In 1957, Edgard Varèse led a series of improvisation sessions in Greenwich Village with jazz musicians, including Charles Mingus, Art Farmer, Don Butterfield, Teo Macero, Ed Shaughnessy, and others. Little scholarship has explored this episode, a lacuna that speaks to a wider, racially inflected rift in historiographies of jazz and non-jazz musical avant-gardes. Against this tendency, I bring new light to these sessions as a messy and fleeting exchange characterized by mutual curiosity and crossed signals, drawing from analysis of sessions recordings, original interviews, and archival research. Within a larger ensemble of musicians, I ultimately focus on Edgar Varèse and Charles Mingus in order to tell a larger story about race, citizenship, and the arts in downtown New York during a period of postwar, self-proclaimed American cultural ascendency and national canon formation. I also ask what it means to grapple with to the laden silences that characterize our archives and historiography.

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