

Glenn Gould's *The Idea of North*: The Cultural Politics of Benevolent Domination

ABSTRACT

This article follows the critical theory that Canadian wilderness painting exists only when the artist disavows their presence at the scene of capture, and suggests that it is due time the theory be applied to Canadian sound pieces such as Glenn Gould's *The Idea of North* (1967). A contrapuntal radio piece that marked Glenn Gould's baptism into experimental documentary, *The Idea of North* explores how the North is placed in the Canadian imaginary as an ambivalent object of national identity. In this article, I argue that the aesthetic procedures of *The Idea of North* create a narrative space through which the Other is constructed as a savage who is subsequently saved by the benevolent welfare state. Thus, *The Idea of North* idealizes the North by virtue of (1) its distantiation from the North, and (2) its Othering of Canada's Inuit as savage and helpless, reflective of (3) a new benevolent racism that made up assimilationist ideology, a requisite for post-World War II Northern resource development. *The Idea of North* is, thus, an aesthetic example of 'differential racism,' which proceeds through perceived cultural rather than biological differences, and works to include the targeted social group rather than exclude them. Given *The Idea of North's* narrative of the North's future, I argue that the future is a convenient temporal schematic through which the present remains governed. I maintain that we must add benevolent racism to the cultural theory of exploitation and domination in order to understand the contemporary structure of racism that haunts any cultural denials of colonialism.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article s'inscrit dans la théorie critique qui veut que les paysages canadiens existent seulement quand l'artiste nie sa présence au moment de la capture, et suggère qu'il est temps que cette théorie trouve son application pour les paysages sonores, en particulier *l'idée du Nord* de Glenn Gould. Une pièce en contrepoint pour la radio qui a marqué l'initiation de Glenn Gould dans le documentaire expérimental, *L'idée du Nord* explore comment le Nord se situe dans l'imaginaire canadien comme un objet déconcertant de l'identité nationale. Dans cet article, je soutiens que les démarches esthétiques de *l'idée du Nord* créent une espace de récit à travers lequel l'Autre est construit comme un sauvage qui est par la suite sauvé

par l'État-providence bienveillant. Ainsi, *l'idée du Nord* idéalise le Nord par (1) la distanciation par rapport à la nature, et (2) l'altérisation des Inuits canadiens en tant que sauvages et impuissants, ce qui reflète un nouveau racisme bienveillant qui fait partie de l'idéologie assimilationniste, un élément requis pour permettre le développement des ressources du Nord dans la période suivant la Deuxième Guerre mondiale. *L'idée du Nord* est donc un exemple esthétique du 'racisme différentiel,' qui opère par le biais d'apparentes différences d'ordre culturelles au lieu des différences biologiques, et qui a pour objectif d'inclure le groupe social ciblé au lieu de l'exclure. Étant donné le récit de l'avenir du Nord dans *l'idée du Nord*, je soutiens que l'avenir est un schéma temporel convenable à travers lequel le présent est toujours gouverné. J'affirme que nous devons ajouter le racisme bienveillant à la théorie culturelle de l'exploitation et de la domination afin de comprendre la structure contemporaine du racisme qui sous-tend chaque effort pour nier l'existence du colonialisme.

KEYWORDS: decolonization, differential racism, Glenn Gould, North, repression, settler-colonialism, *The Idea of North*



Introduction: North as the Witness of Whiteness

From the viewpoint of racism, there is no exterior, there are no people on the outside. There are only people who should be like us and whose crime it is not to be. [...] Racism never detects the particles of the other; it propagates waves of sameness until those who resist identification have been wiped out (or those who only allow themselves to be identified at a given degree of divergence). Its cruelty is equaled only by its incompetence and naïveté. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 178)

White presence appears in the utopic space where the Aboriginals are not. [...] A specific human presence appears in the space established by the general absence of human presence. [...] That vague landscape space, articulating itself systematically in terms of the absence, is the modern Euro-Canadian wilderness that emerges at the beginning of the twentieth century and continues to this day to shape both our imaginative and our most mundane attitudes about human dwelling and the environment. (Bordo 1992: 334)

North is where the Inuit live. (Rosenthal 2004: 101)

Jonathan Bordo's pointed commentary on representations of Canadian wilderness in landscape painting is well worth recapitulating for the purpose of this essay: According to Bordo (1992), the Canadian wilderness exists only when the painter disavows his presence at its scene of capture. The disavowal of human presence at the site/sight of nature fixes this form of colonialist cultural production—vacant,

awaiting occupation. Elsewhere, Bordo explains: “The symbolics of the picture is a screen that offers a visual alibi, a kind of wedge or spacing between an inherited culture saturated with place names and new projects of territorialization that insert themselves by declaring that this land is thinly populated or not populated at all—a juridico-political degree zero” (2000: 245). Namely, the gaze that disavows the presence of the subject at the site of the land is rooted in a Cartesian metaphysics that reveals its fictional coordinate of truth through the form of a picture it makes of itself. Although Bordo’s complex thesis is taken by critical landscape scholars as practically axiomatic, its aural dimension, as understood through sound studies, has remained virtually untouched in considering the ideological operations immanent to Canadian auditory experience. I propose that one such sound piece, Glenn Gould’s *The Idea of North*, is equally complicit as its visual counterparts in a regime of ideological iniquity.

Glenn Gould’s *The Idea of North*, commissioned and aired by the CBC for Canada’s centennial, marked the first installment of his *Solitude Trilogy*. It is a contrapuntal radio documentary composed through the words of five interweaving (southern) Canadian “experts” who narrate their familiarities with the North. Marianne Schroeder (a nurse), Frank Vallee (a social anthropologist), Robert A.J. Phillips (a government official), James Lotz (a geographer), and Wally Maclean (a surveyor) were each asked to speculate on the meanings of North, based largely on their professional experiences as researchers and public servants. Gould subsequently edited the recorded interviews so they intertwined with one another musically: often one hears two or three voices at once, superimposed over one another, voices fading with voices rising, voices crossing one another on common words, voices drowned by the sudden intrusion of a train or its dining car chatter. The documentary is a non-narrative experience of total immersion in vocal textures, bound by what Gould termed the basso continuo of a train in motion (Bazzana 2010: 303).

The prologue is considered by many to be a musical and discursive polyphonic accomplishment (Cushing 2012, 2013; Kostelanetz 1988; Sallis 2005). Using counterpoint as its aesthetic trope, and “contrapuntal radio” as its technical idiom (Gould 1971), *The Idea of North* explores how the North is placed in the Canadian imaginary as a confounding object in the constitution of Canadian identity. Thus, in exploring the process by which southern Canadians become disenchanting by their Northern encounters with isolation, wilderness, and the Inuit, *The Idea of North* sets itself apart from idealisms of the North as frontier; instead, it situates the North as an (un)inhabitable hinterland. The opening (0:00–1:05) fades in with Schroeder expressing nostalgia for the explorer who is enamored with the strangeness of the land at a distance from the immediacy of perception. This establishes the North as a *paratopic space*: a space in which the qualifying test of the southerner disembarks, where the qualities of the land are established so as to make it possible to perform the action of elucidating the North’s aesthetic ruptures and paradoxes. Suddenly, her voice is greeted by a dissatisfied epistemic modality of doubt, as Vallee “doesn’t go

for this Northmanship bit at all,” a statement that utterly destroys Schroeder’s sentimentalism. In the third section (1:30–2:05) Phillips and Vallee become entwined around the word “North” as the former admits to having been changed by it, the latter scoffing at it for having no special virtue. Although the North is a constant, no voice realizes how it is always changing because it appears to remain the same. The ambiguity of the North establishes the final section’s fade-out on the subject of truth (2:05–3:02). The North, as the end of the prologue reveals, unfolds according to a regime that disambiguates yet disarranges: The North, in short, is emptied of certainty (see Fig. 1).

<p>Marianne Schroeder</p>	<p>Frank Vallee</p>	<p>Robert A.J. Phillips</p>
<p>I was fascinated by the country as such. I flew north from Churchill to Coral Harbour and Southampton Island at the end of September. Snow had begun to fall and the country was partially covered by it. Some of the lakes were frozen around the edges but towards the center of the lake you could still see the clear, clear water. And flying over this country you could look down and see various shades of green in the water and you could see the bottom of the lakes and it was a most fascinating experience. I remember I was up in the cockpit with the pilot and I was forever looking out left and right, and I could see ice floes over the Hudson's Bay and I was always looking for a polar bear or some seals that I could spot. But unfortunately there were none.</p>		

<p>Marianne Schroeder</p>	<p>Frank Vallee</p>	<p>Robert A.J. Phillips</p>
<p>And as we flew along the east coast Hudson's Bay, this flat, flat country frightened me ... [Subdued]</p> <p>Because it just seemed endless. We seemed to be going into nowhere. And the further north we went the more monotonous it became. There was nothing but snow, and to our right, the waters of Hudson's Bay. Now, this was a...and this...cause ten I could see the outline of...and...huge...</p>	<p>I don't go, let me say this, I don't go for this Northmanship bit at all.</p> <p>Uh, I don't knock those people who do claim that they want to go farther and farther north and so on, but I see it as a kind of game, this Northmanship bit. And if people would say, well, you know "Were you ever up at the North Pole?" You know and—"Hell, I did a dogsled trip of twenty two days—and the other fellow says—well I did one in thirty days—now that's pretty childish.</p> <p>Perhaps they see, they would see themselves as more skeptical, more skeptical about the offerings of the mass media.</p>	<p>And then for another eleven years I served the North in various capacities. Sure the North has changed my life. I can't conceive of anyone being in close touch with the North, whether he lived there all the time or simply traveled it month after month, year after year. I can't conceive of such a person being really untouched by the North for the rest of his life.</p>

<p>Marianne Schroeder</p> <p>It was most difficult... It was extreme isolation. This is very true. And I knew very well I could not go anywhere except for a mile or two walking. During that time the sun would set, but when there was still the last shimmer in the sky I would walk out to one of those lakes and watch those ducks and geese just fly around peacefully or sitting in the water. And I felt that I was almost part of that country, part of that peaceful surrounding, and I wished that it would never end.</p>	<p>Frank Vallee</p> <p>And there's not like there's as though there's some special merit or some virtue in being in the North, or some special virtue in having been with primitive people. Well I don't know what special virtue is there in that? And, so that I find that in a way I experienced it at Baker Lake, if indeed it is changing significantly which I...more important than that I think I would be. Still you don't...In the way of technological...of thinking that the world outside is too complex.</p>	<p>Robert A.J. Phillips</p> <p>When I left in 1965, at least left the job there, um, it wasn't because of being tired of the North, of more interest, or anything of the sort. I was keen as ever. Because I am a public servant, I was asked to go on another job which was related to fighting a war...and I suppose the main reason that I left...but I had...has ever experienced. The trouble is when you go North, today if you go...a one-time tourist or even if you go often for a year or two, you start a mental snatch of the world around you.... You never see the North as.... You don't realize how it's changed. You hold on to that fallacy of thinking. Ah-Ha! Here the North should be opened up the day before yesterday. Are we right to open it? But the real truth about the North... white man... supreme competence towards the rest of the world...our children...our grandchildren.</p>
<p>This was especially true for me as a nurse because of the fact that whenever I spoke to...it had to go through and...in the... there are no rules or expressions</p>	<p>the mass media, which incidentally... I think that people tend to go for the more...</p>	

Fig. 1 *The Idea of North, prologue (transcribed by author)*

The Idea of North then proceeds to describe the immanence of community, the harsh living conditions, attitudes towards the “Eskimo,” and the future of the North. Anthony Cushing provides the following breakdown of its movements (Fig. 2):

Scene	Synopsis
Prologue	Personal reflections of the North
Scene 1	Descriptions of the characters’ “early days” in the North
Scene 2	First experiences of Northern living with reflections on emotional and community connections
Scene 3	Reality of Northern living and de-romanticizing the North
Scene 4	Conversation in the “dining car” about “Eskimos” and colonial attitudes toward the North
Scene 5	Contemplation on the future of the North
Epilogue	Narrator’s soliloquy on the North’s philosophical meaning and relationship to Canada and what role the North will play in Canada’s future.

Fig. 2 *The Idea of North*, compositional layout (Cushing 2013: 70)

Although *The Idea of North* enjoins the listener to surrender to romantic and ideologically mystified relations to the North, its legacy as a masterpiece of Canadian culture has left it calcified, seemingly impermeable to political criticism. The documentary’s treatment in academic literature focuses instead on its aesthetic and nation-building qualities (see Hjarston 1996; McNeilly 1996; Grace 2002; Newmann 2011; Cushing 2012). It is intermittently resurrected in various formats, including a 1970 television documentary adaptation, a 1971 vinyl recording, a CD release in 1992, as a central motif in the 1993 film, *Thirty Two Short Films About Glenn Gould*, and by commemoration in a 2007 concert held at the Canadian Museum of Civilization featuring performances by Tanya Tagaq, Veda Hille, Creaking Tree String Quartet, Catherine MacLellan, Grand Analog, and The Flaps.¹ Canadians are indeed inclined to accept *The Idea of North*, in other words, as simultaneously timeless and a product of its times—to disavow its violence as a contingency anterior to the present, so as to consolidate its powerful discursive contribution to nationalist identity and the southern relation to the North. But my purpose is not to dwell on adversative features of musicological or literary considerations of the work. This essay instead pursues a new approach to Gould’s *The Idea of North* that addresses its legacy of Canadian settler-colonialism. As Kristin Lozanski observes in a separate context, settler-colonialism “takes up inferior and cultural Indigenous Otherness as hollow mantras with which to fortify the brittle shell of liberal bourgeois whiteness” (2007: 225). My purpose here is to frame Glenn Gould’s *The Idea of North* as a text that retains a powerful sway over the Canadian colonial imaginary while articulating an oppressive system of Canadian

new liberalism. *The Idea of North* builds a new kind of domination by proximity that paradoxically produces the kind of disassociation Alfred Memmi articulated in his seminal *The Colonizer and the Colonized*: “The distance which colonization places between him and the colonized must be accounted for and to justify himself, he [the Colonizer] increases this distance still further by placing the two figures irretrievably in opposition; his glorious position and the despicable one of the colonized” (2013: 98–99).

Accordingly, a veritable repression has been at work in regards to mentioning the Other who is operationalized by *The Idea of North*, despite the fact that the piece itself makes Othering one of its main aesthetic devices. Gould conducts his composition of colonialist discourse through his own disappearance, evidenced by the brief statement he makes after the opening trio of voices fades into the North’s auditory horizon:

This is Glenn Gould, and this program is called *The Idea of North*. I’ve long been intrigued by that incredible tapestry of tundra and taiga which constitutes the Arctic and sub-Arctic of our country. I’ve read about it, written about it, and even pulled up my parka once and gone there. But like all but a very few Canadians, I’ve had no real experience of the North; I’ve remained, of necessity, an outsider, and the North has remained for me a convenient place to dream about, spin tales about, and in the end, avoid. (Gould 1967: 3:04–3:36)

Gould’s departure naturalizes the aestheticization of attitudes towards the North. That is, according to M. Shawn Copeland (2012), when racial difference is made absolute by racialized privilege, the colonized are constructed as agents responsible for their time and their relationship to assimilation: “Thus”, Copeland summarizes, “those who are racially different diverge not only from a set of norms but from what it means to be a human being and, hence, from being human” (81). Accordingly, Gould dematerializes following his monologue. And the listener is left to discover that the North commands an especially ambivalent relationship for southerners through a texture of voices; these are shot through with antagonism, pity, fear, nostalgia, warmth, cold, reflection, and pragmatism. That these sentiments are often contrasted against one another through disparate timbres and dialogues simply amplifies the effect of their equivocality.

The Ambivalent Aesthetic of North

I read the politics of *The Idea of North* as follows: the aesthetic in *The Idea of North* creates an imaginary space of civilization’s destiny through which the Other is constructed as a savage who is subsequently saved through the benevolent welfare state. While Gould’s masterpiece contributes to the ongoing construction of North as the Canadian frontier, it is haunted by the specter of what Robyn Wiegman

(1999) terms “disaffiliation”: that is, *deliberate detachment from the historical images of white domination that distances the hegemony of colonialism from contemporary reality*. There is an aesthetic strategy of distance operating within *The Idea of North*, which opens the North as an imaginary colonialist enterprise: When the North is constructed by this aesthetic strategy, voices of southern authority emerge playfully in a discourse of ongoing social construction through an equivocal exchange of fear and ecstasy. Certainly, this aesthetic is obvious in several of the overlapping narratives, including Schroeder’s, which introduces her fascination with the land in the epistemic modality of a romantic quest: “I was fascinated by the country as such.” Schroeder is immersed in an environment that she is also distanced from by her search for identification that ends with a negation; geography is itself articulated as the witness to the isolation of the colonizer. This is the virtualization of the North as potential. By the end of the first part of her introductory narrative, Schroeder fades into the substratum of fear, making a wish that the North will never end, and expressing disappointment that it will not give her ontological security.

In contrast to her own aesthetic self-disappearance, Vallee’s description of North relies on a corrective confrontation that interrupts the nostalgic certainty of Schroeder’s musings: “I don’t go for this Northmanship bit at all.” But such a disavowal ushers in a new colonial identity, a blatant distantiating from ideologies of heroism and bravery. Vallee’s doubt anticipates the new benevolent domination of the North. With Cartesian tenor, he summons the misguided northern body only to radically doubt the body’s performative function in “Northmanship.” Vallee invokes the irreducible presence of the pure gaze and despair concerning the meaning of one’s own life. His voice enters as a rude contrapuntal awakening to Schroeder’s romantic images. Gould contends that this effect was quite deliberate:

...after a certain period of time she says “and the further north we went, the more monotonous it became.” By this time we have become aware of a gentleman who has started to speak and who upon the word “further” says “farther”—“further and farther north” is the context. At that moment, his voice takes precedence over hers in terms of dynamic emphasis. Shortly after, he uses the words “thirty days,” and by this point we are aware of a third voice which immediately after “thirty days” says “eleven years”—and another crossover point has been effected. (Gould 1971: 19)

Such a contrast places into doubt the unshrinking upward gaze of the southerner’s North. This ambivalence is often celebrated. The subject’s solitude in the quarantined hinterland preconditions its reliance on community to transcend isolation, introducing the necessity of bonding with an arbitrary assortment of northern-southerners. After all, bonding with the Aboriginal population is a near impossibility, as becomes painfully obvious later on in *The Idea of North*. Suffice to say, the contrapuntal epistemology generated by Schroeder and Vallee generates a deep-seated opacity that is suspended by faith in a nationalistic agenda of taming the

North. A third voice, that of nationalism, enters to mediate between Schroeder and Vallee. Phillips rises into the conversation in the role of benevolent patriarch—"I can't conceive of such a person being really untouched by the North for the rest of his life"—then concludes the colonialist narrative: "supreme competence towards the rest of the world...our children...our grandchildren." Phillips offers a candid appraisal of the North as both a site of personal transformation and the ultimate obligation to the nation: the North is nothing less than its own nothingness.

Wally Maclean is the character left to quilt together these perspectives and others. Maclean is a passenger Gould met on his travels North, who he describes as having "parlayed surveying into a literary tool, even as Franz Kafka badgers beetles" (qtd. in Gould 1967: 4:36–4:43). For Maclean, the North is a destination without location, as location merely reinforces the imaginary distance between southerners and the North. Maclean begins his monologue disenchanting, emphasizing the trip North in which one first encounters the boredom and isolation of being stuck on a train, left to connect with fellow travelers:

Before long he's going to have to, perhaps, say hello and...pass the odd word to his fellow man. And indeed it isn't long before—well we've heard what he has to say, why for the first time he's going North. With what? Well with the army, with the navy, with the air force...Well you're studying the Northern Lights then? Well, well, well. Now you can listen for awhile. Because what do any of us know about the Northern Lights? (qtd. in Gould 1967: 6:54–7:46)

The small talk borne of boredom reifies the North. The issue raised here is of a North that assigns a malleable discourse of self-invention to the colonizers and static discourse of the fragile savage to the colonized. This reflects an ideological, political, and cultural assumption about the history of the Canadian state and Northern development. Is *The Idea of North* an aesthetic accomplishment, or a symptom of a historical process? I propose that national construction hinged on the same process that "Othered" the colonized, those who, in Bannerji's words, "face an undifferentiated notion of the 'Canadian' as the unwavering beacon of... assimilation" (2000: 65).

The Civ/Sav Aesthetic

If *The Idea of North's* first aesthetic device is to Other the North as wild, the second aesthetic device is to ground its cultural politics within a Civ/Sav dichotomy, a dichotomy Emma LaRocque (2010) describes as "the long-held belief that humankind evolved from the primitive to the most advanced, from the savage to the civilized" (39). Such a dichotomy reifies the Other so as to attach an image of civilization to the civilizer, a strategy described famously by Norbert Elias (2000) as an axiom of civilization. The nation performs state-sanctioned violence,

such as through the Indian Residential Schools that children of the North were forced to attend. These are the hidden, secluded, secure, and sanctioned spaces of state-administered violence that serve the missions of modernization. LaRocque emphasizes that the Civ/Sav Dichotomy serves the teleological model of evolution through which cultural texts compare Aborigines to colonizers either implicitly or explicitly, the effect of which is the utter dehumanization of Aborigines by way of a “textual warfare” (2010: 39). It is such a dichotomy that constitutes the reticular rhetorical device of Scene 4, the “dining car” scene, in which Phillips, Lotz, Vallee, and Schroeder critically discuss the destiny of the “Eskimo” (qtd. in Gould 1967: 29:17–42:36). Given certain exceptions (Grace 2002; Kobayashi et. al 2011), the Civ/Sav Dichotomy is a stylistic device that is all too often neglected in scholarship devoted to *The Idea of North*.

To realize how the Civ/Sav aesthetic manifests within *The Idea of North*, we must appreciate the historical background against which the piece was commissioned. Canada’s post–Second World War fiscal development was framed by new governing institutions that emphasized care for the health of residents under a wage-economy of nonrenewable resources. The North as a social economic project became clear under John Diefenbaker’s statement of Northern self-governance: “I see a new Canada—a Canada of the North!” (qtd. in Grace 2002: 69). Although pre-industrial and early industrial contact with northern Aborigines was relatively less intrusive than in the South, northern Aborigines still suffered a similar fate to their southern contemporaries as the North gained political momentum during and after the Second World War. The economy was served by northern development in two ways: first, mid-northern mining contributed to the expansion of the U.S. economy; second, the Canadian expansion and shipment of hydro and oil established Canada’s international reputation as a staples-resource economy. Combined, these elements conditioned state-led modernization with which traditional systems were thought incompatible and seen as superfluous. The people of the North were thus disrupted, fragmented, and spiritually dislocated—in Brave Heart and De Bruyen’s (1998) terms, they were *soul wounded*. Eventually, under Pierre Trudeau’s leadership, all Aborigines would face the paradox of assimilation; one must renounce their difference to be treated equally, despite their displacement by Canadian occupation (see Turner 2006).

In *The Idea of North*, a new benevolent racism that derives its origin from this political backdrop converges on the vocal relations with “Eskimo”: Vallee addresses the negative impact on settlement created when industry workers assumed the “Eskimo” would obey the laws of Western time: “there was a great deal of dispute going on as to whether this was a wise thing to do...the settlers [said] that it was in their nature [the Inuit] to work in the mines...Was it in their nature to observe the time schedules that we had and so on and...I found it fascinating to actually live in that community for three or four weeks at the center of the controversy among those people who engage in the art of Northmanship...the debates, that is, about

how the souls and the culture of the Eskimos are to be saved” (qtd. in Gould 1967: 37:05–37:33). Phillips states that, at the very least, alcoholism isn’t as detrimental as the incredibly short lifespan the “Eskimo” faced before modernization: “There are ugly problems and the alcoholism is talked about a lot.... That’s ugly.... However, we are moving forward. When I was first associated with the administration of North, one of our sort of heartbreaking tasks was to add up how many Canadian citizens had starved to death in that season.... Well, thank heavens with all the ugliness that there is in the North today...a downward curve” (qtd. in Gould 1967: 33:26–34:35)

Schroeder depicts “Eskimo” culture as patriarchal, in sharp contrast to her own beliefs and values:

One day it came home to me very clearly why this attitude persists among the Eskimos. One of them was expecting a child that made arrangements with another woman to take that particular baby. After it was born, she would adopt the baby with the consent of her husband, of course. And they all very much hoped for a boy. Anyway, the woman came to the nursing station to have her baby and it turned out to be a girl to the disappointment of the whole group and the family. The frightening part, the shocking part to me was the fact that they named the girl Karmala, which means a parasite, a worm, because of the simple fact that she was a girl. (qtd. in Gould 1967: 40:15–40:52)

In some contexts, the Inuit word for worm is *kopilrok* (or maggot, not parasite). It does not occur to Schroeder that the girl might be named after the “woolly and mischievous ice-worm,” which, by way of melting an igloo, freed an Inuit from Tuktoyaktuk who was frozen in ice. In other contexts it is the *tagiut* (lat. *Cephenemyia trompe*), or “worm infesting nostrils of Cariboo.” Although in some cases worms were feared, they were also revered, as in another story of the Inuit mother who feeds a worm the blood from her armpit, a possible transition towards becoming a shaman (Laugrand and Oosten 2010: 15–16).

Phillips frames the North through his disillusionment with the living conditions of the Inuit:

Well that kind of [romantic image of the traditional Inuit] is really ugly, ugly, ugly and you can’t have all your illusions about the charming old life when you go up and see the tuberculosis and when you use the wretched health conditions, the wretched living conditions, the unspeakable sanitation. When you see the racial distinctions between a sort of white master race and the lesser breeds that have always been kept just a little outside the law. I’m not blaming anybody for this unless I blame us all collectively. But there’s a lot in that Romantic tradition that in my mind was pretty ugly judged by today’s standards. (qtd. in Gould 1967: 29:47–30:27)

It is difficult to tell whether Phillips employs such terms as “white master race” and “lesser breeds” at a distance. The issue raised here is one of a strategy of tolerance that dehumanizes while simultaneously exalting the Inuit as a bastion of humanity, which is how *The Idea of North* concludes. Put another way, the racist structure of this strategy works accordingly: it de-politicizes through aesthetic distance, civilizing the white southerner at the expense of the savage northerner, and finally discerns a loving respect for the northerner through a form of patronizing benevolence.

The Benevolent Aesthetic

The Idea of North conforms to Canada’s imperialist past by way of a false admission. This third aesthetic device performs a disaffiliation with the Colonialist nightmare of Aboriginal assimilation in order to make room for a discourse on what Eva Mackey (1999) terms a “benevolent state”: “the state that supposedly treated, and still treats, its minorities more compassionately than the USA” (2). She recalls her experience at the Canadian centennial, the year *The Idea of North* was commissioned, as an unnervingly proud moment for the nation:

If the goal of the festivities was to ignite pride in nationhood in the population, the government seemed to have been very successful. More than anything there was a sense of national self-congratulation: “we” Canadians had a kinder, better, more international, more inclusive nation than the United States. Further, there seemed to be no contest over the fact that the state would support and promote national identity. The federal government came out of the centennial celebrations looking very good, both on the domestic and the international scene. (Mackey 1999: 63)

The Idea of North conforms to the paradigm of inclusion that is more properly aligned with the imperial nature of Canadian northern development. *The Idea of North* portrays an ambiguity about the North that marks the uncertainty of human consciousness, just as the consistent strain throughout the piece is the ambiguous nature of *humanity*. Schroeder, for instance, transcends her isolation by connecting with other southerners—“right away there was a sense of sharing this life. One could realize the value of another human being” (qtd. in Gould 1967: 21:57–22:02). Similarly, Lotz frames the state of humanity in a nationalist consciousness that constructs difference as inclusive for the sake of the nation:

I’m inclined to think if we only look at the Eskimo not as a quaint, funny little hunter, or as an artist or all these ghastly clichés that clutter up our literature, if we can only look upon him as a sort of human being and adapt some of his ways of doing things, his culture, his values for instance in child-raising permissiveness rather than authoritarianism, a sense of community rather than a sense of individualism. (qtd. in Gould 1967: 39:54–40:21)

Elsewhere *The Idea of North* makes extensive investments in being human and in humanism proper. Lotz's suggestion regarding moon colonies makes this investment clear: "it makes sense to me to send Eskimos to the moon, I mean if we have to go to the moon, simply because they're accustomed to living in isolation. They're accustomed to living enclosed for extended periods of time.... I'd like to see Eskimos for instance employed as consultants in our school systems telling our school kids exactly what it was like" (qtd. in Gould 1967: 41:06–41:41). Such a sentiment is based in the belief that reality can only be experienced through its representation, a practice engrained in Western culture from medieval witnessing, to Cartesian metaphysics, to continental exploration, to—in this case—moon colonies (see Bordo 2000).

In *A Thousand Plateaus* Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987) remark that post-Second World War contemporary racism operates less by exclusion than by inclusion, an idea Slavoj Žižek (1993) would later echo as the kernel of ideological mechanisms marked by the *agalma* (that which is in the object more than itself). In *The Idea of North*, for instance, the substratum of humanity is the welfare schematic through which Others are normalized. The southern relationship with the North marks an aesthetic intervention through which whiteness articulates Aboriginals as those who are in need. Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt observe in *Empire* (2009) that differential racism—based less on biological than cultural difference—condenses human beings into one ontological consistency or substance of humanity. For instance, the Inuit in *The Idea of North* are taken as belonging to a historical contingency out of line with the rest of Canada. Lotz wonders how technology can be introduced to the North "in such a way that [doesn't] harm or hurt people," while Vallee says that there is no "special virtue in having been with primitive people," and Phillips criticizes how the Canadian government uses the "Northern Indian to be a kind of showpiece, a doll, a puppet" when they include Inuit people on boards of representatives (qtd. in Gould 38:11–38:16). In regards to the construct of civilization, Maclean states:

We don't seem to realize there's another end to this, that he is manipulating us. We have some...evidence out on this in George River. That you know because we say oh you know the wonderful Eskimo fine hunter, etc., um, he will play the role we have assigned to him. And he will play this only insofar as it sort of keeps you happy. I think there's something fairly insidious about this. (qtd. in Gould 1967: 36:39–36:59)

Such an attitude justifies the continuation of social separation should assimilation be deemed unsuccessful. Members of every community, marginalized or not, are protected "equally" under the gaze of the law, so long as they maintain a distance between their difference and the rest of Canada. Étienne Balibar explains:

The difference between cultures, considered as separate entities or separate symbolic structures (that is, "culture" in the sense of Kultur), refers on to

cultural inequality within the “European” space itself or, more precisely, to “culture”...as a structure of inequalities tendentially reproduced in an industrialized, formally educated society that is increasingly internationalized and open to the world.... [T]he cultures supposed implicitly superior are those which appreciate and promote “individual” enterprise, social and political individualism, as against those which inhibit these things. (2007: 86)

The thesis of differential inclusion stands to uphold segregation and multicultural ideology in a few ways: it anticipates Otherness instead of veiling it as alterity, and it presents difference as contingent rather than expected. The North in *The Idea of North* does not simply construct the North as Other. Rather, *The Idea of North* (1) blurs the meaning of the northern frontier and its associated southern identities, (2) immobilizes the Other by giving it a static character, and (3) places the unified utterances of subjectivity (the “experts”) in conversation with coterminous singularities in a contrapuntal modality. Disgust cast as difference delineates “them” as being in need of saving through modernization under the guise of the welfare state. Settler-colonizers are washed (whitewashed) of their indiscretions by their own benevolent reinvention, yet it is a reinvention that exercises a more permissive power. Northern Aboriginals were relocated to places where it was more convenient for southern Canada to care for them, or they were relocated to even more remote locations, where they were subsequently neglected, in order to secure northern sovereignty. *The Idea of North* persists as an acquiescent Canadian representation. The natural inception of unity is bound up with advanced capitalism, racial superiority, and gendered supremacy. Indeed, if whiteness is at all unmarked it is because the fantasy of whiteness is most effectively transparent in the bodies of the socio-economically privileged. Racism is not an abhorrent rupture; it is an underlying ontological condition. It does not denote; it infuses all representational systems in a colonialist state. By infusing these systems, it implies an educational and a hereditary component. If we take *The Idea of North* at its word, then its colonialist discourse does nothing less than inflict violence upon that zone of Canada that has moved from frontier to habitat. This is a transition that inflicts damage upon the colonized in ways that also dismantle the colonizer’s space: the subject and its Other fall into a state of distress when the Other resembles the subject to the point that the subject must reinvent the system of domination. This is why the worst fear for the colonialist is full and proper assimilation, because if the Other finally resembles the subject, the subject has no means of identifying himself as dominator. Imperialism is not a physical matter; it is psychic and aesthetic, immaterial and virtual.

The idea of North: the double genitive signifies an ambiguity that breaks down the idea into two products: first, the idea signified by the North, second, the North signified by its idea. *The Idea of North* is as ambiguous as the idea of North. Contradiction thus seems inevitable. Indeed, the propensity to lump *The Idea of North* into an aesthetic category and not a technical manifestation of desire for the North (a variant of the of the North) is endemic to the problem of northern representation

as a whole. Gould frequently equated separation from the world with latitude, but I propose that Gould was unable to abandon the material and physical reality of his program, so he internalized geographical distance by transforming his inner life into an idea of North, an unlimited expanse of creative possibilities. This strategy of internalization is aligned with the established critique of landscape aesthetics: a soundscape, like a landscape, is not an innocent and unproblematic manifestation of a representation of terrain and of man's attempts to wrestle with its darkness. The North belongs at once to the nation and nobody; it is untamed yet framed within the signifying potential of civilization.

Gould colonizes the blank tape as the white figure colonizes empty space. Voices transition from fearful colonizer to benevolent civilized imperialist, colonizing a listening psyche that has been so aesthetically distanced it can only admire what it hears. To recontextualize Bordo's initial argument (2000), in this context, the North's connotative status is a nest within which its wild human and nonhuman inhabitants possess an internal and utterly unfamiliar logic. The North signifies outside signification as the excess of culture and nature, where neither is retained in its "wilderness." Assembled entirely of witnesses—"experts" and "philosophers"—the North is a discourse exempt of a referent except to the *cogito* which disavows its own presence. As Bordo surmises, the *cogito* is inscribed as witness to historical events, and later as the "picture of reality" that frames self-reflexivity. This witness figure landed squarely at the feet of the colonized as a tactic for dominating the land, emptying it of any real significance beyond its aesthetic usefulness for imperial actors. The difference is: while the wilderness landscapes featured in Bordo's discussion are emptied, *The Idea of North* is full: full of affect (fear, disenchantment, loss), borders (distance, travel, future, impossibility, frontier, utopia), characters (American, Canadian, infant, Eskimos, girls, husbands, kids, men, squatters), places (Arctic, Baffin Island, James Bay, Canada, country, community, Hudson Lake, Yukon, Ottawa), things (ducks, geese, gold, government, media, northmanship, water), qualities (dramatic, still, ugly, virtuous). However, what weaves the tapestry of voices is this: North is subject to the necessity of the disavowed witness who pities the North enough to conquer it in the name of compassion.

Simultaneously, there is a contrapuntal procedure in *The Idea of North*, but not between speaking voices; rather, it is between the voices active and voices silenced. Its response comes from within: the rise of The Yukon Native Brotherhood, the Committee for Original People's Entitlement, the Labrador Inuit Association, and the Innu Nation. Many northern organizations began to use political representation and court actions to assert their citizenship and land rights and obstruct development projects that threatened to undermine their sovereignty. While they were not usually successful in stopping projects permanently, they did negotiate better terms for local people. The important result from this is that Aboriginal activism and engagement with non-Aboriginal co-residents has helped to redesign northern political boundaries and institutions. The North is not national; it is an ongoing

territorial resistance. To echo a recent definition by Caroline Rosenthal, which simply and brilliantly challenges the ongoing ideology of northern ambivalences: “North is where the Inuit live” (2004: 101).

The Ideas of North

Maclean meditates on the future of the North when he states that he is “indeed a Northern listener then. And the pity of it all is that I’m not always able to select what I want to hear.... In detaching and in reflecting and in listening I suppose I’m able to synthesize to have these different rails meet in the infinity that is our conscious hope” (qtd. in Gould 1967: 42:50–44:06). As Andrew Baldwin (2012) notes, the future is a convenient schematic through which the present remains governed. And so, perhaps, we can approach *The Idea of North* as a type of symbolic eugenics. Colonialist repression is both the cause and effect of *The Idea of North*. A clear series of colonialist disassociations mark a transition towards the multiculturalist ideology that Canada would adopt: from aesthetic distantiation, to a savage imagination, to benevolent nurturing. The images that come through *The Idea of North* create an assemblage of representations that require a far more extensive analysis than what I’ve offered here. Needed is a total analysis of components that are not included in this study but are certainly dormant in *The Idea of North*, as well as in other works associated with the North: R Murray Schafer’s *Music in the Cold*, The Rheostatics’s *Music Inspired by the Group of 7*, Harry Freedman’s *Tableau and Images*, Derek Healey’s *Arctic Images*, and many more (see Grace 2002: 127–30). North, indeed, is a highly discursive and contestable term, and aligns with Rob Shields’ (1991) established position that “The importance of the ‘True North Strong and Free’ mythology is in its paradoxical reinforcement of a sense of Canadian identity while disguising the simultaneous exploitation and underdevelopment of the North” (199). We must add to this dominant paradigm of exploitation and domination the benevolent imperialism of the nation-state in order to understand the contemporary structure of racism that haunts the continued cultural denials of colonialism.

Acknowledgements

My sincerest of thanks are extended to Brett Wetters, who organized the *Ideas of North* seminar at the 2013 American Comparative Literature Association at the University of Toronto, where this research was first shared. I would like to also thank James Wright for inviting me to speak to his Music and Culture graduate students at Carleton University about this topic, as well as John Higney for his correspondence thereafter. The archivists and librarians in the Library and Archives Canada were most helpful during my research trip collecting images, scraps, and writings by Gould. Finally, I would like to thank my colleagues and students at the University of Lethbridge, as well as the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for funding this research with an Insight Development Grant (2013–15).

Note

1. Those unfamiliar with this lineup might be interested to learn that Tagaq—an Inuk throat singer from Cambridge Bay, Nunavut—was, to my knowledge, the only Aboriginal representative.

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