Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory/Revue canadienne de théorie politique et sociale, Volume X, N. 1-2 (1986).

COUNTERPOINT: GLENN GOULD & MARSHALL McLUHAN

Paul Théberge

I

> It appears that for the memorializers and public mourners it is necessary to reduce him to the level of a mere top-ranking piano virtuoso. It is as if Gould the passionate moralist and Gould the innovative sound sculptor had never been ...[1]

Glenn Gould, from 1955 until his death in 1982, was one of Canada's most internationally celebrated pianists. He was also well known for his controversial ideas concerning the recording medium and his uninhibited use of tape editing in making musical recordings. But now Gould has become the victim of another sort of editing — the screening out of that which is most disturbing in his thought. In the second edition of his book, *Glenn Gould, Music & Mind*, Geoffrey Payzant lists some of the attempts that were made to commemorate Gould. These include the circulation of a petition to name a concert hall after him and the move to establish an annual piano competition in his memory. All this for a musician who, at the age of thirty-two, voluntarily left the concert hall stating that it would cease to exist as a cultural institution in the twenty-first century; a person who spoke out against the spirit of competition and cited its destructive effects on music making and on the development of Western society as a whole.

Payzant has indulged in a certain amount of editing in his own right. Throughout his detailed study there is not a single reference to the work of

I would like to thank Lon Dubinsky who read an earlier version of this paper and offered many helpful comments.

Marshall McLuhan. Yet Gould, in his own writing and in interviews, made numerous references to McLuhan, stated that he had a great admiration for him and that they had once been, in fact, neighbors. It would appear that Payzant, for whatever reason, has systematically edited out Gould's references to, or associations with, McLuhan and his ideas.[2] This is a serious omission.

In this essay I will explore some of the areas in which Gould's ideas concerning the recording medium intersect with McLuhan's more generalized theories of media and technology. Some of McLuhan's theories, for example his distinction between "hot" and "cool" media, are vague if not cryptic and tend to confuse the effects of media themselves with specific media practices. An examination of the various uses to which Gould put the technology of sound reproduction can help illuminate McLuhan's ideas by grounding them in the life and work of this unusually creative individual. What is central to this discussion then is not only the fact that many of Gould's ideas bear a striking resemblance to those of Marshall McLuhan, but that Gould developed his theories while engaged in an intense reevaluation of an artistic practice. The relationship between technology and the artistic imagination is a recurring theme in McLuhan's work and it is this relationship that I wish to explore. In doing so, I also hope to reveal some of the dangers inherent in the single-minded pursuit of the creative potential embodied in technology if that pursuit is not complemented by an adequate social and political conception of the role of technology in society.

II

> I've never conceded any real contradiction between the assumption that one can have a rather solitary existence and the fact that one can supportively have radio in the background at all times.[3]

Glenn Gould was a quintessential "McLuhanesque" figure, living as though technology was an "extension" of himself. In the latter part of his life, when solitude became more and more the necessary condition under which his creative efforts were realized, Gould used technology both as a way of maintaining contact with, and a way of protecting himself from, the outside world. He seldom saw his closest friends but constantly talked with them over the telephone. There were those whom he felt close to although he had never met them in person: "Do you know the writer Jonathan Cott? A very interesting man, and a friend of mine. We've actually never met; our relationship is ... terribly telephonic."[4] For Gould the recording studio was not only the site from which he communicated with his listeners but it also

offered "the privacy, the solitude ... in which it was possible to make music in a more direct, more personal manner than the concert hall permit."[5]

McLuhan viewed technology not simply as a "medium," but as an "environment." Gould is said to have carried a radio with him at all times; he made it his constant environment:

> Radio, in any case, is a medium I've been very close to ever since I was a child, that I listen to virtually nonstop: I mean, it's wallpaper for me — I sleep with the radio on, in fact now I'm incapable of sleeping *without* the radio on.[6]

Gould claimed that at night the hourly news sometimes provided the material for his dreams.

Gould was also able to make use of his radio environment, to put it to work for him. His constant audio input, sometimes provided by more than one audio source, supplied Gould with a means of dividing his areas of concentration. "Quite mysteriously, I discovered that I could better learn Schoenberg's difficult piano score, Opus 23, if I listened to them both at once, the FM to hear music and the AM to hear the news."[7] On another occasion Gould described how he began to master a particularly difficult passage in a Beethoven sonata by placing a radio and a television next to his piano and turning them up "full blast." "The fact that you couldn't hear yourself, that there wasn't audible evidence of your failure was already a step in the right direction."[8]

Gould's ability to divide his various levels of consciousness through the manipulation of his audio environment resembles the type of simultaneous awareness that McLuhan spoke of in relation to the "field" experience of the "oral-aural" person. In the first example cited above, Gould achieved a sense of heightened receptivity while submerged in a multi-channel environment; in the second, he used sound to block the "audile-tactile" relationship which forms the very basis of playing the piano or any other musical instrument. Gould's notorious irrepressible habit of singing while playing the piano, which is clearly audible in many of his recordings, is perhaps another indication that, more than most musicians, Gould was indeed McLuhan's "oral-aural" man — incapable of remaining silent, totally involved in an activity that required "the participation of the whole body and the whole mind."[9]

III

In an unguarded moment some months ago, I predicted that the

> public concert as we know it today would no longer exist a century hence, that its functions would have been entirely taken over by electronic media. It had not occurred to me that this statement represented a particularly radical pronouncement. Indeed, I regarded it almost as self-evident truth ...[10]

Gould's pronouncement was regarded as radical by the musical establishment and, now that a respectable length of time has passed since his death, the opposition to his ideas has once again surfaced. A recent record review has pointed up "the ruinous effect that the uncritical acceptance of Gould's extreme ideas has had" and flatly states that "his assertion that the concert hall was an anachronistic arena ... was incorrect."[11] To argue that the institution of the concert hall still exists however is not enough to prove that Gould's ideas were false. Gould regarded the concert hall as not simply a social institution but as the symbol of an economic and moral system.

For Gould, the concert hall was a "symbol of musical mercantilism." This was perhaps an unfortunate choice of terms for he used "mercantilism" only in the broadest sense of the word and not in its more historically specific usage. More precisely, Gould was speaking of the rise of the concert hall in relation to capitalist modes of production and consumption, and the specialization of the roles of the composer, the performer and the audience.

McLuhan would likely have agreed with this analysis but for entirely different reasons. For McLuhan, the concert hall and the industrial factory represent a cultural and economic order based on print technology:

> ... the first printing of musical scores in the sixteenth century ... became the basis of the great musical developments of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The same kind of fragmentation and specialism in the arts and sciences made possible mammoth results in industry ... and in massive cooperative enterprises such as ... the symphony orchestra.[12]

Today, the creation of demand has become as important to the capitalist economy as the production of consumer goods. "Top 40" radio programming and, more recently, music video are hybrid entertainment/advertising formats which provide essential promotional support (and royalties) to the music industry, as well as creating a self-perpetuating pattern of consumption.[13]

In an economic system that seeks to produce not only the objects but also the conditions of consumption, it is the recording and broadcast industries that should be regarded as the most dynamic symbols of that system.

Viewed in this way, Gould's prediction concerning the disappearance of the concert hall has, to a large degree, already come true.

Gould felt that the concert hall performer occupies a privileged position, operating as he does from a "power-base," savoring an intensely individual form of "ego-gratification."[14] But as Edward Said points out, it is also a position implying a certain vulnerability: "In the concert hall, the emphasis had been on the reception by an audience of a live performer, a commodity directly purchased, consumed, and exhausted during two hours of concert time."[15] Gould insisted that concert audiences possess a desire for communion with the performer mixed with a good measure of what he called "blood-lust" — the desire to see the performing acrobat fall from his wire. Gould's personal conflict as regards the concert hall was essentially a moral one. It was his hope that the intervention of technology would enable the performer "to operate at increasing distances from, to be increasingly out of touch with, his animal response to confrontation."[16]

The recording studio may indeed protect the performer from the more direct influence of his ticket-purchasing public, but it places him in a new relationship to that public and to the system of late capitalism as a whole. In a sense, Gould's attitude was perhaps focused too closely on the production environment and not on the market system. His moral stand against the concert hall and his belief in the technological possibility of liberating himself from the system it symbolized was, in some ways, a case of self-deception. Like McLuhan, Gould "had no systematic, or even eclectic, theory of the relationship between economy and technology."[17] But to take him to task on this point is perhaps unfair for unlike McLuhan, Gould had not set out to construct an overall theory about the effects of technology. Gould was more interested in the aesthetic dimension, the contrast between the experience of the concert hall and that of listening to a recording.

IV

> No musician of our time had given so much thought to the prospects of recording or had better exemplified, through his major career decisions, the practical and philosophical consequences of technology.[18]

Glenn Gould made this statement about the conductor, Leopold Stokowski, but it could also be applied to Gould himself. In 1964, carrying out a promise he had made much earlier, Gould played his last public concert and retired to the recording studio to explore what he considered to be the "limitless possibilities" of the recording medium. The following year Gould

created a radio program for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation entitled, "The Prospects of Recording." An adapted version, which was published in essay form in *High Fidelity* magazine in 1966, provides a detailed account of the effects, and the possibilities, of recording technology on music. It is perhaps, more than any of Gould's other writings, his "manifesto" on the subject of sound recording.

In "The Prospects of Recording," short-comings of the concert hall experience are juxtaposed with the possibilities of the recording medium under three headings: "A Change of Acoustic," "An Untapped Repertoire" and "The Splendid Splice."

A Change of Acoustic

Gould stated that recordings offer the listener an experience of music that is characterized by an "analytic clarity, immediacy, and indeed almost tactile proximity."[19] The latter characteristic is reminiscent of McLuhan who privileged audio technology (along with television) for its role in "the recovery of tactile experience ... a striving toward the union of the audile and tactile."[20] Indeed, Gould's recordings, which utilize close miking techniques, are distinguished by their uncanny ability to convey a sense of the tactile experience of music.

Before the advent of recording, "concertgoers preferred that their occasional experience of music be fitted with an acoustic splendor, cavernously reverberant if possible."[21] Gould stated that the concert hall experience tended to support a kind of "reverence" for music. As our environment of recorded sound has become more pervasive, and our experience of music more "casual," the pursuit of the "cathedral-like" sound in recording has, consequently, become inappropriate. The home listening environment calls for an acoustic experience which is both "intimate" and "impartial."

Elsewhere, Gould spoke of the advantages that the characteristic of "analytic clarity" has for both the performer and the listener. The concert hall environment requires that the performer project the music outward so that it can be heard by 2,000-3,000 people. This often requires the performer to force the tone from his instrument, substituting power for subtlety of execution. An overly reverberant hall may also require the performer to choose slower tempos so as to retain some degree of clarity in the musical texture. To do so however means that the performer may have to sacrifice his notion of the "ideal" interpretation of the work. The concert listener on the other hand is seldom able to avail himself of the best possible experience of the music as his listening perspective may be compromised by the size and acoustics of the hall itself, and his location in it.

The "analytic clarity" which the recording studio environment can pro-

vide allows the performer a greater freedom and subtlety of approach to the interpretation of music. Likewise, the listener is offered a sense of "immediacy," a closeness to the source of the sounding music which represents a complete break with his former experience in the concert hall, an experience which was fundamentally one of distance.

Gould's own predilection for the contrapuntal intricacies of Baroque music, particularly that of Bach, and the complex music of twentieth-century composers such as Hindemith and Schoenberg was well suited to the qualities of the recording studio. He often spoke of the microphone's ability to "dissect" the music, to reveal the inner workings of musical structure. Of Schoenberg's musical theories he stated that they attribute "significance to minute musical connections and they deal with relationships that are on the whole sub-surface and can be projected with an appropriate definition only through the intercession of electronic media."[22]

An Untapped Repertoire

Recording has also helped to create a greater emphasis on music that has its historical origins outside the concert hall tradition. McLuhan claimed that "the tape recorder in combination with the LP revolutionized the repertory of classical music ... it brought in the entire musical culture of many centuries and countries."[23] But the new listening environment created by the phonograph was also an important factor in the development of new repertoire. Gould believed that since World War II, the great revival of the music of the Baroque and pre-Baroque periods, musical forms that relate to a tradition of "hausmusik," was, in part, a result of recording industry initiatives designed to meet the requirements of a home listening environment.

In the recording studio, the performer is met with a new challenge:

> he will necessarily encounter a wider range of repertoire than could possibly be his lot in the concert hall. The current archival approach of many recording companies demands a complete survey of the works of a given composer, and performers are expected to undertake productions of enormous scope ...[24]

This "archival responsibility" frees the performer from what Gould elsewhere described as the "conservative" discipline of the concert hall, a discipline that requires a relatively small repertoire of music to be kept in top form, always ready to be performed. Ultimately, the concert discipline causes many performers to distort their interpretations of a work in order to defeat the deadening effects of overexposure.

The recording medium allows the performer to approach each work in a completely fresh way:

> it enables him "to establish a contact with a work which is very much like that of the composer's own relation to it. It permits him to encounter a particular piece of music and to analyse and dissect it in a most thorough way, to make it a vital part of his life for a relatively brief period, and then to pass on to some other challenge ...[25]

Furthermore, Gould asserted that the recording medium has changed the manner in which some performers interpret music, particularly contemporary music. The performer can present the music to his audience "from a strongly biased conceptual viewpoint, which the private and concentrated circumstances of their listening make feasible."[26]

The Splendid Splice

It was not until after the Second World War, when the tape recorder was introduced into the field of music recording, that the possibility of splicing together several "takes" of a musical performance became possible. Prior to this time a musical performance of a work, or a section of a work, would be committed directly to disc. The process was closer to a live performance (at least with respect to any sense of continuity in time) than that of the flexible, modular approach afforded by the new tape medium. McLuhan regarded the early phonograph as a simple "machine" which functioned according to a linear process. It was the tape recorder that brought sound recording into the electronic age. The new medium destroyed linear time; continuity was established after the fact by splicing together segments of prerecorded tape.

The most obvious advantage of this new capability was the reproduction of a seemingly flawless performance. Gould was hardly in great need of this simple rectifying aspect of the medium but had no inhibitions regarding its use either. He firmly disagreed with critics and purists that insisted that splicing was "a dishonest and dehumanizing technique." For Gould, the splice freed the performer to take risks, to perhaps adopt extreme tempos or other interpretive strategies that might be dangerous, even reckless, in live performance. The "ideal" performance could then be assembled in the editing room.

More important than this, Gould often used the editing process as a separate, parallel means of arriving at the specific interpretation of the work as a whole. He described an occasion when, after taping several

distinctly different interpretations of a Bach fugue, he elected to splice together sections of two different takes in order to arrive at a more varied performance, one that represented his "best thoughts on this fugue." Gould realized that "By taking advantage of the post-taping afterthought ... one can very often transcend the limitations that performance imposes upon the imagination."[27] Whether one arrived at a specific interpretation pre-taping or post-taping was irrelevant. All that was necessary was that the performer realize that the recording was not just a mechanical reproduction of a performance but rather, the performance and the recording were integral parts of a single creative process.

V

> The basic fact to keep in mind about the movie camera and the projector is their resemblance to the process of human cognition ... The camera records and analyses the daylight world with more than human intensity ...[28]

This dictum, made by McLuhan during the 1950's, can be applied to the recording medium by simply substituting the words "microphone," "tape recorder" and "sound world" in the place of "movie camera," "projector" and "daylight world." Gould's use of the microphone as an analytical tool was clearly in keeping with McLuhan's dictum but its relation to "the process of human cognition" is perhaps less obvious and requires further elaboration.

In an early essay entitled, "Joyce, Aquinas, and the Poetic Process," McLuhan reveals that his model of human cognition was that of the "labyrinth figure" as exemplified in the "articles" of St. Thomas Aquinas and in the work of James Joyce. The Thomistic "article" is in three parts: beginning with the "objections," proceeding through the "respondeo," and ending with the "answers to objections." McLuhan described this form as an "'S' labyrinth" and suggested that "this figure is really traced and retraced by the mind many times in the course of a single article."[29] The labyrinth also appears in the work of James Joyce, "who knew that the creative process itself was a retracing of the stages of apprehension."[30]

If music is a form of human cognition, then most contrapuntally structured music, and particularly the fugue, can perhaps be regarded as analogous to McLuhan's labyrinth figure. The fugal subject-countersubject form of organization, the texture in which simultaneous voices make use of devices such as imitation, reverse imitation and inversion, all bear resemblance to McLuhan's description of the multiple perspectives embodied in the Thomistic "article." Gould's recordings reveal the fugal labyrinth

through his own unique style of playing the piano and through his use of the microphone as an aid in "dissection." Furthermore, his creative use of the editing process, the "post-taping afterthought," might be compared to what McLuhan described as the poetic process itself: "one of discovering by retracing."[31]

Gould's radio documentaries, which he referred to as "contrapuntal radio," moved even further in the direction of the labyrinth. In these works he tried "to have situations arise cogently from within the framework of the program in which two or three voices could be overlapped, in which they would be heard talking — simultaneously, but from different points of view — about the same subject."[32] *The Idea of North, The Latecomers*, and his other documentaries of the late 60's and early 70's, with their simultaneous juxtapositions of music, sound effects, and multiple voices can perhaps best be described as "cubist" soundscapes. Throughout his writings, McLuhan privileged the "cubist perspective" as his prime metaphor for the modern electronic experience and for the process of human cognition in general.

VI

> As the performer's once sacrosanct privileges are merged with the responsibilities of the tape editor and the composer, the Van Meegeren syndrome can no longer be cited as an indictment but becomes rather an entirely appropriate description of the aesthetic condition of our time. The role of the forger, of the unknown maker of unauthenticated goods, is emblematic of electronic culture.[33]

Gould stated that Hans Van Meegeren, a forger of Vermeer paintings, was one of his "private heroes." In Van Meegeren he saw the crisis of "personal-responsibility-for authorship" which is inherent in electronic media production. Gould's account of the forger's activities is, perhaps, an attempt at a kind of McLuhanesque "probe" concerning the effects of media.

Apparently, Van Meegeren sold his forgeries (all duly authenticated by critics and historians) to the Germans during the Second World War. After the war Dutch authorities charged him with collaboration and the selling of national treasures. As part of his defense he confessed that the paintings had not been Vermeers at all, and the enraged authenticators of his work then pressed the government to charge him with forgery.

The story of the forger led Gould to question the manner in which the value and status of a work of art is determined. Gould claimed that the interdependence of formerly separate and specialized roles, which is a result of the process of studio recording, calls into question the authorship of the

recorded musical performance. Those of a more traditional cast of mind distrust the techniques of the recording studio and prefer recordings of "live" performances. For Gould, this is a manifestation of the "Van Meegeren syndrome," a form of "rear-guard holding action," that seeks to authenticate the performer's interpretation and relegate the recording engineer to the position of mere documentor of the historical event. In contrast, Gould felt that the recording studio allowed him a certain "anonymity" while working and he welcomed the intercession of both the microphone and the recording engineer. The recorded performance of the musical work is, in a sense, a collaborative forgery. Ultimately, Gould's line of reasoning led him to question whether the concept of the work of "art" itself is still valid in the electronic age.

McLuhan was also suspicious of the "world and bureaucracy of 'art appreciation.'"[34] For McLuhan, specialization was the result of print technology, as was the "consumer-oriented culture that is concerned about authors and labels of authenticity."[35] The new electronic media demand "a high degree of producer-orientation," and this brings about "an altogether new relation of the medium to its users."[36] This new relation is one of "participation." The role of the artist, and the experimental work of art, is to offer training in perception that will allow us to cope with our media environments. But even this role is in part made obsolete by technology:

> Today technologies and their consequent environments succeed each other so rapidly that one environment makes us aware of the next. Technologies begin to perform the function of art in making us aware of the psychic and social consequences of technology.[37]

The notions of "participation" and "environment" are important concepts in McLuhan's discourse on the effects of electronic technology. For Gould also, the aesthetic condition engendered by the technology of sound reproduction heralds the arrival of the listener as "participant" in the transformation of art into "environment."

VII

> The listener is able to indulge preferences and, through the electronic modifications with which he endows the listening experience, impose his own personality upon the work. As he does so, he transforms that work, and his relation to it, from an artistic to an environmental experience.[38]

Whereas the concert hall presents the listener with an experience over

which s/he has no control, the modern hi-fi system allows the listener to subtlely modify the dynamic, timbral and spatial balance of a musical recording. Gould felt that "Dial twiddling is in its limited way an interpretive act."

Since "The Prospects of Recording" appeared in print there has been at least one musical recording which was designed specifically for the home listener/interpreter: the Nonesuch recording of *HPSCHD*, by John Cage and Lejaren Hiller. Parts of the sound material of this computer-assisted composition were recorded in one channel only (left or right) and the other parts in both channels. By using the balance control on his stereo the listener can vary the density and spatial orientation of the sounds. Included in the album is a computer print-out which is "one of 10,000 different numbered solutions of the program KNOBS. It enables the listener who follows its instructions to become a performer of this recording."[39] This constitutes one example of what McLuhan might have envisioned when he stated that the consumer is "invited by new art forms to become participant in the art process itself."[40]

Such listener involvement is indeed "limited" and Gould predicted that new devices would soon become available that would greatly alter the nature of home listening. One such device would enable the listener to edit together sections of recordings of the same work made by different artists in such a way as to "permit him to create his own ideal performance." Here Gould revealed his willingness to share with the listener the option of the "post-taping afterthought," even though it enables him/her to violate the integrity of Gould's own "ideal" interpretation.

Gould's perception of what is technically possible is not balanced by a corresponding perception of the constraining and de-skilling force of technology in consumer society. Just as electronic and computer developments in the regulation of the combustion engine have virtually rendered the amateur mechanic obsolete, so has the invention of audio cassettes and compact discs made it less likely that the home listener will realize his full potential as "participant." Cassette tape cannot be spliced, thus limiting the kind of manipulations envisioned by Gould. Its very real potential as an inexpensive, universally available medium for individually produced and distributed sound recordings of all kinds has been obscured by an industry dominated outcry against so-called "piracy." In the case of the audio cassette then, both the technology and the discourse surrounding it tend to constrain the possibilities for creative "participation." More recently, compact discs have begun to replace conventional phonograph records. The kind of experimental techniques employed by a variety of innovators over the past sixty years, from Bauhaus artist to rap deejay — techniques that rely on the direct manipulation of the record surface or the speed of the turntable —

are unlikely to arise out of a technology such as the compact disc where hands-on contact with the product is limited.

The recording medium does offer the listener a prerogative not previously available in the concert hall — that of choosing a listening program according to individual tastes. The recording industry has responded by making available to the listener a vast collection of the musical traditions of the world. Gould believed that we are on the way to a "stylistic mix" similar in effect to that engendered by art reproductions and described by André Malraux in, *Voices of Silence*. Malraux's expression "museum without walls" was also a favorite with McLuhan who went on to say that the phonograph had broken down the old class distinctions of music: "Everybody lost his inhibitions about 'highbrow,' and the serious people lost their qualms about popular music and culture."[41] But this has little to do with McLuhan's claim for the "in depth" experience of "process" over "content." It has more to do with the decontextualized nature of media experience in which listeners, safe in the privacy of their homes, do not have to physically confront the social and cultural differences of a symphony hall or rock concert audience.

Gould continued his argument in favor of the stylistic mix by describing Muzak as "an encyclopedia of experience, an exhaustive compilation of the clichés of post-Renaissance music."[42] Gould claimed that Muzak educates the listener more effectively than any music appreciation course precisely because of its character as an "environment." Furthermore:

> The cliché residue of all the idioms employed in background becomes an intuitive part of our musical vocabulary. Consequently, in order to gain our attention any *musical* experience must be of a quite exceptional nature"[43] (Gould's emphasis)

Here Gould's argument is essentially the same as McLuhan's: "The Medium is the Message." A concern with "content" merely obscures the influence media has over us as "environment." However, Gould is inconsistent when he implies that there is a difference between a *musical* experience and the experience of background sound.

Given this inconsistency, one must ask whether there is a point when the *musical* experience will cease to gain our attention at all, whether an intuitive musical vocabulary made up of a residue of clichés is not a vocabulary drained of all meaning, a symbolic system that has lost all significance. As Adorno once suggested, music that has become merely "style" cannot point towards any social or aesthetic meaning. It can only point to itself as a commodity: "today every monster close-up of a star is an advertisement for her name, and every hit song a plug for its tune."[44] Music

video, which is currently the culture industry's most intense form of self-promoting commodity, stands at the nexus of musical and visual cliché.

Even if Gould's argument concerning the musical cliché is a valid one, the phenomenon of background sound is not simply a musical affair. Sounds, especially loud sounds, tend to dominate the space in which they occur and have often been used as symbols of power. Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer tells us that "the hunter's horn lays claim to the forest ... the church bell to the parish."[45] Elsewhere, in describing the great machine noises that accompanied the industrial revolution, Schafer notes that "Wherever noise is granted immunity from human intervention, there will be found a seat of power."[46] Muzak then, does not represent a form of musical expression so much as an expression of power, of corporate ownership of space. McLuhan recognized this fact when he stated that "Owners are aware of the media as power, and they know that this power has little to do with 'content' ..."[47]

In this respect, the familiar urban sound of the "ghetto blaster" is perhaps a form of aural graffiti which defies the corporation's sole claim over the sonic environment. It stakes out a personal, self-indulgent space for its owner. But the music emitted by the ghetto blaster is more often than not the product of the culture industry itself and it betrays the impotence of the owner's gesture. Lacking a voice of his own, he ends up reinforcing the corporate sphere of power over himself and the environment.

For the more discrete, there is the Sony "Walkman." With the "Walkman" the listener is invited to indulge in a private acoustic space completely detached from the immediate surroundings. Ownership of the acoustic space is still an important factor as Schafer points out: "messages received on earphones are always private property."[48] Paradoxically, while the "Walkman" offers a sense of personal detachment, it also supplies an umbilical cord connecting the individual directly to the culture industry.

The "Walkman" is an example of what McLuhan meant when he said that technology is "an extension of our own bodies and senses." Until we learn to recognize this we will continue "Leasing our eyes and ears and nerves to commercial interests." Gould's observation concerning the "cliché residue" which makes up the bulk of Muzak programs is perhaps an indication that we have already handed over "the common speech to a private corporation."[49]

VIII

> There is a relationship of the sound to the various envelopes of space you're placing it in that adds immeasurably.[50]

If it can be said that sounds tend to dominate a given space, then it must also be said that our perception of sound is influenced by the acoustic space in which the sound occurs. Phonograph recordings often attempt to create an impression of the acoustical environment in which the recording was originally made. However, a pair of stereo speakers can only create an *illusion* of three dimensional space. In this respect, Gould's use of the recording medium outlined earlier was anti-illusionistic. He rejected any attempt to recreate the concert hall sound in favour of a close, analytical perspective on the sound of the musical instrument itself.

During the early 70's Gould began to experiment with a new technique of recording music which gives some indication of how far his thoughts concerning the medium had evolved since the publication of "The Prospects of Recording." Briefly, the technique consists of making a recording with eight microphones (each recorded on a separate track of a multi-track tape recorder). The mikes are grouped in pairs and are positioned at varying distances from the piano such that each pair presents the listener with a slightly different perspective on the instrument. Later, the eight-track tape is mixed down to normal stereo but, in the process, Gould is able to "choreograph" the various perspectives according to what he feels are the demands of the musical score.[51]

Gould only used the technique to record certain late Romantic repertoire, such as works by Scriabin and Sibelius, works which contain highly coloristic effects. Gould described his technique of "multiple perspectives" in cinematic terms: zooms, long shots, tight shots, dissolves, jump cuts, etc. I would suggest that a more appropriate term for this technique might be "mobile perspective." For in the final, choreographed mix, one is not struck so much by the multiplicity of perspectives as by the impression of "mobility" from one perspective to the next.

The technique was completely in keeping with Gould's predilection for the analytical capabilities of the recording medium. He did not attempt to recreate the acoustics of the original recording environment (although the technique does rely on those acoustics to a large degree). Instead he created a spatial interpretation of the score which, in its every nuance, complements the interpretation that he had created at the piano itself. The multiple perspectives merge into a single spatial continuum in which the listener acquires a fluidly mobile perspective on the musical object.

The spatial overlay perhaps constitutes another example of McLuhan's "labyrinth" structure as the model of human cognition. As with the "post-taping afterthought," Gould used the technique of multiple perspectives as a means of "retracing" the poetic process of musical interpretation. In his radio documentary, *The Latecomers*, Gould occasionally moved voices

across the stereo field as a means of emphasizing certain thematic relationships between the characters. Thus, it would appear that Gould, in both his musical recordings and his radio documentaries, regarded the spatial aspects of recorded sound as a cognitive "labyrinth" of perception.

Only in pop music recordings are the spatial aspects of sound manipulated to such a degree. For example, each instrument in a pop music recording is usually recorded using only extremely close miking techniques. Each instrument is recorded on a separate track and differing amounts of artificial reverberation is added to each track during the mixdown to stereo. The bass drum sound will usually have little or no reverberation added to it while the snare drum may be made to sound as if it had been played in a cavernous acoustical space.

Pop music recording techniques have become relatively standardized and seldom have any integral relationship with the music being recorded. Whereas Gould had attempted to develop a technique that would serve the purposes of musical expression, pop recording practices transform the music in order to meet the demands of a technological process. The multiple acoustic spaces of the pop music recording do not merge, they remain on essentially separate acoustical planes. The resulting image is one of an extremely fragmented space.

The recording techniques explored by Glenn Gould and the recording practices of popular music both create what McLuhan described as a "cubist" perspective: "the acceptance of multiple facets and planes in a single experience."[52] The paradox embodied in pop music recording is that while the artificially enhanced beat of the music exhorts the listener to move, to dance, there exists virtually no acoustical space in which the listener can achieve any sense of mobility; s/he is, as it were, caught between the "multiple facets and planes."

IX

> I referred earlier to the notion of isolation as a liturgical Canadian theme, which in a sense makes Gould's preoccupation with it a validation of his citizenship. He was, in fact, quite at home in the country that Canadian hoboes familiarly refer to as Big Lonely ...[53]

If there is some notion of isolation which is indeed a "Canadian theme," then Glenn Gould, through his life and work, has enriched its tradition. It was through his self-imposed isolation that Gould was able to pursue his most creative impulses with such intensity. According to Gould himself, almost all his major radio documentaries dealt with the themes of isolation

and solitude in some way, several taking place in remote, uniquely Canadian settings.

Similarly, if there is a distinctly "Canadian discourse"[54] on technology, then Glenn Gould, through his numerous writings and his innovative approach to the recording medium, deserves his place, along with McLuhan and others, on that side of the discourse which privileges the creative moment implicit in new technologies. Gould is a prime example of McLuhan's artist "who grasps the implications of his actions and of new knowledge in his own time. He is the man of integral awareness."[55] Gould's thought touched upon some of the most important themes of avant-garde art and music since the Second World War: the use of technology as an integral part of the creative process; the breakdown of the specialized roles of the composer, performer and audience; the notion of anonymous creative work and the destruction of the work of art; the realization of the musical potential embodied in the spoken word; and the exploration of the spatial aspects of sound.

But, as pointed out earlier, Gould also shared some of the failings of McLuhan's side of the discourse. For while isolation and the use of technology may contain potential for integral creative awareness, it would almost seem that the same combination does not contain an equal potential for an integrated political awareness.

The themes of isolation and technology are intimately linked for Canadians precisely because it was, in part, an attempt to overcome the problem of geographical isolation that made Canada so dependent on communications technologies. However, the contradiction embodied in mass media technologies — those based on a system of centralized production and individualized consumption — is that they simultaneously connect and isolate us. If Gould's ideas have been perceived as controversial it is because, by placing himself at the centre of this contradiction, he has revealed our own ambivalent relationship to media and technology.

In this sense, Glenn Gould was much more than "a mere top-ranking piano virtuoso."

Montréal

Notes

1. Geoffrey Payzant, *Glenn Gould, Music & Mind*, 2nd ed., Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1984, p. 146.

2. Gould appears to have been aware of the degree to which some of his ideas resembled those of McLuhan and, at times, would mention his name simply as a way of dismissing him as a possible influence, or so it would seem:

"I think that much of the new music has a lot to do with (and I don't mean to sound like that chap, Marshall something-or-other) the spoken word."
— (Curtis Davis, reprinted in *Variations*, p. 280).
The same passage appears in Payzant's book as follows:
"I think that much of the new music has a lot to do with the spoken word ..." (p. 130).

3. Jonathan Cott, *Conversations with Glenn Gould*, Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1984, p. 103.
4. Tim Page, "Interview with Glenn Gould," *Piano Quarterly*, 29 (Fall 1981), p. 20.
5. Payzant, *Music & Mind*, p. 36.
6. Cott, *Conversations*, p. 103.
7. Richard Kostelanetz, "Glenn Gould: Bach in the Electronic Age", reprinted in *Glenn Gould Variations*, ed. John McGreevy, Toronto: Doubleday Canada Limited, 1983, p. 127.
8. Cott, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
9. Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962, p. 111.
10. Glenn Gould, "The Prospects of Recording", *High Fidelity*, 16 (April 1966), p. 47.
11. Thomas Hathaway, "Glenn Gould: A Legacy of Leavings", *High Fidelity*, (April 1985), p. 71.
12. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, New York: New American Library, Mentor Books, 1964, p. 246.
13. For a thorough, historical examination of the relationship between music and capitalist modes of production and consumption see: Jacques Attali, *Bruits, essai sur l'économie politique de la musique*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1977.
14. Glenn Gould, "Glenn Gould interviews Glenn Gould about Glenn Gould", *High Fidelity*, 24 (Feb. 1974), p. 74.
15. Edward Said, "The Music Itself: Glenn Gould's Contrapuntal Vision", reprinted in *Variations*, p. 52.
16. Glenn Gould, "Music and Technology," reprinted in *The Glenn Gould Reader*, ed. Tim Page, Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys Limited, 1964, p. 355.
17. Arthur Kroker, *Technology and the Canadian Mind*, Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1984, p. 79.
18. Glenn Gould, "Stokowski in Six Scenes", reprinted in *Variations*, p. 160.
19. Glenn Gould, "The Prospects of Recording", *High Fidelity*, 16 (April 1966), p. 48.
20. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, New York: New American Library, Mentor Books, 1964, p. 247.
21. Gould, "Prospects", p. 48.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
23. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p. 248.
24. Gould, "Prospects", p. 50.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
28. Marshall McLuhan, "Sight, Sound, and the Fury", from *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America*, ed. B. Rosenberg & D. Manning White, Toronto: Collier-Macmillan Canada, 1957, p. 493.

29. Marshall McLuhan, "Joyce, Aquinas, and the Poetic Process", *Renascence*, IV 1 Autumn (1951), p. 3.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
32. Payzant, *Music & Mind*, p. 131.
33. Gould, "Prospects", p. 56.
34. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p. 71.
35. McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, p. 161.
36. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p. 174-175.
37. *Ibid.*, introduction to the second edition, p. ix.
38. Gould, "The Prospects of Recording", p. 59.
39. Album liner notes, John Cage & Lejaren Hiller *HPSCHD*, Nonesuch H-71224.
40. McLuhan, *Gutenberg Galaxy*, p. 328.
41. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p. 247.
42. Gould, "Prospects", p. 61.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
44. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception", in *Mass Communication and Society*, p. 381.
45. R. Murray Schafer, *The Tuning of the World*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1977, p. 39.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
47. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p. 60.
48. Schafer, *The Tuning of the World*, p. 118.
49. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p. 73.
50. Jim Aitkin, "Interview with Glenn Gould", *Contemporary Keyboard*, 6, no. 8 (August 1980), p. 36.
51. The most detailed account of the "multiple perspective" technique appears in Jonathan Cott, *Conversations with Glenn Gould*. A shorter description appears in Jim Aitkin's interview for *Contemporary Keyboard* and in Curtis Davis' article in *Variations*.

    A sequence in which Gould is shown directing a mixing of a "multiple perspective" recording (music by Scriabin) appears in "Sound or Unsound" #8 of the *Music Man* series, Yehudi Menuhin, C.B.C. & NFB, 1979.
52. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p. 247.
53. William Littler, "The Quest for Solitude", reprinted in *Variations*, p. 222.
54. Kroker, introduction to *Technology and the Canadian Mind*, pp. 7-19.
55. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p. 71.