

PILGRIMAGE TO SOLITUDE

Landscapes of Glenn Gould

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

Pilgrimage to Solitude: Landscapes of Glenn Gould

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Pilgrimage to Solitude is a documentary film that explores the geographical places of significance from the life of the late Canadian pianist, composer, and writer, Glenn Gould. In *Pilgrimage*, the camera documents a number of the physical spaces that feature prominently in Gould's biography, while the soundtrack deploys a sonic technique pioneered by Gould himself in his influential series of sound documentaries: the formal treatment of layered voices which he called "contrapuntal radio." This MFA project paper contextualizes the film within the broader Gould discourse; examines the film's methods, style, and structure; theorizes the accessing of memory in an important photographic antecedent to this work; and explores aspects of the landscape tradition in the Canadian experimental documentary.

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This project is for Joceline Andersen, and for my parents, Barbara and Nathan Laurie.

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Introduction

“What more can be said about Glenn Gould?” This refrain, encountered with discouraging frequency over the course of my two-year inquiry into the life, mind, and music of the legendary Canadian pianist and thinker, is understandable and perhaps inevitable. The autumn of 2007, when I began photographing the Toronto sites most closely associated with Gould’s career, marked both the seventy-fifth anniversary of his birth and the twenty-fifth anniversary of his death, and the world was awash in tributes of all varieties and scales: from newspaper articles, to film festivals, to memorial concerts. However, the events of that year did not represent a revival of interest in some half-forgotten musical figure; rather, they were a kind of culmination. Indeed, few artists have been the source of so much enduring veneration and so much enduring controversy as Glenn Gould, such that scholars, like Kevin Bazzana, have come to speak of the emergence of a veritable Gould “industry.”¹ This industry has ceaselessly produced major biographies at roughly five-year intervals, each emphasizing a different dimension or employing a different mode of analysis (musical, philosophical, psychological); there have also been numerous commemorative films, plays, artworks, musical tributes, websites, and poems. The best of these works, have, like François Girard’s *Thirty Two Short Films About Glenn Gould* (1993), succeeded in introducing Gould’s music and thought to new audiences, though for the most part, the tributes preach to the legions of already-initiated. Even after the anniversary year, the industry continues apace, as exemplified by the forthcoming works of the filmmaker, Peter Raymont, and the philosopher, Mark Kingwell.²

It is interesting to note that while Gould’s mythology has spawned innumerable written and visual tributes, he has arguably not engendered a significant number of

¹ Kevin Bazzana, *Wondrous Strange: The Life and Art of Glenn Gould* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2003) 9.

² Raymont’s television documentary, *In the Spirit of Adventure: Glenn Gould’s Inner Voice* is currently in development, while Kingwell is due to release his book, *Glenn Gould* (part of Penguin Canada’s “Extraordinary Canadians” series) in September 2009.

pianistic imitators, despite the fact that his bold musical interpretations and repertoire choices lie at the heart of his international fame. As William Littler notes, those lacking the unparalleled technical facilities of Gould would come off as mere “caricature ... and nobody wants to go through life as a caricaturist except a caricaturist.”³ Thus, he observes, Canada’s leading contemporary interpreter of Bach’s keyboard works, Angela Hewitt, does not play in the manner of Glenn Gould.

The unique memorializing impulse that has fueled the Gould “industry” has arisen among diverse groups of individuals, reflecting both the magnetism of Gould’s personality and his broad impact on contemporary cultural life. There are, of course, the music lovers, who have long been enthralled by his path-breaking interpretations of the piano repertoire, above all his mystical Bach, but also his irreverent Beethoven and deeply expressive Brahms and Schoenberg; cultural nationalists, who see Gould as the quintessentially Canadian genius; and artists and theorists, who admire his multi-disciplinary approach, his blurring of artistic boundaries and categories, and his visionary embracing of new technologies. Edward Said, representing this last group, attributed Gould’s broad-based and lasting public admiration to his transcendence of the traditional audience-alienating role of the elite performer, noting that Gould “furnishes an example of the virtuoso purposefully going beyond the narrow confines of performance and display into a discursive realm where performance and demonstration present an argument about intellectual liberation and critique.”⁴ Nonetheless, despite this wide curiosity, or perhaps because of it, the question still remains: “What more can be said about Glenn Gould?” Less and less, it would seem, since the living memory of Gould is finally starting to dissipate, as the passage of a quarter-century has seen his friends and colleagues grow old and, in some cases, understandably tire of granting interviews. One might speculate that the looming disappearance of firsthand, living testimony will signal the demise of the Gould industry’s first, “documentary” phase; it is still unclear what will succeed it.

³ William Littler, Personal interview, 17 September 2008.

⁴ Edward Said, *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007) 121.

It is into this context, crowded and yet uncertain, that my own documentary work on Gould, entitled *Pilgrimage to Solitude*, now appears. It has evolved in growing awareness of the tributes that are ever accumulating to shape and reshape the Gould legacy, and of the ultimate impossibility of recovering a complete picture of that which no longer exists. *Pilgrimage to Solitude*, rather than attempting to produce a totalizing synthesis of a complex life and its equally complex posthumous reverberations, aspires to a more personal objective. As someone born in the historical moment of Gould's death and raised among the Toronto places – and musical traditions – where his mythology is most strongly felt, I have framed *Pilgrimage to Solitude* as a journey to re-imagine familiar sites through the eyes of another, and to inscribe my own voice within the elaborately layered counterpoint that is Glenn Gould's life after death.

1. *Pilgrimage to Solitude: Landscapes of Glenn Gould*

1.1 Project Description and Rationale

Pilgrimage to Solitude is a documentary film that explores the geographical spaces of significance from the life and career of the late Canadian pianist, composer, and writer, Glenn Gould. The project developed from an eponymous book of photographs made in October-November 2007. In that book, I presented both interior and exterior photographs of a number of Gould sites in Toronto, arranged in order of chronological significance, from his childhood school in the eastern Beaches neighbourhood to the various concert spaces where he performed and recorded and finally, to his grave in Mount Pleasant Cemetery.

The public fascination with Gould can perhaps be attributed as much to his legendary eccentricities as to his physical and intellectual mastery of the keyboard. Unfortunately, many of the so-called eccentricities have become distorted and magnified over multiple (sensationalist) retellings, to the point where they sometimes overshadow Gould's artistic accomplishments or worse, elide his fundamental humanity. However, for the most part, they are rooted in a core of documented fact. Some oft-cited examples include the intensely private, hermit-like lifestyle; the constant humming during performance; the preference for overcast days; the heavy woolen attire in all weather conditions; his early retirement from the stage and, thereafter, reluctance to leave his hometown, which was Toronto.

We know from the documentary record that Gould identified strongly with Toronto, a city that was, during his lifetime, undergoing its slow transformation from a medium-sized bastion of Anglo-Saxon morality to its current multicultural diversity. We also know that Gould was very particular about the spaces in which he lived and worked – he was notoriously sensitive to environmental factors such as light and temperature, used spaces unconventionally (with his nocturnal habits, he often blurred the distinctions between work and home), and, in a curiously paradoxical fashion, sought the condition of isolation amidst the noise and bustle of the city. Furthermore,

his attachment to the city of his birth is often seen, particularly by non-Canadians, as one of his many eccentricities in a classical-music world whose prodigies have typically flocked to Paris, London, Vienna, and New York.

With this information as a starting point, can we perhaps find in Gould's personal geography some of the characteristics of his unique artistic vision and philosophy? Can we discover how these sites and spaces continue to shape the personal identities of those who have inherited them from Gould's generation, enabling us to explore the less obvious reasons for our own identification with Gould?

In this film project, I explore cinematographically a number of physical spaces (such as rooms and landscapes) that feature prominently in Gould's biography, above all in Toronto but also elsewhere (for example, in the Northern Ontario town of Wawa where he assembled the script for the radio documentary, "The Idea of North.") In the years since his death, some of these spaces have become places of pilgrimage, marked by commemorative plaques, perhaps because we believe that some faint, spiritual remnant of those departed can be still perceived in the sites where they once existed. Another motivation for pilgrimage might lie in the belief that an artist's sense of place, a source of identification and inspiration, can be grasped by standing in his footsteps. By seeing what he saw, hearing what he heard, we think we may achieve, if not the osmotic absorption of his genius, then at least the ability to understand his work on a more deeply personal level.

At its core, this documentary project deals with the idea of pilgrimage – the spiritual impulse to return to empty sites long since abandoned by the figure whose onetime presence confers upon them, in the mind of the pilgrim, a quality of elevated importance, even sanctity. In a sense, then, *Pilgrimage to Solitude* is a contemplative, journey-type documentary, in that I attempt to recapture through a journey the artist's sense of place (including the solitude that was an essential source of inspiration to him), but inevitably grapple with the fundamental absence of the man and the impossibility of truly finding that which has disappeared.

Glenn Gould is a figure who has long been represented in terms of his relation to space and the landscape. In fact, the genesis of *Pilgrimage* depended, in part, on the

realization that Gould, despite being an artist working exclusively in the domains of sound and language, has become inextricably linked in the popular Canadian imagination with the visual image of the landscape. Gould does seem to have exercised a high degree of control over his own representation in promotional and journalistic photographs, and thus had a considerable role in fashioning the now-familiar motif of a solitary man set against the barren winter landscape. Beginning in the 1950s, Jock Carroll's photographs of Gould depict the young musician negotiating craggy shards of ice against the deep blue horizon of Lake Ontario, in poses recalling the solitary Wanderer in the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich.⁵ Two decades later, Don Hunstein, the Columbia Records staff photographer, followed Gould to a snowy park, resulting in the now-iconic image of the artist huddled contemplatively on a bench looking outwards at a landscape of bare trees and yet more ice.⁶ Recalling such a photo shoot in the mid-1970s, Hunstein noted, "Glenn stopped the car, got out, and stood looking over a frozen lake surrounded by pines, under a heavy sky. Once again, he had found his landscape."⁷ John McGreevy's film, *Glenn Gould's Toronto* (1979), part of his *Cities* series, highlights Gould's affinity for solitary spaces by placing him in just the opposite environments: crowded urban spaces such as the Canadian National Exhibition and the then-newly built Eaton Centre – whose construction signaled the death knell for Gould's beloved recording space, the Eaton Auditorium – where the musician seems genuinely ill at ease, creating the unusual impression of a city-dweller whose sanity depended on finding rare places of escape *within* the chaos. In McGreevy's film, Gould finds such a place at the Toronto Zoo, where he sings Mahler to the elephants. Despite all this visual self-fashioning, the association of Gould as a solitary figure against the landscape that has become such a dominant motif in, for instance, the *Thirty Two Short Films*, stems, above all, from his groundbreaking

⁵ Attila Csampai, *Glenn Gould: Photographische Suiten* (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 1995) 54-56. See also: Jock Carroll, *Glenn Gould: Some Portraits of the Artist as a Young Man* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1995).

⁶ *Glenn Gould: A Life in Pictures* (Toronto: Doubleday, 2002) 6-7.

⁷ Rhona Bergman, *The Idea of Gould* (Philadelphia: Lev Publishing, 1999) 110.

renderings of the landscape in the realm of sound: the three radio documentaries of the Solitude Trilogy, and particularly its first installment, "The Idea of North." It was in these works that he most thoroughly spelled out his philosophy of solitude, and that he most richly explored the complex and often contradictory reactions of the psyche to a range of isolated spaces.

Thus, to explore the intersection between Gould's art and the sense of place in *Pilgrimage*, I adopt a sonic technique pioneered by Glenn Gould himself in the Solitude Trilogy: the formal treatment of voices which he called "contrapuntal radio." In "The Idea of North" (1967), about life in northern Canada, "The Latecomers" (1969), about the outposts of Newfoundland, and "The Quiet in the Land" (1977), about rural Mennonite life in Manitoba, Gould, reflecting his lifelong interest in Baroque counterpoint, experimented with simultaneously overlaying separate vocal lines (as spoken by his interviewees) to create a polyphonic, "musical" effect. In *Pilgrimage*, I deploy the contrapuntal radio technique of layered interviews, integrated with static or slowly moving images of the Gould spaces to suggest intersections between his creative personality that expressed itself through sound and the spaces depicted onscreen. To use a musical allusion, the visual imagery acts as a kind of "basso continuo," providing a sense of rootedness or situatedness (in the landscape) to the spoken lines interacting above it.

1.2 *Documentaris personae*

The contrapuntal soundtrack for *Pilgrimage to Solitude* features four speakers, all of whom were friends and colleagues of Gould in his creative maturity. All were associated in various capacities with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), and, as such, had firsthand experiences of Gould's innovations in the use of recording and broadcast technologies, one of which included contrapuntal radio. They have also been prominent voices in the posthumous discourse surrounding Gould's legacy, surfacing as major sources in the published biographies and, in some cases, producing memorial responses of their own. Nevertheless, they remain a diverse group, full of contrasting perspectives and insights on the mind and music of Gould (who was known to compartmentalize his relationships to the extent that his friends often had little sense of who else he numbered among them),⁸ and thus are ideally suited for the contrapuntal treatment.

There is William Littler, a writer and broadcaster, who was appointed music critic for the *Toronto Star* in 1966. A pianist himself, he wrote countless reviews and articles on Gould for the paper, including its multiple obituary tributes that insightfully drew together the main themes of his life amidst the shock of his sudden death.⁹ Littler had paid a late-night visit to the studio where Gould was editing "The Idea of North," and explored the connections between the radio documentaries and Gould's personality in his article, "The Quest for Solitude," published in John McGreevy's 1983 anthology, *Glenn Gould Variations: By Himself and His Friends*. Littler was also a neighbour of Gould's at the Park Lane Apartments on St. Clair Avenue, and they occasionally drove home together; he recalls, "As befitted my humbler station in life, I was on the third floor, while Gould was in the penthouse."¹⁰

⁸ Interview with Lorne Tulk, 19 December 2008.

⁹ William Littler, "His curiosity made label of pianist so inadequate," *Toronto Star*, 5 October 1982: E1. See also: William Littler, "Glenn Gould: Inside the mind of a genius," *Toronto Star*, 9 October 1982: F1.

¹⁰ Interview with William Littler, 17 September 2008.

Next, there is Margaret Pacsu, an American-born broadcaster who worked as a television news anchor and hosted a music show, "Listen to the Music," on CBC radio. Pacsu collaborated with Gould on his *Silver Jubilee Album* in 1980 (recorded in recognition of Gould's 25th year with Columbia Records), acting as a moderator in scripted discussions among Gould's comic personae and her own alter-ego, Márta Hortaványi, a Marxist musicologist from Hungary (Pacsu notes that Hortaványi was modeled after her own mother, a Hungarian-born pianist and "Bartók groupie").¹¹ Pacsu also makes an appearance in the *Thirty Two Short Films*, whose twenty-fourth installment consists of a brief interview against the familiar backdrop of Lake Ontario, on the topic of Gould's dependence on prescription drugs.

Vincent Tovell represents the voice of the previous generation. A decade older than Gould, Tovell was a prominent producer of arts and history television programming for CBC, working on documentary series such as *Images of Canada*, which, in collaboration with thinkers like Northrop Frye, explored Canadian history and identity through landscape, architecture, and visual culture. (David Hogarth makes a strong case for the exceptionality of Tovell's films, noting that they had an abstract style between "visual essay" and "poetry," and rather like Gould's own radio work, challenged "the indexical authority claimed by NFB documentaries and even journalistic and vérité television reporting at the time.")¹² Tovell interviewed Gould several times (e.g., "At Home with Glenn Gould," 1959), and produced various musical programs with the pianist during the 1960s. After Gould's death, Tovell co-directed (with Eric Till) the first posthumous documentary on the musician, *Glenn Gould: A Portrait*.

Among the four interviewees, it is perhaps only the sound technician, Lorne Tulk, who could be counted among Gould's closest friends. Tulk first met Gould as a boy on Christmas Eve 1950, after cutting an acetate record of the pianist's first radio

¹¹ Interview with Margaret Pacsu, 4 February 2009.

¹² David Hogarth, *Documentary Television in Canada: From National Public Service to Global Marketplace* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002) 84.

recital in his father's recording studio.¹³ He reconnected with Gould fifteen years later, while working on Gould's humorous radio essay, "The Search for Petula Clark," and subsequently assisted, as a technician for the CBC's *Ideas* series, on "The Idea of North" and the later documentaries. Though an employee of the CBC, Tulk also worked after hours for Gould, recording and editing his musical recordings at Eaton Auditorium throughout the 1970s.

¹³ Bergman, 68.

1.3 The contrapuntal soundtrack in *Pilgrimage to Solitude*

The idea of adopting Glenn Gould's contrapuntal radio technique of layered voices for *Pilgrimage to Solitude* arose gradually out of the contemplation of a soundtrack that could accompany the visual imagery of landscapes. It evolved from the initial decision to conduct audio-only interviews with Gould's friends rather than onscreen ones; I reasoned that one-on-one audio interviews would be more intimate, with less self-consciousness and greater candor. However, once adopted, the dominance of the contrapuntal soundtrack in determining the work's overall structure was held to be inviolable, leading to a somewhat unconventional working methodology, more akin to radio than to film. Thus, the resulting work is perhaps better described as a "sound documentary with images" than as a film. In this regard, I was influenced by Judith Pearlman's film version of *The Idea of North* (1970), which sets Gould's radio documentary to a series of evocative images (some overlapping), illustrating the five characters' divergent conceptions of the North as well as their comparatively sedate southern retreats. Although Pearlman is perhaps too modest in her characterization of the film as an early example of the "music video,"¹⁴ such a description does indeed speak to the fact that the intricate construction of Gould's soundtrack, being dependent on the subtle, momentary interactions of spoken words, would not permit any significant re-editing of sound in the service of pictures. Thus, for *Pilgrimage*, I worked towards a final "sound lock," and cut the pictures to fit its themes, harmonies and rhythms.

Gould's works in contrapuntal radio have been described both as documentaries and as musical compositions (Vincent Tovell favours the term "operas")¹⁵, pointing to the technique's most remarkable feature: its ability to evoke simultaneously both the linguistic-communicative and musical facets of spontaneous

¹⁴ Judith Pearlman, "Director's Introduction," *The Idea of Gould*, Cinemathèque Ontario, Toronto, 26 April 2008.

¹⁵ Vincent Tovell et al, "Gould the Communicator," National Library of Canada, Ottawa, 25 May 1988, *The Glenn Gould Archive*, 19 March 2008, <<http://collectionsCanada.ca/glenn Gould/028010-502.8-e.html>>.

human speech. Reacting against longstanding broadcast conventions that accorded supremacy to a single vocal line, lulling the audience into passive agreement with its hegemonic message, Gould intended contrapuntal radio to present a challenge to his listeners. At the same time, he believed himself to have been successful in proving that the listener could, in fact, absorb multiple streams of information at once, while appreciating the “musical” whole created by their overlapping textures.¹⁶ (Gould was hesitant to make the claim, sometimes advanced by others, that contrapuntal radio involved the transposition of highly regimented musical *forms* such as fugue onto spontaneous human utterances taken from interviews; he preferred to speak of creating musical “textures.”)¹⁷ The fact is, however, that the experience of contrapuntal radio varies from listener to listener, and from first to subsequent listenings: the power of contrapuntal radio lies therein. During a first-time listening, the multiple lines can induce a certain aural fatigue, but over repeated listenings this fatigue subsides and the listener may uncover previously hidden juxtapositions – of argument, emphasis, wording, accent, harmony, rhythm, etc. – and thus, perceive the work’s balance of music and meaning freshly each time. For this reason, “radio,” with its limited and unpredictable broadcast schedules, is perhaps not the ideal medium for presenting the contrapuntal sound documentary; portable recordings for personal use (LP, CD, MP3) are better suited to allowing the repeated listenings over which the spectrum of contrapuntal experiences can be had.

As documentary, each of the works in the Solitude Trilogy features an ensemble of interviewees who represent a range of divergent viewpoints on the condition of solitude in isolated regions of Canada. Gould conceived of the contrapuntal structure as a way “in which one could feel free to have different approaches and responses to the same problems emerge simultaneously.”¹⁸ The principle of presenting opposing viewpoints is standard within documentary and journalistic practice, but the onscreen “talking heads” in a film by Errol Morris are not implied to be in literal conversation

¹⁶ Glenn Gould, “Radio as Music: Glenn Gould in Conversation with John Jessop,” *The Glenn Gould Reader*, ed. Tim Page (New York: Vintage Books, 1984) 380.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 379.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 376.

with each other, even if the filmmaker's own questions (and physical presence as a mediator) are routinely omitted in the final cut. In the discourse surrounding Gould's radio documentaries, the question of fiction often arises, since the speakers did not meet each other and thus the apparent "conversations" and "debates" between them are in fact simulated by Gould, the omniscient editor. Gould acknowledged that by editing his questions out and framing the counterpoint as "conversations" (which, in the case of "North," are implied through sound effects to be taking place in a railcar heading into the tundra), he was in effect trying to create fictional, dramatic scenes out of documentary interviews.¹⁹ Although this could be said to raise ethical concerns about de-contextualizing the interviews (not to mention eliding Gould's penchant, while interviewing, to "lead the witness"), the overlapping nature of the spoken lines and the semantic discontinuities among them ensure that Gould never does quite convincingly create the illusion of heated conversations occurring within a dramatic narrative. The fact that contrapuntal radio is a ultimately form of documentary collage is not lost on the listener; to this end, Paul Hjartarson notes, "the effect is less of dramatic interaction than of five monologues on a common theme."²⁰

A major impetus in adopting contrapuntal radio for a documentary about Gould was that it proves an ideal medium in which to raise questions about received mythologies, whether those about the meaning of the Canadian North or those that have become encrusted around the figure of Gould himself. By assigning equal sonic weighting to differing opinions and interpretations, one can emphasize the relativity and subjectivity in our perceptions of a documentary subject, in this case, a departed and legendary individual. Thus, we can chip away at the monolithic biographical representations that attempt to elide or rationalize apparent contradictions and construct a singular, totalizing account out of a necessarily fragmented memory. Hjartarson aptly notes that it was through contrapuntal radio that Gould could question "both the idea of North he and other Canadians had inherited and his own

¹⁹ Gould, "Radio as Music," 377-378.

²⁰ Paul Hjartarson, "Of Inward Journeys and Interior Landscapes: Glenn Gould, Lawren Harris, and 'The Idea of North'," *Essays on Canadian Writing* 59 (Fall 1996): 74.

propensity 'to draw all sorts of metaphorical allusions based on what was really a very limited knowledge of the country and a very casual exposure to it.'²¹ Thus, Kevin McNeilly observes that, unlike many documentaries, the objective was not to suggest "a single topos, a functional 'idea' of North, but a site at which many voices and 'ideas' coalesce, antagonize, support, subvert, mingle, and separate."²² Quoting Gould, Hjartarson asserts that Gould was able to shed his romantic preconceptions about his subject by creating "a space within which 'discordant ideas' about the North could 'be emphasized in all their jarring dissonance.'"²³ Dissonances beg resolution, and Hjartarson argues compellingly that Gould's attempted resolution of the documentary's contrapuntal fragmentation, through Wally Maclean's moving epilogue that philosophizes the North as "the moral equivalent of war," "unwittingly reinscribes the conception of North he set out to question."²⁴ I have attempted to address this apparent problem in the concluding section of *Pilgrimage*, allowing the contrapuntal layering to increase in density until, for the first time in the work, all four voices are heard simultaneously: no attempt is made to privilege a single speaker's testimony over the other three, for the sake of constructing some dramatically satisfying synthesis.

As a documentary work about Glenn Gould that turns the "contrapuntal radio" technique back on itself to examine the mind of its originator, it seems fitting that *Pilgrimage to Solitude* should begin with an exploration of the motivations underlying Gould's own first foray into contrapuntal radio, "The Idea of North." The choice of "North" as both model and subject was not a difficult one for me to make. Compared to his later, stereo works in the Solitude Trilogy, the monaural "North" is quite restrained in its contrapuntal explorations, some of which, Gould later admitted, first emerged as a way of fitting excess content within his limited allotment of airtime.²⁵ It is nevertheless a singularly powerful work, achieving such a fine balance between clarity

²¹ Hjartarson, 83-84.

²² Kevin McNeilly, "Listening, Nordicity, Community: Glenn Gould's 'The Idea of North'," *Essays on Canadian Writing* 59 (Fall 1996):87.

²³ Hjartarson, 84.

²⁴ Ibid., 84.

²⁵ Gould, "Radio as Music," 376.

and complexity – and between the musical and linguistic properties of speech – that it is perhaps the best-regarded item in his entire non-pianistic oeuvre. It also reflects a core preoccupation of Gould's that was central to his self-identification. Gould's passion for northern-ness located his musical tastes towards the Scandinavian and away from the Mediterranean; compelled him to record, against his record company's wishes, a fictionalized "performance" aboard a Beaufort Sea oil derrick to an audience of seals and walruses;²⁶ and it persuaded him, one day in 1965, to board the Muskeg Express and head north 1,015 miles to Churchill, Manitoba, on a journey wherein would emerge the first seeds of his idea for "The Idea of North."²⁷ It has often been noted that Gould undertook his northern journey at a pivotal point in his life, having just retired from the concert stage at the age of thirty-one. As such, the voyage marks an important dividing line in his biography, between his youthful fame as an international virtuoso performer and his more reclusive maturity in which he explored new technological means of achieving, as William Littler puts it, "communication in isolation."²⁸ In light of all this, the soundtrack in *Pilgrimage* begins with a ten-minute "Return to North" that introduces Gould by way of his fascination with northern solitude and then discusses the genesis of his first documentary and the impact it made on its first listeners in 1967. Furthermore, the opening section takes a number of structural and stylistic cues from "North," while departing from Gould's model in several significant ways.

Gould begins the prologue to "North" with a statement that has become emblematic of his radio documentaries generally, in the way the Aria from the Goldberg Variations has, to a much greater degree, come to stand in for Gould's pianistic output: this is Marianne Schroeder's gently lilting opening line, "I was fascinated by the country as such," which emerges almost imperceptibly from the silence and begins a highly sensory monologue on the nurse's first impressions of the

²⁶ Otto Friedrich, *Glenn Gould: A Life and Variations* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1989) 258-259.

²⁷ Bazzana, 294.

²⁸ William Littler, "The Quest for Solitude," *Glenn Gould Variations: By Himself and his Friends*, ed. John McGreevy (Toronto: Doubleday, 1983) 223.

Canadian arctic.²⁹ At the outset of *Pilgrimage*, Margaret Pacsu's rather foreboding statement, "The North is *not* my favourite place in the world," immediately recalls Schroeder's in pitch and metre, while at the same time opposing it in perspective (though Pacsu's next lines reveal a more nuanced and ambivalent view of the northern experience, more closely aligned with Schroeder's mixture of awe and anxiety than her opening line would suggest). In "North," the first contrapuntal texture to emerge is that of the Baroque trio sonata, as Schroeder is joined by the male voices of Frank Vallee, a sociologist, and then Robert Phillips, a government official. *Pilgrimage* likewise features a trio of staggered entrances, as speakers offer perspectives on Gould's relationship to the North: Vincent Tovell tempers Pacsu's initial skepticism with a philosophical meditation on "the arctic dimension" of Gould's imagination and its religious overtones, and then Lorne Tulk counters abruptly that "It had nothing to do with North ... what it had to do with was solitude."

The second half of the opening section transitions from a general discussion of the North to a series of recollections about "The Idea of North" specifically, in which the speakers recount their initial impressions of the contrapuntal radio technique and offer some speculations as to its workings upon the listener's mind. This passage was conceived as a "process about a process," in which each speaker discusses counterpoint while simultaneously becoming a part of it, following Gould's own example in his clever vocal piece, "So you want to write a fugue?," which he described as a "fugue about the writing of fugues."³⁰ In this passage, William Littler describes the way Gould edited the voices of interviewees who had not met each other to create simulated conversations between them; next, Tulk enters to offer an analysis of how contrapuntal radio worked on various cognitive levels; finally, Pacsu enters and exclaims above them, "Yes, it was polyphony!" Soon after this climax, Littler's voice fades away, and then Tulk follows, leaving Pacsu to end the "Return to North" on a bittersweet note: "I

²⁹ Glenn Gould, "Prologue from 'The Idea of North'," *The Glenn Gould Reader*, ed. Tim Page (New York: Vintage Books, 1984) 389.

³⁰ Glenn Gould, "So You Want to Write a Fugue?," *The Glenn Gould Reader*, ed. Tim Page (New York: Vintage Books, 1984) 234.

had never heard anything like that before. And I hear it and it doesn't have the same impact on me, of course, now..."

The next two sections, like the middle five in "North," are far less contrapuntal and more monophonic, permitting each speaker more time to reminisce unchallenged and allowing the listener a temporary break from the challenging juxtaposition of what Gould called "elements in a state of flux, interplay, [and] nervous agitation."³¹ These two sections explore the themes of "Performance and its perils" and "Conversations with Gould." In the former, the four speakers discuss Gould's anxiety about the stage and his desire to replace a culture of live, public performances with an emphasis on studio-based recording. The tensions between seeing and listening in the experience of music are explored, the hybrid space of the televised concert is discussed, and the prevailing view of Gould's aversion to live performance is offset by counter-examples. In the latter section, which is the least contrapuntal and is meant to evoke a telephone exchange, Pacsu, Littler, and Tovell each describe memorable conversations they had with Gould, debating the meaning of his alter-egos and emphasizing his remarkable affinity for the telephone instead of direct human contact.

The fourth and final section mostly departs from the example of "North," whose epilogue consists of the stirring soliloquy by Wally Maclean against the background of Sibelius' Fifth Symphony, in which he expounds on the human struggle against hostile nature and its importance as a unifying tie with which civilization binds itself together. Although contemplated in the early stages of scripting, I dispensed with the soliloquy idea in favour of a recapitulation of the first section's contrapuntal texture. In this section, Tulk and Pacsu remember the shock of Gould's death, followed by a sober assessment of the musician's legacy from Littler. Following "North," we hear music for the first time: Gould playing Brahms' *Intermezzo in A Major*, Op. 118 No. 2. As one of Brahms' last works, the *Intermezzo* here is meant to suggest finality. It is at this moment that the absent figure in the landscape becomes present and embodied in the soundscape. Each speaker offers one last statement on Gould, and for the first time in the work, we hear four-part spoken counterpoint: Tulk remembers an

³¹ Gould, "Radio as Music," 380.

impromptu concert Gould gave at the St. Lawrence Centre towards the end of his life, Littler contemplates Gould's importance in the history of music, Pacsu discusses the local places which remind her of Gould, and Tovell returns his thoughts to the vast spaces of the North. Mirroring the opening, the last two speakers to be audible are Pacsu and Tovell. Tovell expresses the Frye-inflected idea of a journey without arrival: "I keep remembering, he was only fifty. He was still discovering himself as he got older. Most of us, I hope, do." Pacsu, speaking about Gould's gravesite, says: "That whole little area of his with the tree... that's a beautiful place." With this statement, she evokes a peace that was noticeably absent in the statement that began the work: "The North is *not* my favourite place in the world."

1.4 Tissue of memory: The Super 8mm imagery in *Pilgrimage to Solitude*

Along with the use of contrapuntal radio, the decision to shoot the project on Super 8mm motion picture film represents a key moment in the work's evolution towards a final form. Initially, I proposed shooting *Pilgrimage* in high-definition (HD) video; this seemed to follow naturally from the book project, which had been photographed digitally. After undertaking HD shoots at the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C. (the site of Gould's U.S. debut performance in January 1955) and at Gould's cottage at Uptergrove on Lake Simcoe, I was dissatisfied with the results, feeling that, for a project whose goal was to conjure a sense of memory and fleetingness, HD, in its extreme visual sharpness and clarity, could achieve little more than what I termed at the time "a banal indexicality." HD, it seemed, was so crystalline in its indexical rendering of the present that it overwhelmed any contemplation – nostalgic or otherwise – of the un-seeable past. Out of this realization soon followed the choice to shoot *Pilgrimage* on Super 8mm film, an anachronistic and likely dying cinematographic medium now primarily found in archives, whose usage evokes both memory and the intimacy of home-movies and other personal modes of filmmaking, among them the characteristically Canadian "landscape film." It is also, fittingly, a medium contemporary to Gould's maturity, having been introduced in 1965 (the year of his voyage north to Churchill on the Muskeg Express), and likewise in steep decline by the time his death in late 1982. In addition to these desirable cultural associations, the medium intrinsically possesses visual qualities amenable to my objectives: the prominent film grain, high-contrast look, and imperfect, slightly jittery registration serve to imbue even long-held, stationary takes with movement, rhythm, and a sense of fleeting time. Addressing the fundamental qualities that make film, as opposed to video, the quintessentially memorial medium, Rick Hancox, whose own film work will be examined in Chapter 3, suggests that "the idea of the *latent* image – exposed film waiting for development – is one of the key differences between film, and its bond with

the past, and video, with its window on the present.”³² Quoting Babette Mangolte, he adds that, “[grain] in film ‘constantly trades spaces and places from one frame to the next ... reinforcing the demonstration of time passing,’” and yielding a sense of temporal difference that is perceived by the viewer as a kind of “pathos.”³³



Fig. 1
Statue of Glenn Gould, Toronto
Pilgrimage to Solitude
Super 8mm film still

At this historical moment, Super 8 seems to be a medium in a reprieve of unknown duration; camera equipment for the film gauge has not been manufactured on a significant scale for nearly thirty years, and the discontinuation, in 2005, of the legendary Kodachrome-40 reversal stock was widely seen as the medium’s death knell. The grainy Ektachrome-64T stock that replaced Kodachrome is readily usable by only a subset of higher-end cameras, rendering obsolete all the home-movie cameras built exclusively to expose for the dominant film speeds of the 1960s and 1970s.³⁴ However, although it has long been supplanted by video as an affordable home-movie format

³² Rick Hancox, “Film – Is There a Future in Our Past? (The Afterlife of Latent Images),” Keynote speech, “Is Film Dead? A Symposium on the State of Celluloid,” Atlantic Filmmakers Cooperative, Halifax, 23 March 2007.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Jürgen Lossau, “Winners and losers: The ASA/ISO settings of new films render many cameras useless,” *Smallformat 2* (2006): 19.

(especially since the demise of sound film), the potential of Super 8 as a cinematographic medium has, in a sense, greatly expanded. High-speed negative stocks originally developed for commercial filmmaking are currently available in the small gauge, allowing shooting in a much wider variety of lighting conditions than Kodachrome could have ever permitted, and a small community of entrepreneurs now provides high-quality, timed video transfers that have enhanced the Super 8 workflow with the full range of digital non-linear editing capabilities. Despite this, as a vulnerable medium on borrowed time, the act of filming in Super 8 is always an act of remembrance, of looking backwards, especially since the future looms uncertainly (a single executive decision from Kodak could guarantee its prompt extinction). As such, it is not only suited to evoking the past in its projected images, but also to reenacting the past through its antiquated process: it is therefore a good medium for a pilgrimage.

Visually, the work consists of long stationary shots, slow pans and tracks, and time-lapses, documenting the sites in which Gould lived and worked. My principal influence in the filmmaker's use of landscape and architectural cinematography to evoke memory is Claude Lanzmann, whose seminal work, *Shoah* (1985), although dealing with an altogether more solemn subject, similarly combines oral testimony with the physical passage through an empty space in contemplation of its inaccessible human past. (The accessing of memory, and the tension between the past and present significances of places, in what I call the "pilgrimage-type landscape film," will be discussed at length in Chapter 3). In contemplating a structure for the work, I considered exploring the Gould spaces in an order reflecting the chronology of the artist's life, perhaps following the tripartite division of my photo-book into the chapters "1. Formation," "2. Maturity," and "3. Legacy." However, as noted above, the contrapuntal soundtrack made the images subordinate in the work's final form (recall the description of a "sound documentary *with* images"). Thus, the opening "Return to North" is accompanied by images of Wawa's winter landscape, the section on "Performance and its perils" has at its centre the Eaton Auditorium where Gould performed and recorded over so many years, and the discussion of his death brings the viewer to Mount Pleasant Cemetery. Through the 39-minute span of the work, the

camera, responding to sound cues in the counterpoint, travels across Gould's personal geography. At this point, it is appropriate to enumerate and briefly discuss the visited sites here.

The story of Glenn Gould begins in Toronto's Beaches neighbourhood, which, in the year of his birth (1932), was an insular, village-like enclave at the city's eastern fringe that jealously guarded its Anglo-Protestant character. For Gould, solitude could have been found along the lakeshore, scarcely two blocks from his childhood home. Writing in the late 1970s, Gould recalled his sense of excitement when, after the completion of the St. Lawrence Seaway, he would "prowl the Toronto waterfront and encounter ships that had brought Volkswagens from Germany or TV sets from Japan, and had names like *Wolfgang Russ* or *Munishima Maru*."³⁵ At the interface between land and water, Gould could contemplate these travelers from distant worlds as they passed silently across the gray horizon.

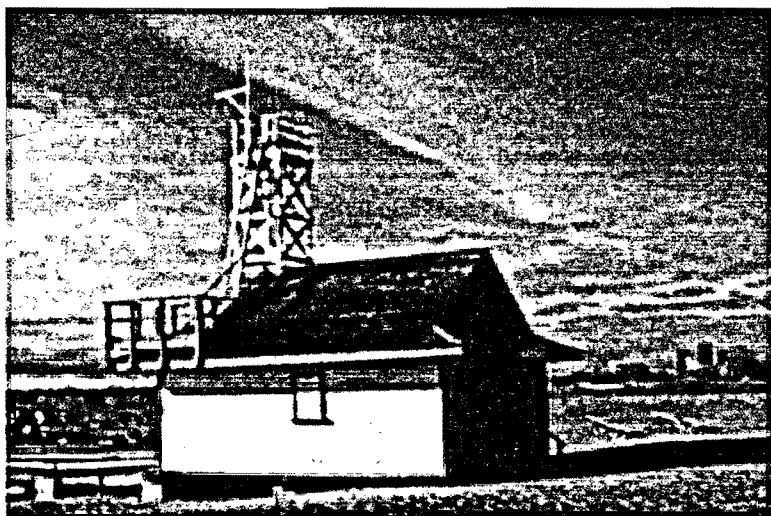


Fig. 2
Leuty Lifeguard Station, The Beaches, Toronto
Pilgrimage to Solitude
Super 8mm film still

³⁵ Glenn Gould, "Toronto," *Glenn Gould Variations: By Himself and His Friends*, ed. John McGreevy (Toronto: Doubleday, 1983) 86.

Outside the city, another place of escape for Gould was his winterized cottage at Uptergrove, on Lake Simcoe, near Orillia. Here, he recuperated from the early concert tours and recording sessions, in a setting where his international fame, although understood by his neighbours in the village, did not entail his singling-out for different treatment. He sometimes spoke of a recurring nightmare in which Uptergrove's inhabitants had completely vanished, leaving no traces of life in the landscape; we might infer from this that, for Gould, what the area provided was not an arctic state of total solitude, but a quiet community "to which he could return again and again, certain in his belief that he was immeasurably enriched by its existence."³⁶

Gould lived until his late twenties in his parents' middle-class Beaches home at 32 Southwood Drive. It was here where his mother provided his first musical instruction. As the clouds of war descended on Europe in autumn 1939, Gould reluctantly began his first foray into the worlds of school and other children, at Williamson Road Public School, a red-brick building with a vast, muddy field out back. The Gould house was directly adjacent to the Williamson schoolyard, and is visible through a chain-link fence, which stands between the comforts of a home he would not leave until his late twenties and an institution he found deeply alienating.

At Malvern Collegiate, another severe brick house of learning dotted with Art-Deco friezes extolling the virtues of an athletic (un-Gouldian) masculinity, Gould's uneasy relationship with conventional learning continued, while his renown as pianist and composer grew steadily. At Malvern, he often performed at concerts and assemblies; Kevin Bazzana recounts a notable concert that took place in 1948, when he accompanied a pianist friend in Beethoven's Fifth Piano Concerto (the "Emperor" Concerto). The piano part itself is a work of utmost virtuosity, but Gould undertook the arguably more ambitious role of performing the orchestral accompaniment on the organ.³⁷

³⁶ Angela Addison, "The Ultimate Soloist: A Portrait of Glenn Gould," *Bulletin of The Glenn Gould Society* 5.2 (October 1988), *The Glenn Gould Archive*, 30 September 2008, <www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/glenn Gould/028010-502.14-e.html>.

³⁷ Bazzana, 55.

From early childhood, he attended concerts of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra under its venerable conductor Sir Ernest MacMillan at Massey Hall, a venue at which he would later perform on many occasions. He performed also at the Eaton Auditorium at Yonge and College Streets, and, after retiring from the stage, used the facility for late-night recordings until its closure in the late 1970s (he continued to record sporadically in the unheated auditorium, which lay in a state of decay for two decades, and has been only recently restored to its original splendour under the name The Carlu).³⁸

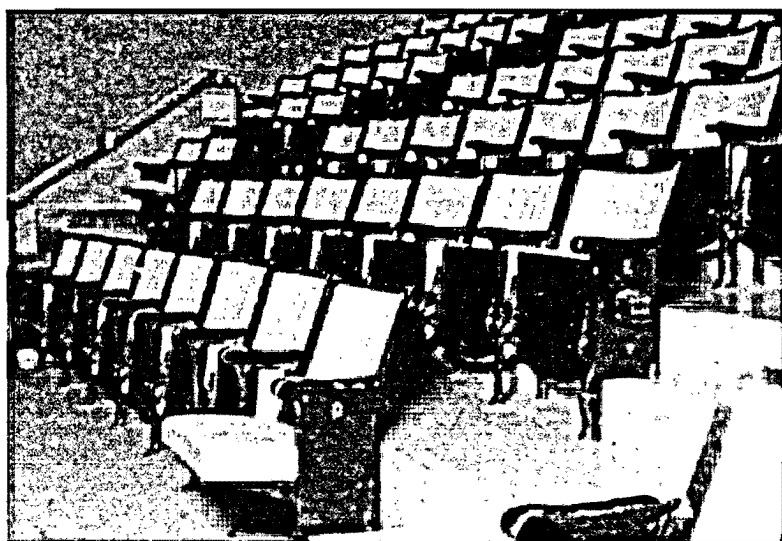


Fig. 3
Eaton Auditorium, Toronto
Pilgrimage to Solitude
Super 8mm film still

Finally persuaded to leave his parents' house in 1959, Gould moved into a mansion outside the city, but seized by something either akin to agoraphobia or an embarrassment of riches, quickly departed it in favour of a midtown apartment. After experimenting with various living arrangements, he finally settled for a penthouse in the Art-Deco Park Lane residences at 110 St. Clair Avenue West.³⁹ It was here that he lived during the last two decades of his life. Gould's nocturnal lifestyle led him to

³⁸ Bazzana, 440.

³⁹ Ibid., 238-239.

frequent a nearby late-night diner, Fran's Restaurant. While the restaurant's St. Clair location has closed, the original College Street location remains, and given its extreme proximity to the Eaton Auditorium where Gould spent many a late-night recording session, it is perhaps not too fanciful to assume he occupied a solitary booth there also.

Aside from the one voyage to Churchill, Gould's only experiences of the North (if one can call it that) were his occasional drives along Route 17, following the shore of Lake Superior. Although south of the 49th parallel and as such, hardly qualifying as "North" from a latitudinal standpoint, the timber and mining towns of the region do, as Gould noted in one of his radio essays, constitute the northernmost extent of continuous settlement in this part of central Canada.⁴⁰ A way station along this route is the town of Wawa, best known for its large statue of a Canada goose erected to mark the completion of the highway, and it was there to which Gould retreated, in 1967, to assemble the script for his first contrapuntal documentary, "The Idea of North."

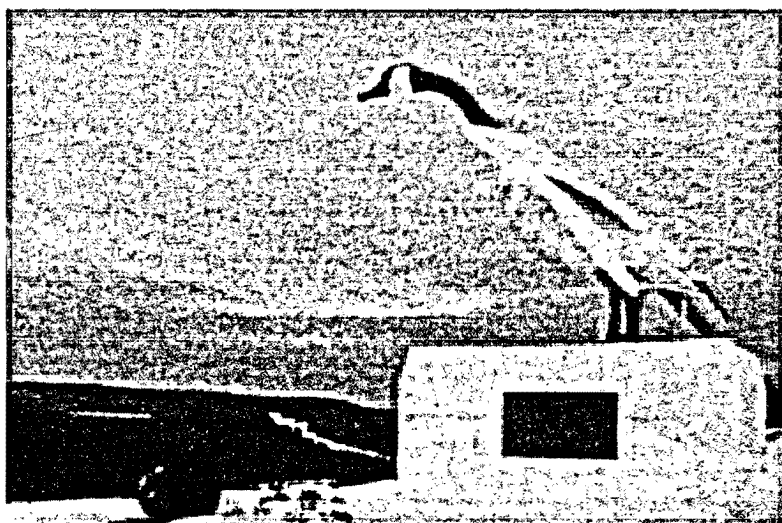


Fig. 4
Canada goose statue, Wawa, Ontario
Pilgrimage to Solitude
Super 8mm film still

⁴⁰ Glenn Gould, "The Search for Petula Clark," *The Glenn Gould Reader*, ed. Tim Page (New York: Vintage Books, 1984) 300.

Towards the end of his life, Gould occupied a studio at the Inn on the Park, a modern glass-and-concrete hotel commanding a high point over the wooded parklands of the Don Valley, and whose 24-hour room service suited his nocturnal working schedule.⁴¹ It was here that he and Margaret Pacsu recorded the conversation segments for the *Silver Jubilee Album*; he was also at the Inn when he suffered his fatal stroke. I photographed the remnants of the now-defunct hotel from the forests of the adjacent Wilket Creek Park, one of many branches of the city's ravine system. Robert Fulford, a journalist and one of Gould's closest childhood friends from the Beaches, asserts that such ravines "are the heart of the city's emotional geography," as canals are to Venice and hills to San Francisco.⁴² Fulford provides an insight into the appeal of the Inn's location for Gould, observing that, "[because] of the ravines, a Torontonion can explore nature with an ease that's impossible for many people living in the country."⁴³ In the ravines, Gould could find a measure of anonymity and restorative solitude more easily than he could near his mid-town apartment.

On September 27, 1982, just two days after his fiftieth birthday, Glenn Gould suffered a stroke. On October 4 he was dead. First coming to the world's attention in his youth with a dazzling, staccato re-interpretation of a then-little-known set of variations by Bach, at the end of his life he chose to revisit those same variations, imbuing them with an austere, pious beauty, befitting this self-proclaimed "Last Puritan," who loved his city less for its bustle than for its order and tranquility. The first three bars of the *Goldberg Variations* adorn his flat grave marker in Mount Pleasant Cemetery. Meanwhile, as tributes to Gould often remark, his music, on a copper record in the Voyager spacecraft, plunges ever deeper into the solitude of space.

⁴¹ Bazzana, 417.

⁴² Robert Fulford, *Accidental City: The Transformation of Toronto* (Toronto: Macfarlane Walter & Ross, 1995) 37.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 38.

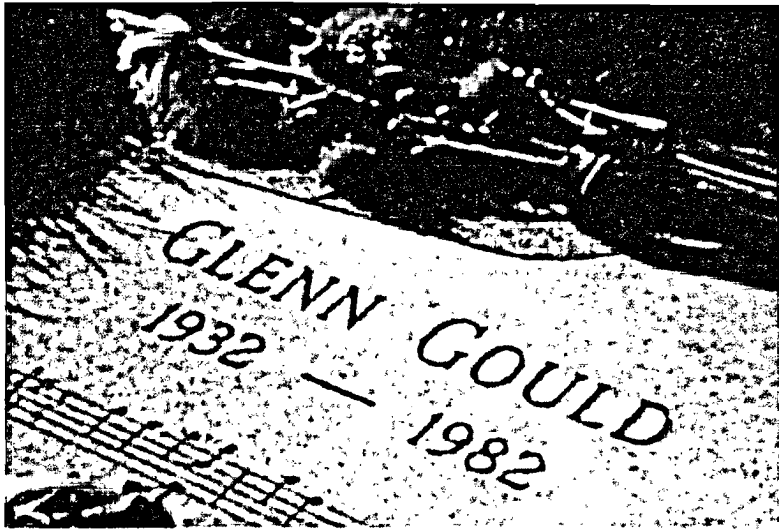


Fig. 5
Grave of Glenn Gould, Mount Pleasant Cemetery
Pilgrimage to Solitude
Super 8mm film still

2. Accessing memory in images of space: Robert Burley's "Places of Glenn Gould"

Shortly after the completion of the *Pilgrimage to Solitude* book in the autumn of 2007, I became aware of a similar project carried out nearly two decades earlier during the winter of 1989-90 by the Toronto photographer, Robert Burley. Commissioned by the Swiss publication *Du: die Zeitschrift für Kultur*, Burley's "Places of Glenn Gould" project, shot with a 4 x 5 view camera, documented significant sites from Gould's biography as they appeared a little more than seven years after the pianist's death. Burley's images, like those that would follow in my own *Pilgrimage*, all depict unpopulated spaces, similarly suggesting the conditions of both solitude and absence. (One could imply the closeness between the two conditions by rendering absence as "solitude minus one"). By way of comparison, Burley's photographs, in keeping with his background as a topographic photographer, generally present more consistent spatial characteristics than those in *Pilgrimage*, where close-up images of details and textures – suggesting both a greater latitude for compositional variety and a desire to depict the passage of time by highlighting the deterioration of surfaces – mingle amongst images of landscape and architecture.

Burley's images could be divided into two main categories: outdoor images of Gould sites that seem to serve a soberly denotative, "documentary" function, and interior shots that are affectively more subtle, supplementing their denotation with a rich complex of connotations, suggestive of the spaces' former uses and memorial significance. An inquiry into the unequal impacts of the two categories raises important questions about what exactly constitutes "memory," and how it is accessed to varying degrees of success in such images of interior and exterior space. In this chapter, I will examine how Burley, in his own pilgrimage to the places of Glenn Gould, negotiates the problems and opportunities presented by ostensibly memorial images, within the frameworks provided by two, very different theorists of memory: Pierre Nora and Gaston Bachelard. Nora, a historian associated with the French *Annales* school, raises cautions about the pitfalls of documentary processes, such as photography, that identify temporal ruptures between past and present. In his view, such processes of

“historicization” signal the death of the lived, embodied continuities across time that, in his view, constitute real “memory.” By contrast, Bachelard, a philosopher whose late work focuses on the imagination, suggests the opportunities inherent in experiencing such “poetic images” of space. According to Bachelard, such images draw on a shared inventory of experience and allow us to integrate – and animate – our own personal memories of space through a process he calls “phenomenological reverberation.” I will argue that it is Burley’s interior images that make the stronger claim to the access of different kinds of memory, both by suggesting the temporal continuity of lived space and by evoking our own formative memories through an appeal to the universal experience of the enclosure.

Burley’s exterior photographs include an oblique shot of the lawns at the Inn on the Park, horizontally bisected by a line of evergreens [Fig. 6]; a nondescript image of Gould’s modest childhood home framed by bare trees on a gray winter day [Fig. 7]; and a pathway receding through nearby Wilket Creek Park, again finding its interest in the geometry of trees, this time radiating across the photograph from a sloping hillside on the left margin. Gould’s flat grave marker, flush with the ground in Mount Pleasant Cemetery, must have presented a special challenge, as it is difficult to represent with a sense of depth. In the photo, it is shown barely cleared of snow and adorned with a desiccated flower. As one of very few images in Burley’s portfolio lacking a clear spatial dimension, its tightly framed, uncharacteristically literal treatment perhaps reflects the interests of the commissioning publication. One might speculate that for the Swiss journal’s special commemorative issue on Gould, its editors preferred a clear rendering of the stone and its inscription in microscopic detail, facing ground-ward in the direction of the artist whose physical location it specifies.

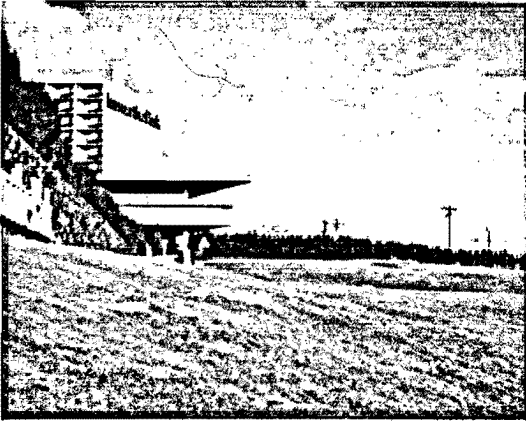


Fig. 6
Robert Burley
Inn on the Park, Toronto, 1990
“The Places of Glenn Gould”
Chromogenic Print



Fig. 7
Robert Burley
32 Southwood Drive, Toronto, 1990
“The Places of Glenn Gould”
Chromogenic Print

Before describing the interior scenes, there is a temptation to apply Roland Barthes’ well-known doublet of *studium* and *punctum*⁴⁴ from his influential *Camera Lucida* to explaining the differing, unequal impacts of the two categories of images. For instance, one could make the claim that “the exterior images, with their coldly ‘objective’ aesthetic, are somehow all *studium*.” However, to do so would imply that finding an affective *éclat* only in the interior scenes is entirely individual and unpredictable. The *punctum*, after all, is “what I add to the photograph and what is nonetheless already there” – that is to say, it is a form of projection dependent on one’s own, unique and unclassifiable tendencies as a viewer of photographs.⁴⁵ Without altogether denying that such a radically individual and anti-authorial impulse could govern the viewer’s response here, in this instance, an appeal to the *punctum-studium* opposition would represent an explanation of last resort, failing the identification of any formal characteristics at work that serve to guide affect and interpretation. After

⁴⁴ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981) 25-26.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

all, the *punctum* is that which cannot be named.⁴⁶ Such a division would explain very little, and would negate the likelihood, discernable through phenomenological inquiry, that Burley's photographs of Gould's interiors work at a more universal and atavistic level: they evoke a powerful, embodied complex of memories in their viewers.

However, at this juncture, it should be important to acknowledge that the search for memory in images of space is problematic, particularly in the wake of Nora's pronouncements on the complex relationship between memory and history, a relationship that Nora considers to be fundamentally adversarial.⁴⁷ In Nora's view, "true memory" is an unconscious (or at least, unselfconscious), living phenomenon situated in the present, and manifested in the continuity of traditional social activities, beliefs and embodied rituals.⁴⁸ In his schema, the contemporary academic and archival discipline of history, by its very function of identifying ruptures between former and present realities, consigns memory to the past and thus signals its death. In polemical fashion, he announces: "Memory is life," while "history is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer."⁴⁹ Nora laments the current regime of historiography – which attempts to write a history of history itself – treating it as a nihilistic pursuit that, by critiquing as misguided a community's traditional understanding of its place within a historical narrative, serves to initiate a break with tradition and to "[run] a knife between the tree of memory and the bark of history."⁵⁰

At the core of Nora's thesis is the concept of the "*lieu de mémoire*," or site of memory, which is the exteriorized, fragmentary trace that remains after the dissolution of the "*milieu de mémoire*," which is to say the immersive, social environment of memory.⁵¹ Stranded and deprived of their original contexts within a living tradition, the *lieux de mémoire* have become the foci for cultish expressions of "commemorative

⁴⁶ Barthes, 51.

⁴⁷ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," trans. Marc Roudebush, *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989):8.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 8.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 9-10.

⁵¹ Ibid., 7.

vigilance,” reflecting a paranoid and morbid desire to enshrine, through something akin to taxidermy, the material traces of past life.⁵² Certainly, Glenn Gould has become the object of just such a commemorative archival obsession, as even those portions of his personal ephemera bearing dubious relationship to his creative output have been meticulously catalogued, preserved and periodically displayed (in the manner of a religious relic) by Library and Archives Canada. Sifting through and enumerating the contents of his personal fonds has become a favourite pastime of biographers; Otto Friedrich observes that the seventy-two metres of shelving devoted to Gould’s personal effects include “a box containing a barometer and thirty-two black felt-tipped pens” and another containing “nothing but ‘miscellaneous keys,’ dozens and dozens of them, on rings and chains and various bits of string, door keys, car keys, trunk keys, keys to God knows what forgotten cupboards and closets.”⁵³ According to Kevin Bazzana, pilgrims visit the library “often not to study Gould’s papers as much as to see and touch them,” asserting that the institution’s staff “have always been uneasy with the library’s status as a *de facto* Gould museum.”⁵⁴ In long-last recognition of this reality, a recent exhibition at the Canadian Museum of Civilization entitled, “Glenn Gould: The Sounds of Genius,” allowed the public to view the pens, keys, and papers (each one carefully numbered in miniscule handwriting), alongside framed Bell telephone bills, cufflinks and sunglasses. According to Nora’s logic, such expressions reflect a historical consciousness and are thus fundamentally anti-memorial; the excesses of contemporary archival fetishism have led to what Nora, at his most pessimistic, decries as “the clearest expression of the terrorism of historicized memory.”⁵⁵ Within this view, it would seem that the closest one could come to achieving a direct, “embodied” memory of Gould would be through the act of listening to his musical recordings, rather than by seeking physical proximity to his preserved artifacts.

A basic point of Nora’s argument is that deliberate attempts at memorializing *lieux* inevitably serve to foreground temporal discontinuity rather than instill any

⁵² Nora, 12.

⁵³ Friedrich, 8.

⁵⁴ Bazzana, 7.

⁵⁵ Nora, 14.

embodied sense of memory in those experiencing them. While acknowledging that this distancing effect has increasingly become the goal – in representations of the past, it is increasingly the “difference that we are seeking, and in the image of this difference, the spectacle of an unrecoverable identity”⁵⁶ – Nora appears to be asserting the impossibility of recovering any “true” memory through the visual representation of a site. (Likewise, he has little confidence in the value of compiling oral histories about a site). In truth, according to Nora, the effect is just the opposite: that the production of visual representations only serves to multiply the archive and to document (and thus establish) the historical pastness of the site, in the process destroying any lingering present-ness it might have retained.

Even if the photographic process itself is often implicated in the processes of archiving and historicization (not unlike the obsessive microfilming of crumbling documents), it would not be correct to view all photographic attempts at memorialization as futile. For instance, in this series, a distinction must be made between the images that portray a space as a site of living, breathing tradition and those which, in their infinite, empty vistas, can only suggest deadness, absence, and temporal rupture. In Burley’s interior images – those that appear to be more effective at memorializing, as opposed to merely historicizing, the Gould sites – a deliberate attempt is made to reveal an unbroken, lived continuity existing between their past and present states. The photographs of interiors represent lived environments, if only because interiors, so long as they resist demolition, renovation and drastic re-purposing, generally retain their patterns of human usage. This being said, Burley photographed his interiors less than a decade after Gould’s death, while they were still active sites; in the ensuing twenty years, some of these buildings have indeed been demolished and redeveloped, lending some credence to Fernand Braudel’s counter-observation that it is in the natural landscape that the greatest sense of temporal stability exists, and “the best means of slowing down history.”⁵⁷ Some of Burley’s interiors include a set in CBC’s Television Studio B, in the broadcaster’s now-defunct

⁵⁶ Nora, 17-18.

⁵⁷ Braudel is quoted in Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) 152.

former headquarters at 354 Jarvis Street [Fig. 8]; the hallway leading to Gould's penthouse at 110 St. Clair Avenue West; a church school room at Emmanuel Presbyterian Church; and, most strikingly, a warmly lit room at the Wawa Motor Inn in Northern Ontario [Fig. 9], to which Gould retreated while assembling the script for his 1967 radio documentary, "The Idea of North."⁵⁸ Overall, these images seem to go beyond a strict mapping of past Gould sites to create a more affective, embodied sense of spatial memory. Drawing on the phenomenology of Gaston Bachelard, I will suggest that Burley reconciles well-known themes from Gould's biography with universal experiences of intimate space, experiences that, in these images, resonate in a Canadian vernacular. If not able to access the "true" memory of a dead artist, he at least succeeds in uncovering the shared cultural memory underlying that artist's mythology.



Fig. 8
Robert Burley
CBC Studio B, Toronto, 1990
"The Places of Glenn Gould"
Chromogenic print



Fig. 9
Robert Burley
Room at the Wawa Motor Inn, 1990
"The Places of Glenn Gould"
Chromogenic print

In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard argues that poetic images of intimate space have an innate capacity to stimulate a *creative* process in viewers ignorant to the

⁵⁸ This last image, though powerfully evocative, could be argued to be problematic, because by switching on the motel room's lamps and television set, and leaving the door slightly ajar, the photographer creates the *illusion* of a lived space, rendering it thus a performative, stylized image. It departs from clinically "objective" documentation to approach staging: the creative alteration of the *mise-en-scène*.

circumstances of their original production; he calls this process “phenomenological reverberation.”⁵⁹ To this end, he writes: “The poet does not confer the past of his image upon me, and yet his image immediately takes root in me.”⁶⁰ In Bachelard’s view, forces of memory govern this process of internalization, of taking ownership of the exterior poetic image. When viewing an intimate space such as a bedroom, a cellar or a study, we “read” the space as a “psychological diagram,”⁶¹ and inscribe our own memories onto it; we are compelled to recall, at once, both our own personal experiences of equivalent spaces as children (and the dreamlike perceptions of space we had during that time) and the primal, repressed memories that draw us intuitively to a shelter’s protective enclosure. Thus, Bachelard asserts that “great images have both a history and a pre-history; they are always a blend of legend and memory.”⁶² Attempting to parse these overlapping impulses neatly is probably a futile endeavour, for an intimate space such as the house is “a site for the union of memory and imagination... each one working for their mutual deepening.”⁶³

Burley’s interiors are spaces that invite an interpretation according to Bachelard’s phenomenological method. At their core, the images present the opposition of warm interior and hostile, wild exterior spaces. This opposition, Bachelard asserts, serves to enhance our dream-memories of the comfort, intimacy, and protective solitude of the interior. (It is worthy of note that he, a Frenchman at the Sorbonne, suggests that this phenomenon is most strongly experienced by inhabitants of northern climates, namely Canadians and Russians).⁶⁴ The bounded interior space also heightens the dialectical attraction of the boundless wilderness beyond its margins; Paul Ricoeur observes that this attraction is “reinforced by the opposition between the constructed and nonconstructed, between architecture and nature.”⁶⁵ As an example, the room at

⁵⁹ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964) xix.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, xvii.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 33.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁶⁵ Ricoeur, 151.

the Wawa Motor Inn presents us with an inviting space: two large lamps fill the humble motel room with a yellow glow, illuminating the floral-printed bedcovers, while a radiant television set creates the impression of sound. A single chair sits poised at the desk. The veritable feeling of human presence is enhanced by a glimpse into the fluorescent-lit bathroom on the photo's left margin, with fresh towels clearly visible in a mirror. At the same time, the spectre of the cold, Lake Superior wilderness looms darkly between the window's draperies: a bluish, indistinct landscape of snow. Bachelard, commenting on words of Baudelaire, virtually describes the effect of the scene: "Dreamers like a severe winter... 'what they really need are Canadian or Russian winters... their own nests will be all the warmer.'"⁶⁶ And later:

Outside the house, the winter cosmos is a simplified cosmos. It is a non-house in the same way that metaphysicians speak of a non-I, and between the house and the non-house, it is easy to establish all sorts of contradictions ... The house derives reserves and refinements of intimacy from winter; while in the outside world, snow covers all tracks, blurs the road, muffles every sound, conceals all colours... The dreamer of houses knows and senses this, and because of the diminished entity of the outside world, experiences all the qualities of intimacy with increased intensity.⁶⁷

In spaces such as the Wawa Motor Inn and the CBC-TV studio dressed to appear as a woodland, with evergreen trees as props and a wrinkled cloth backdrop showing an autumn forest scene, the memory and mythology of Glenn Gould is layered with universal, spatially activated memories and enriched with subtle signifiers of Canadian-ness. (Burley's documentary images never approach the didacticism of Douglas Coupland's assemblages of nostalgic, centennial-era Canadiana, but the material signifiers are nonetheless there). It is important to emphasize that the warm-cold opposition in the *mise-en-scène* at the Wawa Motor Inn *does* draw on resilient themes from the Gould mythos, above all the pianist's seemingly paradoxical yearning for snowy northern landscapes while taking irrational pains to stay warm even in summertime. For instance, it would perhaps not be too fanciful to suggest that the sink and towels in Burley's photo reference Gould's obsessive habit of soaking his arms

⁶⁶ Bachelard, 39.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 40-41.

in near-scalding water before beginning work.⁶⁸ The related oppositions of warm and cold, and of noise and silence, permeate the collective memory of the pianist; a well-known example is found in an account by Leonard Bernstein, who describes a winter car ride with the pianist during which Gould discussed his love of high-arctic solitude while swaddled in several pairs of gloves, with the heating up to maximum and the radio turned up at full blast, drowning out their conversation.⁶⁹ On the other hand, Burley's Wawa Inn is not simply a Gould site, a *lieu de mémoire* of narrow significance: it is also Bachelard's hermit's hut, the primal, protective and secluded domain to which we return in dreams.⁷⁰ Its light attracts our gaze and turns our thoughts to its unseen occupant (blurring the line between absence and solitude); that light is a symbol of "the man who keeps vigil,"⁷¹ an indication that someone "is keeping watch; a man is working there while I dream away."⁷² Rather than a distancing reference to Gould's supposedly "eccentric" commitment to solitude, the image may instead be uncovering a universal yearning for this condition. To this effect, Bachelard muses, "the light emanating from the lone watcher, who is also a determined watcher, attains to the power of hypnosis. We are hypnotized by the gaze of the solitary house."⁷³

In Robert Burley's unpopulated Gould spaces, the historicizing nature of photography is tempered by an invitation to "read" the spaces and to discover within them a universal language of experience. Whatever the images' historical or geographical specificity, they also appeal to our own formative memories and perhaps, to the ancient memories of prehistory.

⁶⁸ Bazzana, 151.

⁶⁹ Friedrich, 176-177. Burley almost certainly would have known this anecdote, which figures in Otto Friedrich's authorized biography of Gould, published in 1989.

⁷⁰ Bachelard, 31-32.

⁷¹ Ibid., 33.

⁷² Ibid., 34.

⁷³ Ibid., 36.

3. The landscape tradition in Canadian experimental documentary: Cinematic pilgrimages of Rick Hancox and Richard Kerr

The image of the landscape in cinema has traditionally been relegated to a subservient role. As background, it is, of course, omnipresent and sometimes celebrated; one need only think of the countless Hollywood westerns with their expansive red and blue vistas receding into the distance behind the mounted actors, where Utah's Monument Valley is made to represent a general, idealized vision of the American West, dotted with the baroque forms of spires, buttes, and mesas.⁷⁴ In documentary film, landscape also serves as a chief constituent of so-called "B-roll," which is to say, footage inserted interstitially between more important scenes to illustrate a concept, establish context, create a mood, or provide "local colour." In the Maysles Brothers' *Grey Gardens* (1975), for instance, it enables the viewer to get a visual sense of the verdant East Hampton neighbourhood in which the Beales' eccentric antics at the film's centre take place. The term "B-roll" itself has a somewhat pejorative connotation, particularly in the digital video era which has enabled it to be obtained cheaply and in quantity. In addition to plainly indicating its inferior status in its name, it has become associated with hastily shot imagery used by editors as optional material with which to smooth over an awkward cut or to "enhance something spoken."⁷⁵ By definition, "B-roll" is never intended to carry a film's primary constituents, nor provide its *raison d'être*.

Unlike the other pictorial arts of painting and photography where landscape has traditionally comprised a major mode of practice, outside the experimental sphere (and perhaps scientific films that take environmental processes as their specific subject of inquiry), the landscape has, for the most part, eluded recognition as a cinematic genre unto itself, at least since the first decades of motion-picture history. Iris Cahn notes that in the early North American cinema, at a time when the relative abundance of

⁷⁴ Edward Buscombe, "Inventing Monument Valley: Nineteenth Century Landscape Photography and the Western Film," *Fugitive Images: From Photography to Video*, ed. Patrice Petro (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1995) 91.

⁷⁵ Michael Rabiger, *Directing the Documentary* (Burlington, Mass.: Focal Press, 2004) 137.

actualities compared to narrative fictions reflected popular amazement with the projected image's ability to transcend time and space, actuality films representing the grandeur of natural landscapes (e.g., Niagara Falls, Yellowstone Park) were quite numerous and profitable.⁷⁶ In a similar vein, the subsequent "city symphonies" of Walter Ruttmann and others continued an aspect of this tradition for a time. But whereas the "portrait" of an individual has become a mainstream sub-genre of contemporary documentary, the "landscape film" has remained a marginal entity largely confined to the rubric of avant-garde or experimental film. This being said, certain exceptional works have, in recent memory, pointed to the power and legitimacy of the landscape as an accessible mode of documentary exploration and expression. Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985) is a key example, combining the oral testimony of survivors of the Nazi extermination camps with long, slow-moving tracking shots that bear witness to the landscapes – by turns ominous, beautiful, and banal, in ruins and concealed by grass or snow – where murder of an unfathomable scale took place. *Shoah* is an obsessive journey, recapitulating, if not the agonies recounted in testimony, the geographical trajectories of the dead and the survivors alike, and in the process gaining a sense of the victims' past visual perspectives. Lanzmann's camera documents his own passage through these hallowed spaces – not simply the destinations, but also the miles and miles of anonymous, un-remembered terrain lying alongside road and railway between the ghettos and the death camps. Mounting the camera on a boat departing Corfu, Lanzmann shows the viewer, through something akin to re-enactment, the Corfu Jews' last view of their home island during their deportation. Likewise, a long journey by rail comes to an end at a depot bearing a familiar name, but one hitherto devoid of a visual referent in our mind's eye: Treblinka. Over the film's epic nine-hour sprawl, Lanzmann's unblinking and sometimes excruciatingly long takes force the viewer to contemplate with dread what happened *there, on that site*, and to remain there longer than spectatorial comfort or cinematic convention would otherwise allow.

⁷⁶ Iris Cahn, "The Changing Landscape of Modernity: Early Film and America's 'Great Picture' Tradition," *Wide Angle* 18.3 (July 1996): 85-86.

In Canada, the “landscape film” has been a central preoccupation of experimental filmmakers, stemming, as Bart Testa notes, from an earlier preoccupation in Canadian painting.⁷⁷ This emphasis on landscape in painting, beginning in colonial times and continuing into the present, is exemplified by the familiar canon of the Group of Seven, Tom Thomson, and Emily Carr, and more recently William Kurelek, Alex Colville, and the painter-filmmaker Jack Chambers. The moods, styles, and perspectives of their paintings certainly inform their filmic descendants. For instance, it could be argued that Lawren Harris’ later, abstract work, with its highly plastic reductions of majestic wilderness forms, directly resonates in an animated film such as Norman McLaren and René Jodoin’s *Spheres* (1969), in which glowing, pearlescent orbs dance to the rhythms of Bach preludes and fugues (played by Glenn Gould) against a dark sky streaked with the shifting, nebulous colours of the *aurora borealis*. Whether the hallucinatory orbs are moons and stars passing over a black expanse of rock and water, or the lights of some lonely northern hamlet flaring outwards as they tend to do on photographic film, remains ambiguous. Testa observes the tendency in Canadian criticism to attribute this obsession with the landscape to its vastness and the indifferent hostility that “surrounds and puts constant pressure on the Canadian experience,” in turn forcing Canadians to adopt what Northrop Frye famously called a “garrison mentality.”⁷⁸ This mentality, always outward-looking from a protective enclosure, has led, critics argue, to the emergence of common characteristics across Canadian visual arts and literature, including “[the] priority of vision, the theme of anxiety, and even the fear that vision involves, the landscape as unknowable and so a source of crisis of knowledge, and imaginary placement of human presence in a space so immense and alien that it threatens humanity itself...”⁷⁹

Testa convincingly applies Gaile McGregor’s ideas about the manifestation of the garrison mentality in painting to film, discovering in certain structural works of David Rimmer and Michael Snow an emphasis on “framing,” “centering” and a

⁷⁷ Bart Testa, *Spirit in the Landscape* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1989) 1-2.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

“boxed experience” that rigidly separates secure inside from hostile outside.⁸⁰ (One cannot help but note the Bachelardian ring to some of these ostensibly homegrown notions). According to Testa, another characteristic of Canadian landscape art and film is the near-omnipresent foregrounding of motifs of communication (telegraph wires) and transportation (railroads, paths, canals) against the background of nature, providing a separation between the two worlds and rooting the viewer in the scale of human activity – and indeed, these motifs do resonate strongly in the films discussed below.⁸¹ Whether the “garrison mentality” can still be said to apply broadly across Canadian arts is arguable. At a time when the vast majority of Canadians live in urban areas, far removed from the frontier struggles of their predecessors (and can, in any event, avoid engaging the landscape by flying over it), the survival of a fortified, “anxious” outlook might simply reflect a nostalgic yearning for a bygone condition.

Within the experimental tradition, there is an important distinction between the “structural films” (the primary focus of Testa’s study) that isolate and interrogate one aspect of cinematic experience or convention, and the poetic but nonetheless narrative documentaries with which this paper is principally concerned. The sub-genre of Canadian landscape films that have most influenced my own practices in *Pilgrimage to Solitude* resemble Lanzmann’s foundational film in that they take the form of journeys or pilgrimages to places that, while presenting an often banal surface image, are sites of profound emotional or memorial significance for their pilgrims. These filmmaker-visitors are compelled to document their journey through the spaces and, somehow, to negotiate the rift between the remembered presence and current absence co-existing within them. I suggest that the affective power of pilgrimage-type landscape films lies in their ability to establish a dialectical tension between landscape as foreground and landscape as background, corresponding to a landscape’s current (documentary) and former (memorial) significances. In this schema, “foreground” and “background” do not refer to painterly, compositional elements, but to the main object of inquiry versus its context or setting. In the first capacity, the landscape itself is “foregrounded” as the

⁸⁰ Testa, 10-11.

⁸¹ Ibid., 4.

object of inquiry: the filmmaker documents, in the manner of a geographer or visual anthropologist, the present state of the landscape and the overlapping temporal processes, both cultural and natural, currently transforming it. In the second, the landscape serves as a setting in which the filmmaker implies the presence of an unseen human subject; the landscape is at once a metaphor for absence and a stage on which the spectral presence of a departed person or group can be imagined.

In the sections below, I will argue that the Canadian pilgrimage films that have influenced my own work, such as Rick Hancox's *Moose Jaw (There's a Future in Our Past)* (1992) and Richard Kerr's *Canal* (1981), use landscape in part as a ground for conjuring what Bill Nichols has aptly termed the "fantasmatic subject."⁸² In these films, the filmmakers exhibit dueling impulses, these being the geographer's zeal in discovering and documenting an environment in all its visual diversity and a personal desire to re-trace former pathways and to project the ghostly images of their own past selves into these ancestral spaces.

Rick Hancox's *Moose Jaw (There's a Future in Our Past)*

Both *Moose Jaw* and *Canal* are cinematic journeys to their filmmakers' places of origin, away from the big cities (Montreal and Toronto) to which they have migrated as adults: we are promised a look at "Rick Hancox's Moose Jaw by Moose Jaw's Rick Hancox" by the former's title card, while in the latter, Kerr revisits the Welland Canal near his native St. Catharines. Both places are way stations on the lines of transportation connecting distant ports and hubs – Moose Jaw a CPR rail stop between Calgary and Winnipeg, the Welland Canal a system of locks connecting the upper Great Lakes with Toronto and the St. Lawrence Seaway. As mere mile markers punctuating the ribbons of transport that cross the country, rarely are they seen as destinations where one would linger.

⁸² Bill Nichols, "Documentary Reenactment and the Fantasmatic Subject," *Critical Inquiry* 35 (Autumn 2008): 73.

Upon his return to Moose Jaw, Hancox discovers an economically depressed town that has become a faded museum of its past. Its touristic mantra, “There’s a future in our past,” is borne out in his visual exploration of the cityscape. The camera tracks down a non-descript street as an interviewee (in voiceover) reminisces about the former glory of the town’s “Golden Mile.” Later, it scans the interiors of a succession of darkened archives and museums, and examines plastic trinkets and tourist kitsch in an adjoining gift shop. The wildlife and First Nations peoples displaced by the encroachment of European civilization are amply memorialized around town. Hancox visits Moose Jaw’s large moose statue and then contemplates paintings of bison to the sounds of Aboriginal chanting, before cutting away to a shot of a real bison, penned-in and on display at the Moose Jaw and District Recreation Complex and Wild Animal Park. (It is closed during his visit). An attempt to enter the padlocked, defunct train station is rebuffed by an attendant, and much of the rest of town is found boarded- or bricked-up. This parade of animatronic dinosaurs, haunting wax effigies of First Nations tribes-people behind glass, and wild bison converted into laminated images and caged animals, renders a clear verdict against this museum-ized landscape. The partitions of glass and steel that separate Hancox from “his” Moose Jaw alienate the filmmaker and tragically hinder his attempts to assume what Tim Ingold terms a “dwelling perspective” in his own home town.⁸³

Ingold, writing from the standpoint of the social anthropologist, asserts that “the landscape is never complete: neither built nor unbuilt, it is perpetually under construction,”⁸⁴ and he makes a case for filming the landscape as a means of conceiving of its essential non-stillness and non-fixedness.⁸⁵ The landscape, in his view, is not a constant, frozen entity but a force subject to the interactions of various magnitudes of natural and human rhythms. Quoting Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Ingold asserts that, by assuming the dwelling perspective of a landscape’s inhabitants, the researcher will better understand the temporal effects of human activity upon its form: “the passage of

⁸³ Tim Ingold, “The Temporality of the Landscape,” in *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London: Routledge, 2000) 189.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 199.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 201.

one present to the next is not a thing of which I conceive, nor do I see it as an onlooker; I effect it.”⁸⁶ Yet Hancox, returning to Moose Jaw after an extended absence (he left the city as a boy in 1959),⁸⁷ finds that he is merely a powerless museum spectator. His surface investigation of the city, not a ghost town left to disintegrate but a hermetically sealed bubble of what Nora terms “historicized memory,”⁸⁸ does not yield many satisfying insights into its present, evolving condition. However, as we shall see, its seemingly sterile foreground still proves a fertile background for the projection of the ghosts of Hancox’s personal memories.

The attentive viewer learns early on that Hancox’s return to Moose Jaw is not primarily an occasion to become re-acquainted with the community and to take stock of the socio-economic challenges it is facing. Before arriving in town, traveling by rail through a prairie landscape of grain elevators and brilliant blue skies, we hear a woman’s voice describing a psychological condition in clinical language:

The patient needed to go back and experience the past instinct in more than its simple recall and verbal form. It had to have the affective impact of being in the actual, physical place. A compulsive need to carry out the given investigation. Eventually, when the experience is digested – and this might take one or more trips – the urge to go back dissipates.

Thus, a therapeutic imperative to “see with one’s own eyes” guides the filmmaker’s journey, and this knowledge strengthens the viewer’s awareness of Hancox’s own embodiment in these mostly empty spaces, even if the filmmaker himself is only seen occasionally (and then, usually obliquely). Though parts of the film are “performative” in the sense of depicting the filmmaker’s actions onscreen, for the most part we identify the camera’s vision and movement directly with Hancox’s body, creating the illusion of an unmediated view. Onto this view, Hancox grafts a soundtrack that serves as the strongest indicator of the spectral presence imagined in the Moose Jaw cityscape, or what Nichols calls the “lost object that haunts the film.”⁸⁹ At first, these spectres are so

⁸⁶ Ingold, 196.

⁸⁷ Jeff Round, “Filmmaker Richard Hancox: A Kind of Connectedness,” *Arts Atlantic* (Winter, 1993): 35.

⁸⁸ Nora, 14.

⁸⁹ Nichols, 74.

subtle as to be barely perceptible; for instance, when we hear a nostalgic conversation among Hancox's childhood friends over images of empty green lawns being watered. In the absence of the seen subject, the landscape becomes itself a potential stage for a mental reenactment in the imaginations of filmmaker and viewer alike; as Nichols notes in a Freudian vein, "the viewer experiences the uncanny sense of a repetition of what remains historically unique."⁹⁰ Later, Hancox holds a shot of the local grocery store, while his father, in voiceover, is heard talking about being informed of his young son's misbehaviour by the store's owner, who threatened to pull his ads from the elder Hancox's newspaper if the behaviour continued. This familial atmosphere of reminiscence as evoked in the soundtrack is strangely absent from the empty spaces. For example, we see a person (presumably Hancox), marginalized in the frame, having meals alone in inexplicably darkened restaurants, surrounded by the vacant seats where we can imagine absent companions. The film changes register in a complex, intense scene in which Hancox is shown filming a line of apparently vacant store windows. The camera cuts to a point-of-view shot from Hancox's camera, and then to a series of empty, unidentified rooms. Disembodied voices are heard beckoning "Richard! Richard!" as in a horror movie, while we watch Hancox winding his camera, now seen from inside the windows looking out. The beckoning voices return later, such as in the local museum of transportation, interspersed with the unsettling, distorted sounds of Morse code signals and old radio broadcasts. It is hard to call the ghostly, multi-layered sounds pervading these empty environments of memory (with points of view shifting nebulously between first- and third-person) "reenactment" in any traditional sense. It is, after all, precisely this complexity of technique that makes *Moose Jaw* an assuredly "experimental" documentary. Nonetheless, by evoking in an abandoned landscape the spectres of past life, the film does succeed in "effecting a temporal vivification in which past and present coexist in the impossible space of the fantasmatic. This form of coexistence revolves around a lost object and the signifiers

⁹⁰ Nichols, 74.

that serve as resurrected ghosts that both haunt and endow the present with psychic intensity.”⁹¹

Richard Kerr’s *Canal*

In Richard Kerr’s return to the Welland Canal of his youth, he discovers a still-living landscape, allowing him to document the transient rhythms of its passing ships and sailors. This is reflected in Kerr’s soundtrack, in which we hear the continuous (if faint) noises of human and mechanical labour. Tim Ingold, whose idea of landscape incorporates not merely form but also the human processes shaping it (the so-called “taskscape”), posits an interesting division between landscape-as-image and taskscape-as-sound, with sound indicating the movements or processes that produce landscape.⁹² Kerr’s soundtrack succeeds in foregrounding these ongoing processes, such that the viewer never feels, as in Hancox’s *Moose Jaw*, that the landscape has become a fixed, impenetrably historical entity. To be sure, Kerr’s camera delights in discovering the old detritus that lines the canal walls, such as a row of abandoned lockers stamped with the names of forgotten sailors or longshoremen: “Fred” and “Moe.” But even these ruins are shown in the process of being overgrown by living bushes and weeds. Kerr does not linger to mourn them, and the bulk of the film consists of slow tracking shots gliding down the canal (and thus assuming the sailors’ ever-changing dwelling perspectives) or stationary shots from the waterside, watching the ships glide through the frame. Mitchell Schwarzer has argued that such omnipresent movement transforms our understanding and experience of the landscape and its temporality.⁹³ In his view, the “moving landscape,” enabled by the technologies of cinematography and mass transportation, changes the way we perceive landscape, noting that, “the perceptual

⁹¹ Nichols, 88.

⁹² Ingold, 199.

⁹³ Mitchell Schwarzer, “The Moving Landscape,” *Monuments and Memory, Made and Unmade*, eds. Robert S. Nelson and Margaret Olin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004): 83.

experience is less aesthetic than phenomenological.”⁹⁴ For Schwarzer, the representation of the moving landscape has major implications for memory, to the extent that, “in constant penetrations of a fanning periphery, the moving landscape makes irrelevant prior temporal dualisms of possession and loss, remembering and forgetting.”⁹⁵ It is the moving landscape that engenders in the filmmaker and viewer alike a relative view of time in which one can observe, more than the layered remnants of a bygone age, the constant conversion of the present moment into memory, as the immediate instant escapes the bounds of the frame and becomes past.⁹⁶

This, rather cyclical view of memory informs the spectral, “fantasmatic” aspect of the film as well, which is less prominent and intense than in *Moose Jaw*. The film begins with a number of flashback-style images of the canal, pulsing to black, with inter-titles and subtitles explaining the personal significance of the place to Kerr. The text describes fleeting childhood memories of fishing and hunting along the canal with his brother. At this point, the camera’s low perspective alludes to Kerr’s own childhood vantage point: we see close-up images of rock textures, bugs, weeds and wildflowers evoking a child’s curiosity for surface details. The images gradually become wider, the viewer gains context and there are periodic flashes of cinematographic virtuosity, while the occasional shot still suggests that we are looking through a child’s eyes: for instance, when grizzled sailors smile and wave at the camera as they drift down the canal. The film ends with a tracking image of a boy and his older brother playing on the canal bank, harkening back to the first inter-titles with their remembrances of Kerr’s youth. The boys are at once spectral projections of Kerr’s childhood memories onto the background of landscape, and young canal-dwellers experiencing the

⁹⁴ Schwarzer, 90.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 100.

⁹⁶ This phenomenon, as described by Schwarzer, is explored to an extreme in Kerr’s later film, *Plein Air* (1991). For that film, Kerr constructed a car-mounted mechanism that allowed him to spin his 16mm camera on an axis while driving through a Northern Ontario landscape. Though the viewer can vaguely perceive the colour and texture of the landscape (green trees, blue skies, a passing red train), the utterly disorienting combination of rotational and linear movement (not to mention the film stock’s own passage through the camera gate) obliterates any contemplation of long-term memory in the surrounding territory and fragments the sense of the present into so many rapidly evaporating instants.

waterway in the present moment, foregrounded as part of it. The camera drifts by, and that moment, too, is consigned to memory.

Conclusion

The landscape films described in the foregoing section depict temporally ambiguous spaces, frozen in the moment of their representation but also pregnant with layer upon layer of the ever-accumulating past. My own film, *Pilgrimage to Solitude*, a journey to the sites and spaces of Glenn Gould, follows in the tradition of Canadian experimental documentary in displaying the tension in the landscape's shifting incarnations as both a living foreground and a background for the projection of Nichols' "fantasmatic" subject, which, in this case, is the departed figure of Gould. As in *Moose Jaw*, sound is the vessel by which the spectral presence is conjured: in *Pilgrimage*, the contrapuntal lines of individual remembrances resist attributing a single meaning to the interpretively open landscapes over which they drift. Yet, throughout *Pilgrimage*, as in the films that have preceded it, a discernable sadness pervades the uncanny gulf between image and sound. The processes of reminiscence and visual exploration are haunted by a knowledge of absence, of the missing, unrecoverable object at the film's centre.

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