"What you intended to say": Howard Dyck Reflects on Glenn Gould's *The Quiet in the Land*

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The Quiet in the Land is a radio documentary by Canadian pianist and composer Glenn Gould (1932-82) that features the voices of nine Mennonite musicians and theologians who reflect on their Mennonite identity as a people that are *in* the world yet *separate from* it. Like the other radio compositions in his *The Solitude Trilogy*—"The Idea of North" (1967) and "The Latecomers" (1969)—this work focuses on those who, either through geography, history, or ideology, engage in a "deliberate withdrawal from the world."[1] Based on Gould's interviews in Winnipeg in July 1971, *The Quiet in the Land* was released by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) only in 1977, as Gould awaited changes in technology that would allow him to weave together snatches of these interviews thematically. His five primary themes were separateness, dealing with an increasingly urban and cosmopolitan lifestyle, the balance between evangelism and isolation, concern with others' well-being in relation to the historic peace position, and maintaining Mennonite unity in the midst of fissions.[2] He contextualized the documentary ideologically and sonically by placing it within the soundscape of a church service recorded at Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite Church in Waterloo, Ontario.[3]

Knowing that the work had received controversial responses from Mennonites upon its release, I framed my questions to former CBC radio producer Howard Dyck,[4] one of Gould's interviewees and later one of his

[1] Bradley Lehman, "Review of Glenn Gould's 'The Quiet in the Land,'" www. personal.umich.edu/~bpl/QITL.htm, accessed January 14, 2015. Lehman describes "The Idea of North" as "a journey into solitude, through the metaphor of Northern geography and climate" and "The Latecomers" as "a study of the isolation of Newfoundland."

[2] Ibid.

[3] A recording of *The Quiet in the Land* is available at www.cbc.ca/player/RADIO+HOLDING+PEN/Glenn+Gould+-+The+CBC+Legacy/Audio/1970s/ID/2134812561/, accessed February 17, 2015.

[4] Howard Dyck is a former program host of CBC Radio One's "Choral Concert" and "Saturday

Sound in the Land – Music and the Environment, ed. Carol Ann Weaver, Doreen Helen Klassen, and Judith Klassen, special issue, *The Conrad Grebel Review* 33, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 176-185.

confidants, from this perspective. In our January 2015 phone conversation, I asked Dyck about his personal involvement with this project, his level of awareness as to how Gould would reconstruct the interview material, and his general understanding of Gould's objectives for the work.[5] What follows are excerpts from that conversation.

DHK: How did you get involved with Glenn Gould's *The Quiet in the Land?*

HD: I had just come off two tumultuous years teaching at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College (MBBC) in Winnipeg. Musically they were two wonderful years, but I had had a running battle with the president when this opportunity came along. One day I got home from my summer job and my wife Maggie said this guy had called and said he was Glenn Gould. Maggie almost hung up on him, thinking it was just a prank, but then she thought it sounded as though [he] was for real, so she talked to him and found he wanted me to give him a call. So I did. He said he was doing a radio documentary, as he called it, and I had been suggested as a person he might talk to. This would have been in July of 1971, long before I had any involvement with the CBC.

We had agreed to meet at the CBC studios in Winnipeg, so I went there on a blistering hot July day and was ushered into a large studio with a grand piano. And there was Gould, wearing his heavy winter coat and boots and a scarf, but his mittens were lying on the piano because he was playing when I walked in. I think he was dressed that way because he knew the place was air-conditioned and he had a mortal fear of air-conditioning, but he was very cordial. We had never met before, but he immediately tested me by asking, "What am I playing?" I listened for a while, but had no idea specifically what he was playing. It occurred to me that it had to be very late romantic and it seemed that it wasn't piano music. It turned out that I was right. He was playing Richard Strauss's *Elektra*. There was not a scrap of music in front of him, but he was singing all the parts. Then we got on with our conversation. That's sort of how it started.

Afternoon at the Opera." His international conducting career has taken him to twenty countries on three continents.

[5] Telephone interview with Howard Dyck, January 22, 2015.

We met at least two times, and both times would have been about two hours, so about four hours of recorded conversation. In the end, I would say, my part in that documentary would be a maximum of two-and-a-half or three minutes, but he did that with a number of other people as well.

I know you were wondering who had supplied him with the names of whom to interview, and I don't know that exactly. I have a very strong hunch it might have been Ben Horch, because Ben was a CBC producer in those years.[6] Certainly [possible], because Esther, Ben's wife, was also one of the people Gould interviewed, as was Esther's brother Clarence Hiebert.

DHK: Right. I found it curious that Clarence, who was living in Hillsboro, Kansas, was part of that.

HD: Well, that would have been for theological reasons, I guess, but I don't know that for sure. As I said, this was in July of '71. I had found a job in Winnipeg, teaching music at Elmwood High, but about a month into that job an opening came up at Wilfrid Laurier, then called Waterloo Lutheran University, here in Waterloo. And so, on extremely short notice, one week to be exact, we packed up everything with our two children. When I was talking to Gould back in July, I had no idea that we would soon be near Toronto where he was based. When he began editing his recorded interviews, that's when the long middle-of-the-night phone calls ensued. You see, he had recorded all these different voices—there must be half-a-dozen or eight in that documentary—and he had recorded them all separately. I mean, none of us ever were in the same room together.

It was strictly he and I chatting. His voice never ever shows up in the documentary, but it was a two-way conversation. Then he would splice these things together and create this kind of quasi-dialogue between and among these various characters, so that you have to pay very close attention when you listen because there's so much going on. In that sense, it reflects exactly the kind of mind Gould had: able to engage in an intense conversation on the phone while also reading magazine articles.

As he was putting all this together, he would take a little phrase, let's

[6] Peter Letkemann confirms that it was Ben Horch who suggested potential interviewees to Gould. See Peter Letkemann, *The Ben Horch Story* (Winnipeg: Old Oak, 2007), 373.

say two-thirds into our conversation, and place it ahead of something I had said earlier. Then he would call me, often in the middle of the night, and say, "OK, I'm going to play you something on the telephone here, things that I've put together. Here's what you said." He would play me the original, with a little bit of a context, a paragraph or two, on either side of my particular comment that he wanted to use. Then he would say, "Now, I've taken these two tiny little bits, and I've inverted them. I want you to listen closely to them so that as a result of messing with the chronology I don't have you say something that you didn't mean to say." He was very scrupulous about that.

DHK: Apparently, some interviewees felt their comments had been misrepresented, but you sensed [Gould's] genuine concern about representing people.

HD: Absolutely. Certainly in my case. He called me more than once to say, "Look, the way I put this together, is this in fact what you intended to say?" As I recall, there was never any doubt. I mean, he nailed it each time. I was incredibly impressed by how well prepared he was coming into the first interview. He obviously had done a lot of reading about Mennonites, understood the kind of ethos of Mennonites had, and anticipated some of the things I was about to say.

Here I was, a young guy 28 years old at the time, trying to find my way professionally. For two years I had been in a good situation in certain ways, but it was also a bit of a sequestered environment, and I was really having to decide whether this was what I would want for the rest of my career. I had been thinking a whole lot about being an artist in a society, in an environment that is by definition somewhat separate. He related to that very, very intimately, because of course he was always an outsider and a loner. He had a very deep sympathy for this kind of thing, and in fact that's why he later said that these three radio documentaries—which he called *The Solitude Trilogy* and included *The Idea of North*, *The Latecomers*, and finally *The Quiet in the Land*—were as close to an autobiography as he would ever get. He felt that they sort of told his story or described the way he felt about the world.

DHK: You mentioned Gould's concern with representing your ideas fairly, so I found it of interest that Gould quotes you as saying: "And that's really what great art is all about, isn't it? I mean, that's what a fugue, ultimately, is all about—using, if you will, the techniques that the composer had at his disposal and making something of it which is really quite other-worldly."[7] This comment is placed immediately after a section of *The Quiet in the Land* for which Gould wrote a composition in the style of Bach because the recording he'd planned to use didn't fit. Did you have any idea that Gould was going to place your comment in juxtaposition to his Bach-like composition?

HD: No. I had no idea at all, none whatsoever. I don't remember what got me to say what I did there. I do know he had originally intended to use the Pablo Casals recording of Bach's cello suites, but there was a problem with the key, with the tonality; he was trying to match it to Janis Joplin.

DHK: Her "Mercedes-Benz" song?

HD: Exactly, and it just wasn't working out, so he decided to compose a little music that would sound right.

DHK: Did Gould discuss that short composition with you?

HD: No, certainly not at the time of the interview. I doubt that Gould himself knew what all was going to happen, but considerably later he mentioned something about the cello suites not having worked out and so he had written something.

I should mention that there was a long delay between the interviews of 1971 and the actual broadcast of *The Quiet in the Land* in 1977. One major reason was related to changes in technology. In the early '70s, the CBC and others generally in technology were thinking the next big thing was going to be quadraphonic sound. Stereophonic sound had taken over, but Gould was very excited about quad and wanted this radio documentary to be in

[7] Cited in Matthew McFarlane,"Glenn Gould, Jean Le Moyne and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin," first published in *Glenn Gould Magazine* 8, no. 2 (Fall 2002). Available at http://cec.sonus.ca/econtact/7_3/mcfarlane_visionaries.html, accessed January 15, 2015.

quadraphonic sound. In fact, in his initial editing he was already assuming there would be four channels. Then, when it became clear that quad was not going to happen, he revamped his plans and was stuck with *mere* stereo. But with clever editing and mixing of channels, he created the illusion of at least three channels: the two speakers, and a voice coming out of the middle as well. If the speakers are placed right, you could swear you are hearing one voice coming right from dead center between the two speakers. So, that's what he worked with, and he described some of these later, particularly *The Quiet in the Land*, as a trio sonata, where you had a low voice, a high voice, and a middle voice. You often hear those textures coming at you more or less simultaneously. It was because quadraphonic wasn't happening that he had to sort of change gears, and that was one of the major reasons for the delay.

DHK: You mentioned the trio sonata, and what came to mind was Ben Horch's ideas for the *Mennonite Piano Concerto*, where the piano takes the role of the preacher and the orchestra the role of the congregation responding to the preacher. Did Gould regard the three voices as a way of allowing the community rather than an individual to speak, or was this more a way of using the technology?

HD: I think he was more aware of using the technology and creating the illusion of a conversation. I'm not sure that by interposing the voices the result had any philosophical, theological, or sociological significance for him.

DHK: So, it was conversation rather than expressing community for him.

HD: Yes, I think so.

DHK: And he himself called it "contrapuntal radio," didn't he?

HD: Yes, he did, absolutely. And he increasingly came to think of these three documentaries as compositions. Of course, they were documentaries, but I think he thought of them as a little more innovative than a mere documentary.

DHK: So, he was essentially experimenting with the technology to create a vocal counterpoint?

HD: Absolutely! He was obsessed with technology and would have loved digital technology. He would be hunched over editing equipment at the CBC studios, with his technician and a razor blade, and cutting tape. Of course, now, he would have just loved what he could have done.

DHK: I want to get back to his focus on the Mennonites. Did Gould discuss with you a particular reason for choosing the Mennonites for part of his trilogy?

HD: He certainly did. He was intrigued with the idea of there being a community that lived within another larger community, in a larger context, in this case, Winnipeg, and deliberately chose Winnipeg because it has such a large Mennonite population. He was interested in how a group like that, where its own identity was fairly clearly drawn for a number of reasons—theological, certainly, but other reasons also, such as cultural and ethnic, and to a lesser extent, linguistic—how a community like that could nevertheless function productively and positively in this larger context. That intrigued him and that is why, I think, he focused on the Mennonites for this one, because in the case of his first documentary, *The Idea of North*, the separateness was clearly established by geography, yet he says the inferences in that documentary were not only geographical but a state of mind. He says it's the *idea* of north, the feeling of being separate, not only the place of north, so it becomes as much a state of mind as a geographical reality that defines it. In the case of *The Latecomers*, it's once again geography, in that Newfoundland is an island, whereas in *The Quiet in the Land* you had a group that was separate in a way yet was in the middle of things. It addressed a whole new dimension of this notion of separate identity and a different kind of isolation altogether.

DHK: I'm still curious about these conversations with you in the middle of the night. Were they generally about the editing process?

HD: No! That was the jumping-off spot, and sometimes, as I recall, these conversations would go on for an hour or two, and they were pretty much a monologue. Sometimes it would be current things happening politically that would get him going. Along the way there would be something specific to the documentary, but on one or two occasions he didn't talk about the editing or the documentary at all; he just wanted to talk. There would always be talk about music, and that would lead to talk about history, literature, and theology, in which he was well versed. You know, in his day he was regarded as one of the leading authorities on settlement of the north shore of Lake Superior, what he called "The Group of Seven" country.[8]

DHK: What other thoughts do you have about *The Quiet in the Land*?

HD: You know that the whole documentary, *The Quiet in the Land*, takes place in the framework of a church service, recorded here in Waterloo at a Mennonite church, possibly before he did all of the interviews, and that's kind of intriguing. That may have been for practical reasons, Waterloo being a lot closer to Toronto than Winnipeg.

DHK: What about the structure of the five scenes, demarcated by parts of the church service? Do you remember him talking about those themes?

HD: No. That kind of thematic delineation never came into those first interviews. It was just that he wanted to know how it felt for a young guy like me, fresh out of music conservatory in Germany and with all sorts of ideas and ambitions, to work within a community that had certain boundaries. That is what intrigued him, but the conversation did go to things like the pacifist dimension. We talked at length about that, and it was very clear to me that he was very sympathetic to the Mennonite position in that regard. So, we would have talked at length about those issues, but never did he at the time indicate to me that the whole thing would take on a certain framework. I'm actually intrigued with whether he would have known at the time. It may just be that as he was listening to all of these conversations something

[8] The Group of Seven, famed landscape painters of the 1920s, initiated the first major Canadian national art movement.

emerged in his mind, but I don't know. On the other hand, he may have known all along what he wanted to do.

DHK: I've read about Gould's rather open-ended interview questions and wonder how he managed to delineate such strong themes from them. For example, questions about the interrelationship between fantasy and the "real" world, or if knowledge of the world helped or hindered. [9]

HD: That's interesting, as he never asked me such specific questions. On one occasion he said he had tried to keep the questions as open-ended as possible. He just wanted people to start doing sort of stream-of–consciousness thinking and talking, because he felt that if the questions became too specific, they would elicit answers the interviewee thought he expected, and he didn`t want that.

DHK: Gould's open-ended questions certainly resulted in an insightful work that we couldn't have anticipated when as teenaged piano students we first encountered his recordings, writings, and, in your case, performances.

HD: Well, you know, it's now 44 years ago that Gould interviewed me. I knew about Glenn Gould. He was a legendary figure even in 1971, and as a student at MBBC in the 1960s, I heard his last performance in Winnipeg in the Civic Auditorium. He played Bach, a Beethoven sonata, and some second Viennese School stuff—you know, Berg, Webern, Schoenberg. I was aware of him, also of his Goldberg Variations of 1955, and all of that. He was this *Wunderkind*. But at the time I had no idea that he would interview me, nor that I would later interview him in my work at the CBC.

Years later, after we came back to Canada, I'd get back to Germany from time to time, and whenever people realized that I not only knew *about* Glenn Gould, but also had done all this work together *with* him, they would just crowd around, and I would have to tell them every last little thing that I knew about Glenn Gould, because he was a cult figure in Europe, and, I think, probably still is.

[9] See McFarlane, "Glenn Gould, Jean Le Moyne and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin" for a list of Gould's interview questions.

DHK: And to think that this very piece about Mennonites was brought to the Sound in the Land conference by yet another German, Sabine Breitsameter![10]

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[10] See Sabine Breitsameter, "Ordering of Sounds: The Homogenization of Listening in an Age of Globalized Soundscapes," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 33, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 142-151.