

Contrapuntal Politics

Glenn Gould, Canadian Landscape, and the Cold War

While Glenn Gould's *Solitude Trilogy*—consisting of “The Idea of North” (1967), “Latecomers” (1969), and “Quiet in the Land” (1977)—has long been celebrated for its nationalist reverberations, Gould's own political investments still appear elusive. Perhaps this evasion is logical. Is not the point of the renowned Canadian pianist and radio artist's contrapuntal technique, defined by the simultaneous expression of distinct melodic lines, the circumvention of a singular voice? More than one critic has referenced Gould's letter to Roy Vogt, dated August 3, 1971, in which Gould defines contrapuntal arrangement as the antidote to “totalitarian” musicality (Roberts 150). And yet, critics such as Kevin McNeilly and Markus Mantere have avoided the full political implications of a term such as “totalitarian” by instead using the letter to establish those now foundational claims regarding the plural identity of Gould's music and his representation of isolated spaces such as the North. But just as the North fascinated Gould, Gould's use of the term “totalitarian” fascinates me. Not only did Gould's career span the Cold War era, but—as historian Graham Carr examines in a recent article—he was the first pianist from North America to perform in the Union of Soviet and Socialist Republics (USSR). The rhetoric in Gould's letters is repeatedly political—notwithstanding his views on the “totalitarian” impulses of music, the artist also reflected on the “undemocratic” harmony in Mozart's opus (Roberts 109) and the “tyranny of stylistic collectivity” both in art and life (Roberts 176). Is it possible, then, that Gould's work was indeed motivated by a politics inseparable from post-Second World War and Cold War tensions?

This article elaborates the wider political resonances of Gould's contrapuntal technique by addressing his lesser-known radio documentary "The Search for Pet Clark" (1967)¹ in relation to his journalistic work and personal letters. The rise of Gould's contrapuntal method is inseparable from his early performance of J. S. Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, wherein the multiple phrases and melodic expressions produce an overlapping, plural conversation to which Gould himself added his improvisation and humming. In the *Solitude Trilogy* documentaries, Gould revolutionarily applied the contrapuntal method to radio by overlapping voices discussing isolated communities made up of either Northerners, outpost Newfoundlanders, or prairie Mennonites. As a political form, the contrapuntal is often associated with Edward Said's application in *Culture and Imperialism*, in which Said recommends reading cultural archives "not univocally but *contrapuntally*, with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts" (51).² While Said applies the contrapuntal as a methodology, for Gould the form embodies political possibility. Gould's work supports a specifically Canadian Cold War and post-Second World War perspective, refusing the simple equation of the United States with democratic pluralism and the USSR with totalitarianism, and instead presenting totalitarianism as a politics that circulated in a multitude of ways (including within the world of art and music) and that affected Canadian space through the homogenizing forces of post-Second World War American capital. For Gould, the antidote to totalitarianism was a pluralism that celebrated individual perspectives simultaneously, a dynamic that informs his presentation of the contrapuntal. And it was in a long-idealized notion of Canadian space where Gould found his model for making manifest the contrapuntal as a utopian political form.

By addressing the Cold War politics of the contrapuntal, this article also approaches a larger gap within Canadian literature, as there is still little understanding of the relationship between Canadian literary studies and Cold War ideology. How has the Cold War been culturally represented in Canadian literature? Are there any formal characteristics unique to Canadian Cold War literatures? Can literature help further our understanding of the ways in which Canadians experienced Cold War tensions? The few studies published on the cultural impact of the Cold War in Canada tend to frame its impact according to Canadian-American relations. Robert Teigrob's *Warming Up to the Cold War* focuses on the role mass media played in cementing Canada's affiliation with American diplomacy. Reg Whitaker

and Gary Marcuse's *Cold War Canada: The Making of a National Insecurity State* also centres on Canada's allegiance with America and American Cold War policies, arguing that this dynamic enforced a conservative strain in Canadian politics that limited liberal freedoms in the country. Richard Cavell's collection, *Love, Hate, and Fear in Canada's Cold War*, includes a number of essays that address how Canada circumscribed and limited the freedoms of those belonging to non-normative identity categories. Nevertheless, questions regarding the particular ways in which Cold War ideology traversed and affected Canadian literature and art, as well as their formal representations, remain largely unanswered.

"The Search for Pet Clark"³ was first written for the November 1967 issue of *High Fidelity* and then broadcast as a radio documentary for CBC on December 11, 1967. The Canadian political resonance of the documentary—especially in relation to the *Solitude Trilogy*—has been overlooked by critics largely because it has been categorized as a piece of music criticism. This impetus was established early on: *The Toronto Daily Star* almost immediately published the work under the title "Why Glenn Gould Loves Petula Clark," removing those portions not pertaining to Gould's music analysis. The documentary actually begins with Gould driving the highway along Lake Superior in Northern Ontario, followed by a detailed description of a local timber town called Marathon. After hearing Clark's latest hit "Who Am I?" on his car radio, Gould launches into a lengthy meditation on her music. Gould's analysis of Clark eventually peters out and he returns to a reflection on Marathon, ending the documentary by driving away from the town at dusk.

As the documentary opens, Gould describes driving the Trans-Canada Highway through the Canadian Shield, "its east-west course deflected" ("Search for Petula" 384). This is a descriptive that foregrounds the influence of the south (the United States) on Gould's first depictions of Canadian space. He imagines the highway as a Hollywood science fiction beast, taking a stance that separates Gould from a Canadian literary tradition of "othering" the northern landscape⁴ and instead focuses on the highway's otherworldly, and particularly American, presence. The highway literally becomes an alienating presence as Gould compares it to the alien monsters in "such late-late-show spine tinglers of the 1950s as *Blood Beast from Outer Space* or *Beak from the Beyond*" (384)—a tactic that belies his desire for a different order of Canadian space. Identifying external colonizing forces in the Canadian North, Gould continues to denaturalize local spaces through a cultural reading of town names: "Michipicoten and Batchawana advertise

the continuing segregation of the Canadian Indian; Rossport and Jackfish proclaim the no-nonsense mapmaking of the early white settlers; and Marathon and Terrace Bay—‘Gem of the North Shore’—betray the postwar influx of American capital” (384). In tracing this history, Gould’s description culminates in the attachment of post-Second World War Canadian space to American capital. Before Gould has even described Marathon, the opening section of “The Search for Pet Clark” renders Gould’s comprehension of Canadian space as, at least in part, colonized by Americanizing forces.

The concern for the American colonization of Canadian space—and as Gould might argue its subsequent alienation—that we see in the opening of the documentary is of course not a unique sentiment, but in communication with a wider post-Second World War Canadian conversation over American influence. From a specifically Cold War perspective, the promotion of Canada’s unique cultural identity would not only help assuage fears over Canadian cultural takeover by America, but would also help mitigate the threat of Canada as a USSR target. Officially, Canadian Cold War policy was aligned with American policy regarding defense, the spread of democratic rights, and anti-communism. Yet Canada was also a neighbour of the Soviet Union by way of the Arctic. The defection in 1945 of Igor Gouzenko, a Soviet spy who worked as a civil servant in Ottawa, was an event that not only reverberated internationally, but awoke Canada to the very real dangers attached to the country’s entanglement in Cold War tensions. As one of the main events marking the start of the Cold War, the Gouzenko affair officially placed Canada with the United States as an enemy of the USSR. One way to mitigate this tension between Canada and the Soviet Union was by emphasizing Canadian difference via the country’s international position as a neutral peacekeeper, as well as by establishing more cultural ties with the USSR. As Lester Pearson advanced a solution to the 1956 Suez Canal crisis, for instance, plans were cautiously concretized for Gould’s concert tour of the USSR (Bazzana 165). As Carr notes, several individuals within Canada’s External Affairs department promoted these cultural visits as a form of diplomacy that could potentially ease relations between the two states (10).⁵

Domestically, a conservative nationalism would not only help redress the outcome of Canada’s increasing economic dependency on the United States, as well as the country’s mass consumption of American media, but would also help distinguish Canada from America on an international level. As Cavell writes, “the discourse of the Cold War in Canada was concerned with complex issues of national self-representation; if the Canadian state was anti-communist

in many of its activities, it was also anti-American” (5). The Massey Report, on the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters, and Sciences (1951) highlights this condition: the report fuses Cold War rhetoric regarding the spread of democracy through culture with an anti-American rhetoric in relation to the promotion of national culture. This connection between anti-American rhetoric and democratic promotion must be considered within a Cold War context, as Canada’s relationship with America affected not simply Canadian nationalism but Canadian-Soviet relations.

While Gould is presented as having avoided overtly political stances in favour of a more generalized moralism, I argue that his morality was indivisible from his Cold War politics. Oddly, biographer Kevin Bazzana foregrounds Gould’s interest in politics while simultaneously dismissing it by affirming his puritan morality:

Gould saw moral issues everywhere, and saw them in black and white—another legacy of his puritan heritage. . . . Curiously, though, he apparently had no fixed views on politics or religion. In his youth he was already fascinated by Canadian and American politics, and in later years he eagerly followed the Watergate scandal, the Quebec referendum, and so on; his surviving videotapes show that he was a news junkie whose television was often tuned to political events. (331)

Those biographers and critics of Gould who point to the artist’s “puritan” nature are likely referencing Gould’s own words in his infamous interview “Glenn Gould Interviews Glenn Gould About Glenn Gould,” that he likes to think of himself as “the last puritan” (40). And yet, the line is an outcome of Gould’s conversation on violence and the atom bomb. Rhetorically, the interview’s progression suggests that Gould’s puritan views have been concretized in reaction to those politics following the consequences of the Second World War. In the interview Gould is concerned with the limitations of the “ban-the-bomb movement” and believes that as long as the logic of violence persists in other realms—even as tangentially related as the plucking of dragonfly wings by children—the successful outcome of any pacifist campaign will remain tenuous (39-40). It is because of this synoptic view that Gould somewhat facetiously refers to himself as both a sixteenth-century reformer and a puritan (40). When Gould is pressed (by Gould) on “the collective censorship of puritan tradition,” he clarifies his affiliation is with the tradition “at its purest,” when it involves “perpetual schismatic division” (40). By associating puritanism with the “individual conscience aspect of the Reformation” (40), Gould is unsettling pre-established categories of totalitarianism, framing his political encouragement of moral purity within an individualist “schismatic” tradition.

For Gould, aesthetic expression is also indivisible from morality: he states that if he makes any artistic judgment it is based on the moral impetus of the creative work (“Glenn Gould Interviews Glenn” 33). Moreover, he makes explicit the relationship of this aesthetic morality to Cold War politics. To illuminate this dynamic, Gould presents a town where all the houses are painted battleship grey, which Gould deems his favourite colour and acknowledges as a rather “negative colour” (34). Gould then identifies a problem that would arise if an individual decided to paint his house red. Inevitably, he suggests, the townspeople would react by painting their houses in “similarly garish hues,” encouraging “a climate of competition and, as a corollary, of violence” (35). I suggest the image analogizes Gould’s view of Cold War politics. By pitting the negatively-defined grey homes against a fervour catalyzed by the confrontational red home, Gould echoes anxieties over the Red Scare—whereby a Western community defined by negative liberalism is infiltrated and affronted by communism and inevitably thrown into turmoil. Gould’s description doesn’t simply replicate American Cold War perspectives, however, as the red home is not associated with communism but with a competitive individualism—an association that echoes more the American spirit of free-market ingenuity. Since the red home encourages the painting of “similarly garish hues,” the totalitarian aspect here is not aligned with the spread of the colour red specifically, but the repetition of a thematic action. As Gould outlines in his letter to Roy Vogt, the “totalitarian ideal” is reflected in a “homophonic music in which one thematic strand . . . is permitted to become the focus of attention” (Roberts 150). The Westernized “climate of competition” perpetuated by the painting of the red house reflects this process in which a homogenized behaviour is given centrality, and which Gould attaches to the totalitarian ideal. Later in the interview, Gould associates Renaissance logic with “menace” (38)—a loaded term that recalls the Cold War designation of both the Soviet Union and communism as the Red Menace. By associating “menace” with individualism’s legacy of Enlightenment thinking, Gould is again undermining the form of subjectivity that the West positioned in opposition to totalitarianism during the Cold War.

While Gould cites the painted houses as an example wherein an aesthetic choice has a moral undertone, the image also allows us to familiarize ourselves with what seem to be Gould’s Cold War politics. His concluding comments on the analogy leave little room to deny that, for Gould, moral aesthetics have a political application:

The man who painted the first house may have done so purely from an aesthetic preference and it would, to use an old-fashioned word, be “sinful” if I were to take him to account in respect of his taste. Such an accounting would conceivably inhibit all subsequent judgments on his part. But if I were able to persuade him that his particular aesthetic indulgence represented a moral danger to the community as a whole, and providing I could muster a vocabulary appropriate to the task—which would not be, obviously, a vocabulary of aesthetic standards—then that would, I think, be my responsibility. (“Glenn Gould Interviews Glenn” 35)

While it appears that Gould is justifying censorship, his tactic here is not force but persuasion through speech—an essential element of the Athenian *polis*, a political formation that Hannah Arendt upheld as the best defence against totalitarianism.⁶ It might seem that Gould, in his reaction, promotes the moral benefits of homogeneity: a preference for a slate of grey houses over a bold red one. However, such a reading, too, would be simplistic. For Gould associates the infiltration of the red home with the formation of a violent, competitive homogeneity, based on the assumption that neighbours would then want their houses painted in “similarly garish hues” (35). Moreover, Gould’s reference to grey as “a negative colour” (34) suggests a constitution of negation where the grey homes are not to be interpreted as an assertion of uniformity, but as objects defined more by their lack (for example, they *are not* garish hues). Gould’s belief in the ethical responsibility of an artistic work, I argue, becomes the political impetus behind his application of the contrapuntal in his radio documentaries. The contrapuntal becomes Gould’s “vocabulary” of political responsibility.

“Glenn Gould Interviews Glenn Gould About Glenn Gould” appeared in *High Fidelity* magazine in February 1974, a full seven years after the publication and broadcasting of “The Search for Pet Clark.” Yet, what prompts Gould’s analogy of the painted houses is a clarification needed after Gould states that “The Search for Pet Clark” “contained more aesthetic judgment per square page than I would presume to render nowadays,” and that “it was essentially a moral critique. . . . It was a piece in which I used Miss Clark, so to speak, in order to comment on a social milieu” (“Glenn Gould Interviews Glenn” 34). For Gould, the documentary became a venue where he could not only promote his synoptic framework—wherein a political approach to violence, for instance, must be considered from many angles—but where he could execute his own belief in the artist’s obligation towards morality through the establishment of the Canadian contrapuntal space. And as the interview demonstrates, for Gould these convictions were embedded in his reaction to the Cold War.

Critical discussion of Gould's Canadian contrapuntal spaces has advanced mostly in relation to "The Idea of North" (*Solitude Trilogy*). Critic Friedemann Sallis suggests that Gould uses the contrapuntal form in relation to the North because he is attempting to push the meaning of music composition. Critics such as Paul Hjartarson and Anyssa Neumann focus on how the documentary aligns with a cultural history that promotes the North as an empty container for the manifold projections (spiritual, personal, sublime) of Southerners, while McNeilly focuses this geographic dynamic in relation to Northern pluralism. Mantere contends that the contrapuntal is not used to help illuminate the North, but the North itself becomes the guiding musical-compositional force and frame for Gould throughout his career. Mickey Vallee recently emphasized the various colonial stakes of "The Idea of North" by stating that if there is a contrapuntal procedure in the documentary, it is "not between speaking voices; rather, it is between the voices active and the voices silenced" (37). And yet, while critics such as Vallee certainly determine a politics within Gould's work, few critics explicitly pursue Gould's own political investment in contrapuntal spaces. What "The Search for Pet Clark" demonstrates is the multiplicity of the Canadian contrapuntal space as the ultimate political affront to homogenizing, totalitarian spaces. In the documentary, Gould suggests an affiliation between the nationalist import of space and the ethical message of art, demonstrating the ways in which spatial and aesthetic representations can overlap and even collapse into each other in relation to their political expression. Because of this affiliation, these realms contribute to each other's realization. Canadian space becomes such an important vessel of representation for Gould because it allows him to express more explicitly the politics and ethics of the contrapuntal form in its conveyance of distinct, overlapping voices and inherent difference.

This important overlap between art and space in "The Search for Pet Clark," as well as the extension of their representation into the ethical and political realm, is reified through Gould's repeated exploration of the dynamic between timbre and range. Gould at one point acknowledges that Clark, "bound as she might be by limitations of timbre and range . . . would not accept any corresponding restrictions of theme and sentiment" ("Search for Petula" 386). Similarly, the implications of timbre and range for nationalist space are represented as Gould listens to Clark's song "Who Am I?" while driving along the Trans-Canada highway, attempting to match his "driving speed to the distance between [radio] relay outlets," so that he could "hear it most hours and in the end [come] to know it" (386). In relation to Canada, range is a tenuous category and the projection of any

nationalist message (the timbre) is reliant upon those technologies that enable the navigation and organization of its space.⁷ At the top of a hill in Marathon (the peak of the town), Gould spies behind a padlocked gate “the two indispensable features of any thriving town—its log-shoot breaking bush back through the trackless terrain and an antenna for the low-power relay system of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation” (385). Here too is an incarnation of timbre and range, though slightly altered. Timbre has been replaced by timber (the main industry in Marathon, represented by the log-shoot), while range is implied again by Canada’s communications infrastructure. This alteration reinforces a particularly Canadian paradigm that affects the country’s realization: the nation’s vocalization is inseparable from its resource economies, whereas the range or projection of this vocalization relies again on how discourses circulate. It also hints at the way that space itself can inform the pitch or message to be projected. This motif of timbre and range, then, underscores the relationship between a fundamental message and its projection/reception. In “Glenn Gould Interviews Glenn Gould About Glenn Gould,” this dynamic is expressed through Gould’s contention that words and deeds are not separate realms, but must be considered in relation to each other with emphasis on their interconnection (35).⁸ This is also the same dynamic that underscores Gould’s linking of the aesthetic and the moral, where the aesthetic functions as the timbre, while the moral outcome manifests as the work’s range or ultimate projection.

Gould’s interest in timbre and range helps illuminate his fascination with Clark and Marathon, as in each case he focuses on the unique way they resonate with and project American ideals. He states that he respects Clark because the progression of her songs between 1964 and 1966 presents a determined narrative of adult self-realization, and because the lyrics of her songs are at times in an antagonistic relation with the music and the delivery of the music. Starting from “Sign of the Times,” then “My Love,” then “Downtown,” and then “Who Am I?,” Clark’s music aligns the British artist with a particularly American expression, as the song order presents a “modest acceleration of the American teenager’s precipitous scramble from the parental nest” that establishes Clark as “pop music’s most persuasive embodiment of the Gidget syndrome”⁹ (386). However, what apparently interests Gould most about Clark’s career is the existential shift and sudden doubt that arises in the song “Who Am I?” which Gould hears repeatedly on the radio as he drives through Northern Ontario.

Gould's analysis of Clark's music is bookended by Gould's aesthetic judgment of the timber industry town of Marathon, a town whose layout reflects spatially the same pattern Gould approves of in Clark's music. While Gould recognizes that each of Clark's four songs presents "an adjacent plateau of experience" (386), Gould also recognizes in Marathon's town planning—which he describes as "1984 Prefab" (384)—spatial plateaus that correspond with the job positions of the locals. These plateaus lead to a series of homes for the executives, which Gould recognizes would "be right at home among the more exclusive suburbs of Westchester County, New York" (385). And while in Marathon's layout "the upward mobility of North American society can scarcely ever have been more persuasively demonstrated" (385), beyond the executive houses the ascent continues. At the top of the hill, however, is the padlocked gate that prohibits access. This shift in town planning presents a stilted ascent that recalls the aspirational shift in Clark's song "Who Am I?" Marathon's Americanization is moreover suggested through the content of the CBC, a "local programming which, in the imaginative traditions of commercial radio everywhere, leans toward a formula of news on the hour and fifty-five minutes of the pop picks from *Billboard* magazine" (385). And yet, even the normality of Americanized radio is destabilized by the limitations of the aerial range, and the acknowledgement that "its power rapidly declines as one passes beyond the country club toward the highway" (392).

Gould's fascination with Marathon is inseparable from the town's moral application. While Gould ultimately conjectures that "the idea of suburbia is meaningless within the context of Marathon" (391-92), it is an unconvincing replication of homogenizing, suburban forces within the town that first prompts Gould's reflection. Marathon's imperfect application of American—or even North American (Gould's use of the term North American at times suggests the extent of homogenizing processes across borders)—social space in regards to town planning is established, for instance, through a stench from a mill that pervades the town. Gould attributes the stench to "a minor miscalculation by one of the company's engineers" in relation to prevailing wind patterns, a pungent mistake that "serves to proclaim the monolithic nature of the town's economy" (385). These instances of proclamation, or calling out, encourage a self-reflective and critical mode crucial for any confrontation of homogenizing forces. What Gould appreciates in the expression of Clark's persona and music is a similar story of American aspiration—there is a seeming failure that attends her shift from "Gidget" adolescence to adulthood. For Gould, the moral message coming from both

Clark and Marathon is also a political one: as the two exceptions that prove the rule, the singer and the town simultaneously call attention to the forces of Americanization while also denaturalizing them.

And yet, Gould wavers. In his final declaration on Marathon, he reverses any initial enthusiasm he had for the symbolic complexity of the place:

The problem for citizens of Marathon is that, however tacitly, a preoccupation with escalation and a concern with subsequent decline effectively cancel each other out. And the result, despite the conscientious stratification of the town, is a curiously compromised emotional unilaterality. (392)

Gould's sudden conviction that Marathon's concern with escalation and decline only perpetuates a homogeneous "unilaterality" is one of the more curious moments of the documentary. For J. D. Connor, this turn in Gould's philosophy renders him a credible narrator. Connor writes: "at the moments we think Gould is overreaching—at the moments when Gould can't possibly support the kind of distinction he wants us to uphold—he himself falls back" (n. pag.). While I agree there is a falling back, this is not a moment of surrender, but a moment of reconsideration, of revision. To illuminate this revision, it's important to first understand how Gould imagined the meaning of totalitarianism.

Gould's letter to Roy Vogt, in which he describes a totalitarian mode of music, is actually in response to an assertion by Vogt, one of the participants in "Quiet in the Land," that Gould's contrapuntal form might harbour a totalitarian aspect. Gould writes:

It is of course true that I hope to devise a form for the programme which in musical terms could be called 'contrapuntal.' I really cannot apologize for that analogy, however, because in my view—and I think this view would be shared by most 20th century, as opposed, perhaps to 19th century historians—counterpoint is not a dry academic exercise in motivic permutation but rather a method of composition in which, if all goes well, each individual voice lives a life of its own. (Roberts 150)

Gould here aligns his concept of the contrapuntal with the views of the twentieth-century as opposed to those of nineteenth-century historians. This approach affirms the relationship between Gould's envisioned contrapuntal form and contemporary history. It also tacitly reinforces the political undercurrents of the contrapuntal form, which soon become overt as Gould establishes the form in contrast to the totalitarian ideal. Totalitarianism—a political system based on authoritarian control that first rose in tandem with the Weimar Republic and then subsequently with the Italian and then Soviet Union governments—was indeed a twentieth-century political issue (at least in

comparison with previous eras). A “totalitarian ideal” in music, as previously explained, is perpetuated by a single thematic that “is permitted” to dominate, while “all other voices are relegated to accompanimental [*sic*] roles” (Roberts 150). For Gould, promoting an alternative to totalitarianism was just as important outside of the political public sphere, and his means of promotion was the contrapuntal modality.

While Gould reads Marathon and Clark as exemplars that denaturalize and question the homogeneity of Americanization, I believe that he ultimately decides that their inherent expression is not contrapuntal and that this is the reason for his sudden misgivings about their political and moral import. The individual expression of both Marathon and Clark is limited by Gould’s focus on the ways in which they relate to American expressions and forces. Connected to this is Marathon’s “emotional unilaterality” (392), as the town’s alleged preoccupation with escalation and decline still uniformly orients it in relation to Americanization. Gould’s final line in relation to Petula Clark is that her song “Who Am I?” ultimately “evokes the interminable mid-morning coffee-hour laments of all the secret sippers of suburbia” (391). Though “Who Am I?” diverts from the message of Clark’s previous songs, the prevailing frame in which it is experienced is still suburban.

The dynamic wherein a preoccupation with escalation and decline reinforces an orientation according to the same guiding system also circulated within discussions over Canadian nationalism during the post-Second World War and Cold War period. Canada’s preoccupation with economic success—inseparable from its relations with America—was coupled with national worries over the disappearance of identity largely by Americanization. While this circumstance of nationalism produced what may not have been deemed “emotional unilaterality” in popular discourse, the circumstance nevertheless produced a space of negation that troubled positive definitions of Canadian identity, prompting intellectuals such as George Grant to declare that a distinct Canadian nation would no longer be possible.¹⁰

For Gould, though, Canada’s unstable identity was also the site of its possibility. Gould’s vision correlated more closely with Marshall McLuhan’s nationalist reflections. In the Marfleet Lecture entitled “Canada and the Borderline Case,” delivered in Toronto in 1967, McLuhan states that unlike Americans, whose strong nationalism relies on a coherent identity, the Canadian’s relative alienation from a singular identity category enables an incisive perspective that McLuhan likens to an artistic perspective. This multifarious form of identity, moreover, is inseparable from the spatiality

of Canada. As McLuhan reflects at the beginning of his lecture, “Canada is five countries between British Columbia and the Maritimes . . . [I]t’s very difficult to address five countries simultaneously, and I think this is perhaps one of our strengths” (106). The intersection of identity and space is of course fundamental to theories of Canadian identity, most presciently encapsulated in Northrop Frye’s 1965 displacement of the question “Who Am I?” for “Where is here?” (826). By casting Clark’s song “Who am I?” onto the Canadian landscape, Gould similarly emphasizes the role of space. In all three documentaries of *Solitude Trilogy*, community identities are portrayed as grounded in and inseparable from isolated landscapes. While Frye theorizes that a “garrison mentality” persists amidst the Canadian wilderness, perpetuated by an inevitably “closely knit and beleaguered society” that upholds “moral and social values [that] are unquestionable” (830), Gould understands a different relationship between Canadian nationalist identity and land. For Gould, a nation defined by vast and empty land is a nation that necessitates mediation between individualist isolation and community ties. These allegedly “empty” landscapes foster intimate reflection, but necessitate community engagement, too, for survival. What critics cite as Gould’s lifelong interest in the North might more productively be seen as an interest in a state of living that contrasts totalitarian impulses by fostering a dynamic of difference at the heart of community—a state of contrapuntal living.

While “The Search for Pet Clark” is not typically associated with *Solitude Trilogy* because of its musical analyses, it is also distanced because for the most part the piece is not considered one of Gould’s contrapuntal radio documentaries. It replicates more what Gould has referred to as the “linear” (borrowing a McLuhan term) form of a traditional radio piece. Gould describes these traditional, “linear” radio pieces to John Jessop: “They came out sounding ‘Over to you, now back to our host, and here for the wrap up’” (Jessop 374). Notably, the form of “The Search for Pet Clark” shifts after Gould discusses the emotional unilaterality of Marathon. Gould sets off at dusk to visit the town of Terrace Bay. As he travels, the landscape grows dark. In this moment Gould finds himself at the highest point in Ontario, just north of Lake Superior. Here, the clarity of AM reception is excellent, and as he plays with the radio dials, his car picks up a variety of stations, their voices bleeding into one another: he hears the BBC services from London; a weather report and car ad from Grand Bend, Ontario; a description of a piece by Mozart played on a French station; and a special dedication for

several callers—including those of “*HMS Vagabond, riding at anchor just a cosy quarter-mile beyond the international limit*”—who also want to hear Pet Clark’s “Who Am I?” (393). Clark’s song is no longer the only option available on a singular station, but part of a variety of stations and voices, whose presences coexist without collapsing into one another. While the peak in Marathon had been fenced off and while Clark’s career peaked with despair, this particular summit—where beyond, “all water flows toward Hudson’s Bay and, ultimately, the Arctic Sea” (392)—is not contextualized by decline, but instead offers the full political possibility of the contrapuntal as a Northern gesture. It is hard not to read this moment in relation to the Arctic rendered in “The Idea of North.” As Bazzana notes, Gould had completed all five interviews for “The Idea of North” by late fall 1967 (296). With little more than two weeks between the CBC broadcast of “The Search for Pet Clark” and “The Idea of North,” Gould would likely have been developing content for both and thinking about them simultaneously. Just as the water in “The Search for Pet Clark” now flows towards the Arctic sea, the flow of the documentary—its discussion of the totalitarian amidst homogeneous forms and suburban social ambitions—has led to this space of the contrapuntal.

In an essay entitled “Toronto,” Gould differentiates the Canadian “political mosaic” from the American “melting pot”: “the implication is that in Canada . . . however intense the heat, we do not melt” (86). For Gould, Canada, with its alleged political mosaic, offered the possibility for a more contrapuntal community. Moreover, this political promise depended upon the nation’s relationship to its land. In “The Idea of North,” the North becomes the fulfillment of that possibility and the literal grounds for Gould’s showcasing of the contrapuntal. Nevertheless, what “The Search for Pet Clark” demonstrates is that everything indeed has a boiling point, and that the anti-totalitarian promise of the Canadian contrapuntal space also can become compromised by those homogenizing forces that followed the post-Second World War influx of American capital. Gould’s views on Cold War totalitarianism aligned with a particularly Canadian perspective, as totalitarianism wasn’t simply a regime in the USSR but a force or impulse inherent in the process of Americanization. For Gould, totalitarianism was, to quote one of his letters again, the “tyranny of stylistic collectivity” (Roberts 176)—with the potential for its presence in everything from music to child’s play. It was the artist’s role to consider the ethical and moral impetus of his or her work and to be tuned in to both the timbre and range of a piece. Gould’s contrapuntal Canadian spaces became the moral aesthetic of his *Solitude* documentaries,

as he viewed something inherently ethical in a Canadian identity framed and molded by the nation's allegedly vast, empty spaces.

Canada's own timbre and range offered the ethical potential of the contrapuntal community, as Gould makes clear at the end of "The Search for Pet Clark." After turning away from Marathon and its symbolic representation, Gould drives toward an alternative space, and in its darkness the contrapuntal emerges:

Traversing that promontory, after sundown, one discovers an astounding clarity of AM reception. All the accents of the continent are spreading across the band, and, as one twiddles the dial to reap the diversity of that encounter, the day's auditory impressions with their hypnotic insularity recede, then re-emerge as part of a balanced and resilient perspective. (392)

The clarity of AM reception in this moment—the response to Clark's "Who Am I?" that Gould has been seeking—embodies not simply a nationalist determination, but an ethical responsibility. Further, this almost musical description of the way voices both recede and re-emerge in a contrapuntal manner elicits a spatial dimension.¹¹ As "auditory impressions" spread out in the night, they provide an alternative to the Canadian identity crisis: the contrapuntal community. And as these spatialized voices intermingle, as "part of a balanced and resilient perspective," they create a form of ethical community that counters the totalitarian impulse. While the voices light up the darkened landscape, they illuminate much more: for in the nationalist identity they produce, there is also something universal—a utopian form of community that Gould identifies as a bulwark against totalitarianism. The contrapuntal space that Gould establishes in "The Search for Pet Clark" is the same space that defines his *Solitude Trilogy*; but as the documentary foregrounds, it's a deeply political form whose oppositional forces of homogeneity and totalitarian thinking are always relational, always an absent presence. For wherever there is "a balanced and resilient perspective," as "The Search for Pet Clark" reminds us, a different reality is just a short drive away.

NOTES

- 1 While Gould first published the radio documentary as an article in *High Fidelity* as "The Search for Petula Clark," Kevin Bazzana notes in *Wondrous Strange: The Life and Art of Glenn Gould* that Gould actually preferred the title "The Search for Pet Clark" and only changed the name upon the magazine's insistence. According to Bazzana, Gould's preference was "duly restored in the radio version" (292).
- 2 In *Power, Politics, and Culture: Interviews with Edward Said*, Said discusses music with a simultaneous melodic structure, such as Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, in relation to *Culture*

and *Imperialism* and reflects: “This has been a long-standing predilection of mine; it’s the kind of music I’m most interested in and one of the reasons why I was so compelled by Glenn Gould, which I think had a direct bearing on this book” (184).

- 3 While the *High Fidelity* article was called “The Search for Petula Clark” and the radio documentary was called “The Search for Pet Clark,” the text used in each is virtually identical.
- 4 The natural environment of the Canadian Shield is more commonly presented as a preternatural creature: for example, in E. J. Pratt’s *Towards the Last Spike* as an ancient lizard.
- 5 It is worth noting that External Affairs also worried about the potential embarrassment of these tours, as Canada’s creative talent pool was considered shallower than Russia’s (Carr 10).
- 6 For Arendt, a truly plural commons was based on a public where self-disclosure through active speech precipitated change; thus change was never forceful but functioned through persuasion. Arendt also emphasized unpredictability in relation to this disclosure (190).
- 7 This representation refracts back on Gould’s own reliance on CBC Radio for the projection of his documentaries and their political and ethical pitch.
- 8 In the interview Gould classifies the separation of words from deeds as an “occidental notion,” one that has helped carry “the Western world to the brink of destruction” (35).
- 9 Gidget was a fictional teenager introduced by author Frederick Kohner in the novel *Gidget, The Little Girl with Big Ideas* (1957), and thereafter featured in numerous other novels, films, as well as a television show. Gidget, whose driven commitment to surfing was balanced by her girlish conformity, became an American symbol in an era increasingly focused on individual self-realization within youth culture. By referencing the “Gidget Syndrome,” Gould is evoking this culture and the teenager’s march towards “social-sexual awareness” and “postadolescent survival” (387).
- 10 In *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism*, Grant reflects that the longstanding governance of Canada mid-century by the Liberal party encouraged Americanization in the country to an extent that Canada could no longer be considered sovereign.
- 11 In *McLuhan in Space: A Cultural Geography*, Cavell analyzes this spatial dynamic as repeated in Gould’s *Solitude Trilogy* using Marshall McLuhan’s notion of “acoustic space,” defined as “empathically aural (and thus non-linear), and a space that was conflated with time—the space you hear, rather than the space you see” (11).

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