Vikki Visvis

The Sounds of North

Political Efficacy and the "Listening Self" in Elizabeth Hay's *Late Nights on Air*

Set in 1975 in Yellowknife, Canada, Elizabeth Hay's novel *Late Nights on Air* takes place during a period in Canadian culture when the value of sound and listening is diminishing. The novel traces the experiences of two women, Gwen Symon and Dido Paris, who have travelled to Yellowknife on a quest for self, and are trained as apprentice announcers on CFYK Yellowknife radio by Harry Boyd, an experienced, though emotionally raw, station manager. In part, the centrality of radio and Yellowknife in the novel is attributable to Hay's own experiences: while she lived in Yellowknife in the 1970s, Hay worked at its small CBC Radio station (Johnson n. pag.). Her previous collection of reflections, *The Only Snow in Havana* (1992), reveals her continued interest in the region. However, Hay has acknowledged that the emphasis on radio in *Late Nights on Air* particularly indicates the novel's preoccupation with "listening" and "sound" (Johnson n. pag.). From the outset, sound and the auditory senses are prioritized: "her voice came over the radio for the first time. A voice unusual in its sound and unusual in itself. . . . [Harry] listened" (1). In these affirming representations of acoustics, the novel deviates from broader technological and ecological discourses of the time, which point to a declining appreciation for sound and auditory engagement.[1] This diminishment is partly linked to radio as an auditory technological medium whose cultural prominence is overshadowed by television. Similarly, the ecological discourse of noise pollution that developed in Canada during the 1960s and 1970s also suggested the unfeasibility of positive acoustic engagement. Canadian composer and music teacher R. Murray Schafer particularly contributed to this awareness of noise pollution through his examination of

soundscapes. More generally, North America began to cultivate an ecological definition of sound as hazardous background noise.

In a historical moment when sound and aural senses are reduced to technological obsolescence or sonic waste, Hay's *Late Nights on Air* mounts a defense of sound and listening by foregrounding alternative discourses that derive from the Canadian North. Critics have recognized that the novel, as Marta Wójcik argues, "utilizes appreciative . . . discourses," that is, positive representations of Arctic and Subarctic natural enclaves, "to celebrate the Canadian North"; however, these "laudatory" discourses are most prominently linked to northern sounds and northern listening (101). Hay gestures to the existence of this discursive priority in an interview, where she explicitly recognizes that the novel is influenced by Glenn Gould's 1967 sound documentary "The Idea of North" (Johnson n. pag.). More precisely, by alluding to Gould's method of contrapuntal listening, which was developed in "The Idea of North," and the explorer John Hornby, whose reticence is described by John Moss as the "greatest Arctic narrative [of] silence" (56), the novel configures sound and listening as efficacious, both in terms of political engagement and identity formation. The political and personal efficacy of sound and the aural is revealed through traits associated with Gould's contrapuntal listening and Hornby's Arctic narrative of silence: namely, multiplicity, inclusiveness, indeterminacy, and openness. These sensory characteristics take on pronounced political implications in Hay's work by enabling social organizations that privilege attentive listening and communal dialogue as well as by countering the ideologically reductive elements of visuality, particularly static and stereotypical visual depictions of Indigenous cultures. However, these acoustic traits not only facilitate political agency; they also cultivate individual subjectivity by promoting what David Michael Levin calls "the listening self" (38). As a *bildungsroman*, Hay's novel of formation privileges a model of subjectivity with "a developed capacity for listening" that "decenters the ego and promotes a more enlightened intersubjectivity" (Levin 37). Ultimately, in *Late Nights on Air* sound and aural sensory engagement within a specifically Canadian northern tradition disallow a reductive understanding of Canada's sonic environment in the late twentieth century as technologically obsolete or as ecologically threatening by functioning as valuable political and identity-forming tools.

Hay's novel examines the diminishing worth of auditory engagement by rendering a period of transition between different types of media technology. The novel gestures to a transitional moment in Yellowknife through the

analogue of war: "this summer of 1975 took on the mythical quality of a cloudless summer before the outbreak of war, or before the onset of the kind of restlessness, social, spiritual, that remakes the world" (8). This foundational shift is not the product of war but technology, and it will "remake the world" of media by emphasizing the role of television over radio as the purveyor of knowledge in the North: "A fancy new CBC station was in the works, to be built on the southern edge of the town and to house the new regional television venture, with radio taking second place" (86). The movement from radio to television is emphasized in the novel, influencing both the plight of Yellowknife and the personal as well as professional development of individual characters. Gwen, an apprentice radio announcer in Yellowknife, is denied this shift in media during childhood: "All this was before television, though not technically. But her parents remained in the pre-television era, doing without one, eventually cancelling their subscription to the *London Free Press*. Living in silence, except for the radio" (43). Furthermore, Harry, a radio broadcaster and station manager in Yellowknife, has his career undermined by "leaving . . . radio for a television talk show" (4). However, this cultural shift in media technology has additional implications when interpreted in relation to Marshall McLuhan's theories of the senses. McLuhan posits that changing media affect the interplay among all our senses, what he calls "sense ratios" (*Gutenberg* 24). In effect, differing technologies privilege distinct sensory responses. In keeping with McLuhan's interpretation of "radio [as] an extension of the aural" (*Understanding* 333), *Late Nights on Air* predominately links radio to the act of listening to sound: "And the radio. I always loved the sound of the radio" (303-04). Similarly, audio recording equipment is connected to the auditory senses, personified as an acoustic medium: "the little body of sound, her bag full of tapes" (339). Therefore, when Harry announces that he will "'defend radio from TV'" (68), he is defending against both the cultural marginalization of radio and the declining appreciation of auditory senses associated with this technological medium.

Technological change not only threatens to undermine the value of auditory engagement; developing ecological discourses also risk reducing sound to noise pollution. In his 1970 essay, James L. Hildebrand drew attention to this ecological campaign, which interpreted sound as a ubiquitous pollutant: "noise has always been with us, but it has never been so obvious, so intense, so varied, and so pervasive as it is today" (652). Attributed to urban and industrial development, the sounds of traffic,

commercial airlines, motors, and machinery were cast as an increasing threat to wellbeing. Such hazards also extended to Canada. *Late Nights on Air* refers to these acoustic pollutants through a series of metaphors that rely on urban sources of noise pollution: there is "traffic in voices" (7) and the "highway of sound" (31). The connection between sound and pollution is made explicit when the source of radio sounds is reduced to waste: "a garbage bin full to overflowing with tape so edited, so beknuckled and thickened with white splicing tape as to be deemed unsalvageable" (9). However, the novel's most apparent allusion to this ecological discourse is its depiction of soundscapes, which recall R. Murray Schafer's World Soundscape Project. Hay has described the Arctic setting of *Late Nights on Air* as "a soundscape" (Johnson n. pag.), thereby gesturing to the existence of Schafer's acoustic project in the novel. For Schafer, a soundscape is a sound or combination of sounds that forms or arises from an immersive environment (*Soundscape* 7). The term "soundscape" can also refer to an audio recording or performance of sounds, which creates the sensation of experiencing a particular acoustic environment, or compositions created using the "found sounds" of an acoustic environment (7). Reminiscent of Schafer's project, Gwen creates soundscapes as "seamless joins between ambient noise and particular sounds" (82). This type of soundscape was crucial to the World Soundscape Project when it was established as an educational and research program by R. Murray Schafer at Simon Fraser University during the late 1960s and early 1970s (Truax n. pag.). The World Soundscape Project grew out of Schafer's attempt to draw attention to the sonic environment through a course in noise pollution (Truax n. pag.). This project resulted in two small educational booklets, *The New Soundscape* and *The Book of Noise*, both of which mention the "sound sewage of our contemporary environment" (*New* 3). Therefore, while Hay's novel acknowledges the ecological threat of the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline on "critical wildlife habitat" (340), it also recognizes the insidious environmental danger of noise pollution, which became a prominent discourse in discussions of acoustics in the 1970s.

Even though the novel notes the diminishing value of sound and listening as technologically obsolete or as ecologically threatening, *Late Nights on Air* resists reducing their significance. By casting sound and listening as valuable, the novel disallows a reductive understanding of Canada's sonic environment. Hay's work particularly reveals the value of sound and aural engagement by approaching acoustics within a northern context. Through allusions to a tradition of sound and listening in the Canadian North, *Late*

Nights on Air recognizes alternative acoustic discourses in the late twentieth century, and so provides a more comprehensive rendering of Canada's sonic environment. Although these discourses are informed by the perspectives of those who are from the "'outside'"—what the novel explains is "the northern term for anywhere south of the sixtieth parallel"—as opposed to the "'inside,'" and "by implication, the North, itself" (337), they remain important contributions to discussions of acoustics in Canada during the period, and thus serve as central allusions in *Late Nights on Air*. In part, intimations of R. Murray Schafer's soundscapes contribute to the novel's investigation of these northern acoustics. As Patricia Shand recognizes in her analysis of the World Soundscape Project, Schafer's "interests lie less in a program of noise abatement than in the more positive approach which Schafer calls 'acoustic design'" (5). Despite Schafer's preoccupation with noise pollution during this period, he also aimed to develop aural sensitivity by investigating various acoustic regions, including Canada's North. He applied this interest in soundscapes to the North when he travelled to an isolated farm in south-central Ontario in 1975. The product was a ten-page text entitled *Music in the Cold* in which he considers the influence that surrounding sounds might have on a composer's creations.[2] He also acknowledges that the northern environment has its own distinct sounds in *The Soundscape*: "The ice fields of the North, for instance, far from being silent, reverberate with spectacular sounds" (26). Reminiscent of Schafer's project, Gwen records sound collages by manipulating, mixing, and juxtaposing taped environmental sounds: "Then she organized the sounds in a formal way, like music. A phrase, then a repeat of it, then a new sound, and a repeat, then back to the beginning" (81). This northern composition of soundscapes is particularly apparent on the trek taken to recover John Hornby's final journey; the descriptions of northern ice echo Schafer's own on the sounds of the North: "Chunks of ice floated by. Candled ice, the long vertical ice crystals that form when meltwater on a frozen lake works its trickling way down to the water below, had bunched against the shore. The candles tinkled and chimed, and Gwen taped the sound" (245). The onomatopoetic "trickling," "tinkled," and "chimed" in Hay's novel are literary "reverberat[ions]" of the "spectacular sounds" (26) Schafer identifies in the North.

Consistent with this acoustic collage technique, Glenn Gould's method of contrapuntal listening is a further allusion to a northern tradition. In an interview, Hay concedes she was influenced by Gould's 1967 sound documentary "The Idea of North": "as a young girl, I listened to Glenn Gould on the radio. He also had

this fascination with what he called 'The Idea of North'" (Johnson n.pag.). Gould's notion of contrapuntal listening was developed through this documentary, where five speakers provide contrasting views of northern Canada. The piece employs Gould's idiosyncratic technique of simultaneously playing the voices of two or more people, each of whom speaks a monologue to an unheard interviewer. Gould called this method "contrapuntal" radio, or what he explicitly names in the documentary itself as "northern listening." The term contrapuntal normally applies to music in which independent melody lines play simultaneously; this type of music, exemplified by J. S. Bach, was a major part of Gould's repertoire (Dickinson 114). Gould's contrapuntal method, Kevin McNeilly contends, "comments on his use of collage techniques and of multiple simultaneous voices as a spur to listeners, as a call to develop, in ourselves, new (and inherently multiplicitous) forms of attention" (102). In accordance with Gould's contrapuntal projects, Gwen listens to multiple sounds simultaneously, carefully hearing intonations and implications, represented here onomatopoetically: "Gwen went to the town dump near the airport to record the extensive vocabulary of the local ravens, their rasping croaks and rattles and gargles and gulps, their metallic *toks* and *awks* and *ku-uk-kuks* and *quorks*. She discovered in the process how to avoid the wind noises that wrecked the clear sounds she was after" (99). Gwen's taped soundscapes, therefore, both record her acoustic environment and promote a distinct form of northern listening, which, as Gould suggests, involves attentive aural engagement with multiple, often simultaneously occurring, sounds.

This openness to variety and difference is a facet of northern acoustics also associated with the explorer John Hornby. Hay recognizes in her acknowledgements that the John Hornby adventure was always at the back of the novel. A fascination with Hornby and Edgar Christian is also a common interest for Gwen and Harry (21).[3] Hornby's fatal foray occurred in the Barren Grounds in 1926 with two inexperienced companions—his eighteen-year-old cousin, Edgar Christian, and Harold Adlard (Stewart 185). In distinctively Hornby style, the party circuitously meandered up the Thelon River for no explicable reason in the late summer, and missed the caribou migration southward, which was supposed to provide them with food for the winter (185). Consequently, they wintered without adequate supplies, and in the spring of 1927, all three succumbed to starvation in their cabin (185). Most likely, had the manner of Hornby's death and final depletion of strength not been chronicled in Edgar Christian's diary, Hornby's experiences would go unrecognized (185). Due to Hornby's inconspicuous literary output, John

Moss, in his study of the Arctic, has aligned Hornby with the "greatest Arctic narrative [of] silence" (56). Indeed, *Late Nights on Air* also makes this connection by reiterating Hornby's professed affection for silence: "The words that kept ringing in her head were Hornby's *I've come to love the silence*" (131). In part, the silence Moss attributes to Hornby is literal; Hornby's only accounts of two decades of subarctic travel were his "Caribou Notes," a few incomplete diaries, and notes for a projected book, *The Land of Feast and Famine* (Stewart 184). However, Moss also interprets this silence figuratively; Hornby's "refusal of linearity . . . his refusal to extricate his dreams from the landscape, to enter with words the continuum of history and geography, culture and kindred consciousness" (56) suggests, like the Arctic itself, "a world with no centre" (18), whereby a pervasive indeterminacy disallows reductive fixity. As with Moss, Hay's novel associates open-endedness with Hornby. When Dido Paris, another apprentice announcer, attempts to reduce him to the word "masochist" (131), Gwen resists the designation, insisting on indeterminate descriptors instead: "'No! Those labels just give you a fancy reason to stop thinking about people.' 'What would *you* call Hornby then?' 'Complicated'" (130).

These ways of listening and configurations of sound not only allude to a northern tradition; they are also politically effective. If *Late Nights on Air* situates alternative northern discourses of sound and listening from the late twentieth century as valuable, this worth is, in part, examined in terms of political effectiveness. The political efficacy of sound and the aural is suggested through traits associated with Gould's contrapuntal listening and Hornby's Arctic narrative of silence: namely, multiplicity, inclusiveness, indeterminacy, and openness. The connection between these characteristics and acoustics is reinforced by other discussions of the senses during the period. In the 1960s, Marshall McLuhan used a spatial metaphor to distinguish between "acoustic space" and "visual space" (Carpenter and McLuhan 67). For McLuhan, "acoustic space" is "discontinuous and nonhomogeneous" (McLuhan and Powers 45), "simultaneous and everywhere at once" (138). Its traits, thus, resemble those of Gould's northern listening and Hornby's silence. In fact, the novel's descriptions of "transparent fruit" particularly exhibit McLuhan's characterization of "acoustic space" as ubiquitous, with "no point of favored focus" (Carpenter and McLuhan 67). Having canoed on Back Bay, "an extension of Yellowknife Bay" (Hay 27), in the early summer, Harry and Dido paddle to a small abandoned cemetery on the opposite shore, where "Dido first smelled invisible apples" (27). Unable to see the apples, and so identify the source of their aroma, Dido experiences smell as

ubiquitous and unfixed, a characteristic that the novel extends to sound later in the same episode: "'Transparent fruit'. . . . The pleasant odour, pervasive but without a source. . . . She hears him call her name. *Dido*. And she looks around, exactly as she did when she first caught the sweet smell of apples in the air. *Dido*" (27-8). These attributes certainly indicate the existence of "acoustic spaces" in the novel; however, they additionally suggest that the multiplicity, openness, inclusiveness, and indeterminacy associated with sound and the aural are aligned with political power in *Late Nights on Air*.

The positive political potential of northern sound and listening is most apparent in the novel's depiction of the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry. *Late Nights on Air* often refers to the commissioner of the Inquiry, Justice Thomas Berger, and the Inquiry itself.[4] In doing so, it emphasizes their political, social, and environmental impact: "At stake was something immense, all the forms of life that lay in the path of a natural gas pipeline corridor that would rip up the Arctic, according to critics, like a razor slashing the face of the Mona Lisa" (83). The Inquiry was commissioned by the Government of Canada on March 21, 1974 to investigate the effects of a proposed gas pipeline that would run through the Yukon and the Mackenzie River Valley of the Northwest Territories, and finally took the form of approximately two hundred volumes of evidence (Gamble 947). The commission recommended that no pipeline be built through the northern Yukon and that a pipeline through the Mackenzie Valley should be delayed for ten years (Gamble 951). Justice Berger heard testimony from diverse groups with an interest in the pipeline. As he recognizes in the first volume, entitled *Northern Frontier, Northern Homeland*, released on April 15, 1977, "At the formal hearings of the Inquiry at Yellowknife, I heard the evidence of 300 experts on northern conditions, northern environment, and northern peoples. . . . I listened to the evidence of almost one thousand northerners" (1). Not surprisingly, Hay's novel refers to Justice Berger as "The Great Listener" (103). In doing so, *Late Nights on Air* both acknowledges Berger's extraordinary capacity as a listener and recognizes that this auditory skill enabled the political reach of the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry.

The Berger Inquiry can be viewed as a political movement characterized by the inclusion and acceptance of multiple voices, precisely because there was a principle of attentive listening and communal speaking. Hay's novel draws attention to these traits in its depiction of mindful listeners at the Inquiry: "the formal hearings of the Berger Inquiry were instructive and more interesting than you might expect. She went whenever she could to sit in the

audience and listen" (144). This careful listening also facilitates communal dialogue. Like Gould's contrapuntal or "northern" listening, the Inquiry was characterized by "dialogism." Peter Dickinson argues that Gould's "Idea of North" presents a contrapuntal style "with a more dialogical definition . . . encapsulated in the montage of overlapping voices" (112). Deriving his definition of "dialogism" from Mikhail Bakhtin, Dickinson posits that the "dialogic" facets of Gould's sound documentary occur because "both the speaker and the listener . . . [are] reciprocally involved in the act of utterance" (115). Similarly, the Berger Inquiry did not merely answer, correct, silence, or extend a previous work, but was continually informed by multiple voices: "Tom Berger had managed to turn his inquiry into an exercise in democracy, informing, questioning, teaching, listening" (Hay 174). Furthermore, the Inquiry's treatment of radio facilitated a dialogic "acoustic space," thereby "emphasizing dialogue and response rather than statement and counterstatement" (Duffy 25). We know that "each evening when the Inquiry was in session, the CBC northern network broadcast Inquiry news in English and in the native languages. Everyone in the region was thus able to keep informed" (Gamble 949). As a result, it undermined the authority of "the businessmen who believed the North belonged to them . . . [who] couldn't wait for the gas and oil to flow, and so . . . resented the platform [the Inquiry] was giving to natives, environmentalists" (Hay 46) by offering an "aggregation . . . of informants and information" (163). Dialogic principles, indicative of Gould's contrapuntal style and McLuhan's "acoustic space," were foundational to the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry, and enabled a politically valuable forum for inclusive, communal interaction. Ultimately, Hay's representation of the Inquiry emphasizes these acoustic traits in order to foreground the political efficacy of attentive aural engagement with the sounds of multiple voices.

The politically efficacious potential of sound and listening is further apparent in relation to the limitations presented by visuality. In his juxtaposition of "acoustic" and "visual space," McLuhan recognizes marked differences between these sensory responses. Unlike "acoustic space," "visual space" has "fixed boundaries . . . [is] homogeneous (uniform everywhere), and static (qualitatively unchangeable)" (McLuhan and Powers 45). These distinctions extend to the political implications of visuality, which, for McLuhan, encode power relations: as he notes, "visually biased technology can also create centre-margin power relations" ("Introduction" 13). Current critical theory by Nicholas Mirzoeff has elaborated the connection between visuality and power. Visuality and visual technologies are, for Mirzoeff,

mechanisms of social power or a "Western social technique for ordering" (*Right* 48). He links visuality—the physical act of seeing—with forms of control, such as the overseer in plantation slavery or the general in war, but recognizes that the authority of visuality is "not composed simply of visual perceptions in the physical sense but is formed by a set of relations combining information, imagination, and insight into a rendition of physical and psychic space" ("Right to Look" 476). Mirzoeff, thus, treats visuality as "a discursive practice for rendering and regulating the real that has material effects, like Michel Foucault's panopticism, the gaze, or perspective" (476).

Hay's novel also betrays an awareness of the political limitations of visuality. Television and the photograph are both forms of visual technology and mechanisms of social authority that can generate fixed and homogeneous representations of northern First Nations cultures. In effect, homogeneity and fixity characterize both sensory responses to visual media, as McLuhan would argue, and the content of visual technologies. The content of television, the novel suggests, risks reducing the diversity of northern culture because its programming is homogeneous and limited in scope, and so will exclude northern First Nations societies, especially Dene culture, and arrest cultural development, both in terms of dialect and social practice. The exclusivity of television programming is revealed in comparisons to radio: "[Harry] wanted one long street of sound that would be interesting to anyone, white or Dene, at any time of day. If radio could be more relevant than ever, he reasoned, then it stood a better chance against television" (Hay 133). Acoustic principles of multiplicity and inclusivity are upheld by radio, a "relevant" technological medium that incorporates dialects that television appears to disregard: "Already [Harry] was picturing Teresa Lafferty's hour of blended Dogrib and English; he wanted to hire another Dene woman, young Tessa Blondin, to do reports in Slavey; and he was tempted to curry more disfavor with the newsroom by carving five minutes off the regular local newscasts and adding them to the Dene allotment" (133). The "disfavor" Harry risks "curry[ing]" from the white senior employees at the station (223) is also indicative of the broader "racism" in the region, which is explicitly recognized by both white and Indigenous characters (46, 47, 168, 84). Although the novel appears to reinforce white privilege by foregrounding North American and European Caucasian characters, it maintains a commitment to diversity by relying on the central Dene protagonist, announcer Teresa Lafferty, to expose the disproportionately high white presence both within the Berger Inquiry and, more subtly,

Hay's novel: "Teresa looked around at the mostly white faces" (175). In a quietly self-reflexive moment, the novel, through Teresa's observation, draws attention to its own privileging of the white presence; however, by positioning Harry as a vocal critic of the colonial potential of television and as an advocate for the culturally inclusive capacity of radio, the novel attempts to address its imbalanced representation of white and Indigenous characters. For instance, the "white frontier mentality" (215), which for Harry is facilitated by television, is questioned by radio; as an "acoustic space," radio is a form of cultural agency that allows First Nations northern societies an outlet for self-expression that would otherwise be absent with television. As Harry explains, "Last March the settlement of Igloolik rejected television in a referendum. They chose instead to have a radio station they control" (180). The inclusive capacity of radio is confirmed with Gwen and Dido's radio documentary about "a Dene play on alcohol abuse" (130), Dido's radio interview with a "native linguist" (186) about his experiences at a residential school, and Gwen's dramatization of "northern legends about Raven, trickster and creator of the world" (184, 217). Such examples illustrate recognition of First Nations issues disregarded by television at the time.

Furthermore, the novel questions visuality by critiquing the reduction of Dene culture to ideologically static and homogeneous photographic content. Although Eddy Fitzgerald, a technician at the radio station, is seemingly committed to Native rights, he reduces the Indigenous experience to the stereotype of the inebriated version of what Daniel Francis calls the "Imaginary Indian," and does so for social recognition:

> A week before he was to leave Yellowknife, Harry opened *News of the North* and read a brief article about an exhibit of photographs in Los Angeles that was causing quite a stir. A series documenting young Dene women, unposed, half-naked, and looking as if they were high on something . . . a young native girl sprawled on her side in what looked like a seedy motel room. . . . He couldn't tell from the article if the photos were true to life, or if Eddy had staged them for his own purposes. (335-36)

When attempting to ascertain Eddy's motives and the implications of the photographs, Harry confides to his friend Teresa: "'But it's all for a good cause, apparently. . . . Art in the service of politics'" (336). Teresa's scathing response reveals the photograph as an ideological tool of both patriarchal and cultural power: "'No,' [Teresa] said. 'It's art and politics as a cover for—you know. His dick'" (336). Her comment confirms John Tagg's summation that the photograph is "a practice [that] depends on the agents

and institutions which set it to work" (qtd. in Ryan 18). Such limitations are highlighted when compared to Teresa's use of radio to create an "acoustic space" that promotes dialogue and social engagement in response to this urgent issue: "She had in mind an on-air manual in English and Dogrib of anecdotes, advice, information—what women faced, what they could do, who they could turn to" (214). Even though a review in the "Canadian Press" supports Eddy's exhibit, stating "'the disconcerting intimacy of the pictures never feels exploitative'" (335-36), the reduction of these Dene women to static and homogeneous stereotypes is, according to Teresa and by implication Hay, exploitative and self-serving.

Despite its awareness of the political and ideological limitations of visuality, the novel does not establish a reductive sensory binary that positions the acoustic over the visual, the ear over the eye. The photographs of the natural world taken by Ralph Cody, a freelance book reviewer, reveal the North as "'always changing'. . . . 'I've taken dozens of pictures and each one is subtly different'" (143). Visual technology here disallows a fixed idea of the North, and like the novel as a whole, explores various constructions of wilderness, revealing the North, as Sherrill Grace has argued, is "multiple, shifting, and elastic; it is a *process*, not an external fixed goal or condition" (16). Instead, we are offered a spectrum of responses to the senses. Gwen and Harry are most affiliated with the aural; however, Harry does not develop the degree of acoustic sensitivity that Gwen achieves. On meeting Harry in New York years after the end of their affair, Dido explains its failure in terms of his aural limitations: "'You weren't listening. You're still not listening'" (355). Ralph represents the more constructive potential of visuality. His reluctance to photograph human subjects suggests his intuitive knowledge of the dangers of objectification and his temptation by these same dangers in a desire to photograph Dido: "'I don't photograph people as a rule,' Ralph said. 'But I'd make an exception for Dido'" (78). Eddy embodies the insidious dimensions of visuality. He is first to acknowledge the male gaze, but identifies it in Gwen when she looks at Dido: "'Your eyes were on her body . . . just like a man's'" (30). However, because the novel examines the affirming possibilities of northern acoustics, it emphasizes the engagement of Gwen and Harry with northern forms of listening, which act as political correctives for the limiting aspects of visuality. In effect, the sensory characteristics of the aural have pronounced political implications in Hay's work by countering the ideologically reductive potential of visuality, such as representational fixity that results in cultural exclusion.

Traits associated with northern listening are not only linked to political efficacy; they are also deemed valuable because they facilitate individual identity formation. In its representation of Gwen's personal and professional development, *Late Nights on Air* incorporates the conventions of the *bildungsroman*; however, as a novel of formation, it privileges a model of subjectivity that has an enhanced capacity for listening. In accordance with the qualities David Michael Levin attributes to "the listening self," such as "openness [and] receptiveness" (45), this paradigm of subjectivity emphasizes the ways listening decentres the ego. This decentering occurs because "unlike things that we see . . . sounds are transitory and impermanent, ever insubstantial . . . they cannot be grasped, held, possessed" (34). Levin, therefore, favours a subjectivity facilitated by listening that cultivates a productive indeterminacy. This indeterminacy, in turn, allows for openness, dialogue, genuine exchange, and "increased awareness of differences and conflicts" (35) or, in Levin's terminology, an "enlightened intersubjectivity" (37). Steven Connor reaches similar conclusions in his discussion of the "auditory self": "The idea of the auditory self provides a way of positing and beginning to experience a subjectivity organized around the principles of openness, responsiveness and acknowledgement of the world rather than violent alienation from it" (219). What Connor calls the "indeterminacy of sound" (209) in the formation of the "auditory self" is not idealized, however. Connor recognizes that a model of subjectivity based on indeterminacy also threatens to create a foundational instability, "insufficiency, and insubstantiality" (213). In effect, for Connor, "the opening of the self to and by the auditory [is] an experience both of rapturous expansion and of dangerous disintegration" (215). Thus, Connor qualifies his analysis by recognizing that listening is complemented by other senses: "The auditory always leads to, or requires completion by the other senses" (220). In sum, for Levin and Connor, "the self defined in terms of hearing rather than sight is a self imagined not as a point, but as a membrane; not as a picture, but as a channel through which voices, noises and musics travel" (207). These principles are evident throughout Gwen's development within the specific context of northern sounds and listening.

Gwen relies on the sounds of the North to cultivate a "listening self," which is accomplished, in part, by decentering the ego. The imperative to listen is made explicit in her professional life as radio announcer: "you have to listen to yourself in a detached way and work to correct what's wrong" (105). By becoming a "rapt listener" (199), Gwen begins to change her

"undeveloped self" (205). Listening encourages her to leave the confines of her own egocentrism: as Harry concedes, "'you won't be any good until you're dedicated to something outside yourself'" (69). In doing so, Gwen begins to understand the nuances of her subjectivity, making distinctions between real self and performed persona: "'No. You're trying to be *almost* yourself. You see the difference? You're giving a performance as your natural self'" (114). This development is not linear, however. Gwen must suffer painful embarrassment after she overhears Dido assert, "'I think she knows exactly how good she is'" (141). Subsequently, Gwen is forced to acknowledge she "felt lost in the enormous gap between how she felt inside and what others thought of her" (144). However, through composing soundscapes and listening contrapuntally, Gwen is able to cultivate a more evolved subjectivity, learning that although she is not "the kind of person . . . 'who truly loves life,'" she is "'the kind of person who never stops trying'" (311). Gwen's development is counterpointed with that of Dido, who is resistant to attentive listening. Dido's listening is often superficial in ways that reinforce her egocentrism: "'Anyway' . . . 'let's get back to me'" (45). At times, it is absent: "The beautiful Dido . . . hadn't stuck around to hear the broadcast" (217) and "'can't listen to [Gwen]'" (44). Unlike Gwen, whose listening opens her to experience, Dido is subsumed by her relationship with Eddy, "her personality darkened" (229) to form a static, fixed self. Dido's personal domination by Eddy culminates in physical abuse (184), thereby literalizing the representational control Eddy imposes with the photograph (186). Thus, like her namesake in Virgil's *Aeneid*, Dido is ruined by a man; however, this tragic end occurs not because a man leaves her, as Aeneas abandons Dido in Virgil's work, but because a man claims and asserts authority over her: "the thousand ships set sail for Troy . . . until Aeneas fled his burning city . . . 'where he broke poor Dido's heart'" (280). The failure of the *bildungsroman* as it relates to Dido is most clearly articulated in her obituary: an "erratic, emotional, beautiful woman who never quite found herself" (363).

Unlike Dido, Gwen refuses to limit her experience, particularly her engagement with sound, and so consistently opens herself to multiple possibilities in keeping with the indeterminacy Moss locates in Hornby as a signifier. This openness to the experience of northern sounds is most apparent when Gwen surveys Hornby's grave and dilapidated cabin. She is confronted with the sounds of the Arctic in the form of a bear, unmediated and intense: "She heard the bear behind her, then beside her. She heard its heavy breathing. . . . [She] heard saliva bubbling in its mouth . . . and heard

the bear moving, and realized it was moving away" (300). Although Gwen also relies on vision in this scene—"Gwen's scream coincided with her seeing a set of small, black, gleaming eyes" (299)—thereby confirming Connor's recognition that "the auditory always leads to, or requires completion by the other senses" (220), Gwen's experience with sounds in this episode is intense and transformative. Here, her interaction with sound changes, as she has no radio booth, no microphone, and no tape recorder to mediate her encounter; instead, she is exposed directly to the sounds and dangers of wilderness.[5] The unmediated confrontation may leave Gwen feeling like "a shell-shocked survivor of the trenches" (300), but it teaches her an important skill set that is refined while in the wilderness, namely, her capacity to listen well. This aural sensitivity is akin to that described by Eleanor and Ralph: "Here in the Barrens there wasn't music, but a hum, a vibration, the sound of the earth. . . . In moments of silence, she'd heard it too" (309). Silence in this context is not simply the absence of sound; silence is what Moss attributes to the explorer Hornby: a refusal to stay fixed and an indeterminate openness to experience. This understanding allows Gwen to learn other essential lessons, such as the permissibility of personal errors. She acknowledges that "she'd done everything wrong . . . fleeing when she should have stood her ground, turning herself into prey. Yet here she was, still alive. The world around her tingled with life" (302). Gwen may lose the shoulder bag containing her tape recorder and tapes, but she gains what these sounds and her new form of listening intended. In short, Gwen learns that she can, in fact, be herself: "what mattered more than sound effects was the effect of sound" (303). Her cultivation of a "listening" or "auditory" self culminates in an "enlightened intersubjectivity" (Levin 37), for Gwen forms an identity as a professional listener in the service of others: "She'd volunteered at a hospice and found her calling. It was listening to people with real problems tell her their troubles" (352).

By focusing on alternative northern sonic discourses from the late twentieth century, those which did not diminish acoustic engagement to technological obsolescence or noise pollution, Hay's novel emphasizes the importance of sound and the aural in power relations and identity formation. Specifically, the multiplicity and inclusiveness associated with Glenn Gould's contrapuntal listening facilitates political advocacy. Further, the indeterminacy and openness indicative of John Hornby's Arctic narrative of silence aids the development of a "listening self." Ultimately, *Late Nights on Air* reminds us of a transitional moment in Canada's history when northern sounds and northern listening were crucial—crucial in responses to mediums

of cultural knowledge, such as radio, in areas of political and social activism, such as the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry, and in the formation of a subjectivity willing to hear others.

NOTES

1 Acoustics in this essay is defined as "relating to, involving, or of the nature of sound" (OED) and "relating to the sense of hearing" (OED). Thus, it includes both the production and reception of sound. Sound, which is conventionally defined as pressure waves created by a vibrating body, will be approached as "the external object of audition" (OED). That is, this essay will focus on sound as an external object produced by vocal and environmental forces. Standard definitions of sound often also include the act of reception: "The sensation produced in the organs of hearing when surrounding air is set in vibration in such a way as to affect these" (OED). However, this analysis will rely on references to the aural senses, that is, the sense of hearing, in its critique of reception to sound.

2 Schafer's discussion of the North in *Music in the Cold* tends towards dichotomies that are not apparent in Hay's construction of the North. Schafer's North is in direct opposition to the South: "The art of the North is the art of restraint. The art of the South is the art of excess" (65). Hay's novel, however, complicates an idea of the North that turns on firm divisions between North and South, that is, between nature and culture or the rural and the urban, to provide a more complex experience of place: Yellowknife is "such a curious mixture, the city was, of brand new and raw old, of government buildings and beer parlours and bush planes and little shack houses close to the water, which seemed to lie in all directions, as did the vast wilderness" (12).

3 Gwen and Harry exhibit a particular interest in George Whalley's script for the CBC Radio feature "Death in the Barren Ground: The Story of John Hornby's Last Journey," which dramatized the narrative of Hornby, Christian, and Adlard (21) and was first broadcast on March 3, 1954. They also acknowledge Whalley's subsequent biography of Hornby, *The Legend of John Hornby,* published in 1962 (21). In 1980, this biography was followed by *Death in the Barren Ground: The Diary of Edgar Christian*, Whalley's newly edited version of Christian's diary, which had previously been published in 1937 as *Unflinching: The Diary of Edgar Christian*.

4 See Berger 8, 46, 83, 173, 214-15, 334, 340.

5 The novel, thus, subverts traditional androcentric constructions of wilderness as a space for the male quester. As Margaret Atwood explains, "even though the North itself, or herself, is a cold and savage female, the drama enacted in it—or her—is a man's drama, and those who play it out are men" (90). Instead, Hay's novel reconsiders wilderness as a female quest, containing beneficial elements, such as liberation and transformation.

WORKS CITED

Atwood, Margaret. *Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1995. Print.

Berger, Thomas R. *Northern Frontier, Northern Homeland: The Report of the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry: Volume One.* Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1977. Print.

Carpenter, Edmund, and Marshall McLuhan. "Acoustic Space." *Explorations in Communication*. Eds. Edmund Carpenter and Marshall McLuhan. Boston: Beacon, 1960. 65-70. Print.
Connor, Steven. "The Modern Auditory I." *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present*. Ed. Roy Porter. London: Routledge, 1997. 203-23. Print.
Dickinson, Peter. "Documenting 'North' in Canadian Poetry and Music." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 59 (1996): 105-22. Print.
Duffy, Dennis. *Marshall McLuhan*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1969. Print.
Gamble, D. J. "The Berger Inquiry: An Impact Assessment Process." *Science* 199. No. 4332 (1978): 946-52. Print.
Grace, Sherrill E. *Canada and the Idea of North*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2001. Print.
Hay, Elizabeth. *Late Nights on Air.* Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2007. Print.
Hildebrand, James L. "Noise Pollution: An Introduction to the Problem and an Outline for Future Legal Research." *Columbia Law Review* 70.4 (1970): 652-92. Print.
Johnson, Lisa. "Go North and Prosper? Elizabeth Hay on the Canadian Romance with Radio and the Arctic." *The Tyee*. 3 Oct. 2007. Web. 21 Nov. 2015.
Levin, David Michael. *The Listening Self*. New York: Routledge, 1989. Print.
McLuhan, Marshall, and Bruce R. Powers. *The Global Village*. New York: Oxford UP, 1989. Print.
McLuhan, Marshall. *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1962. Print.
—."Introduction." *The Bias of Communication*. Ed. H. A. Innis. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1964. Print.
—. *Understanding Media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 1994. Print.
McNeilly, Kevin. "Listening, Nordicity, Community: Glenn Gould's 'The Idea of North.'"*Essays on Canadian Writing* 59 (1996): 87-104. Print.
Mirzoeff, Nicholas. "The Right to Look." *Critical Inquiry* 37 (2011): 473-96. Print.
—. *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2011. Print.
Moss, John. *Enduring Dreams: An Exploration of Arctic Landscape*. Concord, ON: Anansi, 1994. Print.
Ryan, James R. *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1997. Print.
Schafer, R. Murray. *The Book of Noise*. Vancouver: Price Print, 1970. Print.
—. "Music in the Cold." *On Canadian Music*. Bancroft, ON: Arcana, 1984. 64-75. Print.
—. *The New Soundscape*. Don Mills, ON: BMI Canada, 1969. Print.
—. *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*. Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1977. Print.
Shand, Patricia. "The Music of the Environment." *The Canadian Music Educator* 15.2 (1974): 5-12. Print.
Stewart, Hugh. "John Hornby 1880-1927." *Arctic Profiles*. The Arctic Science and Technology Information System (ASTIS/SISTA). U of Calgary. 184-85. Web. 16 Feb. 2016.
Truax, Barry. *World Soundscape Project*. Simon Fraser U. Web. 16 Feb. 2016.
Wójcik, Marta. "'The Stillness is the Time before the Change': Celebrating the Canadian North and Northern Environment in Elizabeth Hay's *Late Nights on Air*." *Lublin Studies in Modern Languages and Literature* 38.1 (2014): 101-09. Print.