

Composing Situation:

A personal approach for understanding and repeating a musical practice

2023

Arie Verheul van de Ven

Written in conformity with the graduating requirements for the Master of Music Composition at the  
Koninklijk Conservatorium, Den Haag

## Table of contents

Acknowledgements .....	3
Abstract .....	4
Introduction .....	5
Part 1: Conceptual and Artistic Backgrounds.....	7
1.1 Psychogeography and Getting Lost as a Tool .....	7
1.2 Community Theatre & Arts – Composing (in) Social Space .....	9
Part 2: Background in musical practices .....	13
2.1 The Great Fences of Australia .....	13
2.2 The Scratch Orchestra .....	15
2.3 Katt Hernandez – Ephemeral Space.....	16
2.4 The World Soundscape Project.....	18
2.5 Christopher Small – Musicking.....	20
Part 3: Personal Approaches to Composition .....	21
3.1 Composer/Performer vs. Facilitator/Participant.....	21
3.2 The Setting Up of the Conditions Under Which This Can Happen .....	24
3.3 Writing Exclusively for Myself and Electronics (or: Dérive and Facilitating My Own Practice)....	30
Part 4: Pieces .....	32
4.1 In This Moment, Composing for Impossible Situations .....	32
4.2 Overpass Music & LAKESCAPES, My Ephemeral Toronto .....	41
4.3 Navigations, Viola Geographies.....	48
Conclusion, further explorations .....	54
Works Cited:.....	56

## Acknowledgements

I'd like to acknowledge the support of my research supervisors Tao G. Vrhovec Sambolec, and Alison Isadora for their support in my research, and the support of my composition tutors Yannis Kyriakides, Peter Adriaanzs, and Genevieve Murphy throughout the creation of the works in this paper. I would also like to acknowledge the incredible support of my mentors in community arts & my colleagues at the Gather Round Singers: Ruth Howard, Shifra Cooper, Tijana Spasic, Latasha Lennox, Ahmed Hagezy, Animikiikwe Couchie, Natalie Fasheh, Beth Helmers, Karis Jones-Pard, Rakefet Arieli, Catherine Moeller, Tamyka Bullen, Hodan Ibrahim, Tasmeen Syed, Pesch Nepoose, Sharada Eswar, Vivien Ilion, and Risa de Rege, from whom I've learned so much more than I can impart in 39 pages. I'd also like to thank the musicians who performed the works mentioned in this paper: Jonathan Stuchbery, Áine Schryer-O'Gorman, Ximena Huizi, Raneem Baraket, Lisette Cogdell, Mark Pinder, Emma Bilger, Martin van de Ven, the many members of the Gather Round Singers, and the Kirkos Ensemble. And of course, a massive thank you to my family, and my fiancé Sam Rowlandson-O'Hara, who have all graciously listened to me talk through this paper for many months.

## **Abstract**

This paper is about finding relationships within my own composition process, how these relate to my relationships with the world around me, and how these impact the music that I make. In this paper I will touch on how my work has been influenced by psychogeography, making music about locations, and my experiences working in community arts. I will discuss my influences from the work Situationists International and later psychogeographic explorations, the community art world in Toronto, discussing how they have influenced my composition process and how the relationships between people, places, and sound play into the music that I compose, and the musical worldviews that helped me shape these influences into my own work. I will further explore, specifically, a part of my process which involves the setting up of situations in which music occurs as part of my compositional practice, discussing how the situation in which music is being made impacts that music, and how the music can impact the situation, finding reciprocity within these musical relationships.

## Introduction

Since the beginning of my master's degree in 2019, my work has comprised of being an improvising violist, film score composer, filmmaker, community arts facilitator, music teacher focusing on teaching klezmer, composition and improvisation, composer of acoustic orchestral and chamber music, and as a composer of acoustic chamber music and composer of electronic and electroacoustic music. I've been writing highly specific scores, and composing music based on open improvisatory elements. There are a many parts to my musical practice, but they feel isolated like islands, an archipelago of ideas and methods of music making. My ongoing musical identity crisis is one of the few things that remains consistent over my life making music. While diverse practices are not necessarily a rare thing among musicians, particularly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, what has left me confused in the past is the feeling that there is something linking all these sides of my musical life – that there is some part of my practice that remains consistent whatever context I find myself making music in. This research is about trying to find a commonality in my own approach, dealing with following my interest, finding enthusiasm in my approach, placing myself in situations, and composing my way out. While I don't know whether I will ever find that thing definitively, or if it is something that exists in the first place, this research has brought me towards a method of working that remains consistent across multiple projects and manages to keep me interested and engaged with the music making process. What I've arrived at is the importance of context and situation in my writing process, and the use of two sides of my musical self that work in tandem – one that is dealing with creating or finding a context or situation to make music in, and the other that deals with finding my way through or composing my way out of that situation. This research paper is about my personal approach to composition and should not be seen as a strict set of beliefs around music making as a whole. Through this research, I hope to further clarify and understand what it is in music that I find interesting, and why it is that I continue to pursue particular strategies in composition. Through

understanding my own interests and practices with more clarity, I hope that I can further refine my techniques and aesthetic values throughout my work in the future. I will begin this paper by discussing ideas, movements, and projects that have influenced me in the areas of composing with situation. Then, I will discuss my techniques and ideas on composing with situation drawing on my personal experience as a musician, and finally sharing four of my works and connecting them back to these techniques, and the aspects of them that have influenced me.

#### *A Note on the Word Situation*

In this paper, referring to situation includes space, time, emotional state, social context, and all other elements of a particular context that influence musical decision making. Walking around a particular part of the Toronto waterfront is a situation. Being a composer on a collaborative project that involves a community choir who are forced to meet online during a pandemic is also a situation. Placing my viola on a table in front of me, and playing it with transducers, is also a kind of situation. Instrumentation is a part of a situation. My personal relationships with the individual instrumentalists (Have we met before? Are we familiar with each other's working process? Do we share common interests in music making?) is another part of situation. The word situation in this paper refers to the wider context in which the music making is taking place, including elements of location, memory, and social context.

## Part 1: Conceptual and Artistic Backgrounds

### *1.1 Psychogeography and Getting Lost as a Tool*

Psychogeography: a beginner's guide. Unfold a street map of London, place a glass, rim down, anywhere on the map, and draw around its edge. Pick up the map, go out into the city, and walk the circle, keeping as close as you can to the curve. Record the experience as you go, in whatever medium you favour: film, photograph, manuscript, tape. Catch the textual run-off of the streets; the graffiti, the branded litter, the snatches of conversation. Cut for sign. Log the data-stream. Be alert for the happenstance of metaphors, watch for visual rhymes, coincidences, analogies, family resemblances, the changing moods of the street. Complete the circle, and the record ends. (MacFarlane 3)

In this section, I will discuss psychogeography and its origins, its fundamental techniques of *dérive* and *détournement*, and contextualize it within composition and my own practice.

The term psychogeography was introduced by the Situationists International, a mid-20<sup>th</sup> group of Marxist political thinkers, writers, and artists. Guy Debord, the founder of the Situationists, coined the term and defined it as such: “The study of the specific effects of the geographic environment of the geographic environment (whether consciously organized or not) on the emotions and behaviour of individuals” (Knabb 45-46).

For Debord, psychogeography is a way of identifying urban ambiances. Different ways that urban spaces influence psychic atmospheres. These psychic atmospheres encourage the urban inhabitant to move through a city in a particular way, and it is only in subverting the cities psychogeographical atmospheres through a technique like *dérive* that these urban ambiances can be truly observed and understood by the psychogeographer (Coverly 118).

The *dérive* is another invention of Debord, who defines it as: “A mode of experimental behavior linked to the conditions of urban society: a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances” (Knabb 45 – 46). The *dérive* is a very particular kind of wandering, one which attempts to circumvent the psychogeographic character of the city. By drifting through the city, and resisting the pull of various psychogeographic effects, the individual, or *dériveur* can now experience the ambience of the various parts of the city they are drifting through from a perspective less conditioned by the dominant cultural ideology. Merlin Coverly, connecting Debord’s techniques to the Situationists revolutionary underpinnings, describes this technique of drifting as coming from the tradition of military tactics, rather than the avant-garde, where drifting is defined as “a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus” (Coverly 124). While the *dériveur* is a drifter in a sense, the act of moving through the city against its implied currents is one that holds quite a specific intention, rather than a technique of aimless wandering. (Coverly 124)

The final technique of the Situationists relevant to this research exposition is *détournement*, rerouting, or hijacking in English. *Détournement* seeks to pull images, words, art and other recognizable cultural artifacts, hijacking them to subvert their original meaning (Coverly 121). *Détournement* is quite familiar in an age where media in all forms is constantly reinterpreted and rendered into recognizable memes. Important to *détournement* is the act of subversion of the original, familiar, thing that is being hijacked. *Plunderphonics*, the 1985 album by John Oswald, an album made entirely of samples from popular music, remixed in ways where the source is always recognizable, but transformed in a way that completely divorces it from its original intention as a popular song, is an example of *détournement* in music.

*Dérive* gives us powerful tools to explore an urban environment. The technique of wandering, drifting, and following or subverting one's internal sense of a city's psychogeography, and that of using a completely arbitrary system to understand a place differently as demonstrated by Robert MacFarlane's beginners guide quoted at the start of this section. *Détournement* gives us a way to reinterpret a locale



through artistic practice. In hijacking a recognizable location, image, or phrase, we can recontextualize it to better understand it, or to subvert its meaning totally (Coverly 124). As a compositional technique, détournement may be rather obvious in a time when remix culture is fundamental to dozens of popular musical traditions – but does not need to end at sampling and remixing. Détournement seeks to reroute (or to paddle against) the psychogeographic streams of our familiar images and cultural artifacts, in the way that dérive allows us to for urban environments.

Psychogeography as a term has gone on to describe a broad range of activities, both predating the Situationists, and into the present day. These techniques, while turning out to not be so useful for social revolution (The Situationists and Debord largely abandon writing about psychogeography by 1960 (Coverly 128)), are extremely useful for the artist or composer trying to situate themselves in an environment. They exist in a paradoxical contradiction between methodical techniques and personal meanings and relationships that make them a fascinating well for artistic exploration. Debord himself recognized this contradiction within his conception of psychogeography, writing “The secrets of the city are, at a certain level, decipherable... But the personal meaning they have for us is incommunicable” (Sadler 80)

This distance between the precision of measuring geographic space, and the impossibility of measuring my own relationship with it is what draws me towards psychogeographic practice. Why is my attention drawn to where it is drawn to? Why do I find myself returning to the same places over and over again? What happens when I intentionally go the wrong direction, on my commute – and how does that change my interactions with the city at large?

### *1.2 Community Theatre & Arts – Composing (in) Social Space*

My work in community arts in Toronto over the past six years has deeply influenced my own musical practice. In this section I will begin with a brief introduction to community arts in Toronto, discuss the

origins of this practice in the United Kingdom, and give a brief overview of the community arts methodologies which have influenced the processes by which I make music.

Community art is social practice-based art which is characterized by artistic dialogue between professional artists and community members and involves participatory practices where both professional artists and community members who may have varying levels of art-making experience contribute towards creating a work.

In Toronto, community arts as a term came into common usage in the 1990s (Howard 5-9), describing a set of socially engaged, participatory arts practices that are difficult to pin down in a single definition. The Ontario Arts Council's handbook *Framing Community* gives a solid introduction from the perspective of an arts funder:

Community-engaged art practices are forms of collective artistic expression. In this field, individuals who aren't professional artists actively participate in the artistic process, and the artistic process is considered as important as the final artistic product. Both the social and artistic outcomes of community-engaged art have value. (Hutcheson 1)

A Toronto-based community-engaged arts organization, Jumblied Theatre + Arts, places the origin of its own practice on the work of British playwright Anne Jellicoe, who founded the Colway Theatre Trust (now Claque Theatre) in 1979

In the 1970's [Jellicoe] moved from London to the small town of Lyme Regis, Dorset, to raise a family. In 1978 Ann was asked to write a play for her children's school. It evolved into something quite different from the usual school play: it was large scale, included people from all sections of the town, was based upon historical research of the area by local people, and was animated by a team of theatre professionals – friends and colleagues she brought in from London. She had happened upon a unique formula – for what has since become known as The Community Play. (Jumblied Theatre "The Community Play")

This structure – bringing both local community members and professional artists together to create work based on local histories and stories, is central to community arts practices in Toronto. Jumblied Theatre has completed several cycles of *Jumblied Projects*, residencies that take place over multiple years in a neighbourhood passing through multiple phases of research and creation. (Jumblied Theatre “About Jumblied”)

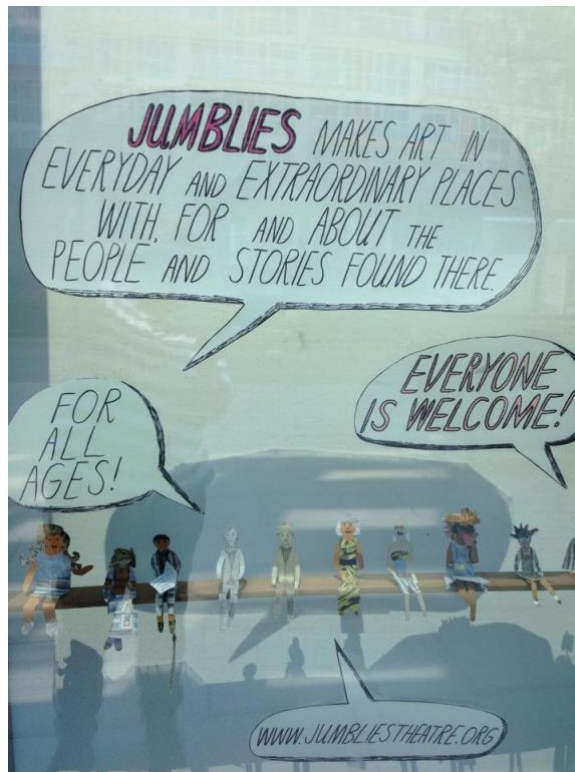


Figure 1, welcoming signs in the front window of Jumblied Theatre. Source: Jumblied Theatre website, About page <http://www.jumbliedtheatre.org/jumblied/about>

The *Jumblied Project* is a multi-year long research and development phases leading into the creation of large-scale interdisciplinary theatre projects with local participants heavily involved in every step of the process. Before settling in Cityplace, the Toronto neighbourhood they are currently based in, Jumblied had run *Jumblied Projects* in several places around the city of Toronto often leaving behind ‘offshoot’ organizations in those neighbourhoods that continue their work after Jumblied has moved on.

I have worked with Jumblies and other community arts organizations under various roles since 2017, and what I have learned about my own practice while working in these contexts is the importance of social context in artistic creation. A fundamental part of planning workshops and community arts events is curating the social space. Creating an inviting environment that is conducive to creative flow, especially for groups that have varied backgrounds and levels of artistic experience, is an art in of itself. Experienced community artists are highly successful at this, having developed their practice over decades. Elements that may seem small: having a friendly welcoming staff, preparing snacks and tea, providing childcare for children who are too young to take part in the activity, and actively paying attention to participants to anticipate needs add up to a space with little friction for creative flow and where artist/facilitators can be open to explore activities and ideas with participants. This process of creating the context in which the art can be made is its own artistic practice. The composer who works with scores written for classical instrumentalists is also, in a sense, dealing with setting up a situation in which artmaking can occur. One can consider the score as instructions for setting up an artistic situation in which musicians can follow instructions written on a page to produce a piece of music. Often in the 21st century, with the diversity of musical practices within the sphere of western contemporary music constantly growing and changing a composer will be expected, if not to lead a rehearsal, to bring significant input to the realization of their own music in the particular context of that performance.

These aspects of understanding, working with, and curating social space can too easily be dismissed as a secondary part of the music making process, coming after considerations of composition like pitch content and form. My goal in my work is to keep all these elements in balance, treating the context in which the music will be made as fundamentally as I would treat choosing pitches or selecting timbres. The social conditions in which music occurs will always have an impact on the music being made, whether it is considered beforehand or not, so considering it as a part of the composition process should be as vital as something like knowing the ranges of the instruments being written for. In this way, the context around the piece of music can inform the content of it, and vice versa, the content of the music

can impact the context in which it occurs, whether that is in a community arts context, or in a professional orchestral rehearsal.

Setting up conditions under which music can occur is fundamental to composition. From making sure that instructions are possible to achieve on a particular instrument, to running a workshop that helps an ensemble understand a particular aspect of a piece of music. The importance of setting up these relationships is summed up well by Ruth Howard, who writes in her article *The Cultural Equivalent of Daycare Workers?*:

I would say that this experience of receiving a gift of artistic value from the participants on the part of the artist – the setting up of the conditions under which this can happen – is one of the necessary conditions for a community-engaged artist, as distinct from the more detached function of the daycare worker, social service programmer or even art teacher. Rachael Van Fossen talks about the community artist as “an agent of change in herself. (Howard 6)

## **Part 2: Background in musical practices**

In this section I will discuss relevant musical practices and pieces to the themes in my research. including Jon Rose's, *The Great Fences of Australia* Project, Katt Hernandez' concept of *The Ephemeral City*, the work of Cornelius Cardew and the Scratch Orchestra, The World Soundscape Project, and briefly, Christopher Small's concepts of *Musicking*.

### *2.1 The Great Fences of Australia*

From the 1980s to the mid-2000s, violinists and composers Jon Rose and Hollis Taylor collected sounds from hundreds of fences around Australia, bowing them, striking them with mallets, and making recordings of sounding the fences. This can be seen in Figure 2 below.



Figure 2, Jon Rose and Hollis Taylor playing a fence in the Outback. Source: Jon Rose, *An Aural Map of Australia*, Uploaded to YouTube by Eyes Like Propellers: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yD-BNkxiQEM>

The basic conceit of the project has always been that Australia wasn't covered by millions of miles of fences but by millions of miles of long string instruments and we just gotta get out there and play'em. I started to do that in 1983 and the variety of music possible still amazes me. (Rose "Great Fences" YouTube video description)

These long fences carry a special significance in Australia, as a symbol of colonial past & present. Many of the longest stretches of fence in the world were built to keep out (or in) invasive species (rabbits in Western Australia) or native species that caused problems for settler agriculture (the Dingo Fence). These fences define the landscape of many stretches of the Australian Outback, and act as a symbol of British imperialism (Rose "Playing Music of Fences" 2). Rose spins this practice of travelling along the fences and playing them into multiple individual projects. In the mini-documentary *An Aural Map of Australia* he describes not only the experience of playing the fences, but the people the trips brought him into contact with – spinning a story of DIY music in Australia (Eyes Like Propellers). The Kronos String quartet performs on sections of fences in Rose's 2009 piece *Music from 4 Fences*.

This forms a kind of psychogeographic practice, treating a piece of infrastructure in the middle of the desert, designed specifically to keep animals out, as a line to follow and a place to be explored, as somewhere to find music. This nearly arbitrary practice of following the fence and finding its sounds results not only in a collection of recordings, but a body of work, and a network of social connections crossing geographic, political, and cultural boundaries.<sup>19</sup> Hollis Taylor writes:

This Fence doesn't figure on most maps, and when it does, it's a vague dotted line progressing in fits and starts as if the unsure hand of its cartographer had erased the displeasing bits, or as if some parts of it flow through prohibited areas under state censorship. It's downright unAmerican, this subtlety. Where are the T-shirts, the bragging billboards? Who will write its tourist text? If the Dingo Fence does not command a sign, a shop, or a TV screen, I won't believe a word of it.

(Taylor 3)

## *2.2 The Scratch Orchestra*

The Scratch Orchestra was founded in 1969 in London by composer Cornelius Cardew in order to perform his piece 'The Great Learning', after an unsuccessful performance by a group of professional singers. Gavin Bryars states in a BBC interview about the performance:

They were probably very good at singing Bach & Brahms, but they were not very good at clicking stones together. Seems astonishing for a chorus... and as a result of that Cornelius realized the need to get together the kind of people who were capable of understanding the aesthetic (qtd. In Nettleship 1)

The primary requirement for joining The Scratch Orchestra were interest & enthusiasm for making experimental music as part of a group, rather than technical ability or previous musical experience. This meant that the group had a wide range of musical experience, ranging from professionals to beginners at their instruments (Nettleship 1). The orchestra went on to mount multiple successful

performances between the years of 1969 and 1972, taking a Fluxus approach towards creating improvised pieces known as *scratch music*.

The importance of interest and enthusiasm cannot be overstated for this kind of collective music making. The professional ensemble who was not interested in diving into the methods of making Cardew's piece work could not perform a piece at the same calibre as the mixed group who had joined out of interest in experimental music. Not only that, but the built situation of a group of like-minded interested musicians coming together to make improvised sound resulted in years of performances and jamming in a unique environment, leaving a lasting legacy on improvised music in Britain to this day.

### *2.3 Katt Hernandez – Ephemeral Space*

Ephemeral space is the gossamer realm where the cognitive maps, memories, imagined objects, futures and stories of the one who inhabits or traverses a place perceptually interweave with, or are layered onto, the architectures, sites, rooms, features and geographies of the space at hand (Hernandez 149).

In her dissertation *The Ephemeral City: Songs for Ghost Quarters* Katt Hernandez explores the relationships between a number of psychogeographic practices and composition techniques from her own practice. The ephemeral city is a concept from Hernandez' dissertation which draws on psychogeography to describes an internal relationship between the city-goer & the place they inhabit. Our relationships with cities (and non-urban places) are not just geographical in a physical sense, but mediated through histories, memories, identities, and other geographies. Hernandez writes about the example of the Stockholm neighbourhood Klara: a place that was demolished in the mid-50s as part of the modernization of Stockholm, and which still features in and influences Stockholm's art today (Hernandez 149).

One can engage with many different ephemeral spaces simultaneously - as they can exist layered on top of the more conventional physical geographies that we experience as our main relationship with the places we move through day to day. Psychological cartography is an interesting way of expressing these



ephemeral, internal relationships between places and the way that we think about them or remember them. “A Torontonians Map Canada” (figure 3, below) shows a tongue-in-cheek example of psychological cartography, where an imaginary Torontonian sees the world as progressively less important as the view shifts away from the centre of Toronto.

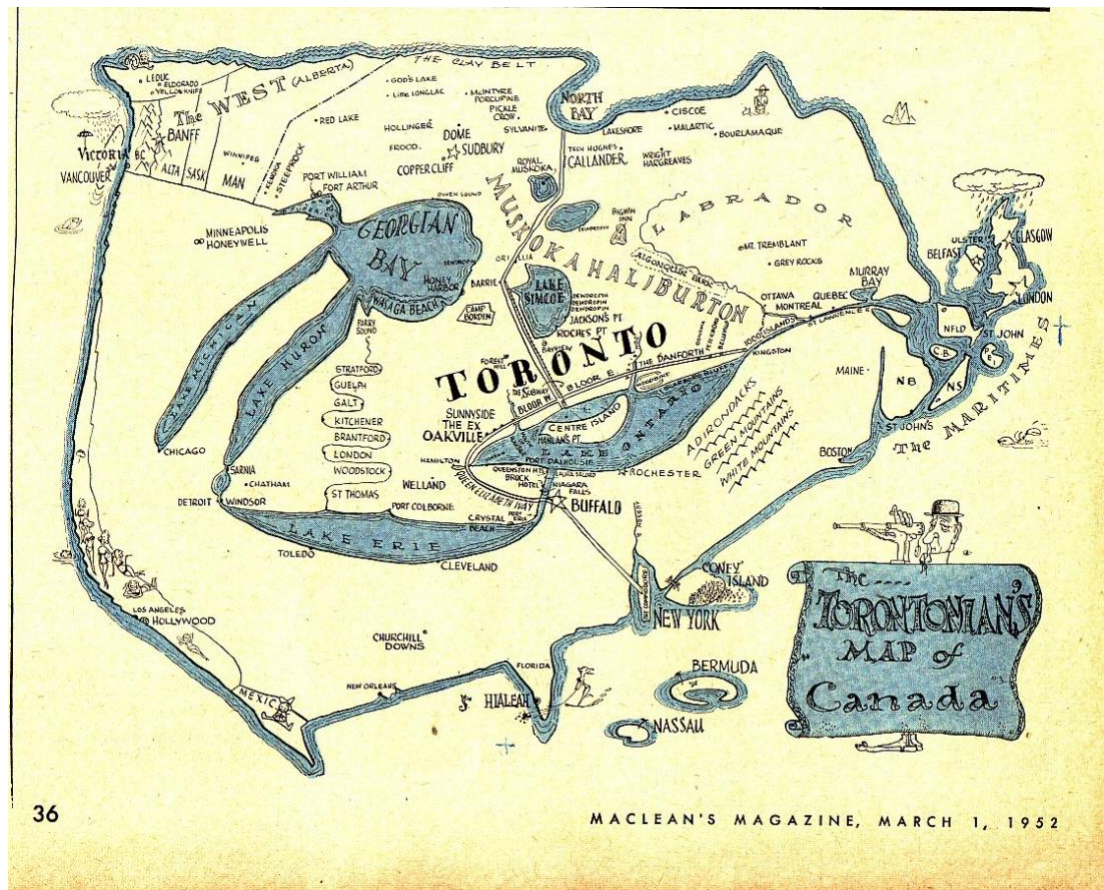


Figure 3 A Torontonian's Map of Canada, Source: Macleans Magazine, March 1952

This is an interpretation of a psychological geography of Toronto where the Toronto resident is perceived as thinking of themselves as the centre of the world, with the rest of North America becoming progressively smaller and less important the further away it is from the centre (with the exception of popular holiday destinations like New York and California). A psychological map uses internal understandings of how places connect – dealing with how a location ‘feels’ rather than the reality of its physical geography. This way of thinking about mapping can be very useful when it comes to situating musical composition in

relation to location. The ephemeral city describes situating oneself in place as situating oneself among a set of relationships, a method for dealing with geographic relationships from a creative perspective.

#### *2.4 The World Soundscape Project*

The work of the World Soundscape Project in the 1970s is fundamental to our current culture of relating sound and space. Now known as the World Forum for Acoustic Ecology, this movement was developed by R. Murray Schafer, Hildegard Westerkamp, Barry Truax, Howard Broomfield, Peter Huse, Bruce Davis, and Jean Reed at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, British Columbia. The WSP originally aimed to raise consciousness on the effects of sounds on the human condition. This work often came from an ecological perspective (Schafer himself coining the term ‘Acoustic Ecology’), as many WSP composers were concerned with the impact of noise pollution damaging existing natural soundscapes as Vancouver grew through the 70s and 80s. In his book *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art* Brandon LaBelle argues that the founding of the WSP is “an important step in the [cultural] recognition of the auditory experience” (208). The WSP introduces the idea of thinking of a location in terms of its sonic characteristics first - and how these sonic characteristics form the identity of a place. Thinking of a place in terms of its soundscape gives us an aural perspective on location, and another method to situate music and sound art more broadly within place. Works like *5 Village Soundscapes* (part of which is pictured below in figure 5) attempt to document the sounds of locations, using a mix of cartography and musical notation.

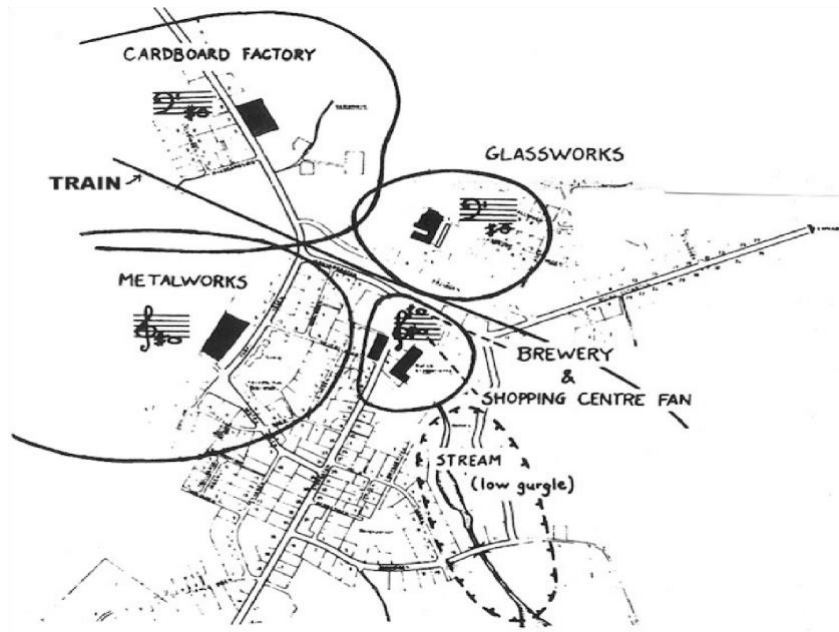


Figure 4, Skruv, Sweden. Source: World Soundscape Project, *Five Village Soundscapes*. accessed online at <https://www.sfu.ca/~truax/FVS/fvs.html>

Other works by WSP associated composers, such as Hildegard Westerkamp's *Kits Beach Soundwalk* use field recordings to situate the listener directly in a place, by displacing the soundscape of a physical location with field recordings and loudspeakers. *Kits Beach* centres the relationship between the soundscape and Westerkamp's experience as a listener. Westerkamp makes us aware of our position, as listeners to displaced sounds, outside of the context where they were recorded. She overtly expresses her own perceptions (the sound of the city becoming quieter because of the beautiful view, and then becoming louder again when trying to listen to the barnacles in more detail) and uses studio techniques to help us understand these. Later in the piece, we are overtly brought into this metaphorical studio, so we can hear details only possible with audio technology.

Recording technology--from filters to equalizers--instigate the recovery of that internal, primary soundscape of unconscious musicality, while creating overlays with real life. The mimesis of

recorded place thus wears two faces, one being the simulation of presence, as in the city's noise, the other the stimulating of poetic drifts mythological origins (LaBelle 208)

### 2.5 Christopher Small – Musicking

Christopher Small's book *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* Small argues that music should be thought of as an activity rather than an object. He coins the term *Musicking* to describe the act of making music as a verb rather than the music itself as a noun. Small argues that meaning in music comes from the social relationships within the musical activity. Within Small's framework is the idea that all elements of the musical activity, are in a sense part of Musicking (Small 2).

To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing. We might at times even extend its meaning to what the person is doing who takes the tickets at the door or the hefty men who shift the piano and the drums or the roadies who set up the instruments and carry out the sound checks or the cleaners who clean up after everyone else has gone. They, too, are all contributing to the nature of the event that is a musical performance. (Small 9)

For Small, the meaning in music exists in the process of creation, and the relationships between all those involved in music as an activity. Music can happen between a listener and a recording, between professionals in an orchestra rehearsal, or in the isolation of singing in the shower. The context in which the music is occurring, or the perceived quality of the musical product is not the thing that gives it legitimacy as music, rather it is in the process of musicking where music occurs.

## Part 3: Personal Approaches to Composition

### *3.1 Composer/Performer vs. Facilitator/Participant*

In this section I will discuss the differences and similarities between the traditional composer/performer relationship in contemporary music, and the facilitator/participant relationship in community arts, drawing from my personal experiences as a composer, facilitator, participant, and performer.

In the traditional western classical composer paradigm, the composer conceives of the piece of music completely independently, meticulously marking every detail onto a score. The composer then sends the document to the performers, who rehearse and learn the music independently as well, with the aim of performing something as close to the composer's intention as possible. In the most extreme examples of this, a piece might only receive one rehearsal with the composer present. The processes of creation and realization are completely separated. The composer must create the entire piece, sometimes before any kind of relationship is established between the person creating the score and the person performing it. Rehearsal time is extremely limited, and often so close to the performance that only minor changes can be made.

There are many reasons for this, including economic ones. Professional musicians' time is expensive, and their expertise allows them to realize complex music in a relatively short time span. Not all creative relationships in this field have such a dearth of communication, especially with ensembles and musicians who are dedicated to performing contemporary music, who may allow extra time for discovery and research, or who are interested in a more collaborative approach. Still, the default, assumed relationship between composer, score, performer, and music is a linear one. The composer (conceiving of the entire piece of music completely independently) creates the score as a set of instructions that produce this ideal imagined music, the performer then studies the score with the goal of getting as close as possible to the composers' original intentions, producing the piece of music in the context of a (usually) single performance.

As a facilitator in a community music context, the entire situation is different. While there may be a larger project, goal, or theme that the group is working towards, the focus is on the here & now situation of the workshop. The process of making the art is just as important, if not more important, than the resulting product. The process can (and should) evolve and change according to the needs of the participants who enter the art making space. The relationship between participant and facilitator is a reciprocal one, rather than the linear relationship of composer/performer.

When I was working with Jumbles Theatre on the music for *In This Moment*, a large-scale collaborative work for community choir that met on Zoom during the COVID-19 lockdowns, the shape of the final piece emerged over time after many different workshops. My goal as a composer was not to design an elaborate and complete piece of musical art that we then spent rehearsals learning. Rather, it was to create a learning activity for a small group of 5 – 10 mixed ability singers to learn, practice, and then perform (to some extent) within the space of a 30 – 40-minute workshop. This situation became the framework which I composed the piece within, each musical element needed to be simple enough to learn in a short 30 minute time frame, memorable enough for choir members who may not be able to make it to every rehearsal and fit into a musical context where singing together in rhythmic unison is completely impossible.

From my perspective of composing, I was very rarely thinking about the entire piece as a whole until very late in the process. I was mostly concerned with what material I was going to bring into the Zoom rehearsal that particular week. The goal of the workshops was not to precisely execute a written musical idea, but to find a small piece of the experience of singing together as a group in a time when making music in a group wasn't possible. As a composer, instead of focusing on the flow of the musical work, I was focusing on the flow of the learning process. This way we could achieve something that was both satisfying musically and was accessible for a group with a wide range of singing abilities to learn quickly.

Working within this format had a major impact on the kind of music that I wrote for the group. The process of repeatedly working on material, thinking in short term spurts of learning and practice, and focusing primarily on how the material would be learned in the next session gave me a fantastic set of limitations to work within. In each session I received immediate feedback from the ensemble. Sometimes we would get through everything I had planned in the first five minutes, and sometimes it would take three sessions to get through material I had only planned for one. Throughout all of this, the culture of the choir group was also impacting the way I was working. I was not an “artist-as-service-provider” bringing in an activity to keep a group of people engaged in music for an afternoon, but a member of a community who met every Thursday to sing together and share joy in a time where social connection was desperately needed.

The response and feedback I received from bringing in new material as I was writing it led to a dynamic composition process which felt more akin to a very slow improvisation between me, a group of singers, and a team of collaborating artists from many disciplines; where the groups response to the music I brought in one week would influence the next stage of the composition project, which I would then bring in the following week – repeating recursively over the course of two years.

Putting ourselves in situations where this change can happen and impact on our artistic practice is the counterpart to the equally important but better-documented transformative power of community arts for its participants, and locates the artist, as well as the participant and audience, within the aesthetic of “emergence”. (Howard 6)

Working in this manner led to a series of ‘islands’ of musical techniques and ideas, which we continued to workshop over the following years. Within the archipelago of what we had worked on, we may have one island which is a short melody with lyrics, and another which is a technique for singing as a group over the internet – both practiced and prepared within their own contexts within a single workshop. As we collected various techniques and musical pieces – the larger form of the piece emerged. This was both a natural process and one that involved intention on behalf of the artists involved in the project.

Building a familiarity with the material we were learning meant that we collectively understood each element of the piece and could make decisions about which elements of the piece would work well adjacent to each other based on the intuition that came with that familiarity. This also gave a great deal of flexibility. Each element of the music was somewhat ‘modular’ being that they all had to be learned in the relatively short time span of a 30-minute workshop. This meant that large-scale changes to the form could be done quickly, tested, experimented with, and either implemented or thrown away based on how the result worked. The choir could quickly understand an instruction like (italics represent sections of music while bold represents techniques) ‘when we finish singing *Uncertain Times* in unison, move immediately into *Grabbing Groceries* fast-to-slow, once we have all stopped, begin signing *We Are Outside* for the *ASL interlude* at the cue, using the numbers game.’ This also meant that choir staff from different musical & artistic backgrounds could easily interface with the piece and make suggestions. Many of the transitions between sections, for example, were composed by our conductor Shifra Cooper, whose familiarity with the choir as a group helped give us a sense of what kind of musical challenges could be overcome quickly, and what challenges might require another few rehearsals to practice.

### *3.2 The Setting Up of the Conditions Under Which This Can Happen*

In this section I will discuss the importance of considering and curating social space and social relationships while composing music for other people to learn or perform. I will also draw connections between the process of designing a situation for a community arts project, and psychogeographic activities such as the *dérive*.

Referring to ‘curation’ of social space involves considering the social aspects of a musical situation – relationships between musicians, and the way that the social space is set up. For example, an orchestral rehearsal is a kind of social space that is set up for efficiency by setting a very clear hierarchy with (relatively) strict rules of behaviour. The conductor and lead players make decisive decisions on how the music is played, most musicians in the room will only give input on the music after being asked by the conductor. Casual socializing is saved for the dressing rooms before and after the rehearsal. An opposing



situation might be a trad music session at a pub – where the act of making music is in of itself, a kind of casual socializing. As composers, we don't always have control over the nature of these situations – but understanding how they operate, considering them as part of the music making process, and taking control of what elements of the social space that we can is the act of curating social space.

A musical performance is a much richer and more complex affair than is allowed by those who concentrate their attention exclusively on the musical work and on its effect on an individual listener. If we widen the circle of our attention to take in the entire set of relationships that constitutes a performance, we shall see that music's primary meanings are not individual at all but social. (Small 8)

Curating social space or setting up conditions within music can be made is an important aspect of my work which I began to learn while taking part in community arts. From a composer's perspective, there are two sides to this. First, there is the consideration of *who* one is writing music for, what their strengths are, their musical experience and background, and what sort of engagement in the music making process will keep them enthusiastic about being a part of the project. Second is the extra-musical considerations about creating the space in which the music occurs - the basic infrastructure of the musical activity. Both are important aspects of my own work, and I would argue are important considerations for any composer working with others, whether they are a professional classical soloist or a community ensemble.

### **Writing for People, not Instruments**

Composers will often talk about “writing for people, not for instruments”. This statement comes from a common pitfall in composition, when sitting in front of staff paper with names of instruments, it can be easy to lose sight of the individual musicians who play them. Training in orchestration will teach a composer about physical limitations of instruments (how high, or how low can they play?) and ideally more detailed information about what kinds of material work well in what register, and what sort of material idiomatic for a particular instrumentalist to play. The rudiments of orchestration technique begin

with understanding each instrument as an object, and how the human body interacts with it. “Writing for people” is a reminder to understand the needs and abilities of the individual who is playing that instrument. There is precedent for this kind of collaboration in the contemporary music tradition. Soloists will have techniques that they specialize in, and composers can work with them to develop those techniques into a piece of music. Luciano Berio’s *Sequenzas* are a good example of this. These solo pieces written in the 1960s are each written for an individual soloist and make significant use of what would have been known at that time as ‘extended techniques’.

In a situation where one is working with musicians from backgrounds outside of the western classical sphere in which composers are trained, thinking of the individual rather than the instrument becomes vital to the process of creating music together. The training composers receive on orchestration and instrumentation usually assumes that the musician playing said instrument is trained in the same classical conservatory system. Most musicians in the world are not trained in this highly specialized system, do not use western notation and instead rely on oral traditions for learning and playing their instruments. Some musicians may be able to read, but only as a secondary skill, not used often in their main practice. A composer presenting a page of complex notation to a musician whose main practice does not involve reading notation may notice that they can play what is written, but the focus expended on understanding music through a less familiar medium will cause the player to stay stuck to the page, preventing them from contributing the strengths of their musical practice to the musical situation. While a professional old-time fiddle player may have spent time studying classical or jazz violin in a conservatory and be familiar and even somewhat comfortable with reading notated music, giving a player with this kind of specific expertise a standard classical violin part would be a wasted opportunity. Instead, taking time to learn each other's working methods and musical traditions can lead to a far more satisfying musical result for all parties. Rarely, in musical situations outside of the classical sphere, does one single author commit to so much control over the final musical result. This is something that I would like to learn from, and implement in my work, and I believe is vital to understand for a western-classical trained

composer working with any musicians who are primarily working in traditions outside that sphere. When working with lutenist Jonathan Stuchbery on my piece *Mosquito Touch* for theorbo, we worked together extensively. The theorbo is a complex instrument which can be challenging to get one's head around without having physical access to the instrument. Jonathan and I developed a variety of techniques that formed the basis of the piece and showed me the things that fascinated him about his own instrument. The re-entrant tuning in particular, where the top two strings are tuned an octave lower would have appeared as a limitation to me had Jonathan not shown me how the close-together tuning of the strings allowed for notes in scale passages to continue ringing and gave opportunities for very close together voicings of chords.

### **Curating and Composing Creative Spaces**

The other side of considering the relationship between composer and collaborators is the situation in which that collaboration happens. For Cardew in the scratch orchestra, this meant enthusiasm-based (rather than technical ability based) prerequisites for joining the project, and the use of simple fluxus tasks, often written by ensemble members, as a means of producing the framework for scratch music. Largely, this is an area which I have learned about from my improvisation practice. When a group of people who don't know each other get together for a jam session (at least, in the Ontarian free improv context with which I am familiar) a few elements in the way the social space is curated help to make this successful: There should be ample opportunity for failure, having a space in which it is safe to play ideas that fall flat encourages experimentation, opening up the flow of ideas between players. Between each improvisation, generally a group will have a short conversation, discussing how they felt about the previous improvisation. If, for example, a player of a quiet instrument voices a concern that they could not find space to play among louder more dominant voices, the ensemble can adjust, and shift based on the needs of its constituents. Finally, the core tenet of improvisation is listening, and the ability to listen

and respond to each other. This is the kind of space that both allows for rapid experimental creation, while also making space for enthusiasm and group cohesion to grow over time.

In a group space where everyone is listening well, every individual should also have the opportunity to contribute creatively. This sense of contribution is extremely important – there must be a sense that an individual's contributions to the whole have a recognizable impact. If a performer can only play one note, they should have the opportunity to play that one note, and it should be the most important thing that happens in that moment. This sense of contribution feeds back into interest & enthusiasm and helps cultivate the kind of group social environment that allows for effective creative collaboration.

Welcoming spaces are those that adjust to the needs of their occupants and provide for their needs. If something in the situation is not working for someone, it is the situation that should change to accommodate the individual's needs, rather than the individual changing to accommodate the space. While working on *In This Moment*, this was an important consideration while working with the choir team. It was important that any member of the choir staff be able to quickly see and understand the structure of the piece. The choir staff came from many different professional backgrounds (theatre, movement, visual arts...) so it did not make sense for the 'score' to exist as a document full of musical notation. Conductor of the choir, Shifra Cooper, made a folder on google drive early in the process, which ended up containing all the materials that could be considered constituting a 'score'. Included in this folder were sheets of lyrics, voice recordings of each musical line (for people to practice and learn the music by ear), and a large spreadsheet which showed a list of events in order, so each element of the piece could be cued and understood by all members of the choir staff. I only wrote out these events in traditional notation nearing the end of the composition process, when Lutenist Jonathan Stuchbery joined as live accompaniment to the choir. In a later iteration of the piece, this was stripped down to a document with a list of events and cues, and occasional sections of musical notation.

In addition to notational and technical considerations, it is important to consider the time needed for these kinds of collaborations to occur. There is a risk especially coming from a classical/orchestral

background of moving too quickly, trying to ‘get to the point’ and run rehearsals as efficiently as possible. Time must be allowed for collaborators to get to know each other, to share thoughts, and to understand the ways in which they can work together. A rehearsal which allows no time for this kind of interpersonal communication in favour of exclusively spending time on learning the music assumes that all musicians present are familiar and comfortable with this method of working, which in most situations outside of the classical context will not be the case. In an ideal situation, allowing time for all collaborators to get to know each other can allow for more buy-in to the project as a whole.

An open space that allows for reciprocal processes between composer and collaborators, can also lead the music in new directions. When I was collaborating with the Kirkos Ensemble on a piece that became *Boundary Music* we began with conversations about places. Subjects of conversation ranged from the global problems of gentrification and ongoing housing crises to the ways that the designs of our home neighbourhoods impacted the ways in which we interacted with the world around us. These conversations culminated in explorations of physical places, led by a single prompt ‘find a place which exists somewhere between a built and natural environment’. Each member of the ensemble engaged in a psychogeographic *dérive* in a place that they found personally interesting. These explorations went on to inform musical material in *Boundary Music* for the ensemble in the final performance on the Grand Canal in Dublin.

Like in Cornelius Cardew’s *Scratch Orchestra*, the most important element in a creative social situation is enthusiasm between parties in a collaboration. Treating the social conditions of the collaborative process of realizing a piece of music as a fundamental part of the composition process is something that is becoming increasingly important in my work. Even in the most traditional situations, where I email a pdf to a performer and don’t see them until the performance (something that, thankfully, is rarely a way that I work anymore) the thing that is interesting to me is the way that the performer has interacted with the document I created, the way in which their choices finds music in between the information I provide in a score, rather than how closely they were able to achieve ‘my vision’ of the

music in question. I strongly believe that if social relationships aren't an important factor in my music I might as well be writing exclusively for myself and electronics.

### *3.3 Writing Exclusively for Myself and Electronics (or: Dérive and Facilitating My Own Practice)*

In this section I will discuss how techniques I've learned from community arts work have impacted my practice when creating solo projects, and how these practices overlap with psychogeography.

Composing social space is about creating the conditions for effective creative collaboration, setting up a situation which allows for open communication between participants in the musical act, and allowing the interest and enthusiasm of the group to fuel the creative process. Can this framework also be applied to an independent creative process?

Over the past year, since finishing *In This Moment*, I've pivoted towards musical projects that I can complete on my own, working with my instrument and electronics, or automated instruments that I can program beforehand. After a long period of time with a significant amount of my creative energy being dedicated to a collective effort, it seems natural to me that I would follow with a period of looking inwards with my work, and my time spent composing in community situations has given me new frameworks for how to do so.

Designing a workshop involves putting together the necessary conditions for art making to happen, and curating the social conditions in which that is possible. This has been very useful when applied to my own creative practice. Separating the act of producing a situation where I can be creative, and the actual creative work allows greater freedom during the process of creation.

Following this framework, I can broaden my role as composer within my work to one which includes both the act of composing within a situation, and the act of composing the situation itself. These two elements influence each other. The compositional limitations of a situation (ex. A piece in which I play my viola using transducers while it is lying on a table) influences which musical decisions I as a composer can make, while the compositional needs of a piece can influence the way in which the situation

itself can be composed (ex. The composition involves moving the transducer with one hand while playing the bow on the other, so the viola needs to sit on a table for me to be able to use both devices). The composer then acts as a balancing point between these two fields of influence – on one side the creation of the work, and on the other the situation in which the work is created.

Within the situation itself, I can create a similar kind of reciprocal process to the ones inherent to collaborative community art. By following the drifting of my own attention in a kind of internal drive, I can use my interest as a guide for where to focus my compositional work. While shooting short video along Toronto's Humber Bay, which eventually became the video piece *LAKESCAPES*, I found myself fascinated by a pair of condo buildings, the first built in 1978 as the tallest residential building in Canada (at the time), and the second, an exact replica, built as a twin in 1994. When filming footage at the lakefront, I did not know the background of these buildings, or why I was so interested in them, just that they continuously drew my eye as an unusual set of twin towers that looked different than any other buildings on the lakefront – and seemed to predate the later construction of luxury condominiums in the area that began in the late 2000's.

In *LAKESCAPES* the situation came first, I was shooting video in the Toronto lakeshore, in a spot easily accessible by bike from where I was living at the time. Within that situation, my interest guided me towards these buildings, and more broadly towards the places that sat in between the city and the lakefront. Later, when processing the footage, and composing the music for the piece the themes of transitional spaces and translation between media emerged naturally out of the process of working within the situation, while broadly following what kept me interested in the project.

This describes a process of partly controlled wandering, where I create a situation in which I allow my intuition to guide me. This characterizes my working style across much of my work, with a significant influence from my experiences working in community-engaged arts. The situation, the composition, the following of my own interest to 'drift' through these elements, and the way all these elements inform and influence each other are what lead to my own compositional voice.

## Part 4: Pieces

### *4.1 In This Moment, Composing for Impossible Situations*

In this section I will discuss the piece *In This Moment*, going through multiple elements of its creation process, and going into detail about the reciprocal relationship between my practice as a composer and the Gather Round Singers. I will discuss in more detail the technical challenges of composing for a choir on Zoom and connect some elements of the piece back to the influences of psychogeography on my methods of working.

*In This Moment* was a large-scale collaborative work that involved dozens of artists and participants working and creating over two and a half years. In write up I will be focusing mainly on the composing of the musical elements of the piece from my perspective, and how the situation of this collaboration influenced my musical practice I will not giving a comprehensive overview of the entire project, as that would be outside of the scope of this paper. Since most of this piece was performed simultaneously in English and American Sign Language, when I refer to a section being ‘sung’ I am both referring to the sung English and the ASL poetry composed by Tamyka Bullen, both of which were performed concurrently by the choir. In sections where it is important to discuss the English and ASL elements of the piece separately, I will point this out.

### Context

*In This Moment* was a multi-year project over multiple media that was centred around a musical collaboration with the Gather Round Singers, taking place online through the COVID-19 lockdowns in Toronto between 2020 and 2022. The Gather Round Singers are a radically inclusive community choir that are a part of Jumblies Theatre. What this means is that anyone can join the choir at any time, regardless of age, ability, experience, or number of rehearsals before the performance.

In March of 2020, when the first of the COVID-19 lockdowns hit Toronto, the choir was forced to find a way to work remotely. By the summer of 2020, they had started to meet regularly on Zoom, and



had invited me to write a project for them to sing while they had to meet online (at this point, we were expecting to be back singing in person by the fall). To get the choir online singing on Zoom, the Gather Round Singers developed a robust system to help participants, some of whom had never used a computer, or never had internet access at home, join the meeting and deal with unfamiliar technology. Each call would generally begin with a movement exercise and a vocal warmup before splitting into separate breakout rooms of between 5 – 15 participants each, with a few staff members in each room as well. Each room would be centred around a different activity or workshop, and participants would rotate to a new room every 20 – 25 minutes. For example, a typical rehearsal may have one breakout room dedicated to learning a new section of music, another breakout room dedicated to learning the signs in ASL for the same section, and a final breakout room with a movement workshop. The choir worked on multiple projects throughout the time we were developing *In This Moment*, so variations in activities and what kind of work we were doing were commonplace.

This was the infrastructure in which we were building the piece, and I was contributing the music and formal structure to what would become *In This Moment*. The process involved collaboration with numerous artists and facilitators. Significantly, Tamyka Bullen, a deaf poet who performs in American Sign Language (ASL), was translating the text of the piece into ASL poetry, which would be performed by the choir concurrently to the sung English. This meant that the piece was going to be multi-lingual, and considerations needed to be made in the musical structures to make sure that Tamyka could properly translate them into ASL, and that both English and ASL could be performed simultaneously. From a compositional perspective, this meant that the structure of musical ideas needed to be translatable into movement. Through experiments in the first summer of the pandemic, we learned that taking short phrases, singing them and signing them, and playing with speed and duration worked very well over Zoom and produced beautiful effects in both the English and ASL parts of the piece.

The Zoom software carried with it its own set of limitations which we learned to embrace. Latency is inherent to any kind of online music making, so all the music needed to be written without the intention of

precise timing or exact unisons. Zooms built in noise and echo cancellation (which could not be turned off at the time, only limited) and its automatic levelling algorithm which focuses the output on a single, or small group of speakers meant that the sound of singers would chop, cut out, and bounce around to various focal points, seemingly at random. Because of the infrastructure invested in getting the choir online, and used to Zoom as a platform, switching to a more music friendly, (but more technically demanding) platform like Source Connect, or Jamulus would likely mean we would lose many choir members who couldn't make that transition, the ubiquity of Zoom (especially in the early days of the pandemic) also meant that hosting on that platform made it easy for new members to join in. Zoom also incorporated accessibility features in 2020 that allowed pinning multiple speakers at once, which was helpful for ASL interpretation throughout rehearsals. We decided early on that switching platforms was not an option and that we would need to work with the limitations that Zoom provided. In the end, despite its limitations, the glitchy, broken sound of many voices singing on Zoom, and its own algorithms not really knowing how to deal with this, became a unique part of the piece itself – and somewhat of a unique soundmark of the virtual space we were making music in. There were other interesting sonic characteristics as well. Because each choir member was joining in on their own unique device in their own unique space, there was no sense of blending between voices as there would be in a traditional choir. Different independent voices would pop in and out of sonic prominence, with their individual characteristics highlighted by their own unique device and microphone combination.

*In This Moment* had several performances over its life cycle. Multiple on-Zoom workshop performances of various parts, and stages in its creation, two hybrid performances in which the Zoom choir was projected live and joined by a small group of live singers, accompanied by theorbo and electronics, and a final all in-person performance, made as a celebration of the choir finally being able to meet in person again, accompanied by violin and viola.

## **Composition**

### *Text & Conceptual Framework*

*In This Moment* grew out of early experiments between me and GRS choir director Shifra Cooper as part of Jumblies Theatre's *Grounds for Goodness* project. *Grounds for Goodness* is a multi-year long artistic research project centred around a single question: what are the conditions which lead people, especially groups of people, to perform acts of good? We had a long conversation about urban infrastructure, and Eric Klinenbergs concept of Social Infrastructure from his book *Palaces for the People*, in which Klinenberg argues that spaces built to encourage social cohesion (like libraries or parks) make neighbourhoods more resilient during times of crisis (Klinenberg 17). The text came from multiple sources which will be detailed in the following section and was written and selected by Ruth Howard.

### Part 1: The Chicago Heatwave

The first sections text was pulled from Klinenbergs book *Palaces for the People* and based on his research. This section introduces the story of the Chicago heatwave of 1995, a devastating heatwave for that the city was not prepared for. Klinenbergs research showed that neighbourhoods with open social spaces, such as libraries, parks, barbershops, and wide sidewalks fared better during the heatwave regardless of socio-economic factors. Because people knew each other in these neighbourhoods, they were more likely to check in on vulnerable, elderly neighbours when the heatwave was at its peak (Klinenberg 17) This section also includes lyrics inspired by this story, written by Ruth Howard.

### Part 2: Community Support Group

The text from the second section of the piece was pulled from the CityPlace neighbourhood support Facebook group, right at the onset of the pandemic in Canada the weekend of March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Ruth was a part of this group, as Jumblies Theatre is located on the ground floor of an apartment building in CityPlace. The text included snippets from offers of help and support made by residents, offering to pick up groceries and medication for residents who needed. This section was the core of the piece and included many of the methods we learned for making music with latency. Each portion of text would first be sung as a group, captured by a looper, and repeated in the background through live electronics (discussed

below in the technical challenges section), followed by the lines *Grabbing Groceries, Medication*, sung with each choir member either speeding up or slowing down independently. Throughout this section different sounds from the choir were captured and looped, growing into a soundscape that would serve as the backdrop for the final section.

### Part 3: We Are Outside and We Are Inside

The final section of the piece incorporated text from a phone call with long time choir member Daphne, who was stranded in Jamaica while trying to return to Toronto at the beginning of the pandemic. This section involved a mainstay of our set of latency-compatible music techniques: the numbers game (described below in the remote music techniques section). It also included a group improvisation of sounds and movements, inspired by images that were artistic interpretations of the combined virtual space of our Zoom breakout rooms.

#### *Remote Music Techniques (Uncertain Time)*

Making music remotely online meant that latency was inherent to the music we were making. In the early days of the project, we ran many experiments with different techniques. Three of these techniques stuck with the piece as being both effective in English and ASL, and being enjoyable techniques to perform with.

#### 1. Singing Simultaneously

The simplest way to deal with latency was to ignore it and try to sing together as we would in person. Each choir member would start after they see a visual cue from a conductor. Since latency is impacted by each individual members internet connection, each singer would start around the same time, but not quite, singing through the whole line independently. Because of Zooms quality of prioritizing one or two voices, the lines would ebb and flow between singers, with the end result being surprisingly coherent on the audio side despite the effect of ‘blurring’ and jumping slightly back and forth in time. Visually, the effect was

similar, with signing starting at nearly the same time, and changing nearly, but not quite in unison throughout the line.

## 2. Playing with rates of change

For the line *grabbing groceries, medication*, we followed two simple systems. For the first, starting the line at an exaggerated slow speed, and slowly increasing in speed until each choir member independently reached the point where they could no longer sing any faster, at which point they stop. At slower speeds, it was possible to hear individual syllables coming from independent singers, and at faster speeds the sound was a continuous din of activity and events, with occasional audible syllables spilling out. Since we were signing at the same rate we were singing, there was a physical & visual effect to this as well, the movement of the ASL was mirrored in the chaotic sound of everyone singing and signing as fast as possible.

## 3. The Numbers Game

The numbers game was an activity developed early on to help develop confidence in singing independently. As we were beginning on Zoom, many choir members expressed discomfort around singing ‘alone’ in their homes. At first, we experimented with ‘open’ improvisations, where choir members were asked to sing a short line, at some point within a given period of time. Most of the time, this would result in some singers singing nearly the entire time, and others never finding a time to start and not singing at all. The numbers game allowed an arbitrary system for each singer to follow independently, and to get used to singing independently coming from a context where singing together is the norm. Each singer would pick a number, usually between 1 – 10, and after a cue, start counting. Once they reached this number, they would sing their line, and then begin counting again, repeating the process. More complex iterations of the numbers game involved adding or subtracting the number being counted to (resulting in a slow decrease or increase in density of sound, respectively). This technique ended up in the final section of *In This Moment* for the line *we are outside, and we are inside*.

## Technical Challenges

### *Achieving the sense of singing together*

As discussed previously, one of the major issues with transitioning to an online space for the choir was a lack of the sense of singing together. Choir members had gone from blending into a single sound as a group in a physical space, to singing into laptops or tablets and hearing the glitched jumbled sound of Zoom in response. We had committed aesthetically to this sound world of cutting in and out, but still missing was the chance to hear one's own voice contributing to the sonic whole. I began experimenting with adding electronics to *In This Moment* to help with this issue, along with giving us a way to have multiple musical lines playing back simultaneously. The output of the Zoom call was routed into an Ableton session, which I could treat as an effects send as well as a looper, capturing audio from the choir and looping it. The whole signal chain was routed back into Zoom using the 'share computer sound' function, which somewhat bypassed Zoom's inability to play more than a few sounds at once (although this required riding the fader on Ableton's volume level throughout the performance, to make sure it was not overpowering the rest of the ensemble). This was somewhat successful. Looping audio back into Zoom via a DAW was very complicated in Windows (requiring multiple computers to get working properly without feedback issues), and many choir members reported not hearing the electronics at all, or sometimes only hearing the electronics and not anyone else's voices. The advantage when it did work, however, was that choir members could finally hear themselves as part of the musical whole.

### *Mixing Live Musicians and Online Choir*

The hybrid versions of *In This Moment* that were performed in December of 2021 and February of 2022 involved a complex mix of online and in-person singing. The in-person contingent consisted of a small group of singers, the choir conductor Shifra Cooper, a theorbist accompanying, and myself managing the sound of the Zoom call and running electronics. We had a webcam centred on the singers, so Shifra could cue both the live choir and the Zoom choir. On the Zoom end, we had a second conductor, Sam

Rowlandson-O'Hara, looking for Shifra's cues, and relaying them to virtual choir via painted signs she held in front of her camera. Throughout all of this, we were all connected to a chaotic WhatsApp chain, where choir staff were holding the infrastructure of the ensemble together, helping choir members with mid-performance technical challenges, moving people who needed assistance into separate breakout rooms, and generally managing the Zoom call to keep the performance smooth. The choir itself was projected onto a large screen in the performance space so that the audience (entirely live) could see them as they performed.

### **Recursive Performances and Imaginary Zoom Rooms: Reimagining our Virtual Space**

We began making 'maps' of our Zoom breakout rooms in the fall of 2021. By this point we had become so used to meeting and making music in this space, that a choir member joining with a different wall in the background was an event that was cause for conversation. The mapping activity was simple, each member of the group call would describe something they were noticing in their space - it could be a sound, a sight, or otherwise. While each choir member was describing their space, an artist in the room was taking each element and painting them together into 'maps' of our imagined, collective, virtual space.

This process of reimagining our virtual space as an imagined physical one helped me understand the work we were making together in a new way. By mapping the virtual space between our various laptops and internet connections, we could begin to imagine our online rehearsals, which up to this point had felt like a place of necessity, as having its own, unique, identity. The images became markers of a space that was never ideal but kept us singing and imagining in a time when that otherwise would have been impossible. In making an abstraction of the space that was created only in the instant we were all connected online, I understood new ways that I felt connected to that space and felt the significance of the community that the choir was. This went on to inspire the main content of Part 3 of the piece, one where we would improvise sounds, treating each one of these imaginary zoom rooms as scores to be performed. This was an act of embracing our virtual space, which had really been a meeting place of necessity more than a year. The improvisation was non-specific by design, as a sort of open final 'hurrah' of *In This*

*Moment*. For each image, choir members could pick something out of the drawing and make a sound or movement related to that. We could also choose to watch and listen to other choir members, repeating and reinforcing the sounds and movements we heard and saw. This section ended up becoming a reflection on the place we had been singing, and the work we had been doing, over the years of the pandemic. With each performance, I would take the previous iteration of this section and superimpose it over the images of the Zoom rooms, so we were not only responding to interpretations of our ephemeral locations, but also responding to our previous responses to these interpretations. This reflection would finally end with a final iteration of the line *We are inside, and we are outside*, repeating to a fade out – further cementing the strange space between physical and virtual we were all inhabiting throughout making *In This Moment*.

### Conclusion

Decisions made for *In This Moment* on my end were heavily influenced by ideas of psychogeography and the *dérive*. I wanted us to explore our virtual space as if it was physical, to treat the place that we were meeting only by necessity as somewhere worth congregating and singing in its own right. Writing the music for *In This Moment* was a wonderful exercise trying to use a limiting situation as a source of creative inspiration. Ultimately, the online space really was only a meeting place of necessity. When restrictions were lifted for long enough for us to congregate in person in the summer of 2022, we put together one last iteration of *In This Moment*. What had taken us years to put together in an online space, only took hours in the physical one. Using the same techniques (speeding up and slowing down independently, the numbers game) we were able to simulate a lot of the sonic character of an online space in a physical one. While this final version was more satisfying for me performance wise, there is something unique about the online and hybrid iterations of this piece – which likely could only have occurred in the specific circumstance of the COVID-19 lockdowns between 2020 and 2022.



#### 4.2 *Overpass Music & LAKESCAPES, My Ephemeral Toronto*

In this section I will discuss my video pieces *LAKESCAPES* and *Overpass Music*, which were both inspired by a particular spot on the Toronto shoreline. I will discuss the process of making these works, and how following my own intuition in the space I was shooting video connects with *dérive*. Both pieces are primarily video works with embedded audio playback.

*Overpass Music* is a sonic exploration of a particular place that I became fascinated with in Toronto where the Gardiner Expressway crosses over the river closest to the place I was living at the time. In this single location, three eras of transportation infrastructure intersect. The first is Niwa'ah Onega'gaih'ih, which can be translated to English as Little Thundering Waters, or more commonly known by the colonial name Humber River. This river has been an important tributary for trade for thousands of years as a major route between Lake Ontario and Lake Simcoe; a gateway into Northern Ontario. Crossing over the river is the Gardiner Expressway, a classic mid-century North American urban motorway, cutting through the downtown core with the misguided automobile optimism of 1960s urban planning. Running parallel to the river, and underneath the overpass of the Gardiner, is a bike and pedestrian path - leading towards the Martin Goodman trail, a massively important piece of bicycle infrastructure in a city where travelling by bike remains dangerous in many places.

My fascination with this location started with a project titled *LAKESCAPES* a video/fixed media piece I wrote for a concert in Waterloo, Ontario in 2018. I wanted to create a piece where I explored my relationship with the shoreline of Lake Ontario. The process was fairly simple - I recorded video of places along the shore, trying to follow my interest in areas which felt like they lived between the built and natural environment (in reality, the whole environment is built – the shoreline of Lake Ontario has been continuously filled with land reclamation projects over the past few centuries) and edited it while composing - treating the video as a part of the 'ensemble' of the piece.

Part of what interests me about this area of Toronto is its liminal qualities. This area exists between the states of transport corridor, industrial zone, high-density housing & luxury condos, and nature

preserve - all while the city sinks towards the lakeshore. Much like Toronto as a whole, the lakeshore seems unable to find and hold onto a single identity. Figure 5 shows a section of *LAKESCAPES* captured in this place.



*Figure 5, Databent and superimposed footage of two residential towers on the Toronto Lakeshore, from LAKESCAPES.*

My second exploration of the lakeshore, *Overpass Music*, happened a few years later. This was focused in on the single crossing point of the Gardiner Expressway, rather than the whole lakeshore. I discovered a lovely resonance under the highway and made a short field recording of the sound of cars passing over the bridge. Figure 6 shows several shots of this bridge, set in a collage.



Figure 6, the Gardiner Expressway crossing the Humber River, from *Overpass Music*.

### Situating Myself at the Lakeshore

Both works began as explorations of location. *LAKESCAPES* spanning much of the west Toronto coastline, and *Overpass Music* centered on a single place where the Gardiner Expressway crosses the Humber River. My interest in these locations began far before I had considered making pieces about them. For years, regularly, I had cycled down the river to find my way to the lake. *LAKESCAPES* began when I brought a camera with me, and decided to shoot some video of spots that drew my attention. This footage sat dead on my hard drive for a few months, until I read an online article about databending, a technique for breaking video files in interesting ways by editing the information in the video file directly with hex editor. I happened to have these video files of the lakeshore lying around, so I used them for these experiments. The results of these experiments were so compelling that they eventually drove me to make *LAKESCAPES*, with the musical elements composed to support what was already there visually.

*Overpass Music* began in a similar way, with a bike ride down to the lakeshore at the mouth of the Humber River, this time with an audio recorder. Standing under the overpass, I could hear a distinct pitch resonating under the highway as cars drove above me. I made a short recording, which then became the source of the music for the piece, later returning to take video of the location for the visual component of the piece.

While the working processes I employed for *Lakescapes* and *Overpass Music* later diverged, what they had in common was starting as a moment of curiosity about my environment. I had set up a situation by putting myself in this location with which I was intimately familiar, with a camera or a zoom recorder, and allowed my own interest and fascination to drive the direction of the material I captured. In this way, the relationship between myself and a place becomes the subject of the piece. In both pieces, the audiences experience of the location I explore is mediated through my own eyes and ears. These early explorations of the lakeshore, for both pieces, shaped what they would become in the end.

### **Superimposition, Translation, and Transition**

The Lakeshore on the west side of Toronto consists of a small strip of land between Lake Ontario and a series of major city roads and highway arteries leading into downtown. This small strip of land can be challenging to access from the rest of the city, since one needs to find their way across all the transportation infrastructure leading directly into the city to make it to the lake. This area of transition – from city infrastructure, to parkland, to freshwater lake inspired some elements of the techniques I used to make *LAKESCAPES*.

The gradual transition between land uses inspired a kind of gradual translation between media and data types, using rather haphazard, lossy methods of digital translation. In the first movement of *LAKESCAPES*, the sound of the contrabass clarinet opens a kind of ‘window’ dependent on its amplitude revealing the lake behind it. I translated this sample of the clarinet into MIDI information, using Ableton

Live's audio to MIDI translation feature, which can work very well on simple material, but is still quite flawed. By setting this translator to look for chords and harmonies, it pulled haphazard harmonies out of the spectral characteristics of the contrabass clarinet. These harmonies become the backbone of the musical material in movements two and three. Databending the videos was also a process of translation. By forcing an audio editing program like Audacity to open a video file as if it is an audio file, it was possible to edit the raw data of the video file. Using careful edits, it's possible to break some elements of the file while still allowing it to be played – resulting in lovely melting and flashing glitch effects.

I found that these databent visuals worked well while superimposed over their original versions, sometimes using some subtle chroma keying to give the sense that the databent video is stuck behind the original or vice versa. These effects formed the main part of the visual side of *LAKESCAPES* and worked particularly well on the analog CRT televisions which the film was originally presented on.

This project marked one of my first uses of superimposition as a technique, taking multiple of the same, or similar sounds or visuals and placing them on top of each other. Through superimposition, new parts of a sound or image can be revealed. Attention is drawn towards differences between superimposed things where elements don't quite line up. This haphazard, and slightly broken approach felt connected to the kind of haphazard, circular, urban planning that leads to strange urban environments like the West Toronto Lakefront.

### **Recursion, Making Something More Itself**

The music in *Overpass Music* used superimposition through a recursive process. After recording a sample under the Gardiner Expressway at the spot that it crosses the Humber River, I analyzed the recording to find resonant peaks, and tuned my viola as close as I could to these frequencies. I then recorded the sound of this sample being played through my viola via a transducer, took that recording, and played it once again through my viola, recording that and repeating the process. After ten recordings, the original sounds started devolving into a mess of feedback. Superimposing these ten recordings (which also included a few where I responded to the sound of the overpass with some slow drones on open strings and harmonics),

resulted in the final sound of the piece. This final iteration is somewhat oppressive in its droning-ness, with the frequencies that resonated on the inside of the viola nearly overpowering the original recordings sense of being placed in a location. In this way, through recursion and superimposition, the sound of a location becomes more of itself, disconnecting from being situated in geographical space, yet still remaining related to that original spot through the few sounds of the original recording that pass through the oppressive drone, and the video of parts of the overpass superimposed on top of each other.

### **My Ephemeral Toronto**

The process of building these two pieces brought me closer to understanding my way of relating with my urban environment. I find myself fascinated with this particular location. In addition to these two pieces I have dozens of archived footage and field recordings taken here. My fascination with this place still remains somewhat of a mystery to me. As much as I can write about its liminal qualities, the strange imposing nature of the twin 1970s condo buildings which feature so heavily in *LAKESCAPES*, and the tragic irony of Toronto's worst urban planning decision barrelling through what could be one of the most lovely natural areas in the city (and crossing the regions older, by a few thousand years, major transport corridor in the form of the Humber River), I'm still not certain what keeps bringing me back to this particular location. It could even be as simple as the fact that it has often been one of the most easily accessible ways to get to the lake from most of the places I've lived in the city.

### **Conclusion**

Retroactively examining my explorations of this part of the Toronto lake front, I can draw connections to psychogeographic processes that I would not have been aware of yet at the time. Certainly, I can recognize inspiration from Rose & Taylor's *Great Fences of Australia* project. This impetuous to 'get out there, and play' my environment certainly came from a place of wanting to examine and understand something through the lens of my own psychogeographic relationship with it.

Like in the *Great Fences*, I wanted to treat the lakeshore as an instrument within the work. Particularly in *Overpass Music*, where the resonant frequencies of Toronto transportation infrastructure

become the central material to the music. Through all elements of the composition process of both these pieces, there were elements of setting up situations and drifting through them, engaging with *dérive* both at the physical location and in exploring the digital recordings of that place. The ‘psychic ambiances’, as Debord would say, were driving me towards selecting certain subjects to record video, and certain ways to translate between images and sound. Far from being universal, these were the result of my history and proximity with this place. In making these pieces I engaged in creating my own ephemeral cities, I now have a history with this little corner of the city, and a relationship with it, one that I explored, but also somewhat created through recording the location into audio and video and translating these recordings between media.

The translation process of taking footage and breaking its playback reveals the ephemeral nature of digital storage of information. While placing us in the mouth of the Humber on Lake Ontario, it also keeps us distinctly aware of the fact that we are watching a representation of it, which becomes its own kind of location. Compositionally, this process allowed me to continue the process of exploration through drifting after I had left the physical place I was recording. Translating the footage between digital media in order to break the playback and create glitched effects led me to finding similar strategies for the composition of *LAKESCAPES*. The themes of translation emerged naturally out of the ways I was processing my materials and became a major subject of the piece as I was composing it.

Both *LAKESCAPES* and *Overpass Music* started as bike rides down to the lake with a camera or an audio recorder, with no intention of making them into fully realized projects. Later parts of the process began as questions. What do all these video files look like if I remove chunks of their data with a hex editor? What happens if I record the resonant sound of a space running through my viola, and repeat the process in a recursive way ten times in a row?

### 4.3 Navigations, Viola Geographies

In this section I will discuss my partially improvised piece *Navigations*, discuss the psychogeography of exploring the space of an instrument, and connect the composition process to designing workshops in community arts contexts.

*Navigations* is a piece where I play my viola using a pair of transducers. The viola is placed on a table in front of me, with one transducer attached to the bottom of the body of the instrument, and the other transducer left free, to be held by hand on various parts of the viola, seen in figure 7.



*Figure 7, The transducer setup for Navigations. One transducer is placed on the bottom of the viola on the lower bout, while the second is in my hand.*

The piece emerges in a loose set of steps, related to a set of patches played by SuperCollider into the viola, and a fixed media recording played at the end of the piece.

The “score” of the piece is a series of brief instructions written into the SuperCollider file containing the code for the various patches, seen below in figure 8. The openness of this score, more of a roadmap, is important to the character of the piece. In *Navigations* I want to have the sense that I am exploring my instrument like it is its own space. Having a small set of musical landmarks to arrive at



gives me the freedom decide how I get to them, and as a result the piece has changed every time I play it.

```
205 //clicks - one minute
206 //Explore instrument with FM
207 //explore strings with FM, transition to saw
208 //bring in Pulse
209 //Rhythmic saw bits, slowly incorporate pizz and bow
210 //switch to saw2, continue
211 //turn off pulses, turn on clicks, start QT player
212 //Phase out saw2
213 //listen to clicks w qt player - eventually join in
214
215 ~fmenuv = ~f.play
216 ~blips = ~b.play
217 ~pulses = ~p.play
218 ~clicks = ~c.play
219 ~saw = ~s.play
220 ~saw2 = ~s2.play
221
222 ~saw2.stop
223 ~saw.stop
224 ~blips.stop
225 ~clicks.stop
226 ~pulses.stop
227
```

Figure 8, Comments in the SuperCollider code for Navigations describing the basic structure of the piece.

The vagueness here gives *Navigations* a sort of life of its own, some changes made in performances that work well I will repeat again in later versions, but no changes are baked into the score. Each landmark written in the score helps me to arrive in a particular musical situation, with the transducer (or bow) located in a particular place on the instrument, the transducers playing a particular patch from the SuperCollider file, and a vague instruction like ‘Explore instrument with FM’. This gives me a form I can drift through and explore. The way that I move from one destination to another with the transducer on the instrument is open.

*Navigations* opens with a cloud of impulses in various polyrhythms, running through bandpass filters into the transducer on the back of the instrument. In a quiet space, one can hear the decay of the strings after the impact of the clicks. This continues for a minute and is the only time in the piece where I

use an external timer. Eventually, I place the transducer on the strings, where we can hear the way that the impacts of the vibrations of the transducer rattle against each string. The synthesized sounds have interesting qualities when they are played back onto the strings of the viola. By muting different strings with my fingers, so that the vibrations coming from the transducer can't reach the bridge through that string, I can operate the viola as a sort of filter – each string only carrying a part of the frequency spectrum being played through them by the transducer. 'rhythmic' refers to a way in which I mute the strings rhythmically, creating a groove against the pulse playing through the transducer on the bottom of the instrument.

### **SuperCollider Patterns and Controlling Un-expectedness**

SuperCollider is an open-source audio-focused programming language for synthesis and algorithmic composition. The SuperCollider environment is divided into two parts, a programming language in which synthesis modules and musical patterns can be written, and a server which synthesizes audio with instructions received from the language side. There are two important SuperCollider concepts to understand for *Navigations*, The SynthDef and the Pattern.

A SynthDef can be thought of like a self-contained instrument, coded with familiar synthesizer components like oscillators, filters, and envelope generators. Every SynthDef has a series of parameters which can be modulated & controlled over time inside a Pattern. A Pattern is a series of instructions for change over time. This can be as simple as a set, repeated sequence of pitches and durations, instructing a SynthDef what notes to play when. Patterns can become increasingly complicated, using multiple different kinds of indeterminate algorithms, and nesting patterns and events within themselves. It is the amount of control the SuperCollider user has over these indeterminate algorithms that drove me to use it as the main sound source in *Navigations*.

For example: The piece begins with a cloud of ever-evolving clicks pushing through the viola. This sound is created using a Pattern connected to SynthDef that produces impulses running through a bandpass filter. The rate of the impulses is in a set pattern, repeating between three different sets of polyrhythms (2:3:5:7, 3:5, and 12:15). However, the duration of each set of polyrhythmic impulses, and the length of its fade-in and fade-out are determined randomly each time, as is the frequency and resonance of the bandpass filter which each set of impulses passes through, creating constant variation in timbre. Additionally, there is a ‘detune’ parameter, which randomly, but subtly shifts the frequency of each rhythm faster or slower, meaning the polyrhythms are never quite precise, and constantly overlapping each other with their randomly decided fade-ins and fade-outs. The composition process than involves fine tuning of the limits of the randomly decided parameters – mostly done by ear, and repeated listening to different permutations. This means that while the overall effect of one of these patterns can be predicted, the actual content is different each time the piece is performed.

SuperCollider offers a huge amount of control over how random decisions get made. The Pwhite function for example will choose a value completely at random between two numbers, where a Pwrand function will allow you to weight certain values over others, letting the composer choose some values to be more common while others are less common. Creating indeterminate musical situations through other kinds of algorithms are possible as well, such as the Pbrown function which simulates Brownian motion (extremely useful for stuttering, but still cohesive sounding rhythmic gestures). In *Navigations* much of the composition process involved selecting between different algorithms and fine tuning their parameters, until I arrived at a pattern which was predictably satisfying, but still unpredictable enough to surprise as I perform.

This lack of predictability is fundamental to the performance of *Navigations*. As an improviser, I am stepping into the situation generated by my SuperCollider code, with the sonic result emerging from the way that I respond musically to the partly unpredictable nature of the Patterns that I’ve written. I think

of this as a sort of musical *dérive*, where I drift through a sonic environment which I am familiar with, but in a way where I cannot predict precisely what kind of musical decisions I may make, allowing my intuition to guide my improvisation on the instrument in response to the sounds that are sent through the transducers attached to it.

### **Recursive Processes, Improvising with Past Selves**

The electronic element in *Navigations* concludes with a sample playing through the viola which was created using a recursive process similar to the one in *Overpass Music*. This began by recording a short improvisation consisting of hitting the strings of the viola with the hair of the bow. This recording was then played back through the viola via transducers, as I then recorded a second improvisation, also hitting the strings with the wood of the bow, responding to the sound of the previous improvisation playing back through my instrument. I then repeated this process ten times, which resulted in the recorded sample used in the final version of the piece. At the end of every performance of *Navigations*, I start playback on this sample, and repeat the same process, improvising with hitting the strings with my bow in response to the ten previous improvisations in which I did the same thing. In future iterations of the piece, I will start to record this section, using the new recording at the next performance. In this way, *Navigations* will always be drifting and changing, iterating on itself as long as I am playing it.

### **The Instrument as a Long-Standing Commute**

Part of the *dérive* is to interrupt the sense of familiarity one has with a place, in order to see it in a new light. I became quite aware of this as I was writing *Navigations* in the first few months after I moved to The Hague. I took notice of the way I experienced my daily route to The Hague, how much I paid attention to my surroundings, to details like the names of businesses on buildings, the different qualities of the streets I passed, and the layout of the bicycle infrastructure I was using to get where I was going. I became very interested in the way that, as I repeated this route, I naturally began to pay less attention to detail as my brain became more familiar with my commute, eventually reaching a point where I could

make it between the conservatory and my apartment in the Bezuidenhout neighbourhood completely on autopilot, paying very little attention to the world around me outside of the others I was sharing the road with. There's a sadness to this process of familiarization, as I become familiar with a way of moving through a place it takes more and more effort to stay interested and engaged with the built environment around me. Staying fascinated with the city I live in takes more effort as I grow more familiar with the ways I move through it.

In a way, this reminded me of the process of learning how to play the viola. The work I did practicing scales and arpeggios, familiarizing myself with the layout of the instrument through practicing my shifts so much that I would no longer need to think about where my fingers needed to go, intentionally imprinting the landscape of my instrument into my muscle memory. The instrument itself becomes a familiar commute, with musical choices governed by the familiarity of the relationship between the instrument itself and my body which I have trained to play it.

Part of my improvisation practice has always been to interrupt this familiarity by changing my physical relationship with the viola itself. I will often set the viola on my lap, play it vertically like a cello, or horizontally like a mandolin. I find that this leads me to make new, interesting decisions, forcing me into musical corners that I then must find my way out of, and resulting in music I would not have made otherwise. This was a part of the impulse for writing *Navigations*, as I wanted to write a piece where I play the viola using transducers along with the bow. By placing the instrument in front of me on a table, my familiar methods of making sound on the instrument are lost. I'm forced to re-engage with the viola as a sound making tool, without the comfort and familiarity of my years of practice.

An interesting side effect of all this, which I did not predict while composing, is that the more I perform this piece, the more set and consistent it becomes. As I continue to play *Navigations* in different contexts, I grow more familiar with this method of playing my instrument. I've noticed that the result of this is that the more I perform the piece, the less it changes from one iteration to the next, as I settle into

the familiarity of playing the viola on a table with transducers. I'm not sure that this is a problem, if anything it gives me the impetus to write more works that continue to interrupt my familiarity with the viola, drifting across the instrument and finding new possibilities in an instrument I am intimately familiar with.

## **Conclusion**

Where in *LAKESCAPES* and *Overpass Music* I was engaging in explorations of physical spaces and digital recordings of those spaces, in *Navigations* I explore my instrument as a location. This piece came after a long period of struggling to practice and work with my instrument in a conventional way. By placing the viola in front of me on a table, I could separate it from my body, and explore it as its own sound-making object without being distracted by technique or my challenges stemming from my history with learning the instrument. Through treating my instrument as a space to be explored rather than a skill to be mastered, I could again approach the process of composing for the viola through a lens of curiosity and exploration.

Approaching musical situations with this kind of curiosity (what might I find here? What happens if I combine this idea with that idea? How far away from conventional playing can I move in this piece?) has been one of the major benefits of thinking about music making through the lenses of psychogeography and situation-making. The music becomes a living entity, something that reflects my ongoing relationship with the space that is my instrument, and that can change itself as time goes on.

## **Conclusion, further explorations**

This research has largely been centred around learning to understand my own working processes, and developing techniques of music making that feel congruent with my interests and values as an artist. In trying to understand what parts of my approaches worked, what I've carried between musical contexts, and how I've refined processes of working that I may not have been aware of while in them. Moving

forward, I will continue to integrate these methods of situating myself (or other collaborators) in a situation and composing my way out into my creation process – especially as a way to explore locations through music, whether they be physical locations, virtual spaces, or musical instruments treated as landscapes.

These two streams of composition and improvisation are linked processes in my practice, just like the designing of a situation and the act of responding to it. This research process has had me reflect on a number of things: the infrastructure of the music making process and the reciprocal relationships between music makers, composer and performer, or otherwise. While at the time of writing I am still largely working with electronics and writing for myself as a performer, having both engaged directly in these kinds of relational situations, and now having researched and written about those experiences will have a continued impact on the music I'm making. I find myself stuck in an excellent recursive process of becoming fascinated with my own fascination, which is quite useful as a creative tool, placing myself somewhere musically where I know I will find something I'm interested in, even if I don't know what that thing is yet. While composing (especially in the western classical traditions that my training comes from) can feel like it is always about producing a product (Score, performance, piece, recording...), this research reaffirms to me that what I am interested in is process. Where do musical ideas come from? How are they realized? What happens when we centre the experience of the person learning the music, rather than the imagined listener? While musicking, we are engaging with a network of relationships – between people, places, and histories, and sounds. Where do I sit, as a composer, within this network of relationships, and what kind of agency can I hold?

## Works Cited:

Coverley, Merlin. *Psychogeography*. Oldcastle Books, 2018.

Hernandez, Katherine. "The Ephemeral City: Songs for the Ghost Quarters.", *Research Catalogue: an International Database for Artistic Research*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.22501/rc.1361322>.

Howard, Ruth. "Is Anyone Political Anymore?", *Canadian Theatre Review*, vol 148, 2011, pp. 5-9.

---. "The Cultural Equivalent of Daycare Workers? Reflections on the Arts For All project at Davenport Perth Neighbourhood Centre, Toronto", *Dramatic Action: Community Engaged Theatre in Canada and Beyond*, 2005.

Hutcheson, Maggie. *Framing Community: A Community-Engaged Art Workbook*. Ontario Arts Council, 2016, [www.arts.on.ca/news-resources/resources/resources-for-community-engaged-arts](http://www.arts.on.ca/news-resources/resources/resources-for-community-engaged-arts), accessed June 2, 2023.

Jumblies Theatre. *About Jumblies*, accessed June 8, 2023, <http://www.jumbliestheatre.org/jumblies/about>

---. *Jumblies History*, accessed June 8, 2023, <http://www.jumbliestheatre.org/jumblies/jumblies-history>

Klinenberg, Eric. *Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life*. Crown, 2018

LaBelle, Brandon. *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art* Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2015.

Macfarlane, Robert. "A Road of One's Own: Past and Present Artists of the Randomly Motivated Walk", *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 October 2005, pp. 3-4.

Nettleship, Robert. "Applications of Scratch Music: A Personal Approach", *Research Catalogue: an International Database for Artistic Research*, 2022, [www.researchcatalogue.net/view/160991/1601990](http://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/160991/1601990)



Rose, Jon. "Playing Music of Fences: The Sound of Politics, Social Control, Economic Exploitation, and History", *The International Mosse-Lecture, Humboldt University*, Berlin, 2011,

[www.jonroseweb.com/f\\_projects\\_great\\_fences.php](http://www.jonroseweb.com/f_projects_great_fences.php)

---. "Great Fences of Australia 7", *YouTube*, Uploaded by Jon Rose, January 1, 2022,

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=OGCHpU93PmQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OGCHpU93PmQ).

---. "Jon Rose: An Aural Map of Australia", *YouTube*, Uploaded by Eyes Like Propellers, May 11, 2011,

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=yD-BNkxiQEM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yD-BNkxiQEM).

Sadler, Simon. *The Situationist City*, MIT Press, 1982

Small, Christopher. *Musicking: The meanings of performing and listening*. Wesleyan University Press, 1998.

"Definitions" (Internationale Situationniste #1, June 1958), in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed.

And trans. By Ken Knabb, *Bureau of Public Secrets*, 1981, pp 45-6

Taylor, Hollis. *Post Impressions: A Travel Guide for Tragic Intellectuals*, Twisted Fiddle, 2007.