put into relation with the need to understand: “Any ethnographic moment, which is a moment of knowledge and insight, denotes a relation between immersement and movement.”\footnote{Strathern, \textit{Property, Substance, and Effect}, 6.} This passage spoken by Udo touches on meta-themes that I pursue throughout the length of this study, such as tensions between orality, visuality, and intersensoriality, the supersession of the auditory over the ocular in post-typographic culture, which McLuhan advocated for throughout the course of his career, and to which Udo’s work of the 1960s is conceptually indebted; the lingering spectre of identity haunting the cultural politics of Canadian music in the 1960s, which Udo’s Canavangard project rather pitilessly addresses, and towards which he harboured deep criticism; the unstable field of signification containing material objects and their
ascriptions as sounds in language, and clusters of letters in alphabetic systems; finally, the allusion to the singular question which, according to Udo has remained at the heart of his creative inquiry, and which he evoked many times during our conversations: “What is music, and how does it work?”

Ethnomusicology and Experimentalism: Scenes, Institutions, Others

This dissertation, then, takes a methodological approach that draws equally on ethnographic, textual, and archival data in considering experimental music’s role as germinal agent of cultural change in 1960s Toronto. As such, it benefits from other studies of music falling into the category of Western Art Music that also take an ethnomusicological orientation in researching music’s social dimensions in practice. Paraphrasing his grandfather Charles, Anthony Seeger writes that “true musicology would be ethnomusicological,” that any study of music must take into account the processes and circumstances factoring into music as expressive practice. Ethnography, as Seeger (Anthony) writes,

is not defined by disciplinary lines or theoretical perspectives, but rather by a descriptive approach to music going beyond the writing down of sounds to the writing down of how sounds are conceived, made, appreciated and influence other individuals, groups, and social and musical processes. The ethnography of music is writing about the ways people make music.

“We are all (ethno)musicologists now,” observes Nicholas Cook, noting that the work done by “new” musicology over the last quarter century, which leaves a crucial legacy in bringing musical texts in more intimate proximity to their sociocultural world, has now

33 Interview with the author, March 14, 2010.
effectively become anachronistic. Indeed, Cook prefers to look at musicology’s “performative turn” in the new millennium, citing musicological contributions that dispense with overarching presumptions suggesting art music’s autonomy and the scholarly fidelity towards it (what Lydia Goehr has famously called Werktreue36) shielding it from the scrutiny of ethnographic or sociological analysis. Indeed, scholarship on art music “and its derivatives” (to quote Kay Kaufman Shelemay, below) that puts its sociological contexts above the purely aesthetic materials of sound or the work-object itself have produced paradigm-changing models since the “new” musicological turn of the late twentieth century.

Many such studies have emerged that outfit this dissertation with methodological models supporting my approach. Philip Bohlman’s37 study of chamber music in Israel, a genre that forms the “the ahistorical core of Western art music in its ideal,” elucidates a “complex of performance, repertory, social behavior, and audience and patronage systems.”38 Bohlman submits that his work in this area isn’t about any one particular ethnic group, or the music of that group, but rather a “music history resulting from the response of a group with a shared value system to a musical repertory that articulates those values;” an ethnomusicological approach, as he argues, reveals music history, even Western history, as multitudinous.39 Ingrid Monson’s interview-based research with jazz performers in Chicago has exposed the rich phenomenologies of listening that structure

35 Nicholas Cook, “We are all (Ethno)musicologists now,” in The New (Ethno)musicologies, ed. Henry Stobart (Toronto: Scarecrow, 2008), 55.
38 Ibid., 255.
39 Ibid., 266.
social scenes and articulate performance histories.\textsuperscript{40} Her important formulation of intermusicality exposes the myriad worlds of interpretation, the “aurally perceptible musical relationships that are heard in the context of particular musical traditions.”\textsuperscript{41} As critics would lambaste Udo’s concerts as noisy, incoherent, and decidedly unmusical, Monson’s model shows how musical meaning emerges through processes of sonic intertextuality and performative competence.

Kay Kaufman Shelemay has been an exemplar in questioning the separation between domains of musical scholarship based on a music’s genre, social status, and its variously traditional, elite, or authentic qualities. In a seminal 1996 article on crossing “boundaries” in music scholarship, she notes that the biggest challenge in studying musical practices is neither methodological nor theoretical, but psychological.\textsuperscript{42} Shelemay argues that:

Musical scholarship can help lead the way out of its own methodological and theoretical impasses by looking deep within its own materials for fresh methods for studying musical expression past and present. We have a possibility of providing insight into what is at once a most ephemeral, yet at the same time collective mode of expression in society.\textsuperscript{43}

Her often-cited 2001 work on Boston’s early music community shows us that notions of the ethnographic “other” must be considered as not merely a cultural, temporal, or musical other, but rather a construction of unfamiliarity, an other that affords investigation from the ethnographer. Shelemay profitably cites Gary Tomlinson’s

\textsuperscript{40} Ingrid Monson, \textit{Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 128.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 26.
groundbreaking study of magic in Renaissance music,\textsuperscript{44} quoting Tomlinson’s own sense of distance from his topic that produced its link with “anthropological thought.”\textsuperscript{45}

Further, Shelemay notes that a moment of change in the ethnomusicological study of European art music and its derivatives has effectively come to pass, that the “categories of ‘Western-music’ and ‘non-Western music’ have disintegrated, if indeed these rubrics ever had the integrity with which they were invested by scholars.”\textsuperscript{46}

The “other” of the present study, necessary for it to qualify as an ethnography rather than archaeology or historiography, is formulated from a temporal unfamiliarity and exoticness, rather than, for example, a cultural one or even social one. My personal relationship to Toronto’s experimental music scene was formed long before this research began—as an arts worker, performer, and recording artist, my own position among some of my interviewees was already known. Thus gaining access to many of them did not always require an external point of contact, or trusted insider, and I was able to forge and in some cases strengthen personal relationships to people I had cultivated earlier, since first becoming involved in experimental music making in the early 2000s. This, coupled with a nearly-unanimous desire among my interviewees to see scholarly research on Udo Kasemets appear, made for an unusual willingness and availability among my informants that created a rich, accessible, and welcoming ethnographic space.

The ethnographic site of 1960s experimentalism, as I earlier suggested, is spread across interdependent spaces that also connect the past with the present—archives of

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 4.
things, and archives of memories. Yet cultural institutions and their own histories play an important role as constituent elements in the creation of this space: as Chapter 1 examines, postwar arts policy and the institutionalized support of Canadian music had a defining influence on the generation of composers with whom Udo became associated in the 1950s upon arrival from Europe. Georgina Born notes that the ethnographic method is especially effective in understanding the workings of cultural institutions and their systems: “Because these phenomena have the capacity to absorb and conceal contradiction, it takes a method such as ethnography to uncover the gaps between external claims and internal realities, public rhetoric and private thought, ideology and practice.”

Born’s foundational study of IRCAM in Paris, as both cultural institution and ethnographic site, addresses five main themes from which the present study benefits: the sociocultural analysis of music; the sociology of high culture; the relationship between modernism and postmodernism expressed by IRCAM; how history and culture together can be used to theorize the production and transformation of modernism and postmodernism as long term cultural systems; and the tensions between authorship and cultural production. Throughout the second part of this dissertation, similar issues bear out and cohere to form a thematic substrate that nourishes the tensions between conservatism and experimentalism in Toronto. As will be seen in Chapter 4, the disbursement of public money to fund avant-garde projects in music as well as visual art was met with suspicion from critics. Postwar anxieties about the public stewardship of

culture reveal themselves in such ways, and highlight a remarkable urgency in art’s central role as an index of cultural growth and identity in the 1960s.

**Historical Ethnography: Dilemmas, Challenges, and Opportunities**

This research’s ultimate aim is to argue for experimental practice’s role as a fundamentally communicative pursuit, as well an aesthetic enterprise whose efficacy can be measured in terms of the relationships between people and place that it articulates. Toronto’s conservatism, which Chapter 4 examines primarily through critical reception of the avant-garde, provides one axis along which the cultivation of such antagonistic activities can be mapped. But this musical climate is also grounded in specific historical and cultural circumstances, and part of the challenge in situating Kasemets’ work within a larger analytic frame comes with adequately accounting for these through an ethnographic method that combines oral accounts with archival records to recreate an impression of 1960s Toronto. This section of this chapter considers the issues associated with historical ethnography, which has emerged as a critical subfield of anthropological and social scientific research, one that carries with it an acutely unique register of challenges and affordances.

William Kornblum observes that historical ethnography, while also having the fortune of disciplinary or theoretical freedom, asks of the ethnographer a willingness to embark on a kind of “time travel.” Kornblum studied Chicago’s jazz scene of the 1920s, and tells us that historical ethnography appears as combination of “historical research and

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retrospective ethnography,”\textsuperscript{49} which at the same time fixes and emancipates ethnographic spaces from their temporal sitedness. Kornblum notes that historical ethnography has, to some extent, existed as part of the process of “writing culture”\textsuperscript{50} as long as anthropologists have been undertaking this work. He mentions Adolph Bandelier’s 1890 study *The Delight Makers* as an early attempt at historical ethnography that reports on extensive fieldwork among Navajo and Hopi people of New Mexico, with archaeological and linguistic research providing a framework for recreating daily life in the centuries before contact. *The Delight Makers* is a model of historical ethnography because “it is based on exhaustive social scientific research; it successfully reconstructs the time and cultural complexity of the Indian, clan-based villages, among people who lived in cliff dwellings or pueblos long before any contact with Europeans.”\textsuperscript{51}

Yet my use of the term historical ethnography bears more in kinship to Postill’s “multi-timed” ethnography—one that aspires beyond merely recreating in writing a past social and cultural arena that has since vanished. Richard Widdess, in considering historical *ethnomusicology* as a discipline, offers that it “might well take as its twin objectives the uncovering of historical events, and the study of their relationships in terms of processes of change, taking into account all available evidence, including that of sociomusical continuity and change observable today.”\textsuperscript{52} This accords more squarely with Postill’s diachronic ethnography, that lets us account for changes in the ethnographic space over time. Even more pertinent here, as Widdess observes, it is the

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 178.

\textsuperscript{50} To borrow the phrase known widely as the title of important collection of essays about the ethnographic process. See James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: the Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

\textsuperscript{51} Kornblum, “Discovering Ink,” 179.

life of historical and archival artefacts that give us a closeness to the past, as they “offer a
degree of intimacy with the past that is lacking in other types of evidence.”

Further, as Allan Thomas notes in his study of classical music performance in the
town of Hawera, New Zealand following the Second World War, “an historical
ethnography also has the benefit of hindsight; it has a wider perspective on the issues that
influence the everyday patterns, which are observed in the ethnography. It places the
music in relation to the particular forces which shape … society.” Oral testimony, as he
observes, has remained largely absent in studies of Western music history, largely
because of musicology’s predominately text-based approach to scholarship. But in
studying the practices of music making, Thomas suggests that “Questions about the
reliability of memory are less important than understanding the level of interpretation that
an eyewitness or participant brings to the subject.” Oral history, as told in interview, is
“an amalgam of past and present; history is interpreted through experience and
hindsight.” Agreeing with Widdess’ assessment of archival documents, Thomas
reminds us that newspapers, reviews, and journals of the time are “similarly evocative of
the values and texture of music-making,” that in those historical records whose original
existence was to document the contemporary, we are given the opportunity to brush up
against the immaterial textures by our handling its material history—a different kind of
“time travel” altogether.

53 Ibid., 220.
54 Allan Thomas, Music is Where You Find It: Music in the Town of Hawera, 1946. (Wellington NZ: Music
55 Ibid., 12.
56 Ibid., 13.
Yet using oral testimony from interviewees of sometimes very advanced age, about events that took place as far back as a half century ago, comes with its unique set of challenges—namely, the roadblock of memory, which the example opening this chapter illustrates. But memory plays a crucial role in helping ethnographers deal with what exactly constitutes a “past,” and how that past exists in a fluctuating relationality with the present. Nachman Ben-Yehuda notes that two basic answers have been postulated by scholars working in the field of collective memory:

One assumes that there was such a past and we need to contrast that past with its present constructions. That is, the … valid research pattern to follow is to examine how this past is interpreted, molded and presented in the present, and why. The other assumes that there was no “past” and that the “past” is a construction of manipulative and interested agents who create pasts that fit various interests (e.g. political, ideological) of the present.57

Like George E. Marcus’s suggestion that the raw archival field produced by ethnographic activity (transcripts, interviews, field notes) acts as a counterweight against hegemonizing historical narratives, Ben-Yehuda’s observation here similarly illustrates that memory’s role in historical ethnography is crucial to establishing a system of balance that constantly puts the past into a dynamic sense of presence. When I was interviewing Hart Broudy about SightSoundSystems, for example (which took place when he was a student), he often mentioned how his capacity for recall was tinged, even fundamentally altered, by the change in vantage point some forty-five years on:

In those days, as far as I remember, it was pretty—I don’t know if it’s ill formed, or very gestative at the time—nothing was really formed. Performance art as such, I don’t even think that term was even used at that point. I think people talked about installations, and they talked about maybe multi-media, I don’t know. Again, I don’t know if I’m putting a modern spin on something that happened

maybe forty years ago. I do remember that technology was beginning to heavily influence art.\textsuperscript{58}

Paraphrasing sociologist Jeffrey Olick, Nachman tells us that “memory is not a ‘thing’ but an interactive process—much like a conversation or a dialogue in which meaning is not ‘there’ but emerges interactively.”\textsuperscript{59} So when Udo says, “I have to research my own memory,” or “I cannot remember anymore,” I am inclined to observe this as a new space of inquiry, or a new mode of dialogic dissonance becoming available.

**Conclusion: Between Memory and Material—the “Fecund Interval”**

In a very short preface to an edited memoir by Eric Havelock about Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan writes that a “strange apposition” existed between the two scholars, both of whom, along with McLuhan, were part of the Toronto School of Communications theory. McLuhan notes that the tension between Havelock and Innis, which arose from fundamental discontinuities in personality and intellection, created a resonant interval, a “fecund” interval.\textsuperscript{60} Interval, in McLuhan’s lexicography, forms yet another dialectic pairing in the same way environment and anti-environment, and figure and ground work together in forming productively discontinuous couplets. But interval also implies simultaneity and co-incidence, which, in McLuhan’s use, offers an exit from the uniform sequences that materialize in typographic communication and mechanical technology, and an opening to the productive potential of discontinuity. To describe the interval as *fecund* qualifies it as a generative site and a place from which “new content” can emerge.

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\textsuperscript{58} Interview with the author, April 3, 2012.


again, as a dialectal formation of antithetical structures.\textsuperscript{61} In this chapter, I have built a case that supports a methodological approach that profits from the fecund interval between memory and archival material—a site of productive dissonances. In nearly all of my interviews, memory played a key role in our discussions. In some cases Udo was able to access small but nonetheless illuminating details absent from the handful of biographical entries that describe his years in stateless limbo:

> I remember that I was stuck in Germany after the war, and in these bombed out cities, they, the small theatre companies started to play all kinds of unusual stuff by Sartre and Ionesco and whoever at this time and at the same time of course there were also little—everything of course was bombed out but people tried to find new ways of dealing with old media. Because we had only the old media at that time.\textsuperscript{62}

Again, Udo’s recall of the past interpolates historical details with an atemporal perspective; it is a recollection of the material past inflected by an intellectual pallor that came after his arrival to Canada and exposure to McLuhan, Cage, and the medial properties of music and sound. In other instances memory revealed significant ontological disjunctures, as in the following example where Udo recalls the genesis of Men, Minds, and Music, the subject of Chapter 5 in this dissertation:

> Well, again, my memory is a little bit vague about some of these things, but I tried to get things happening just after I’d gotten sort of new energy from my Ann Arbor connections. I started here—before I did the Isaacs Gallery concerts, I was involved with the Brodie School of Music, and he [Paul Brodie] wanted to do a kind of lecture series or something like this, and I said, “Well let’s do concerts.” Well, there is my favorite word again—I think the series was called Men, Minds, and Music. And naturally, minds have always been my preoccupation about anything.

Jeffrey Olick observes that memory, as theorized by postmodern writers, is “one component in a complex and shifting amalgam of perceptions that form the pervasive and

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{62} Interview with the author, June 16, 2010.
permanent, though ever changing, historicity of the world.” Memory in modern societies, Olick provocatively states, has been separated from the “continuity of social reproduction.” He continues, “Memory is now a matter of explicit signs, not of implicit meanings. Our only recourse has been to represent and invent what we can no longer spontaneously experience.” So memory then is materialized in its temporality. Olick notes where for “pre-modern societies” experience was one of living with a continuous past, modern cultures understand and perceive memory through sign systems, images, and objects that render meaning as discrete and unambiguous: memory becomes a game of loss and recovery through artefacts belonging to other times.

Prefiguring Derrida by a few years, the French historian Pierra Nora writes that “modern memory is, above all, archival. It relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image.” History and memory for Nora have become at the same time antithetical and intertwined in modern societies, to the extent that memory has become a historical process through the “indiscriminate production of archives,” which he writes is the “acute effect of a new consciousness.” Memory exists, according to Nora, principally as a mediated phenomenon—in traces, in lieux (sites) that have replaced the pre-modern processes of memory that occurred as a natural way to ritualize our everyday behavior as an expression of its connection to a collective heritage. The sites of memory—museums, memorials, archives—are

64 Ibid., 379.
66 Ibid., 14.
effectively responses to the pressure of history (its acceleration, as Nora calls it) which besieges memory.

Methodologically then, the challenges posed by historical ethnography are equally unique affordances to use the processual, interactive nature of memory. Returning to *Counterbomb Renga*, Udo’s large-scale collaboration from 1983 protesting nuclear proliferation, he described the means of actually assembling the work together from the fragments of recordings and poetic statements submitted by contributors from across the globe: “Well, the tapes went around. People recorded them, and sent them to the next person and all that. And some of them recorded just some sonic material and some recorded just the words. As I remember it.” Again, remembering becomes a means of both reconstructing the past, but also an act of connecting that historical moment to subjective present: *As I remember it*. Memory and remembering imply not only the existence of archival zones, but also their dynamic pulses that conflate space and time into a living present.
CHAPTER 4.

LISTENING CULTURE IN 1960S TORONTO: TENSIONS BETWEEN CONSERVATISM AND EXPERIMENTALISM

Introduction: Toronto? “It’s a Bore”

What’s it like to be avant-garde? The Toronto daily newspaper The Globe and Mail asked this question, rhetorically, to its readers in a column printed in November of 1959. The question was asked literally (and with a palpably derisive tinge) of Martine Gourbault, a fourth-year high school student at Toronto’s Central Tech, recent newcomer to the city, and herself the subject of the column. Gourbault—a self-proclaimed artist at just eighteen years old, who wore baggy sweaters but no make-up, listened to folk music, and drove a scooter—seemed to represent the image of a new youth culture that would, throughout the following decade, radically influence attitudes among the city’s populace and its policymakers. Gourbault had moved to Canada from France, and the Globe wanted her opinion on what it meant to be young and on the cultural vanguard in Toronto. According to her, it was lonely. The city was full of money, but empty of feeling, said Gourbault, who lived in a “swanky apartment” in the centre of town. All she saw were other apartments, and below them, taverns. “It’s a dead city,” she says. ‘Going for a walk in Paris is an experience; in Toronto, it’s a bore.”

Throughout the first half of 1960s, the term “avant-garde” appears in Toronto’s daily newspapers with a frequency that is noteworthy, as a catch-all for anything

1 “Toronto? ‘It’s a Bore:’ A Lonely Girl in the Big City,” The Globe and Mail, November 7, 1959, 42. Gourbault, as of 2015, is a practicing artist living and working in Vancouver. See, for example, http://www.martinegourbault.com
remotely culturally progressive. “What does avant-garde mean?” the *Globe* asked,\(^2\) as if encountering for the first time a strange and ominous word. Food, fashion, art, sculpture, architecture, and, of course, musical activity became enmeshed in a burgeoning conversation about cultural life in Toronto that unfolded in two directions: one safely, if divisively, veering towards the city’s conservative past that commentators were prone to attaching to a mindset solidified in nineteenth-century aesthetic values; the other, under a new rubric categorized (and often castigated) simply as belonging to the avant-garde. As this chapter will show, anything privileging cultural expression for its own sake— or “Art for Whose Sake?” as a 1965 *Globe* editorial queried in a huff of suspicion— appeared to herald a new avant-garde age in Toronto’s civic life. The byline of that editorial, printed in the front section of the paper during the height of the city’s flirtation with the avant-garde, asked the question which delineated the dividing line in the debate: “Has modern art given rise to a clique of charlatans, aided by incompetent art critics and authorities, who are perpetuating a fraud upon a long-suffering public?”\(^3\) Indeed, by 1965, the creep of culture in staid, boring Toronto seemed overwhelming, and even the avant-garde began to permeate the previously mundane aspects of the city’s growth. “I think we’re all getting a little too culture minded around here,” complained Toronto city alderman Frederick J. Beavis that year, as the Parks and Recreation Committee of City Council debated proposals for a park sculpture—a sculpture in danger of being “too avant-garde” for local residents.\(^4\)

\(^2\) Ibid.
This chapter seeks to explore the tensions between conservatism and experimentalism by looking, primarily, at how they became articulated in discourse around music in Toronto during the 1960s. In so doing my primary aim is to account for what constituted a *listening culture* in Toronto: the attitudes, assumptions, and expectations circulating among listeners that went into shaping and influencing the experience of music in its cultural context. I argue that this listening culture was defined broadly and animated vigorously by the debates that flourished among local critics in an extraordinary public conversation about the arts and their role in society that took place in the pages of the city’s daily newspapers—*The Globe and Mail, The Toronto Daily Star,* and *The Telegram.* Music (and arts) critics writing for these dailies during the 1960s saw themselves not only as observers, reporting on “good” and “bad” concerts or art openings as they happened across the city; rather, as I show in this chapter, they partook in a larger project of stewarding the city’s listening culture and aiding Toronto audiences in developing greater acuity as listeners of avant-garde music. “All of us are critics,” Arnold Rockman told readers of *The Toronto Daily Star* in a January 1963 editorial:

> If we are to be genuinely interested in art and are not just hangers-on because it’s the ‘in’ thing to do, then we must be ready to find it, even in the most unexpected places. We must learn to look for poetry in advertising copy, for music in the noise picked up by radio telescopes, for drama in our own families, for painting on billboards and in the cracks of a Toronto sidewalk.5

I follow three lines of inquiry in exploring how a discourse about critical listening culture emerged throughout the 1960s—where audiences might be able to pick out the music in

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5 Arnold Rockman, “Observations on the Critical Act,” *The Toronto Daily Star,* January 26, 1963, 27. Rockman was a professor of Sociology at York University in the 1960s in addition to being a freelance writer and critic. He was also an artist and curator, and deeply influenced by McLuhan. Donald F. Theall writes that Rockman argued “McLuhan, as a revolutionary prophet, had to exaggerate the force and application of his vision in order to persuade his audience that it would re-order their vision and provide it with new significance.” Donald F. Theall, *Virtual Marshall McLuhan* (Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2001), 83.
the noise. First I examine two opposing figures in this debate that defined the poles at either end of the spectrum of viewpoints: John Kraglund and Udo Kasemets. Kraglund, The Globe and Mail’s classical music critic from 1952 to 1987, “wore his conservatism like a badge of honour,” and was a resolute skeptic who wrote artfully on musical life in Toronto for 35 years; his opinions on the avant-garde varied from informed critique to outright hostility, and during the 1960s Kraglund often reported on developments within Toronto and around the world. Kasemets, the composer, agitator, and enfant terrible of Toronto’s music community, was a columnist for The Toronto Daily Star from 1959 until 1963, whose impassioned views on music in the city became focused around mobilizing a young generation of musicians and listeners into action. Second, I situate music within a contextual discussion of visual art and architecture in 1960s Toronto, and how civic identity cohered, briefly, around the idea that it might in fact be an “avant-garde” city; finally, I discuss the perceived divide between composers and listeners in Toronto, a gap that critics and composers alike felt needed to be quickly closed if contemporary music had any chance of surviving in a modernizing cosmopolitan landscape.

Kasemets Contra Kraglund

Music criticism in 1960s Toronto was a serious business. As in other major metropolitan centres of art and culture in North America—New York, Chicago, Montreal—the postwar decades of economic growth gave cities room to develop more ambitious cultural agendas. In tandem with the rise in professional music activity, a growth industry of concert promotion, tour and event-management emerged; particularly

in Toronto, new venues were built to present not just concert music, but also theatre, musicals, television, and radio. The O’Keefe Centre opened its doors to much pomp and fanfare on October 1, 1960 with a production of Lerner and Loewe’s *Camelot* that ran in advance of its Broadway premiere; moreover, the facility became the new home of the Canadian Opera Company (then formally called the Canadian Opera Association) in addition to the National Ballet during the 1960s, which gave those organizations a higher profile and renewed importance in the city’s cultural scene. In 1962, Ed Mirvish began what would be a decades-long career as Toronto’s legendary theatre impresario and entertainment magnate by purchasing the Royal Alexandra Theatre on King Street, saving it from its lumbering fall into insolvency by promising to use the building for theatre for five years, and in equal measure injecting Toronto’s theatre scene with new excitement. Television by 1960 in Toronto had grown to give the viewer access to 17 channels—many network affiliates broadcasting from Ontario, but also US cities within range: Rochester, Buffalo, Detroit— and radio offered more. In short, the competition for consumer dollars in the city was getting stiffer, and the rise of the professional arts critic to report upon and guide the city’s cultural elite (and their pocket books) to the right box office was commensurate with such expansion. Nathan Cohen, Kenneth Winters, William Littler, and the culturally omnivorous Robert Fulford figured prominently in Toronto’s arts scene, and their names have become synonymous with a golden era of arts criticism that flourished in the 1950s and 1960s.

Yet also, as Chapter 1 of this dissertation observes, the 1950s and 60s were decades in which an extraordinary organizational effort among local musicians and

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7 *The Toronto Daily Star*, February 1, 1960, 16.
composers began to impact the city’s musical life. The rise of small independent groups that specialized in curated concert programs of non-mainstream works—Ten Centuries Concerts, Musica Viva, and of course the Isaacs Gallery Mixed Media Ensemble—gave critics a new kind of cultural event to report about, beyond the gamut of mainstream music and theatre. Local musicians and performers of limited financial means were attempting to assert creative control over the concert landscape in Toronto and its “porcine” promoters, as R. Murray Schafer called them. This was exciting for critics, and narrowed the focus inward towards the city and its musicians.

The two critics who offered the most frequent commentary on local music activity were also passionate ideologues: Udo Kasemets and John Kraglund. Kasemets’ early career in Canada was as much as critic and writer as it was as composer and conductor. Under the auspices of a good word put in by John Beckwith, Kasemets began writing local reviews for the *Star* in 1959 as a Hamilton resident who commuted to Toronto. One of Kasemets’ earliest columns, from January 1959, seems to hint at the broader themes which both he and Kraglund would take up over the following decade. Kasemets reports on the Hamilton Philharmonic’s appointment of its new conductor Victor Di Bello, whom he hoped would bring youthful energy needed to lead the orchestra’s transition from amateur to professional ensemble. In an optimistic (if hyperbolic) tone that would come to characterize Kasemets’ writing in the *Star*, he notes that the orchestra was entering its most “important season,” and that Hamilton should not “deny its wholehearted support” for the new conductor.⁸ Evident in this early piece is the zealous enthusiasm for change and for new regimes of listening and performing to replace what

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Kasemets would come to vigorously dismiss as inadequate models for communicating music in Canada.

John Kraglund, on the other hand, remained reticent to embrace the change that Kasemets wanted to see, and his predilection with the avant-garde would often border on the obsessive. Yet as the pre-eminent music critic of his day, Kraglund was remarkably even-handed in contextualizing local music activity within broader currents, and he often feted local performers in columns that demonstrated his investment in the city’s local scene. Writing in 1960 of John Beckwith’s *Five Pieces for Brass Trio*, Kraglund staked his territory as a conservative voice, which throughout the decade would unwaveringly articulate the view that experimentalism’s promise was an empty one. “Since Mr. Beckwith is one of Canada’s most dedicated avant-garde composers, it may be assumed that his five pieces are a fair indication of what is new in the world of music. The obvious answer is: ‘Nothing much.’”

Setting the tone for the kind of dialogue that would unfold in the ensuing years, Kraglund noted in 1961 that programming contemporary music was, “a risky sort of procedure in Toronto.” In December of that year, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation staged a “Festival of Contemporary Music” over the course of several programs, and Kraglund’s review offers us a telling glimpse of both Toronto’s listening culture and the critic’s unwillingness to mince words. He reports that the festival featured “a curious mixture of old, new, relatively absorbing, and almost completely worthless music”—the concert reviewed showcased violist David Mankovitz and included Darius

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Milhaud’s *Concerto for Viola and Orchestra* (1929), the *Viola Concerto in B minor* in the style of Handel by Henri Casadeus (which Kraglund mis-identifies as Handel’s) and Oskar Morawetz’s *Second Symphony* (1959). Kraglund ended the column with advice to his readers: “For concert-goers who are interested in the avant-garde, it will hold little interest. Others may find it closer to our social reality—clinging, albeit reluctantly, to nineteenth century romanticism.”\(^{11}\) It is remarkable to read in something as seemingly innocuous as a concert review this kind of reflexive social commentary; yet it is precisely the kind of critique that made the arts pages of Toronto’s daily newspapers a platform where contemporaneous attitudes about music’s role as a cultural barometer were made evident.

In a 1965 interview with Pierre Boulez, (“young—he turns 39 next Thursday”) publicity for Boulez’s appearance in Toronto to conduct a program of Debussy with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, the author probes the French composer about the avant-garde. Here we catch a glimpse of Kraglund’s reverence for serious music and musicians, and even a deferential tone towards Boulez, who takes care to draw his own line in the sand, telling Kraglund: “Striving for special effects that have nothing to do with music does not interest me. Tapping a piano case is neither music nor avant-garde.”\(^{12}\) Five years earlier in 1960, Kraglund wrote a brief column about a radio experiment conducted by the British Broadcasting Corporation where a number of instruments, randomly hit, fooled several listeners into thinking it was the premier of an avant-garde Polish


composer. “There seems to be something about modern art that makes it a natural target for practical jokes,” he writes.

Modern music in its various forms, whether serious like the atonal works of some European composers, or popular like American swing or jive, is so far removed from traditional ideas of harmony and rhythm that it is difficult for even a trained ear to distinguish it from casual or accidental noises such as might be made by aimless pounding on a drum or blowing on a wind instrument.13

Indeed, Kraglund found ways to take aim at the avant-garde with implicit jibes at Kasemets and experimentalists of the new generation in many columns found in the Globe throughout the early- to mid-1960s. Writing in 1969, Kraglund appears to take an unprompted shot at Udo in a column about the Canadian Opera Company, and its current season being marred by too many contemporary works. “Champions of the avant-garde would have audiences believe the ultimate in art and communication is the mixed media performance—hinting, of course, that they invented it.”14 Kraglund’s lengthy column is a paean for a “simpler” time in the “old days” when performers weren’t concerned with appearance, acting, or anything other than their voices and the repertoire. Although Kraglund’s angle—to attribute a lackluster season by the opera company to the avant-garde’s predilection for mixed media—is skewed a little too far to warrant credibility, this piece is itself a snapshot of the tenor of music criticism in Toronto:

To revitalize Verdi’s La Forza del Destino would be relatively simple. It is worth hearing for Marina Krilovici’s glorious singing as Leonora. It would become an appropriately grand operatic experience if she and fellow star Don Gerrard, Guardino, were given steady and powerful orchestral support by conductor Ernesto Barbini. That, in turn, might spark Mignon Dunn, Preziosilla, to the vocal and dramatic heights she has revealed in the past.

It was Barbini’s wayward tempos that proved the stumbling block in Puccini’s Turandot, as well. If these could be turned into the service of the score and the singers—rather than the conductor’s personal interpretation—one could

have ignored the tinseled sets. Leon Major’s staging might even have achieved a musical flow.\textsuperscript{15}

Kraglund’s lamentation for the disappearing purity in opera must be read in the context of experimentalism’s rise in the 1960s. Effectively blaming the avant-garde for shifting opera’s focus away from music, and onto the varying other medial aspects of performance, Kraglund’s approach is to levy a heavy-handed critique of the Canadian Opera Company’s failings in executing scores as written by the composer. In the same way that Kraglund was assuaged by Boulez’s particular flavour of postwar modernism—one devoid of the tricks and distractions of mixed media—he represents not simply a reactionary voice to things new, but one that valourized craftsmanship in any form, old or new.

So we must remember that for Kraglund the term \textit{avant-garde} is complex, at once laden with disingenuousness, amateurism, and ephemerality as well as palpable weight. His columns from the early 1960s became platforms for him to question, and often outright discredit the movement. In a piece on Mahler’s ninth symphony, receiving its first performance in Canada in January 1963, Kraglund opens with a short polemic which could easily be seen as pointed towards Kasemets:

\begin{quote}
It is curious to note the distress of those who promote the so-called avant-garde contemporary music in Toronto when they discover that public interest is negligible, almost non-existent. The fact is disturbing, certainly, but scarcely surprising when one considers how many works—long accepted elsewhere—are still awaiting their first public performance in Toronto.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

Yet Kraglund’s skepticism was not total: his position on the avant-garde was, at times, as equanimous as it was reluctant. As a critic for the \textit{Globe} his duty to report on current

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
musical events was a top priority, but his vision for Toronto’s art music scene was anything but shortsighted. Like Kasemets, Kraglund certainly absorbed the Zeitgeist pervading arts and culture in Toronto. In an otherwise tepid review of an organ concert from 1962, he muses on larger themes at play in the early part of the decade: “But what of the avant-garde composers, those who have resorted to electronics, chance, and other more or less disorganized methods? Perhaps a half-century from now, someone will be able to pick up one piece and make the undisputed claim that this ‘represented the culture of the mid-twentieth century’.”17

UDO KASEMETS HAD SINCE the beginning of the decade been writing about avant-garde music in just such terms—that the new explorations in composition and performance which others viewed as aberrant, wayward, and faddish were indeed harbingers of a new era to come. He started writing for The Toronto Daily Star first on a casual basis as concert reviewer in 1959, and by 1961 had become a staff writer. Yet Kasemets’ contribution to music criticism and the burgeoning avant-garde extended beyond the pages of the Star, and outside the combative sandbox of Toronto arts criticism. He contributed articles and reviews to The Canadian Music Journal, a scholarly periodical published quarterly between 1956-62, including a substantial review essay on John Cage’s 1961 book Silence: Lectures and Writings. Silence, as Kasemets told me several times in interviews, remained for him a foundational text in many regards to which he returned frequently throughout his long life. Kasemets’ review of the book is unsurprisingly favorable; yet even Cage himself is not exempt from the critic’s scalpel, as

Kasemets points out Cage’s own constrictive use of the meaning of “indeterminacy.”

Discussing an “illogical” comparison between Bach’s Art of the Fugue and Stockhausen’s Klavierstück XI made by Cage—that timbral and amplitudinal indeterminacy undergird the former work’s existence as a performance, while the latter’s open form does not qualify as truly being indeterminate—Kasemets points out that the full weight of the term indeterminacy is given short shrift: “[Cage’s] error is that he uses as his point of departure a preconceived idea about the word … rather than realizing the immensity, the inexplicability, indeed the indeterminacy of the meaning ‘indeterminacy’.”

In Kasemets’ review of Silence, he emphasizes how aspects of the book’s typographical layout and mosaic juxtaposition of Cage’s writings (which span 1937-61) effect a decidedly a-chronological, and “multi-dimensional” presentation of ideas:

Cage’s particular approach toward history becomes very obvious. …Because he always talks out from the focal point of the present, his utterances made at various times become multi-dimensional. The reader of today is never offered faded facts of the past, but he is carried back to some imaginary time—moments from which he can view the events and thoughts of the day in proper perspective.

In Silence we can locate a powerful originary expression of presentness and of immediacy that remained a prevalent force in Kasemets’ writing and thinking throughout his life. The persistent emphasis on “the present moment”—a phrase which Kasemets used with notable regularity during our interviews—came to dominate Kasemets’ outlook on 1960s culture, and indeed its relevance in the advancement of listening culture in Toronto materialized throughout Kasemets’ writing for the Star in the early 1960s.

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19 Ibid.
Beginning as a freelance staff critic, Kasemets contributed reviews of concert life mostly in Toronto, but also reported on noteworthy events and festivals around Ontario. By 1961, he had been given his own editorial column, “Udo Kasemets on Music,” which appeared regularly in the Saturday editions of the paper. Over the course of about 150 pieces, Kasemets proffered a mordant view on musical life in the city: praising the merits of amateur music clubs at one turn and dragging performers of international renown to the pillory at another. Glenn Gould, the eccentric genius of pianistic modernism, was skewered by Kasemets for ruining a night at the Stratford Festival in 1962 by performing on a tack piano instead of the customary concert grand—a decision Kasemets called a “cruel joke” played by Gould on his audience. An admonishing review of a July 1961 recital by pianist Reginald Stewart so offended the sensibilities of Lady Flora McRea Eaton—wife of the department store magnate John Craig Eaton—that she wrote the Star to complain:

Who is Udo Kasemets? Whence cometh he? What are his achievements? What are his credentials? We know Reginald Stewart. We know his achievements and credentials. Now we are entitled to know where Udo Kasemets studied, what degree he holds in music, what instrument … he plays. This is not a defense of Reginald Stewart, but of Canadian audiences.

Lady Eaton’s dyspeptic letter, perhaps written in a tone more befitting of 1861 than 1961, gives us a glimpse into the mindset of some of Toronto’s concert attendees, one that recoils in shock at the words of a foreign critic’s affront to the tastes of upper class anglo pedigree.

And the targets of Kasemets’ unflattering reviews themselves on occasion responded in print. Dr. Heinz Unger, the esteemed conductor and musical director of the

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York Concert Society—also an émigré to Canada, and renowned Mahler champion—wrote to the Star to express his dissatisfaction with the critic’s report on a concert from January 23rd 1963. In his letter (“My Concerts Never Evoked so Ignorant a Review”), Unger writes: “Never in my life has any concert of mine in any country been exposed to the amount of malicious falsehood and ignorance” levied by Kasemets, who, as Unger suggests to readers, is in possession of a “stone-deaf soul.” Kasemets’ review of the concert is, on balance, favourable towards Unger, whose performances of Mahler Kasemets describes as “an act of love.” Yet Kasemets used the concert as an excuse to polemicize on the very unsuitability of presenting the music of the nineteenth-century Austro-German canon to contemporary audiences. Calling Mahler’s ninth symphony “foreign in nature to the spirit” of the 1960s, it made for “tedious and disturbing” listening. Kasemets further challenged the notion of Mahler’s universalist appeal to all listeners:

Mahler’s anxiety-laden, long-winded musical speeches stem from a neurotic turn-of-the-century Vienna. Agonies and frustrations of a particular generation, living in a confined locality, are expressed through Mahler’s music, rather than matters meaning something to all humanity. It is no wonder that music of such content has little appeal for those who have no spiritual relationship with the era and place in question.

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22 The Berlin-born Unger arrived in Toronto 1948 after having lived in London, England for fifteen years, where he established a reputation conducting Mahler.
25 Ibid.
In Kasemets’ words about the conductor, Unger read “calculated malevolence towards Mahler” and “tendentious misstatements” that the abundance of empty seats had to do with Unger’s choice of programming.26

This was not the first time Kasemets used his power as a music writer to highlight the obliquity of programming nineteenth-century music for young listeners in a time of rapid cultural transformation. This is a theme that would evolve into a central polemical current in Kasemets’ writing as the decade progressed: namely, that the ways people were not only listening to music, but relating to each other socially, was fundamentally incongruous with the music of past decades. In one of his editorial columns, “Udo Kasemets on Music,” from October 1962, Kasemets opines about the controversy surrounding Herman Geiger-Torel’s upcoming staging of Wagner’s *Die Walküre* with the Canadian Opera Company. Geiger-Torel had made plans to cut sections of the opera to make it more palatable to younger listeners. Kasemets begins his Saturday column by chastising musical “purists,” as “people who cannot see the forest behind a tree. They niggle about the length of a grace note or ague endlessly about the merits of a harpsichord versus grand piano in performances of baroque works.” He continues:

> Music to them is an assemblage of pedantic facts. They are incapable of relating music to life, time, or the circumstances under which it is performed. Everybody has accepted the fact that a modern-day listener is quicker, or more superficial, in his reactions to music than his counterpart of yesteryear. Also, there is no quibbling about the truth that today’s listener is mentally and physically unfit to sit through a four-hour oratorio performance. Why then should Wagner be subject to preferential treatment?27

26 Heinz Unger, Letter to the editor. It should be noted that Kasemets, ever the contrarian, called a 1962 concert of the York Concert Society “unforgettable” in a review from April 26 of that year. Conducted by Unger, the program featured Schoenberg’s *Transfigured Night* and Bach’s E major violin concerto, and yet for Kasemets, the outstanding highlight was Haydn’s concerto for violin in C major. Udo Kasemets, “Haydn Performance ‘Unforgettable,’” *The Toronto Daily Star*, April 26, 1962, 32.

While Kasemets is ultimately writing in support of the COC’s planned abridgment of *Die Walküre*, it is curious to note the tone of condescension levied towards contemporary audiences, with “superficial” listening skills “unfit” for absorbing the long dramatic arc of Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

His attitude with respect to this topic appears to have been contradictory. An illustrative example of this came with a review, almost incredulous in tone, of a Toronto Symphony Orchestra concert held in Scarborough in April of that year. The TSO had given its first suburban concert at the auditorium of newly opened Cedarbrae Secondary School, and Kasemets again minced no words, calling it a “miserable failure.” Kasemets openly chastised conductor Walter Susskind (appointed to the TSO from 1956 to 1965) for programming an uneven concert of light classics as an affront to the intellection of the audience: “Who does [he] think the citizens of Scarborough are? Uneducated ignoramuses who have never heard a good piece of music? Resistant children who have to be lured to the pastures of symphonic music by offering them sugar-coated candies?”

And in this short review, Kasemets’ investment in local and small-scale musical experiences—marginal even—cannot evade notice: “In a truly professional artist’s life a concert on the outskirts of the city … is as important an enterprise as a royal command performance. The ultimate best is the expected standard in both cases.”

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28 Udo Kasemets, “Scarborites given Susskind Leftovers,” *The Toronto Daily Star*, April 18, 1962, 36. According to Kasemets’ review, the program included Massenet’s *Last Sleep of the Virgin*, Berlioz’s “Dance of the Will O’ the Wisps” and “Dance of the Sylphs” from *La damnation de Faust*, Britten’s *Soirées musicales* (presumably, as he identifies them only as “Britten’s meaningless Rossini paraphrases”), and Kabalevsky’s “flimsy” *Colas Breugnon* overture.

29 Ibid.
The question of listener acuity became a major point of debate amongst critics and composers, and in the final section of this chapter I explore it further.

Earlier that year, 1962, Kasemets wearily asked readers in the *Star* if they, like him, had grown tired of symphonic “run-of-the-mill” repertoire: “Have you, too, become impatient with conductors who under the disguise of presenting novelties insist on pouring second-rate music upon listeners’ ears?”

Toronto’s musical culture in the early 1960s was remarkable for nothing if not the conservative tastes of concert patrons and its promoters, and in the foregoing review we are able to gain insight into the kinds of frictions generating the nervous energies surrounding listening culture in the 1960s. It is not surprising that Kasemets—debonair, transnational, and authentically European—provoked the ire of readers by criticizing them on a regular basis for being stuck in a provincial backwater.

“Up until recently,” wrote Kasemets in 1962, in the haughty tone that offended Lady Eaton and other readers (several of whose letters expressing outrage at a Kasemets review the *Star* printed), musical life in Toronto had fit neatly into the “conventional pattern of the 19th century grand concert tradition. …On the surface Toronto’s musical scene was as glamorous as that of any sizeable city on this continent. But underneath the glitter it also was pretty hollow.”

Kasemets castigated Toronto as “musically a provincial town with a well-lit main street and many dark alleys.”

Yet the 1962-63 concert season held the potential for transforming Toronto’s music scene in Kasemets’ view, thanks to a number of musical initiatives being

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30 Udo Kasemets, “Sunday Concerts Listening Treat,” *The Toronto Daily Star*, December 26, 1962, 31. In a rare column praising CBC programming, Kasemets notes the abundance of contemporary music being performed by the CBC Symphony Orchestra and the Vancouver Chamber Orchestras.

31 John Beckwith recounted to me, in an interview on April 20, 2011, that Kasemets was fired in 1963 for writing favourably about Karlheinz Stockhausen.


33 Ibid.
undertaken by the Canadian League of Composers, student ensembles at the University of Toronto, and Ten Centuries Concerts. Somewhat disingenuously, Kasemets used the column to promote his own upcoming concert series, Men, Minds, and Music, without mentioning his name as organizer. “If everything goes according to plans,” Kasemets predicted, Toronto would be witness to a revolutionary reconfiguring of musical culture, “for this is the season when Toronto musicians and concert promoters have undertaken to reshape Toronto’s musical appearance from the ground up.”34

In a column from January 1962, Kasemets commented on the generation of composers who were responsible for what we might call a “conservative modernism” in Canadian music, and compared their work as pathfinders to what young and enthusiastic practitioners of theatre and art were striving for. “As things stand now,” he notes, “the tenor of the Canadian musical life is still set by the same generation which produced radical changes of the 1940s.” 35 In a statement reflective of his own attraction toward young people, Kasemets warned that “unless this group feels the threat of an aggressive youth on its heels, it is apt to turn stale and self-satisfied.”36 In the same column, Kasemets expressed his disdain for the complacency of both audiences and musicians in a battery of rhetorical questions that implied the time to overthrow Toronto’s music establishment was at hand. “Wanted: Musicians to Storm the Barricades” read the byline, calling to mind the militaristic origins of the very word avant-garde. “Where are the impassioned, orthodoxy-shattering, angry musicians?” asked Kasemets:

34 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
Where are the young performers with the imagination and curiosity to attempt a personal interpretation of [Sylvano] Bussotti’s drawings, of [Morton] Feldman’s charts, of [Earle] Browne’s verbal instructions? Or do young musicians even know the names of these three and other composers who, by replacing traditional musical notation with their own systems, have turned the modern performer into a co-creator in his own right? …Most of all, where are the young composers whose work would make musical Tories of John Weinzweig and Harry Somers? Where are the young firebrands ready to prove that the age of the divertimento and of the fugue is passé, that we live in the space age calling for musical means of expression? Where are they all?  

Art is GO in Toronto

The conservatism that Kasemets and others felt so permeated music was also present within a wider landscape of culture, and the polemical tenor of arts writing reflected this urgently. Arnold Rockman’s injunction, charging “all of us” to be critics, is as much a cri de coeur for the responsibilities of the arts critic in a cultural climate palpably in transition as it is an evidentiary relic of the promience that those arguments held in the daily lives of the city’s population. Rockman’s most incendiary statement echoes much of what Kasemets propounded in his own pieces for The Toronto Daily Star. From the same 1963 editorial Rockman writes:

If our schools and universities insist on teaching 19th-century attitudes towards the arts, then their work must be undone by the newspaper … if the critic accepts his responsibilities, perhaps he should try sometimes to preach to the unconverted. He ought to try to explain what has happened in the arts since Renoir, Tchaikowsky, Rodin, Ibsen, Tennyson, and Dickens. Perhaps artists like Stockhausen, Ionescu, Ferlinghetti and Pollock might then be accepted by wider audiences.

Kasemets had begun to take notice of the changes to other arts in Toronto—especially theatre and visual art—and drew inspiration from the adventurousness of young risk-takers and students who were embracing avant-garde tendencies that had

37 Ibid.
begun to take hold in the United States. He notes that the “young people, the inquisitive university students, the eager experimentalists, the uninhibited idealists” had begun to consolidate efforts in building a growing experimental theatre scene in the city. “Whether their various endeavours, enthusiastically carried out in converted basements, attics, and burlesque houses, will succeed is unimportant. What matters is that youth, dissatisfied with things as they stand, is on the move.”

In April 1962, critic Elizabeth Kilbourn wrote in the Star that in Toronto, “Art is GO. …If you don’t fall into a subway excavation near Bloor and Yonge, chances are you’ll trip over a new commercial art gallery. The artists to fill these galleries seem to be proliferating with indecent haste.” Critics had begun to report on the rapid increase of young artists that constituted a burgeoning micro-economy of independent creators, gallerists, and buyers. As early as the late 1950s, the scene emerging around Avrom Isaacs’ Greenwich Gallery (located originally at 736 Bay Street between College & Gerrard streets) was being hailed as the epicenter of Toronto’s avant-garde visual art. Michael Snow, Graham Coughtry, Gordon Rayner, and Dennis Burton—all of whom would later drift in and out of Kasemets’ orbit in the mid-1960s—represented the face of this generation, “favourites with the public seeking avant-garde painting and sculpture.”

Toronto’s engagement with avant-garde art preceded the city’s awkward embrace of avant-garde music by nearly a decade: in 1949, the Art Gallery of Toronto (later the Art Gallery of Ontario) staged the first exhibition of Pablo Picasso’s work, collected from

39 Udo Kasemets, “Musicians Wanted to Storm the Barricades,” 19.
galleries, private owners, and Picasso himself. Attracting “cheers and jeers,” critic Pearl McCarthy described it as the “most sensational exhibition [the gallery] has ever shown.”

In December of 1961, the Isaacs Gallery hosted an exhibition of works by Burton, Rayner, Snow, and others that the Star’s Robert Fulford approvingly reviewed in a column with the headline “Anarchy,” and writes that the “only conceivable critical response would be to burn down the building.” Fulford describes the show as being Dadaist in spirit, with works designed to elicit shock, laughter, and even horror: a mannequin with a cow’s skull affixed in place of the head; a monument to Napoleon with candles burning at all hours, a pile of nails, and others. Audience members—spectators—were encouraged to participate, to fiddle with the works, rearrange them, and even sing the exhibition’s anthem, “Oak and Dada,” to the tune of “O Canada.” “It is a show that must be seen,” he writes; and if spectators’ views are that “current art is essentially insane,” they would be “smugly confirmed” in their beliefs: “It is a show to please everyone.”

Comparing music in Toronto to other arts became a common tactic for Kasemets in his attempt to make listeners aware of how much work was needed to expedite the transition in Toronto’s scene. In a revealing interview on CBC radio’s The Arts This Week which aired on January 30, 1966 (in a program narrated by the young filmmaker

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44 Ibid.
David Secter\textsuperscript{45} Kasemets expressed his views to what would likely have been his widest audience—the general Toronto listenership of the CBC. Also featured on the program were other public intellectuals discussing the current state of the arts in Toronto, including Mayor Philip Givens, as well as Marshall McLuhan. In a lengthy excerpt, Kasemets made several statements, many of which had found their way into promotional materials for Men, Minds, and Music and the Isaacs Gallery concerts:

You find painters such as Robert Rauschenberg branching out into dance. Which means that he is acting out his visual images not only on canvas but also in movement, and in time. You find at the same time that composers are using graphic notation for their scores which, again, is very much a combination of visual art with musical thinking. And this has been going on for 10 or 20 years, and its time that Toronto gets to know something of these developments generally, and of course that’s the idea of the [Isaacs Gallery] Mixed Media concerts. As far as visual artists go, they understand, say, the newest developments in music extremely well, much better for instance than local musicians, who of course, like musicians from all over the world are academically trained are very hard to bring out of their narrow shell in which they have been put and in which they stay.\textsuperscript{46}

Canadian artist Michael Snow in 1963 was the abstract expressionist prodigy of the Toronto art scene, as someone who, as Elizabeth Kilbourn writes in \textit{The Toronto Daily Star}, was “unloved by academicians of art in Canada.”\textsuperscript{47} Yet Kilbourn saw in Snow’s early work from the late 1950s and early sixties a “scorn for fashion” and “a relentless pursuit of the most basic problems of art,” which in her critical opinion

\textsuperscript{45} Secter, then only 23, had the year previous received critical acclaim for his independent film \textit{Winter Kept Us Warm}, which bears the distinction of being the first English film from a Canadian director screened at the Cannes Film Festival. \textit{Winter Kept Us Warm} tells the story of two young University of Toronto students, both male, who embark on a vaguely romantic relationship, and remains an iconic early work of Canadian English language art cinema.

\textsuperscript{46} \textit{The Arts This Week}, Wendy Michener, producer, originally broadcast January 30, 1966 (CBC Digital Archives, ACCESSION 660130-12/00 Location 20010116-20 (04)).

produced pivotal artworks in Canadian history. Snow got his start in the mid-1950s at the Isaacs Gallery, before relocating to New York in 1961 to establish what would become an international career as a painter, sculptor, and video artist. As perhaps the most widely recognized name in contemporary Canadian art (both in the 1960s as well as now), Snow’s ties to experimental music in the 1950s and 60s have been understandably overshadowed by his prolific output in other media. Yet during those years, Snow and Kasemets travelled in close circles, and Kasemets affirmed to me during my interviews with him the respect he reserved for Snow’s virtuosity as a pianist and improviser. When I talked to Snow about Kasemets’ involvement with the experimental arts community in Toronto, he mentioned that Udo was present at events, parties, and gatherings, but that he was a marginal figure. Snow also recounted to me the tenor of excitement in the arts community, and especially the scene revolving around Isaacs’ gallery:

I think the feeling in the art community was that people were interested in, and ready for something new, as a community. It was successful in that sense, that there was writing in the newspapers about it, which was—so there was public dialogue. Bob Fulford was writing about art then. So there was a certain strength, because there were also collectors; some people did buy. So there was a creative excitement that was, I would say, ready for something new, probably more than the new music community.

I mean, of course, the biggest influences [in music in Toronto] were atonal—were Schoenberg, which is actually still pretty new for some people [laughs]. But at any rate, that’s what would be considered new at the time. Whereas Udo, with his media-comprehensive attitude, which brings in theatre and so forth, would definitely have been pretty much alone at the time.49

By 1961, Avrom Isaacs had relocated the Greenwich Gallery to a new building at 832 Yonge Street, just north of Bloor Street. Designed by modernist architect Irving Grossman, its appearance in the cityscape was part of a much larger transformation of the

48 Ibid.
49 Interview with the author, March 11, 2011.
Toronto’s urban environment. “The effect is instantaneous,” a columnist wrote in the *Globe* of the building’s design: “It is so good as to tempt ecstatic reaction.” Grossman was a central figure in Toronto’s architectural revolution of the 1950s and 60s, and designed a number of structures in the neo-Brutalist style that would come to mark those decades of the city’s history of built development. Grossman was young—he graduated from the University of Toronto’s architecture program in 1950, and his “jazz-filled studio … at 7 Sultan Street was a gathering place for the city’s artists, architects, and musicians”—and his collaboration with Isaacs in designing the impresario’s new space signaled the heyday of that site as Toronto’s premier place for experimentalism in the plastic arts. “Nothing is pretentious or too opulent,” the *Globe*’s critic writes of the new space. “On the other hand, many may rejoice that avant-garde art is shown in a place that does not flaunt its meagerness as a kind of snobbery in reverse.” Its interior was spacious, with long rectangular rooms designed to draw viewers’ attention towards the art and not to the structure; its streetfront façade was equally minimal in character, with the gallery’s name affixed in Helvetica lettering on a plain concrete face.

Figure 4.1. Image of The Isaacs Gallery in the mid 1960s (unattributed). Used with permission of the Centre for Contemporary Canadian Art.

Toronto in the 1960s was a city—like much of Canada itself—facing not so much a crisis of identity as much as one of its own historical conservatism, and nowhere was this reflected more clearly than in the changing nature of its built environment. Demographically, it began to change drastically, as waves of immigrants from Portugal, Italy, and China began to establish large communities within the city’s west end. Today Toronto’s cultural and ethnic diversity remains one of its most attractive qualities, and this wave of refugees and migrant workers in the 1950s was an important moment in steering the city towards its future. But culturally, Toronto of the 1960s (at the time, Canada’s second-largest city—until 1981, Montreal would hold on to that distinction) still bore the marks of its Protestant past. By 1961, the metropolitan region had doubled
from 900,000 to nearly two million people in just twenty years, an astonishing postwar growth that was part of the city’s massive urban expansion in the 1950s.

Toronto’s tactile urban environment in the 1960s was also a landscape in transition: the explosion of Brutalist architecture—raw concrete forms of aesthetic and structural innovation—physically altered Toronto’s geography and propelled it into a period of exploration and excitement. David Lieberman writes that concrete’s materiality was an expression of renewal, individualism, and optimism that the postwar period afforded: “Form was limited only by the sculptural ambition of the designers; architects and engineers had a material to shape and to mould.” But concrete also exposed the processuality of design, and of building, as “embedded in [concrete’s] presence was trace of its making.” Finnish architect Viljo Revell’s winning design for Toronto’s New City Hall (finished in 1965) luxuriates in the seeming plasticity of concrete, of its possible flows and fluid directions. Two soft-edged and curved towers, one taller than the other, cradle its central saucer-like council chamber; nearly fifty years on, its presence at the pulsing civic heart of the city is still paradoxically futuristic while at the same time emblematic of the idealism of the 1960s: the unevenness of the towers suggests growth and movement, while the spherical inner structure implies balance, equilibrium, and stability.

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53 In 1954, the greater Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto was incorporated—“Metro Toronto” as it was called (until its amalgamation in 1998 as “the megacity” of Toronto) included a number of towns and townships in the old city’s borders: Etobicoke, North York, Mimico, and others. While each retained their own lower forms of government, Metro Toronto’s highest appointed office was that of Chairman. Frederick Gardiner (namesake of the Gardiner Expressway, the city’s major throughway running east-west along its south edge, bordering Lake Ontario) was the region’s first Chairman, and oversaw many of the major initiatives in the 1950s that helped connect the municipalities together.
Toronto’s concrete cityscape materialized not only in its downtown core, but also its expanding (and now “inner”) suburbs—North York, Etobicoke and Scarborough are marked by Brutalist buildings, searing the city’s extensive development of the 1960s and 70s into permanence. The concrete explosion apocryphal with the completion of the CN Tower in 1976, a futuristic (and phallic) structure piercing the sky that encapsulated the movement’s upward purview, but also the audacity and arrogance for which it was criticized. “Where architecture has previously been built on a codified set of values for materials and techniques,” write Graeme Stewart and Michael McLelland, “concrete was inexpensive, locally produced and readily available, and it broke from established practice.”

Interestingly enough, an architect responsible for some of the city’s most noteworthy structures built in the 1960s was also an Estonian expatriate: Uno Prii. Prii, five years the junior of Kasemets, designed some 300 apartment buildings in Toronto, the most striking of which are found in the city’s Annex neighbourhood, all constructed during the 1960s. Bold, fluid, curvilinear, they are palpably resistant to the wave of modernist concrete flowing into Toronto during the decade. Prii’s most famous building remains at 20 Prince Arthur, a 22 storey high rise that is “massive, monumental, and shocking.” Supported by sixteen flying buttresses that fall with a tangible velocity as the eye follows them from the peak of the slope to the earth, Prii’s idea was to combine old and new—“medieval and modern.”

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57 Ibid.
In many ways, the changing physical dimensions of the city reflected the emergence of experimental thinking that flourished within an atmosphere of immense possibilities, at the same time surrounded by the reminders of Toronto’s colonial heritage—an always oscillating focus on the old and the new. As an affirmation of the rapid growth in the city’s arts, architecture, and infrastructure, Metro Toronto seemed to want to display its alignment with the avant-garde. The city’s 1961 brochure, 20,000 copies of which were made to be distributed far and wide as promotional materials for Toronto’s civic culture, departed from the usual depiction of urban bustle on its cover. The image on the 1961 cover, designed by Polish artist Imre Koroknay, is a topographic view of city as modernist collage, with the new images of Brutalist structures superimposed onto the city’s outline.

Figure 4.2. Koroknay’s brochure cover, printed in The Globe and Mail, June 23, 1961, 7.

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58 Koronkay himself was an émigré from old Europe, arriving (like Udo) to Canada in 1951, and worked at the Metro Planning Board during the 1960s before moving to teaching positions at Ryerson Polytechnic and the University of Toronto.
Canadian Composers Care If You Listen—Even the Serious Ones.

As Toronto’s profile became more and more complex alongside its rapid postwar growth into a major metropolitan centre of culture and commerce during the 1950s and 60s, the question of music’s role in that development became an increasingly urgent one. As I have thus far shown, the critical discourse surrounding listening culture oscillated back and forth along an axis where conservatism and the avant-garde rested at either terminus. Yet an equally important dimension to this conversation manifested in the perceived gap between composers and listeners—we have seen this aspect of Toronto’s listening culture hinted at implicitly in this chapter, in Kasemets’ comments about “superficial” listening skills; in Lady Eaton’s outrage at his presumptions about the disposition of Canadian audiences; in Kraglund’s litany of slings aimed at a generation of fraudulent experimentalists assailing a listening public with incoherent noise. Yet throughout the course of the decade, both critics and composers contributed to voicing their concerns about a seemingly irreconcilable disjuncture that characterized the relationship between composers and listeners. The final section of this chapter looks at how this conversation materialized as part of the critical debate about music in 1960s Toronto.

In July 1954, the *Globe* published a lengthy letter, submitted by the self-proclaimed “very amateur” composer William Philip Rowley, under the byline “The League of Composers and its Listeners.” The CLC, just in its third year of existence as Canada’s first lobbying body for composers, had become widely known for its advocacy efforts in the area of improving the working conditions for composers, and exploring new ways for them to access broader audiences; however, the CLC was explicitly modernist in purview in those early years, with the majority of composers aligning themselves
strongly with serial and twelve tone composition methods. Rowley’s letter highlights a number of relevant points with regard to the conservative tradition in Canadian music (following Keillor), and provides a glimpse into the problem of the “listening gap” that has, since the institutionalization of art music in Canada, factored consequentially into listening culture.

He writes, bluntly, that, “the fault lies in that Canadian composers—the serious ones—are trying to be both different and very, very modern, and that the devotees of the 12 tone scale have captured the League, with the result that the music they present, while it may please the avant-garde, has little meaning for the average listener.” Rowley continues, “The fault may lie to a great extent in the listener. But not entirely so; having been brought up in the classical masters, from Beethoven to Tchaikovsky, I could still appreciate the more modern Stravinsky and Milhaud when I first heard them. Some time I hope to sample Hindemith, Berg and Britten.” 59 Rowley implores a body “so august” as the CLC to mitigate its heavy dodecaphonic programs with lighter fare to attract a more diverse, casual, and “amateur” audience.

As Chapter 1 discusses, the plight of Canadian composers had attracted the attention of federal policymakers, with submissions to the Massey Commission influencing the outcome of that report. Canada’s surplus of “homegrown talent”—the growing number of young composers (and also more senior composers recently arrived from Europe as part of traumatic postwar diasporic movements)—had reached a critical mass where the weight of their collective influence (and needs) began to resonate within bureaucratic circles in Canada’s government. Yet, years hence in the late 1950s and 60s,

the reverberations of their cries for more access to audiences, more profile, and better infrastructural support had trickled down into local debates, where the reception of “difficult” music became parsed out in public channels.

In 1961, the year after Kasemets and John Beckwith assumed major roles in organizing the International Conference of Composers held in Stratford, Ontario, the topic of listeners and composers was the subject of a panel held at the annual meeting of the Canadian Conference of the Arts. Chaired by Louis Applebaum (who, as music director of the annual Stratford Festival, played no small administrative role in the 1960 conference), the panel debated whether or not “there was an abyss between the contemporary composer and his audience, how wide the gap was, and how to bridge it.” At the panel, two compositions were performed: Barbara Pentland’s *Duet* for piano four hands, and Kasemets’ *Logos* for flute and piano. According the Kraglund, who attended and wrote about the panel in the *Globe*, the discussion was mired in circumspection, with broadcasters, administrators, and composers laying blame in a number of different areas. To Jean-Marie Beaudet, head of programming at the CBC, the problem was a “lack of good music”; to composer Walter Hombuger, the problem remained in insufficiently educated listening publics; to Ezra Schabas, clarinetist and critic, audiences were fatigued with trying to understand composers preoccupied with the quintessentially modernist pursuit of self-expression.

As Kraglund reported, the panel discussion articulated the multivalent nature of the listening gap, which would remain, for the most part, unsutured throughout the better part of the 1960s. Paraphrasing Harry Somers in a column from February 1962, John

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61 Ibid.
Kraglund writes: “If the musical gaps—for listeners—between the beginning of the twentieth century and today were properly closed, there might be less reason to worry about the gap between audiences and contemporary composers.” Somers (speaking in interview with Kraglund) makes an observation about the reception of serial music in 1960s Toronto, that it isn’t especially a new phenomenon—simply that composers working in modernist idioms were facing the same challenges communicating to audiences as had their forebears at the outset of century. “How can audiences understand what is going on now when they have no knowledge of where the contemporary movement started?” asked Somers, intimating that the dissemination of twelve tone music in the present day is at its core a fraught pursuit.

For Somers, the problem persists largely as one of education amongst listeners, and the lack of a broad awareness of development in art music. Somers was of course not alone in addressing the “gap” by deflecting culpability away from composers; it is important to bear in mind that the 1950s in Canadian art music was a period that has become rhetorically configured as a trailblazing, “heroic” period by the annalists of Canadian music historiography. Certainly the fault lay not in the noble work of the modernist Canadian composer, entrenched in the cultural wilderness, but rather in wider socio-cultural strata.

Culpability, as many composers observed, could be found in antiquated educational paradigms. R. Murray Schafer—just 30 years old in 1962—speaking to a room full of secondary school teachers in 1962, remarked, “Since we live in a society where the performance of music is left to the few … it is obvious that most students

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should be trained as listeners. So it is only important that they be able to tell the difference between good and mediocre music.”

Schafer’s work in music education during the 1960s and 70s came in tandem with the exposure his own music received; as an early proponent of progressive, even experimental pedagogical methods, Schafer’s acerbic criticism of Canadian musical culture was matched by his tireless work to ameliorate listening habits among new generations. “We have at our disposal a broad, historical plain [sic] of music—a reservoir of nearly 2000 years of it,” Schafer is quoted as saying; “It is the duty of teachers to open this unlimited number of doors for children. And, in the process, contemporary music should be included.”

Indeed, Ten Centuries Concerts was founded on the assumption that “good” music transcended the temporalities of genre, period, style, and such. Part of Schafer’s project as a concert promoter and educator was, like Kasemets, to disentangle music from the entrenched value hierarchy that placed nineteenth-century masterworks at the very top of ladder. In the July 1967 issue of Musicanada (the monthly newsletter published throughout the latter part of the decade by the Canadian Music Centre), Schafer queried Canada’s self-perceived inferiority, and asked why a “competitive society” such as ours would “converge in cherishing this unanimous ambition” of musical legitimacy in the name of opera houses and symphony orchestras. “The answer is because Europe has such things. We stand transfixed before the European culture-embroidery:”

Could we not establish something else as a stronghold of civic or provincial pride to break the parade of symphony orchestras? What about a choir specializing in Renaissance music for one community; or a medieval concert for another, or for

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64 Ibid.
areas with ethnic groups, first-rate folk ensembles (before the whole heritage vanishes completely).  

The conundrum of the listening gap had, by the early part of the 1960s, become a topic of inquiry for writers outside of the small community of composers and their public. Recalling Arnold Rockman, who asked listeners to pick out the “music in the noise,” this question became metonymic of broader currents in the arts in postwar Toronto, where audiences—not just of music, but consumers of all forms of aesthetic expression—were being enjoined to nurture a deeper and more intellectual relationship with art. Robert Fulford, arguably the most influential newspaper writer of arts and culture in Toronto during the 1960s, entered into the debate early on. In 1961, he weighed in on the reception of dodecaphonic music, which was plagued by a conundrum of its own: namely, that serial music was at the same time an antiquated paradigm as it was incomprehensibly “modern” for listeners. In a column reviewing John Beckwith and Kasemets’ *The Modern Composer and His World* (the published conference proceedings of the 1960 International Composers’ Conference in Stratford), Fulford writes, “Twelve tone music—that is, the music of Schoenberg, Berg, Webern, and their followers—is regarded as almost old fashioned by the bright young men of music. They have moved on to serial music, electronic music, and other comparatively esoteric approaches to composition.” Tellingly, Fulford’s comment relays an unusual attention to detail that often escaped most arts pundits— parsing out the difference between twelve tone and serial systems. He continues, “But the audience—meaning the concert audience, not the large public—has hardly come within hailing distance of Schoenberg, who wrote much

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of his important work nearly half a century ago. Before the audience has even reached him, the composer has moved on.⁶⁶

Fulford’s column offers a richly contextual view of the situation, and on balance is sympathetic towards the unique situation facing composers of contemporary music. It is also prescient in its foreshadowing of the heated debates about what constituted musical performance, and what didn’t—debates that would often radiate outward from the polemic epicenter of Kasemets’ writing and concert promotion. The “extreme distance” between composer and listener, as Fulford writes, was a “problem of modern culture.” Here he draws a two-fold connection between music and other arts with respect to this problem:

One cause is the general tendency of modern art, whether it happens to be Ezra Pound’s poetry, Alban Berg’s music, or Wassily Kandinsky’s painting, to become academic and scholarly in its approach. The other is the general fragmentation of all culture and the gradual disappearance of a cultural consensus; more and more, experts disagree on what constitutes art. For the consumer, possibly, there are too many choices.⁶⁷

Yet, as Fulford notes, the urgency that impelled composers to keep this discussion vibrant in public debate was the result of the special demands placed on composers to move within infrastructural frameworks, and in fact remain reliant on them in ways other arts need not be:

[This problem] is found in its most painful form within the musical community, probably because music depends more heavily on audiences and patrons than other arts do. Anyone can rent a store and call it an art gallery. …Similarly, you can issue a book of poems or start a little magazine for a few hundred dollars. But assembling an orchestra, or preparing an electronic music studio, requires a great deal of human and financial resources. Thus the composer is dealing constantly with public authorities (universities, foundations, etc.) and it must become

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⁶⁷ Ibid.
especially evident to him that the representatives of these institutions have practically no idea what he is doing.68

Kasemets, in a review of pianist William Masselos’ concert at the Women’s Musical Club of Toronto on February 2nd, 1962, echoed the claim made by Fulford regarding the anachronistic and puzzling positioning of European dodecaphony in the postwar context in Toronto. Masselos had caught Kasemets’ ear by including Charles Ives’ first piano sonata on the program, and the critic was inspired to open his review by contextualizing Ives as a visionary mind set apart from luminaries of early twentieth-century modernism.

“No people 200 years hence, music of the 20th century will not mean Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Bartok or any of the hundreds of their lesser satellites. Their creation, significant as it is in its own way, will be regarded as the last consummation of the great tradition of the 18th and 19th centuries.”69 He continues (in a tone he would later adopt in promoting his own concerts—one over-zealous in its fetishization of progress): “What the future generations will consider as typical 20th century music is the one created by men with vision great enough to see the need for the reassessment of the functions of the elements of music, and with the genius to mold them into utterly new forms of expression.”70

The perplexing and persistent impasse that kept audience members from truly appreciating the work of their local, homegrown composers seemed, at least temporarily, bridged with a Toronto Symphony Orchestra concert featuring Karlheinz Stockhausen’s Kontrapunkte No. 1, on January 8—simply by virtue of the fact that it was played. In his

68 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
review of that concert, John Kraglund noted, “the only way that audiences can learn to appreciate contemporary music is by listening to it, which can, of course, be accomplished only if someone plays it.” Kraglund, demonstrating his even-handedness, used the opportunity in his review to address the listening gap by bringing up the very practical point that not enough contemporary music was available for listening audiences in Toronto during the 1960s. “To anyone aware of the diverse sounds of our times,” Kraglund writes, “there was nothing particularly strange about Stockhausen’s music, except that like most modern scores, its patterns and sonorities are not instantly recognizable. Only frequent hearings can make them so.”

Conclusion: Listening in the Incomplete City

So the gap in Toronto’s listening culture that kept composers and their audiences apart was the result of several factors that critics and composers alike identified throughout the early part of the decade: the relative paucity of concerts where contemporary music was performed; an insufficient contextual knowledge of musical culture by listeners (or, more bluntly, an insufficiently capable listening public); the incongruity of twelve tone and atonal music with the listening climate of 1960s Toronto; and lastly, as the first section of this chapter implies, a failure of the avant-garde to furnish audiences with music worth listening to. The tenor of Toronto’s listening culture, then, was dynamized by several countervailing narratives that created an extraordinary environment in which the very act of listening became attached to broader cultural contingencies. Toronto’s civic identity at the beginning of the 1960s hinged in part on

72 Ibid.
how it was to come to terms with the encroachment of the avant-garde, as the foment of creative activity revealed frictions between the city’s nineteenth-century heritage and its practitioners of experimental art and culture.

Yet, in the same way critics purported the paradoxically inhospitable climate of Toronto’s concert stages towards twelve tone music—which was at once too modern and too old for listeners—the same conditions had, by mid-decade, galvanized the scene for experimentalists. The Canada Council’s ninth annual report, released in 1966, allocated a noteworthy increase in funds to support avant-garde projects, to keep the avant-garde “at least in sight.” The Globe’s Brenda Large wrote, “It is not simply that our young people dismiss what a previous generation has expressed, but that they challenge the very means and allowed forms, the symphony, the three-act ballet, the square picture, by which that expression was made. Indeed, these imply that these may be museum forms which should now be in a museum.” That same year, however, critic Ken Winters wrote a scathing review of an appearance by John Cage in Toronto on May 13th at the Art Gallery of Toronto, in a concert organized by Kasemets. In his review in The Telegram, which ran under the byline “How to be Quaintly Avant-Garde,” he calls Cage “a museum piece” and dismissively notes “our own nice Udo Kasemets could not have given us a much tamer time.” Winters’ review is interesting not because of its offensively condescending rejection of Cage, but because it betrays a bored familiarity with the avant-garde, a sign that even by 1966 the combative discourse surrounding experimentalism had begun to grow wearisome.

74 Now the Art Gallery of Ontario.
In *The Arts This Week*, from January 1966, host David Secter ruminates that the city “is somehow incomplete, and demands participation.” Listening, then, would become the means through which Torontonians could express an agentive and participatory investment in civic culture. As composers and critics debated whether the avant-garde’s rise to prominence signaled either a death knell for serious art or the clarion call for revolution, listening was the hotly contested site where any such transformation would become manifest. As this chapter has shown, the early part of the 1960s witnessed a concentrated effort by composers and critics to take possession of this site—to shape the culture of listening in Toronto in the kiln of public debate.

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76 *The Arts This Week.*
CHAPTER 5.

MEN, MINDS, AND MUSIC: THE “HERCULEAN TASK” OF ACQUAINTING TORONTO WITH THE AVANT-GARDE

Introduction

By 1963, Udo Kasemets had taken up a position teaching piano and conducting at the Brodie School of Music and Dance, a busy private studio in north-central Toronto. The school was opened by the saxophonist Paul Brodie (who would later go on to considerable renown as one of the premier classical saxophonists of his generation) and his wife, Rima, a teacher and performer of modern dance.¹ The Brodie School was located in a former furniture store on Eglinton Avenue West, which is now where the terminus of the Allen Road empties out onto that busy lateral artery.²

Brodie’s school was humming with activity. It had six studios for private music instruction in the basement, and half of its teachers were members of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. Roughly 650 students passed through its doors every season. In the

¹ Paul Brodie (1934-2007) was born in Regina, and studied with Marcel Muse in Paris before returning to Toronto in 1960 looking to begin a career teaching. In a strange coincidence I would discover some years later, Rima passed away on June 5, 2010, in Toronto’s Sunnybrook Hospital, just a few kilometers from Udo’s apartment on Delisle Avenue, where I interviewed him that spring and summer.
² In the 1960s, the Allen Road (then the Spadina Expressway) became a cause célèbre for civic activists, led by the famed urbanist Jane Jacobs, who successfully led a lobbying effort, under the banner SSSOCCC (Stop Spadina Save Our City Coordinating Committee) to end construction on the proposed expressway that was to run south through the city’s centre. As part of Toronto’s massive investment into increasing its capacity to allow vehicular traffic move through and around the growing city in the 1950s (which resulted in the construction of Highway 401 to the north, Highway 404 running north-south along the Don Valley River, Highway 400 to the west, and the Gardiner Expressway, the city’s southernmost highway separating the waterfront from the rest of Toronto), the Spadina Expressway became a kind of bellwether for grassroots organizing that marked Toronto’s first wave of urban activism. Bill Kilbourn was an important part of the movement that influenced the city to cancel the remaining portion of the project, which eventually happened in 1971.
top floor, where Brodie and his wife lived, a small four concert series would take place in the Winter and Spring of that year, organized by Kasemets, that has become anecdotally referred to as Toronto’s first “all avant-garde” concert series: Men, Minds, and Music. Consisting of four Sunday evening concerts that happened once a month from January through April of 1963, the series was Kasemets’ first concerted effort to engender a shift in Toronto’s listening culture. By all accounts, Men, Minds, and Music was at best an ambiguously successful effort: financially, it was a disaster, and ran a deficit of nearly a thousand dollars (nearly $7800 adjusted for inflation); attendance at each of the concerts was far lower than Kasemets would have anticipated, with only a few dozen people in the audience at each performance; critically, the series was mostly panned as a failed experiment. The Telegram’s George Kidd, reviewing the final concert in April, captured the general consensus of the critics: “What was missing … was music one could remember.”

In this chapter, I offer an evaluation of the Men, Minds, and Music that focuses on the aspects of the series that contemporary commentators only mention in passing—namely, the compositions performed at each concert, and their place within the milieu of postwar experimentalism. Given the limited amount of space afforded to reviewers, the existing critique of the series remains incomplete, textured by the biases, attitudes, and assumptions each reviewer brought with them to the series. This chapter argues that despite overwhelmingly negative assessment of each concert—which betrays not only a hostility to many of the features Kasemets included as part of his curatorial vision for the series, but also an unfamiliarity with the composers and their works—Men, Minds, and Music...
Music remains an invaluable part of Toronto’s early encounter with the international avant-garde in the postwar period. This chapter is divided into two sections: I begin by placing the series within a larger context of experimental practice in the early 1960s: although Kasemets was setting a precedent in Toronto, other cities in the United States had already begun cultivating the kind of DIY ethos of presenting marginal musics and mixed-media performance. I look especially at the ONCE collective of Ann Arbor, Michigan, whose annual festivals of experimental art were a direct inspiration for Kasemets to try and initiate a similar forum for exposing Toronto listeners to the most forward-thinking “trends” (as Kasemets often called them) in post-serial musics. Second, I then follow with an ethnographic reconstruction of the concerts based on extant historical and archival materials, and look in some detail at the programming and commentary offered by Kasemets: each concert was meant to take on the feeling of an educational experience, with readings between the performances and visual objects set up in the performance space to create an immersive atmosphere for audience members, most of whom, Kasemets presumed, were listening to the ideas and sounds of the avant-garde for the first time. Finally, I assess the reception of Men, Minds, and Music: derisive, incredulous, and often mean spirited, this small collection of reviews by writers for The Toronto Daily Star, The Globe and Mail, and The Telegram amounts to the only critical writing on a series that was purported to be a radical intervention into the stifling atmosphere of Toronto’s musical scene.
Early Experimental Communities in North America

Udo Kasemets became an adherent to the thinking of John Cage in 1961. His conversion to Cage’s philosophies of sound, music, and performance happened during a trip to New York City, and the story is well known among Kasemets’ friends and colleagues. Kasemets of course knew of Cage prior to this: by 1961 Cage’s notoriety was widespread—his name was synecdochical with the avant-garde—and Kasemets himself referred to Cage as the *enfant terrible* of American music in his summary of the concerts presented at the Stratford Festival.4 But it was in that year, 1961, when Kasemets was sent to New York as an envoy to adjudicate a young composer’s competition, and made a visit to the Eighth Street Book Shop, located on the corner of Eighth and MacDougal in Greenwich Village. The Eighth Street Book Shop during the 1950s through to the 1970s was a countercultural landmark, a kind of “literary gathering spot reflecting and in turn influencing the latest local, national, and international vagues in everything from poetry to astrophysics.”5 Kasemets tells the story thus:

Well, I remember that quite acutely because at that time there were two organizations: BMI and CAPAC. I was a member of the BMI. They sent me to—they had always, every year, they had a competition for young composers in New York. So a member of Canada would be also on the jury. And I was sent there several years in a row, and this one time I arrived in New York, and at that time, there was an Eighth Street bookstore in the Village. And that was a bookstore that had all kinds of fascinating information always. And every time when I went to New York, that was my first destination. And this one time, I went there and there was this book, *Silence*, and I picked it up and I went to my hotel room and found so fascinating that all the time I was there, I didn’t go to any theater or art show or anything. I just stayed in my hotel room except, yes, I went to the office to do my jury duty but otherwise I always went back to my hotel room and was fascinated

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4 Udo Kasemets and John Beckwith, eds., *The Modern Composer and His World* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 167. In conversation with me, Kasemets mentioned that he felt embarrassed at having his description of Cage this way remain in print, after all these years.
by that book. And at that time, all that the way not only just the subject matter of Cage’s writing, but also the way—it was at once sort of a composite book of ideas and sounds and scores and whatever. It was just absolutely fascinating and as I said, I didn’t put it away. I just kept reading it at all hours and that changed my complete attitude about all the questions I still had at that time.  

This discovery of Cage’s ideas, appropriately happenstance, would be the single most important event in Kasemets’ creative life, leading to a radical conceptual shift in the foundational notions he had held of sound, music, and art:

Well of course, I came from Europe. But the real influence, the spiritual influence or whatever you want to call it, is purely American. It is John Cage, as you know. And John Cage is, unfortunately, not understood in the proper way even by his aficionados, because he’s called always like a rebel and all these kinds of things. Cage, essentially, really from the beginning on, kept asking the same kind of questions that inspired me to ask these questions. Yes, I switched my direction after I read *Silence* and just for this reason that his insights were so enlightening and profound, really in that direction, that: what is music, and how does it fit into our time? That has been the one trend that I have been following all the time.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Kasemets reviewed *Silence* in a lengthy and even-handed (but not altogether laudatory) essay published in *The Canadian Music Journal*. *Silence* is a key text of mid-century experimentalism, encapsulating the basic premises that would come to define Cagean aesthetics in the ensuing decades: as a collection of writings, lectures, and thoughts, *Silence* acts as a kind of grimoire of Cage’s early thinking, devoid of intention or any overt narrative trajectory. It is partly autobiographical, detailing the early history of experimentalism in the United States, but largely colloquial, quizzical, and at best provocative in its formlessness. Kasemets treated the work as a manual, one with talismanic power, for rethinking his vision for experimentalism’s potential in his adopted homeland of Canada.

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6 Interview with the author, July 20, 2010.
7 Interview with the author, March 14, 2010.
By the early 1960s, when Kasemets experienced his volte face with Cage, experimental praxis had begun to take hold in communities throughout North America thanks to an increasingly active and eclectic number of artists that had access to the means and materials for engaging in increasingly radical art practices. Cage was, by and large, the most influential figure that inspired practitioners in the early 1960s, due to his visibility and notoriety as the quintessential American maverick straddling the blurry divide of modernist and post-modernist musical thinking. As an instructor at the New School for Social Research in New York in the late 1950s, Cage’s teaching was instrumental in giving rise to Fluxus in the early 1960s: George Maciunas, Jackson Mac Low, Dick Higgins, and others took classes with Cage on experimental music there, and Fluxus became a model for inter- and mixed-media art interventions, conceptualist practices that challenged deep-seated notions of conventional performance situations.

In 1962, the composer and choreographer Robert Dunn, who had worked with both Cage and Merce Cunningham, was involved in the formation of the Judson Dance Theatre. Its name came from the Judson Memorial Church in New York’s Greenwich Village where the company, made up of a loose collection of young dancers who had taken Dunn’s choreography class at Cunningham’s studio, performed between 1962 and 1964. The Judson Dance Theatre, in like mind with Fluxus, began questioning the parameters of traditional and modern dance of the 1930s and 40s, and more importantly, flourished in the welcoming space of the church—outside the boundaries of academic or institutional legitimacy. As Sally Banes writes, “the Judson situation was deliberately undefined, unrestricted,” and that within the collective,

Improvisation, spontaneous determination, and the use of chance techniques were not simply formal devices, but carried political meaning. This was a group that
whole-heartedly rejected the hierarchical organization of the modern dance world it had become a part of, and by extension, the authoritarian elements of American society its generation had begun to defy.\(^9\)

The impetus behind Judson came directly from Cage, as Burt Ramsay notes in his study *Judson Dance Theatre: Performative Traces* (2006). Dunn’s class began with a study of Cage’s *Silence*, in particular a passage where Cage defines composition (although Ramsay does not say which specific definition from *Silence*, as Cage offers many observations about composition throughout the book). Ramsay describes the avant-gardism of Judson as “more polemic and disturbing” than the non-intentionality of Cage, and the avant-garde of indifference that was characteristic of historical forbears such as Duchamp and Erik Satie (two of Cage’s well-known influences).\(^10\)

In an interview with me, Kasemets made note of his seeing the Judson Dance Theater for the first time, in 1961 or 1962 at the ONCE Festival in Ann Arbor, Michigan.\(^11\) The ONCE festival and the collective of composers behind it were by far the most direct inspiration for Udo Kasemets in the early 1960s to establish a presence in Toronto for experimentalism.

When I was settled somewhere around here, I became aware, I think through reading something in one of the musical magazines of that time, *Musical America* or whatever that was, that there were some interesting people working in Ann Arbor of all places. And my parents, at that time, lived in Detroit, so I went to visit them, and I made contact with some of the people in Ann Arbor. And they were Gordon Mumma, Robert Ashley, and well, a number of other people. At the same time, there were also filmmakers, like [George] Manupeli who later on came


\(^11\) Interview with the author, July 20, 2010. “And it was also in Ann Arbor where I had the first connection with the Judson Dance Company. That was another really completely mind-breaking event. I remember that they had been brought into one of the festivals that the ONCE group organized. They were doing an afternoon performance and an evening performance, and I went to both of them. The ONCE people said that they were flabbergasted by all these people, Lucinda Childs and whoever were partners in that event.”
and worked at York University here, and different people in different artistic disciplines.\textsuperscript{12}

Kasemets, in 1960, became acquainted with ONCE founders Gordon Mumma and Robert Ashley at the Stratford Conference. As he recalled, however that initial meeting was icy:

Kasemets, then a senior presence in the Canadian art music community, brushed off the young composers:

\begin{quote}
I mean actually, it was in Stratford where Gordon Mumma came up to me and told me that there was this group of young composers from Ann Arbor that wanted to participate in that festival in some way, and I kind of turned them down. And later on we sort of ... became friends and connected.\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

In another interview, Kasemets described the importance of his visits to Ann Arbor:

\begin{quote}
As I said, these small places—I mean you were asking earlier about small places in Canada—butAnn Arbor was a small place. But it happened to have, at that time, interesting people who were asking questions and connected right away with people in other places. At the same time, [Morton] Subotnick and Pauline Oliveros became very keen about establishing electronic studios, and they did that in California.\textsuperscript{14} Ashley and Mumma started the thing going in Ann Arbor and connected with Alvin Lucier, who was at Brandeis [University], and there was a fascinating development that happened at that time: the real questioning of those issues that mattered for the real substance of the arts of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

ONCE was, as Richard James writes in an early article on the group, a microcosm of the radicalism, activism, and grassroots orientation that characterized much of the decade’s cultural zeitgeist.\textsuperscript{16} Its yearly festivals of multi-media performances of avant-garde music, dance, and theatre which ran from 1961 through to 1966 were venues for the composers

\textsuperscript{12} Interview with the author, June 30, 2010.
\textsuperscript{13} Interview with the author, July 20, 2010.
\textsuperscript{14} In 1962, the San Francisco Tape Music centre opened, which acted as a locus for West Coast experimentalists interested in exploring the possibilities of magnetic tape as a compositional medium. It became an important centre in the early part of the decade of community building for composers like Steve Reich, Terry Riley, and Pauline Oliveros. See David Bernstein, \emph{The San Francisco Tape Music Center: 1960s Counterculture and the Avant-Garde} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).
\textsuperscript{15} Interview with the author, July 20, 2010.
(Mumma, Ashley, George Caccioppo, Donald Scavarda, Roger Reynolds, and others) to premiere new works, but also became increasingly magnetizing events towards which international figures were drawn. But it was Ann Arbor’s welcoming environment, and small size, that helped ignite the excitement around ONCE.

As much as Kasemets took his cue from ONCE, and the kinds of things that could be accomplished in modest circumstances, with limited means, in a small town, James makes a rather important observation: it was the Stratford Festival, where Mumma, Ashley, and Caccioppo travelled in 1960—and where Kasemets coldly ignored them—that served as the “final impetus” for the group to begin their activities. There, they gained exposure for the first time to the music and ideas of Varèse, Berio, Otto Leuning, and others; and as James writes, the experience “inspired further discussion of ways to bring more modern music, including their own, to Ann Arbor audiences.”

**Men, Minds, and Music: an Examination of the Series**

In the intervening two and a half years between Stratford, and when Kasemets began planning for Men, Minds, and Music, the visits to Ann Arbor bolstered the composer’s enthusiasm for the viability of programming experimentalist works in even the most hostile of environments. In an interview, he recalled to me:

Ann Arbor really was the kind of place where I was able to learn all that was going on here. I met Cage there; I met Lucier, Rauschenberg, and different dancers and choreographers at that time, and so on. Because their festivals were really full of that kind of energy that one needs in arts. And it was in Ann Arbor, and the Ann Arbor people and the ONCE group that inspired me to get going here, and gave me all kinds of courage and information about it, and the contacts that I developed.

17 James, “ONCE,” 368-369.
18 Interview with the author, July 20, 2010.
The press releases for Men, Minds, and Music, which Kasemets circulated to journalists in late 1962, position the series within a wider cultural milieu of experimental practices in other arts, of which he hoped Toronto audiences would have been at least somewhat cognizant:

While the persistent work of Toronto art gallery owners and some more enterprising theatre directors, Torontonians have been well in touch with up-to-date trends in visual and stage arts, live performances of musical compositions reflecting the spirit and thinking of our age have been totally missing on the local scene. To partly fill this void is the aim of [Men, Minds, and Music].

In another, he enumerates a list of artists and movements which had acquired a cultural cache followed by the developments in postwar music which lingered in obscurity for Toronto listeners:

Ionsecu, Pollock, Joyce, action painting, Albee, Snow, theatre of the absurd, Cummings, Tharrats, Genet, Kline, Neo Dadaism, Beckett, Pound, Bloore, collage, Stankiewitz, Kafka, Gelber—these are just a few names and terms from the realm of the theatre, literature, and visual arts which have already become household bywords to Torontonians interested in artistic trends of the day.

At the same time their equivalents in the world of music—Ives, Nono, musique concrete, Partch, Joachim, indeterminacy, Stockhausen, Varèse, randomness, Cage, Boulez, sine-wave, Cardew, Wolff, Ashley, parameter, Garant, Brown, ONCE, Berio, Mumma, Feldman, graphic score, Anhalt, Reynolds, change—have had very little, if any, exposure in Toronto.

Kasemets’ public statements about the series set its antagonistic tone before the first note of music was played in the opening concert in January of 1963. Rather than simply programming “challenging” music, the curatorial vision of the series included other elements aimed at illuminating the minds of Torontonians, with readings by the featured composers, commentary by Kasemets himself, and visual displays related to the music of each concert.

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20 Ibid.
Although Men, Minds, and Music has been referred to in print and colloquially as Toronto’s “first avant-garde” concert series, the characterization is, in part, apocryphal. The League of Composers had been programming concerts as early as the mid-1950s of new Canadian works, which could readily be called avant-garde; the Ten Centuries Concerts series, which had its inaugural season in 1962, was just as daring in its collage-like juxtaposition of (often obscure) music from different periods and genres. R. Murray Schafer, one of the series’ founders, recalled that “in the 1960s Toronto audiences were as ignorant of medieval music as they were of twentieth-century music,” and Ten Centuries Concerts lasted a long six seasons during the decade. What distinguished Men, Minds, and Music as a particularly controversial intervention was the overt polemical (and political) tone that surrounded it; Kasemets, in his press releases, implicated the whole of Toronto’s art music community—the composers, performers, listeners, and critics—in describing its shortcomings. Of course, as a critic and editorial columnist for The Toronto Daily Star, he had been doing much of the same for the past two years.

Yet, Kasemets’ strategy piqued the interest of the critics. The Globe’s John Kraglund made a brief but charged mention of the series in print nearly six weeks before the first concert. In a statement that encapsulates the conservatism and skepticism Kasemets was aiming to counter with the series, he wrote, “The Brodie School of Music and Dance has decided to undertake the Herculean task of acquainting Toronto with the so-called avant-garde schools.” Georg Kidd, in The Telegram, interviewed Paul Brodie in a column the day before the opening concert. “‘It would seem that we have become too traditional in our listening habits,’ Brodie says; ‘I think the time has come for us to sit

back and expose ourselves to what is described as avant-garde. … It may not have the melodic of a Tchaikovsky [sic] but it is a new phase which we can no longer ignore if we are to grow musically’.”

This mix of expectation and foreboding set the tone for the first concert in the series, which took place on a seasonably cold night in the middle of winter, on January 27th. Getting to Brodie’s school for an 8:30pm concert in the early 1960s would have felt a longer journey than in the Toronto of today. Only one subway line ran in the city in 1963—up Yonge Street, from Union Station in the downtown core north to Eglinton Avenue in the north. The school, at 1310 Eglinton West, would still be a 20 minute bus ride from the station (the 32 Eglinton West route, still active today), sitting along a desolate stretch of closed storefronts amidst the tumult of the Spadina Expressway’s doomed construction. Driving would be the quicker option from downtown, but still, as the Star’s Anne Marshall made sure to note, the trek that far north to for those curious enough to see what Udo Kasemets had planned was “bitter.”

For the first concert in Men, Minds, and Music, the entire program featured works by the American proto-experimentalist Charles Ives. The first half of the concert was divided into two presentations of a selection of Ives’ songs, performed by soprano Catherine Hindson and Kasemets at the piano, with readings by Kasemets from Ives’ Essays Before a Sonata. Following the intermission, the American pianist Lawrence Smith performed the Concord Sonata, Ives’ iconic tribute to the nineteenth-century Transcendentalist school of American philosophers Emerson, Hawthorne, Louisa May

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and Bronson Alcott, and Thoreau. The 23-year-old flautist and composer Robert Aitken, who would play an important role in the series, was present to perform the flute part of the third movement.

Kasemets began the evening by reading from the prologue to Ives’ *Essays*, although which passages he chose remain unknown. In the prologue, Ives asks a number of questions about perception, musical taste, and the efficacy of so-called program music in furnishing discrete aural images to a listener: “How far afield can music go and keep honest as well as reasonable or artistic? Is it a matter limited only by the composer's power of expressing what lies in his subjective or objective consciousness? Or is it limited by any limitations of the composer?” In effect, Ives is proposing an almost poststructural reading of music, in that its strength as a communications medium lies in its *inability* to convey singular meanings, or embody and reflect “moral goodness,” or “high vitality.” He concludes the prologue with a series of challenges to readers:

Can music do more than [translate into sound notions of “moral goodness” and “high vitality”]? Can it do this? and if so who and what is to determine the degree of its failure or success? The composer, the performer (if there be any), or those who have to listen? One hearing or a century of hearings?—and if it isn’t successful or if it doesn’t fail what matters it?—the fear of failure need keep no one from the attempt for if the composer is sensitive he need but launch forth a countercharge of “being misunderstood” and hide behind it.

It is not difficult to understand the appeal Ives’ writing would have had for Kasemets, and why Ives’ music would have been an ideal platform upon which Kasemets could launch his series. The topics about the value of music in culture which played out so forcefully in Toronto’s critical forums, and the criteria with which critics judged live performances, hinged on the very notions Ives was challenging in *Essays*. In fact, as

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25 Ibid., 9.
Christopher Bruhn has recently argued, Ives’ vision for the *Concord Sonata* was as much informed by early twentieth-century experimental psychology as it was by nineteenth-century transcendentalism. Bruhn aligns Ives’ sonata with the philosophy of William James (1842-1910), who explored a multiplicitous functioning of the human mind, and especially James’ notion of a pluralistic universe: “the fringed images that constitute the stream of thought, with their multidirectional and multidimensional relations.” Bruhn argues that Ives was attempting in the *Concord Sonata* (and other works composed around the same time) to restore the place of “vagueness” to the musical experience, that Ives himself maintained a restless and unstable relationship with the work throughout his life.

The seven songs Kasemets and Hindson performed come from Ives’ massive collection of tunes that the composer wrote throughout the course of his life, edited and compiled in various collections. Commentators have described Ives’ songs as among the most important works in his oeuvre, constituting an autobiographical portrait reflecting Ives’ interests, boyhood experiences, and compositional methods—quotation, collage, polytonality, and experiments in formal structures. Kasemets and Hindson ordered the songs from earliest (“Walking,” from 1902) to latest (“The Greatest Man,” from 1921), perhaps as a way of demonstrating to audiences the developments in Ives’ writing over the course of the first two decades of the century.

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27 Ibid., 193.
28 For instance, see David Nicholls, review of *129 Songs* by Charles Ives; H. Wiley Hitchcock; Richard Crawford, in *Notes* 62, no. 3 (March 2006), 794-796.
29 The other songs programmed were “The Indians” (1912), “The See’r” (1913), “Serenity” (1919), “Maple Leaves” (1920), and “Evening” (1921).
In the context of the larger philosophical questions about music, space, and perception that Kasemets would pursue through his integration of Cage and especially McLuhan throughout the 1960s, the inclusion of Ives at the outset of the series helps us draw connections between this first event and Kasemets’ continued activities in the ensuing years. The concert program for January 27 includes detailed information about Ives, major biographical events, as well as references for future reading and listening. The organization of the concert certainly prefigures Kasemets’ predisposition with marking experimentalism’s chronology—one that would make itself most apparent in his index to Canavangard, published in 1967, where he outlines major events in Canada.

Here we get a sense of a journey into the present from older modes of listening through the prism of Ives’ maverick mind, not so subtly hinted at with the first piece, “Walking,” through to the irresolute complexity of Ives’ “endless experiment,” the *Concord*.30

A month later, on February 24th, Men, Minds, and Music’s second concert featured a decidedly more radical program of experimental compositions, and thematically was focused on questions about notation, form, and indeterminate compositional processes: “‘Action’ or ‘chance’ music will be the order of the day,” read a preview in the *Star* the day before Sunday evening’s program.31 The first half of the night was dedicated to the music and writing of John Cage; in between performances of *Suite for Toy Piano*, *The Wonderful Widow of 18 Springs*, and *Amores*, Kasemets read excerpts from Cage’s essays (all of which appear in *Silence*) “Experimental Music,” “Lecture on

Nothing,” and, continuing to evince his affinity towards situating experimentalism in its historical context, an excerpt from “History of Experimental Music in the United States.”

The second half of the concert featured two recent pieces: Cornelius Cardew’s *Octet ’61 for Jasper Johns* (1961), which Kasemets realized for piano and voice, employing another of Cage’s essays from *Silence*, “2 Pages, 122 Words on Music and Dance”; and Karlheinz Stockhausen’s *Zyklus für einen Schlagzeuger*, which received its premier only a few years earlier in 1959. Kasemets began the second part of the evening with more reading—excerpts from Cardew’s “Notation-Interpretation, etc.,” and the concert space was furnished with a blown-up print from one of Cardew’s graphic scores.

Cage had delivered “Experimental Music” as an address in 1957 at the Music Teachers’ National Association meeting in Chicago, and it remains one of his most important writings. It appeared in print for the first time in the brochure to his 25th anniversary concert at New York’s Town Hall the following year—a milestone in Cage’s career—and it outlines the reasons that Cage came to accept the category of “experimental” music. Experimentalism denotes for Cage a critical shift from composer to listener, and this has been a criterion which has continued to define experimental music more than any other. Cage writes:

> What has happened is that I have become a listener and the music has become something to hear. Many people, of course, have given up saying “experimental” about this new music. Instead, they either move to a halfway point and say “controversial” or depart to a greater distance and question whether this “music” is music at all.32

Cage describes the importance of non-intentionality of sound, and the ramifications that holds for bridging the divide between art and life. When one is able to make a difficult

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“psychological turn” in disavowing oneself of a desire to possess sound, a world of possibility becomes available to any listener. This turn, as Cage writes,

seems at first to be a giving up of everything that belongs to humanity—for a musician, the giving up of music. This psychological turning leads to the world of nature, where, gradually or suddenly, one sees that humanity and nature, not separate, are in this world together; that nothing was lost when everything was given away. In fact, everything is gained. In musical terms, any sounds may occur in any combination and in any continuity.33

The short essay concludes with one of Cage’s most well-known statements regarding the autonomy of sound in this new field of compositional praxis: the paradoxical notion of “purposeful purposeless or purposeless play:”

This play, however, is an affirmation of life—not an attempt to bring order out of chaos nor to suggest improvements in creation, but simply a way of waking up to the very life we’re living, which is so excellent once one gets one’s mind and one’s desires out of its way and lets it act of its own accord.34

Following the reading—although, again, it is not known which passages Kasemets chose, but those quoted above contain some of Cage’s key observations in the text—Kasemets performed Cage’s Suite for Toy Piano. The Suite dates from 1948, written while Cage was teaching at Black Mountain College, and showcases Cage’s inventiveness while working within extreme limitations, using a register of only a minor 9th (e below middle C to the F above) and no accidentals. Suite for Toy Piano was originally an accompaniment to “Diversion,” a dance suite composed by Merce Cunningham, and is an exceedingly accessible piece for even the most skeptical of listeners: ostensibly a work whose liveliness comes from Cage’s use of rhythm and meter, it is above all a pleasant six or seven minutes of happy music. The internal motion created by Cage’s shifting meters and rubato indications give the piece a strangely

33 Ibid., 7.
34 Ibid., 11.
meditative yet unstable rotational inertia, and the Suite has a distinctly modal quality that seems to emerge as a result of its imposing and “inescapable diatonicism.”

Cage’s Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs, like the Suite, makes use of a small amount of material—the voice part contains only three notes (B, A, and E), the song is only a few minutes long in performance, and perhaps most demandingly, the pianist must play only on the outside of the instrument, using knuckles to execute the constantly shifting rhythms of the accompaniment. Cage chose a passage from Joyce’s Finnegans Wake to set for the soprano Janet Fairbank, who commissioned the work after meeting Cage at the Chicago Institute of Design in 1941 or 1942, and the song became one of his most-performed works. Lauriejean Reinhardt notes that Cage worked with the syntax of the text (capitalizing every letter), and removed most of the punctuation from Joyce’s words, resulting in a “depersonalization of Joyce’s literary ‘voice,’ and an early intimation perhaps of Cage’s desire to release art from the constraints of individual taste and self-expression.” Indeed, Cage instructs the singer to not use any vibrato, and the effect the vocal line takes is an incantatory and almost ritual quality. Most importantly, the Wonderful Widow is among the most explicit of Cage’s works to draw attention away from the complexity of pitch, and towards the piano’s percussive capacities.

The *Wonderful Widow*, in the context of the program, may have acted for Kasemets as a bridge to the third work of Cage’s to be programmed, *Amores* for prepared piano and percussion. *Amores* is a four-movement work, and is a study of rhythmic densities and timbral variations between the percussive sonorities of the prepared piano and the two inner movements for percussion trio. *Amores* is, like the *Wonderful Widow*, one of Cage’s most critically well-received early works (dating from 1943), lauded for its precision, economy, and clarity of vision.\(^\text{38}\) Douglas Kahn notes that *Amores*, a piece of remarkable quietude and placidity, was one of Cage’s ways of escaping the “Age of Noise” during the Second World War.\(^\text{39}\) The bookending movements for solo piano have a tendency to sound mechanized, thanks to Cage’s instructions for preparations, with the inner movements for percussion trio having an overwhelmingly natural sound pallet. The overall impression is, as Tom Delio tells us, a presentation of organic and inorganic elements\(^\text{40}\)—a composition that completely eschews any of the tonal specificity of Western music while at the same time bringing in natural and artificial sonorities into dialogue with each other. This merging, Delio suggests, is a more corrective reading of the false oppositions of modernist (natural) and postmodernist (unnatural) studies; in fact the two should be viewed as integrated, interrelated, and coexistent within the continuum of twentieth century music.

Taken as an introductory triptych of Cage’s early works for Toronto audiences, Kasemets was as accommodating as he was provocative: choosing relatively short, quasi-


tonal, and totally through-composed pieces would have been a strategic move in acclimatizing listeners—or perhaps providing a false sense of assuredness for them—in advance of the more aggressively experimental compositions by Cardew and Stockhausen in the second half. But the three brief pieces exemplify the most radical philosophical aspects of early Cagean thinking: first, and most readily, is a reimagining of the piano’s supremacy in concert music—the *Suite for Toy Piano*, with the inevitable juxtaposition it beckons with a standard concert piano, neuters that instrument’s expressive and harmonic capabilities within a prison of diatonicism; further, if we consider a performance of the *Suite* as a multi-modal perceptual event, the proportional disjuncture of the toy piano’s miniature presence on stage being played by a grown adult seems to playfully, if not entirely without a hint of malice, question how seriously we should take the piano. Second, not once in the *Wonderful Widow* and *Amores* do we hear a single “natural” note from the piano. Instead, its presence on stage is doubly neutered—by the child’s version of the instrument that opened the concert as well as by the inaccessibility to the sounds the audience would have expected to hear.

So a decidedly meticulous curatorial vision appears to have guided Kasemets’ programming of the concerts, and the second half transitions to a focus on indeterminate structures. Cardew’s *Octet ’61 for Jasper Johns* offers performers an almost overwhelming array of choices, and is at its core an almost pedantic study in interpretation. The score (published in the January 1962 volume of *The Musical Times*) consists of sixty numbered musical events, with events 1 and 61 being a point of confluence in its cyclical structure.
Figure 5.1. Excerpt of Cornelius Cardew’s *Octet ’61 for Jasper Johns*, printed in *The Musical Times* 103, no. 1427 (January 1962), 36.

Cardew indicates that the score may be played by anyone, for any length of time, and that the events can be read either front to back, or back to front. A series of signs precede the events, which performers can apply at their discretion. Yet, as Cardew warns in the performance instructions, the piece is anything but free or improvisatory, but rather a call for interpretive loyalty in working with the chimerical performance notes. Its identity hinges on the execution of one particular sign, which performers are asked to use only once:
beginning to the end if you are reading backwards) and may be played for any length of time. End anywhere.

Figure 5.2. Excerpt of performance instructions, printed in *The Musical Times* 103, no. 1427 (January 1962), 35.

He writes, “the piece will be known and remembered (if at all) as ‘the piece where something peculiar happens in the middle.’ Any composer or potential composer interpreting the piece and wishing to take the problem of form on his own shoulders will probably interpret [the sign] at either the beginning or the end.” Cardew’s politics read clearly—as perhaps the most overtly radical experimentalist of the mid-twentieth century, his works are aimed almost militantly at concrete overhauls of the performance conventions of “works.” His most notoriously open work *Treatise*—a 193-page score of geometric shapes that unfold along a linear axis, and initially devoid of any performance instructions—was created during the mid-1960s, and poses basic semantic and philosophical questions to performers. In the instructions for *Octet ‘61*, Cardew offers a short polemic about the impasse facing performers and composers at mid-century:

If the most important function of a composer were the stimulation of an interpreter, this piece would be a composition. The stimulation of the interpreter is a facet of composition that has been disastrously neglected. Disastrously under-stimulated performances of contemporary music are the result (for here, past glories cannot act as stimuli). When performed, the piece may be judged as a musical experience (sounds brought together by human agency) and thrown down the drain. No one is to blame. My reputation is free to suffer. This piece is not gilt-edged. 41

It would be impossible to reconstruct Kasemets’ realization of *Octet*, save for some general guesswork, as no sketches remain extant in Kasemets’ archive. At best, we

can assume that the melodic content would have been derived from the cells outlined in Cardew’s score—likely performed on the already modified piano that would have required preparation for Cage’s *Amores*. However, Kasemets made one rather brilliant choice in using Cage’s “2 Pages, 122 Words on Music and Dance”: Cardew’s score contains sixty-one cells, so we can favorably assume that two words would have been paired to each event given that the only formal direction is to join the piece from its beginning to its end by using the same event as the first and last event. The number of words in Cage’s essay was arrived at by chance operations,\(^{42}\) and lends itself to the kind of atomized, paratactical structure of *Octet*. As it appeared in *Silence* (it was originally printed on two different sheets of paper in 1957, which factored in to how Cage visually laid out the text), the first page of the essay appears approximately thus:

To obtain the value  
of a sound, a movement,  
measure from zero. (Pay  
attention to what it is,  
just as it is.)  
A bird flies.  
Slavery is abolished.  
The woods  
A sound has no legs to stand on.  
The word is teeming: anything can happen.\(^{43}\)

Stockhausen’s *Zyklus* complements *Octet* especially well on the program as a piece that like many of Cardew’s graphical works, is an example of “composing processes as opposed to composing individual works.”\(^{44}\) The score consists of sixteen unnumbered pages (one of which is marked by a double bar line), with each page

\(^{42}\) Cage, *Silence*, 95.  
\(^{43}\) Ibid.  
representing a period in the work; there are thus 17 periods forming the basic structure of *Zyklus*. The form itself is (also like *Octet*) cyclical, hence the title, and performers are allowed to start on any page of the score, mirroring the arrangement of percussion instruments around the player on stage. The performer reads the work from left to right, and upon arriving at the final note (the last note preceding whichever the first they began on), then reads right to left until the piece has been played backwards.


*Zyklus* has become a central work in the canon of twentieth-century experimentalism as one of the first pieces for solo percussion, but also for the possibilities it presents for interpreters. Stockhausen himself conceded that the formal design of *Zyklus*—nine degrees of statistical distribution enacted as bandwidths outlining
minimal and maximal values—needn’t be understood. Yet as B. Michael Williams suggests, “the cyclic form of Zyklus can be perceived on the most obvious level through the visual observance of the performer moving around the circular arrangement of instruments, completing the cycle at the same spot it began.”

So in both the programming of Men, Minds, and Music’s second concert, and across the first two concerts in general, it becomes clear that Kasemets had in mind a kind of long-term plan that was beginning to take shape. Starting with Ives—the iconic original twentieth-century maverick, whose musical language foreshadowed postmodernist tropes of pastiche, jarring and atemporal quotation, and the insistent blurring of high art and folk idioms that materialized decades later—and transitioning into Cage seems obvious enough; but even within the second concert we can trace the lines of inquiry that were being prioritized by experimentalists: the presumption of instrumental hierarchy in art music; the increasing appeal of non- and indeterminately pitched sounds as loci of inventive potential; cyclical and indefinite forms; and notational methods being used as a means of generating an infinite diversity of performances of the same composition.

In the series’ third and fourth concerts, the programming became far more eclectic, and included mostly music by Kasemets’ colleagues. Kasemets also refrained from including any readings in these two last concerts, which might be construed as a sign of fatigue on his part: the series was not going well, and a short article that appeared in the Star hinting that both Kasemets and Brodie had at one point abandoned plans for

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46 B. Michael Williams, “‘Nr. 9 Zyklus,’” *Percussive Notes* 60 (June 2001), 67.
continuing. Kasemets’ notes reveal substantial overhead, including large performing fee for Lawrence Smith, the American pianist who travelled to Toronto to perform the Concord. Yet Brodie managed to secure backing for the remaining two concerts, and they went ahead as scheduled. In the remaining examination of the concerts, I offer some thoughts on a selection of the pieces (rather than discussing every work) to reinforce this chapter’s argument that Kasemets’ series was meant to be conceived in its totality.

The March 17 concert began with a rather bold trio of works for solo flute, performed by the young Robert Aitken: Debussy’s Syrinx, Edgard Varèse’s Density 21.5, and Luciano Berio’s Sequenza No. 1, three pieces that are complementary to each other as benchmarks of new music. Electronic Composition No. 4 by Kasemets’ colleague Istvan Anhalt followed, and the concert’s second half showcased music by ONCE composers Gordon Mumma and Robert Ashley: two of Mumma’s Mographs for piano, and Ashley’s Details for two pianists (“a pair of simultaneous monologues, simultaneous decisions” and a screening of ONCE-affiliated filmmaker George Manupeli’s experimental film The House (which featured an electronic score by Ashley).

Varèse’s Density 21.5 was written in 1936 for flautist Georges Barrère, and specifically the platinum flute he had developed (21.5 is the molecular density of platinum). Like Syrinx, Density 21.5 showcases the flute’s timbral and registral dynamics, but with a strict observance by the performer on the dynamic markings to

48 Aitken has gone on to a long and distinguished international career as a performer, composer, clinician, and concert organizer (of New Music Concerts).
bring out the diverse profile of moods in the work. Varèse’s piece, as Roberto Fabbriciani notes, relies on rhythm to define its structure rather than thematic development.¹⁰

Berio’s *Sequenza No. 1* dates from 1958, and is the first in the composer’s long and famous series of virtuosic pieces for solo instruments. Berio’s concern was not virtuosity for its own technical sake; rather, in this particular *sequenza*, Berio sought out a polyphonic language in the most “monodic” instrument ever, the flute.¹¹ The *Sequenza* also exemplifies Berio’s graphical signature of “spatial notation,” in which proportional note values are laid on the page in the absence of metrical specificity. *Sequenza No. 1*’s significance here might also be found in its placement along the composer’s oeuvre: according to Christoph Neidhöfer, it marks a split from Berio’s earlier serialist pieces from the mid-1950s. Thanks largely to Berio’s notational methodology, the flute sequenza “extended the notion of openness beyond the compositional means and the listening process to include the act of performance itself.”¹²

Problems of compositional and communicative comprehensibility are taken up by Berio in this work, and it has been viewed in terms of its delegation of choices to be made away from Berio, and onto the performer. Umberto Eco, in his essay “The Poetics of the Open Work” writes of the *Sequenza* (in discussing it along with a handful of other open works), that what “is immediately striking in such cases is the macroscopic divergence between these forms of musical communication and the time-honored tradition of the classics.”¹³ Later in the same piece, Eco goes on to contextualize the

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“open work” within the same literary canon that McLuhan drew so deeply from in working out his ideas of space and time, namely the symbolists and Joyce, and their deviation from the syllogistic visuality of the baroque, *linera* and Euclidian perspective. The binaries of “true and false,” writes Eco, become irrelevant in the new philosophical plane of open works—works which are in constant flux, and never aspire to static embodiments:

In this general intellectual atmosphere, the poetics of the open work is peculiarly relevant: it posits the work of art stripped of necessary and foreseeable conclusions, works in which the performer’s freedom functions as part of the discontinuity which contemporary physics recognizes, not as an element of disorientation, but as an essential stage in all scientific verification procedures and also as the verifiable pattern of events in the subatomic world.\(^{54}\)

Eco’s words about open works *vis a vis* the unpredictable results of “scientific verification” resonate in a strangely appropriate way with Gordon Mumma’s *Mographs*. Mumma had worked in a seismology lab at the Willow Run Laboratories in Ypsilanti, Michigan. He had been interested in technology and electronics as a young man, as Douglas Kahn writes, and his *Mograph* works come from his time spent accessing seismic data. Mumma wrote three types of works in the series “Large-,” “Medium-,” and “Small-size” mographs (a play on “seismograph”), and Kahn observes that the mograph series are “a meeting point of musical notation with the graphical practices of laboratory science.”\(^{55}\) The mograph series is also a kind of injunction as to the piano’s irrelevance: in a letter to Udo from 1967, Mumma decries how the piano, as a technology, had remained essentially unaltered for a century.\(^{56}\)

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\(^{54}\) Eco, *The Open Work*, 15.  
\(^{56}\) Cited in Kahn, *Earth Sound and Earth Signal*, 289.
In the final concert in the series, on April 21st Kasemets finally included his own music in another program that once again extensively featured the performing abilities of Robert Aitken. Three of Kasemets’ compositions closed out the concert and the series: *Canciones* (1955/6), *Haiku* (1961), and *Squares* (1962), preceded by Otto Joachim’s *Expansion for Flute and Piano* (1962), two works by Roger Reynolds—*Epigram* and *Evolution*, and *Mosaic*, and Aitken’s *Composition* for flute and magnetic tape, which was prepared especially for performance at the series. The music, in sum, seems to be again thematically tied into an investigation of formal circumscriptions, but also several of the works bear affinity with each other in their use of dodecaphonic material.

Both Joachim’s *Expansion* and Reynolds’ *Epigram* are inquiries into the possibilities of working with rigorous formal schemes that eschew the development of melodic content in their traditional sense in favor of a methodical drawing out of musical ideas. *Expansion* begins with a solo flute exposition of a 12-note row, in a twisting line that diminuendos from a fortissimo flourish almost immediately to the silence of a quarter rest. The rests, indicates Joachim, are an important structural and performative aspect of the work, indicating the separation of sections that outline the course of the motivic expansion, increasing in value each time they occur: “During these silences, no movement of any sort should occur, neither should there be any noises either through page-turning or for other reasons, as any distractions would destroy the rigorous structure of the expansion.”

57 *Expansion* interpolates silence as an ever-increasing element as the piece unfolds in a clever sleight-of-hand, perhaps as a nod to Cage’s 4’33”, by pulling the listener into a tense loop of anticipation. Although Joachim indicates that the structure

of the expansion is itself rigorous, the spaces between them take on an unsettling organic presence, consuming the sound that came before them. In a more liberal interpretation, Joachim is paraphrasing the Cagean dictum that silence is illusory as the notes of *Expansion* appear to recede into a background texture—almost as fragmented overtures to the presentation of the space that they create. *Expansion* is not simply that of the music written down, but also of the awareness of physical and relational space among listeners that emerges in the anxious waiting for the next iteration of the row to begin, until finally the silences are all that remain.

Reynolds’ *Epigram and Evolution* likewise begins with an introduction of a 12-note row, one that articulates four distinct “events” that comprise the epigram. The “evolution” is divided into four larger sections that mirror the quality of events in the epigram. The program notes to the concert tell us that “*Epigram and Evolution* is an attempt to realistically implement the concept of presentational semantics as applied to discursive phenomenon [sic]. That is, an extremely brief epigram is expanded (not developed) so as to parallel the experience of coming to know a painting.”58 Michael Boyd notes that in the early 1960s Reynolds had been working with “proposed and posited structures” derived from pre-determined formal strategies drawn from his studies in Ann Arbor with Roberto Gerard. Reynolds referred to this as “normative sense of proportionality,” as a kind of compositional scaffolding that one could work with.59 Each section is marked by its contrasting character with respect to the others in the “evolution.” Leta Miller describes the impression the work leaves:

The first begins pontillistically but soon evolves into a fearfully difficult fantasia. The second focuses on resonance—though notated strictly, the aural impression is arhythmic, individual pitches intersecting to create aggregates of sound. The same texture continues into the third, though the meter is transformed into measured quarter notes occasionally broken by loud interjections using other rhythmic figures. The final variation recalls elements from previous material.

Reynolds’ *Mosaic*, for flute and piano, by contrast, is essentially a colour piece, marked by readily identifiable motivic elements within a free dodecaphonic language. Reynolds is writing a showpiece of sorts here to celebrate the kinds of technical innovations that were being embraced by experimentalists: a mixture of extended techniques appear throughout, including fingernails on the piano keys, plucked piano strings, and breathy timbral effects produced by loose embouchure.

Kasemets’ *Haiku* and *Squares* are templates for playing with elements of the opposite of structural rigour, and set up a space for formal indeterminacy and interchangeability of sections. In *Haiku*, Kasemets sets the text of seven Japanese haiku poems for flute, piano, cello, and soprano, with a series of instrumental canons and interludes that act as short preludes and postludes between the songs. The order and instrumentation of the canons is left up to the performers, however they determine that sequence of instrumental configurations for the piece as a whole. Yet Kasemets’ compositional sketches reveal an intricate system of organizing sounds according to dynamic densities, the number of syllables in each poem, as well as the tessituras of each instrument.

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60 Miller, “ONCE and Again.”
Figure 5.4. Sketch for *Haiku*. Udo Kasemets Papers, Archives Collection 11 : B.1.1, University of Toronto. Used with permission.
Figure 5.5. Sketch for *Haiku*. Udo Kasemets Papers, Archives Collection 11 : B.1.1, University of Toronto. Used with permission.
Kasemets writes that he had been occupied by the possibilities of using flexible form in composition, and the “concise, tightly constructed poems of many moods” of Haiku poetry afforded him the kind of freely associative juxtaposition of images that lent itself to a malleable structure. He began to think more deeply about the organization of the work, as well as the possibility of having an interchangeable combination of instrumental sonorities within one piece after hearing the premiere of Canciones, in

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Montreal in April 1961. The quality of that particular performance, by Catharine Hindson, the flautist Wolfgang Kander and guitarist Steve Fentok, inspired him to write again for high voice, guitar, and flute. This also accounts for the inclusion of *Canciones* on the program—songs based on poetry by Lorca (“The Song Wishes To Be Light,” “Pause of the Clock,” “The Guitar”)—as yet another instance of Kasemets’ fealty in positioning experimentalism within its historical purview. *Canciones* is a rare appearance of a pre-1961 Kasemets composition, a dedication piece to Kasemets’ close friend Harry Somers.

The idea for *Squares* (written for John Beckwith) came to Kasemets, as he writes in the score, during a performance of Dvořák’s *Slavonic Dances* by Walter Susskind and Oskar Morawetz: “The purpose of this study (and it is purely a study which could well be used as a classroom exercise with composition students or as an etude for young pianists) was to explore various dimensions of sound and its notation, their interrelationships and interchangeability.”⁶² It is ostensibly a companion piece to *Haiku* in the sense that it again demonstrates Kasemets’ infatuation with leaving macro-elements of the form up to the predilections of the performers. More importantly, it is one of Kasemets’ earliest attempts at working with notation as a purely visual medium: the score consists of one sheet of paper, divided into sixteen large squares, each of which themselves are fractioned into nine sections. In each square, a number of actionable events occur indicated by symbols (a legend of which appears in the performance instructions); however, performers are instructed to recopy the score, and to not put the same events in where they appear in Kasemets’ score.

Figure 5.7. Udo Kasemets, *Squares* (Toronto: BMI Canada, 1968).
Squares is Kasemets’ first experiment in multidirectionality: with a pitch scheme outlined on the periphery of each main border, the score is meant to be read in all four directions, with the first player and second player reading oppositely. It is also one of Kasemets’ most rigorous uses of aleatory—all of the durational, registral, and dynamic aspects are defined in the score and performance notes, yet the architecture of Squares is nonetheless beguiling in its openness. Kasemets, in a personal letter to Beckwith (he sent him a copy of the score), calls Squares “music of the absurd,” and one gets the impression that the mantle of complexity the work presents to the would-be performer might be more artifice than structure—or at least an attempt to capture the intellectual playfulness of 1960s experimentalism. Kasemets writes in his letter that “abstraction is carried out as far as possible,” and muses to Beckwith that his next piece may end up being a blank sheet of manuscript paper. This piece also stands as a testament to the deep mutual respect that was cultivated early on between Beckwith and Kasemets: Squares is a “small tribute” to Beckwith, whose “imagination, open-mindedness, and ever-probing intellect” Kasemets admired.

“Crazy, Man, Crazy”: Emotion, Reason, and Incomprehensibility in Critical Reception of Men, Minds, and Music

For the April 21st performance of Squares, Kasemets had a blown-up print of the score displayed along the wall for audience members to look at while he and pianist William Aide worked their way through the piece—each pianist had access to the lower and higher forty-four keys of the piano. The Toronto Daily Star’s Blaik Kirby noted that

64 Kasemets, Squares.
Kasemets told the audience that there was an “88-note row,” since each key of the piano was struck only once; the result—like the ornate description of the piece Kasemets furnished the audience with—was “crazy, man, crazy.” Reviews of the four concerts in Men, Minds, and Music appeared in most of Toronto’s three daily newspapers, and critical responses were by and large overwhelming in their negativity. They tended to either emphasize the lack of emotional connection that critics’ felt with the music, or the incomprehensibility of the sounds that they encountered—Kirby’s review ran under the byline “‘Men, Minds, and Music’ Crazy, But Nice,” and several others alluded to the “craziness” of the music Kasemets programmed. Although the series was dismissed as a failure by the press, the criticisms levied at Kasemets and his work unintentionally affirm the value of experimentalism—as a reflexive lens through which the characteristics of Toronto’s listening culture were exposed with a greater sense of urgency.

The first half of Globe and Mail critic John Kraglund’s review of the final concert reads more like an obituary of Kasemets’ vision than a report on the music performed:

Men, Minds, and Music … ended last night, almost as unspectacularly as it began, with an audience of about 50 persons. The series was another example of what the Canadian League of Composers learned long ago—that the only thing achieved by programs devoted entirely to contemporary music is the performance of some contemporary works.

True, it may have pleased the handful of devotees of modern music in Toronto. I doubt that it won any new fans. In fact, it may have discouraged those with a willingness to give contemporary music a chance, for today’s compositions never sounded as dreary as when they are numerously presented.

Kraglund’s review of the first all-Ives concert was by contrast favorable, and the resolutely skeptical critic was even hopeful that the series might have a chance at success.

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Kraglund highlighted the “accessible and emotionally appealing” program that Ives’ music offered. In his praise for Lawrence Smith’s performance of the Concord, Kraglund equates the “emotional intensity of his interpretations” that Smith brought to each of the sonata’s movements with “a musical insight many of his contemporaries lack.”

Frank Haworth reviewed the second concert (of Cage, Cardew, and Stockhausen) in the Globe and took the opportunity to write a brief polemic on the disconnect between mind, heart, and understanding. I quote him here at length, from the review that ran with the byline “The Sound-Art of Un-Music Hits No-Emotion”:

Attempted judgment of the matters proposed in Men, Minds, and Music … presents unusual difficulties. For ordinary standards hardly apply to these works for prepared (i.e. distorted) piano, voice, assorted tom toms, rattles, woodblocks, and regular percussion instruments. …Music employs a limited number of sounds (related in particular ways) both singly and in combination, rhythmically patterned, and organized according to a system partly physical and partly psychological in basis, to produce a particular range of mental and emotional effects.

The works of Cardew and Stockhausen, and most of those of Cage, heard last night, employ noises rather than musical sounds, and abandoning most of the other elements in the musical system, are clearly not music, as ordinarily understood, and so cannot be judged by ordinary musical criteria. …

Forgetting music, and listening to them with that idea in mind, it is possible to detect elements of form and logic in them—but not, it must be said, much consolation for the spirit. They are to music, in fact, as arithmetic is to poetry; and facts like two and two making four, while incontrovertibly true, are hardly profoundly so, or deeply engaging of the emotions.

Haworth was himself a composer, born and educated in England, who moved to Toronto in 1956 to begin a career in journalism and teaching. His views on music as represented here are especially conservative, and exemplify the kinds of critiques John Cage had earlier encountered and described in “Experimental Music.” Haworth’s review embodies

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the dualistic vision of music and noise as antithetical categories that Cage had moved beyond. Whereas Ives’ *Concord* was performed with a perceivable (to Kraglund) emotional investment by the pianist Smith, that same criteria denoting musical value was absent to Haworth. Describing the preparation of the piano as a “distortion” rather than a modification or alteration suggests a veering into the incomprehensible: in purely acoustic terms, the amount of distortion added to a sound affects its signal-to-noise ratio, obscuring the audible properties of the sound intended for apprehension. This is of course inaccurate in the case of the preparations Cage had instructed, which fulfilled the opposite goal of isolating and enhancing the harmonics on strings, clarifying the attack of a prepared note for more accurate rhythmic execution of passages, and so on.

In a purely rhetorical sense, Haworth’s use of distortion is meaningful here, as a way of alluding to the inability to psychologically or emotionally “understand” much of the music critics heard. Reviewing that same concert, Ralph Thomas wrote in *The Toronto Daily Star* that some people “sat in open-mouthed wonderment, in serious concentration” as Kasemets performed Cage’s *Suite for Toy Piano*.\(^{69}\) Ezra Schabas negatively reviewed the third concert in the *Globe* (titled “New Music Hard to Understand”), and lamented that he saw “two quite competent pianists [Gordon Mumma and Robert Ashley] behaving like curious children”—behaviour that itself is meant to be taken as demonstrative of a deficit in intellect, maturity, and competence. In that same review, Schabas comments on Anhalt’s *Electronic Composition No. 4* that the “strange textures” coming out of the loudspeakers “added up to so many sound effects and nothing

else. Perhaps several more hearings will help my deficiencies in the inability to comprehend and appreciate the piece.”

Some of the reviews were especially harsh towards Kasemets and his music, and they provide us with a glimpse into the personal politics of music criticism during the early 1960s in Toronto. In the Star (where Kasemets still worked) appeared Ann Marshall’s cold review of the January concert, highlighting not only how long it took to get to the Brodie School, but also the poor turnout it received compared to Ten Centuries Concerts, who’d sold 200 season tickets “through word of mouth alone.” In a kind of underhanded jab at the unconventional and, to her, perhaps shabby performance environment, Marshall made note of how the room was fluorescently lit, painted in the colours of the Brodie School (“orange and blue on beige-white”). Incredibly, Kasemets’ own review of another concert from two nights before—which he would have had to find time to write and file on the opening day of Men, Minds, and Music—appeared on the same page. This would have undoubtedly been an issue of layout in the paper, but nonetheless must have added insult to injury.

George Kidd, in *The Telegram*, was impressed with both Lawrence Smith’s *Concord*, as well as how Catherine Hindson sang the seven songs by Ives in the first concert; but he made note that Kasemets’ playing marred the set with his heavy-handedness.  

Incredibly, Kraglund, in the same review, blamed both Kasemets and Aitken as being too...
ubiquitous in Toronto’s scene to be able to draw audiences; in his report on the final concert (excerpted above), Kraglund’s skepticism gave way to mean-spiritedness outright, calling three of Kasemets’ works on the final half of the program “two too many.” The best that George Kidd could muster was that Men, Minds, and Music was “interesting,” but offered no reward to audiences looking for a hopeful vision of the kind of music to come in the future. Ultimately, he felt that Kasemets and Brodie had “attempted too much and reached too far out for effects.”

**Conclusion: “Squaresville’s Hipsters Dig That Crazy Difference”**

In his letter to Beckwith, in which a copy of the score of *Squares* was included, Kasemets makes a brief clarification about the title of the work: “[It] has to be understood in its strict literal meaning without any reference to its colloquial interpretation. Consequently it does not include any implications in regard to the composer’s or the dedication receiver’s habits or personality.” Toronto was still “Squaresville” in 1963, and Men, Minds, and Music was a provocative if not ultimately successful attempt by two enthusiastic members of the city’s concert music community to excite audience members about contemporary ideas germinating within international experimental communities. “Toronto is very square in its musical tastes,” said Brodie. “This music … opens up your mind to new things,” continuing, “It doesn’t tug at your heart strings, and you won’t leave humming a tune. Most of this music has no tune.”

The fact that much of what Kasemets programmed was deemed “forgettable,” or not “memorable,” or

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72 Kraglund, “Concert Series Achievements Deemed Slight.”
73 Kidd, “Concert Was Interesting, But Not Very Memorable.”
confusing, incomprehensible, and emotionally distant by critics became the key criteria by which they judged the series as, ultimately, a failed experiment.

Yet within the broader historical context in which Kasemets and Brodie were operating, Men, Minds, and Music might be understood, rather, to be exemplary in how its claims of provocation manifested in ambiguity, and even disinterest. While the two promoters had an ambition to perhaps embark on a proselytizing mission to convert the uniformed by exposing audiences to the most contemporary ideas in composition, experimental music, by Cage’s definition, aspires to nothing more than dissolving those very expectations as part of a process of simply being aware, of listening to everything. As Frances Dyson observes, Cage’s now-famous expression *let sounds be themselves* “opened the musical establishment to the democratic ambience and semiotic ambivalence of aurality, while at the same time inaugurating the disappearance of the received category ‘music.’”\(^76\) Taken as a whole, the reception of Men, Minds, and Music by Toronto journalists leaves us with a record of affirmation, however unintentionally, of precisely that conceptual shift in the perception of sound underneath the aegis of experimentalism.

Brodie, in hindsight, spoke fondly of the series in his autobiography, calling it a “great success,”\(^77\) despite all of the difficulties both he and Kasemets encountered during the stages of its planning and execution. Marred by low audience turnout and lackluster advance ticket sales, Men, Minds, and Music lost a thousand dollars at the end of its run.

\(^76\) Frances Dyson, “The Ear That Would Hear Sounds In Themselves: John Cage 1935-1965,” in *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio, and the Avant-Garde*, ed. Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994), 374. However, lest it seem I am taking Dyson’s words out of context of her larger argument, it is worth noting here that she also critiques the presumed non-intentionality implicit in these words by arguing that it forces “those who would ‘let’ sounds be themselves to occupy an impossible existential position and to speak an impossibly stunted discourse.”

\(^77\) Brodie, *Ambassador of the Saxophone*, 40.
But creatively, it pointed towards the vitality of experimental music to generate interest—if not excitement—as well as the viability of executing a long-term curatorial vision across several concerts under less than ideal conditions. Perhaps the highest praise bestowed upon Men, Minds, and Music came from one of the audience members. A young man, quoted anonymously in Ralph Thomas’ review of the February concert, said: “This isn’t great music or anything. But it’s interesting, like a breath of fresh air. It shakes out your mind of all the conventions of the past and makes you listen to music of the past with new insight, new pleasure.”

78 Frank Thomas, “Now It’s Concert with Toy Piano.”
CHAPTER 6.

“MUSIC OR NOT, IT WAS FASCINATING”: THE ISAACS GALLERY MIXED MEDIA CONCERTS OF 1965-67

Introduction: Well, It’s New, Anyway

In a Tuesday column from January 1967 published in The Toronto Daily Star titled “What Bothers Me,” jazz critic Patrick Scott fulminated angrily about the experimental music performance he had attended over the weekend as part of the 1966-1967 Isaacs Gallery Mixed Media Concert series.¹ “Loud Brass and Jazz,” subtitled a “Festival of 3x3 concerts,” featured programs on both Saturday and Sunday at Toronto art impresario Avrom Isaacs’ spacious Yonge Street gallery, and tickets priced at $3.50 (“This festival is a bargain!”)² paid for admission into any or all of the weekend’s proceedings. On the bill were four “participants,” as the program listed them: American trombonist Stuart Dempster, who performed works by Luciano Berio, Pauline Oliveros, John Cage, and others;³ the Kinetic Improvisation Ensemble and the Artists’ Jazz Band, both local groups comprised of well-known visual artists and musicians; and London Ontario’s proto- (and now iconic) noise ensemble Nihilist Spasm Band. What did not bother the critic Scott so much is that the concerts were “grotesque without the saving grace of being funny,” nor that they had received critical attention “vastly incommensurate” with even their “novelty value.” Nor was it, as he suggests, the “sleazy

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² From the concert’s program note. Udo Kasemets Papers, Archives Collection 11 : C.1.4.
³ Dempster performed Berio’s Sequenza V; Oliveros’ Theatre Piece; Cage’s Solo for Slide Trombone; Rory Erickson’s Ricercare a 5 for Trombone and Magnetic Tape; Barney Childs’ Music for Trombone and Piano and John Mills-Cockell’s REVERBERATIONS in 7 movements for trombone and 4 loudspeakers.
demonstration of group therapy” staged by the director and curator of the Isaacs Gallery Mixed Media Concerts, Udo Kasemets, that troubled him. Rather, it was that the series, which was halfway through its controversial second season, had once again secured funding by the Canada Council for the Arts to the tune of $2000 (about $14,250 adjusted for inflation). “This is your money, as well as mine,” blustered Scott, before reminding his readers that Kasemets also got access to Isaacs’ gallery rent-free, and that his “foul can of worms” had hoodwinked 350 “paying fish” into seeing the performances.4

Udo Kasemets had by 1967 become a moving target for music critics in Toronto, and most of his efforts throughout the decade promoting experimental music wound up as fodder for writers in The Globe and Mail, The Telegram, and even The Toronto Daily Star, his former employer. In the press Kasemets was routinely accused of being at the same time too transgressive and an insufferable bore: the entertainment sections of the papers, in the days following his concerts, invariably contain acerbic reviews written by palpably exasperated critics: “Avant-Garde School Camouflage Inanities,” “Mixing Media with a Yawn,” “Well, It’s New Anyway,” “It Didn’t Add Up to Much,” and so on.5 With precious few exceptions the voluminous amount of writing that appeared throughout the mid-1960s covering Kasemets’ presentations of avant-garde and mixed media art accused him, essentially, of charlatanism; of being a trouble-maker and agent provocateur whose predisposition towards castigating Toronto and its music scene for being old fashioned earned him few friends in the local media.

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4 Scott, “What Bothers Me.”
Yet as evidenced by the vituperation of Patrick Scott and others, a tender cultural wound was being salted by Kasemets’ habitually antagonistic explorations in experimental performance. This chapter looks at the Isaacs Gallery Mixed Media Concerts of 1965-1967 as barometers for measuring the musical climate in Toronto, as the ascendance of the avant-garde in 1960s concert music culture began to irritate the city’s notoriously conservative musical tastes. As test sites where Kasemets put into practice an increasingly polemical vision of music and performance that seeks to query the very circumstances of musical communication in its localized contexts, the Isaacs Gallery Concerts take up performance for its *medial* properties. Buttressed with a McLuhanesque conviction that communication technologies have critical ramifications for sensorial and social change, they act on antiquated modes of experiencing music that had, in Kasemets’ view, atomized listeners, performers, and composers in Toronto.

As we will see, the concert series generated an impressive (and impressively hostile) account of responses from reviewers who took issue not simply with Kasemets’ programming, but also the financial support it received from arts funders in Canada. The dichotomous formulations of what did and did not constitute legitimate cultural activity become a theme that the Isaacs Gallery Concerts succeed in exposing as a point of acute discomfort. Where Men, Minds, and Music was an ultimately modest injunction into the city’s listening culture, and was received by critics as a flawed effort to introduce Toronto to postwar avant-garde musical thinking, the Isaacs Gallery Concerts were distinctly more inflammatory in their scope, attracted far larger audiences, and took place in the core of the city. In this chapter I consider the work they do as catalyzing agents pushing for a change in listening culture by reading the concerts as spaces of aesthetic
confusion. Bjorn Heile’s formulation of *metaxis*, which describes the qualities of simultaneity and “in-between-ness” characterizing perceptual experience of experimental musical theatre, provides a useful model for thinking about “multi-strand” musical performances that oscillate within musical and gestural, and aural and visual frames. But more importantly, it also helps render coherent the overwhelming impression of confusion that the Mixed Media Concerts leave as their critical record. In this chapter I again rely heavily on reviews throughout, as they comprise a vivid archive of the concerts, told in an often blunt and unforgiving account, but also for their value in giving us a glimpse into the confusion the concerts wrought through Toronto’s conservative musical environment. That confusion, overwhelmingly documented by critics in their reviews and instantiated by the Mixed Media Concerts, anchors them to both a time and place that highlights not only their contextual specificity, but also their urgency.

**The Eye and the Ear: The Isaacs Gallery Concerts and 1960s Mixed Media**

As I have illustrated in earlier chapters, Toronto had always been especially considered a “stuffy, conservative, backward place:” it was, as reported on the CBC’s *The Arts This Week* in 1966 “not a cosmopolitan city in any way, shape, or form.” Udo Kasemets’ work in staging intermedia concerts at the Isaacs Gallery was, in a North American context, not in any way a path finding enterprise: in fact, the concerts were modelled on a presentation forum that was more than a decade old by the time Kasemets

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8 *The Arts This Week*, Wendy Michener, producer, originally broadcast January 30, 1966 (CBC Digital Archives, ACCESSION 660130-12/00 Location 20010116-20 (04).
organized the first Mixed Media Concert in November 1965. Although Kasemets himself avoided labelling the series as anything beyond “concerts,” they were conceptually indebted to the work of Cage, Fluxus, and especially Allan Kaprow—they weren’t precisely “happenings” in the formal sense, but they embodied in method and spirit the kinds of open-ended platforms for creating alternative performance environments unburdened by the limitations, expectations, and formalities of traditional concerts.

As was briefly mentioned in Chapter 2, the earliest performance to be called a happening was an untitled theatre piece that John Cage and Merce Cunningham organized in 1952, at Black Mountain College. While individual reports of the event are highly contradictory, due to the “vagaries of memory retention,” as Günter Berghaus writes, Cage and Cunningham organized a non-focal, multi-layered and non-narrativized sequence of aesthetic actions that occurred over the course of a predetermined time frame. Berghaus describes how Robert Rauschenberg hung four of his so-called white paintings in cruciform from the ceiling; Edith Piaf records were played at double speed from a scratchy wind-up phonogram; David Tudor played a piano and prepared piano; Mary Caroline Richards read poetry from the top of a ladder; Cage read a lecture on Zen and Music; and Cunningham danced up and down the aisles chased by a dog. About fifty people attended.9

Happenings were, as Berghaus writes, “non-matrixed” performances, wherein random and chance actions were permitted within an organized time structure in a

planned space. They were like reality, but with a sense of spectacle—an “immediate, sensual experience of reality.”

Fluxus member Al Hansen, in his book *A Primer of Happenings & Time/Space Art* (1965) calls happenings “the art of our time”:

The happening is a rather unique art form which, simply because it holds a great deal of energy and promise, has been misunderstood and misinterpreted in wonderful ways, perhaps giving us a much broader range of very powerful, exciting, experimentally rich theatre than would have been available had there not been this confusion as to what a happening was.

The perception that happenings were free form events devoid of structure and purpose is inaccurate, as is the prevalent misreading that audience participation was encouraged or even allowed. “Contrary to the public’s conception,” Hansen writes,

the majority of happenings are quite formal, are very carefully rehearsed, and do not invite any audience participation at all. These happenings advertise, send out mailings, and have a theatre-bill-what’s-going-to-happen-in-what-order sheet. This pattern is heavily Victorian, highly causal and related to what we might call more normal, old-fashioned theatre.

Happenings were only one type of several radical performance situations that emerged in North America in the 1960s and gained momentum under the conceptual shift embodied in Cage’s definition of theatre—“something which engages both the eye and the ear.” Richard Kostelanetz, in his 1977 essay “Mixed Means Theatre” remarks that “mixing of presentational means is probably as old as theatre itself”; that is to say, that the kinds of performances undertaken by experimental artists, groups, and dance companies (exemplified by Yoko Ono, Fluxus, and Judson) were radical chiefly because

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10 Ibid., 86.
12 Ibid., 7.
their work emphasized the elements of aesthetic spectacles which lingered in the recesses of perception in pre-Cagean performance. The notion of “something which engages both the eye and ear” is as meaningless as it is definitional, as everything within our perceptual field thereby becomes theatrical—but like the paratactical, and alogical panoply of sounds and objects that comprise that field, Cagean theatre is divested of any notion of narrative coherence. “Chaos seems to be everyone’s threat,” writes Al Hansen; “I find it my rhythm. If there were no order and all seemed chaos then one would be suspended in a place where change seemed to be the whole—no steadiness, no anchor, no fulcrum. I prefer the flux and buildup of changes, all interpenetrating, with surprises arriving steadily.”

The first Isaacs Gallery Mixed Media Concerts was titled, appropriately, “Music for the Eye and the Ear,” and took place on the weekend of November 27th and 28th, 1965—but it was decidedly not a happening. Four separate “programs” ran in an hourly loop over the course of Saturday evening, Sunday afternoon, and then again into the night, with audience members being admitted on the hour: Gordon Mumma’s *Megaton for William S. Burroughs*, a theatrical piece for live performers and electronics; Michael Snow’s *White Leader* and a screening of his 1964 film *New York Eye and Ear Control*—one of Snow’s notable early film works featuring a soundtrack of free jazz improvisation (by saxophonist Albert Ayler’s ensemble, recorded by Snow), as well as the iconic image of Snow’s “walking woman,” the figure that occupied a central role in his art from 1961-67; Kasemets’ *Cascando*, a “mobile” score (as described in the press release) performed in a number of variations alongside a recording of Samuel Beckett’s radio piece of the

same name; and finally, *Music of Chance and Choice*, “a collage of simultaneous presentation of music, poetry and theatrical pieces” by Dick Higgins, La Monte Young, Jackson Mac Low, Cage, Emmitt Williams, and others.

In addition to Snow and Mumma, who were present as guest performers, the material was interpreted by the group that Kasemets would convene with regularity over the course of the concert series. The Isaacs Gallery Mixed Media Ensemble was a loosely organized and fluid troupe of musicians and painters, and for several performances included William Kilbourn, then the Dean of Humanities at York University, whose bombastic recitations of texts were often highlighted in reviews of the concerts. Robert Aitken, the multi-reed player Jean-Guy Brault, pianist Paul Kilburn, and singer Catherine Hindson were also regular members, rounded out by visual artists Gordon Rayner and Dennis Burton.

The Isaacs Gallery itself was by and large the locus of Toronto’s independent and avant-garde art community by the time that Kasemets staged the first concert, as I discuss briefly in Chapter 4. Avrom Isaacs—“Av” to most everyone that knew him—was born in Winnipeg, and after graduating with a degree in business from the University of Toronto, opened a framing shop at 77 Hayter Street in the heart of Toronto’s so-called “Greenwich Village,” the stretch of Gerrard Street West between Bay and Elizabeth Streets.\(^{15}\) The Greenwich Art Shop became a gathering spot for many of the city’s younger artists—including Rayner, Burton, and Snow, and Isaacs opened his own gallery proper in 1955, The Greenwich Gallery, at 735 Bay Street, before relocating north of Bloor in the new, spacious building designed by Irving Grossmann. As Isaacs told me,

Yeah, I developed a habit or a pattern of having “outside” things in the gallery. And, poetry readings, film nights, stuff like that. So there was a certain amount of things going on within the gallery simply because there was a lot of wonderful space there to be used.

And Udo and Catherine Hindson, his then girlfriend, came to see me one night with a proposition. They wanted to use the gallery for a series of musical events, to use that word vaguely. And I said, “sure.” So I signed on to it and its basic—a large part of it was—Udo knew where he was going and what he wanted. I was an amateur, and I went along for the holiday so to speak. So we put on certain things.16

Before Kasemets and Isaacs struck up their informal partnership, the free improvisation ensemble The Artists’ Jazz Band (AJB) had been using the gallery as space to rehearse and perform at night. The AJB featured Snow on piano and trumpet, Burton on saxophone, Rayner on drums, and several other artists who worked primarily outside the medium of sound—it was a group that continued into the 1980s, preceding the formation of the more well-known CCMC (Canadian Contemporary Music Collective) that Snow formed in 1974. Snow was the only professional musician of the AJB—he had been working and touring as a jazz pianist since the 1940s—and admitted that he initially found the idea of the group “pretty funny,” as he told an interviewer. “I got over my snobbishness fairly soon,” he continued, “especially because a couple of musicians I’d played with professionally … started to play with the AJB because they were interested in free improvisation. And no professional musicians were making any attempts in that direction.”17

16 Interview with the author, May 3, 2012.
Snow described the scene as it was in the late 1950s and early 60s to me, and hinted at Udo’s lingering presence among the painters that congregated around Isaacs’ gallery:

I think my strongest impressions are probably from the late 50s, of Udo’s presence. And you’re right that there was something very—what you implied—very noticeable with the visual art world. It was a little community, where at least the Isaacs Gallery gang, we all knew each other. As you probably know the Artist Jazz Band came out of those social connections.

Um—and we were all painters, and I had been a professional musician before that. I was the only one that had played before, when the rest of them started to play. But there weren’t that many people that weren’t painters that were part of this little scene, which tended at that time to have parties at Gord Rayner’s studio on Spadina, near College. That’s where a lot of the AJB sessions took place. And when I was in town, even though I was living in New York, I often went to parties and played with the AJB.

But any rate there weren’t many people that were not painters in this little scene as a social thing, and [Udo’s] presence was really—you know even though he’s a very quiet character it was very noticeable that there was this person who was something like a classical musician in a sense who was really involved in what was going on.

In *New York Eye and Ear Control*, Snow’s first long film (at 36 minutes), the walking woman figure that had become the idée fixe of his creative practice since about 1961 reached its apogeeal expression. The walking woman is a life-size, two-dimensional form that Snow had taken up as a basic theme upon which a number of variations were enacted in painting and sculpture. As Snow describes the figure in the 1963 documentary film *Toronto Jazz* (in which Snow is profiled along with other predominant jazz musicians such as Don Francks, Alf Jones, and Lenny Breau), the walking woman was a template—a restriction and set of limitations with which he could work, akin to “the twelve bar blues, out of which an infinite number of beautiful thing have been created.”

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18 *Toronto Jazz*, dir. by Don Owen (1963; National Film Board of Canada).
In the film, the cut out of the walking woman is shown as stationary two-dimensional negative space, against the backdrop of different three-dimensional landscapes both urban and otherwise. There is a jarring collision within the visual field of these spatial dimensions—the film in essence explores not only the seriality of the figure, but also how the presence of a static shape can alter its surroundings. \(^{19}\) Snow himself described the series in the following way in a 1998 interview:

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I had this idea to separate the “figure” from the “ground,” literally, by making contoured (cut out) representations of people, which, being only figures, used the wall as their ground. One of these was what became known as the “Walking Woman.” … The interest for me was the transformative aspect of placing this two dimensional “absence” (“art”) in three-dimensional “life” in order to make two-dimensional static representations.\(^{20}\)

Thinking of the walking woman in terms of “figure” and “ground” as Snow does here helps us bring *New York Eye and Ear Control* into dialogue with McLuhan, who was also writing about art in such terms. McLuhan’s “figure and ground” formulation exposes the dialectical relationship between any medium and its environment. As Robert K. Logan tells us, “figure” must, in McLuhan’s terms, be considered openly: “a person, a social movement, a technology, an institution, *a communication event*, a text, or a body of ideas.”\(^{21}\) The “ground”—the environment in which this figure operates—“provides the context from which the full meaning or significance of the figure emerges.”\(^{22}\)

**New Performance Situations: Figure and Ground**

In the same way that Snow’s walking woman transfigured the environments in which it exists—seemingly inert and altogether indifferent to the vibrating externality emphasized by shaky camera positions, and in sound, the scorching free jazz improvisation of Ayler’s ensemble—I am arguing here that the Isaacs Gallery Mixed Media Concerts operated as figures against the ground of Toronto’s contemporaneous musical climate, a ground that we have seen was defined so strongly by its conservatism and skepticism. McLuhan’s figure/ground implies a ratio set of forms in apposition, an analytic that assumes a modality of mutual engagement concerned with “interface and

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\(^{21}\) Robert K. Logan, “Figure/Ground: Cracking the McLuhan Code,” *E-compôs* 14, no. 3 (September 2011), 2. Emphasis added.

\(^{22}\) Ibid.
pattern rather than … a fixed point of view,” and the Isaacs Gallery Concerts cannot be meaningfully thought of as anything but a part of Toronto’s musical and cultural landscape of the 1960s.

It is worth reiterating that both Men Minds, and Music and later the Isaacs Gallery Concerts carry with them an explicit politics that emerges directly from Kasemets’ uneasy station within Toronto and also Canada’s cultural landscape as a foreigner. In the press, published and draft writings, Kasemets grounds his work as a response to the obsolete and antiquated modes of experiencing music that have trapped Canadian listeners, evoking McLuhan, in a nineteenth century environment. Men, Minds, and Music had to happen, says Kasemets, to “reflect the spirit and thinking” of the time, which had been “totally missing on the local scene.” In the polemic topology of Canadian culture that serves as afterward to Canavangard, the publication series of graphic-scores Kasemets curated and published in 1967 (explored in Chapter 7), he writes of the necessity for a disruption of the continuum in compositional activity to unlearn “Old-worldly habits and hangovers” getting in the way of building a “truly 20th century Canadian culture.” Experimental, mixed media performance for Kasemets afforded the destabilizing possibilities to social patterning that post-typographic communication technologies did for McLuhan. Kasemets latched tightly on to McLuhan’s “percepts” of electronic media, and how using them requires a different configuration of sense ratios than using media predominant in literocentric societies. In

23 Ibid.
25 Canavangard featured the scores of graphic works by several Canadian and American composers: Barney Childs, Gordon Mumma, Istvan Anhalt, R. Murray Schafer, and others. The project was Kasemets’ most concentrated attempt at deploying McLuhan’s notions of post-print media theory into a musical framework.
their use, to paraphrase McLuhan’s key point, rehearsed throughout *The Gutenberg Galaxy* and *Understanding Media*, we simply change how we behave and relate to each other.

Seeing in the anatomy of traditional musical performance an analogously unitary, sequential, and individualizing act rooted fundamentally in the past, Kasemets appropriated at a rhetorical level the multisensory, non-hierarchical, and simultaneous characteristics of post-typographic media McLuhan ascribes over and over again to televisual, telephonic, and radiophonic media. Echoing McLuhan’s messianic intonation, he writes in an Isaacs Gallery Mixed Media Ensemble press release:

> In recent years science has provided mankind with a new awareness of space and time, and technological discoveries have brought forth a revolution in communications media. Such developments have rendered many centuries-old traditions obsolete and have laid foundations for new artistic concepts, means of expression, and performance techniques. The old rigid borderlines of individual artistic disciplines have been done away with.²⁷

Elsewhere, Kasemets matter-of-factly explains to an interviewer, ventriloquizing McLuhan in style and tone:

> You see, we were conditioned by print and the tradition of the performer and the audience. The kids have grown up in an environment of immediate and simultaneous information. Light shows and electronic manipulation are already part of their lives. They carry their sound around with them—a transistor radio. It’s like a snail carrying its house. They are not necessarily worried about the individual songs; they want the sound. So the music listening situation is changing. The concert hall will remain a museum—I mean this in the best sense—and the new music will have to find new performance situations.²⁸

The Isaacs Gallery Concerts, while drifting in the slipstream of intermedia performance proliferating during the 1960s, warrant our attention not only because of the


zealous and appropriative interpolation of McLuhan’s media theory (by Kasemets) that affixes them so inseparably to this period—although this is certainly a fascinating aspect; rather, they beckon us to consider precisely what is reflected back onto the environment by these new music listening and performance situations, as Kasemets calls them—what relational aspects between them become dynamized and transformed.

McLuhan applied the malleability of the figure/ground tool to an epi-theory of “environment/anti-environment,” which paid particular attention to the role that artists (and scientists) played in creating new perceptual situations in changing media environments. Confusion, as McLuhan tells us, is often the byproduct of the interruptive and frictious interplay between older environments and the newer “figure-as-anti-environment.”

It is in this context that I wish to examine the Isaacs Gallery Mixed Media Concert series along with their critical reception, for it furnishes us with contemporary (mis-) understandings by Toronto media of the nature of the events (often dismissed simply as “happenings”). But more importantly, it also helps us better place the concert series within McLuhan’s dialectic that goes beyond a theoretically precarious coupling.

In the First Season of the Mixed Media Concerts, 1965-1966, Kasemets organized five weekend-long events that ran at the end of November, January, February, March, and April (the first being “Music for Eye and Ear,” described above); and the following year, four events in January, February, April and June. The Mixed Media Ensemble, in various configurations, was the resident performance ensemble for many of the works, and the

29 Qtd. in Logan, “Figure/Ground,” 5.
Artists’ Jazz Band was featured in several of the concerts as well, performing mostly free improvisation. Two other early pioneering noise groups made appearances at the concerts: London’s Nihilist Spasm Band, founded in 1965 by painter Greg Curnoe, performed on mostly homemade instruments (the group is still active as of this writing); and the Kinetic Improvisation Unit, a quintet led by the pianist Stuart Broomer (who later became a notable jazz critic). The latter were described in one review of a Mixed Media Concert as a group who “strive to smash your eardrums with a continuous, discordant crash of sound.”

But Kasemets also brought leading experimental performers in from the US—including pianist David Tudor, the double bassist Bertram Turetzky (to whom Kasemets’ major piece *Trigon*, discussed in Chapter 7, was dedicated), trombonist Stuart Dempster, (a regular interpreter of the work of Pauline Oliveros), and the composer Alvin Lucier. In contrast to more traditional conventions, the Mixed Media Concerts ran continuously throughout each weekend, giving audience members an opportunity to enter and exit as they wished—to stay as long or as short as they felt appropriate. Given the aleatoric, indeterminate, or improvisatory nature of the pieces Kasemets programmed, the cycling of “works” over the course of each concert emphasized their mutability in performance rather than their repetition. As well, films, audience participation and theatrical pieces comprised a significant portion of the programming, and audiences were often encouraged to wander the gallery in an ambulatory flow from one room to the next.

In effect Kasemets was attempting in many concerts, to create a dynamic and immersive environment—or, anti-environment, per McLuhan—that allowed participants the freedom to move not only through the gallery, but also to assume roles not simply

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confined to audience or performer. As John Kraglund reported in the *Globe* the Monday following “Music for the Eye and Ear,” “Even with a program it was difficult to tell the musicians from the painters from the singers from the speakers from the conductor and sometimes even from the audience. …The only definitely identifiable performers were the tape recorders.” Kasemets himself composed several audience participation pieces for the Mixed Media Ensemble—although *Contactics* was the only one they performed at the gallery proper. The piece is a “choreography” for musicians and audience, and involves members of the ensemble focusing on one particular member in the audience. According to a pre-determined code, musicians respond to movements made by the person they have chosen to “play”—those in the audience are encouraged to move about the performance space, in and around the musicians—without that person being immediately aware of which musician has selected them. Over the course of the performance, audience members are supposed to try and guess the musician for whom they’d become the “score,” and once they’ve correctly identified them, move into position with their “interpreter,” to receive a prize.

Although no reviews of *Contactics* exist—it was performed at the last Mixed Media Concert, in June 1967 by the Kinetic Improvisation Unit—this kind of exuberant

32 5PP (“five performance pieces”) was a folio of performance situations for the Ensemble that folded the audience into the design of the compositions in various ways. One of these, for instance, called “Sound, Smell, Taste, Touch, or How to Take a Trip Without LSD,” involved giving audience members candy-floss or lollipops as they sat in a darkened room before a screen, with a film projector being turned off and on. Loud music is supposed to fill the room via pre-recorded tape, and scents of varying intensities and pleasurableness are to be introduced into the environment—perfume, incense, and then burning rubber and sulphur dioxide. When a substantial portion of the audience is determined to be palpably restless or uncomfortable, the performance instructions indicate that “a large net is pulled over the heads of the seated people and then dropped on them so that they all feel the TOUCH of it and realize that they are trapped in their seats until the end of the performance which comes with the conclusion of the music.” 5PP was never realized at any Mixed Media Concerts, although two performances took place as part of the University of Toronto’s Festival of the Arts at Hart House, in 1967. Udo Kasemets Papers, Collection 11 : B.3.11.
and playful engagement with performance that marked so many of the concerts was exactly what many critics wrote about in scathing dismissals. Entwined in the radical narrative of creating new performance situations, so much of the actual aural and kinesthetic content of the concerts was leavened substantially by the awkwardness of audience reactions, novel aspects of the performances—including, for example, Stuart Dempster using a garden hose as an instrument during his concert in January 1967 (the same concert that drove Patrick Scott from the Isaacs Gallery in his chair-kicking exit)—as well as what critics perceived as poor executions of “important works.” In one of several of Ken Winters’ reviews of the 1965-66 concert season at the Isaacs Gallery, he writes of the March event that it was a “well laid but flabbily-executed … theatre of the mildly absurd. They were like come-and-go affairs in the notions department of an artistic second hand store.”

For that weekend’s concert, “Quiet Sounds and Loud Happenings,” Kasemets organized a diverse program of pieces by a dozen different composers/artists. The structure of the proceedings was classically theatrical, with an overture followed by three “acts”—Act 1, “Look;” Act 2, “Listen;” and Act 3, “Look/Listen.” The entire concert (each iteration of it) lasted more than three hours, and featured sound, text, and theatre works by (among others) Barney Childs, Toshi Isiyanagi, Alvin Lucier, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Frederec Rzewski, and Kasemets. “To put it bluntly,” Winters wrote, “Udo Kasemets and his merry men (and two women) were obviously willing but not, apparently, able. As performers in their chosen theatre of the absurd, they gave the discouraging impression of being ungifted or unprepared or both.”

Winters describes the interpretations by the performers as “indifferent,” with “bad reading, clumsy posturing, and tame high jinks.”

John Kraglund, in reviewing the first Mixed Media concert in November 1965, wrote that he was inclined to “suspect the Mixed Media Concerts are a hoax. …When absurd things happen in an institution, they prove that the inmates are mad. When they occur in a gallery they constitute art.” The concert series, over the course of its two years at the gallery, attracted intense critical scrutiny, and was received predictably with derision and hostility in reviews that range from the dismissive to the apoplectic. *Maclean’s Magazine* brought the series to a national profile in a piece called “When is a Happening Not a Happening?” published in April 1966, reviewing the January 1966 concert dedicated to interpretations of e.e. cummings that featured what author Carol Gregory describes as “a mad counterpoint of sinuous dances, music, poetry, and balloons.” In an entertainingly patronizing tone, she calls Kasemets the series’ “inventor,” “a pianist, music teacher and newspaper columnist with a predictable beard and unlikely name.” Setting what would become a trend in reports on Mixed Media Concerts, she does not fail to mention the $1500 dollar grant Kasemets secured “for this year’s series of organized insanities,” and duly noted the “music critic who left huffily before the end, [and] the art authority who merely fell asleep.”

34 Winters, “‘Black Mass’ Sunday School.”
35 Kraglund, “A Happening: of Cellars and Such.”
37 Ibid., 21.
38 Ibid., 21.
At that concert, the Mixed Media Ensemble performed Kasemets’ 
*Communications*, a “non-composition,” whose “master score” is cummings’ poetry. In *Communications* Kasemets did not so much “set” cummings’ words to music as he facilitated performers with a method to aurally present the texts in ways that accentuate the visual dimensions of their layout in print. As Kasemets writes, “the numbers in this collection are not musical compositions per se, but merely audio-visual realizations of the manifaceted [sic] formal and poetic devices used by the poet to present his ideas and images.” In the published version of *Communications*, thirteen of cummings’ poems are included with realizations that range from those almost fully notated (for instance, poem #79 from cummings’ *95 Poems*), to one that merely reproduces the original type, with almost unnoticeable typographic modifications to parenthetical punctuation (poem #92 from *95 Poems*):

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For singer and soprano recorder.
Gaily, but not too fast.

whippoorwill this noon—any

whirl—ing whose rhime (spilling his rings)
For speaker.

i carry your heart with me (i carry it in my heart) i am never without it (anywhere i go you go, my dear; and whatever is done by only me is your doing, my darling)

i fear no fate (for you are my fate, my sweet) i want no world (for beautiful you are my world, my true) and it's you are whatever a moon has always meant and whatever a sun will always sing is you

here is the deepest secret nobody knows (here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud and the sky of the sky of a tree called life; which grows higher than soul can hope or mind can hide) and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart

i carry your heart (i carry it in my heart)

Duration ca 1'15"
i carry your heart with me (i carry it in
my heart) i am never without it (anywhere
i go you go, my dear, and whatever is done
by only me is your doing, my darling)

i fear
no fate (for you are my fate, my sweet) i want
no world (for beautiful you are my world, my true)
and it’s you are whatever a moon has always meant
and whatever a sun will always sing is you

here is the deepest secret nobody knows
(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud
and the sky of the sky of a tree called life, which grows
higher than soul can hope or mind can hide)
and this is the wonder that’s keeping the stars apart

i carry your heart (i carry it in my heart)

Figure 6.4. Taken from e.e. cummings, Complete Poems 1904-1962, ed. George Firmage (New York: Liveright, 1991).

Communications is perhaps Kasemets’ most focused attempt at exploring the intermediality of the voice, as a site where visual, aural, and kinesthetic modes of communication intersect. As a “non-composition,” Communications intervenes with the autonomous nature of creative works and the tenuous ownership of the creative labour which authors and composers presume. In a striking relegation of that ownership, Kasemets not only offers performers—or other “non-composers” as he refers to them in performance instructions—the choice to present the “settings” in any order they choose, or to omit selections should they desire, but also to integrate realizations of other poems not included. In short, Communications is a remarkable invitation to experience cummings’ poems through collaborative interpretation. The collection published by
Kasemets is more a template for a communal partaking of the rich (but latent) sound worlds that cummings’ work contains, waiting to be actualized in performance.

Carol Gregory’s review of the concert in Macleans typifies not just the tone of condescension that Kasemets’ organizational efforts were met with in print, but also the inaccurate, incomplete, and otherwise incorrect descriptions of the events that appeared. Her report is rather embarrassingly construed: she defines happenings as “that spontaneous do-it-yourself form of performance popular in avant-garde coffeehouses,” cummings only as the poet who “eschewed capital letters,” and John Cage merely as “a contemporary American composer.” While it is evident that the Macleans readership is assumed to be mostly unaware of the finer nuances of mixed media performance conventions of the 1960s, Gregory’s take on the concert is that the whole thing amounted to not much more than mildly amusing absurdist spectacle.

Kasemets, however, was incensed. He wrote Macleans a letter in response, challenging almost every descriptive and evaluative aspect of Gregory’s article. The magazine printed it in its August 6th issue (some eight months after the concert itself happened, and four months after the original article appeared) in an edited version. By 1966, Kasemets would have become accustomed to reading reviews of his activities in print that were either under-informed about the performance and historical contexts of experimentalism, or were negative in their critical assessment, or were simply open attacks. As we’ve seen throughout, critics were, by and large, wary of much of what experimentalism offered, and Kasemets himself was the author of many tough words about music in concert. Yet this particular instance rubbed raw—perhaps because, as

40 Gregory, “When is a Happening Not a Happening?,” 21.
Kasemets wrote in his letter (in a passage excised by the editors of *Macleans*), “there was hardly a paragraph in the entire story which would describe correctly the events of the evening or the thoughts behind the whole undertaking.”

The aesthetic character of the Mixed Media Concerts, defined variously over the course of the series by dance pieces, painting, music (lots of it by Cage), poetry, and so on rarely seems to coalesce into anything substantive for critics beyond being variously boring, disorienting, or … awful. The February 1966 Mixed Media Concert—which brought Bertram Turetzky to perform Kasemets’ original, solo version of *Trigon* for double bass—was roundly written off by Kraglund. Again, the ensemble performed *Trigon* as a nonet (in the second half of the concert, this time with text drawn from Dante’s *Inferno*), which Kraglund only perceived as “deliberate chaos”: “The difference between modern music and the avant-garde [is that] modern music has form and something to say, but the other does its best, with remarkable success, to destroy form, and by including fragments of non-musical media, to camouflage the fact that it has

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41 Udo Kasemets, letter to *Macleans*. Udo Kasemets Papers, Archives Collection 11 : C.1.3. In his letter Kasemets takes care to refute nearly every point made by Carol Gregory in her article, and especially on her lack of knowledge of the performance genre she writes about: “If your charming reporter, Carol Gregory, had done some home-work on happenings (there are several good books and numerous articles available on this topic by such authorities as Alan [sic] Kaprow, Michael Kirby, Al Hansen, Dick Higgins as well as a whole issue of Tulane Drama Review devoted to this subject), she would have realized that the program *Tribute to e.e. cummings* had nothing whatsoever to do with this specific art form. Consequently her statement that I ‘invented a new kind of Happening especially for the Outs’ is totally untrue. Neither did I ever call the mixed media concerts ‘No-Happenings,’ in itself a totally meaningless term. It is bad enough that through your reporter’s ignorance your readers are being misinformed about the character and meaning of certain new art forms, but it is downright unforgivable that the readers are fed totally incorrect descriptions of the performance.”

42 eldritch Priest has recently suggested that boredom and distraction are more than simply negative aspects of what he calls “post-*4’33’*” performance. He writes that “composers, specifically those informed by a post-Cagean sensibility regarding the way boredom’s intensity modulates itself over time, and who are writing long, quiet, repetitive, and slow moving music intended to be experienced without (external) interruption, express a sense of boredom characterizing a more general feeling of being unjustified. This feeling is engine to a neoliberal injunction demanding constant self-invention.” eldritch Priest, “Listening to Nothing in Particular: Boredom and Contemporary Music,” *Postmodern Culture* 21, no. 2 (2011). *Project MUSE*. [http://muse.jhu.edu/](http://muse.jhu.edu/), accessed February 1, 2013.
nothing to say.”\textsuperscript{43} Ken Winters, reviewing the same concert, took at least a glimmer of interest in the idea behind \textit{Trigon}, but agreed that in the end its execution did not meet the demand posed by its conceptual aspirations: “Undoubtedly a kind of musical-literary-visual theatre of the absurd with method in its madness is the aim of this grand finale of \textit{Trigon}. The aim, therefore is worthy; the achievement, however, is clutter. Art to convey horrendous thoughts by means of horrendous hullabaloo.”\textsuperscript{44}

Virtuoso percussionist Max Neuhaus was featured as the main performer at the April-May 1966 Isaacs Gallery Concert (the weekend fell across both months), and brought with him the audience participation radio piece \textit{Max Feed}. \textit{Max Feed} allowed people to freely manipulate the controls of some 20 tape recorders (set up with a 12-inch loop of tape) and about as many radios, jammed to emit only different kinds of static. In between these segments, Neuhaus performed solo on a variety of percussion instruments. To Kraglund, it was absurd, noisy, “awful”;\textsuperscript{45} Ken Winters, again tempering Kraglund’s adamantine conservatism, opened his own review of the same concert thus:

Sitting through an entire Isaacs Gallery Mixed Media Concert has something in common with that ancient public school punishment, sitting in the corner with your face to the wall. Your mind is at once freed and cramped, and you are inclined to feel more petulant than penitential during your stint, more relieved than recreated after it.\textsuperscript{46}

In a forthcoming paper on experimental music theatre, Bjorn Heile proposes a framework for explaining the embodied performative tensions of mixed media concerts described above by reviewers. Drawing from Hans-Thies Lehmann’s notion of \textit{parataxis},

\textsuperscript{46} Ken Winters, “In the Corner” \textit{The Telegram} May 2, 1966, page unknown.
Heile employs the term *metaxis*[^47] to denote “the in-between-ness or simultaneity of, or oscillation between the frames of theatrical and musical performance.”[^48] The precursive idea of *parataxis*, explained by Lehmann in his well-known overview of “postdramatic” theatre[^49] accounts for the new strategies governing the delivery of performative texts in their postdramatic environment. He writes:

> Everything indicates that the reasons why dramatic action was formerly central to theater need no longer apply: the main idea no longer being a narrative, fabulating description of the world by means of mimesis; the formulation of an intellectually important collision of objectives; the process of dramatic action as the image of dialectics of human experience; the entertainment value of “suspense” where one situation prepares for and leads to a new and changed situation.[^50]

Parataxis points to “the non-hierarchical use of signs that aims at a synesthetic perception and contradicts the established hierarchy,”[^51] which, according to Lehmann, renders conscious the “fundamentally fragmentary nature of perception.”[^52] Seen as a “liberating possibility” rather than a deficit, Lehmann valorizes the paratactical abandonment of totality, what he heralds as a “retreat of synthesis” as audience members partake in a communal, collective structuring and selecting.[^53]

Heile expands Lehmann’s parataxis to accommodate the parameters of experimental music theatre, where the threshold separating the musical and theatrical is continually traversed, questioned, and ultimately nullified. *Metaxis*, then, as Heile explains, describes the emergent perceptual tensions of being both at the same time—an

[^47]: As Heile acknowledges, the term is partly borrowed from Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal.
[^50]: Ibid, 69.
[^51]: Ibid, 86.
[^52]: Ibid, 88.
[^53]: Ibid, 82-83, 88.
unsetting and “dream-like” simultaneity carved from the oscillations between worlds.\textsuperscript{54} I use it here for its concision in conveying precisely what Kasemets intends to accomplish with mixed media performance in the 1960s: the perceptual disjuncture, tension, what Heile calls “multi-strand” heterogeneity, prefigures what the series aims to impart on a broader scale in the city. In the same way that works like \textit{Communications} or \textit{Contactics} molt the habituated modes of performative action embedded within the traditional dyad of composer-performer, exposing the ruptures of a double presence, the series itself is a study in superimpositions, of new interactional aesthetic models layered on the old; returning to McLuhan, it is the confusion attendant to the new anti-environment gaining purchase on the old.

I rely so heavily on reviews in this chapter, not only for their colourful if often condescending accounts, and not only because they remain invaluable for describing what actually happened; but also because in a backwards way they affirm Kasemets’ conceptual propositions about performance as a transformational medium. Heile notes the tensions between the presentational and the representational, the aesthetic and the semantic, and ultimately the musical and the theatrical, the metaxis, are “embodied and enacted by performers” in experimental music theatre.\textsuperscript{55} The overwhelming absence of coherent meaning gleaned by critics points precisely to a shift in perceptual strategies towards a McLuhanesque sensory multiplicity, which negates the performance environment’s viability as a didactic medium for art to reveal its immanent meaning. In this reading, it is only logical that the Isaacs Gallery Concerts become spaces of confusion, madness, and “insanity.”

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
Not everyone who wrote about the concerts missed how this experiential transition codifies the cultural dilemma so particular to place, to Toronto. Returning to the same concert that “bothered” critic Patrick Scott from January 1967, *The Telegram*’s Barrie Hale insightfully observed that the Artists’ Jazz Band “present not so much a concert performance of music, but an expressionistic, self-satirical, social history of who they are, what they are, and everything that got them there.” Hale appears to be the lone voice reporting hopefully on a post-Greenbergian avant-garde practice suggested by the Mixed Media Concerts: they are “more than merely funny music,” and the incomprehensible sensory assault witnessed by others actually locates in time and space an unmistakable impression of place.

Where other critics excoriate Kasemets for wasting taxpayer money on making a mockery of the practice of doing art, Hale acknowledges that the Mixed Media Concerts themselves build on thriving conceptual practices established elsewhere, citing Jim Dine’s early happening *The Smiling Workman*, from 1960. Dine’s piece is a darkly comic study of the visceral pleasure of art’s processuality, and ends with Dine pouring paint all over himself and jumping through the canvas on which he has just frantically written, “I LOVE WHAT I AM DOING HELP.” Hale recognizes that Artists’ Jazz Band’s performance is simply a similar experiment in locating art practice as a

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57 Ibid.
58 It is rather striking to observe just how newsworthy arts funding appeared to be during this period. Blaik Kirby writes in *The Globe and Mail* in 1967 a lengthy column listing 61 recipients of recent arts travel grants, and the awarded artists’ photos appear like mug shots in the piece. Kasemets naturally gets mentioned: “Composer-impresario Udo Kasemets is also seeking to combine the arts—in this case, to combine music with whatever else he can get in the mixing bowl. Whether this will mean travelling, he hasn’t said.” Blaik Kirby, “Here’s how we spent $400,000 last week on 61 Canadian Artists,” *The Globe and Mail* March 25, 1967, 14.
59 Hale incorrectly identifies this work in his column as “The Happy Workman.”
fundamentally embodied phenomenon, an exuberant if satirical commentary on presence, context, and place, as it exits the body joyously in gestural, sonic expressions.

**Conclusion**

In his final report to the Canada Council detailing the 1965-66 Isaacs Gallery Mixed Media Concert season (subsidized to much critical consternation), Udo Kasemets wrote that 900 to one thousand people attended, although exact numbers were impossible to acquire due to the informal nature of the admission process. The gallery, which had several partitions in place during the events, created, as Kasemets detailed, “an environment where the viewer-listeners were surrounded by, or were themselves surrounding the performers rather than facing them in the conventional two-dimensional way. Direct involvement of the audience in the proceedings was the frequent result of such an arrangement.” Even in fulfilling the mundane obligations of report writing to the Canada Council, Udo Kasemets seems not to have been able to keep McLuhan’s guiding hand far out of mind. The reviews that appeared in Toronto’s dailies Kasemets describes as “vivid”; and of the reviewers themselves, he writes: “Music critics who for years have been concentrating on the music of the past seemed to be completely lost in the realm of mixed media and reacted accordingly.”

The Isaacs Gallery Mixed Media Concerts are most valuable as they triangulate the strands of critical reception, Kasemets’ own cultural agenda, and the musical climate in Toronto, each of which must independently be approached with interpretive caution. I am not trying to position the Isaacs Gallery Concerts as singular or unique within the wider landscape of 1960s experimentalism. They are transparently modelled on the work

60 Udo Kasemets, final report to the Canada Council. Udo Kasemets Papers, Archives Collection 11 : C.1.3.
done elsewhere by happenings, Fluxus and ONCE, perhaps even parasitically so. But in their situational specificity, which couples the unpalatable foreignness of Kasemets—“the man with the unlikely name”—with Toronto’s almost psychosomatic aversion to musical experimentalism, the Isaacs Gallery Concerts are an extraordinary document of the efficacy of experimental performance in its embodied, localized actualization. The very fact of Toronto’s deeply engrained skepticism towards the cosmopolitan provides a fertile test site for Kasemets to embark on what I see as a larger cultural project. It is a project that in its grandest purview conflates the possibilities of experimental music with modern subjectivity, citizenship, and social progress. The metaxis of mixed media performance, in 1960s Toronto specifically, has the power to comment on the relationship between city and citizen; the social environment and how we move through it.

The Mixed Media Concerts are perhaps critically flawed at a polemic level by too literal or too utopic a reading of McLuhan, whose messianic vision of communications media so deeply informed the writing and work of Kasemets. Anchored in the morass of cultural politics at what might be the waning days of Canada’s postwar era, they reveal a tension that might be more accurately seen as ambiguous rather than malignant. To say that the series effected any kind of direct crucial change in the habits of experiencing music in the way Kasemets wanted would be specious at best: perhaps, to use a linguistic distinction, they are illocutionary rather than performative. In fact, the one event that activated Toronto, perhaps more than any other, as a nodal point along the networks of experimental music during the 1960s, and which I discuss in this dissertation’s conclusion, was a final coda tagged on to the enterprise that operated under the Isaacs
Gallery aegis, in March 1968: *Reunion*, the now-iconic meeting of John Cage and Marcel Duchamp at Ryerson Theatre, that opened the week-long SightSoundSystems Festival.

But I will submit at the very least they are precedent-setting for this kind of activity that proliferates today, almost to the point of saturation in Toronto, and elsewhere. In *Isaacs Seen* (2005), a retrospective history of the Isaacs Gallery compiled by Av Isaacs and Donnalu Wigmore, the authors write that the concerts “made a first Toronto link with a number of artists south of the 49th parallel who were pioneering radically new directions for the sonic and performing [arts].”

Accusations by the righteously indignant towards hucksters plying the shady trade of experimental art, who pillage the public purse to fund such deviant performances, are not as inflammatory as they once were; in truth such subsidization now critically sustains that work in Toronto and across Canada. But as focal points around which debates about music, performance, and the doing of art in the city played out, often in vitriolic discourse, the series seemed to succeed, at the very least, in opening a window for Toronto audiences that had remained stubbornly shuttered. To quote critic William Littler, writing in *The Toronto Daily Star* the Monday following January 1967’s Loud, Brass, and Jazz festival of 3x3 concerts—the day before the bloviate Patrick Scott rebutted with what so sorely bothered him—“music or not, it was fascinating.”

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61 *Isaacs Seen: 50 Years on the Art Front, a Gallery Scrapbook*, compiled by Donnalu Wigmore (Toronto: Hart House, 2005), 70.

CHAPTER 7.

CANAVANGARD, TRIGON, AND McLuhan: GRAPHIC NOTATION IN THE ELECTRONIC AGE

A new generation which has grown up with a fresh sense of involvement will make radical alterations in the overall character of the music scene. The symphony hall and the opera house will be treated for what they are: museums for keeping the treasures of the past. The real musical life will be governed again by music of its own time.

—Udo Kasemets, Canavangard: Music of the 1960s and After.¹

Introduction

This chapter examines Canavangard, one of Udo Kasemets’ most ambitious and aesthetically-defined projects of the 1960s. Primarily a publication series of graphic scores, Canavangard aimed to connect composers “prob[ing] new territories” as Kasemets puts it;² but at its essence, it was an initiative with a much broader and philosophically radical telos. In Canavangard, Kasemets directly transposed Marshall McLuhan’s theory of the ascendance of electronic communication and the recession of the typographic-print era in the mid-twentieth century onto an analogous musical framework. As McLuhan predicted that such large-scale transitions would reconfigure the sense ratio of human perception, so did Kasemets believe that the collapse of standard Western musical notation in favour of newer graphic systems would likewise recalibrate the broken hierarchical triangulation of composer→performer→listener. At a conceptual level, Canavangard was Kasemets’ attempt at exploiting the purchase of this intellectual zeitgeist to mobilize and internationalize experimental musical practice in Canada by

² Ibid., 14.
facilitating “immediate multidirectional flow of musical information across existing national borders.”³

But the project was also grounded in more practical matters: Canavangard was a means of navigating a changing and challenging climate for music publishing in Canada, one which was not especially accommodating to avant-garde works with little or no commercial profitability. A convergence of factors during the last half of the decade opened a window of opportunity, albeit a brief one as we shall see, which allowed Kasemets to move ahead with Canavangard. Ronald R. Napier, a great supporter of experimental initiatives in music, was the head of BMI Canada’s (BMIC) publishing division and manager of concert music, and had worked with Kasemets on small publishing projects throughout the early part of the decade to help the composer make ends meet. As Napier recalls, Kasemets was living in a room at a YMCA in Toronto’s west end, “struggling to survive.”⁴ Kasemets approached Napier about the possibility of initiating a publication series of avant-garde works in 1967, and Napier was able to persuade his advisory committee, albeit reluctantly, to approve the project.

Canavangard’s lifespan was short, but its significance, as I intend to demonstrate here, reaches far beyond the three years—1967 to 1970—Kasemets spent trying to realize his vision with the project. I will examine closely the discursive underpinnings of Canavangard, as articulated by Udo Kasemets in unpublished writings, as well as the manifesto included in the series’ catalogue, _Canavangard: Music of the 1960s and After_ (BMIC, 1967). This examination will reveal the deep influence Marshall McLuhan exerted on Kasemets during the 1960s, and the extent to which Kasemets utilized

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³ Ibid.
⁴ Email correspondence with Ronald R. Napier, May 2, 2011.
McLuhanist theories of literocentrism, and the return to a “secondary orality”\(^5\) with the rise of electronic media for his own purposes in galvanizing a coherent conceptual rationale for Canavangard. But McLuhan’s presence was not merely an inspirational one: in focussing on Kasemets’ major work *Trigon* (1963, for variable ensemble, published in 1969 by BMIC as part of Canavangard) I will show precisely how Kasemets put into practice, musically, McLuhan’s axiomatic percepts of media in the electric age and their various properties. The precise meanings of such notions in McLuhan’s writing are often obscured in vexatious and jargon-laden rhetoric, and this chapter intends to clarify, in part, aspects of McLuhan which are often relegated to abstract debates. Specifically, I employ McLuhan’s foundational notions of acoustic space and cool media, and position *Trigon* as a direct musical analogue of these problematic theoretical constructions. We can locate McLuhan in body as well as spirit within this analysis—he attended the October 1965 performance of *Trigon* at the opening night of the Ten Centuries Concerts season, which for that occasion made use of textual fragments of his wildly-popular book *Understanding Media* (1964), and archival records show intermittent correspondences between the two during the time Kasemets was formulating Canavangard’s nascent theoretical framework.

Finally, in the socio-political climate of the 1960s, where nationalism and cultural protectionism were tidal forces shaping narratives of Canadian identity, this chapter concludes by interrogating the ways in which Canavangard offered an alternative discourse to postwar nation-building strategies, as an initiative which interpolated figures of the international experimental musical vanguard as part of the rubric of twentieth-

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century Canadian culture. Kasemets harboured sceptical views about nationalism wholesale, at least in the manner arbiters of culture promoted the need for a unified Canadian musical complexion. As an émigré composer, a “neo”-Canadian in the phrasing of Jean-Marie Beaudet, and a perennial “outsider” by his own describing, Kasemets had by the mid-1960s distanced himself from the often-jingoistic parlance of conversations about nationalism in Canada as the country raced toward its centennial celebrations in 1967. Instead, Kasemets’ vision of a “truly 20th century culture, free of any haunting echoes of the past” emphasised the cosmopolitanism and globality of Canadian artists and citizens. Canavangard was a platform for Kasemets to articulate why Canadians needed to abandon old paradigms he considered to be tied to the nineteenth century. This position too can be traced back to McLuhan’s “global village” of “instantaneous interconnectivity” and models of citizenship which transgressed borders both physical and political via media and technology.

“Onward with Canavangard!”: Music Publishing in Canada During the 1960s…May As Well Do It Yourself

Canavangard is as much a collection of scores bound together by Kasemets’ adventurous curatorial vision as it is an account of his networking and relationship-building with figures of Canadian and American avant-garde music throughout the 1960s. Its origins can likewise be traced back to Kasemets’ entrepreneurial acumen in a music publishing industry that was still in relative infancy in Canada, and what follows is a brief

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7 Interview with the author, March 14, 2010.
8 Kasemets, *Canavangard*, 110.
contextual overview of the state of publishing experimental and avant-garde works during the mid-1960s.

Canavangard was published by BMI Canada thanks to Kasemets’ relationship with Ronald R. Napier, who ran the publishing division at BMIC’s Toronto office in the 1960s, and, as Kasemets told me, was a supporter of his work as a concert promoter.\(^9\) Napier remembers that Kasemets approached him about publishing a series of “avant-garde pieces by Canadian composers” which Napier thought would be a worthwhile project.\(^10\) Indeed, Napier’s importance in getting Canavangard off the ground and convincing the board of directors at BMIC of its viability in many ways reflected in microcosm his energies in mobilizing and elaborating the profile of new Canadian music during the postwar years.

BMIC (the Canadian division of Broadcast Music Incorporated) took its first steps toward operational independence in February of 1940—the same year BMI incorporated in New York as an alternative to ASCAP (the American Society of Authors and Composers)—but did not actually commence activities until 1947.\(^11\) ASCAP had secured a market share monopoly in publishing popular and commercial music of Tin Pan Alley songwriters during the 1920s and 1930s, and BMI was created in part to provide composers, songwriters, and arrangers of competing genres (to the pervasive English ballad style) an alternative publishing and performance rights organization. As Reebee Garofalo notes, the commercial music industry relied on the sale and distribution of sheet music published by a loose aggregation of “song factories” increasingly based in New

\(^9\) Interview with the author, June 30, 2010.
\(^10\) Personal communication, May 2, 2011.
York City following the First World War.\textsuperscript{12} The individual song-writing houses of Tin Pan Alley came together to form a central lobbying body to protect their composers against copyright infringement, and ASCAP was formed in 1914 to monitor the distribution, sale, and broadcast of song-writing houses based largely out of New York, Los Angeles and Chicago. By 1940 however, the music industry in the United States had changed drastically, and the sale of commercial recordings of Tin Pan Alley songs had eclipsed the song-sheet industry as the overwhelming source of revenue for copyright holders to musical works. This change was tied intimately to radio and gramophone technologies and their widespread placement in the homes of millions of music consumers during the interwar years, and scholars have traced the impact of this transformation and its ramifications on the decline of song-sheet publishing by mid-century.\textsuperscript{13}

BMI was incorporated to introduce two new “basic elements” to the expanding performance rights field: an “open door” policy that would allow any legitimate writer or music publisher to collect royalties for performances which took place throughout the country… [and] to structure a broad logging system for tracking such performances so that royalty distribution would no longer be limited to those whose works were performed primarily in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles.\textsuperscript{14}

BMI in the United States wished to open the door to commercial genres excluded by ASCAP’s limited criteria for eligibility—authors of popular idioms such as blues, latin music, and the booming country music industry of the inter-war years were serviced by


\textsuperscript{14} Matejcek, History of BMI Canada, 3.
BMI’s inclusionary practices. Pertinent to our discussion here, Reebee Garofalo notes that US copyright law during the 1920s and the various existing performance rights organizations protecting authors’ copyright over intellectual property had favoured “from the start” artistic expression based on European notated music: works whose registration as intellectual property derived solely from their lyrical and melodic content, which he links to Gutenberg’s moveable type notation and its influence on industrializing nations.\textsuperscript{15}

As we will observe, Canavangard’s conceptual nucleus resides precisely in decentralizing the authority of music derived from such logocentric foundations.

Beyond popular music, BMIC had from its earliest years a mandate to promote the viability of “serious” Canadian music, due to the appointment of composer Claude Champagne as chief editor of Canadian music in 1949—a position he retained until 1965, the year he died. Throughout the 1950s, with the bulk and influence of the 1951 Royal Commission on National Development in Arts, Letters, and Sciences (known commonly as the Massey Commission) fresh in policymakers’ minds, debates about the importance of fostering and promoting home-grown culture circulated fluidly amongst the small community of avant-garde composers in postwar Canada. As Ronald Napier explained to me, BMIC had been engaged in numerous activities throughout the postwar decades in the service of promoting the awareness and availability of music by Canadian composers. Publishing was only one of many such enterprises into which BMIC invested its resources, and initially only works that had “the potential to earn performance royalties were considered.”\textsuperscript{16}

However, after 1955 BMIC began to open its purview to works with educational value for younger musicians with the view that such a strategy would yield

\textsuperscript{15} Garofalo, “From Music Publishing to Mp3,” 323.
\textsuperscript{16} Personal communication, May 5, 2011.
longer-term benefits for Canadian composers: if Canada’s “young people were introduced to contemporary Canadian sound at an early grade … they would be more receptive to it later as teachers and performers.”  

By the mid-1960s, Napier had assumed the stewardship of BMIC’s publishing division. His relationship with Kasemets extended back to the early part of the decade when Napier offered the composer, who was struggling financially, a chance to earn some money by realizing figured bass on some baroque sonatas scheduled for publication, as well as writing some elementary level piano pieces for BMIC. Kasemets recalled to me that by the middle of the decade he felt a need to take control of publishing not only his own work, but also the work of experimental composers who could not get scores disseminated to a wider public—it was, as he described it, a DIY, or “do it yourself” effort inspired in part by the introduction of the photocopier to consumer markets at the beginning of the 1960s. He approached Napier with the idea of publishing a curated series of avant-garde works, by Canadian composers initially, and Napier was able to persuade BMIC’s Board of Directors of the value in going forward with the project, despite its limited potential for commercial viability or generating performance royalties.

In early 1967, Kasemets began soliciting composers to submit works for Canavangard. The composers chosen by Kasemets were a decidedly mixed group in terms of their age, style and number of works they had written, and professional standing.

18 Kasemets received mail, for a good part of the 1960s, addressed to the West End YMCA at 961 College Street in Toronto, where he rented a small room. Napier writes that Kasemets was struggling as a freelance composer (personal communication, May 2, 2011). The piano pieces in question were the duet series 1 + 1, published in two volumes by BMI Canada in 1964.
19 Interview with the author, June 30, 2010.
20 Personal communication, May 2, 2011.
From Canada, Kasemets selected Murray Schafer, Istvan Anhalt, Harry Somers, Gilles Tremblay, Serge Garant, Sydney Hodkinson, and Otto Joachim, all of whom by the mid-1960s were established as influential, if not central, figures of postwar Canadian composition. Along with these more senior composers Kasemets included John Mills-Cockell, a 23-year-old self-described “drop-out” from the University of Toronto, and Lowell Cross, then a graduate student at the University of Toronto. Mills-Cockell was at times a member of the Isaacs Gallery Mixed Media Ensemble which Kasemets directed (see Chapter 6). (He was also involved in Perception ‘67, a festival of psychedelic and experimental art held at the University of Toronto, which transformed University College into a series of multi-media “environments.”) Lowell Cross would achieve considerable notoriety for his role in the Reunion concert of 1968, where John Cage and Marcel Duchamp played a sonically-amplified chess match at Ryerson Auditorium in Toronto as part of Kasemets’ SightSoundSystems festival: Cross was enlisted to build the electronic chessboard in question which provided the raw sonic material for the concert.

The remainder who participated in Canavangard were Americans. Barney Childs, Gordon Mumma, George Cacioppo, and Alvin Lucier were all composers that Kasemets knew through his association with ONCE, and the Isaacs Gallery Mixed Media Concerts. A “fascinating microcosm of the avant-garde activity of its time,” ONCE was a collective of musicians, artists, and composers based out of Ann Arbor Michigan who organized community-oriented festivals of multi-media works in the early to mid-

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21 Kasemets, Canavangard, 77.
22 See Lowell Cross, “Reunion: John Cage, Marcel Duchamp, Electronic Music and Chess,” in Leonardo Music Journal 9, 35-42. Lowell Cross was kind enough to send me a substantially expanded unpublished version of this paper (revised 2009) which provides a detailed personal account of the circumstances surrounding the building of the chess board and other insights into the staging of the five-hour concert.
The group typified the kind of radical activism and aesthetic experimentalism which became the hallmark of the decade’s avant-garde legacy, and Kasemets had become increasingly attracted to their methods of interposing artistic and politically-liberal agendas into creative practice. Indeed, Kasemets presented works of his own at Ann Arbor (including Trigon, discussed below), and both Mumma and ONCE-associated composer Robert Ashley toured and performed several of Kasemets’ works across the United States throughout the 1960s.

Correspondence from composers about their involvement with Canavangard reveals not only a range of attitudes toward the project among the people Kasemets wanted to include, but also practical concerns about distributing and securing copyright for scores which did not easily conform to traditional publication formats. Anhalt was immediately on board with Kasemets’ vision to publish a collection of graphic scores, calling Kasemets’ ideas “courageous,” and inquired about what would result from multiple performances of an aleatoric work published in the series: “I am very curious to hear, if available, several realizations of the same work. (You remember what we talked about concerning the “identity” of an indeterminate piece?).” Mumma, with whom Kasemets had been collaborating since the early 1960s, enthusiastically wrote “Onward with Canavangard!” but later had concerns about the legality of distributing the tape

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24 Also see the epilogue, “Experimentalism meets Iggy Pop,” (pp.177-198) in Benjamin Piekut’s recent monograph Experimentalism Otherwise: The New York Avant Garde and its Limits (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011) for ONCE’s affiliations with other radical arms of the volatile counter-cultural milieu in Ann Arbor.

25 Most notably 5√3 (1962) for two pianos, written for Mumma and Ashley. Ashley and Mumma were also performers at Men, Minds, Music, Toronto’s first “all-avant-garde” concert series organized by Kasemets in January to April of 1963 (see Chapter 5).


part to one of his *Mograph* pieces, slated for inclusion in the series.\textsuperscript{28} From 1967 to 1969, Kasemets had been in correspondence with Pauline Oliveros, whose part in Canavangard never materialized. In her letters to Kasemets she queries how she would properly make her multimedia works *Light Piece* (1965) and *Theatre Piece* (1966) available in such a series: in their communication, she writes that *Light Piece* “really requires [pianist] David Tudor and *Theatre Piece* requires [trombonist Stuart] Dempster. … Their instructions are personal and I wouldn’t expect any other performer to do these pieces.”\textsuperscript{29} These fragments of communication speak to not only the problems of accurately representing musical works which encompass a wide spectrum of supra-visual and non-standard notational media—audio tapes, personal instructions to performers, aleatoric and graphic scores—but also to the core concepts which Kasemets was trying to articulate in Canavangard: that 400 years of standardized and commercialized music publication had dramatically compromised the tactility of music, had compromised the unique relationships between composers of music, performers, and audiences, and had effectively respatialized the positionality of these “subjectivities” into individuated and detached locations in the musical communication process.

**McLuhan and the Geometries of Musical Literocentrism**

Kasemets articulated the discursive underpinnings of Canavangard in the series’ catalogue, published in 1967, and it is here where we can locate the project within the wider context of international experimental practice, Canadian cultural nationalism, and also unify the loose agglomeration of composers and works by examining the critical


\textsuperscript{29} Letter to Udo Kasemets, March 27, 1967, Udo Kasemets Papers, Archives Collection 11 : E.1.1.
impact Marshall McLuhan had on the project. The catalogue *Canavangard: Music of the 1960s and After* (BMIC, 1967) contains a complete and indexed list of works, along with brief composer profiles accompanied in some cases by a “very personal statement” from the composer. In an introductory essay, titled “FOREWORD: Variations on a theme by Marshall McLuhan,” Kasemets outlines not only the practical aims of the project—to accelerate the availability of what he believed to be critically-important musical contributions to the zeitgeist of the era—but also situates Canavangard within a *fin de siècle* climate of cultural transition.

Structured in the form of a concrete poem, the Foreword is laid out textually in a manner that echoes the stylized typographic design of McLuhan’s chapbooks published in the 1960s as well as work by experimental poets like Jackson Mac Low and Louis Zukofsky. The Foreward is “to be read / wholly or in part or not at all, / silently or aloud, / not necessarily in the order the pages and statements appear,” and contains two epigraphic quotes—one by Charles Ives, from the *Essays Before a Sonata* (“My God! What has sound got to do with music! … That music can be heard is not essential—what it sounds like may not be what it is.”), as well as a statement from Cage’s essay “Experimental Music: Doctrine,” which has since become one of his most ubiquitously-quoted phrases: “Composing’s one thing, performing’s another, listening’s a third. What can they have to do with one another?” The latter passage has proven to be as mercurial in its construction as many of Cage’s own works, as it seems to simultaneously ask the same question from two opposing angles—as both a rhetorical formulation and a challenge.
The question posed by Cage distils what Kasemets had in mind in publishing Canavangard, and anchors the rather presumptuous set of statements that follow in the foreword. Kasemets describes the 1960s as being the “end of the era of the predominance of the WRITTEN score … of the prominence of the music WRITER … [and] of the era of systematized music WRITING.” He identifies three large-scale “phases of culture,” parsed out into categories of pre-print, print, and post-print. The pre-print era, Kasemets writes, is characterized by the transmission of aural information and person-to-person communication. The predominant musical activity associated with this era, in Kasemets’ words, is one of “making.” Conversely, Kasemets describes the print era as being defined, musically, by “writing,” and that information is communicated visually, from person to persons. Kasemets’ archival papers reveal a much longer exposition in draft form regarding the transition from pre-print to the print-era in music, where he cites the publication of Ottaviano dei Petrucci’s *Harmonice Musices Odhecaton A* at the beginning of the sixteenth century:

> Ever since Petrucci manufactured & marketed in Venice in 1501 the first printed pages of music, the role of the publisher has been that of a middleman between the composer and the performer. …Not only that, by assuming this role, the music publisher has been as instrumental in shaping the form and content of music during the last four and a half centuries as any other participant in the musical communication process.

The *Odhecaton*, a collection of 96 popular French chansons, was the first book of music published using the moveable type technology of Johannes Gutenberg’s printing press, and effectively marked the beginning of the music publishing industry: Petrucci, foreseeing the financial potential of the printing press, had secured a twenty-year

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30 Kasemets, *Canavangard*, 3.
31 Ibid., 4.
32 Udo Kasemets Papers, Archives Collection 11 : E.1.2.
exclusive license on all music published in Venice, earning him the nickname “the Father of Music Publishing.”

According to Kasemets in the print-era of musical transmission—1501 to the present (the 1960s)—composers became writers, “distinctly apart from a musician ... and totally remote from the listener.” Further, the print-era of musical transmission witnessed the systematization and concretization of musical notation, and a fixed regime of typographic practice which in turn influenced the entire process of musical creation:

The more music developed on a line of set rules, the more the conventions of musical notation became fixed, the more composers ceased to be practicing musicians and developed into abstract speculators, the more the language of music grew complex and the larger the performing forces the greater became the publisher’s part establishing and maintaining workable communication lines between the composer & the performer.

During the print-era of music publishing, as Kasemets argues, the relationship between composer and listener had become increasingly abstracted to the point where modalities of musical communication had been fatally compromised. Composers had become “writer-specialist[s] communicating by visual rather than aural means,” “prisoner[s] of [their] visual communication methods.” The intermediaries responsible for facilitating communication—musical performers—had likewise become adept visual interpreters, highly-skilled labourers “of literacy and scholarship, versatility and individuality” produced by centuries of mercantile industrialism.

34 Kasemets, Canavangard, 4.
35 Udo Kasemets Papers, Archives Collection 11 : E.1.2.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
The 1960s, then, was a decade of a very particular kind of cultural transformation for Kasemets. The print era was slowly giving way to a post-print phase of culture, wherein the predominant state of musical activity would be “listening,” and the principal class of music practitioner would not be the composer, or performer, but the listener.\textsuperscript{38} The scores in Canavangard, all of which rely on unconventional notational practice, are a codex of post-print era musical technologies, requiring new strategies and new competencies on the part of the composers, performers, and listeners in the successful transmission of musical information. The emergence of graphic notational methodologies in the 1960s for Kasemets represented the very collapse of the print-typographic logos responsible for the conditioned patterns of musical creation, and regimes of performance and audition. Utopically, and perhaps even naively, Kasemets writes that

the post-print era composer has turned into an explorer, discoverer, thinker, teacher. … He has deducted that if he has to communicate with performers he needs more realistic [and] more direct communication means than the straight-jacketed notation methods of yesteryear.\textsuperscript{39}

However, as we have seen in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, the conceptual basis of Canavangard—the periodization of history into three broad phases, and that the communication of musical information had entered into a transitional stage between the second and third—was not at all of Kasemets’ designing. Kasemets was in essence translating McLuhan’s main arguments, put forth most fulsomely in \textit{The Gutenberg Galaxy} and elsewhere, into a specifically musical context. Where McLuhan drew freely and often irresponsibly (as Chapter 2 discusses in some detail) from musical terms to

\textsuperscript{38} Kasemets, \textit{Canavangard}, 4.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 7.
generate a spatial configuration of perception based on the oral-literate divide, Kasemets in his foreword to Canavangard takes McLuhan’s obsession with Gutenberg’s typographical legacy as a ground zero for constructing his polemic architecture. As the essay draws near its conclusion, Kasemets’ prose reads like an incantatory text, with a series of predictions laid out in mostly capitalized lettering. In many cases, he is not far off the mark, despite the zealous tone in which such predictions are presented: Kasemets writes of “houses of sensory pleasures” replacing concert halls, electronic equipment becoming as common as the pianoforte, scores becoming disseminated electronically, and an overall rise in amateur (or non-professional) music-makers. All of these transformations to the relationships in musical communication are taken from McLuhan’s general theories; but also in a way the entire prefatory writing to the series that comprises the essay takes up Cage’s challenge of addressing what can composing, listening, and performing have to do with each other?

All told, more than fifty works comprise the Canavangard catalogue, although some titles included were published by BMIC independently of the series—for instance, R. Murray Schafer’s contributions, which included his works Five Studies on Texts by Prudentius and the massive Requiems for the Party Girl. Yet some of the most notable pieces of the 1960s avant-garde repertoire by Canadian composers were part of Canavangard, including three important electroacoustic works by Istvan Anhalt. Cento, which explores the continuum of lexical comprehensibility in speech, might be seen as the series’ centrepiece. It was performed ten times alone in Canada’s centennial year of 1967 (for which it was commissioned), and was Anhalt’s first composition that materialized in the newly built electroacoustic studio at McGill University. Cento is
based upon text taken from Eldon Grier’s poem, *An Ecstasy*, and integrates pre-recorded sounds with a live twelve voice choir, resulting in what Carl Morey calls a “telegraphic version” of the original poem.\(^{40}\) The other two pieces by Anhalt were *Electronic Composition No. 3* and *Electronic Composition No. 4*, both works that Anhalt conceived after research trips to electronic music studios in Europe and the United States. As David Keane notes, the latter (which was performed at the third concert of Men, Minds, and Music) was created upon Anhalt’s return from the Bell Telephone Laboratories in New Jersey, a major centre of innovation and experimentation in electronic music. Keane describes how the work’s harshness, angularity, and fragmentation are enfolded within a “distinct matrix of an implied vast, resonant space.”\(^{41}\) Anhalt’s works are of particular note in the context of Canavangard, as they are the only compositions by a Canadian (besides a few of Kasemets’ pieces) to feature an integrated use of technology and live performance forces. More importantly, they reflect aesthetically, if implicitly, the ambition of the series such as Kasemets wanted.

Canavangard also included music from three composers working in Quebec—Otto Joachim, and two leading members of the French-Canadian avant-garde, Serge Garant and Gilles Tremblay. Joachim’s circuitous path to Canada via Singapore and Shanghai from Germany as an émigré preceded Kasemets by two years. Settling in Montreal in 1949, Joachim established himself as a musical polymath in that city—in addition to his ventures in instrument building, he earned a living as a professional violist, founded the first early music ensemble in Montreal, and built his own electronic studio in the mid-


1950s. Joachim was an early experimenter in graphic scoring, electroacoustic, and mixed media compositions, and two of his works from the 1960s were published in the series: *Expansion* (performed first in Toronto at Men, Minds, and Music), and a major work for mixed media *Illumination I* for speaker, five instruments, and light bank (also a Centennial commission). *Illumination I* is concerned with the interactional possibilities between sound and light, with performers “reading” the dynamic intensities and colours of lights, determined aleatorically and controlled by a conductor placed off stage. Garant’s *Anerca* and *Cage D’Oiseau* are perhaps the two works that make the most limited use of graphic scoring—they are more or less standardly notated with a few modifications—but Tremblay’s massive *Kekoba* for voice, percussion, and three Ondes Martenot (yet another Centennial commission) makes extensive and systematic use of non-traditional methods.

Notably, Kasemets achieved a minor coup with the inclusion of American composers who had music included in the series—BMI Canada was, as both Ron Napier and Gordon Mumma noted in interview, exclusively in the business of publishing Canadian works. “There was no reason to publish the works of non-Canadian composers,” Napier recalls. “You can well imagine the astonished disapproval I was met with when it was discovered that Canavangard included works by Lowell Cross, Morton Feldman etc.” Mumma’s *Mograph* series for piano, works that translate seismic activity into actions for performers (discussed in Chapter 5), were part of Canavangard, as well as several pieces by George Cacioppo, Alvin Lucier, and Barney Childs. Childs’ folio *Music For...* includes a handful of compositions for various ensembles, several of which are

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42 Personal communication, May 5, 2011. Napier is mistaken about Feldman here; none of Feldman’s works were published in the series, and it is plausible he was referring to Gordon Mumma.
word scores that operate ironically on a conceptual level: *Oboe Piece For Jackson Mac Low* for instance, outlines an absurd performance scenario in which many parameters defining the action are invariably annulled within the same sentence containing the instruction: “The piece may begin when it is announced or it may begin either 8, 12, 17, 23, 28, 34, or 45 minutes after it has been announced”; “Any number of oboe players from one to seven may play; they should preferably be seated somewhat close together, but they need not be close together, nor need they sit.”

George Cacioppo’s collection *Piano Pieces* contains the score for *Cassiopeia*, which became, as Gordon Mumma writes, an “immediate classic” after its performance at the ONCE festival in 1963 by pianist Donald Bohlen.\(^43\) A native of Regina, Saskatchewan, Bohlen was working on a PhD at the University of Michigan, and played several of Cacioppo’s new piano works. *Cassiopeia*’s score is a one-page chart of pitches, spatially configured in the form of a map connected by what Cacioppo describes in the performance notes as fields of intersecting sound paths. Each of the fields has a particular visual character to them, designed by the composer to elicit particular psychological reactions in the performer, who is given a series of suggestions as to how to best navigate the networks of pitches. Cacioppo described, in interview, the experience of performing this piece as seeing “a cloud go by, or a sunset,” that it gives one’s eyes an opportunity to “roam about the score.”\(^44\)


As a notational strategy, *Cassiopeia* emphasizes the interconnectedness of each pitch as well as their individuality as isolated sonic artefacts—in the same way that astrological constellations are aggregates of stars whose intensities are perceived in space by size and brightness, the intensities of sounds in the score are likewise fixed to specific pitches. Yet also as constellations are the arrangement of celestial bodies into an anthropomorphized imaginary, Cacioppo’s *Cassiopeia* imbricates the performer’s own visual fantasies as part of its indeterminate constitution—the score itself is no more a prescription for performance than an invitation to trace out a vision, along the manifold pathways that form its network of possibilities.
While there is limited space (and perhaps less need) to adumbrate every composition published in Canavangard, one piece especially warrants a brief mention—Sydney Hodkinson’s *Armistice: a truce for dancers and musicians*. *Armistice* is ostensibly the most obscure work in Canavangard, written for a performance on November 11, 1966 by the Ann Arbor Dance Theatre, but its combination of conceptual, graphic, and mixed-media elements evidence a close affinity to Kasemets’ goals with the series. It is also, arguably, the most distinctly accomplished visual score in Canavangard—two pages of intricate and evocative gestures illustrating a range of potential actions that performers (specifically, any number of dancers and musicians) may execute.
Figure 7.2. Excerpt of *Armistice: a Truce for Musicians and Dancers* (BMI Canada, 1968).

The example shown above is the first page of the score for *Armistice*, outlining the first 180 seconds in the work over three systems of notation. In each, the range is indicated by H, M, L—high, medium, low—with specific pitches left up to the performers. In the work’s notes, Hodkinson explains that a “somewhat ambiguous graphic situation will engage an educated performer’s response, thereby leading to many ‘correct’ interpretations of the work as both a visual and audible event.”

The point of the *Armistice*, as Hodkinson writes, is to create a dynamic in which musicians and dancers

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are mutually supportive of each other in realizing the work in a unified way, though cooperative interaction: “The attempt is to further enhance and intensify the feasible composer-graphic implications—performers—SOUND-MOVEMENT—audience relationships.” Premiered during the height of the Vietnam War, the work’s topicality is evident in its title, yet *Armistice* invites a kind of medial integration that relies on performers’ dexterity in improvising and responding to kinetic and aural events as a means of reconciliation.

*Trigon, and the Performer as Co-Composer*

As I have tried to show above, Canavangard was anchored, philosophically, not only in McLuhan’s pre- and post-typographic technological nexus, but also practically along the perimeter of concert-music publishing in Canada—a truly peripheral distinction if ever there was one. In the same way McLuhan called the scribal and communal reproduction of medieval illuminated manuscripts a “DIY” pursuit, so did Kasemets avail himself of technological advances in commercial printing as well as his connections with Ron Napier to get Canavangard off the ground by 1967.

McLuhan’s status as a public intellectual bordered on celebrity during the 1960s, and his relationship to avant-garde music has most frequently been identified through the influence he exerted on John Cage, Glenn Gould, and R. Murray Schafer. Cage wrote that McLuhan’s views “corroborate and extend the far-reaching perceptions of the most advanced artists of this century,” and notes that McLuhan had been an influence since

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at least the beginning of the decade: “everything I write is in some way influenced by him.”

However, the degree to which McLuhan actually understood musical processes, theory, and practice has been called into question: when I spoke with John Beckwith and Donald Gillies (the latter worked with McLuhan extensively in the late 1960s and early 70s) in separate interviews, each commented rather unexpectedly that McLuhan didn’t really know much about music at all. Beckwith, laughing, told me that McLuhan “figured he had more knowledge of music than he really had, I have to say. When you pinned him down, his ideas of music were kind of vague. But his thinking—the direction that culture was going, trends in thinking in the arts—certainly he had an impact on musicians as he did on other artists.” But the connection between Kasemets and McLuhan was much more tangible: Kasemets knew McLuhan, dedicated several works to him, and possibly even collaborated with McLuhan during the decade.

McLuhan utilized the symbolic power of music and sound consistently as a mitigating force against visuality and all of its associative limitations. Acoustic space, as Richard Cavell has recently contended (2011), was largely a polemical strategy McLuhan employed in agitating against the dominance of visuality in modern culture. McLuhan’s own writing, in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, *Understanding Media*, and elsewhere

48 Gillies was a young professor at Ryerson Polytechnic Institute during the late 1960s, and was a key figure in coordinating the SightSoundSystems festival.
49 Interview with the author, April 20, 2011. Beckwith told me he knew McLuhan “a bit.”
50 In a letter from McLuhan to Kasemets dated November 1, 1966, McLuhan writes: “My apologies for any misunderstanding due to my delay. Have been out of town a good deal. Tried to reach you by phone. It is simply that I have been swamped with masses of academic duties in addition to out of town matters. Is it too late for me to be of any help?” Udo Kasemets Papers, Archives Collection 11: E.5.27.
notoriously pushes against the linearity and unidirectionality of alphabetic writing. Instead, his prose is often organized “mosaically:” blocks of information are distributed, organized, and spatialized throughout the ambit of a text in such a way that narrative and chronology recede into the background, lose focus and remain secondary formal elements. I would submit that McLuhan was very much laying out his ideas in experimental presentation formats which mirror the “acousticity” of electronic and post-print media. As I will show, these tactics resonated strongly with Kasemets, and are present in the Canvangard project at a broad level, but also more concretely as evidenced by his work *Trigon*, published under the Canavangard aegis.

*Trigon* is Kasemets’ major work from this period, and was performed at least sixteen times in various versions between 1964 and 1967 in Canada and the US.\(^{52}\) Described by the composer as a “many-dimensional work for a soloist, trio, nonet or 27 piece ensemble of instrumentalists and/or singers and or/dancers” *Trigon* encapsulates the conceptual ethos of Canavangard in microcosm. Its graphic score—published after its run of performances in the mid-1960s—is a distillation of the complex structural parameters Kasemets set for the work, which define its form and ultimately shape its content. Broadly stated, *Trigon* is organized by multiple layerings of aural, visual, or kinetic expressions of events which fall into tripartite divisions of high-medium-low, short-medium-long, quiet-medium-loud, and so on. Performers are given the option to generate their own parts using whatever kind of notation they choose based on the information given in the master score, after working with it for an extended period of time. What follows is an attempt to demonstrate how *Trigon* “works,” or as we’ll see, does not

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\(^{52}\) Kasemets, *Canavangard*, 63.
always “work,” as a blueprint for performers to engage in the processes—haptic, tactile, experiential—of repairing the relationships between composer/performer/audience, for which Kasemets advocated so forcefully in Canavangard.

Kasemets began working on the score for *Trigon* in early 1963. Figure 7.4 and 7.5 show initial pencil sketches of what would eventually become components of sequence, time, and event charts, which I discuss below.

![Figure 7.3. Early sketch of *Trigon* event chart, found in Kasemets’ 1963 day planner, Udo Kasemets Papers, Archives Collection 11: B.2.8a, University of Toronto. Used with permission.](image)
In the “Foreword” to *Trigon*, Kasemets writes that the order of appearance of each layer is simple, “almost classical in concept”: the events essentially progress from slow to fast, back to slow again; or quiet to loud, and back again; or low to high and low. He maintains that

> [h]owever elementary and static the layout of the individual “layers” may look, they all hold in themselves an immeasurable amount of latent intricacy and dynamism when one considers that their simultaneous appearance has been designed to occur in an infinite number of constellations, to be decided by the performer(s).\(^{53}\)

Further on in the foreword, he continues:

Since the score consists of a number of separate charts which have to be co-ordinated by the performer(s), it is quite evident that only a very skilled player who has “lived” with the score for a considerable amount of time and has virtually memorized the ingredients of it, may be in a position to perform directly from the score. Otherwise the performers have to prepare their own parts.  

Figure 7.5 shows the score of *Trigon*. Each of the separate layers, or charts, as Kasemets refers to them, is arranged spatially on one large master sheet. There are four charts constituting the totality of the score, which performers are to effectively destroy in the process of working with the piece. The “time chart” in the centre (also shown in Figure 7.5), dictates the duration and quantity of events to be played in prescribed durational intervals. For example, 3/7 indicates three events are to be executed within a frame of seven seconds; 0/3 indicates no events during three seconds, etc. Each horizontal row on the time scale has a sum durational total of 49 seconds, divided into seven units of executable actions. Black bars indicate the durational cells of such events, where white spaces equal “rests,” or non-action.

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54 Ibid.
55 The dimensions of the score are the unusual size of 16”x 22.” The image here is a photograph, hence the blurry edges, meant to give the reader a general impression of the visual layout of all the elements as laid out by Kasemets.
Figure 7.5. Score of *Trigon* (Toronto: BMI Canada, 1968).
The “event chart,” shown below in Figure 7.7, “provides intervalllic, rhythmic, coloristic and instrumental-technical material of varying thickness and density for the realization” of *Trigon*. The “note-heads” in the event chart—round, square, and triangular—correspond to any three basic instrumental techniques, to be chosen by the performer, and are to be adhered to with as much consistency as possible throughout the duration of the performance. The event chart is divided into eight blocks which Kasemets has correlated to cardinal directions (north, east, south, west). East and west are
subdivided into three, and on the whole the event chart borders in the time and two sequence charts (refer to Figure 7.5).

Figure 7.7. Event chart from *Trigon* (Toronto: BMI Canada, 1968).

Figure 7.8 shows one of these “sequence charts,” which are meant to interact with the cardinal regions of the event chart. The performance notes indicate that each combination of “high-medium-low” as it occurs along the sequence chart axis corresponds to specific event charts—either east or west, or north or south—with the performer given the freedom to choose material from each column or event box.

Figure 7.8. Sequence chart from *Trigon* (Toronto: BMI Canada, 1968).

Figure 7.9 shows the volume chart—the fourth layer completing *Trigon*, which consists of 24 rectangles containing “amplitude” indications. Every copy of *Trigon* I have been able to gain access to, save Kasemets’ own archival and unused version has been missing this element of the score, which was published as a separate sheet, and included
with the performance notes and master score. Partly this may be due to Kasemets’
instructions that performers cut out all rectangles, and insert them in the perforated lines
above and below the time chart (also to be cut) so that corresponding volume indications
line up with the Roman numeral and letter indications outside the time chart. In effect, to
create a working template upon which musical (or visual, or kinetic) content may be
generated, performers are required to alter the physical artefact of the score itself.

![Volume chart from Trigon (Toronto: BMI Canada, 1968).](image)

**Figure 7.9. Volume chart from Trigon (Toronto: BMI Canada, 1968).**

The full performance notes for Trigon go into far greater detail than what I have
summarized above—in fact the rules, or more appropriately, the gamuts (to use Cagean
phraseology) Kasemets has set for a “faithful” realization of Trigon are off-puttingly
difficult, and early performances of the work posed substantial difficulties. *Trigon* was originally written for (and dedicated to) contrabassist Bertram Turetzky, who in the late 1950s was employed by the Hartford Symphony Orchestra. In 1959, his frustration with the restrictions of being an orchestral musician, and the limited opportunities for exploring new repertoire for the contrabass led him (and his wife) to start soliciting pieces from avant-garde composers in North America:

> We started writing letters to composers looking for repertoire. I desperately wanted to play out of the symphony, cos I felt that it was a machine and I didn’t like the idea of being told in September what I would be playing in April. … I suspect that I wrote Udo a letter looking for music.\(^{56}\)

Turetzky told me that he was just beginning to marshal his interest in the avant-garde as a performer of the contrabass, and was dissatisfied with existing repertoire for the instrument and the lacuna of pieces written to showcase the contrabass’s rich technical and expressive resources. Yet *Trigon* was more than Turetzky bargained for as a potential interpreter, and I quote an excerpt from our conversation at length:

> I was slowly moving toward getting interested in new music, improvisation. Before that, I played what was written. I didn’t add anything. When I played baroque music, I studied performance practice and I would add the necessary ornaments that I felt would be appropriate. So, I must admit that I was a little perplexed at the first look at the score. So I think I wrote Udo or spoke to him. I said, ‘Gee…[I’m] not a composer.’ He thought I was a composer who would, you know, make a realization with ease. So he made a realization for me, which I basically adhered to, with maybe a little change here, a little change there. But nothing radical. So we didn’t enter into a partnership in a way, Jeremy, that—let’s see, how to say it…we ‘held hands’ and we did the piece together. But he did more in this case than I did.\(^{57}\)

Turetzky performed *Trigon* first during what he described as a “wonderful weekend” in Toronto, at one of the Isaacs Gallery Mixed Media concerts in their inaugural concert

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\(^{56}\) Interview with the author, January 22, 2012.  
\(^{57}\) Ibid.
season of 1965-66 at Av Isaac’s Yonge Street Gallery. The concert took place over the course of a Saturday and Sunday, and featured several sets by different performers. Turetzky remembered that Michael Snow and the Artists’ Jazz Band also performed over the weekend. Whether or not Turetzky performed it earlier, he couldn’t recall with certainty, but mentioned that Kasemets and Catherine Hindson travelled to New York for a concert in the Donnell Library on West 53rd St. in Manhattan to witness Turetzky perform it there.\(^{58}\) Turetzky remarked that Kasemets “opened the door most of the way” for him to actualize Trigon, and the piece was an early introduction for Turetzky to the challenges of interacting with graphically-notated scores. In fact, Turetzky’s role as a pioneer of developing a lexicon of extended techniques for the contrabass ostensibly arose from these early experimental years working and commissioning new repertoire by avant-garde composers.\(^{59}\)

Although Trigon was initially written for Turetzky, Barney Childs, one of the handful of American composers included in the Canavangard project, had been working on preparing Trigon for performance as early as 1963 for a January 1964 concert in New York City. Childs had become associated with Cage and the New York School by the early 1960s, despite holding academic positions in Nevada and Arizona throughout most of the decade. Kasemets and Childs corresponded throughout late 1963 about matters related to realizing Trigon for nonet. Childs was having difficulty understanding certain aspects of the performance instructions, and eventually abandoned the piece. In a letter to

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\(^{58}\) The Donnell Library Centre, in Midtown Manhattan (now closed), was a regular site for small concerts of experimental music in New York during the 1960s.

\(^{59}\) In 1974, Turetzky, himself widely regarded as the foremost contrabassist in America, published The Contemporary Contrabass (Berkeley: University of California Press, [expanded and revised 1989]), which has become considered an “essential” resource for modern bass players and composers. See Rodney Slatford, review of The Contemporary Contrabass by Bertram Turetzky, Performance Practice Review 5, no.1 (Spring 1992), 116.
Kasemets from December, Childs wrote, “Trigon is a helluva job to ‘realize.’ … I’ve been hacking away at it off and on for some time now and it just isn’t going to be ready for 5 January’s concert.”\(^{60}\) Childs evidently went on to prepare it as a realization for solo oboe,\(^{61}\) which likely was performed later that year in Tucson, where Childs was teaching.\(^{62}\)

Even from the outset then, the practical problems that Trigon posed were substantial. By 1967 eleven separate realizations had been prepared for performance of the work, which ranged from solo voice to a full 27-piece ensemble. Kasemets had prepared nine of these himself; the other two by Barney Childs, for solo oboe, and Bertram Turetzky, for solo contrabass (as discussed above). Trigon had become something of a staple in the Isaacs Gallery Mixed Media Ensemble’s repertoire, and Kasemets toured various versions of the work with the Ensemble, as well as supervising and realizing parts for different groups of interpreters. Figures 7.10 and 7.11 are taken from Kasemets’ ambitious realization of Trigon for three nonets (totalling 27 players), which was performed at the ONCE Festival in Ann Arbor Michigan on February 21, 1965. By 1965, the ONCE group had moved into staging larger, more theatrical performances, as the festival and seasonal programming became more popular and well-


\(^{61}\) Kasemets Canvangard, 62.

\(^{62}\) Childs’ archival fonds at the University of California Redlands mention a review of a concert given on November 21, 1964 at the Centre for Arts, Tucson University, directed by Childs. The review, titled “Winds Concert Good—Or Maybe it Wasn’t…” is from an unknown journal. [http://www.redlands.edu/docs/Library/Barney_Childs_Collection_Finding_Aid.pdf](http://www.redlands.edu/docs/Library/Barney_Childs_Collection_Finding_Aid.pdf), accessed February 27, 2012.
attended. In larger iterations of *Trigon* (such as this one), the positioning of performers conforms to the spatial qualities of the performance space, as figure 7.10 demonstrates, with movement in and around the space and audience members.

![Diagram indicating spatial arrangement of “nonet 3” over the course of five cues. Udo Kasemets Papers, Archives Collection 11 : B.2.8f, University of Toronto. Used with permission.](image)

Gordon Mumma recalled that Kasemets directed the “ONCE Festival Orchestra” for this performance, held in the local VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars) Ballroom. In the *Canavangard* index of performances of *Trigon*, Kasemets notes that Mumma also performed as an instrumentalist, and the full ensemble required two other conductors.

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(Robert Ashley and William Albright), presumably assigned to each of the nonets.\textsuperscript{64} Due to increasing scope of the performances, and also the growing audiences—1965 was ONCE’s “busiest season ever”\textsuperscript{65}—larger performance venues were required. Mumma recounted that by 1964 appropriate spaces in Ann Arbor had become problematic, especially with the lack of any suitable civic auditorium or performance hall, a curious predicament given Ann Arbor’s reputation as a “cultural oasis” during the 1960s.\textsuperscript{66} For the performance, Mumma remembered that individual performers often moved around “by the walls at the perimeter.”\textsuperscript{67}

\textsuperscript{64} Kasemets, \textit{Canvangard}, 73. Also performing was the experimental percussionist Max Neuhaus (1939-2009). Neuhaus traveled to Toronto three years later for the SightSoundSystems festival, where he performed the audience-participation work \textit{Public Supply} on Ryerson’s campus radio station.

\textsuperscript{65} James, “ONCE,” 381.


\textsuperscript{67} Personal communication, February 26, 2012.
Figure 7.11. Graph indicating sequence of actions for all three nonets across a duration of 49 seconds. Udo Kasemets Papers, Archives Collection 11 : B.2.8f, University of Toronto. Used with permission.

Figure 7.11 (shown above), an excerpt from the ONCE Ensemble realization, provides a clear visual representation of how the three nonets interacted with each other, over a timespan of 49 seconds beginning at 10 minutes and 37 seconds into the piece. Kasemets organized each nonet according to instrumental likeness, subdivided into groupings marked A, B, and C. Thus the complete composition of the ensemble was

Nonet 1: percussion, broken down into A (piano, 3 players), B (percussion, 3 players) and C (piano, voice, spinet); Nonet two: chorus, broken down into three groups of three speakers (A, B, C); and Nonet three: winds & brass, broken down into A (flutes: piccolo,
flute, alto flute), B (winds/brass: clarinet, saxophone, horn), and C (brass: trumpet, trombone, tuba). For example, then, from 10:37 until 10:44—the first seven-second interval of time on the excerpt in Figure 7.11—the ensemble is playing almost in its entirety, with the exception of a few performers. One of Nonet 1’s “A” members, for instance, does not execute any actions until 10:44. Between 10:44 and 10:51, the graph indicates this specific player—a pianist in this case—is to perform six actions in seven seconds, with the last two occurring closer to time marker 10:51, and the first four closer to 10:44.

“An Expression of Our Electronic Age”: Graphic Notation as Cool Media

The most frequently realized version of Trigon was for nine players, performed by the Isaacs Gallery Mixed Media Ensemble in its various iterations and directed by Kasemets between 1965 and 1967. I would suggest that the Ensemble’s nonet version, which combined spoken word, visual art, dance, and music, exemplified an idealized materialization of the work’s potential as triangulated in the performance notes, the score itself, and the broader discourse informing Trigon and Canavangard. For each nonet performance with the Ensemble, Kasemets incorporated sections of texts by authors whose works were invigorating his own thinking during the time: The Medium is the Message by McLuhan, Dante’s Inferno, The System of Dante’s Hell by LeRoi Jones, Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett, and Finnegans Wake by James Joyce. In 1966 and 1967, the Ensemble “toured” Trigon, giving performances in Toronto, Hamilton, Windsor, and Kingston, in a version called Trigon (Inferno) using texts by Jones, and of course, Dante.
I want to focus on the first performance of *Trigon* as a nonet as a way of illustrating how the piece might work as an experiment in deploying the theoretical abstractions of McLuhan and especially acoustic space into practice, and to equally focus my discussion of Canavangard as more than merely a project of polemics. In so doing I also consider *Trigon*, and graphic notational methods as they are used discursively in Canavangard as “cool media”: what McLuhan described as media requiring high levels of intersensory participation. I offer that Kasemets was fully convinced of the viability of McLuhan’s technological utopianism as a model for testing the limits of musical communication.

John Beckwith recalled that he invited the Isaacs Gallery Mixed Media Ensemble to be included on the program of Ten Centuries Concerts 1965 season-opening performance, on October 3rd at the University of Toronto’s Edward Johnson Building’s Concert Hall. The program was unusually diverse: the first half featured two ragas performed by P. Randeva (sarod) and Hem Ray (tabla), and two duo improvisations by guitarist Ed Bickert (who would later go on to successful career in the Canadian jazz scene as a performer and teacher) and pianist Maury Kaye (misspelled Kay in the program). Three works filled out the evening following the intermission: Kazuo Fukushima’s *Three pieces from Chu-U* for flute and piano; Barney Childs’ *Music for Singer* (commissioned by Kasemets in 1964, and eventually published as a Canavangard score in 1968); and, completing the program, *Trigon*. For this concert, the Ensemble was comprised of Jean-Guy Brault (saxophone, flute, clarinet), Catharine Hindson (singer), William Kilbourn (reciter), artists Graham Coughtry, Dennis Burton, and Gordon Rayner (painters, all of whom were affiliated with the Isaacs Gallery at the time, and who each
went on to develop successful careers as visual artists in Canada), Bruce Mather\textsuperscript{68} and Paul Kilburn (pianists), and Kasemets (conductor, piano).

The main text used for this performance was excerpted from \textit{The Medium is the Message}, spoken by Kilbourn, while other players were positioned variously throughout the hall. Reviews of the concert help to recreate the environment in greater detail: \textit{The Telegram}'s Paul Ennis noted Hindson and Kilbourn were stationed at either end of a long gallery above the stage (presumably the organ loft in what is now Walter Hall), while Kasemets, Mather, and Kilburn were clustered together at stage centre around a single piano, playing, as Ralph Hicklin noted, “the keyboard, case, and innards” of the instrument.\textsuperscript{69} Burton and Coughtry stood at easels at either end of the stage, and Rayner, also at an easel, just to the side of the piano. Brault, on reeds, was dead centre, in front of the piano. Interestingly, and possibly as a last-minute addition, a tenth performer—an unnamed female model—also took part in the performance, compromising the rigid numerology of the performance instructions.

Hicklin, a drama critic, noted that Hindson “sang and controlled a tape recording of the Merry Widow Waltz” and Kilbourn “orated with ferocious virtuosity and accompanied himself on some form of drum.” Coughtry, he also observed, “was permitted to destroy the magic number 9 [the number of performers allowed by Kasemets] by bringing in a model in white face and black union suit to posture against a blackboard, while he outlined her in chalk.”\textsuperscript{70} He further writes, and here I quote him at

\textsuperscript{68} Curiously, when I spoke to Bruce Mather in February of 2011 on the phone, he denied being in the Isaacs Gallery Ensemble, despite being named in the program and in reviews of the concert.

\textsuperscript{69} Unpublished review. Udo Kasemets Papers, Archives Collection 11: C.5.2.0.

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.
length, that the event was “not for concert-goers who close their eyes and let the music
penetrate their pores:”

No matter where you looked, you were conscious that you were missing some
other musical event, spoken or blown or pounded or drawn. I found myself
concentrating [sic] more and more on the painters, and especially [sic] on Gordon
Rayner, who had a position stage centre, and who was making music in a medium
far more spectacular than any of his fellow musicians. On one side of a wooden
stepladder he was building a composition with paint. As a hammerer, Rayner is a
rythmic [sic] virtuoso, though the holding power of his hammering led to the
composition’s being something of a mobile; but that’s how music is. Over in a
dark corner, where I could not see well what he was creating, Dennis Burton was
doing things to a sheet of plastic mounted on a frame. Towards the end of Trigon,
the frame collapsed, and Burton sat down on a stool and smoked until the finale.
I’m not sure whether the smoking would have been in Kasemets’ time chart, or
volume chart, or sequence chart, or event chart. It may have been a spur-of-the-
moment improvisation by Burton.71

Hicklin’s final comment points to a familiarity with the piece absent in so many other
reviews of Kasemets’ works from the 1960s—he clearly had some knowledge of the
work’s form and performance blueprints. Like each realization of Trigon, the October
1965 incarnation contains performance instructions unique to the players and their
configuration. Kasemets used a system of colour coded and modified note heads which
pointed each player towards a particular kind of action. For example, green note heads
tell pianists to play a “normal” attack, and to produce “conventional” piano colour; red
note heads to produce sounds on the strings, piano frame, additional percussion
instruments, etc. Green note heads instruct painters (divided into high, medium, and low)
to “paint only ‘what is in your head’”; blue notes, to listen to the sounds around you and
“be influenced by them,” and red notes, to speak the given text (in their case, from 26
Statements re Duchamp by John Cage). Similar such instructions are given to speakers
and to Brault (telling him which instrument to play—either flute, clarinet, or

71 Ibid.
saxophone—and specific timbral and articulative attacks). Figures 7.12 and 7.13 detail excerpts from parts prepared for the concert, and Figure 7.14 shows the entire ensemble’s trajectory through the first 49 seconds of the work.

Figure 7.12. Excerpt from Catherine Hindson’s realized part of October 3, 1965 performance of *Trigon*. Udo Kasemets Papers, Archives Collection 11 : B.2.8e, University of Toronto. Used with permission.
Figure 7.13. Beginning of the “low” piano’s realized part of October 3, 1965 performance of *Trigon*. Udo Kasemets Papers, Archives Collection 11: B.2.8e, University of Toronto. Used with permission.
Figure 7.14. Ensemble chart (first page) of October 3, 1965 performance of *Trigon*. Udo Kasemets Papers, Archives Collection 11: B.2.8e, University of Toronto, Used with permission.

Ennis, writing the in *The Telegram*, called the piece “a juxtaposition of three art forms whose common source is physical actions,” and wrote that the audience was “bombarded on a multi-sensory level.” In a McLuhanesque flavour, he contextualized the work as “an expression of our electronic age where the medium is instant and society’s senses [are] almost saturated”:

Above all, the work is absorbing, involving. It is undeniably ‘cool’ in the Marshall McLuhan sense … McLuhan’s “the medium is the message” (that is, the spirit, the feeling, the ‘what is’ of a culture is better understood by the means of communication rather than by the substance of it) is central. … That it does
involve us in some measure of its quality; that it is unconventional is more the food for the controversy.\textsuperscript{72}

Cool, “in the Marshall McLuhan sense” refers specifically to media which force its user to more actively engage with the technology in order to comprehend meaning through immersive and agentive multisensory participation. The textural consistency of cool media, in McLuhan’s lexicon, is low-grade, low-definition: a comic book, a seminar, television, speech. The amount of information given in cool media is minimal and fragmented, and the user (or, listener) has to fill in the missing data through sensory and cognitive processes. The opposite “hot” media are high-definition, enhancing a single sense, requiring less effort, less participation: a lecture, a movie, a book—print typography and radio, according to McLuhan. This terminological dyad was originally generated from McLuhan’s perception of jazz and popular music, and their transformations through the hot medium of radio. As he put it, the big band-era jazz of the 1920s (the age of the new media of movies), was “hot,” whereas smaller jazz combos from the 1950s onwards, were detached, reserved, and “cool”: “jazz of itself tends to be a casual dialogue form of dance quite lacking in the mechanical and repetitive form of the waltz.”\textsuperscript{73}

Janine Marchessault notes that this theoretical move of quantifying various types of media into either hot or cool categories, was one which McLuhan himself explored the least, and refrained from giving much nuance or definition. She usefully labels them as

\textsuperscript{72} Paul Ennis, “It’s a Multi-Sensory Assault Called Trigon,” \textit{The Telegram}, October 4, 1965, 41.

\textsuperscript{73} Marshall McLuhan, \textit{Understanding Media: Extensions of Man} (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1964), 27. This may be a good example of McLuhan’s naiveté in writing and thinking about music, to which both John Beckwith and Donald Gilles alluded.
“discursive probes rather than empirical categories,” and notes that McLuhan’s use of hot and cool was consistently confusing, frustrating, and even crude. But as a general tool for characterizing the “acoustic” qualities of new media in the electronic age, the rhetorical quality of “cool” is useful to us here for pointing to a movement towards immersiveness and involvement.

Thus I would argue that *Trigon* exemplifies how Kasemets envisioned graphic and non-standard notation systems as a kind of cool medium from a number of possible angles. I have shown, through a somewhat brief and largely incomplete biology of the work as dynamic and mutable over the course of its various realizations, that it requires—and as a “composition” may be defined by—a level of engagement from performers that shifts their roles into that of a co-composer. Graphic notation as a technology describes an object whose material content is ostensibly missing, and needs to be realized or “filled in” by its user. Also, as I have discussed above, this was a task for which performers were not always adequately equipped: recall attempts by Turetzky and Childs to complete the compositional process asked of them in *Trigon* as being thwarted by the complexities presented to them in the “score.” We may consider this conflict as a symptom of the inherent dialectical tensions endemic to the secondary orality expressed by Ong, wherein the embodied and systemic tactics of comprehension associated with typographic visuality reside at a deep level. Further, following Ong, the parts themselves which performers used to execute the actions in *Trigon* may be considered indications that the process of moving beyond the typographic universe requires tools suited to the laws of its

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75 Ibid., 177.
76 Ibid.
cosmology: performers still need notes to read; speakers still need words laid out in visual, alphabetic translations to communicate language.

Yet, when we consider the processes involved in its realization, how its master score requires a prolonged and advanced tactile interaction by performers—often in collaboration with the composer, and ideally, total internalization—the decoding and deciphering of its material amounts to what McLuhan was describing as the electric age. As a visual medium, the score resists the systematized and prescriptive strategies of interpretation developed by so-called typographic musicians. This particular performance of Trigon from October 1965, as evidenced in part by the reviews quoted above, accentuates a disavowal of lineality and perceptual distance in the simultaneous, overlapping, and competing actions of performers. The resultant confusium approximates a McLuhanesque acoustic space, where single focal points are purposely obscured in favour of projecting multiple sensory stimuli in the guise of speech, dance, painting, and music.

I have laboured over Trigon and especially the October 1965 concert in detail here to present it as one instantiation of Canavangard’s discursive propositions, which may be to varying degrees of success applied to the works by composers Kasemets chose in curating the series. This concert is also unique for one other reason: McLuhan was there to witness his ideas being tested in the kiln of performance. The following day, he telegrammed Kasemets to thank him for the performance—the same note I examined in Chapter 3.
Conclusion: Canavangard and Canada—a Centre without Margins

As an artefact, Canavangard is a valuable document in one aspect for its direct and explicit importation of McLuhan’s communication theories into the milieu of experimental music. In the same way that McLuhan viewed media as content, exemplified by the habitually-misused aphorism “the medium is the message,” Kasemets saw graphic and non-normative systems of musical visual communication as technologies having radical potential to reconfigure music’s ontological framework of composer → performer → listener by forcefully engendering a dialogical process involving all three “classes” of musical participants. McLuhan suggests that the post-print era of electronic communication signals a return to a new, haptic orality of communal interaction, and Kasemets’ draft materials for Canavangard reveal a similar hope. Kasemets observes that “our century represents a rapid transformation from the industrial era into one of electronic technology” with the consequences affecting “arts in all their manifestations. ... Old relationships have given way to new ones.”

Yet Kasemets had even more ambitious goals with the Canavangard project beyond fixing the broken relationships between composers and listeners. Commenting in the catalogue’s afterward on Canada’s lack of “cultural unity,” Kasemets locates the work done under the Canavangard umbrella in a wider landscape of postwar cultural politics. As a country of “isolated cultural hamlets,” he writes that Canada was “never able to develop anything even remotely resembling a national musical tradition.” Where the prevalent narratives about cultural nationalism in the 1960s lament such coherence,

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77 Udo Kasemets Papers, Archives Collection 11 : E.1.2.
78 Kasemets, Canavangard, 109.
79 Ibid.
Kasemets sees this as a “blessing” when “older nations are fighting hard to shed parochial prejudice in order to become world citizens.” Nationalist rhetoric surrounding Canadian composition during the 1960s emanated most strongly from cultural arbiters like Keith MacMillan of the Canadian Music Centre, who later suggested composers “ought to be made to write Canadian.” Others, such as broadcaster Hugh Davidson of the CBC, advocated legislating cultural nationalism in music, lest “we return to our old habits of having it dominated by foreigners.”

By the late 1960s, the conversation about nationalism had become ubiquitous, and largely inflected by the fear of American cultural imperialism and fuelled by the accomplishments of Expo in Montreal for Canada’s Centennial celebrations. Kasemets contextualized Canavangard within the postwar nation-building projects of infrastructural and communications development, but as means of expressing what he sees as the globality of Canadian composers—and citizens. Canavangard attests to the international networks of exchange occurring at local levels between Canadian cultural producers and their international collaborators, and offers an exit from the inward and circular discourse of cultural identity by instead emphasizing the unusual cosmopolitanism of postwar Canadian music activity. By including his Ann Arbor associates from ONCE—Mumma, Lucier, Cacioppo, Childs—as part of what he calls a “truly 20th century culture,” Kasemets makes an oblique manoeuvre that rejects the hollow sloganeering about “writing Canadian,” at the same time acknowledging the rhizomatic border-crossing

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80 Ibid.
movements of Canadian and American avant-garde composers, exemplified in no small part by Kasemets himself.

Kasemets’ vision for Canadian culture in the late 1960s, if we permit Canavangard to be considered as a vehicle or expressing such a vision, conformed to McLuhan’s technological utopia of the global village. As we have seen, the global village’s spatial profile is “acoustic,” and immersive—a centre without margins, in McLuhan’s way of putting it. But Canavangard disappeared with the 1960s, for reasons as banal they were reflective of any change in the prevailing currents of avant-garde practice at decade’s end. BMIC relinquished its publishing interests in the early 1970s to Berandol Music, which effectively became a “holding company” for all the Canadian scores it acquired,\(^1\) and with Ronald Napier’s support and political influence removed from the picture, Canavangard as a publication enterprise ground to a halt. For all of Kasemets’ “DIY” aspirations to remove the publisher as middleman from the chain of communication, Canavangard’s fate was, in the end, ultimately determined by the vagaries of the music publishing industry. Beckwith recalls:

> In the 60s, BMI certainly was a lively place. You could imagine that you were doing something that if it wasn’t too big and too complicated, BMI would’ve produced it. … So that was a good period that he got those things out. … Udo could show that there were composers in Canada and the States who were doing interesting things in musical notation, and he got the enterprise started. Even in the 70s you couldn’t have done that. … Berandol didn’t have nearly the same interest or impact.\(^2\)

Kasemets’ preliminary sketches for the project also included a periodical series called FOCUS (the first issue of which, “FOCUS on Musicecology,” was published in 1970 just before the switch to Berandol) which would elaborate on the scope and contents

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\(^1\) In John Beckwith’s words. Interview with the author, April 20, 2011.

\(^2\) Ibid.
of the Canavangard catalogue, and include LP recordings of works featured in each issue, but these never materialized. We must consider that by the 1970s, however, Kasemets’ brand of experimental music practice—unapologetically Cagean in scope and execution—perhaps no longer resonated with the same urgency and immediacy as it did during the electric arc of the mid-1960s. McLuhan’s intellectual influence had likewise waned, and would continue to diminish steadily, and in some respects the ideological undergirding of Canavangard today seems decidedly less-than-sturdy. Even at the time, not everyone was convinced of Kasemets’ entrepreneurial ability to re-shape the constitution of sensory and subjective experience through experiments with notation, music, and the mixing of media. Jackson House was in the theatre at the Edward Johnson building on October 3rd in 1965, and didn’t buy it: The next day, in *The Toronto Daily Star*, he reported that *Trigon* was vaguely amusing for about the first five minutes … but the fun grew thin very rapidly. If this is the direction the modern concert hall is travelling, I for one want no part of it. I agree that music must change, but if the changes mean that we are to be treated to ideas that fail to stimulate either negatively or positively, then the future of music is bleak indeed. Mr. Kasemets, you’re on the wrong road…

As I discussed in earlier chapters of this dissertation, such dismissive reception of Kasemets’ projects was commonplace, and many critics regularly took the opportunity to excoriate him in print, and to delegitimize experimentalism at large as a fraudulent cultural pursuit.

Significant incongruencies emerge in reconciling Kasemets’ interpretation of McLuhan, such as the analogous role that graphic-alternative notation seems to occupy in place of electronic media. But as a new musical *technology*, Kasemets believed that

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abandoning standard notation would have extraordinary ramifications for musical
practice going forward in the twentieth century, similar to how McLuhan saw the
messianic power of electronic media to destabilize the typographic universe.
Canavangard, as much more than a short-lived publication series of graphic scores, maps
the convergences of music, culture, and technology which intersected in such particular
ways, and offers an account of the physical, disciplinary, and aesthetic border-crossing
that shaped Canadian experimental music during the 1960s.
CONCLUSION.

EXPERIMENTALISM AND THE CONFIGURATION OF PLACE

Udo Kasemets organized what was arguably the most famous performance of experimental art—or music, or whatever you will call it—that occurred in 1960s Toronto. On March 5, 1968, John Cage, Marcel Duchamp, and Teeny Duchamp ascended the proscenium at the Ryerson Auditorium to play a few rounds of chess on an electronically rigged board. The concert, Reunion, was the opening event in the week-long festival of art and technology called SightSoundSystems, held at Ryerson Polytechnic Institute (now Ryerson University). But for one final curtain call Duchamp made later that year, Reunion was the avant-garde master’s final public appearance before his death. After handily defeating his erstwhile chess student Cage in a quick twenty-five minutes, the players took a brief pause and began a second, longer match that lasted, according to various accounts, towards one o’clock in the morning. By this time the audience, numbering in the hundreds at the beginning of the performance, had dwindled to about ten, with at least one person shouting “Encore!” after both Cage and Duchamp decided to adjourn for the evening.¹

Reunion has become a kind of mythic event in avant-garde performance, often written about (Brackett 2008; Chen 2002; Tomkins 1996; Smith 2005 et al.), and as

Lowell Cross notes, erroneously so. Cross, who was then racing to complete his MA thesis (on electronic music) at the University of Toronto, designed the chessboard that Cage and Duchamp used. Consisting of a series of 64 photo-resistors placed under each square, and equipped with several internal contact microphones, the board broadcast signals to loudspeakers and screens positioned throughout the audience. Cage titled the event *Reunion* to celebrate the people with whom he had worked most closely in recent years—Gordon Mumma, David Tudor, David Berhman, and Cross, who were present at the concert, performing their own electronic and electroacoustic works simultaneously throughout the duration of the event. The signals from their sound sources were run through the board, and the moves made by Cage and Duchamp determined which sounds would be triggered and when. Cage, at this point—the late 1960s—had more or less distanced himself from the notion of composition altogether, and although the concept for *Reunion* was his, the performance featured not a single note by Cage.

As David Pritchett describes it, *Reunion* was a piece with a “personal theme of friendship,” as Cage, Mumma, Berhman, and Tudor had by 1968 “all gone their own ways artistically,” and the event had a celebratory and theatrical air to it. Both chess players drank wine and smoked (cigarettes for Cage, cigars for Duchamp), and the auditorium for five or so hours was transformed into a space where Cage could exercise his “public delight in living everyday life as an artform.” *Reunion* emphasized, rather bluntly, many of the values entrenched in McLuhan’s utopic view of the new media

2 Ibid. Cross takes great care to correct the many minor errors that appear in print about the details of that night in his article, including those concerning the date and length of performance, as well as the specificities of the chess board he created.
environment of the decade: simultaneity, paratactical or alogical relations, immersiveness, a rapturous intersensorial experience that seemed to at once collapse and expand time. Donald Brackett, writing in *Musicworks* somewhat hyperbolically, called it “one of the closing acts in the triumph of twentieth century discontinuity in all the arts”\(^5\)—an abrasive and unrelenting implosion of sound and play that seemed intent on divesting itself of all the preconditions conscripted into the métier of performance. For Cage, the stuff of everyday life had become all that was necessary for performance to transpire, with its incongruencies, happy (and unhappy) coincidences, and the barrage of sensory images and objects that constitute the mundane.

As we might by now predict, the critics sent to cover the event by their newspapers were unanimous in their disproval, and reprinting choice passages from their columns would, at this point, prove redundant. It also doesn’t especially matter. It was loud, they wrote; it was chaotic; it was, according to most, boring. Cage and Duchamp, the ossified ambassadors of an already-aged avant-garde, were put on display in front of a packed house (which, again, included McLuhan, according to Donald J. Gillies) forced to endure yet another incomprehensible pageant of noise. Its end was appropriately inconclusive, incomplete: the players, having ran out of wine, and having grown tired at the lateness of the hour, decided to adjourn until the next day. But *Reunion*’s legacy has loomed large in Toronto, as the one marquee event that sewed the city into the fabric of 1960s experimentalism, right at the tail end of decade. More than any other single event or performance, it accomplished what I am arguing that Udo Kasemets had been working towards since staging Men, Minds and Music five years before—perhaps even in his

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critical writing in the pages of *The Toronto Daily Star* since the late 1950s. The map of experimental performance, as it was being etched across the cultural geography of 1960s North America historiographically and critically, now irrefutably included Toronto.

Strangely, and perhaps appropriately, Udo Kasemets lingers in the marginalia of any account of *Reunion*. SightSoundSystems, the incredibly ambitious festival that unfolded in the days following Cage and Duchamp’s chess match, is rarely mentioned in connection to *Reunion*—the spectacle of the avant-garde’s two luminaries on stage together eclipsed the rest of the week’s proceedings. SightSoundSystems brought leading mixed-media practitioners to perform at Ryerson in what was publicized as the opening of the Toronto branch of E.A.T—Experiments in Art and Technology—the organization run by Billy Klüver of Bell Labs (where Istvan Anhalt had earlier journeyed for research) and the artist Robert Rauschenberg to explore the increasing creative proximities between art and technology. The festival featured a remarkable array of programming by artists of professional reputation who were using media and technology as an integrated part of their practice, including the visual artist and sculptor Les Levine, the poet John Giorno, and the percussionist and composer Max Neuhaus. Students at Ryerson and other artists were given the opportunity to present installations, performances, and revues—including one by the painter Pierre Coupey, guitarist Rick Kitaeff, and the vagabond fire-breathing circus performer Marcel Horne (known professionally as “El Diablo, the Human Volcano”) called “The Electric Shaman and Other Carnies.” Kasemets staged “lecturessays” on the intersections between art, communication, and technology; his first computer piece, *Tt* (a “cybernetic audience-controlled, audio-visual performance piece,”
composed in tribute to Buckminster Fuller, Marshall McLuhan, and John Cage), received its only realization at the festival.

The impact of the festival on Toronto audiences and critics, says Donald J. Gillies, was not especially positive. Gillies, now a Professor Emeritus of media communication, was then a lecturer at Ryerson, and handled most of the coordinational and administrative duties associated with SightSoundSystems. Critics “were predisposed to disapprove of much of what Udo Kasemets did,” as he said to me in a 2012 interview. “[The] form that SightSoundSystems took … did not have the effect of building a new positive audience. It had the effect of repelling potential audience, I would say. I think that’s not misleading. And the repulsion was lead by the critics.”6 As with nearly all of the experimental activities that Udo Kasemets spearheaded in the decade, SightSoundSystems seemed to accomplish little more than giving conservative critics more to complain about.

The festival was one of a handful of similar campus-based events bolstered by the wave of countercultural energy in Toronto—The University of Toronto had already hosted several, including the notoriously risqué Perception ’67 that transformed several rooms of University College into a series of environments, which were to be dedicated to exploring different aspects of the LSD experience (although discussions were at the last minute moved to Hart House, due to the disapproval of University College President Douglas Le Pan). Toronto artist Michael Hayden designed the so-called “Mind Excursion Rooms;” the New York avant-garde rock group The Fugs performed, and Allen Ginsberg appeared as a special guest. Stuart Broomer’s Kinetic Improvisation Ensemble, who had

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6 Interview with the author, January 27, 2012.
appeared at several of the Isaacs Gallery Mixed Media Concerts, played a set of what was presumably noise music at Convocation Hall; their 50-minute performance was “roundly booed,” according to historian Charles Levi.\footnote{Charles Levi, “Sex, Drugs, Rock & Roll, and the University College Lit: The University of Toronto Festivals 1965-69,” \textit{Historical Studies in Education} 18, no. 2 (2006), 178.} The festival’s big draw, Dr. Timothy Leary, was detained while trying to cross the border from Detroit and didn’t attend—but McLuhan, whose celebrity in 1967 was cresting, made an appearance at the festival’s Saturday night “happening” at Convocation Hall, wearing a light-refracting “third eye” on his forehead.

Yet, as Gillies adroitly observes, there was something about Kasemets that seemed to enervate critics on a personal level. The opprobrium they reserved for him in their reviews manifested sometimes as openly hostile tack—which, by today’s standards, seem to transgress bounds of professionalism. Patrick Scott, in a random stroke of pettifoggery that was \textit{a propos} of nothing at all, concluded one of his columns from November 1967 (about the comedy duo Wayne & Schuster) in \textit{The Toronto Daily Star}, “…What ever happened to Udo Kasemets?”\footnote{Patrick Scott, “Wayne & Schuster: Omit One Booster,” \textit{The Toronto Daily Star}, November 4, 1967, 30.} Recall that Scott was the purple-faced critic driven from the Isaacs Gallery Concert earlier that year, who often found space for nastiness aimed at Udo; here, in the interval between the final Mixed Media Concert of June 1967 and SightSoundSystems, Scott’s rumination is unquestionably tinged with an overtone of schadenfreude at Kasemets’ currently lack of visibility in Toronto’s music scene—his defeat in the wake of the Isaacs Gallery Concerts’ widespread critical failure.

But \textit{What ever happened to Udo Kasemets?} asks another, more important question about the city and the influence that Kasemets’ activities had exerted. Indeed,
their absence, even for a few months, had become conspicuous. Experimentalism, which critics had received with such trepidation and suspicion, had become indelibly ingrained into the cultural topography of the city Harry Somers had once described as the “restaurant that only serves fish and chips.” It had begun to factor into how place was being configured as Toronto’s postwar transition into a major metropolitan centre of culture and commerce occurred across lines of civic identity. Place, as many commentators have remarked, is a combination of material, social, spatial, and symbolic vectors that cohere to form the tactile and sensible contours of our everyday experiences. Place and places are not simply physical locations where we live, play, or travel to; they are dynamic spaces where power, meaning, and relational aspects of our existence take shape.

The relationship between place and music has been explored, in the main, by scholars of popular idioms in the mid-1990s and beyond who drew inspiration from the work done by cultural geographers in a time when place’s value was being challenged. Globalization and modernity, writes Martin Stokes in the introduction to the influential collection Ethnicity, Identity, and Music: the Musical Construction of Place (Oxford, 1994), enacted a critical dissolution of the feeling of place. Music, he observes, is a vital process through which that feeling of locality and all its uniqueness are reconstituted.9 For all of McLuhan’s rhetorical architecture about the intersensory and the spatial, it is place that is sensed, as Sara Cohen notes. She tells us that music “invests every day relations and practices with a sensuous exhilaration—peculiar embodiment of movement

and collectivity,”¹⁰ and that places “are socially produced as practical settings or contexts for social activity but, through such activity, [they] are also produced in a conceptual and symbolic sense.¹¹

What is remarkable is the startling, almost serial absence of place within McLuhan’s imbrication of music as a spatial tool for relationality, yet the net effect of Kasemets’ work in 1960s Toronto is to highlight the very placefulness of the city itself. This is especially telling if we consider the sum of Kasemets’ activities in the context of modernity—not in its abstracted sense as a global phenomenon, but in the personal narrative of loss and recovery that marked Kasemets’ journey from Estonia to Canada. Mahyar Arefi, in writing on how modernism has changed urban planning, suggests that place and placelessness have become a central debate in urban design in light of how modernism has disrupted the emotional connections to place in an overarching sense of loss. Urban designers, he writes, consider the elements of the city’s built and traversed environment in the context of how they articulate aspects of place or non-place—centredness or rootedness versus “nowhereness” or “otherness.” Non-places, Arefi writes provocatively, “lack diversity, surprise, ambiguity.”¹²

¹² 1960s Toronto offered Udo Kasemets a chance to reaffirm a connection to place, to connect, through music, to what Andrew Bennett has called “local structures of feeling.”¹³ When Udo says he’s always been an outsider, we must remember that it’s not simply an off-handed gesture of self-

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¹¹ Ibid., 438.
¹² Mahyar Arefi, “Place and Placelessness as Narratives of Loss: Rethinking the Notion of Place,” Journal of Urban Design 4, no. 2 (June 1999), 188.
deprecation: he is of a generation whose attachments to place are far more grounded in feelings of dis-placement, dislocation, and rupture.

Can experimentalism, with its ambiguous and open-ended aesthetic structures help configure a sense of place? Can it be a way of recouping a sense of rootedness from the nowhereness? When I asked Udo in 2010 about what he thought the impact was of Canavangard on Toronto’s musical culture in the 1960s and beyond, he paused for a while, and simply said, nothing. All of the questions I had been presenting him with about this activity, he said, were about “ancient history.” I know that for Udo, the only thing of any importance was what was going on “at the present moment.” I am not quite sure that he appreciated what it was that I was implying; namely, that his work in 1960s Toronto was precedent setting in forcing experimentalism into a mainstream awareness, of presenting compositions by so-called “avant-garde masters”—the real avant-garde, like Stockhausen and Berio with amateurs and dilettantes. In the post-Massey Report era of culture, this divide was yawning, untraversable; cultural activity was serious business, and the transgressions committed in the name of something so sacrosanct could not be countenanced by the elite arbiters of culture.

The real value in thinking about Udo Kasemets, and what he did in a historical context, is how it integrates the marginality of experimentalism with every day life. I believe that what differentiates Udo from someone like Cage, who also denied a separation of art and life, and whose ideas and methods he unapologetically borrowed, was that Toronto and Canada represented the promise of something tangible—an actual place to try and make better through art. So it makes sense to me, that in the years following Udo’s arrival here, he would see the promise of a city like Toronto even if it
only barely poked through the heritage of its nineteenth-century past. His Toronto of the 1960s may have held the possibilities that were denied him in his Tallinn of 1930s, when everything was new. It also makes sense, that, 50 years later, when I pressed him about the efficacy of that work, he would brush it off as ancient history. I got the sense that Udo didn’t see much sense in dwelling on the past, because the past doesn’t exist. There were far too many interesting puzzles left to solve and questions to ask, and I think he firmly believed that all of his work mobilizing an avant-garde sensibility back then went for naught. On that last point he was of course dead wrong.

To finish with a final thought about Udo, the past, and the present: All of these things I have looked at over the course of this study did happen long ago: most of Udo’s output as a composer, as Toronto performers and (the small, devoted) audiences that know it, comes from the 1970s, 80s, and 90s. I have refrained from mentioning this work here for the sake of concision—his music and work in post-1969 (after he began a long career teaching experimental practices at the Ontario College of Art) is almost too voluminous to consider in one study. Hundreds of works, re-written and re-configured to suit specific performances by specific performers in Toronto, are the products from this period.

I am certainly not trying to diminish the importance that experimentalism places on discovery, on newness, and on the unknown—all things that Udo held to be most important. *All questions are meaningful. Not all answers are meaningful.* But the activity that we see happening in Toronto today, with experimental music thriving in every corner of the city; with new performance spaces opening as quickly as others close—The Music Gallery, Double Double Land in Kensington Market, Arraymusic to name only a few—
with a sense of community among performers that is truly intergenerational, dynamic, and always renewing itself—this is the promise that Udo saw in the 1960s, fulfilled.
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