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# Glenn Gould and 'Opus 2': An outline for a musical understanding of contrapuntal radio with respect to *The Idea of North*

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#### Article abstract

*The Idea of North* is the first of Glenn Gould's *Solitude Trilogy* documentaries. Like the two works that follow it in the trilogy, *North* attracts a significant amount of attention for its place in a nether region between Gould as a performer and Gould the intellectual. The bulk of the literature on the work debates categorizing it as documentary, radio drama/theatre, or music. Gould's own descriptions of it encompass all three and render the task of pigeonholing the work difficult. This article will explore what makes *The Idea of North* musical. I contend that, even if considered as documentary, drama, or music, the work is musically conceived and musical and, as such, is a milestone for Gould in developing his compositional voice.

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# Glenn Gould and ‘Opus 2’: An outline for a musical understanding of contrapuntal radio with respect to *The Idea of North*

Anthony Cushing

In the murky nether region between ‘Glenn Gould the intellectual performer’ and ‘Glenn Gould the performative intellectual,’ lies *The Idea of North*, the first of the *Solitude Trilogy* radio documentaries.<sup>1</sup> In 1967, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation commissioned Gould to produce a documentary to celebrate Canada’s centennial year. The work’s focus is on the solitude of Northern living from the perspective of five people, each of whom spent considerable time North of 60. Comprised of overlapping speech in many scenes, *The Idea of North* attracts a significant amount of attention by listeners and scholars if only because it is unlike most works in Gould’s creative output to that point in his career.

The bulk of the literature on this work debates the virtue of classifying *North* as documentary, radio drama/theatre, music, or a combination of all three. I outline some of these discussions below. That Gould’s own descriptions of it encompass a creative trinity renders a definitive classification difficult; this, predicated entirely on the assumption that one *must* arrive at a conclusive finding.

This article sidesteps the issue of animal, vegetable, or mineral classification, as it is irrelevant to the discussion at hand. In particular, I want to explore the particulars of contrapuntal radio, a series of musically-conceived audio production techniques that, most often, result in two or more voices sounding simultaneously. Further, I use this to examine *North* as a musical phenomenon. By Gould’s definition, in contrapuntal radio,

1. Glenn Gould (1992). *The Solitude Trilogy*. Compact Disc. CBC Records PSCD2003-3, reissued 1992. The other two documentaries are *The Latecomers* (1969) and *The Quiet in the Land* (1977). All three recordings are available as a set from CBC Records.

[E]very voice leads its own[...] life and adheres to certain parameters of harmonic discipline... how the voices came together and in what manner they splashed off each other, both in the actual sound and in the meaning of what was being said.<sup>2</sup>

I contend that *The Idea of North*, even considered as a documentary, drama, or music, is conceived musically and is musical. Further, as a musical work, *North* is a milestone for Gould in developing his compositional voice.

A musical understanding of *North* requires re-thinking some traditional elements of music theory: harmony must take into consideration semantic content and shifting topic areas; form follows somewhat traditional musical structures (ternary, binary, etc.); and texture encompasses layering of literal voices and dispenses with traditional notions of melody. One must also consider the spatial component of tape composition, in which voices inhabit locations in a sound field. The later documentaries in the trilogy and the Leopold Stokowski and Pablo Casals tribute radio documentaries contribute to a more complete musical concept of contrapuntal radio—complex polyphonic textures, stereo sound, pitch-based harmonic content—the germ of contrapuntal radio was developed and actualized in *North*. In maintaining a balance with the extant literature, I restrict my discussion to that particular work to the exclusion of later works.

The body of literature on *The Idea of North* is growing not only in volume but also in specificity. The literature breakdown falls somewhat discretely into five categories: first, Biography, which often includes a brief mention and editorializing on the radio documentaries;<sup>3</sup> second, analyses both of Gould as performer, composer, and philosopher;<sup>4</sup> third, those that co-opt Gould's work as a talking point in their own respective discipline, usually in philosophy or cultural studies;<sup>5</sup> fourth, Festschriften, compilations of writings, and miscellaneous Gouldiana;<sup>6</sup> and fifth, literature devoted specifically to *The Idea of North* and contrapuntal radio at large.<sup>7</sup>

The literature straddles the gulf between mainstream and academic though neither is the sole claimant to incisive analysis or thoughtful commentary. Payzant's biography, written with Gould's cooperation, offers a compelling insight into Gould's then current ideas on performance, recording, and what Payzant terms the 'New Philosophy.' Helen Mesaros' self-published work grows out of her own professional concerns as a clinical psychologist and is, by and large, a Freudian post-mortem of the Apollonian Gould. Her engagement with the radio work is minimal and superficial.

It is fair to suggest that the bulk of analyses of *North* lack depth because it is so unlike other contemporary compositions. Compared to experimental radio projects in other international contexts—Radiophonics in the UK,

3. Payzant, 1978; Friederich, 1989; Ostwald, 1997; Bazanna, 2005; and Mesaros, 2008.

4. Kazdin, 1983; Angilette, 1992; Bazanna, 1997; Martens, 2004; Varga, 2003; Sanden, 2009; Kingswell, 2011.

5. Berland, 2002; Neumann, 2011.

6. McGreevy, 1983; Page, 1984; Roberts, 1999.

7. Hurwitz, 1983; Said, 1983; McNeilly, 1996; Sallis, 2005; Laurie, 2010.

*musique concrète* in France, and the German *Hörspiel*—*The Idea of North* is not easily containable in a particular category. Most writers who venture into a discussion of *North* tackle the task of categorisation. Payzant describes *North* as a hybrid, “music, drama, and several other strains, including essay, journalism, anthropology, ethics, social commentary, contemporary history.”<sup>8</sup> Kevin Bazanna spends several pages arguing for the documentary label.<sup>9</sup>

Every writer cedes that *North* is, to a varying extent, musical; however, their final assessment avoids a conclusive definition of the work as music beyond vague descriptions of multi-voiced polyphony. Bazanna devotes a mere two and a half pages of his book to a discussion of the work as music;<sup>10</sup> Friedemann Sallis treads closest to a musical discussion. His article is rooted primarily in semantics and thematic content though he makes an argument for classification as music,

[...] composition of sound (duration, dynamics, tempo, phrasing, and pitch) and silence, the polyphonic manipulation of voices and the interaction of musical parameters with the semantic content of the text.<sup>11</sup>

This is perhaps the closest and most insightful musical analysis of *North* that incorporates both technique and thematic content though it wants for more detail. Gould, in retrospect in the context of a discussion of contrapuntal radio, suggests the following:

I think that much of the new music has a lot to do with the spoken word, with the rhythms and patterns, the rise and fall and inclination, the ordering of phrase and regulations of cadence in human speech.... it's unrealistic to think of that as anything but composition... I think our whole notion of what music is has forever merged with all the sounds that are around us, everything that the environment makes available.<sup>12</sup>

By contemporary standards, *North* fits tidily into the musical avant-garde. The mid-twentieth-century vogue of composition with voice (either acoustic or electronic) produced a significant number of works: Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Gesang der Jünglinge* (1955-56), John Cage's *Imaginary Landscape* 4 and 5 (1951 and 52, respectively. The former involving twelve radios sounding simultaneously and the latter, 42 turntables), Mauricio Kagel's *Anagrama* (1957-58); *Cento*, Cantata Urbana (1967), by Gould's compatriot István Anhalt was also familiar to Gould and similarly admired.<sup>13</sup>

This is not to say that Gould was so favourably inclined to his composer contemporaries. He made public his disdain for Stockhausen whose work in electronic music was the antithesis of Gould's penchant for the contrapuntal. The pianist comments on the modernist's foreword to Henry-Louis de la Grange's biography of Gustav Mahler. In it, he describes the composer

8. Payzant, 1978, p. 130.

9. Bazanna, 2005, p. 295-302.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 302-304.

11. Sallis, 2005, p. 143.

12. Payzant, 1978, p. 130.

13. We might also consider Lennon and McCartney's "Revolution 9" from *The White Album* for its extensive use of collage and spoken voice; Gould revealed in his essay "The Search for Petula Clark," his disdain for Lennon and McCartney's compositional voice. Nonetheless, this work, inspired in part by works of Edgar Varèse and Karlheinz Stockhausen, stands for inclusion in this category.

14. Glenn Gould, ([1974] 1984), "Data Bank on the Upward-Scuttling Mahler" in Tim Page (ed.) *The Glenn Gould Reader*, Toronto, Key Porter Books, p. 81.

15. Glenn Gould (1975) "Krenek, the prolific, is probably best known to the public at large as—Ernst who?" *Globe and Mail*, July 19, p. 29.

16. Gould, 1974, disc n° 1.

17. Gould, 1992. On the disc is the sonata for bassoon and piano, a piano sonata, the Liebermann Madrigal, the string quartet, Op. 1, and "So you want to write a fugue?"

18. *Ibid.*

as the 'guru of the sufi set.'<sup>14</sup> In a later article on Ernst Krenek, Gould pens a Stockhausenian 'letter to the editor' that satirizes the composer's propensity for 'carbon dating analysis.'<sup>15</sup> The satire extends into the realm of television.

Gould created witty fictional personalities to opine generally on music and musical aesthetics for a series of CBC commercials for *Musicamera*. One such advertisement introduced the "brilliant German reductionist composer, Karlheinz Klopweiser," who bears a striking resemblance to Stockhausen. The long, blond-haired, hippyesque figure replete with tasseled leather vest and tie-dyed t-shirt, wanders through a set of suspended picture frames while brandishing a metal detector, the sound of a screeching Theremin corresponds with the detector's proximity to the frames. Klopweiser waxes philosophically on modernist music and on "German silence, which is organic as opposed to French silence, which is ornamental."<sup>16</sup>

If he disdained anything of musical modernism, it was the bent to eschew convention in favor of an inaccessible avant-garde elitism, a shift in focus from counterpoint, harmony, and form to mathematics, philosophy, and aleatoricism whose organization system constituted a distinct absence of formal organization by traditional measures. Gould, by contrast, adhered to convention in conceiving and 'composing' *The Idea of North*.

Sallis' assertion as to semantic content as musical element, as mentioned above, resonates with Gould's definition; however, Gould left unanswered the question of what constitutes "harmonic discipline." The following discussion of his early compositional efforts, I hope, will create a context to discuss the 'harmonic' elements of *The Idea of North*.

Gould's unextraordinary foray into composition was short-lived and the bulk of his completed works fit tidily onto a single compact disc.<sup>17</sup> Only two works are performed regularly now: the string quartet, opus 1 and "So you want to write a fugue?" the latter, a novel short work, is a fugue about composing a fugue. It adheres rigidly to academic contrapuntal rules and incorporates musical quotes from Schoenberg, J.S. Bach, and Wagner. The semantic content, in tandem with incorporation and transformation of the borrowed musical material eschews the lyric's own advice, "never be clever for the sake of being clever, for the sake of showing off."<sup>18</sup> The work is notable but not sufficiently significant to indicate what sort of compositional voice Gould possessed.

More than a decade earlier, in 1953, Gould began work on his string quartet, opus 1. Work progressed periodically over two years. It is a large-scale, single movement work with a harmonic scheme and contrapuntal texture highly reminiscent of the works of Richard Strauss.

**FIGURE 1** A manuscript page of the fugue from Gould's string quartet, p. xxiv, mm. 234-239 (1955).<sup>19</sup>



19. Manuscript conserved in the Glenn Gould Papers, Library and Archives Canada. MUS 109 22/ 24,13. Used with permission courtesy of the Glenn Gould Estate.

The quartet's fugue (Figure 1) amply illustrates the work's weaknesses. In the first measure of the second line, measure 237, cross-relations abound: the violin parts cross from there to beyond the end of this example, and the interval boundary between the viola and violin II is frequently too wide. This presents problems for sonority and violates one of the fundamental rules of voice leading. The 2:3 polyrhythms that figure prominently in the fugue thicken the texture but render some voices unintelligible and in need of clarity. The harmony wanders without a clear trajectory more so than even Richard

20. Ken Winters (1961) "Reviews", *The Canadian Music Journal*, vol. V, n° 4, 51.

21. Glenn Gould ([1961] 1984), "Gould's String Quartet, Op. 1" in Tim Page (ed.) *The Glenn Gould Reader*, p. 234.

22. Gould, 1964b, p. 226.

Strauss' most adventurous chromaticism. The string quartet as a whole reads as a series of promising student counterpoint exercises and highlights the work's protracted composition period.

The first recording of the work by the Juilliard String Quartet was released in 1961 and the reviews were not all positive. One critic opined, "[It is] kind of a suet pudding of chafingly repetitious, oblique harmony, thick counterpoint and ordinary rhythm."<sup>20</sup> As if apologetic and prophetic, anticipating the lukewarm reception, Gould proclaimed at the end of the recording's liner notes, "It's Op. 2 that counts!"<sup>21</sup>

The composing career of which Gould often spoke never materialized, at least not in the way he expected. His concert obligations monopolized his time and distracted him from various composition projects. Post-performance retirement, Gould was endowed with ample time to devote to a career of recording, intellectual rumination, and composition disguised as documentary production.

### Gould and the 'New Philosophy'

Gould's self-professed love affair with the microphone, twinned with his disdain for the concert stage, spawned an interest in the possibilities of electronic media. His foray into the burgeoning field of media theory, pioneered by local contemporary Marshall McLuhan, was productive and insightful. A trio of essays, "Strauss and the electronic future", "The prospects of recording," and a convocation speech he delivered at the University of Toronto, "An Argument for Music in the Electronic Age," formed his manifesto for a new philosophy of cultural production. In his convocation address he asserted,

In my mind, the relationship between music and the various media of electronic communication is the key to the future not only of the way in which music will appear or be encountered, but also the key to the manner in which it will be performed and composed.<sup>22</sup>

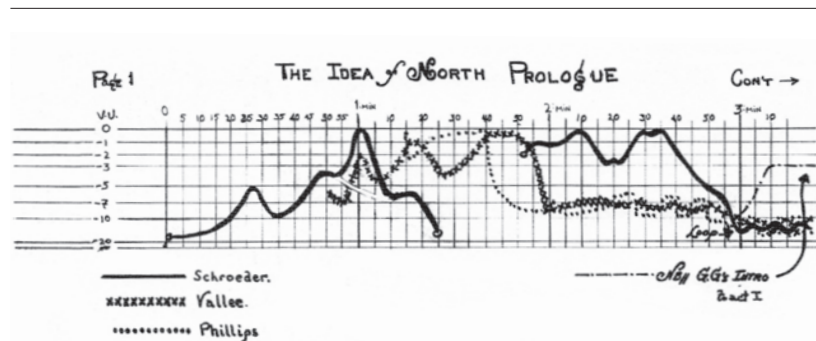
The statement is vague however intriguing. In his other essays he discusses a more participatory approach to music creation that implies a user-configurable cultural model, a democratization of cultural production via accessible audio production technologies. The timing of three essays coincides with his "Art of Glenn Gould" series for the radio show *Ideas*, and his deepened involvement as a broadcaster at the CBC.

His first notable attempt at radio documentary was "The Search for Petula Clark," an enlightened commentary and analysis of Clark's quartet of popular music singles. The work progressed quickly with the able assistance of radio technician Lorne Tulk that led to five additional significant documentary collaborations.

Tulk (b. 1937), a young audio technician at the CBC, worked on the program *Ideas*. Unlike other CBC Toronto technicians, he did not graduate from the radio program at nearby Ryerson College, but rather apprenticed for several years at his father's in-home recording studio.<sup>23</sup> He later worked for Foster Hewitt at the venerable broadcaster's own radio station, CLFH. The combination of his years of practical work experience was a boon to Tulk; unhindered by conventional studies in audio production theory, his imaginative and intuitive technical solutions proved an invaluable asset for his later work with Gould.

In 1967, *Ideas* commissioned Gould to produce a documentary, *The Idea of North*, to celebrate the Canadian centenary. The work's prologue, which Gould described as a trio sonata texture, was Canada's first exposure to contrapuntal radio.<sup>24</sup>

**FIGURE 2** Lorne Tulk's graph of *The Idea of North* prologue (1967). It illustrates the progress of the character's voices in volume level over time.<sup>25</sup>



Lorne Tulk drew this graph (Figure 2) at Gould's request to accompany the article "Radio as Music." Based on Tulk's production notes, it illustrates the interplay of voices in the prologue. The vertical axis is volume level (VU) and the horizontal, time (minutes and seconds). The graph does not include semantic content but, nonetheless, gives the listener a 'guide' to examine 'melodic contour.' The line styles assigned to the work's characters, Marianne Schroeder, Robert Phillips, and Frank Vallee, render the graph lines distinct and also suggest different vocal profiles. In this, the listener may glean an indication as to the variety of timbral combinations actualized by juxtaposition, and focus by adjustments in volume level. In it we see Gould's experimentation with texture. From a three-voice texture until 2'00" when Gould creates a two-voice texture as Phillips and Vallee merge to form a single 'compound voice' and Schroeder's voice maintains its independence.

23. It was there that the two encountered each other initially; Gould came to pick up a recording at the elder Tulk's studio on Christmas Eve, 1950 when Lorne was 13 and Gould, 18.

24. Gould, 1967; Gould, ([1971] 1984), p. 379.

25. Manuscript conserved in the Glenn Gould Papers, Library and Archives Canada. MUS 109 2/5, 40. Used with permission courtesy of the Glenn Gould Estate and Lorne Tulk.



Later, at 3'00" Schroeder's voice joins Vallee and Philips while Gould's voice comes into focus, in effect reducing a four-voice polyphony to the aural appearance of a two-voice texture.

This work poses a distinct set of challenges to listeners and analysts alike. Specifically, how does one prioritize one's focus on the semantic content of the myriad voices? Alternately, is it necessary to focus on a particular voice or listen to timbre and texture at the expense of semantic content? Sallis offers an imperative for future analysts,

[T]he challenge facing those who wish to study *North* is that the musical aspects have not been notated. They exist as recorded sounds and are consequently difficult to grasp and analyse, but they[...] are present nonetheless.<sup>26</sup>

26. Sallis, 2005, p. 132.

I question whether 'notation,' an inexact representation at best, is necessary for consideration of *North* and contrapuntal radio as music. To paraphrase Marshall McLuhan, the work's form is the message (music) and the content is the old form (documentary) that demands a different model, not necessarily an outmoded system of notation, to illustrate a *musical* analysis. In the remainder of the article, I briefly explore what specifically is musical about *The Idea of North*. The answer is in a broader discussion of contrapuntal radio to provide a context for what Gould referred to above as 'harmonic discipline.' Specifically, I explore: harmony, form, texture, and space as musical elements in *North*.

### Semantics as Harmony

Contrapuntal radio as a series of compositional techniques encompasses material beyond the breadth of traditional notions of music. If horizontal melody and vertical chord successions constitute traditional notions of harmony, then speech and miscellaneous sounds are the harmonic elements idiomatic to contrapuntal radio. Harmony in *The Idea of North* is about consonance and dissonance of juxtaposed ideas, opinions, and actions in semantic content; short programmatic scenarios in *North* are as transitional as key areas in conventional music works, just as changes in subject matter are akin to 'key changes.'

*North*'s harmonic system is not bound by rules of voice leading, though Gould literally composes with recorded voices. The 'harmony' of spoken narrative or programmatic scenarios displaces concepts of vertical harmony and what does and does not constitute 'chord progressions.' Harmony, in a sense, becomes the practice of managing theatrics; however, this is differentiated from the overlapping cinematic dialogues of Robert Altman,<sup>27</sup> as work is

27. Robert Altman's *M\*A\*S\*H* (1970) was his first commercial film with overlapping dialogue. Later films like *The Player* (1992) and *Gosford Park* (2001) also feature extended scenes with scripted polyphony.

scripted to overlap. I will outline a harmonic system *first* with an analysis of semantic content as ‘key area,’ and, *second*, the train as basso continuo and ‘harmonic support.’

A brief examination of the semantic content from the five scenes of *The Idea of North* reveals a programmatic progression that I read as harmonic teleology. *North’s* plot, if one may call it that, does not unfold similarly to then contemporary radio documentaries or dramas, and has no linking material to indicate the listener’s location in the work. That is, there are no clear plot points to differentiate an exposition, rising action, plateau, or climax.

**FIGURE 3** Summary of semantic content by scene in *The Idea of North*

Scene	Synopsis
Prologue	Personal reflections on the North (as trio sonata)
Scene 1	Descriptions of the characters’ ‘early days’ in the North
Scene 2	First experiences of Northern <i>living</i> with reflections on emotional and community connections
Scene 3	Reality of Northern living and de-romanticising the North
Scene 4	Conversation in the ‘dining car,’ about Eskimos and colonial attitudes toward the North
Scene 5	Contemplation on the future of Canada’s North
Epilogue	Maclean’s soliloquy on the North’s philosophical meaning and relationship to Canada and what role the North will play in Canada’s future.

There is a clear progression in *North’s* programmatic content (Figure 3) suggesting a dramatic teleology that ranges from the characters’ optimistic first impressions, eventual disillusionment in the reality of the North, and finally, upon reflection, a wistful longing to return North or nostalgia for their time there.

In a musical context I posit this progression of ideas with a beginning, middle, and end suggests a harmonic progression, even if non-musical in content, with an arch of ideas that is not unlike the large-scale harmonic teleology of a symphonic structure. One might be hard-pressed to find a direct analogue to the harmonic ideas of major or minor keys, or tonic and dominant chords, the ‘home’ key to which the work must return for a satisfactory conclusion and the midway chord that propels the work toward resolution to the tonic; however, in reviewing *North’s* programmatic progression the threefold program of 1) optimistic start, 2) disillusionment, and 3) wistful reminiscence suggests a ternary harmonic structure with the first and last scenes

28. Sallis, 2005, p. 119.

as a ‘positive’ program, a ‘home key,’ and the inner scenes as a ‘negative’ programme, a ‘dominant’ key area that demands resolution to the home key.

Sallis, in his semantic musical analysis dismisses outright the most conspicuously musical element of *North*, the train ‘basso continuo’.<sup>28</sup> A stalwart element of much baroque consort music, the literal ‘continuous bass’ establishes the harmonic foundation for the tenor, alto, and tenor voices that outline and define the chord quality—major, minor, augmented, or diminished. Here, the concept of the continuo provide Gould with a convenient musically-derived element to fulfill the need for continuity throughout *North*.

29. Personal interview with Tulk, 06/09/2010.

Gould’s conception of the basso continuo, however, establishes a two-way relationship with the other sounds in the scenes: first, the continuo provides the dramatic premise (the ‘dialogues’ transpire on a train) and, consequently, the harmonic framework for the foreground voices; second, the continuo takes specific harmonic cues from the speech content.<sup>29</sup> This is an inversion of the conventional role of basso continuo in which the upper voices elaborate the bass harmony.

The continuous train is not *just* sound, but sound with *inflection*. That is, the sonic characteristics of the basso continuo sound changes as the semantic content and topic area changes. When the dialogue voices convey conflict, the train wheels thrash over rail switches. In scenes when speech indicates wistful reminiscence the continuo is similarly calm, the train glides on a length of smooth rails. Rather than maintaining a particular inflection for the entirety of a scene, the sonic characteristics of the continuo change many times over the scene’s duration. I suggest that inflective change indicates a harmonic rhythm unrestricted by regular phrase lengths or bound by meter. Gould’s use of continuo reflects the ‘organic’ progression of ideas in conversational dialogue.

Form in *North*, to some extent, follows the progression of conversations and works on both the micro and macro levels.

### Form & Texture

As in musical works, we observe form on two scales: *one*, the local level. That is, we look at micro-level forms *within* larger formal sections, and; *two*, large-scale forms and how the collection of sections form the total work. Texturally, *The Idea of North* incorporates both linear, homophonic textures, and contrapuntal textures. Gould’s formal structure for *North* mixes metaphors.

One must invest a form which expresses the limitations of form, which takes as its point of departure the terror of formlessness[...] there are a limited number of rondos you can exploit in the radio documentary; then you[...] have to invent according to the criteria of the medium.<sup>30</sup>

30. Gould, 1971, p. 379.

At once, he invokes the rondo form but states its inadequacy for a large-scale work. “Inventing” a form idiomatic to the radio medium, in this case, is a quasi-theatrical form with scenes and thematic content for each. For *North*, the ‘terror of formlessness’ motivated Gould to draw on musical forms to sustain the sections within the larger work; however, Gould required a *variety* of forms to stave off monotony. A summary of the work’s formal structure (Figure 4) reveals the mix of formal styles in each scene.

Scenes 1 & 3 are extended rondo forms. Each character is assigned a letter and their vocal entries distinguish the micro-level markers that comprise the form.

The ‘dining car’ scene (Figure 5) is densely contrapuntal and, by Gould’s own reckoning, scenes of many voices are organized like fugues.<sup>31</sup> After 37’00” the scene’s texture grows more dense. The continuo of train noise, the sound effects of dining accoutrements, and voices fading in, out, and moving between the foreground and background, is a marked departure from the linearity of earlier scenes.

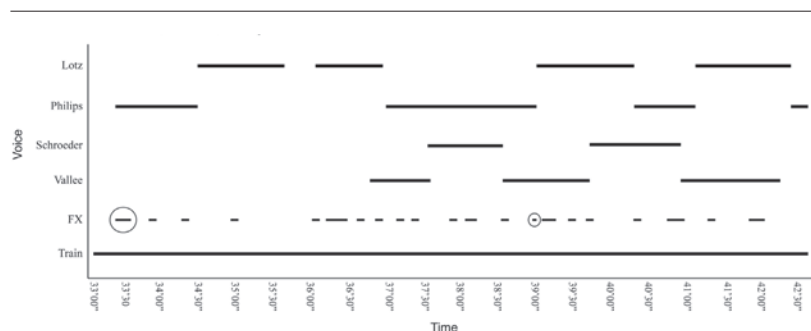
31. Gould, 1971, p. 383.

32. Each letter (A, B, etc.) represents each of the documentary’s characters. The succession of letters represents the order in which those characters appear in the scenes

**FIGURE 4** Summary of formal structures by scene in *The Idea of North*.<sup>32</sup>

Section	Time	Form
Prologue	0’00”-5’13”	Trio Sonata & Gould’s Introduction
Scene 1	5’14”-18’54”	ABABABABCDBDBBCA
Scene 2	18’55”-22’49”	ABABABABAB
Scene 3	22’50”-33’22”	ABCBD-ACEBE
Scene 4 “Dining Car”	33’23”-42’49”	Fugue
Scene 5	42’50”-49’57”	3-part invention with continuo, 1 <sup>st</sup> -voice drops out quickly. May be read as free counterpoint
Soliloquy	49’58”-58’54”	Wally Maclean and Sibelius Symphony Sibelius Symphony N° 5, IV movement

**FIGURE 5** Textural density in the “dining car” scene, *The Idea of North*



The above graph illustrates only the presence of voices but not the volume level as in Tulk's graph of the prologue. The indication of volume level, to a large extent, affects the sensation of space, of depth.

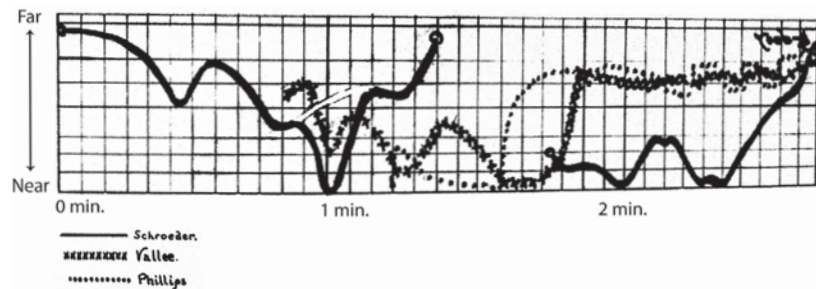
In considering *The Idea of North* as a musical phenomenon, we must move beyond notions of music notated on paper. Electronic music composition is an entirely new medium that incorporates different elements in the compositional process, in particular, space.

### Space as musical element

In audio production, the process of spatializing sound objects in the sound field is necessary to render these objects distinct. Without judicious adjustments of volume and frequency content, recordings sound like an audible tangle of sounds competing for the listener's attention.

If the compositional tools and techniques of contrapuntal radio are the hardware and processes of audio production, then the sonic manuscript is what I call 'contrapuntal space.' In it, Gould brings together preexisting interview material, spliced, spatialized, and dramatized. The contrapuntal space holds the raw materials, transformed painstakingly into theatrically spatialized scenarios.

**FIGURE 6** Author's adaptation of Lorne Tulk's *Idea of North* prologue graph to illustrate proximal movement in contrapuntal space.



*North's* prologue offers a compelling example of the use of contrapuntal space (Figure 6). Increases in the volume level of individual voices affect forward movement on the proximal plane. That is, as the volume increases, the character's voice appears to move closer to the listener. As the volume decreases, there is a corresponding movement to the background. One may read this figure as one might imagine movement of actors on a stage; the closer one moves to the front of the stage, the louder their voice appears to

audience members, and conversely as their voice's volume decreases as they move backward.

Similarly, Gould achieves the same effect of proximal movement in the dining car scene as the listener appears to move between a number of different conversations. The sheer number of sounds and voices in the scene, however, complicates the effect. Surely, the affect of space was a lofty goal if not entirely successful.

### **Gould's rationale and defense of contrapuntal radio**

Not until several years after *The Idea of North* and two other radio documentaries did Gould publish a significant comment on contrapuntal radio in the form of an interview. In "Radio as Music: Glenn Gould in conversation with John Jessop," he defended his compositional techniques and made an argument for the documentaries as music. His discussion benefited from the hindsight of working with multitrack tape and stereo audio production, both of which were unavailable when *North* was in production.

The interview reads as a casual conversation that only touches on Gould's compositional voice and technique. Unfortunately, the article amounts to only a scattered series of concepts and the reader is left with the impression that Gould's composition was more by intuition than by a codified system.

*The Idea of North* is an early work, the byproduct of a compositional aesthetic in its embryonic form. The bulk of contrapuntal radio technique was developed for *North* that informed production of later documentaries: a theatrical form, the basso continuo, and experiments in space as a compositional element. An underlying compositional system clearly takes cues from Gould's experience with Baroque contrapuntal keyboard repertoire, but also from his earlier compositions. "There is a true fraternal link, both in subject matter and technique, between the vocal polyphony of 'The Idea of North' . . . and the chromatically constructed counterpoint of the quartet."<sup>33</sup>

Commentators who argue the merits of categorizing *North* as documentary, radio drama, or music may be correct on all counts. Analysts should be hard-pressed to deny the work classification as music. Gould conceived the composition techniques of contrapuntal radio in a musical idiom and they are consistent with notions of harmony (with some exposition on semantics as harmony), form and texture. In the context of Gould as composer, *The Idea of North* occupies a significant milestone in his creative output. It is an instigator of confusion for listeners and analysts but a perennial source of fascination. Indeed, it *is* opus 2 that counts.

33. Gould, quoted in Friederich, 1990, p. 185.

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