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## **Imagined Engagements: Interpreting the Musical Relationship with the Canadian North**

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**Abstract** In this article, we extend Benedict Anderson’s notion of imagined communities to examine the idea of an “imagined engagement” between or among people and groups that have not met. These imagined engagements include a blurring of temporal lines, as one group “interacts” with another’s past, present, or future. Imagined engagements are a form of failed interaction, and, as such, have their place in Goffman’s interaction order. We argue that musical language can comprise a meeting point of these engagements. We then demonstrate how two composers—one historic and one contemporary—have used the musical cultures of an Othered people, with a focus on Indigenous America, in an attempt to create a sense of community and common ties between the West and these Others—a sense of community in which the Othered have no part.

**Keywords** Imagined Engagement; Music; Musical Language; Interaction Order; Inuit

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Martin Stokes (1994:4) identifies the ability to “preform” our knowledge of other places as a property of music. In this sense, the borrowed Inuit music that is present in southern Canadian concert halls preforms our knowledge of the Canadian North while offering a glimpse into the ongoing Euro-Canadian treatment of its most present Other, the Indigenous populations of Canada. This paper examines the mechanisms through which such cultural appropriation takes place and proposes the presence of an *imagined engagement*. An imagined engagement, in this case, exists among or between people and groups that have not met, and it includes a blurring of lines between past, present, and future. Imagined engagements are constructed by their agents or doers as two-sided interactions, but, in their actuality, they reveal a one-sided approach that undercuts or simply omits the experience or contribution of the other side.

In the present discussion, we present a case for imagined engagements through music, for, in music, we can identify a meeting point for these interactions of the mind. More specifically, we investigate composed Canadian music that draws upon Inuit culture in order to present a sense of what it means to be Canadian.

Recent Canadian headlines have brought issues of cultural appropriation into public discourse. Hal Niedzviecki, an editor for *Write*, the magazine of the Writers’ Union of Canada, states in a May 2017 opinion piece that

I don’t believe in cultural appropriation. In my opinion, anyone, anywhere, should be encouraged to

imagine other peoples, other cultures, other identities. I’d go so far as to say that there should even be an award for doing so—the Appropriation Prize for best book by an author who writes about people who aren’t even remotely like her or him. [Renzetti 2017]

This statement made public a trend that exists in Canadian creative arts, namely, that it is still somehow considered acceptable (at times even desirable?) to engage in appropriation—a creative activity historically linked to colonial hegemonic display and ignorance by conquerors that is viewed in academic circles as one of the negative effects of cultural imperialism. The concept of imagined engagement serves to provide an interaction-level mechanism for explaining how works of cultural appropriation continue to be developed by arts creators as they “engage with the sounds of exotic foreign societies in order to find some authentic sense of self” (Kotarba et al. 2013:186).

## Imagined

The concept of imagined engagement resides upon ideas expressed in Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*. Anderson (2006:6) writes that the nation

is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.

Imagined engagement is concerned with the final line in this statement, that is, with how the mind of one participant communes with another (or an

Other) member. While Anderson examines the nation as a macro-level imagined community, here we seek to examine the levels of interaction in which members engage that cause them to feel a relationship with a group they will never in fact know.

Anderson (2006:7) further states that the nation is

imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.

We propose that, in contrast to this horizontal comradeship, imagined engagement implies a vertical, hegemonic relationship between individuals at the center and at the margins of a given community. Canada's nationalism faces challenges distinct from many European examples insofar as

no one any longer knows how to situate the nation's origins, which some now identify with the settlement of the "first Canadians" some 10,000 years ago. [Bouchard 2008:272]

This statement highlights the nation as a narrative—a narrative that changes over time and speaks to different parts of the nation differently. Bhabha (1990:1) explains that

Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye. Such an image of the nation—or narration—might seem impossibly romantic and excessively metaphorical, but it is from those traditions of political thought and literary language that

the nation emerges as a powerful historical idea in the west.

Canada's national narrative is then being rewritten today. It is no longer "rooted in the splendors of the British past" (Bouchard 2008:273), but rather identifies Indigenous peoples as integral to the founding narratives of the country.

In respect to Bhabha's comment above, it is in the "mind's eye" that we enter into imagined engagements. In this article, we question composers who engage in their mind's eye with Indigenous Canada through music, which then acts as an "imagined link to a shared cultural identity" (Lukic and Brint 2001:14).

## Engagements

Van den Scott (2016) investigates active and passive engagements within the context of mundane technologies in the non-Western context of an Inuit hamlet. She argues that we engage with technology through "two modes of use," passive engagements and active engagements. In the former, "technology itself brings consequences to bear on society." Active engagements, in contrast, "are human guided," and they result in "adjustments, either in form, function, or meaning" (van den Scott 2016:33), to the technology. It is through engagements with the material residue (Mukerji 1994)—housing technologies in van den Scott's case study—that cultures come into indirect interaction. Technologies in the North, however, embody the resilient colonial power dynamics between mainstream Western hegemonic culture and Inuit culture. Through interactions with

the material residue of the colonizers, these power relations continue to be a part of the everyday landscape of Inuit.

Like housing technologies, music is another form of material, cultural residue. Within music, we see composers from mainstream Canada imagining an engagement with the North through the creation of music that sounds, to the composers, like a representation of the North. In respect to cultural borrowing and questions of appropriation, it is a simple step for Others to be treated as objects who are subjected to active engagement through the imagination and mind's eye of composers. This leads to changes in the form, function, *and* meaning of the borrowed Other.

## From Imagined Interactions to Imagined Engagements

We have chosen the term imagined engagement to indicate an interaction-level concept against the background of the notion of active engagements. In addition, it expands on the idea of an imagined interaction, which, although rooted in psychology, has already gained a foothold in symbolic interactionist literature.

In the 1980s, the social psychologist James Honeycutt introduced the term imagined interaction in order to highlight the imaginary conversations that individuals have with “significant others” for a variety of purposes. Honeycutt (2010:129) defined an imagined interaction as

a process of social cognition whereby people imagine and indirectly experience themselves in antici-

pated and/or past communicative encounters with others.

Honeycutt (2010:129) located imagined interactions in “the theoretical foundation of symbolic interactionists and phenomenologists,” adding that imagined interactions have “characteristics similar to those of real conversations.”

Crisp and Turner (2009:231) argue that imagined interaction provides “a simple, flexible, and effective means of promoting more positive perceptions of outgroups”. In their study, however, the outgroups are primarily peers, and the “positively toned imagined contact leads to a greater projection of positive traits to the target outgroup” (Crisp and Turner 2009:234). While McCann and Honeycutt (2006:275) call for cross-cultural studies of imagined interactions in order to facilitate examining features of imagined interactions in non-Western settings, they make no mention of interactions across and between cultures—such as in the Canadian-Inuit dynamic.

Imagined engagements are interactions constructed by the agent as two-sided (or multi-sided), between or among people and groups that have not met, that undercut or plainly omit the experience or contribution of the other side. This can include a blurring of temporal lines between the past, present, and future. In the cases we will examine here, these imagined engagements result in instances of cultural appropriation—but this is not the only possible result of imagined engagements. The “other” party, who possesses less power in the interaction, can also have an imagined engagement with different results. In Nunavut, for example, there has been

a trend to set western musical genres to Inuktitut lyrics in an attempt to reach an imagined southern audience (van den Scott 2015).

It should be noted that imagined engagements have their place within Goffman's (1983) interaction order. Goffman is primarily concerned with interactions that occur when both parties achieve what he terms "response presence." This means that those involved in the interaction are close enough to react to each other and transmit some component of that reaction back into the interaction. Scholars, including Goffman, have largely applied this concept to face-to-face interactions, even while plagued with a bevy of researchers crying out "what about the Internet?" However, Goffman (1983:2) included communication over distance, such as telephone communication, when he originally introduced the concept, describing phone and mail communications as "reduced versions of the primordial real thing." One can thus be more or less present when maintaining a response-presence.

In the case of imagined engagements, the actor—the composer in the cases we are examining—imagines that a member or members of a group that reside at some significant social distance away has somehow entered into the agent's response presence. This is not the case, however, since there is no actual engagement with the Other. We can imagine this sort of failed interaction in a more intimate setting. For example, one might call out to a friend in a crowded room, and that friend might turn and acknowledge someone behind you—yet you imagine that you have connected with your friend at a distance. You go happily on your way,

unaware that your friend is unaware that you were ever there in the first place.

Goffman (1963) allows for various types of failed interactions, and he notes that they can lead to spoiled identity. He emphasizes that any interaction involves risk and vulnerability on either psychological or physical levels (Goffman 1983), and at times we can fail in carrying out our performance or interaction along expected and routinized lines. We might also make mistakes, such as by committing a gaffe or tripping. Some failed interactions are predictable as failures due to the structural expectations that constitute their social context. "Looping," for example, involves the psychological mortification of actors when their actions are interpreted through a particular stigma and interpreted in a negative light (Goffman 1961). Goffman also delineates various measures that actors use when caught up in failed interactions, such as face-saving (Goffman 1961) and civil inattention (Goffman 1972).

We regard imagined engagements as a particular form of failed interaction. They indicate that there has been a failure to successfully engage with the other party at all, even though the actor still has the feeling of having participated in an interaction, of having their "doings" socially situated (Goffman 1983).

Furthermore, we construct ourselves during social interactions, regardless of how reduced the response presence is. In the main, this feeling of having accomplished an interaction, regardless of whether or not this was the case, stems from the element of constructing oneself through interaction. The con-

struction of the self is indeed an interactive, interpretive, and moral act that engages the narratives and stories we tell—and tell ourselves (Holstein and Gubrium 2000). This element of interaction has been routinely highlighted by symbolic interactionists. Rowe (1999) has examined interactions that occur when members with a high degree of social distance come into each other's response presence, while Burri (2008) highlights the ways in which we make distinctions through interactions. Adler and Adler's (1989) work relies on the concept of master status as they examine how athletes construct a "gloried self" through interaction (Hughes 1945). This seminal work demonstrates how actors can valorize parts of their identity through interactions. Actors also define themselves in relation to others in terms of sameness or difference (Burri 2008). It is through interactions that actors establish who they are, with whom they do or do not belong, and how they see themselves in the social world (Cooley 1902).

Those conducting imagined engagements do not actually interact with members of the groups whom they imagine to be within their response presence. They nevertheless construct and define themselves through a partial, incomplete, and even impotent experience of an interaction—an imagined engagement. The social performance (discussed below) that Michael Colgrass conducts by means of a musical composition claims the North as part of the Canadian identity, and he imagines that he is engaging with the Indigenous Inuit population resident there. At the same time, however, the performance exoticizes Indigenous populations. Imagined engagements thus have a particular and somewhat odd place within the interaction order as failed in-

teractions that are rarely perceived as failed—they are missed connections that are rarely perceived as missed, and one-sided experiences that are rarely perceived as one-sided. Such failed interactions succeed only in allowing the doer to feel as though she or he has done something with someone, as if they had reached out and found an interactive connection with which to construct and perform their own sense of self.

In the cases we will examine more closely, the doer accomplishes a performance of self through a stated connection to and a representation of the North. However, such performances are tied to narratives of colonialism and appropriation. The composers we will discuss engage in a narrative about their social world (Holstein and Gubrium 2000) that reifies narratives of Canada as a nation which includes, and is even anchored in, the North. Canadian composers express their vision of the North as a process of understanding their nation and of understanding themselves, one of the three disambiguations of "identity" that Brubaker and Cooper (2000) have identified. Their music attempts to construct and present Canada in particular ways that they believe Northern residents will hear and connect with.

These imagined engagements also intersect with commodification insofar as the music such composers offer comes attached to financial incentives. For example, one of the pieces we will address is commissioned, and it was bought, sold, and created with the intention of contributing to a music industry. As the body has become commodified in certain kinds of constructions and expressions of the self in respect to tattooing (Orend and Gagné 2009), so,

too, have these musical expressions of personal and national constructions of self.

In short, we add imagined engagements to Goffman's (1983:7) list of interaction entities, which already includes "ambulatory units, contacts, conversational encounters, formal meetings, platform performances, and social occasions." The doers imagine that they engage with a group or with representatives of a group that lies at the extreme edge of their response presence. In actuality, however, this comprises a type of routine failed interaction in which the doer is unaware of the failure of the interaction.

Studies of imagined interactions conducted from a psychological perspective ask individuals to imagine meeting someone they in fact have not met (McCann and Honeycutt 2006; Crisp and Turner 2009; Honeycutt 2010). But, what is the result of such interactions for outgroup members, particularly across cultural boundaries? Do members of an outgroup benefit from the practice? How are members of another or an Othered group represented or imagined? Do they feel as though there has been an actual engagement with the other group? Musical composition provides the opportunity to address these questions in that composers place their imagined Other on a concert stage for the consumption of an audience. While the framework of the imagined engagement may be new, using music to project an imagined idea of another group or culture is not.

We will draw on two musical compositions—one from the early eighteenth century and the other

from the late twentieth century—to examine the idea of imagined engagement in musical settings.

## The Musical Setting of Imagined Engagements

### Jean-Philippe Rameau, *Les Indes galantes* (1735/1736)

Nicholas Till repeats a suggestion that the early modern era be "rebranded as 'Early Colonial'" in an effort to underscore the importance of colonialism during that period, with opera playing a key role (Karantonis and Robinson 2011:16).

Jean-Philippe Rameau's opera-ballet *Les Indes galantes*, composed in 1735 and expanded in 1736, provides one example which, like the more contemporary composition we will discuss later, draws on Indigenous America for inspiration. We should note that it was not the first such case. Rameau's work consists of a prologue and four acts, with a libretto by Louis Fuzelier. Each of the four *entrées* (or acts) is a love story set in a different exotic land—the first on an island in the Indian Ocean (*Le turc généreux*), the second in Incan Peru (*Les incas de Pérou*), the third in Persia (*Les fleurs*), and the fourth in Native North America (*Les sauvages*). *Les sauvages* presents the story of Adario, an (imagined) Indigenous man who loves Zima, daughter of the chief. Two Europeans, the Spaniard Don Alvar and the Frenchman Damon, also vie for her attention. Zima chooses Adario, however, and the act (and the opera-ballet) ends with a peace ceremony joining the Indigenous and European populations in the New World.

The inspiration for this opera-ballet is believed to have been a 1725 visit to Paris by delegates of the Louisiana colony in New France (Kaufmann 2005). Agapit Chicagou, a chief of the Mitchigamea tribe from today's Illinois, met with Louis XV and pledged allegiance to the French crown. Dances performed at the *Théâtre Italien* as part of this visit underlie the final act of *Les Indes galantes* and also led to a pair of harpsichord pieces of the same name. While Rameau might have had first-hand experience of these Mitchigamea dancers, the story certainly follows an imagined engagement with them. Anthony and Savage (n.d.) describe the entire opera-ballet as being "supported by references to discussions with 'many esteemed travelers' and with 'the most skilful naturalists.'"

Although Rameau was influenced by this visit, his music for the airs and recitatives is distinctly of the French Baroque tradition and makes no attempt at borrowing or imitating Indigenous American styles. Generalized exotic music does appear in the dances—particularly in the section representing North American Indigenous populations. Pisani (2005:39) notes that "the most recognizable features of otherness occur in the ballet sequences that close the work."

A 2004 production of the work at the Opéra National de Paris and Les Arts Florissants demonstrates the lasting influence of this type of imagined engagement. The fourth act of this production heightened its comic nature, with the title being clarified on-stage by actors carrying a sign reading "*Les Sauvages d'Amérique*." Overall, this production presents the Indigenous American population as

very much historical and representative of the almost-mythical "noble savage" trope. The costume designer presents Adario in a red leather jumpsuit with long red fringe under his arms, feathers in his hair, and war paint on his face. Damon and Don Alvar carry the flags of their countries, pointing them menacingly at the savage Adario before ogling a line of Indigenous women clothed in simple grey tunics and headbands. Zima wears a fitted white dress with a large feather headdress. It is Zima and Adario who are clearly the center of attention. In the background, the company wears an assortment of dresses, from sun masks to bison head masks, in a pastiche of all things associated with the imagined Native America.

The success and controversy of such an approach can be seen in the YouTube comments on the rondeau, "Forêts paisibles," a late scene in this act that features dancing bison masks. User Rikard Nyberg writes that

I stumbled upon this clip 4 days ago, and have been listening to it more than 20 times each day since then. I LOVE the joyous energy of their performance, and the music is absolutely fantastic as well. One of the internet's golden nuggets for sure. [Ambasciatrice 2006]

Rozni Yusof remarks

How quaint! This is surely the strangest bit of Ballet/Opera I have ever seen. It starts with a bunch of Pokemons dancing to Rameau's music. Then some Indians come in and do the Chicken Dance. Then the Indian Prince and Princess start walking like Egyptians. [Ambasciatrice 2006]



Yusof both describes the camp of this act and presents a rather accurate image of what to expect of the choreography.

Although an argument can be made that this production recreates something of the early eighteenth century approach to Native Americans by Europeans, we also see it celebrated as an accomplishment in the twenty-first century in audience reactions on YouTube.

### Michael Colgrass—*Arctic Dreams* (1991)

Western composers continue to turn their creative imagination to Indigenous America two-and-a-half centuries after Rameau. For a recent example of music emanating from an imagined interaction, we turn to Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Michael Colgrass and his 1991 work for wind ensemble, *Arctic Dreams*.

The University of Illinois Symphonic and Concert Bands commissioned Michael Colgrass' *Arctic Dreams* for their 100th anniversary in 1991. In composing the seven-movement suite, Colgrass drew upon his three-week visit in 1989 to Pangnirtung, Nunavut (on Baffin Island) (Colgrass 2012). Upon meeting Inuit there, Colgrass (1991, Program Notes) remarked that he was "fascinated by their way of life, their humor, and their sense of mystery and wonder at the awesome nature around them." The titles that Colgrass chose for his movements reflect commonly shared elements of Inuit and Arctic life and culture: I. Inuit Landscape, II. Throat Singing with Laughter, III. Whispering Voices, IV. Polar Night, V. Spring Light, VI. The Hunt, and VII. Drum Dancer.

Colgrass explains some of his inspiration for the work in a trailer for a forthcoming documentary about his career. His son, Neal, is producing the documentary and has uploaded the trailer, which focuses on *Arctic Dreams*, to multiple video streaming websites, including Vimeo and YouTube (Colgrass 2012). The interview that appears in this excerpt from the documentary highlights Colgrass' limited understanding of the world about which he was composing. Not only do his own words reveal his interactions with Inuit as one-sided, he further asks his audience to create an imagined interaction insofar as he leaves incomplete statements or says "you know." This allows the audience to fill in the blanks from their own imagined knowledge of Inuit and life in the Canadian Arctic.

The beginning of the documentary reflects the opening of *Arctic Dreams*. The music opens with a sustained trombone call, marked in the musical score as being "like a voice calling over endless space" (Colgrass 1991:1). Colgrass (2012 [0:09-1:05]) further explains this through the following story in the documentary:

The first thing I did was I want to take a walk. This was April, by the way, so the spring thaw is about to start. I was all padded up and I said, "I want to go out and take a walk," everyone was, "Whoa, whoa, you don't just go out and take a walk around here. Where you gonna go? How long you gonna be?" 'Cause, you see, in the Arctic, suddenly a storm can come up and you can have a whiteout.

[music plays]

Everything is white. The wind is blowing. And, you see no ground. You see no anything on the sides. So,

he says, “There can be a whiteout and you can be 10 feet from the front door of your house and lost and freeze to death.” So, I walked—I didn’t go too far—and the first thing that I wanted to do; I wanted to yell. Because where else in the world can you yell as loud as you want to and no one is gonna be disturbed by it—you know, they’re not gonna call the police or something. So I went, “Hey!” [yells].

In this excerpt, Colgrass first states that he ignored the advice of those from the town by walking alone and did what *he* wanted to do—to yell. He says “no one is gonna be disturbed by it,” but what he truly says is that no one *of consequence* will be disturbed by his actions. In our experience of living in and visiting an Inuit community for over a decade, we would suggest that residents would be quite worried about a visitor’s yelling at nothing on the tundra, but that they would likely not interfere.

There is also an intersectionality present in Colgrass’ interview that serves as an axis of privilege as he uses his position as a Euro-Canadian male to explain Inuit culture from his own perspective. He feels entitled to describe the culture, despite the incomplete nature of his narrative, and his remarks are supplemented by statements illustrating his lack of any depth of understanding. In his interview, Colgrass indeed appears to think about Inuit as if they were children.

In discussing Inuit throat singing, for instance, Colgrass (2012 [1:24-1:47]) states that

The Inuit have a great sense of humor. They love to play. They’re always kidding around or fooling

around. So, I wrote a movement. It was called “Throat Singing with Laughter,” because they love the throat singing, like this with the [trails off mimicking throat singing]...and when they do this face to face, they do it in rhythms; “hee-haw-haw hee-hee-haw-haw.” I go “hee” and you go “haw-haw.”

In addition to this very rudimentary explanation of throat singing, Colgrass’ insistence on referring to throat singing as “kidding around or fooling around” suggests that it reflects a childlike state. He also notes in the score that “[t]hroat-singing is an amateur folk practice performable by all” (Colgrass 1991:14). Colgrass even seeks to compose throat singing into his work, inviting members of the performing ensemble to take one of the microphones that are positioned around the stage and mimic the practice by repeating the syllables “he-ha-ha-who who-ha-ha-he...” He provides instructions to “exhale and inhale catching sound in throat [sic] so we can hear the syllables. The effect is somewhat like loud panting with the pitches unspecified” (Colgrass 1991:15). In doing so, Colgrass treats throat singing as a commodity, moving it from its Arctic context into the music hall for the consumption of concert goers.

Ethnomusicologist Andy Necessian (2002:13) writes that “[a]ppropriation of musics is everywhere. It is inseparable from globalization and very much a consequence of postmodernity.” He also asks a series of questions about appropriation, including

Is there an “original context?” Can we speak of the “decontextualization” of a music? Are we not, in doing so, privileging one context more than another or

others without always challenging the grounds of this privileging? [Nercessian 2002:13]

In the case of Inuit throat singing, we feel it fair to suggest that, yes, there is an original context, and that the privileging of this context is necessary due to the history of colonialism leading to systematical-ly racist treatment of Indigenous peoples in Canada. Removing throat singing from its context—indeed, from the very throats of Inuit—and placing it into the mouths of wind ensemble musicians in Illinois (or Toronto, or...), particularly doing so with a very limited understanding of the cultural context of throat singing, acts as a demonstration of the power imbalance present when discussing cultural appropriation.

In Nunavut, throat singing is practiced almost exclusively by women, in contrast to its being “performable by all,” as Colgrass claims. While the folk practice element clearly has some truth to it, the idea of throat singing as simply “kidding and fooling around” stands in contrast to the attitudes towards throat singing that we experienced during our field-work. For example, Margaret Uyauperk Aniksak, an Inuit elder who passed away in the early 2000s, describes the meaning of throat singing through a connection to history. She explains how

The words contained in the throat singing tradition are words that were used by our remote ancestors. People have forgotten the meaning behind the words and that, I assume, adds to why people don't have any knowledge of their meaning...They came from the mouths of the ancients. [Bennett and Rowley 2004:108]

“Cara,”<sup>1</sup> an Inuit woman who throat sings regularly in her community and abroad, also ties throat singing to Inuit history. She says “it’s always taught the same way. For all we know, it could be the same song they used 2000 years ago” (interview with the author, May 2012). She also describes learning throat singing from her elders, recalling a teacher saying “Don’t smile! No, you’re doing it the wrong way!” (interview with the author, May 2012). We observed similar interventions by elders during a community drum dance in 2010, when younger performers would laugh too much during or between throat songs. While there was no specific verbal reprimand, a quick call of ‘ah!’ and a light physical touch would remind the youth of proper ritual around this activity (field notes, July 2010).

Such views of throat singing, its history, and associated learning practices stand in stark contrast to Colgrass’ description of “kidding around and fooling around.” They also reveal just how one-sided Colgrass’ interaction with Inuit was—while it was enough to inspire his composition, it was not sufficient for him to aptly or accurately describe the culture he represents through *Arctic Dreams*. He thus took from Inuit, but provided no accurate or meaningful representation.

Colgrass further reveals his shallow understanding of Inuit beliefs in describing the *aurora borealis*, or northern lights, another frequently romanticized feature of the Arctic landscape. As in his previous

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<sup>1</sup> Cara is a pseudonym for a participant in a larger ethnographic study. In this case, she illustrates the difference between Colgrass’ learning from an Inuit community and an Inuit perspective on the same practice.

descriptions, Colgrass leaves room for the audience to fill in the blanks through such statements as “you know” and the repeated use of the word “something,” which replaces meaningful description. He states in the documentary that

And then they believe that their ancestors become stars at night. And when they have the *aurora borealis*—you know, the northern lights—that’s the ancestors, I don’t know, doing something; having a celebration or something like this. And that inspired a whole movement. [Colgrass 2012 (2:04-2:20)]

Colgrass recalls the portrayal of northern lights in the third movement, of which the full title is “The Whispering Voices of the Spirits Who Ride with the Lights in the Sky.” He describes this section as hearing the “mysterious mutterings that make a gradual transformation into ‘gossamer curtains of light that seem to undulate across the Arctic skies’” (Colgrass 1991:iv).

Again, Colgrass’ account of the northern lights lacks subtlety and accuracy when compared to descriptions of the meaning of the northern lights from Inuit sources. Bennett and Rowley (2004), in their *Uqalurait: An Oral History of Nunavut*, interviewed elders and collected recorded statements from historical sources to create a written account of some of the oral histories of Inuit life and culture. Their single account of *aqsarniit*, or *aqsaarniit* (the northern lights), suggests much more depth than Colgrass even attempts to provide.

Although the story found in *Uqalurait* is consistent with Colgrass in that there are “dwellers of

*aqsaarniit*,” including a deceased relative of the storyteller, Suzanne Niniattian Aqatsiaq (Bennett and Rowley 2004:169), Bennett and Rowley introduce many more details. For instance, shamanistic ritual allows for visiting with relatives who have passed away, who, it seems, play football with a walrus skull. In addition, “the *aqsaarniit* are in the area below heaven,” and those who reside there died not from illness or sickness, but, in this account, through blood loss (Bennett and Rowley 2004:170). There is also an aural element to the aurora that is evident as Bennett and Rowley (2004:170) relate Aqatsiaq’s story:

When we would play outdoors we would whistle at the northern lights to make them come closer. They would make a swishing sound. I don’t know what that may be. Perhaps they were once alive amongst the living.

George Kappianaq, from Iglulik, shares another view of the northern lights in Laugrand and Oosten’s study of Inuit Shamanism. Kappianaq relates that

At that time they [*aqsarniit*] were so close that although I was an adult, I was afraid of them...What elders say about being cautious so your head isn’t decapitated is very true. They say this because it happened in the past. There would be incidents of people who had their heads lopped off when they were whistling at them to get them to come closer. The *aqsarniit* rushed by the person who was standing there and knocked their head off. They say that they play kickball using a walrus head for their *aqsaq*, their kickball. [Laugrand and Oosten 2010:24]

For Colgrass, then, the vague idea of the northern lights as ancestors celebrating is enough to light his imaginative fire. As in throat singing and his first impression of the Arctic landscape, Colgrass demonstrates a one-sided engagement with Inuit life and culture. He then attempts to share his “knowledge,” gained through his imagined engagement, with a broader listening audience.

## Conclusion

Colgrass composed *Arctic Dreams* in 1991, and although appropriation discourse has changed in Canada since that time, his work nevertheless remains relevant today. It continues to be performed by wind ensembles, including at the University of Toronto in 2016, shining a light on the role of the North in Canadian nationalism. The concept of imagined engagement thus has implications when we think about nationalism in the twenty-first century. Benedict Anderson (2006:205) writes that there is a “need for a narrative of ‘identity’” in modern nations due to a forgotten experience of the continuity of secular, serial time. Music, an art form intimately tied to the passing of time, provides a rich avenue for the discussion and representation of national identity. Colgrass embarks on such a discussion in *Arctic Dreams*, where he presents an iconic aspect of Canadian identity—“the true north, strong and free”—while demonstrating his imagined engagement with the people and culture of that part of the nation.

Nercessian (2002:23-24) remarks that

Postmodernism is a way of thinking, of envisaging the world in which transcendental truths do not ex-

ist, only meanings, and these meanings are culturally circumscribed and constructed.

Colgrass interprets the North through his cultural lens—a lens informed by generations of colonial behavior, also evident in Rameau’s opera-ballet—as he directs it towards Canada’s northern regions and Indigenous populations. In doing so, he presents a truth in *Arctic Dreams* that is not an obdurate reality, but one that instead results from his imagined engagement with the entirety of the region and its people.

Colgrass attempts to establish a relationship between his Toronto-based life and the life experiences in the far reaches of his nation. Pryke (2009:45) states that “National identities correspond to collective histories and thus bestow meaning to human lives.” Colgrass’ interpretation thereby contributes to a collective history of Canada as a whole—symbols, myths, values, and traditions play an important role in the formation and persistence of the modern nation (Pryke 2009). His imagined engagement with the North in *Arctic Dreams* is one of many attempts by Canadian composers—among other artists—to bring Inuit culture into the center of Canadian identity. One only need to visit any gift shop in the country to find representations of Inuit culture available for purchase and consumption as iconography of Canada, most notably the *Inukshuk*—stone cairns roughly formed in the shape of people that are used by Inuit as landmarks and guideposts.

One area for further thought and research regarding the concept of imagined engagement, particularly as it relates to the sociology of music, involves

a consideration of music scenes. Virtual music scenes, in contrast to co-present local and translocal music scenes, are created in a day, place fans in control of the scene, and are mediated, for example, through fanzines or the Internet (Bennett and Peterson 2004:10-11). The virtual scene as a site of imagined engagements could provide an avenue for

a consideration of Inuit musicians creating songs for a perceived southern audience that may or may not exist. We offer the concept of imagined engagement as a way to further examine, within the interaction order, attempts at interaction that fail to reach the second party, but are nonetheless perceived by the first party as having been successful.

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