MUSIC IN THE MONOPOLIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE

Glenn Gould, the CBC, and the Construction of Canadian Intellectual Identity

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During the 1950s and throughout the 1970s, Canada pursued its domestic and international goals by developing a national brand, an effort that included valuing certain music as nationally symbolic. For his part, the pianist Glenn Gould's television programmes for the CBC articulated a potent national space for its viewers. In this space Gould interwove his distinctive philosophies regarding music and Canadian national identity with the Canadian intellectual *Zeitgeist*. Culturally, as of the Massey Commission of 1949, Canada took a newly comprehensive and centralized approach that built on the early twentieth-century efforts of Canadian amateur musicians to replicate British culture in Anglophone Canada. According to Canadian historian Maria Tippett, "the bottom-up interests of community groups and the top-down approaches of institutions such as the CBC and the National Film Board conventionalized a broad educational model based on cultural borrowing and nationalism."[1] These top-down institutions, according to economist and media theorist Harold Innis, operated to promote the creation of monopolies of knowledge.[2] Through an integration of musicology, media studies, and cultural studies, I will explore how the case of Gould on CBC Television illuminates the nature of intellectual authority and its construction, and the privileges granted to the technocratic elite served by its social and technological institutions.

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1   Maria Tippett, *Making Culture: English-Canadian Institutions and the Arts before the Massey Commission* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 18.
2   Harold Innis, *Empire and Communications* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950); Harold Innis, *The Bias of Communication* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951).

In this study, I begin with an interpretation of how Gould capitalized on Marshall McLuhan's pervasive influence during the 1960s, and what effects this had on his position within the Canadian communications school. I then consider Gould's own media theory, and finally, I analyze three case studies of Gould's CBC television programmes as performances of Canadian identity and electronic utopianism. In all of these cases—which are *Music in the U.S.S.R.* of 1962, the *Canada Centennial Concert* of 1967, and the television version of *The Idea of North* of 1970—I will focus on the manifestation of Gould's view of music in Canadian identity more than the viewers' consumption of, or participation in, these programmes. I argue that CBC Television invited viewers to participate as citizens under a monopoly of knowledge, as theorized by Harold Innis, and built an imagined community, as theorized by Benedict Anderson.[3] I will apply this theoretical framework to a selection of Gould's now unprecedentedly available broadcasts and interviews. This investigation will bring us one step closer to understanding the relationship between television and music, as well as the persistent impact of one of the country's few innately domestic cultural icons.

This study is informed by Harold Innis's theorizing of communications and Benedict Anderson's theorizing of national formations. Innis begins his exploration of monopolies in the economic realm of Canadian staples. In his 1930 study, *The Cod Fisheries*, Innis explores the relationship of decentralizing forces and monopolizing forces.[4] Innis recounts several efforts to establish monopolies over the Atlantic shipping and fishing industries, each unsuccessful due to the decentralized nature of the ocean in comparison to the rivers on which the fur trade operated and could be controlled. In his post-1945 works on communications, Innis applies this monopoly-versus-decentralization paradigm to the market of information. During this period, Innis could see that the CBC was able to monopolize knowledge through its ability to control the variety and scheduling of information available to the public. Further, these powers allowed the institution to mold the character of how knowledge was defined.

In *Imagined Communities* Benedict Anderson argues that the multifaceted nature of material‒cultural practices, which he terms print-capitalism,

3   Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of* Nationalism, Revised Edition (London: Verso, 1991).
4   Harold Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada: An Introduction to Canadian Economic History* (New Haven: Yale University Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1930), 379.

contribute strongly to the creation and maintenance of the "imagined community" of a nation whose citizens feel "deep attachments" to each other in absence of personal relationships: "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."[5] Anderson's conception of the nation is that of an abstract community in which meaning is shared and distributed by the mass media addressing citizens as a public. In Gould's case, his own privileged role in the national media endowed him with the ability to navigate the meanings determining Canadian identity.

In *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, Marshall McLuhan studies how communication technology influenced human psychology and social structures across history and various regions of the world. McLuhan contrasts print and electronic media in a way Anderson does not. While Anderson primarily focuses on print communications, he applies his thesis to electronic media such as radio and television as well. McLuhan, however, argues that the nature of electronic media produces a different effect than print media. For McLuhan, the rise of the printing press formed human cognition into patterns of visual/linear thinking. Therefore, print media ordered thought and emphasized the cerebral and quantifiable at the expense of the subjective and emotional. However, whereas print technology made possible nationalism and capitalism, McLuhan sees these effects as challenged by electronic media. However, despite the utopianism McLuhan shares with Gould, I argue that the national mandate of the CBC formed an important subtext to the specific content of its different programmes. Indeed, the medium is the message. Nationalism is not expunged by television so much as exhibited in new ways. In Gould's case, his privileged role in the national media endowed him with the ability to navigate the meanings determining Canadian identity.

Gould—like McLuhan—saw television as offering a sort of media-based salvation from the spatial imbalance initiated by the printing press, an imbalance causing the societal changes that culminated in the evils of conflict and alienation in the twentieth century. McLuhan believed that electronic media offered the present West a way back to the authentic human condition of the pre-Gutenberg medieval West.[6] Following an exhausting period of

5   Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 224.
6   Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto:

international performing, Gould came to see the technologies that McLuhan considered transformative as both an artistic and physical escape from live concerts. Undoubtedly influenced by his long association with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, by the early 1960s Gould began to argue that the future of music lay in the development of technology and the private listening sphere.[7] Gould anticipated a new kind of listener, characterized with an interest in a higher definition of music and improved musical appreciation:

> It may well be that the very near future will produce a do-it-yourself laboratory of home recording techniques… We already see this happening in the case of the hi-fi bug, the fellow who places his own interpretative notions on questions of dynamics, of balance, of separation, of textural preferences [on] the recording which he plays on his home stereo.[8]

After a final concert on April 10, 1964, Gould withdrew from public performance and began to expound his own media theory. He read McLuhan's recently published magnum opus, *Understanding Media*, and quickly got to know McLuhan personally.[9] When the University of Toronto awarded Gould a honourary degree in 1964, he used the June 1 convocation as an exhibition for his arguments on the future of music in the electronic age.[10] I will briefly look at Gould's media theory as presented in Gould's convocation address,

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University of Toronto Press, 1962). McLuhan devotes *The Gutenberg Galaxy* to studying "an inventory of effects" of print on the manuscript culture of the Middle Ages. That the West has returned to a world of multisensory perception from one of linear thought is a large part of McLuhan's historical theory. McLuhan viewed late-twentieth century culture as a renaissance of the Middle Ages which fit into his conception of epochal retrievals.

7   Gould argued in 1962 that "the justification of art is the internal combustion it ignites in the hearts of men and *not its shallow, externalized, public manifestations*. The purpose of art is not the release of a momentary ejection of adrenaline but is, rather, the gradual, life-long construction of a state of wonder and serenity" (Quoted in Mark Kingwell, *Extraordinary Canadians: Glenn Gould* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2009), 194, my italics).

8   Glenn Gould, "Forgery and Imitation in the Creative Process," in *The Art of Glenn Gould: Reflections of a Musical Genius,* ed. John P.L. Roberts (Toronto: Malcolm Lester, 1999), 219.

9   Kevin Bazzana, *Wondrous Strange: The Life and Art of Glenn Gould* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2003).

10   Glenn Gould, "An Argument for Music in the Electronic Age," *The Art of Glenn Gould*. Gould also repeated this speech at the Royal Conservatory of Music's convocation on November 11, 1964.

"An Argument for Music in the Electronic Age," its relation to McLuhan's tetrad of the laws of media, and how it informs Gould's concept of a "**participant audience**."

In "An Argument for Music in the Electronic Age," Gould drew from McLuhan's theoretical approach. McLuhan eventually organized his media theory into the tetrad, which takes the classic thesis-antithesis-synthesis dialectic and incorporates a fourth element, that of retrieval, emphasizing the historical grounding of future development.[11] He asked, first, what does an emergent medium enhance; second, what does it render obsolete; third, what does it retrieve that was previously made obsolete; and, fourth, what does it produce? McLuhan considered television in general as, first, enhancing depth experience; second, displacing film and radio; third, retrieving mythology; and, fourth, producing a discarnate spiritual experience.

Firstly, Gould argued in "An Argument for Music in the Electronic Age" that the electronic mediation of music enhanced the listener's awareness of studio procedures, transforming the way in which westerners *preferred* to encounter music. He contrasted recordings of his time to recordings made during the late nineteenth century, which Gould heard as still oriented to live performance in terms of aesthetics, tempo, and dynamics. Gould proclaimed that, "today the performer conditioned to think in terms of electronic projection automatically comes to think in terms of an immediacy of reception… represented by the microphone… [which makes possible a] subtle range of interpret[ations]."[12]

Secondly, Gould clearly viewed electronic media as obsolescing the musical hierarchy of specialization inherent in the Gutenberg era's concert tradition. For Gould this was encouraging, as "music… has been both victim and beneficiary of the post-Renaissance emphasis on specialization."[13] Gould located this specialization in the distinction between composers, performers, listeners, and managers. Gould drew from McLuhan's view that new media took previous media as its content; as a result, the electronic mediation of musical performance through recording not only made live concerts obsolete, but also, and more importantly, it effectively superseded their attendant hierarchy.

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11   Marshall McLuhan and Eric McLuhan, *Laws of Media: The New Science* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988).
12   Gould, "An Argument for Music in the Electronic Age," 228.
13   Gould, "An Argument for Music in the Electronic Age," 223.

Thirdly, Gould argued that electronic media would, by removing music from the public sphere, retrieve the community of art production. This would be achieved because the specific, individual roles of authorship would become obscure in the final artistic product. As Gould told his convocation audience,

> the association between electronic technology and the art of music is going to be of such profound effect that it will… provide the one way in which the great schism brought about by the… musical hierarchy can be healed, and that it will provide a new unity between the functions of composer and performer and most important, of the listener.[14]

Finally, the fourth aspect—what is produced—is evidenced in Gould's early 1965 CBC radio programme, "Dialogue on the Prospects of Recording." In a multiple-subject interview on the effects of electronic technology on music, Gould engaged McLuhan by addressing the concept of a "participant audience": a liberated audience, produced by electronic media, which represented for Gould a utopian achievement. McLuhan responded that "[The] mass audience is a participant audience because [of its] speed of access… [as the] viewer becomes aware of the services available to him, he becomes much more participant."[15] Gould agreed that the responsibility in the choice to engage in electronically produced musical performance represents a moral imperative on the part of listeners. But his implicit assumption is that this performance would resemble his own aesthetics.

I argue that, through the intersection of media and music found in his CBC television programmes, Gould held a privileged position regarding the construction of discourse surrounding Canadian national identity. The influence of his personal views was augmented by its location within the monopoly of knowledge produced by the CBC. Implicit in this link was the equation of the participation of Canadian viewers with the integrity of their citizenship. Three case studies will now be drawn on, covering the Cold War, the Canadian Centennial, and the North.

Gould's thematic special, *Music in the U.S.S.R.*, drew on a recent history of successes in Gould's career at a time when Cold War tensions would soon

14   Ibid., 226.
15   Glenn Gould, "Prospects of Recording," Ed. John P.L. Roberts. *The Art of Glenn Gould: Reflections of a Musical Genius* (Toronto: Malcolm Lester, 1999), 247–249.

reach their peak.[16] Gould's historic 1957 Soviet tour established his credentials not only as a musical ambassador for the West and the Second Viennese School, but also at home as both a dominant player in the official national culture and as an expert on current events in classical music. At the same time, technological developments formed the context for Gould's actions.

Gould appeared in *Music in the U.S.S.R.* as a Canadian observer, his rhetoric and insight centered on his role in the West as a cultural mediator for the Soviet Union (a position which mirrored Canada's reputation as an international peacemaker). Produced during the golden age of postwar cultural funding, the set spares no expense. The opening frame has Gould in a large antechamber constructed in imitation of the Peterhof Palace in then-Leningrad, complete with portraits of eighteenth century Russian nobles, ornate decorations lining the walls, bookshelves, antique furniture and the like. Gould strolled along the outer walls of the chamber, outlining the great dilemma of Russian music history: its relationship to the West and whether that would come to nourish or corrupt its own artistic values. Gould proffered a history of pre-Soviet Russian composers as evolving toward a synthesis of the Russian and Western musical legacies:

> And then there came figures who seemed to reconcile, by their genius, both aims. Composers like Tchaikovsky who brought to the forms and disciplines of Western music the spiritual legacy of Russia. Who brought to the excesses of Wagnerian tonality the reproving mystic glow of the Russian liturgy.[17]

Gould then approached the great tragedy of Russian history. Just as the likes of Scriabin promised the onset of Russia's musical century, the Bolshevik Revolution suddenly shattered the Russian musical achievement and isolated Russia from the West. Gould emphasized that the policies of the USSR did not so much call for the representation of a future communist utopia as for a critique of its own bourgeois past. At the time, the official Soviet slogans claimed that the labour experienced by workers would lead to a "bright future." However, its activities were more directed to purging the remaining tendencies it identified as reactionary or bourgeois, an orientation which formed

16   Glenn Gould, "Music in the U.S.S.R.," *Glenn Gould on Television: Complete CBC Broadcasts 1954-1977*, Disc 2, DVD (Sony Classical, 2011). Originally aired on Sunday, January 14, 1962.
17   Gould, "Music in the U.S.S.R."

the crux of Gould's objection. In the climax of Gould's critique of Socialist Realism, he condemned the idea that music should reflect society and the State's ideology. Gould concluded that the purpose of art is not its basis in any particular meaning, neither that of the State nor even that of the listener:

> The relation of an artist to a society is not determined by his acquiescence to the supposed best interests of that society. His work may in an appreciative sense produce its effect, its reaction, many generations after its own time, as Beethoven's did. And therefore, the assumption that art in an individual creative sense is at all necessary to the present health of the community remains debateable. And, at the very least, one must concede that if the good of the community does not necessarily argue the good of art, then all those qualities which in an artistic sense must be judged most prized cannot be so judged in relation to their contribution to the welfare of the community. In short, art can only play its proper role, which is to say in some cases no role at all perhaps, when it is allowed to stand wholly outside the relationship of moral good and evil which are constructed to govern the community. To remain as Jacques Maritain expressed it, 'disengaged'.[18]

For Gould, the artist must remain disengaged, set outside social notions of morality, and produce works of universal beauty. Perhaps the ideal place of an artist in society as presented in Gould's *Music in the U.S.S.R.* looked suspiciously like Gould's in Canada: funded by the State but without explicit ideological regulation, not dependent on the world of the public concert from which he would soon retire. Gould's role in the Canadian national identity is based in such simultaneous experiences of individuality and communality. Anderson has argued that part of what constitutes the modern national identity is a shared experience of spatial-temporal organization achieved by newspapers and literature, forms that "provided the technical means for 'representing' the kind of imagined community that is the nation."[19] Indeed, media are "a force in shaping or legitimating the nation."[20] The fact that Gould actually poured himself a glass of tea out of a samovar as he described the artist's proper role in society amusingly contrasted his role as a Canadian artist with his colleagues on the "wrong side" of the Iron Curtain.

By the Centennial of Confederation in 1967, Gould's utopian epiph-

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18   Gould, "Music in the U.S.S.R."
19   Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 25.
20   Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 37.

any became concurrent with an abrupt transformation of Canadian national identity. The historian Jose Igartua contends that during the 1960s, English Canada underwent its own Quiet Revolution and that Canada's "British ethnic definition of itself… [came to be] abruptly discarded."[21] The CBC joined the myriad of Centennial-related cultural activities seeking to redefine Canada's apparently outmoded identity. For Gould, the CBC's Centennial Concert series, for which he produced the final programme, offered a testing ground for his budding media theory centred on a "participant audience."[22]

In Gould's "Canada Centennial Concert," Gould performs the Bach Concerto No. 7 with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra under conductor Vladimir Golschmann. The sophisticated movement of the camera view offered a critical commentary on Gould's effort to bring to the audience a newfound participation. For example, each movement of the Bach began and ended with the camera facing the performers from a traditional audience's perspective, but immediately after the introductory measures of the first movement the camera cut to Gould's face. After the first close-up of the orchestra, the viewer is increasingly presented with the orchestra not just from the standpoint of a liberated bystander, but from that of the conductor himself. Suddenly, the view which rested on Gould's hands, the sound of the piano and orchestra interacting musically, transitions from Gould's-eye-view to the conductor's-eye-view.

It is important to recognize that the aesthetic choices involved in this aspect of the concert are made by Gould himself and allow the audience a limited role of participation. However, they are consistent with Gould's media doctrine. The audience of this kind of concert had a relationship with the musical performance that would have been impossible in a live performance. Kevin Bazzana illuminates the postwar Canadian discourse on technology, saying that "the history of communications and the psychological, social, political, and cultural effects of the mass media were hot topics in intellectual circles, subjects of scientific research as well as philosophical speculation, and Gould absorbed the theorizing no less enthusiastically than he took the machines themselves."[23] However, it is interesting that while Innis considered the

21   Jose Igartua, *The Other Quiet Revolution: National Identities in English Canada, 1945–71* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007), 5.
22   Glenn Gould, "Canada Centennial Concert," *Glenn Gould on Television*, 2011, Disc 7. Originally aired on Wednesday, November 15, 1967.
23   Kevin Bazzana, *Wondrous Strange: The Life and Art of Glenn Gould* (Toronto: McClel-

non-technological oral tradition as a means of decentralizing the monopolizing nature of media, Gould would pursue work in the latter rather than the former. It is here that there is a curious blending of media technology with Gould's discourse on Canadian national identity.

During the Centennial year of 1967, Gould's utopian epiphany also brought him to produce the first of his contrapuntal radio documentaries, *The Idea of North*.[24] In the documentary Gould wove together the voices of five individuals speaking about their experiences in Canada's North. The TV version of *The Idea of North*, co-produced in 1970 with PBS' Judith Pearlman, complemented the contrapuntal audio of *The Idea of North* with images of an unnamed young Canadian taking the train north from Toronto, Ontario to Churchill, Manitoba.[25] The narrator Wally MacLean—one of the five speakers—shares Gould's notion of metaphorical meaning of the North for Canadians. Their metaphorical conception of the North has implications for Canadian national identity as constructed on television screens tuned in to the CBC.

Gould's *The Idea of North* is an important work joining the conceptual North with music.[26] The only recording of classical music to appear in the film is Sibelius' *Fifth Symphony*, played during the film's climax. Payzant indicates that Gould considered the work a musical representation of the parts of northern Ontario he had visited.[27] It is interesting to note that in Gould's own writing on Sibelius' music he stated that "Sibelius … partook of that spare, bleak, motivically stingy counterpoint that nobody south of the Baltic ever seems to write."[28] Gould's Sibelius, evoking solitude, formed a counterpoint to Maclean's narrative conclusion which is clearly directed to the young Canadian. Maclean paraphrases William James' view that nothing unites people like something to be against, the most extreme example of which is war. Maclean expressed the view that what the North presents to Canadians is not an

land & Stewart 2003), 257–258.

24   Glenn Gould's *The Idea of North* was originally commissioned for the CBC radio programme "Ideas" as a Canadian centennial project.

25   Glenn Gould, "The Idea of North," *Glenn Gould on Television*, 2011, Disc 8. Originally aired on Wednesday, August 5, 1970.

26   Bazzana, *Wondrous Strange*, 297.

27   Geoffrey Payzant, *Glenn Gould: Music & Mind* (Toronto: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1978), 55.

28   Tim Page, "The Piano Music of Sibelius." in *The Glenn Gould Reader*, ed. Time Page (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 103.

imagined space, but instead an unimaginable space, an extreme danger that unites Canadians:

> The common enemy of both of us, whether it's now, or yesterday, or forever, you know […] I suppose the common enemy is… nature […] Now he's willing now to be a fellow traveller of my imagination, eh? So, I go on to say that the North is the war, that you can afford to be against… nature.[29]

At the programme's conclusion, Maclean elaborates that in the act of going north Canadians bring with them what Maclean calls a "contagion" from the south. This contagion is the colonization brought by human subjectivity, which in conquering the northern frontier destroys what the North represents in its capacity to unite.

> The North that was, no longer do humans combine then to defy, or to measure, or to read, or to understand, or to live with this thing we call… nature. Our number one enemy, instead of being… nature, is of course human nature. It's crept stealthily from the South. Not necessarily by steel. All these long and endless miles that we've sort of passed. And now it's infecting the north with a contagion that's, huh, I don't know what it's like. I don't dare tell this person that it's that bad. I just indicate. He's a nice fellow. You know, I don't want to destroy his dream. Also I don't want to smash my own which is paper-thin at times. So, we're up against this William James. The moral equivalent of war. The moral equivalent of this war now is now the North. This William James that wrote in Harvard this many years ago, whatever he did, I suppose he meant really that, not war, the moral equivalent for us is going north.[30]

Thus, we find in Gould's *The Idea of North* that going north is a double-edged sword allowing Canadians neither to find nor lose themselves. Gould's literal re-presentation of the railway, the means of the Canadian struggle against nature, on CBC Television, illustrates a metaphorical linkage between the two technologies. In this linkage, McLuhan would argue that the content of new media is always older media.[31] By connecting broadcast media to the Ca-

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29   Gould, "The Idea of North."
30   Gould, "The Idea of North."
31   In other words, the role of linking the Canadian nation once achieved via the railway was appropriated by radio and television in the twentieth century. Thus, the content of

nadian landscape in this way, Gould adds an important voice to the discourse on Canadian identity and technology that Arthur Kroker identifies as including Innis, McLuhan, and George Grant.[32] Gould's CBC programme—and the images of the young Canadian as he travels the Muskeg Express through the trackless North—technologically constructed the imaginary nation for CBC viewers. *The Idea of North* brought its Canadian audience to participate as a community of citizens in the experience of imagining the North as presented by Gould, and in turn take part in the CBC's monopoly of knowledge.

The national mandate of the CBC formed an important subtext to the specific content of its different programmes. Indeed, the medium is the message. I contend that Gould's CBC Television work still offers a serious commentary on questions of Canadian identity as articulated through music and technology. Gould argued that the consequences of technology for musical works and performances were negative only when one assumed that the concert performance must continue to be considered the "authentic" means of listening to and creating music. However, Gould was uncritical of his own privileged cultural position on the CBC and his use of its monopoly power to his advantage. Throughout his CBC television programmes, he was able to assert his vision of an authentic music practice. Specifically, Gould targets the controls and limitations imposed on musicians by totalitarian governments, as well as the "oppressively" non-mediated nature of live concerts. In its place, he attempts to erect a musical practice that may not have resembled the oral, democratic ideal of Harold Innis. However, for Gould, these television programmes offer autonomy to himself and fellow-minded artists at the expense of traditional sources of political, economic, and social power. Gould's argument that television and other electronic media created a separate musical art form with its own imperatives constructed an important discourse inextricably linked to Canadian national identity, an authoritative televised national space that remains an historical force in Canada today.

"The Idea of North" is not just the discursive and geographical North, but also the railway as a medium. This is a further meaning implicit in McLuhan's aphorism "the medium is the message."

32   Arthur Kroker, *Technology and the Canadian Mind: Innis/McLuhan/Grant* (Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1984).

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